

# Disrupting Doble Desplazamiento in Conflict Zones:

## Alternative Feminist Stories Cross the Colombian-U.S. Border

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### *Preface*

Documentary film has the power to carry the stories and ideas of an individual or group of people to others who are separated by space, economics, national boundaries, cultural differences, life circumstances and/or time. Such a power—to speak and be heard by others—is often exactly what is missing for people living in poverty, with little or no access to the technologies or networks necessary to circulate stories beyond their local communities. But bound up in that power is also a terrible responsibility and danger: how does the documentarian avoid *becoming* the story (or determining the story) instead of acting as the vehicle to share the story? How does she avoid becoming a self-appointed spokesperson for the poor or marginalized? Or how does he not leverage the story of others' suffering for one's own gain or acknowledgment? These questions become even thornier when intersected with issues of race, cultural capital, and national identity. One

might ask all of these questions to our next author, Tamera Marko, a U.S. native, white academic who collects video stories of displaced poor residents of Medellin, Colombia. How does she do this ethically, in a way that performs a desired service within the communities that she works, without speaking for them or defining their needs? Her article, which follows, is a testament to that commitment.

Marko's life's work (to call it *scholarship* seems too small a word) resides within a complex politics of representation, and she directly takes on issues that others might shy away from. She provides a stunning example of the tightrope academics can—and perhaps should—walk, by leveraging the academic privilege she has to provide international access to the stories of displaced residents of Colombia, while working very hard to allow the residents to shape and respond to the stories they tell and to control with whom they are shared. There is probably no other working academic whose work I admire more.

In her writing or talks, Tamera rarely says much about herself, because, I suspect, she believes that the stories she helps circulate are more important than are her personal stories. Not discussing herself, however, does not mean that Tamera lacks a critical self-awareness about the privileges that she has that the Colombian storytellers do not. Yes, Tamera is white, blonde even. She has a Ph.D. in Latin American History from University of California at San Diego. She has taught at Duke University and is now the Assistant Director of the First-Year Writing Program at Emerson College. Yet Tamera herself is most aware of her vexed position. She has written a poetry collection that explores the power and pitfalls of white privilege, gender, and interracial relations. Before academia, she worked as a journalist covering human rights in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the United States.

Most significant, Tamera's commitment to Medellin is deep and continues to grow with each next trip she and her family take to Colombia. Her husband and collaborator is Colombian; their daughter is Colombian-American; more Spanish is spoken in their home than English. And when Marko takes college students from Duke and Emerson to Colombia to collect video stories of displaced

women and families in Medellin, she takes the utmost care to gather the stories with reverence, and circulate them without shaping or claiming them. That reverence and care is imprinted on the pages of the following article, which I am proud to see published in *Reflections*. Marko sets the bar high for those academics in rhetoric and writing studies who care about issues of economic justice and the power of words to make meaningful social change. I am proud to call her a colleague and friend.

—Paula Mathieu, *Boston College*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

My name is Farconely Torres Usuga. [Our] neighborhood was started by an elderly man, a friend. We were tired of paying for rent because if we paid the rent, we could not feed the baby, and if we fed the baby, we could not pay the rent and so...he invited us to come with him to the top of this hill where he had got a piece of land for him. ... So we started collecting sticks and materials and began building our new homes...The owners denounced us [meaning the police came]. First, they knocked down our houses, then, the second time, they burned them down with the flag and everything.<sup>2</sup> I sat to the side of the burning flag, watching my house and everything I had burning, and I began to cry. Because I knew they were never going to leave us alone. Later when more people had settled, we were already 12 families and we decided to get everyone together... and we all got on a bus and went down to the government building to protest. All of us women had our pillows perfectly in place [to appear heavily pregnant] and we had given the children banana water that they say makes them have to go to the bathroom. All of us stood with our kids outside the building pooping and peeing all over the place. We were demonstrating our need. And so finally, they said yes, that we could live in our houses, and that nothing would happen to them. ... Then we looked at the paper they gave us and realized there were no signatures. So, we stopped

the bus, turned it around, and went back to the city government building, demanding that someone officially sign the paper. So then they gave us a paper that said they would stop knocking down our houses and burning them. ... And when we got home, everyone started singing "We have triumphed!" And every one was shouting, "We have triumphed!" So we decided that since we had triumphed, we would call the neighborhood *El Triunfo*.<sup>3</sup>

What I want to spotlight about Farconely's story is not the story itself—though her story and thousands of stories like it in Colombia are important. I want to illuminate a different question. How did the story *move* from her family album in Medellín, Colombia to publication in this journal? Why and for whom is it important that this story has crossed the U.S.-Colombian border? These questions, I argue, must be considered in terms of the unequal power relations within which transnational circulation of *desplazadas*' stories happens. In Colombia, people who are forced to flee their homes due to violence are called *desplazados*.<sup>4</sup> When *desplazados* self-settle in another region of the same country, they are called "internally displaced."<sup>5</sup> This armed conflict began during the period called *La Violencia* between 1948 and 1958 when the country erupted in war among guerrilla, military, and paramilitary groups. In the last decade, the conflict's intensification has caused an estimated 4 million people to be internally displaced in Colombia,<sup>6</sup> making it the country with the world's most internally displaced people. Since the late 1970s, another dimension intertwined in the conflict has caused massive displacement: narcotraffic.<sup>7</sup> This led to Medellín being declared the world's most violent city in late 1991 and early 1992.<sup>8</sup> Medellín is now home to Colombia's second largest population of internally displaced people.<sup>9</sup> This represents 8% of the city's 2.7 million people, not counting the metropolitan area. At least half of these displaced are women. More than 40% of Medellín residents live below the poverty line.<sup>10</sup> As Farconely's narrative illustrates, however, displaced women's stories are more than their displacement. Over the past six decades *desplazados* have built 15 sprawling neighborhoods in Medellín. Until the past decade they have done so on their own, with little to no official state support.<sup>11</sup> Since 2004, through three mayorships, *desplazados* have collaborated with the City of Medellín in government urban interventions and socio-political inclusion of stunning scope.



In a tragic irony, while they are the most “mobile” people in Medellín—having moved from their hometowns to another one foreign to them—*desplazadas* have the least mobility to circulate their stories. Colombians of all socioeconomic standing are among the most denied international travel visa applicants in the world. In a competition of who gets to tell the past, present, and future story of Medellín, *desplazadas* have the least access to circulating their perspectives in citywide, national, and global arenas. So the *desplazadas* are displaced again, this time from their own stories of displacement. This I call *doble desplazamiento*, *double displacement*.

Haunted by the scarce circulation of *desplazadas*’ perspectives, Jota Samper<sup>12</sup> and I began our archive project with a question: What happens when the “official” and “popular” stories about your neighborhood do not match what you archive in your family album? Our response in 2008 was to begin a transnational community literacy story archive. We work with U.S. and Colombian university students to craft documentary videos from our first-person interviews with *desplazados* and the stories they narrate from their family albums. We especially focus on the stories of displaced *campesinos*, subsistence farmers who have fled violence in the countryside to build their homes and communities in urban areas. Our documentaries put their stories into conversation with research in archives, human rights and government publications, media coverage, and academic literature. We build this archive with U.S. and Colombian university students and faculty, Medellín Solidaria<sup>13</sup> social workers from the City of Medellín’s Department of Social Welfare,<sup>14</sup> and *desplazados* and neighborhood founders in Medellín. Mobility in and out of the neighborhoods where the storytellers live also requires that *Medellín Solidaria* social workers vouch for the integrity of our university students and faculty so that people in power there allow us, and the stories we carry, to pass. Those with power include gang leaders, church leaders, NGO workers, activists, and police who have come to trust the social workers and the City of Medellín they represent.

Over the past five years, our project has organically evolved into an ongoing alternative feminist archive of how women have built the city of Medellín. Called *medellín, mi hogar/my home medellín*,<sup>15</sup> it includes 2,300 hours of stories from 650 people. People choose

the stories they tell in their own images, written word, and artistic performances. They tell their stories in their homes, where we record them in photograph and video. We have edited 50 stories into videos of ten minutes or less, which we circulate online and in film festivals, exhibitions, and K-12 classrooms and beyond throughout the Americas.

