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INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT: VIOLENCE, PUBLIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC POLICY IN COLOMBIA

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Internally displaced persons living in Colombia experience three types of violence. In this paper, I discuss how state and structural forms of violence reveal the current hardships many IDPs face as a result of the military, paramilitary and guerrilla conflict that displaces them and the socioeconomic policies that seek to resettle them. My analysis also shows that symbolic violence manifests itself through 'othering' narratives and practices, which affect how IDPs resettle in Bogotá. I highlight relations between institutions and individuals, show how public policy affects IDPs in urban centers, demonstrate how IDPs create new identities in situations of forced migration, and examine how IDPs experience symbolic violence.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Colombia has a population of over 45 million people, making it the fourth most populous country in the Americas behind the United States, Brazil, and Mexico. It also has one of the world's largest and longest-running armed conflicts raging in its territory, which forced the displacement of 5.2 million people between 1985 and 2010 (CODHES2011) — the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world (Martínez 2011). In 2010 alone, violence displaced over 280,000 people, or about 780 people a day — a reduction from 2009, when over 286,000 were displaced. Acción Social, the Colombian government office that registers IDPs, registered 86,312 people as displaced in 2010 (CODHES 2011). Altogether, the Colombian government has registered 3,303,979 IDPs as of 2010 (IDMC 2010). Bogotá has the highest numbers of IDPs of any city in the country. In 2009, around 43,000 IDPs arrived in Bogotá, adding to the 300,000 to 400,000 already there — around 3 percent to 5 percent of the city's population (CODHES 2010:1). Displaced persons come from all segments of society — including landed elites and poor peasants — and from all political parties. Despite this, certain populations are overrepresented: Afro-Colombians and indigenous populations make up 4 and 2 percent of the entire population but represent 33 percent and 5 percent of displaced individuals, respectively (Bello 2006).

A brief overview of the history of Colombia will highlight the social and political woes at the root of internal displacement. As Ibáñez and Querubín argue, in Colombia there is a direct correlation between forced displacement and three main factors: 1) the intensification of the armed conflict in areas of land interest; 2) territorial disputes between paramilitary groups and guerrillas; and 3) illicit crop cultivation and the drug trade (2004, 8). Since the 1960s, the Colombian government has waged war against insurgent groups attempting to take control of the country —including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Popular Liberation Army (ELP), which coalesced from early land reform movements that began in the late 1930s. Political assassinations (Gow 2008; Bagley 2005), overlap between the drug trade and politics (Pearce 1990; Avilés 2006a), wrongful killings of peasants believed to be counterinsurgents (Kline 2007), use of child combatants (Human Rights Watch 2003), and internal displacement (Rojas Rodríguez 2001; Ahumada Beltrán et al. 2004) have all at one point or another characterized the Colombian conflict since the 1960s. Today, this continuing armed conflict affects much of the population. The *apertura económica*, or economic opening, of Colombia in the late 1980s and early 1990s through structural adjustment programs (SAPs) also contributed to displacement (Ahumada Beltrán et al. 2004). In addition, land-owning elites formed self-defense groups to protect their lands in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These groups, which would become today's paramilitaries, fought against the guerrilla factions, lobbied for policies favorable to their interests, and helped elect political leaders (Medina Gallego and Téllez Ardila 1994; Avilés 2006a; Palacios 2006). The Colombian military worked hand-in-hand with paramilitaries in the 1980s to “effectively [cleanse] entire regions of guerrilla sympathizers” (Palacios 2006, 203).

Despite little support from the general public, many guerrilla factions finance their operations by taxing the farmers who produce coca plants, an important component in the cocaine produced and exported by urban drug cartels. This was particularly lucrative in the 1980s, when the United States cancelled its participation in the International Coffee Agreement

(ICA) — originally created to ensure “a degree of equality in the power dynamics between poor producing countries and rich consuming nations” (Gibbs and Leech 2009, 51) — forcing the price of coffee per pound to fall and motivating many *campesinos* to replace their coffee crops with coca plants. The Medellín Cartel and, later, the Cali Cartel brought the business of trafficking narcotics to the cities of Colombia. But the Andean Initiative, between 1989 and 1994, and Plan Colombia in the last decade brought U.S. money and assistance to fight against these groups, which many governments have categorized as terrorist organizations.

