

The Effects of the Drug Cartels on Medellín and the Colombian State

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ABSTRACT

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In 2012, Medellín was named “City of the Year” by the Urban Land Institute and became a universal model for a country’s comeback from extreme violence. However, twenty years earlier at the height of the drug cartel’s power, Medellín, the hub of the cocaine industry, was reported the most dangerous city in the world. The author posits the economic, political, social and physical effects of the cartels are and were profoundly felt by both marginalized and mainstream citizens who came into contact with the consequences of the cartel’s actions on a daily basis. However, Medellín is altering its contemporary reputation to one of innovation, creativity, and equity. This paper examines the effects of the drug cartels and international cocaine trade on the Colombian Republic with a focus on Medellín, the nucleus of the industry. It will also address what has been done in Medellín’s era of reconstruction to recover from a dark history and create a space free of violence, fear, and uncertainty.

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Introduction

In 2012, Medellín was titled “City of the Year” in a contest sponsored by Citigroup, the Marketing Services Department of the Wall Street Journal and the Washington-based Urban Land Institute. A list of 200 cities was compiled measuring eight criteria: environment and land use, culture and livability, economic / investment climate, progress and potential, places of power, education and human capital, technology and research, and mobility and infrastructure. Among the three finalists, Medellín, New York City, and Tel Aviv, consumer voters elected Medellín.¹ “Few cities have transformed the way that Medellín...has in the past 20 years’ read a ULI statement, highlighting improvements to public security, transportation and civic spaces.”²

This marks a momentous occasion for citizens, government officials, and urban planners of both Medellín and Colombia as no less than twenty years ago, Medellín was the hub of the international drug trade and possessed the highest homicide rate in the world. This city presents an interesting case as it was overtaken and its infrastructure reorganized in less than a decade to serve the powerful drug cartels. Before intervention, the homicide rate was 185 for every 100,000 people.³ No less than twenty years later, Medellín is attempting to overcome its enduring reputation, and restructured itself as one

¹ "Wall Street Journal and Citi Announce Medellín Wins ‘City of the Year’ Global Competition." *Citi*, March 2013. Accessed March 11, 2013.

² Rico. "Medellín: How Colombia's Second City Overcame Its Drug Cartel Past." *International Business Times*, March 5, 2013. Accessed April 1, 2013.

³ Magdalena Cerdá, Jeffrey D. Morenoff, Ben B. Hansen, Kimberly J. Tessari Hicks, Luis F. Duque, Alexandra Restrepo, and Ana V. Diez-Roux. "Reducing Violence by Transforming Neighborhoods: A Natural Experiment in Medellín, Colombia," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 175.10 (2012): 1046.

of the world's most pioneering cities. Colombia experienced a resurrection since the decline of the drug trade, and Medellín, in particular, is the nucleus of the country's rebirth. It experienced the deepest violence, and recovered stronger than any other Colombian city.

According to the Uruguayan newspaper *El Espectador*, Medellín is a model for cities experiencing a rise in violence⁴. In the article, interviewee Jorge Melguizo, director of the Mayor's office of Medellín, states:

Es una violencia que nos ha golpeado desde muchos lugares. Desde la violencia política, la violencia guerrillera, la violencia paramilitar, el embate permanente del narcotráfico por intentar hacerse con los territorios urbanos, por el control del microtráfico. Pero, como usted decía, llevamos ocho años en un proceso de transformación profunda de la ciudad, y si usted hoy busca en Internet la palabra Medellín, aparecerán también las palabras cultura, educación, transformación, cambio. Es una ciudad que ha dado la vuelta y nos hemos parado ante el mundo a decir: tenemos estos problemas, los reconocemos, asumimos que los tenemos, los nombramos, pero les hacemos frente. Y les hacemos frente con una construcción colectiva, con hacer de esta ciudad un proyecto de inclusión y de equidad y con una transformación profunda desde lo público.⁵

Melguizo describes the numerous forms of violence that simultaneously plagued Medellín: political, guerilla, paramilitary, and drug traffickers battling for control over urban territories. He notes in as few as eight years the city experienced a miraculous transformation as it now stands as an international symbol for culture, education, transformation, and change. Melguizo is proud to claim *Antioqueño* leaders, those from the Antioquia state of Colombia, recognized the problems, and faced them as a collective

⁴ "Medellín: Un Ejemplo De Reconstrucción De Ciudad En Base a Educación Y Cultura," *El Espectador*, July 2011. Accessed March 11, 2013.