The *desplazada*-neighborhood founders' stories contradict a bifurcated, one-dimensional image of the state as overarching savior or evil invader of their neighborhoods. Instead, the women's stories complicate the state's public rhetoric of rescuing their neighborhoods with another interpretation. Many of the *desplazadas* view what the city government terms "the transformation of Medellín" as one of the most recent (and largely welcome) state interventions in a series of ongoing community collaborations that these same women, their families, and neighbors have been directing for decades. These stories highlight the feminist dimension to their roles in founding their neighborhoods. That is, ways that women strategically wield the power that Colombian culture grants mothers and grandmothers to convince state leaders and male neighbors to improve quality of life in their neighborhoods.

The strategic agency hundreds of *desplazadas* employ in building their neighborhoods, however, must also be understood in the context of two additional intertwining injustices. Both injustices reinforce the unequal power relations involved in how women's stories move from their family albums to here on this page. First, there is a direct relationship between the risks the storyteller makes in telling her story and her relationship to the conflict in Colombia.<sup>16</sup> Circulating their stories as video documentaries increases this risk because the storytellers choose to be identified by face, name, and neighborhood. Many of the storytellers in the archive openly discuss armed actors<sup>17</sup> who burned down their homes or murdered their loved ones. Generally, the women do not frame this violence in terms of support of these armed actors' actions. Furthermore, many women can identify these actors by face and name. This unsupportive stance and ability to name names could inspire armed actors or those who support them to commit more violence against the women storytellers. Secondly, the storyteller's risk is inextricably

intertwined with her ability to circulate her stories about it. Among all of our archive's collaborating participants, the *desplazadas* have the most intimate and violent relationship to the conflict in Colombia, take the most risk in telling their stories about it, and receive the least rewards for doing so. *Desplazadas* also have the least access to controlling their stories' circulation. This is especially true when circulating their stories across the Colombia-U.S. border.

In this context of unequal risk and circulation access, the storyteller's displacement from her own story of displacement poses the greatest challenge to grounding our project in research as academic contribution *and* activist social justice. This article discusses four ways we experiment with our archive's knowledge production and circulation process to disrupt this *doble desplazamiento* and ways that key community literacy projects and scholarship have inspired and informed our experiments. First, we seek to disrupt traditional research methods about *desplazadas* in Colombia by not separating their first-person stories from the visual and aural frame of their homes, neighborhoods, and family albums. This requires us to move from written-word academic articles and human rights reports to the genre of documentary video. Second, we expand the academic revision process(es) between editor, writer, and peer reviewers to include the storytellers in these roles. That is, we first listen and respond to the critiques of the storytellers at our DVD debut in a theater in Medellín. Third, we expand our target audience by asking the storytellers whom they would like to receive their stories and why. Throughout these three disruptions, we integrate *desplazados*'-turned-neighborhood-founders' perspectives on the City of Medellín's interventions in their communities since 2004 that include official access to the city's water, electricity, and public transportation. Fourth, when we return to Medellín, we bring the storytellers photographs, videos, and written comments from audiences where their stories have traveled. Running through the marrow of our archive is a relentless question. How might we and our audiences more justly wrestle with an ongoing contradiction: the distance between the storyteller and her story that begins the minute we academics and *desplazadas* part ways?



## The Political Economy of *Doble Desplazamiento*

No one is quite sure anymore of how to reconcile feminist politics of social transformation and international sisterhood with a research practice in which relatively privileged academic women seek out, record, and publish the edited voices of relatively underprivileged women from somewhere else in the name of a feminism to be borne across the border. (Behar 297)

What would a *desplazada* in Medellín have to do for her story, and herself as its storyteller, to cross the U.S.-Colombian border? Farconely would have to find access to a computer and someone to help her read the U.S. visa application form online.<sup>18</sup> For the questions asking her if she has ever been engaged in illegal activities in her country, she might pause, perplexed at how to answer.<sup>19</sup> She lives in a country in conflict that forced her to flee her home with only the clothes on her back and her children in her arms. As a displaced person she illegally “invaded” land owned by someone else in Medellín to build her home and community. Is that illegal? She must also apply for a passport, which many people can receive in one day in Medellín. For this, however, she will have to get her *cédula*, her national identity card, which she had lost on her journey to Medellín or never needed in her rural *pueblo* where everyone knew everyone. At the Municipal Office, social workers will ask her questions about the town she fled, and they will try to contact her town’s surviving residents and research media coverage of massacres there to prove her identity and story. This could take months. She then must go to a bank. On this day she hopes it does not rain because armed security guards might not let her in with mud-splattered clothes. With a code she buys at the bank, she must call a U.S. Embassy official who will ask more questions before granting her an appointment in Bogotá. If this official speaks English to her, Farconely will not understand. If the 5-minute code she can barely afford is not enough to complete the transaction, she must buy another code at the bank. If she is granted an appointment she must ask for a letter of invitation from someone in the United States who promises to provide food and housing during Farconely’s stay there. It costs \$70 to send this letter to Farconely, who does not have a mailbox. Alternatively, Farconely can find a place to print out the letter sent via email, which means she



must learn how to use email. Farconely must then make the 12-hour bus ride through winding mountain roads between Medellín and Bogotá. Bogotá, for residents of tropical Medellín, can feel bitterly cold.

In Bogotá, a city of 9 million people with some of the world's worst traffic, Farconely must overcome her confusion over which three bus changes she must make to arrive at the Embassy. There she will wait outside in the courtyard open to the sky. She is afraid, as are many others waiting, to go to the bathroom, for fear they will call her name and she misses her appointment. For six hours she waits. They call her name, and she stands tiptoe at the window to speak through the holes drilled into bulletproof glass that separates her from the Embassy official. The official speaks in English, "Why do you want to go the United States?" "Are you planning on working there?" The questions come in rapid fire. The official might not look up from paperwork. When Farconely cannot respond out of exhaustion or fear, the official will likely deny her application. She cannot reapply for two years. The application form asks: "Have you ever been denied a visa for travel to the United States? Explain." Often, when people answer yes, they are denied a visa again. Unless she is applying for political asylum, she must hide her experience as neighborhood founder and thus *desplazada* from U.S. embassy officials



because it reveals her poverty and direct connection with violence via armed actors in direct contestation with the state. Poverty implies to many Embassy officials that Farconely is going to the United States to work, which is forbidden by a tourist visa. Her displacement at the hands of armed actors implies to some Embassy officials that Farconely herself might be a violent actor in the United States. The entire visa application process, including her plane ticket, would cost Farconely two years of income and more than one week off work. At no point during this process is Farconely's story part of the story.

What is the process for me, a white, native English-speaking U.S. citizen and academic, to go to Colombia, document Farconely's story, and return to the United States to circulate it? Ten minutes booking my plane ticket online in my home, 60 seconds at the immigration booth in Medellín, and about one-quarter of one month of my family income, an expense fully reimbursed by a university research grant. I can conduct all these transactions in my native language. I do not ask time off work because this *is* my work. At the airport in Medellín, I am greeted with photographs of flowers on signs that say in English: "Welcome to Medellín!" At the immigration booth, the official and I speak eye-to-eye, with no bulletproof glass between us. No visa application required. Farconely's story as "my" research is central to every juncture of my journey's story.

## Producing Knowledge About Displaced Women in Colombia

Hollywood movies, the media, and academic publications focus largely on stories about Colombia in terms of violence, narcotraffic, and poverty. Women as key actors in general are largely absent from national histories of Colombia. Scholarship about women in Colombia tends to position women within the frame of national or local histories of violence: as warriors, narcotraffic dealers, or victims of the conflict. This is similar for national (Colombian) and local (Medellín) production.<sup>20</sup> An exception to this is the groundbreaking *Colombia: Building Peace in a Time of War*, a multi-authored book of articles about international, national, state, and local peace initiatives, edited by Virginia Bouvier. It is one of the first major publications to focus on peace in the context of war.<sup>21</sup> If you Google “woman” and “Medellín,” you will find 15 pages dedicated to prostitutes, female drug mules and assassins, sex tours, and mail order brides. If you Google “displaced women in Medellín,” you will find links to blogs, scholarly articles, and news reports about displaced women. The pages, however, are often headed by a large ad that reads: “Lovely Medellín Ladies – Connect With Medellín Women.” Below the title reads: “View 1000s Verified Profiles. Safe site.”<sup>22</sup> The link routes you to “AmoLatina.com,” which describes itself as “A Premium International Dating Service.” A tourist’s monthly rent for a penthouse featured on the website could pay to build more than 200 *ranchitos*<sup>23</sup> *desplazados*. In the virtual space of this Google page’s design, the image of women as transnational sexual commodities who are “safe” and “verified” for English speaking wealthy male tourists takes priority over the perspectives and accomplishments of all Colombian women, especially *desplazadas*.