Social scientists have studied numerous factors that cause violent displacement in Colombia: the relation between economic policies and displacement (Avilés 2006a), personal decisions for fleeing (Engel and Ibáñez 2007), social networks (Salcedo Fidalgo 2005) and gender (Merteens 2007). This article discusses how displaced individuals experience violence before, during and after displacement. In particular, I focus on interactions between IDPs and the bureaucratic agencies that serve them. The paper begins with a review on existing laws on IDPs, presents a literature review on the kinds of violence that IDPs face, and concludes with the effects of public policy on IDPs.

LAWS ON BEHALF OF IDPS

Although most of them are not enforced, many of the laws written over the past decade on behalf of IDPs in Colombia are among the most progressive of their kind in the world. On July 18, 1997 the Colombian Congress passed “Ley 387” (Law 387) defining an internally displaced person and his guaranteed rights:

A displaced person is someone who has been forced to migrate within the national territory, abandoning his/her place of residence or daily economic activities, because his/her life, physical integrity, security or personal liberty has been violated or directly threatened, within the following situations: the internal armed conflict, disturbances and internal tensions, general violence, massive human rights violations, infractions on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), or other circumstances arising from the prior situations that can alter or disturb public order. (Law 387, Title 1, Article 1 [1997]). (*Note: translation by author*)

Ley 387 also guarantees the right of IDPs to solicit humanitarian aid; receive basic human rights under international law; be protected from discrimination due to their situation, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, language, religion, public and political opinion, place of origin, or disability; reunite with family members lost due to violence; demand due resolution to their problems; return to their place of origin; receive personal security (that violent events will not occur again) from the government; and move without restriction throughout the country. In addition, the Colombian government must facilitate all avenues for these rights to be met. Sections 3 to 6 (Articles 14 to 17) of Ley 387 establish methods for the government to prevent further displacement, provide humanitarian aid, help people return or resettle in lands of their choosing, and help stabilize IDPs socially and economically.

In 2003 the Constitutional Court of Colombia ruled in Sentence #T-602 that the government has an obligation to guarantee additional rights to IDPs. Those rights include access to land, dignified employment, housing, social integration programs in the settlement area, medical attention, adequate nutrition, community-rebuilding initiatives, education, political participation, and protection from actors in the armed conflict. But a year later, in Sentence #T-025, the Constitutional Court found that the Colombian government was falling short of its duties to protect displaced persons and that the state at all levels of government had ignored laws written for IDPs: “These generalized violations were due to structural failures of the government, seen as a whole. Thus, [the Constitutional Court] declared that an ‘*unconstitutional state of affairs*’ had arisen in this field” (Cepeda-Espinosa 2008, 3; emphasis in original). T-025 has become the normative framework for providing needed attention to IDPs. The ruling declared that national and local authorities must adjust their budgets to meet the demands of IDPs. It also requires that groups representing IDPs be allowed to participate in the legal process of improving the “unconstitutional state of affairs.” The Court appointed itself to monitor the advancement of the laws and to ensure that all laws are followed.

T-025 also formed steps for the creation of laws directly addressing youth under eighteen (Auto 251 de 2008), Afro-Colombians (Auto 005 de 2009), people with disabilities (Auto 006 de 2009), women (Auto 092 de 2008) and indigenous populations (Auto 004 de 2009) affected by displacement. These *autos*, or writs, tackle problems related to these specific populations, which are not proportionally represented among the internally displaced. There is some disconnect, however, between these progressive laws and their implementation. Laws written on behalf of IDPs have not been followed, as the Constitutional Court has declared, and large numbers of IDPs that should have access to funds do not.

STATE, STRUCTURAL, AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Between April and September of 2009, I conducted fieldwork in the city of Bogotá for my MA thesis, spending a month during that period in the city of Medellín. I performed participant-observation, structured, semi-structured, informal and open-ended interviews with the review and approval of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee (HSRRC) at Portland State University. The IDP stories told in this paper, which I analyze in terms of three types of violence, are from that fieldwork. I will not summarize all of my findings here — for that, please see my MA Thesis, titled *Internal Displacement in Colombia: Violence, Resettlement, and Resistance*. Instead, I will focus on how categories of violence serve as a framework for analyzing the IDP experience. I separate state, structural and symbolic violence solely for directing the theoretical discussion, when in reality, violent events experienced by displaced persons have aspects of all three forms of violence.