⁵ Translation by author: "It is a violence that has hit us from many directions, from political violence to guerrilla violence to paramilitary violence to the constant onslaught by drug cartels trying to gain control of urban territories. But, as you said, it has been eight years in a profound transformation of the city, and if you look on the Internet today for the Medellín, you will also see the words "culture", "education", "transformation", and "change". It is a city that has turned around, and we have stood up in front of the world to say: we have problems, we recognize them, assume we have them, name them, but we face them head on. And we face them head on with a collective construction to make this city a project of inclusion and of equity and with a profound transformation from the public."

group, thus making the city a project of inclusion and equity. Projects such as a cable car running from the *Metro* to the top of the slopes where slums are primarily located, facilitated the commute into the city for *comuna* members, thus expanding the distance residents could travel for employment, as well as desegregating the classes.

Los Angeles Times writer Christopher Hawthorne praises the city's use of public architecture as a means of curbing urban problems with youth and violence. "Rising in some of Medellín's roughest neighborhoods, these projects are the capstones of a broader civic rebirth that has seen murder rates tumble nearly 90% from their highs of the early 1990s. Even the tourism business here has begun to make a fragile recovery."⁶

Hawthorne examines buildings and public space, such as library parks and recreational centers, constructed to integrate the marginalized into the city by offering a range of social services. The buildings, furthermore, are "strikingly inventive as works of architecture." This signifies that it is not solely the activities within buildings that have been responsible for the city's transformation, but the physicality of the buildings, as well. They act as symbolic borders between two eras, the era of *Narcos* and the era of innovation and safety.

Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times* makes similar observations. He notes Medellín has become internationally recognized as a city that used architecture and public space as a means of re-making an urban center into an international power house.⁷ The construction of the *Metro* and cable cars brought the rich and poor together, seizing the city from the traffickers and giving it back to the people. Furthermore, architects used

⁶ Christopher Hawthorne, "Medellín, Colombia's Architectural Renaissance," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2010. Accessed March 11, 2013.

⁷Michael Kimmelman, "A City Rises, Along With Its Hopes," *New York Times*, May 18, 2012. Accessed March 11, 2013.

public space as a means of promoting cultural urbanism, transforming Medellín from a superficial, consumer driven city to one of culture. Medellín has even surpassed Bogotá, the country's capital, in terms of organized public transportation, art, and education. Kimmelman writes "the goal of government should be providing rich and poor with the same quality education, transportation and public architecture. In that way you increase the sense of ownership." Medellín is striving to undo class-based segregation perpetuated by the drug cartels, as well as provide opportunities for those who have historically lacked them.

Considering this, the illicit drug economy and powerful drug traffickers molded expectations of a lifestyle that shaped the personalities of *Paisas*, a term for those from Medellín, which has not been easily abandoned, as well as created an era of terror and violence deeply affecting all touched by it. The aim of this paper is to identify how the Colombian cartels, international drug trade and the violence perpetuated by the cartels affected the economic, political, social, and physical landscape of Medellín. I will also address what has been done to counteract the consequences of the cartels' actions following the collapse of the Medellín cartel. In order to understand the situation wholly, certain time periods will be examined. The Colombian cocaine trade as a commercialized market officially began in 1972, but it was not until the early 1980's it gained its power and disturbed every facet of Colombian life. When discussing the height of the cartel's power, I will refer to approximately 1982 until Pablo Escobar's death in 1993. The following twenty years will be considered a period of "reconstruction."