In Medellín, there is a dizzying amount of careful and steadily growing historical and cultural production about women’s rights, many with a feminist approach. These projects produce a prolific number of multi-media publications created by and about women, including *desplazadas*.<sup>24</sup> In 2002, the Municipality of Medellín created the Metrowoman Undersecretariat,<sup>25</sup> as in “women from the city’s Metropolitan area.” It was linked to the Department of Citizen Culture. In 2007, the Municipality created the Department of Women whose mission is “to contribute to the equal rights and opportunities between women and men and the reduction of discriminatory practices

that hinder the political, social, economic, and cultural development of women in the Municipality of Medellín.”<sup>26</sup> The Department of Women especially focuses on addressing two discriminatory practices against women. One is the violence and discrimination that *desplazadas* in Medellín have to negotiate every day. The other one is the violence that women experience in their homes at the hands of their fathers, brothers, grandfathers, boyfriends, and husbands. Throughout this famously literary city, people are sharing stories about women’s experiences with violence and resilience. Women share these stories around kitchen tables, on blogs, and in exhibitions, posters, music, literature, and theater. Intertwined in these stories are women’s efforts to grapple with the contradictory and painful contexts of Roman Catholicism, *machismo*, narcotraffic, hunger, gangs, and single motherhood. Women also talk about leaving their role in the conflict.<sup>27</sup> Women in their teens and early twenties who were born into displaced families are now producing their own cultural critique to counter sexual objectification of women and the social stigma against girls who come from impoverished and violent neighborhoods.<sup>28</sup> Through this literature, it is clear that women have been, and continue to be, courageous and effective actors in negotiating truces, kidnapped hostage releases, and peace alliances between warring groups.

Woven throughout these publications and conversations are also two intertwining tensions. The first is a tension regarding women breaking their silence about their experiences with the conflict in Colombia and domestic violence in their homes. The second tension focuses on gender norms that have five centuries of colonial roots in Colombia: women’s place “at home” or “in the street.” Women are pressured to “be good” by staying home or negotiate the negative consequences of operating outside of it. Our archive’s stories complicate this dichotomy of “house vs. street” because being displaced means building your home in the unprotected space of the street and protesting in the street<sup>29</sup> to protect your home. Displaced women also publish literature that critiques the ideal that city life is better than a rural one.<sup>30</sup> Many displaced women’s stories frame their negotiation of these cross-class, house/street struggles as fundamental to their identity and dignity as *desplazadas* and neighborhood founders.

A side effect of academic literature's focus on the trauma of women's displacement is that it gives an impression of women as having a precarious, illegal, and temporary position in Medellín. Everyday rhetoric reinforces this impression. Land that people occupy without purchase or title in Colombia is called *un invasión*. To represent community founders' agency, creativity, and strategy, Marlin Fianco Aguime, Promoter of Cultural Development for the Cultural Center in Moravia, explains, "I don't like to use the word 'invaders.'" Regarding people who have built their own neighborhoods like Moravia, where 10,000 people built communities on and around the city's trash dump, she argues, "[i]t is better to use the term 'colonizers' because in history when you talk about colonizers, you say that they *founded* a church, *built* the houses, etc."<sup>31</sup> There is little scholarly work on how women founded—*post* displacement—their homes and neighborhoods. Also largely absent from scholarship about *displacement*, are women's perspectives on their *place* in Medellín as not just refuge, but home.

There is another powerful source of knowledge production about displaced people in Colombia: The City of Medellín's international and national public relations campaign about what it calls "the transformation of Medellín."<sup>32</sup> This campaign is tricky to disentangle into a dichotomy of "good" or "bad" state power structures versus an impoverished community. On one hand, publicity about a city government that invests 60% over 10 years of its city budget on "education," that includes building 300 points of infrastructure with state-of-the-art materials and design in the poorest, most violent, and most isolated parts of the city deserves to be known. It is these award-winning buildings, public spaces, and transportation between them that have allowed us to do this story telling project. Medellín's Metrocable (gondola), built in 2006, moves between one metro station in the city's valley and some of Medellín's poorest neighborhoods, located 1,300 feet up the Andes mountains. This is the journey many impoverished residents make between work and home to feed their families that week or that day. The trip used to take 2.5 hours each way. With the metrocable, the same trip now takes as little as 10 minutes, and the ticket includes access to the metro, which runs from one end of the city to the other.

On the other hand, the city's campaign about the transformation of Medellín often positions itself in terms of "heroic rescue" of the communities.<sup>33</sup> This city-as-hero framing is targeted for city, national, and international audiences outside of the neighborhoods they help. Slick YouTube videos entice tourists to come to Colombia. The tourism campaign slogan is, "Colombia: The Only Danger Is Wanting To Stay."<sup>34</sup> The Medellín campaign is problematic not just because of its myth of "rescue," but also because it makes invisible the labor, artistry, and expertise of thousands of community members who had built dozens of neighborhoods five decades before state support. This transformation is ongoing and being modeled in other Latin American cities.<sup>35</sup> The women neighborhood founders' stories are crucial to understanding the impacts of interventions in self-settled communities.

Why are *desplazadas*' stories in sparse circulation by those who have privileged mobility? Historian David Bushnell attributes limited scholarship about Colombia to "faint-hearted" scholars' decision to study elsewhere based on fear of violence portrayed in the media.<sup>36</sup> Virginia Bouvier credits "the drug-and-violence prism through which the world tends to view Colombia" to news stories' "policy hooks."<sup>37</sup> She argues that "[s]ince most U.S. foreign aid thus far has been earmarked" for the war, "other agendas—regional stability; democracy, human rights, and the rule of law; socioeconomic development and humanitarian needs; and peace initiatives—make headlines only occasionally."<sup>38</sup>

To these arguments regarding the sparse circulation of stories about women's self-settlement in Medellín, I would add another reason. Usually, the only record of a *desplazada*'s life in her original hometown before her displacement exists in personal photos she saves in her family albums. These albums are also usually the only photographic record of how they built their communities in Medellín and of 60 years of everyday life in them. Access to these albums requires being invited into community founders' homes. Most scholars depend on university, media, and state archives for knowledge about these communities. In these archives, information about these neighborhoods mainly comes from military and paramilitary incursions, police invasions, narcotraffic raids, and deadly floods and



fires. These are second- or third-person sources created by people from outside these neighborhoods who usually have no personal experience with being displaced.

## Family Albums As Alternative Narrative Force: 4 Experimental Disruptions

This archive's circulation process is inspired by ways that Steve Parks' New City Community Press<sup>39</sup> and Diana George and Paula Mathieu's work on *Hobo News* seeks to circulate stories told in the words and images of under-represented socio-economically oppressed groups.<sup>40</sup> Our archive has been especially informed by Paula Mathieu's "Not Your Mama's Bus Tour," in which she held writing workshops with unhoused adults in Chicago. This tour's audience engagement involves the mobility we imagine for our archive process in Medellín. The Chicago group wrote scripts and choreographed a bus tour to show residents and tourists *their* city. This city is a stark alternative to the official Chicago bus tours, which focuses on wealthy areas, monuments, parks and gleaming architecture in the image of "The American Dream." This alternative bus tour revealed the city living in poverty, crime, racism and political abandonment. In addition to the performative textual nature of this project, what strikes me about "Not Your Mama's Bus Tour" is that the storytellers were not only accompanying their own stories as they told them to an audience. These storytellers were *moving their audience* to the spaces and contexts where their stories happen. This reverses the circulation flow of stories traveling to the audience. In this traditional flow, the stories become a sanitized version of words on paper abstracted from the flesh-and-blood storyteller: a text (without context). Unless readers can connect their own lived experiences to this text, they can only read this story with one out of their five senses. They never have to smell, taste, hear, or feel the story. Scholars have proven that the more we engage information with all of our senses, the more we retain what we learn. Thus, the more it can mean to us. This kind of approach to a pedagogy of experiential learning created through community-university collaboration inspired and sustains the archive *medellín mi hogar*.