The Internal Armed Conflict: State and Insurgent Violence

The Colombian government’s military campaigns against insurgent movements — an example of ‘state violence,’ or violence created or supported by government against its perceived enemies and justified as a necessary tool for national security and defense — has been a major contributor

to rural displacement. The Colombian government uses a discourse of national security to justify its economic development and military actions. In 1999 Colombia and the United States created Plan Colombia to replace drug cultivation with direct aid and development. But the policy has transformed from a development plan emphasizing crop substitution and alternative economic programs into a military strategy focused on combating insurgency (Rojas 2005, 217). The three main objectives of Plan Colombia — to reduce coca cultivation by 50 percent in five years, to end the internal conflict, and to strengthen Colombia's economy — has been implemented primarily through counterinsurgent attacks against the FARC in rich, resource-filled territories (Gibbs and Leech 2009, 53). The result has been an increase in violence, leading to the displacement of many rural Colombians.

In 2002 then-President Álvaro Uribe Vélez put forward the notion that Colombians should be more active in the government's fight against illegal, armed actors. In other words, ordinary citizens were responsible for protecting the state by fighting insurgency (Uribe Vélez 2003, 5). This policy, called *seguridad democrática*, or democratic security, also argues that the state should be able to strengthen its military forces and deploy them throughout the national territory. The government claims that the policy has succeeded in making the country safer, but critics suggest that it has done more harm than good. In 2008 the scandal of *falsos positivos*, or false positives, shocked the country and the international community. Military personnel had rounded up people, including IDPs, from poor neighborhoods of Bogotá and neighboring Soacha on the pretext that they were to receive employment on farms. The military personnel then tortured, murdered and dressed those individuals in FARC uniform to give the impression that the government's policy of *seguridad democrática* was working (Evans 2009).

The government leverages the idea of national security to legitimize its actions, creating what Agamben calls "the state of exception" (2005). Claiming a state of emergency, the government takes away liberties and rights that are defined and (normally) protected by constitutional law. For example, when President Álvaro Uribe took office, he ordered the creation of "rehabilitation zones" in which security forces operated with impunity and detained individuals without due process (Avilés 2006, 405). This "suspension of the order that is in force in order to guarantee its existence" is a defining characteristic of Agamben's state of exception (2005, 31), which has allowed the Colombian government to continue to undermine its political boundaries indefinitely. We see the paradoxical loss of security and order in adhering to the doctrine of democratic security so that the Colombian state may regain the security and order that it claims has been lost due to armed insurgents (Uribe Vélez 2003). The free reign given to military forces has caused massive displacement in areas where the armed conflict takes place — areas that are key to economic interest and development (CODHES 2011, 3).

Since the late 1980s, the Colombian government has also depended heavily on paramilitaries to fight its battles against guerrilla movements in rural areas. At the time, the government was shifting away from military-headed institutions toward a more civilian-dominated state (Avilés 2006, 381). For example, a civilian replaced the military head of the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (DAS), the country's domestic intelligence agency, in 1991. In addition, the 1991 Constitution allows the participation of political parties besides the majority Conservative and Liberal parties, making the Colombian government more inclusive and easing its integration with the global economy by ostensibly demonstrating open democratic

views and curtailing human rights violations (Avilés 2006). The shift to civilian control of military procedures led to the government's alliance with paramilitary groups, which allowed Colombian forces to deny responsibility for human rights violations (e.g. assassinations, social cleansing and torture). Since 1993, "increasing violations of human rights by paramilitary groups [have corresponded] with a decrease in the number of *direct* violations of human rights committed by the armed forces" (Avilés 2006, 402; emphasis in original). Today, the government continues to financially and tactically support attacks undertaken by provincial and local paramilitary groups and does not punish human rights violations that the groups commit (BBC 2010).