It is important, if not imperative, when studying the city of Medellín to consider the economy of the drug trade and the experiences of those affected by it. It dramatically

shaped the city, economically, physically and socially, and altered the ways both marginalized and mainstream members of society interacted with their physical and social environment. The *Capos*, heads of the cartels, promoted extreme violence as a means of exerting power over the Colombian economy. As traffickers paid armed groups for protection or as terrorist lackeys, and created employment opportunities for youth as drug runners or contracted assassins, *sicarios*, Medellín became the most violent and dangerous city in the world. It is necessary, then, to examine the experience of violence by citizens, and analyze how people structured their lives in order to survive in a world of ever-present violence.

I first traveled to Colombia in January 2011 as a volunteer English instructor. My first impressions of the country were in stark contrast to its reputation. People were friendly and happy, and cities lacked the sense of danger the country's reputation perpetuated. I lived in Manizales and Pereira. While not Medellín, these cities are located in the interior where residents consider themselves to possess *Paisa* qualities. *Paisas* are characterized, and often describe themselves, as hard workers. Furthermore, it is notable they pride themselves on finding the easiest way to make a quick buck. It is common in Medellín to see young, surgically altered escorts with their rich, older clients, and youth from the slums with expensive tennis shoes actively participating in the consumer lifestyle. I began to wonder if Colombians, most specifically those from this region, possessed these characteristics before the rise of *Narcos* or if this a direct consequence of their lived experience?

To appreciate the fall and subsequent rise of Medellín as a city it is necessary to understand what was occurring in Colombia that led to the creation and growth of the

cocaine industry and cartels. This background information will help illuminate the factors that propagated the world's most violent city. As previously noted, Medellín was the hub of the drug industry, both commercially and socially, and repercussions of the cartel's actions were felt stronger in Medellín than in other cities. Therefore, knowledge of the entire country's experience during the era of the cartels will elucidate more clearly what was occurring in Medellín. Finally, an understanding of the consequences of the drug trade on Colombia's national economy and politics, in addition to its effects on Medellín society and physical space, will allow one to grasp the severity of the situation at the moment Medellín officials decided to regain control of their city. It can be argued that Medellín earned its title as world's most innovative city because its problems were apparent, and, therefore, could not be ignored. Therefore, in order to understand Medellín's current position as "City of the Year," it is imperative to understand its holistic situation, which acted as the catalyst for government officials and city planners.

History

Colombia was plagued by violent and bloody civil conflict and further afflicted by the illicit drug trade and armed insurgency groups since the middle of the twentieth century⁸. The period of *La Violencia*, literally translated as “The Violence”, was a civil war ranging from 1948-1958 between the Colombian Liberal party and Conservative party. The war cost over 200,000 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands more. The end result was the creation of the bipartisan National Front, a power-sharing political party between the Conservatives and Liberals. However, many peasants were discontent with this decision and banded together to create opposing insurgent groups. The FARC-EP, *Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo*, was the first, and most famous, guerilla group formed in 1964 as a response to the newly formed government. A Marxist group with anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialistic ideologies, they fought for the rights of agrarian farmers. Consequentially, numerous other left-wing guerilla movements were formed, as well as numerous legal and illegal paramilitary groups who fought against the guerilla groups. However, these groups were primarily ideological, and, while violent and dangerous, were primarily concentrated in rural regions, and not considered a national security threat.⁹

⁸ Jennifer S. Holmes, Sheila Amin Gutierrez De Pineres, and Kevin M. Curtin, "Drug, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis," *Latin American Politics and Society* 48.3 (2006): 157-184.

⁹ "Un Sueño Llamado Paz," *RCN Noticias*, Bogota, October 15, 2012.

The National Front neither created institutions or social programs for the poor nor paid attention to social, political, or economic improvement in the peripheries. According to Professor of Sociology Carlos Yáñez Canal of *La Universidad Nacional* in Bogotá, the regions existed in terms of production and marginalization. There was little legitimacy of the state, and little confidence in state representatives¹⁰. It was in this period drug traffickers took advantage of the absent state and discontented peasant farmers to grow illegal crops.