This section outlines the genealogy of this story archive. This genealogy begins with the City of Medellín's radical changes in how it engages with displaced communities in Medellín. It was these changes that make documenting these stories in the archive possible. In 2008, the City of Medellín's *Secretaría de Bienestar Social*<sup>41</sup> founded *Medellín Solidaria* in a painstaking process of official state-community encounters throughout Medellín. These encounters took place in neighborhoods that displaced people had self-settled over the previous 50 years, with little official state support. The process began with hundreds of social workers who, wearing blue vests with the *Medellín Solidaria* logo, began walking into neighborhoods that had been ignored by city public transportation due to fear of entering the city's most violent streets. They walked into communities where for years narcotraffic and other armed leaders had blocked outsiders from entering without their permission. The community residents also had reason to fear and resent representatives from the city government, who over the past few decades had ordered military and police incursions into their neighborhoods and also looked the other way when armed groups burned down their houses. House to house, the social workers walked, asking if families wanted to speak with them about their rights as Colombian citizens and Medellín residents. Many people slammed doors in the social workers' faces. Some residents pulled guns. Some people invited the social workers into their homes and offered them *café con leche*. Over the course of a year, the social workers walked hundreds of miles. They risked their lives crossing *fronteras invisibles*, invisible borders marking gang, guerrilla, and paramilitary turf. City government vans transported *Medellín Solidaria* participants to and from their homes to government buildings downtown. The social workers would point to the Mayor's Building and say, "This is *your* building."<sup>42</sup> They showed community members how to process paperwork. The city government began fulfilling its promises to provide cement floors to cover dirt ones and access to potable water and other basic services, usually free of charge. News spread among residents that they might be able to trust this government program. These social workers could actually be a viable non-violent move toward connecting displaced residents in Medellín with city resources.

This social welfare office cannot be easily critiqued into a scholarly activist box and tied up with a state-as-panopticon theoretical bow. In



the context of Medellín, with ongoing violence and more displaced people arriving every day, being a state social worker means being a communications bridge between community members—the same members the state previously abandoned—and armed actors who are in direct contest with the state and the military. Social workers also represent the front lines of communication between community residents and the last three mayorships in Medellín. Former mayor Sergio Fajardo (2004–2007) and subsequent mayor Alonso Salazar J. (2007–2011) were the first Medellín mayors in 100 years not to come from the two-political parties (*Liberal* and *Conservador*) whose war with each other had prompted *La Violencia*. The current mayor Aníbal Gaviria (2012–2015) is affiliated with the *Partido Liberal* but he came into power through an alliance between his party and the Independent Party led by Sergio Fajardo.

In 2008, a year before the *Medellín Solidaria* social workers began walking into displaced people's neighborhoods, Jota Samper and I founded a study abroad civic engagement project with Duke University's DukeEngage pilot initiative. DukeEngage funds Duke undergraduate students to participate in one of 42 civic engagement projects worldwide. Called DukeEngage Colombia, the project which Jota and I still direct brings U.S. university students to live and work

in Medellín for eight weeks in the summer. This project's purpose is dedicated to human rights, not through social work but through social consciousness. We focus on ways students' lived experience in Medellín can help dismantle local and global stereotypes that reduce Colombia to nothing more than violence, drugs, and poverty.<sup>43</sup>

In 2008, we brought DukeEngage Colombia's first five U.S. students into self-settled neighborhoods, but under heightened safety conditions. Students ran free art and sports workshops with children and adults inside the *Parques Bibliotecas*, or Library Parks, which the City of Medellín had just built in what had been the most isolated neighborhoods throughout Medellín. Like all government and many cultural centers in Medellín, these Library Parks are patrolled by armed security guards. Our students were among the first foreigners to give workshops in these Library Parks, which had just opened their doors to 1,500 visitors a day. We quickly realized that our greatest privilege as U.S. students and faculty from an elite university in the United States was our mobility, our time, and the way Medellín residents from various neighborhoods welcomed our presence. Medellín residents wanted to share their stories with us simply because we had come to their city *despite* the city's reputation for violence that for two decades had scared tourists and foreign residents away. Jota and I worked with the students to develop what we saw as our responsibility among community members: to listen. When these Duke students graduate, they will likely become people with power: doctors, journalists, public policy analysts, professors, lawyers, and scientists. A core intention of DukeEngage Colombia is that the students' experience in Medellín will instill an ongoing questioning of their responsibility to human rights and an awareness of how they move through the world impacts people's rights.

The following year's DukeEngage Colombia students worked with the Library Parks staff in Medellín to make video documentaries about some of the city's new urban infrastructure and cultural programming. This time Jota and I gave the students more freedom to move around the city and neighborhoods. We worked with the historical memory project *Sala Mi Barrio*, located in the city's five Library Parks.<sup>44</sup> At each park, we circulated by flyer and word of mouth an invitation for people to share any story they wanted. To our

surprise, within three days, more than 1,000 people signed up. When we realized that more than 90% of the 250 people we interviewed were *campesina desplazadas* who had founded their neighborhood in Medellín, the idea for our alternative feminist archive was born.

After debuting our archive's first DVD to the storytellers in the videos in August 2009, the City of Medellín's Department of Social Welfare<sup>45</sup> invited us to make documentaries with families who were collaborating with *Medellín Solidaria*. For the last three summers, DukeEngage Colombia has worked with *Medellín Solidaria* on the archive. Every summer, each of our eight students spends four days a week, waking up at dawn, to walk with a *Medellín Solidaria* social worker on her route visiting families' homes. This collaboration with the social workers has moved our students out of the Library Parks and deep inside the neighborhoods and people's homes. The students accompany the social workers via metro, bus, metrocable, and on foot up into neighborhoods 1,300 feet into the Andes Mountains. Other students travel by horse, taxi, and motorcycle forty minutes into Medellín's rural municipalities, where they then walk another hour on unpaved paths to people's homes. The families are supposed to be informed that the students are coming and are invited to tell any story they like. The family members receive the student and social worker in their home. There the student photographs and video records women and their families telling a story in their own words and images. We specifically ask how they built their home and neighborhood and their perspectives on the City of Medellín's recent socio-urban interventions.

DukeEngage has played a fundamental role in not just funding student researchers to work on this archive, but also in negotiating the bureaucratic and legal structures to facilitate students to come to Colombia as part of an official university initiative. This allows students to become co-writers and co-caretakers of first-person stories they otherwise would encounter in a more abstract form, like in a book about a country they have never been in and about people they have never met. This first-person connection with the stories *and* the storytellers often heightens the students' sense of responsibility to them. Many universities in the United States will not allow official student programs in Colombia for fear of the State Department's

travel warning for this country.<sup>46</sup> Throughout our process with the students in Medellín, Jota and I run multi-media research writing workshops. To edit the video stories for an audience not familiar with Colombia, we guide students' further research in newspapers, oral interviews, books and archives. The students' research moves first to the women's photo albums and then to the city's official archives. This methodology is significant because it reverses the traditional archive-centric research flow by placing *desplazadas* as first-person narrators at the core of each story. The move from written-word articles to the multi-modal genre of documentary video further contextualizes this focus on the first-person *desplazada* narrator by including the storyteller's home and neighborhood in the story's visual and aural frame. Amidst widespread images of women as sexualized commodities and warriors or victims, our videos fight (genre) fire with (genre) fire. Documentary video is also an attempt to disrupt *doble desplazamiento* and move closer to keeping the storyteller with her story as it moves. I argue that channeling university resources to keep the storyteller with her story as it moves across borders, is fundamental to John Trimbur's framing of circulation as part of "the unfinished work of the democratic revolutions to expand public forums and the popular participation in civic life."<sup>47</sup>

Then we attempt to disrupt *doble desplazamiento* a second way. We expand the academic revision process(es) between editor, writer, and peer reviewers by listening first to the critiques of the storytellers. At our DVD debut in a theater in Medellín, hundreds of storytellers—as protagonists, audience, critics, and respondents—are the largest presence in the room. In a temporary inversion of power, the community members have more prestige and voice than the politicians, social workers, media, and university people also present. The community members' stories move across the massive film screen and boom through the speakers. The storytellers fill the majority of the 400 theater seats. After each video, the storyteller and audience members critique the student and the archive director. This face-to-face critique immediately after we experience their stories on "the big screen" is nerve wracking for all of us. More than one student has burst into tears before the debut out of fear that she did not get a woman's story "right," thus dishonoring the storyteller. Here the *desplazadas*-neighborhood founders hold us responsible for the way we tell and circulate their stories. This sense of responsibility between

story documenter (student) and storyteller (*desplazada*) is crucial because it is nearly always the last time the students will be face-to-face with the storytellers. It is this intensity of personal interaction that we hope will continue to inspire the students to circulate the stories when they leave Colombia. When the storytellers decide the edited version reflects what they want communicate, we circulate the stories throughout the Americas and online.