Consider the following example of government-paramilitary collaboration: Jorge, a 40-year-old Afro-Colombian whom I interviewed, stated that paramilitary groups in his department of Cauca went unpunished even though state police and military knew of abuses they had committed. Jorge was displaced after paramilitary forces killed his brother in retaliation for Jorge's refusal to join their ranks. After contacting local authorities and realizing that no action was going to be taken for the murder, Jorge, his wife and three daughters left the region and fled to Bogotá. His mother, who still resides in Cauca, tells Jorge that the authorities have done nothing about the murder of his brother. This example suggests that paramilitary forces operate with the implicit consent of the government.

The government's use of paramilitaries in counterinsurgency operations incites similarly violent responses from guerrillas, and civilians get caught in-between. Guerrillas recruit youth to fight for their causes, and families that do not cooperate are subjected to violence leading to displacement from their homes. Xiomara, a single mother of two displaced from Boyaca, was sexually harassed by FARC personnel. "The guerrilla threatened the life of my children if I did not sleep with one of them and allow them to take one of the boys," she said. She told me that she did not experience any physical violence because the guerrilla group who took over her house was called to another post. Xiomara escaped during the night, and a bus driver gave her and her children a ride to Bogotá.

Economic and Development Strategies: Structural Violence

Structural violence — in which institutions exclude people politically, deny them access to services and welfare, and exploit them for economic gains (Farmer 2004) — exists in Colombian political and economic policies. For example, the government's adoption of neoliberal reforms, which seek to transfer economic control from the public to the private sector in order to qualify for foreign aid, has led to the rollback of state subsidies and social welfare programs. This impacts the integration of IDPs in urban centers by limiting their ability to find jobs and their access to adequate assistance. Institutions that perform structural violence include governments, international economic development organizations and local municipal offices.

In 1991 the Colombian government adopted a new Constitution with a pro-democratic and U.S.-backed ideology to guarantee its receipt of foreign aid tied to development, political ideology and militarization (Avilés 2006, 389). Colombia opened its economy to foreign, capitalist investment and weakened "labour and popular movements through presidential decrees and articles in the new constitution . . . [charging] labour leaders with terrorist acts when they

engaged in social protest” (Avilés 2006, 391). Doing so enabled Colombia to receive development funds from the United States. Foreign aid was also the motivation for initiating Colombia’s war on drugs: The Andean Regional Initiative, totaling \$2.2 billion for the first five years, was created in 1989 to combat the drug trade (Advocacy and U.S. Foreign Policy), just as the era’s political leaders were promoting democracy to combat “the continuing challenges of social protest, guerrilla violence and narcoterrorism” (Avilés 2006, 388).

Such socioeconomic policies have serious implications for IDPs. Many displaced Colombians arrive in urban centers with no previous experience of participating in a market economy. The majority of people interviewed in this study remarked that wage work is almost impossible to obtain, and they think they belong in *el campo*, or the fields. Lacking education, experience or references, IDPs often fail to integrate into the market economy and must participate in an informal economy as street vendors or *jornaleros* (day laborers).

Eduardo, a 31-year old IDP from the department of Sucre, compared the way he must act in the city and in the *campo*. I met Eduardo at the Foundation of Attention to the Migrant (FAMIG), a non-government organization led by the Archdiocese. He said that in the *campo* one can do anything at any time. In addition, people open up their homes to feed anyone in need. There, Eduardo did not have to worry about having a job or enough money to eat. But in the city, Eduardo said, you must have money to eat. The only way to get money is to work, and no one in the city will help him get a job because of his situation as a displaced person. Eduardo feels he has been excluded from the socioeconomic reforms taking place in Colombia. As a displaced individual, he carries the additional difficulties of the stigma associated with being an IDP. Consequently, he must scavenge the streets for things to collect and sell. He finds this shameful and says that the glares he receives put him down.

Social institutions that create oppression through structural violence affect IDPs’ chances at acquiring job opportunities (Farmer 2004). Financial and military aid has continued to pour into Colombia from the United States, with an understanding that the money will be used for neoliberal development and investment strategies (Gruner 2007, 156; see also Black 1999; Schaffer 1995; Escobar 1988), but social welfare programs have been cut so that foreign aid through neoliberal reform can enter the country.