The drug trade began in the 1960s with small-scale cultivation of marijuana. However, the production of cocaine for export in neoliberal economic terms and the advent of the organized international narcotics trade as a commercialized industry is a modern phenomenon with its formal appearance as recently as 1972.¹¹ It makes sense the industry initially emerged in Medellín, as it was Colombia's first city to industrialize, and for many decades led the nation in the exportation of other valuable commodities. In the mid-1970s, coca cultivation was outsourced to rural farmers in Peru and Bolivia, processed in Colombia,¹² and exported in small quantities to the United States. "High profits quickly allowed the business to become self-financing and to expand, and induced Colombians to develop 1) stable routes and links with coca paste suppliers from Bolivia and Peru and with suppliers of chemical inputs to refine cocaine and 2) transportation systems to make large shipments and distribution networks."¹³ Small businessmen began

¹⁰ Carlos Yáñez Canal, Personal interview, January 4, 2013.

¹¹ Mary Roldán, "Wounded Medellín: Narcotics Traffic against a Background of Industrial Decline," *Wounded Cities Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World*. Ed. Jane Schneider and Ida Susser. London: Berg, 2003.

¹² Holmes, Gutiérrez de Piñeres, and Curtin, "Drug, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis," 165.

¹³ Francisco E. Thoumi, "Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 582 (2002): 105.

to see potential in the drug industry, and shifted focus from legal crops to coca cultivation. By the 1980s, the illicit industry accounted for 10 to 25 percent of the country's total exports.¹⁴ With technological advances for growing and refining coca, Colombia became the highest producer of cocaine in the world.

Next we must examine the rise of the cartels. Pablo Escobar is the most infamous, violent, and successful of *los Capos*, the leaders of the mafia-like cartels. He came from a poor slum in Medellín and dreamt of becoming a millionaire. Escobar began his career stealing headstones, running petty scams, and smuggling contraband. In 1975, he developed his cocaine operations, personally smuggling drugs from Colombia to Panama. In seven years, Escobar's cartel had grown to the largest in the world, bigger, wealthier, and more violent than its rival in Cali, led by the Orejuela brothers.¹⁵ It is important to comment that the Cali cartel was notably more discreet than its *Antioqueño* counterpart, and neither partook in the war against the state nor used widespread terrorism to maintain control of the market.¹⁶ By the mid 1990s, eighty percent of the world's cocaine came from Colombia,¹⁷ and was primarily produced by the Medellín and Cali cartels. In 1989, Forbes Magazine named Escobar one of the world's 227 billionaires with a net worth of over three billion dollars.

¹⁴ Holmes, Gutiérrez, and Curtin, "Drug, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis," 165.

¹⁵ *Pablo Escobar Angel Or Demon*, Dir. Miguel Sierralta, Sierralta Entertainment, 2007.

¹⁶ Roldán, "Wounded Medellín: Narcotics Traffic against a Background of Industrial Decline," 178.

¹⁷ *Pablo Escobar Angel Or Demon*, 2007.

The Globalized Drug Industry

Historian Frederick Cooper believes globalization implies “a single system of connection-notably through capital and commodities markets, information flows, and imagined landscapes- has penetrated the entire globe”¹⁸ in something he labels a non-systematic system. This single system, the globalized illegal drug trade, manifests itself differently on the ground in each location, and may even appear unrelated. While a global phenomenon, it holds a different significance when examined at the microcosm level of geography or class. The system reveals itself differently in Colombia versus the United States and differently at the top with the *Narcos* versus at the bottom in the slums. Therefore, it should be examined both on the global and local scale.

Globalization has many positive effects as it unites the world and opens it to international trade, ties, and relations. However, neoliberal policies and the massive evolution of international trade have, in many cases, created fewer employment opportunities in the formal sector and conditions conducive to transnational crime.¹⁹ The increase in trade of licit goods and the sharp increase in transnational immigration made difficult to detect the passage of illicit goods across borders, both drugs as well as the smuggled contraband purchased with drug money. Therefore, it is important to note the drug industry’s evolution at the global level, and its movement across borders.

¹⁸ Frederick Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For?: An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 189.