There is a third way we seek to expand the storyteller's ability to influence circulation of her own stories. We ask the storytellers whom they would like to receive their story and why. Women have asked that their stories circulate to state representatives, community members, hospitals, human rights groups, youth, employers, armed group leaders, warriors who wish to leave the conflict, and universities. Some women ask that their stories circulate to neighborhoods from which they are isolated by geography or invisible borders controlled by armed groups. Many women, such as Farconely, want their stories included in the official physical maps of Medellín. Luz Amparo Duque Garcés, who in 2010 had lived in neighborhood of Blanquizaral for 9 years with her 5 children, wanted to record a public-service announcement to sustain her community garden.<sup>48</sup> While touring the garden with 12-foot tall trees lush with sweet-smelling tropical fruit and flowers, Luz explains to a student, "We brought the trees and fruits that grew on the street, and we began planting them. Mango, lime, orange, lulo ... the banana tree."<sup>49</sup> In this area that used to be a trash dump, people from outside the neighborhood still illegally deposit trash, including medical waste, which contaminates the community well.

Marta Libia Velez Yepes, wants people to take care of "her stairs," in the neighborhood she co-founded.<sup>50</sup> When she arrived 30 years ago there were none of the drainage channels, which she and her neighbors built. "There was absolutely nowhere to walk," she says. "And the houses would flood from the water that came down the mountain. Everything would get ruined." Every 8 days they sold *empanadas* to raise money for supplies. She explains:

I would go house to house and the wives would tell me, "Look, he doesn't want to wake up." So [with the wife's permission], "I





would enter the house and pull them [the men] outside and say, “Do you want to keep living in the mud?” That’s how I would get them to come outside and help.

Looking at her stairs out her livingroom window in the house she and her family built, she adds with a grandmotherly smile, “the person who throws trash out here has to reckon with me.”

Many women want to tell why they are willing to work with a state government that has in the past burned down their homes or done nothing about it. A young university student narrates with pride how much she loves her home in the neighborhood of Moravia and is grateful for her state-funded education grant.<sup>51</sup> This home is on the same plot of land where the state had burned down her home 12 times in her lifetime. Marta Nelly Villada Bedoya said when she was first displaced she relocated herself and her family to Pereira, where she built a *ranchito*. “I had been living there for 15 days when *Control Físico* came and knocked it down and burned it.”<sup>52</sup> As Marta Nelly speaks, she holds up newspaper clippings showing her and her family sitting outside in the dirt next to where their home had just been destroyed. “They burned my roof, all the walls. Everything. I

just took out my beds, my storage closet and my clothes. And since I had a newborn baby, I laid her in the crib outside in broad daylight.” She was one of 40 families who, as one newspaper reports, “woke up yesterday to the sound of machines destroying their homes.”<sup>53</sup> The next day “government employees from Control Físico, Public Works, and more than 200 policemen began evacuating families out of the invasion settlement.”<sup>54</sup> A day later, a different government commission brought humanitarian aid.<sup>55</sup> A few years later, Marta Nelly received visits from *Medellín Solidaria*, which she says have “given me inspiration to keep going.” Like many women, she archived these newspaper clippings in her family album.

The women’s desire to communicate their stories also risks damaging their amicable relationship with the city government and their reputation in their community. One woman asked us to make two versions of her video about her love for her children. One that revealed she sold her body at night to feed her children. The other obscured how she earned money. This was so her young children could attend the theater debut and not learn that about their mother yet.<sup>56</sup> Several stories are from Moravia, the city’s trash dump from 1973-1983, where more than 10,000 people had made their homes on the dump’s *morro*, the mound of trash covering 18.7 acres of land. Many Moravia founders want to communicate to politicians, urban planners, and social workers that while they are grateful for the City of Medellín moving them off “the hill” to new public housing apartment buildings, this move also cost them painful sacrifices.<sup>57</sup> Maria Consuelo Soto Gomez arrived with her family in 1980. On The Hill, she says, “the people were united,” and there was a women’s cooperative where she and her mother worked.<sup>58</sup> “You saw everyone everyday with their baskets, with their sacks, and with their hoes and their shovels, rummaging there in the trash.” She adds:

It was the life, because most people found new things; I can say from experience that [we found] curtains, little packages of things; new shoes, everything new. It was a success because no one recycled. Many people lived off that and it was very good. To me it seemed like a beautiful hill, like a market. But then, we were removed because they said we couldn’t live there anymore. The people were sad, because many of them lived off what they found.”



Also complicating circulation of the *desplazadas*' stories is the women's fear that telling their stories will risk their lives. Sometimes women regret details they revealed in their stories and ask us to burn the footage. We do. Other times, we wrestle with a tension between destroying record of a woman's "story truth" and risking the storyteller's life. One woman named the people who had caused a fire that had obliterated a neighborhood where she lived. Later, she asked us to remove these names. We researched newspaper archives for evidence to cite the same information. This research proved inconclusive, but word of mouth in the neighborhood was consistent with her story. In the end, we did not name who caused the fire in the video version. With her permission, we kept the written-word transcript with the names for future record. Another woman Sobeida Tinoco was born in the rural town Cudinamarca in Bogotá.<sup>59</sup> She is a descendant of one of Colombia's oldest indigenous tribes, the Muisca de Indios. Sobeida explains how she became displaced from Urubá in 1995. "There were *paras* [paramilitaries] there and after the *paras* came the army, followed by the *guerrillas*. So one was stuck in the middle of this conflict between three armed gangs." She continues,

I went to protest in the marches, because they [members of all three groups] came into the field and didn't let us work. They were fighting for territories and also for [power over] organizations. The guerrillas arrived at my house. I couldn't tell them, 'No, I won't do this favor for you.' I had to give them a tax [food and other supplies in return for sparing her life.] Finally, came the day when they [the paramilitaries] arrived at my house at six in the morning.

This raid was one of the dozens of massacres in Urubá between the 1980s and the early 2000s. These massacres in the banana zone killed hundreds and displaced thousands. The paramilitaries had come accusing Sobeida and other *campesinos* of collaborating with the *guerrillas*. For six years after the raid, Sobeida fled her attackers from city to city with her three children. She never saw her husband again. When her daughter was 9, the paramilitary members kidnapped her daughter. A U.S. nun from the International Red Cross in Colombia eventually found her daughter hidden in a convent in Medellín and returned the little girl to Sobeida. Sobeida eventually decided to



settle with her children in Medellín on a plot of land that belonged to her uncle's wife. This neighborhood had been one of Medellín's most dangerous neighborhoods in the 1990s and early 2000s due to violence, especially daily shootouts. With help she sought from the government, NGOs and international agencies, Sobeida has since remodeled her house that now has running water, electricity, a kitchen, gleaming tile floors and framed pictures of her family adorning the freshly painted walls.

The week before the archive's August 2012 DVD debut, a *Medellín Solidaria* social worker went to Sobeida's home to explain that the city government would provide transportation to and from the theater where the video version of her story would show. Sobeida told the social worker she had changed her mind and did not want her story shown in the debut. She wanted the video to be edited so her face was covered and so she was not identified by name. Jota Samper, the archive's co-director and Medellín native, called Sobeida to ask what had happened. Sobeida informed him that she had gone "to declare" details of her displacement in Bogotá for a housing grant, which she received. She had to again name names of those who had burned down her house and kidnapped her daughter. Sobeida says that after she had gone to Bogotá this time, she heard someone was murdered in her neighborhood. This murder could have been a totally

unrelated event. Scared, however, that this murder could somehow be related to her “naming names,” Sobeida said she no longer felt safe enough to circulate her story. Jota asked her if she would like to come to the debut for a private showing of her video. She agreed. That morning she called to say that she could not come. Without Sobeida’s permission, we would not distribute the DVDs with her story on it. We debuted the other stories with the storytellers present, but made arrangements to destroy all 500 DVDs and republish them without Sobeida’s story.