Another form of structural violence exists for many IDPs at *Unidad de Atención y Orientación* (UAO) offices throughout Bogotá, where bureaucratic steps hinder IDPs from receiving state aid. IDPs I spoke with told me that lines at the UAO were long, often forming around 4 a.m. or earlier, with security officers not attending to them until the late morning. Many IDPs stated that government representatives talked down to them when they visited the offices at Ciudad Bolívar-Usme and Bosa-Kennedy in Bogotá. Patricia, an IDP from Llanos, recounted that in her visits to the UAO, government agents she interacted with yelled at her because they did not believe what she told them. In one case, the official, without looking at her National Identification Card, said that her ID was illegal and forged. Complaints against UAO workers are common, as is evidenced when IDPs hold meetings and conferences about their plight. At one such conference, in June 2009, IDPs drafted a document that listed treatment by government workers as one of six ideas that they believed to be important.

The Formation of the IDP Other: Symbolic Violence

The non-displaced public often views IDPs as non-citizens who use up resources — an example of symbolic violence, or violence through social modes of control that form categories of dominance through strategies of power or discrimination (Bourdieu 1994). In other words, people impose labels onto others to exert power over them. Malkki's theoretical essay on refugees and their "uprootedness" brings to light how refugees' identities are formed (1992). Her analysis of events in Tanzania parallels what is taking place in Colombia: People who see refugees as amoral populations believe that by losing their physical homeland, the refugees lose their moral bearings. "Broken roots," or displacement, "signal an ailing cultural identity and a damaged nationality" (Malkki 1992). Many see Colombian IDPs in the same manner — as refugees within their own homeland. The public at large condemns them and defines them as vagrants, and the government argues — despite the law — that most of those arriving in Bogotá are not IDPs but poor job seekers ineligible for government aid (Gonzales Bustelo 2005). In such cases, 'othering' serves economic and political purposes.

Many urban Colombians tell the common narrative of *invasiones*, or invasions, which are the shanty towns that line the outskirts of major cities throughout the country. These shanty towns are home to large numbers of people classified as belonging to the poorest segment of the population and negatively stereotyped by non-displaced people. More often than not, internally displaced individuals come to these poor areas of the city and acquire all the same negative stereotypes given to people in invasions. Through these narratives, much of the public assigns characteristics to IDPs — that they are uneducated, drug dealers, beggars or only interested in state money — erasing IDP life histories and creating new definitions that do not fit their lived realities. For example, the UAO offices at Bosa-Kennedy and Ciudad Bolívar-Usme are located in some of the least desirable parts of Bogotá — marginalized shanty towns that are home to newly resettled IDPs. I often received warnings from friends and acquaintances when I visited the offices because, being ignorant of what shantytown dwellers have gone through, non-displaced individuals often identify slum-dwellers as drug dealers or as criminals to be feared and despised. This 'othering' engenders symbolic violence (Rojas 2005).

"Othering" — attempting to define the self as positive by defining the "other" identity as negative — prevails today in Colombia. Theorists see it as a way to assign essential ideas and definitions to others in order to demarcate difference and exert control. The non-displaced public creates both a stigmatized identity of the other and an identity of themselves as everything the other is not. Additionally, "othering" explains perceived anomalies inherent in an imagined world view (Biolsi 2007, 402). These can be a number of things: For example, in Colombia "othering" discourses address why displaced persons are poor and uneducated compared to the rest of society, why people's displaced situation occurs, or why misconceptions about IDPs' work habits offer excuses for not providing work opportunities. The non-displaced public, in an everyday and social context, identify IDPs as money-hungry, uneducated, ungrateful and amoral "invaders." Such stereotypes affect IDPs adversely, derailing their attempts to find jobs (because IDPs are seen as untrustworthy), adequate housing and education.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) offer a disentanglement of the various concepts now encompassed by the term "identity." "Identification" examines the processes of creating identity:

Identifying the self, or the other, creates defining characteristics that may apply to everyday life in any social context. For example, the non-displaced public assigns identity descriptions that suggest that IDPs are lazy or uneducated because they affiliate IDPs with pre-existing negative perceptions of shantytowns.

Another set of terms useful for understanding the numerous implications of identity are “self-understanding” and “social location.” Self-understanding is how one senses, or understands, who one is within one’s social location, and how, once these two attributes are understood, one acts (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 18). In the neighborhoods surrounding the UAO offices of Ciudad-Bolivar and Bosa-Kennedy, people understand discrimination and the social categories placed upon them. For example, knowing how hard it is to find employment, many displaced persons make a living in the informal economy by collecting and selling recyclable trash, cleaning houses to get paid under the table, or selling merchandise on the street, such as CDs or pirated DVDs.

Commonality, connectedness and “groupness” form a last set of ideas related to identity. These three terms create an emotion of belonging to a group through solidarity or sameness, while feeling antipathy or difference to outsiders (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 19). Commonality refers to the notion that shared attributes or qualities exist within people. Connectedness represents the social or relational webs, links and bonds that connect people. IDPs in Bogotá feel a sense of togetherness with other IDPs due to their social commonalities of living at the margins of cities, of living through violence and abandoning their lands and homes, and of being discriminated against (Zea 2010). Groupness among IDPs creates strong collective action — for example, in instances when IDPs have taken over government offices or marched on the streets to demand better rights.

Discrimination, a type of symbolic violence, is experienced by many who come to Bogotá. Take this statement from Mario, a man from Caldas:

I am living at Parque Tercer Milenio [a city park] right now. It is hard asking for money or shoes. Just last week, some guy gave me a pair of boots. Nice gesture, but they couldn’t be used; neither had soles. I nearly threw them back at the guy’s face. People don’t care. I didn’t go hungry in the fields (*campo*). There was always food. If you were hungry someone gave you food. Bogotá is very cruel. Tell me, who is going to take care of *un desplazado* [an IDP]? Sometimes I go up to Plaza Bolivar [the main square in Bogotá, where the country’s principal government offices are located], and see all those guys in their business suits. They don’t care about me, or the others who took over Parque Tercer Milenio. They spit at me sometimes. Working is impossible, and begging is shameful. Not only that, I try to speak to people, sell what I make with my hands, but they don’t want me near them. They think I smell bad, or perhaps that if I get close I will mug them.

In addition, the non-displaced public has negative perceptions of those who live at the margins of society. IDPs avoid these existing negative images about themselves in order to find

jobs more easily. Adriana, a 32-year old IDP and single parent of four children, understands how other city residents view her. She knows that in order to survive and provide for her children, her best strategy is to hide her displacement. “When one says that one is displaced, no one helps you,” Adriana said, referring to job opportunities. Employers in the city are not willing to take “risks” on IDPs as potential employees because they believe that IDPs are uneducated or untrustworthy. “It is best not to say anything,” Adriana said. She understands the stigma associated with IDPs and believes that it is in her best interest to keep this identity hidden when seeking employment.

Gracia, a woman in her late 50s, is a business owner who lives in an upper-middle class neighborhood in Chapinero. When asked her opinions of the displaced, she responded with a perspective mirrored by many non-displaced individuals:

There are still displaced people? I thought that they all went back to the fields. Well, anyways, you can’t believe what they say. One time my husband and I helped out a displaced family, but they did not do anything. We told them to take care of a lot for us — because my husband, an architect, had been contracted to build a house — so they could live somewhere while they found another place to live. But they would lie to us.

Gracia’s comments, like those of other individuals, show that displacement is not at the forefront of the general public’s mind. In addition, Gracia generalizes her bad experience with one family to the rest of the displaced population.

Many non-displaced people do not believe displaced children deserve spots at schools in Bogotá, alleging that their parents were not really displaced. For example, Marcela, a 27-year-old college student from Bogotá who was one of seven participants in a focus group, said that the children of IDPs had no right to take the classroom spots of children from Bogotá, even though the law says they deserve access to education. She argued that many IDPs are simply a burden and that their situation is not going to change. Marcela described IDPs as people who could not be educated because of their rural background and said that sending them to school was a waste of government funds. She believed that IDPs belong in the margins of the city or in rural areas. By defining her “self” as a Bogotana and IDPs as “others,” Marcela reasoned that IDPs do not deserve state help and that further structural violence is permissible. Some of the people in this focus group nodded, while the rest kept quiet.