Alexa Barrett, the student who had interviewed Sobeida, and Jota still wanted to fulfill their promise to show Sobeida the final version. They also wanted to give Sobeida a copy of the entire uncut interview and accompanying photographs as well as a DVD with the 14 other edited stories. Story documenters do this for every one of the 650 people interviewed for the archive. Jota called Sobeida and asked if he and Alexa could show her the edited version of her story in the privacy of her home. Sobeida agreed. At dawn the next day, Jota and Alexa traveled to Sobeida’s home. Alexa says, “When we walked into her home, Sobeida gave me a big hug and was so happy to see us.”<sup>60</sup> She first watched the video story of a woman whose husband had also been murdered by paramilitaries, forcing her to flee her beloved rural town with her son. This woman lives with her now grown son in another neighborhood she helped found in Medellín. Sobeida murmured, “Oh, I know someone who would really be interested in seeing this.”<sup>61</sup> She said she felt connected to the woman because of their similar experiences as *campesinas* and *desplazadas* and urban neighborhood founders. Then she watched the video of her own story. In the end, Sobeida said she wanted to circulate the video story, emphasized how much it meant to her that Jota and Alexa made the effort to come show the story to her in her home, and asked to be invited to future public showings of her story.

There is a fourth way we attempt to expand women’s access to circulation of their own stories. When we return to Medellín, we bring the storytellers photographs, video, and written comments from audience members where their stories have traveled. This is our most difficult promise to fulfill, especially when a woman chooses to

tell a story that might put her life at risk. An indigenous community leader in Medellín, Morelia, had worked for decades with children, combating racism and trauma in contexts of war and poverty.<sup>62</sup> As part of her after-school programs, she rewrote lyrics to popular Colombian children's songs. In a song similar to "Simon Says," but where "The King" gives orders, Morelia adds a character: an indigenous female folk healer called *La Chamana*. The children are to disobey the King and obey *La Chamana*. The first thing *La Chamana* asks is for the children to hug each other. When we returned to bring Morelia news of where her story had traveled this year, we learned she had fled her home because paramilitary members had threatened to kill her because she refused to support them.<sup>63</sup>

## Inflection Points & Ongoing Contradictions

This article discusses four ways we experiment with our archive's knowledge production and circulation process to disrupt *doble desplazamiento*, a woman's displacement from her own story of displacement. (1) We choose the genre of documentary video to keep a woman's first-person story within the visual and aural frame of her home and community. (2) We include the storytellers as active members of the revision process in a theater debut of their edited video stories. (3) We ask the storytellers whom they wish to read their story and why. (4) We bring to the *desplazada* storytellers in Medellín feedback from audiences where the women's stories have traveled. My experience with this kind of literacy project in which story, storyteller and audience interact has always made it harder for me to abstract the story and storyteller as existing outside of her relationship with me. Jota and I created this archive *medellín mi hogar* because we believe this relationship means that we are responsible to the storyteller and her story. Our sense of relationship and responsibility is deepened by the direct relationship between the risks the storyteller makes in telling her story and her relationship to the conflict in Colombia.<sup>64</sup> Making stories as videos increases this risk because the storytellers choose to be identified by face, name and neighborhood. Women with the most intimate and violent relationship to the conflict take the most risks in telling their stories and have the least access to controlling circulation of them. Scholars often have the most indirect relationship to the conflict in Colombia and thus risk the least.

Jota and I are now working with storytellers, students, faculty, and social workers who want to circulate the archive's stories. I ask each person to identify her privileged access to sites of knowledge production: neighborhoods, cities, the media, human rights groups, film festivals, and universities. We seek to locate inflection points among these sites where dominant knowledge production about Colombia circulates. Over the past three years, the time and energy of people working on this archive has been absorbed with documenting the stories. The archive's stories have circulated to hundreds of people worldwide. But this has happened in a rather haphazard and spontaneous manner that depends largely on people finding our website, or teachers and film festival directors requesting a showing.

Our archive's goal is for women, especially *desplazadas*, to insert themselves into the dominant circulation of stories about who built the city of Medellín. With this in mind, we are mapping what we call "rhetorical inflection points"—film festivals, media outlets, blogs, scholarly forums and educational curriculums—where circulating our archive might be effective as an alternative transnational narrative force. Our map is concerned with two questions. How might we exponentially repeat our DVD debut theater moment inversion of power? And what happens when the (re)presentational context is abstracted from the flesh and blood woman who tells the story and is reduced to a documentary of it—from person to object?

Our first inflection point is at meetings with the City of Medellín officials who are working on current urban interventions in the *desplazadas'* neighborhoods. We are especially dedicated to circulating the *desplazadas'* stories to city officials who are creating a new City Plan. This plan will project how the population of the city will grow in the next 20 years and ways the government will allocate infrastructural and socio-economic resources to city residents. As noted above, the *desplazada*-neighborhood founders' stories contradict a bifurcated one-dimensional image of the state as overarching savior or evil invader of their neighborhoods. Instead, the women's stories complicate the state's public rhetoric of rescue with another interpretation: they view what the city government terms "the transformation of Medellín" as one of the most recent (and largely welcome) state interventions in a series of ongoing

community collaborations that these same women, their families, and neighbors have been directing for decades. Their stories could contribute a feminist dimension to the City Plan. The plan could be informed by the *desplazadas*' experiences founding and sustaining their own neighborhoods by strategically wielding the power that Colombian culture grants mothers to convince people to improve quality of life there. This year, Jota and I are circulating the stories to those creating the City Plan for Medellín and to audiences throughout the Americas and online. Inspired as much by the storytellers and their stories as I am haunted by our archive's contradictory unequal distribution of power, I hope the circulation of our archive's stories can sustain a more inclusive and thus more accurate narrative force that represents women's roles as *desplazadas* and neighborhood builders in the last sixty years of conflict and resilience in Colombia.

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## Notes

- 1 I wish to thank the many people in Colombia and the United States, who over the last five years have generously given their time to this archive project. This article is dedicated to the 650 women and their families who shared their stories for this archive. I also thank Eric Mlyn for taking the chance to include my DukeEngage Colombia project among the first DukeEngage pilot programs, when most universities in the United States would not officially endorse bringing students to Colombia. I wish I could individually name here the many people from Duke University; Emerson College; the Alcaldia de Medellín; the Secretaria de Bienestar Social and its Programa Medellín Solidaria; Agencia de Cooperación e Inversión de Medellín y el Área Metropolitana; the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín; SosPaisa; AULA Internacional; and the families of Carlos E. Restrepo. I thank Ryan Catalani who came to Medellín and helped video edit and created a documentary about this archive as well as a website that houses all of *medellín mi hogar's* edited videos. I especially thank those who generously critiqued my writing about this archive: Jota Samper, John Trimbur, Anupama Taranath, Suzanne Hinton, Clara Elena Mojica Vélez, Estephania Vásquez Gutiérrez, Alexander Silva Carmona, Natalia Isabel Pérez Villegas, Fabian Adolfo Beethoven Zuleta Ruiz, Hugo Rafael Avendaño Ramírez, and Diana George. I especially thank Diane Shoos for her multiple critiques on this article, which have had a profoundly meaningful impact on this final version. I also thank Gloria for keeping our Medellín home in order and my family on both sides of the border whose care for our daughter and other domestic love and labor makes it possible for Jota and me to do this project.
- 2 At this time in Medellín, there was an unspoken understanding between the state armed forces and the communities (a loophole in the Colombian constitution) in which any homes with a Colombian flag raised would not be torn down when the army or police was sent to “clear out” the settlements.

- 3 José Samper et al. Because the stories told in this article are meant to be read in their multimedia format, the storytellers and I invite you to read the written word text and watch the videos as you move along or watch the videos after you finish reading the written word text. The internet links to each video story appear in the text or endnote the first time a woman's story is mentioned. For Farconely's story see <http://youtu.be/ljD9w6PuSGw>.
- 4 In Spanish, women who are displaced are called *desplazadas*.
- 5 See Yacoub and Bouvier 2009.
- 6 The 1948-1958 period in Colombia known as *La Violencia* was sparked by the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a populist Liberal Party leader. The *Partido Conservador* (Conservative Party) had just been elected into national office, evicting the Liberal Party that had been in office for the past 16 years. See Bushnell and *Unidad de Atención a la Población Desplazada*.
- 7 For a detailed account of drug wars in Colombia and the U.S. involvement in it, see Kirk 2003
- 8 In 1992, Medellín was known as the most dangerous city in the world, due to the number of homicides per month in that city. See Ceballos.
- 9 According to data from the *Personería, la Unidad de Atención a los Desplazados (perteneciente al Municipio de Medellín), y Acción Social, antigua Red de Solidaridad Social*, 21,596 displaced people were registered in 2000; 20,469 in 2002, and 7,536 in 2005. As of August 31, 2011, there were 216,288 people registered as displaced in Medellín, living in 52,769 homes. This represents 8% of the city's population of 2.7 million people, not counting the metropolitan area. This makes Medellín home to the second largest population of internally displaced people in Colombia, a country with the largest number of displaced people in the world. See *Unidad de atención a la población desplazada* 2011.