Government workers also often adhere to narratives of IDPs as greedy people who seek free money from the district. Carlos Padilla’s account was typical of those told by government functionaries: A government worker at the Ciudad Bolívar-Usme UAO office, Carlos was in charge of handing out emergency funds to those in need. In our numerous conversations, Carlos often talked about how stressful the job was because many IDPs lied to him. He described IDPs as “cow farmers,” saying they were milking the state for all its money. He would even act out the action of milking whenever he said this. Carlos stated that he stopped asking people the reasons for their displacement because it made him depressed, so he no longer sympathized with their personal plights. Instead, he just saw IDPs as liars who were only interested in money.

“Othering” convinces non-displaced people that IDPs are different, lesser and undeserving of state aid because they cannot escape from their past experiences. Thus, the popular discourse declares that the IDPs’ homeless, shoeless, uneducated existence befits them. In the 1990s, numerous actors formed race-based identities of black communities for political reasons in Colombia (Escobar 2007:249). These formations came about by both the “flexing power” of the state and the enacting agency of the “subaltern” to create collective action (Escobar 2007). Similarly, IDPs today undertake a dialectical discussion with narratives created about them to form alternative identities for political reasons. Just as “black communities” became a new identity that had to be defined by multiple actors for different political reasons, IDP identity formations also take place through the “flexing power” of the state, the non-displaced public, NGOs and the “subaltern” IDPs themselves

CONCLUSION

State, structural and symbolic violence feed into and overlap one another. IDPs bear the brunt of these and have to navigate in places where people do not see them as valued citizens. First is state violence, in which the actions of armed groups force many individuals to leave their homes to escape being assassinated, punished, fumigated or tortured (Salcedo Fidalgo 2005, 164). They are caught in the middle of a war between guerrillas and a state funded by foreign aid. The large amount of funds and counter-insurgency training provided by the U.S. in return for neoliberal reforms — a form of structural violence — allow state violence to perpetuate unchecked. Finally, once people displaced from their homes and lands resettle in urban centers, they face forms of discrimination and marginalization — manifestations of symbolic violence.

Despite some gains in improving the plight of IDPs, the root causes of discrimination from both the non-displaced public and government institutions remain unchanged. Internally displaced persons continue to live in social structures that reinforce discrimination and mask their past experiences and histories. This enables violent actions by larger structures and the state to continue, perpetuating power inequalities that limit access to jobs and housing opportunities in Bogotá.

A significant social disruption since the 1980s that has displaced more than 5 million people (CODHES 2011), Colombia’s internal violence, though relatively less prevalent than earlier, shows no sign of being resolved, and current laws merely deal with the aftereffects of displacement, protecting people only after they have experienced traumatic events of violence, murder and torture. Contemporary legislation, though progressive, fails to address the root causes of displacement, which many have stated is the lack of agrarian reform (Garay 2009). Efforts of NGOs and government institutions, such as the Constitutional Court, to draw attention to the hardships, realities, and “unconstitutional state of affairs” that IDPs face every day have contributed to only minor positive changes over the last ten years. State offices and officials continue to deny people the basic rights that the Colombian Constitution, Law 387 and international humanitarian law (IHL) guarantee.

Given the size of Colombia’s IDP population and the magnitude of the conflicts that continue to force displacement, a scholarly understanding of the experience of displacement is

vital. My discussion focused on IDP experiences when resettling in Bogotá and the violence narratives that affect and define this marginalized population. Given that displacement has long-term consequences for individuals and their families, future research should explore how IDPs integrate into their host communities. Examining inter-generational understandings of displacement will show if IDP populations have resettled successfully. One way to do this would be to focus on people who were children and young adults when they resettled in urban areas. Factors such as social and economic standing may indicate the success or failure of long-term integration into urban centers, specifically in relation to laws on behalf of IDPs. As IDPs continue to challenge and voice concern for negative treatment at government offices and in neighborhoods, laws will change to allow IDPs to successfully integrate in urban centers.

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