- 10 See *Encuesta de calidad de vida* 2004. <http://www.medellin.gov.co/irj/portal/ciudadanos?NavigationTarget=navurl://6d39e618cf27dc5d27abf891c0a35b4a>
- 11 In a complex legal argument used to justify what some criticize as the city government's socio-economic abandonment of displaced people for six decades, the *desplazados* were squatting on land in Medellín, and thus by law the city government could not officially provide them with city resources. Instead of evicting people, which they state could have legally done, the state just looked the other way. This was partly because many assumed "the squatters" were a temporary consequence of war. See Samper "Granting of Land Tenure" 2012.
- 12 Jota Samper was born and raised in Medellín, and his teenage and early university years were in the 1990s when bombs were exploding daily throughout his city. He has worked as an architect for the last 16 years and has done projects in informal settlements (what some call self-settled or slum communities) in seven countries. He has a master's degree in urban planning from the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT, where he is now a Ph.D. candidate. For his professional biography and articles informed by this archive, see his blog <http://informalsettlements.blogspot.com/p/medellin.html>.
- 13 *Medellín Solidaria* literally translates as Solidarity Medellín.
- 14 *Departamento de Bienestar Social*.
- 15 See our edited video stories on [mobility17.com](http://mobility17.com).
- 16 For a more extensive argument regarding these risks that all actors in our archive, see my forthcoming chapter "We Also Built the City of Medellín: *Desplazadas'* Family Albums as Feminist Archival Activism" in *Taking Risks: Feminist Stories of Social Justice Research in the Americas*.

- 17 In Colombia, ongoing conflict happens between groups that can be understood in terms of those who are officially from the state and those who are not. There are at least eight distinct state and nonstate groups all in conflict with each other. Those from the state include the military and the police. Those not from the state include paramilitary, narcotraffickers, gangs and three active guerrilla groups (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*—*Ejército del Pueblo*—FARC–EP; *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*—ELN (National Liberation Army); ELN and Movimiento 19 de Abril – M-19. The English translations of the guerrilla groups respectively are the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army; the National Liberation Army; and the 19<sup>th</sup> of April Movement. The latter group “demobilized” by giving up its weapons to the government, received pardons, and became a political party in the late 1980s and is now called the *Alianza Democrática M-19*, or AD/M-19 (the Democratic Alliance). Complicating the understanding and experience of this conflict is that members of one group often switch sides to another group. This switching happens because for many impoverished people, being part of an armed group is not based on a political ideology but instead on the fact that it is a job, a way to support their family. Or, they are forced to join one group and/or the other by the group’s leaders who threaten to harm or kill them and their family if they do not. Also, (the nonstate) paramilitary, were originally founded by the Colombian military based on advice from U.S. counterinsurgency advisors during the Cold War. These U.S. advisors were contracted to combat leftist and narcotraffic groups in Colombia. *Campesinos*, or subsistence farmers in the countryside, since the 1960s have often been caught in the middle of these warring groups and forced to join or assist one side or the other or flee, making them displaced, *desplazados*.
- 18 In 2009, the U.S. Department of State introduced a new global online application form for Nonimmigrant Travel Visas to the United States. This form is called the DS-160. See U.S. Department of State “Worldwide Deployment of the DS-160.” All visa application questions referenced in this article come from the online DS-160 Nonimmigrant Travel Visa Application required of all Colombians applying to travel to the United

States. See <https://ceac.state.gov/GENNIV/default.aspx>. The narrative account of what Farconely would have to do to apply for a Nonimmigrant Travel Visa from Colombia to the United States is based on my past ten years of working with dozens of Colombians as they apply for these visas. These visa applications have been for my family members, university students and faculty, and artists. The latter is for a transnational youth art and human rights project I co-founded and direct called Proyecto Boston Medellín. See <http://mobility17.com>. The first visa application for my mother-in-law to attend my wedding to her son was denied. The second application was accepted but required me to send proof that I was indeed inviting her to the United States to help care for her newborn granddaughter. This proof required an inch-thick packet of legal documents, including notarized letters from friends accounting for the “goodness” of “my character,” ultrasound images of my womb and a notarized letter signed by my doctor that the unborn baby in the ultrasound images was indeed inside *my* body. As of the publication of this article, we have not yet applied for a travel visa to bring a *desplazada* to accompany her story across the border to the United States. We are strategizing with the City of Medellín officials who work with women on how to apply for U.S. travel visas for some of the storytellers in our archive to come present their documentary videos in the United States.

- 19 See U.S. Department of State DS-160 application form for Nonimmigrant Travel Visas from Colombia to the United States. <https://ceac.state.gov/GENNIV/default.aspx>
- 20 The most widely circulating national history of Colombia in English and also in Spanish translation is David Bushnell’s *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself*. It was published in 1993, about two years after Medellín, based on the number of homicides in the city per year, was labeled the most dangerous city in the world. Unlike Bushnell’s observation in 1993 that Colombia in scholarly meetings and academic journals, “is featured far less frequently” than many other South American countries or Mexico, each of the previous three Latin American Studies Association conference program lists more than 40

presentations on Colombia. The telenovela running since June 2012 in Colombia is about Pablo Escobar and another recent popular telenovela in this country featured 60 episodes of *Rosario Tijeras*, a television series about the real-life woman assassin by the same name.

- 21 Scholarly literature about displaced women's peace movements tend to focus on high profile national and regional women's movements for peace and conflict resolution. These tend to be historiographies, ethnographies, or public policy analyses. There are also psychology models for working through displacement trauma. See for example, Bouvier; Rojas; Roldán; Alzate "container-title": "Disasters", "page": "131-148", "volume": "32", "issue": "1", "abstract": "As of 30 June 2006, more than 3.5 million Colombians are internally displaced persons (IDPs; Vågen; Unidad de atención a la población desplazada; Iáñez Domínguez and Pareja Amador; and Murdock. Other scholarship focuses on women working in factories (see Farnsworth-Alvear) and NGOs or women's rights organizations (see Murdock).
- 22 Accessed July 6, 2012 at 10:39am. <http://www.amolatina.com/?gclid=CKOG9eKwhbECFQoFnQodeAY85Q>
- 23 A *ranchito* is a home people build by hand with found planks of wood. When *desplazados* arrive to self-settle in Medellín, they build a *ranchito*.
- 24 See for example, *Vamos Mujer*; "Asociación nacional de usuarios campesinos"; "Corporación para la vida: Mujeres Que Crean"; de Medellín; and "Centro de Desarrollo Cultural de Moravia."
- 25 *Subsecretaria de Metromujer*.
- 26 "En el año 2002 se creó la Subsecretaría de Metromujer, adscrita a la Secretaría de Cultura Ciudadana y luego, mediante el Acuerdo Municipal 01 de 2007 se crea la Secretaría de las Mujeres, la cual trabaja por contribuir con la igualdad de derechos y oportunidades entre hombres y mujeres de la ciudad

de Medellín y sus corregimientos, promoviendo la participación y el empoderamiento de las mujeres en los escenarios políticos, culturales, sociales, económicos, entre otros.” *See Municipio de Medellín.*

- 27 An equally popular theme is a media-perpetuated conception of feminine beauty that is as narrow as it is voluptuous. Complicating matters is that this “beauty” is achievable with extensive plastic surgery, which is easily attainable in Medellín if someone can pay for it. Hundreds of women every year in Medellín go under the plastic surgery knife. Many impoverished young women see this as their best way to marry into money and out of poverty.
- 28 See Rap musician Soria Shorai’s song “More than an Image,” which she released in 2008 on open-access subterranos.net and posted her video for it on YouTube in 2009. The song encourages women to rip up fashion magazines, not sell themselves to men, and instead develop their mind and heart. In her song another woman also appears: “the destitute barefoot mother,” who the media “clouds over” while lying “at their own convenience of course, yeah, only speaking of celebrity and expensive clothes.” This mother is the woman who arrives to Medellín as a *desplazada* and builds a wooden plank house like the one in the music video where Shorai sings (Municipio de Medellín). For the full lyrics in Spanish and a book written by and about youth rappers from Medellín’s poor neighborhoods, see Programa Planeación Local y Presupuesto Participativo 2008. In this book rappers and graffiti artists position their work in the context of U.S. hip-hop as anti-racist social justice movements.
- 29 Here I consider “the street” to include other public spaces outside the home, including the internet.
- 30 María Elena Giraldo González’s story “Little Red Riding Hood In Search of The Wolf,” describes a young girls’ decision to leave her grandmother’s house in her rural pueblo in search of a better life in the city of Medellín.

*Dejó el vestido dominguero sobre la cama,  
vistió jean rojo, encendió la moto roja por  
supuesto y llegó hasta el apartamento del  
lobo, quien esperaba impaciente.”*

*I left my Sunday dress on my bed, got  
dressed in red jeans, started up my  
motorcycle, which is red of course, and  
arrived to the wolf’s apartment, who  
waited impatiently.*

This is one of 9 story contests published by Medellín’s Metro Company with the slogan “One city, one METRO, 15 years of stories, and 100 words to tell one.” This story was selected among 1,000 submissions for publication in the 2010 story contest called “A Story For Your City in 100 Words.” Judges for this contest have received more than 6,000 stories with similarly gendered and feminist themes from women and men who live in the city’s most impoverished neighborhoods. Each book, which publishes a pocket-size paperback selection of the story submissions, is distributed for free in the metro stations’ Bibliometro offices that are open to anyone.

- 31 In Spanish, Promotora Cultural de Desarrollo de Centro Cultural de Moravia. For the interview with her and residents of Moravia, see Marko, Jota Samper, and Murphy. <http://youtu.be/FaP-OlBIU40>
- 32 See Samper Escobar and Massachusetts Institute of Technology Dept. of Urban Studies and Planning and Martin and Inter-American Development Bank. The urban and social interventions in Medellín since 2004 are routinely referred to as “the transformation of the City of Medellín” in publications produced by the Medellín City Mayor’s office, Colombian tourist ads, and local, national and international media. For those who live in Medellín or study it, “the transformation of Medellín,” has become a household phrase.
- 33 See de Medellín, *La Transformación de Medellín desde la Cultura*; Samper Escobar and Massachusetts Institute of Technology Dept. of Urban Studies and Planning; and de Medellín, *La Transformación de Medellín desde la Cultura*.

- 34 See Proexport Colombia <http://www.colombia.travel/en/international-tourist/colombia/tourism-campaign> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzZe0gcc0eY>.
- 35 The *Favela Bairro* project and the *Morar Carioca* project in Rio de Janeiro, the largest urban upgrading project in the world, is modeled after the urban intervention projects in Medellín. See Samper “The Granting of Land Tenure” 2012.
- 36 Bushnell’s own research on Colombia began when he went there as a doctoral student in 1948, and was there when *La Violencia* began. He also cites how complicated it is to synthesize Colombia’s idiosyncratic localisms throughout the country’s cities and regions. Colombia has three major Andes mountain ranges, Amazon jungle, desert, ranch-filled plains, two (Pacific and Atlantic) coasts, and five border regions with Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama and Peru. Colombia is also culturally and ethnically diverse with Spanish, indigenous, Afro-Colombian and European roots. For another national history of Colombia published in English see Safford and Palacios.
- 37 She continues, “In the United States, policymakers have promoted three sometimes overlapping paradigms that have shaped U.S. relations with Colombia”: (1) counterinsurgency concerns that since the 1950s “governed U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America”; (2) the U.S. war on drugs that “dominated U.S. policy directives in the Andean producer countries; and (3) and U.S. government war on terror which since the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon Building, “has driven U.S. foreign-policy concerns around the globe.” Within this frame, Bouvier also cites Plan Colombia. Launched in 2000, this multibillion-dollar Plan Colombia’s goal was to strengthen the Colombian state’s, especially its military and police, fight against leftwing groups and narcotraffic leaders and to protect oil pipelines. Plan Colombia made Colombia one of the leading recipients of U.S. aid, “surpassed at the time only by Egypt and Israel” (Bouvier 5-6).

- 38 Bouvier 5-6. Finally, she argues that human rights practitioners' "most pressing task is to respond to human rights violations" and to violations of international humanitarian law" (7). In the conflict-resolution field, she cites an "ironic" and "inherent bias" against "actors who have eschewed violence in the pursuit of peace. Conflict analysis generally is performed with 'conflict actors' in mind."
- 39 See Parks.
- 40 See George.
- 41 The City of Medellín's Department of Social Welfare.
- 42 See Barriga Personal Interview.
- 43 DukeEngage is a civic engagement program with the motto "Change yourself, change your world." DukeEngage has funded 2,000 students to participate in more than 42 projects worldwide. See <http://dukeengage.duke.edu/> and our students' Colombia program blog <http://dukeengageinmedellin.blogspot.com>. For a discussion of a pedagogical theory and practice emerging from the work my students and I do on this archive, see my forthcoming article "Proyecto Boston Medellín: Toward A 21st-century feminist pedagogscape." *Proyecto Boston Medellín 2011 & 2012*. Medellín, Colombia: *Universidad Nacional de Colombia*.
- 44 *Sala Mi Barrio* translates as "My Neighborhood Livingroom," which references the intimate home spaces where family members and friends spend hours, often daily, chatting about their lives. For more about Sala Mi Barrio and the Parques Bibliotecas, see [http://www.reddebibliotecas.org.co/sistemabibliotecas/Paginas/parque\\_biblioteca\\_espana.aspx](http://www.reddebibliotecas.org.co/sistemabibliotecas/Paginas/parque_biblioteca_espana.aspx).
- 45 In Spanish this state entity is called *Secretaria de Bienestar Social de la Alcaldia de Medellín*.



- 46 See [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1090.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1090.html).
- 47 See Trimbur 191.
- 48 See Marko, Jota Samper, and Robelo. <http://youtu.be/YzwSqFzARWQ>
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 See Jota Samper, Marko, and de Armas “Escaleras a La Cima.” <http://youtu.be/ZmXOP2knkBw> All discussion and quotation regarding this story come from this video.
- 51 See Jota Samper, Marko, and Murphy “La Necesidad.” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=IuRPeeailZ0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=IuRPeeailZ0)
- 52 See Marko, Jota Samper, and de Armas “Al Aire Libre” [http://youtu.be/pV5dzKT\\_nG0](http://youtu.be/pV5dzKT_nG0). All subsequent quotes about this story come from this video.
- 53 “Zona de Despeje.” *Diario del Otún*. 23 de enero, 2004.
- 54 “El pulmón en la calle.” *La Tarde*. 23 de enero, 2004.
- 55 “Colaboración con los desplazados.” *El Diario del Otún*. 25 de enero, 2004.
- 56 See Marko, Jota Samper, and de Armas, *Un techo que brindarles* <http://youtu.be/ISPxR19CMVk>
- 57 See Marko, Jota Samper, and Rosenthal <http://youtu.be/Tj75ukawRQU>
- 58 See Marko, Jota Samper, and Murphy “Los Colonizadores” <http://youtu.be/FaP-OlBIU40>. All subsequent information and quotes regarding this story come from this video.

- 59 See Marko, Jota Samper, and Barrett. <http://mobility17.com>
- 60 See Zuckerbrod, Jota Samper, and Marko. <http://mobility17.com>. All subsequent information and quotes regarding this story come from this video.
- 61 See Barrett and Jota Samper “Personal Interview.”
- 62 See Mojica Vélez and Soto Posada <http://youtu.be/cj6sWc2RQuM>
- 63 Morelia’s need to flee is not necessarily directly related to her rewriting the children’s lyrics or even her anti-racist work *per se*. Her position as a community activist with decades in her community does mean she holds a position of power among her neighborhood residents. It is this power position that armed actors consider a threat, unless people like Morelia agree to support them.
- 64 For a more extensive argument regarding these risks that all actors in our archive, see my forthcoming article “We Also Built the City of Medellín: *deplazadas*’ family albums as feminist archival activism” in *Taking Risks: Feminist Stories of Social Justice Research in the Americas*.

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