¹⁹ Robert J. Kelly, Jess Maghan, and Joseph Serio, *Illicit Trafficking: A Reference Handbook*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005. 7.

Members of the Colombian cartels were skilled entrepreneurs and successfully used their “monopoly position” in the cocaine industry to create a contract style form of business. The cartels outsourced the cultivation of coca to poverty stricken growers in Peru and Bolivia,²⁰ processed the paste in Colombia, and smuggled it into the United States or Europe. Often smugglers were immigrants who went abroad to be with relatives in Miami, New York, or Spain.²¹ Roldán notes the fortunate coincidence that many Colombians, a large number of them coming from Medellín and its surrounding regions, were migrating and settling in the United States in the beginning years of the narcotics trade, creating a ready group to facilitate distribution and aid in the industry’s growth.²² Miami, New York, Mexico, and Spain became the principle entry points into the United States and Europe for two reasons. The first being the cultural and linguistic connections to Latin America, and the establishment of strong trust networks and host communities to receive and distribute drugs. The second reason is because of long coastlines and unmonitored borders difficult to police.²³

Ethnographies such as *In Search of Respect* by Philippe Bourgois allow readers to experience the affects of the Colombian business in the US system, not merely in the form of addiction, but as “a vivid symbol of deeper dynamics of social marginalization and alienation,”²⁴ and as an example of how the “enormous, uncensused, untaxed underground economy allows hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers in neighborhoods

²⁰ Misha Glenny, *McMafia: A Journey through the Global Criminal Underworld*, New York: Knopf, 2008, 175.

²¹ Glenny, *McMafia: A Journey through the Global Criminal Underworld* ,246.

²² Roldán. "Wounded Medellín: Narcotics Traffic against a Background of Industrial Decline," 167.

²³ Glenny, *McMafia: A Journey through the Global Criminal Underworld*, 43.

²⁴ Philippe I. Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. 2.

like East Harlem to subsist.”²⁵ Puerto Rican immigrants living in East Harlem turn to selling drugs when there are no other job opportunities available, as well as when they feel a sense of alienation and marginalization in the legal or formal sectors. The illegal drug trade allows those living on the limits of society and participating in the illicit or informal economy “to adopt and adapt a model of legitimate behavior.”²⁶

Ruggiero and South analogize the manifestation of the drug industry on the local level to a bazaar; a market that appears chaotic but, is, in reality, comprised of a network of interrelated relationships among buyers and sellers in an exact organized fashion. The bazaar analogy “alludes to a variety of individuals interacting in a market where commodities and services are bought and sold irrespective of their being legal or illegal. The notion of the bazaar, as applied to contemporary cities, entails the coexistence of legality and illegality and the permanent shifting of the boundaries between the two,”²⁷ as well as the blurred line between the surface image of disorder and the control created by a complex system of relationships. Bourgois explains that slums may appear to the naked eye to lack stability and order, but in actuality, use illegal or informal markets to create a sense of security and consistency to those living in them.

This is particularly true in Medellín, as residents of all classes felt the effects of the cartel’s actions. They created employment, as well as provided the country with cheaper goods in the form of smuggled contraband. This will be addressed later in the paper when examining the cartels’ complex money laundering systems. The manifestation of the drug trade in Medellín seems complicated, unsystematic, and

²⁵ Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, 3.

²⁶ Vincenzo Ruggiero and Nigel South, "The Late-Modern City as a Bazaar: Drug Markets, Illegal Enterprise, and the 'Barricades,'" *The British Journal of Sociology* 48.1 (1997): 61.

²⁷ Ruggiero and South, "The Late-Modern City as a Bazaar: Drug Markets, Illegal Enterprise, and the 'Barricades,'" 63.

unregulated in the manner it affects both consumers and producers. However, the cartels had complicated and organized systems to ensure their business ran smoothly. As the bazaar analogy implies, the appearance of the drug industry locally applies to individuals at all levels: drug runners, traffickers, farmers, *sicarios*, and even licit workers whose services are disturbed. In a bazaar, sectors are not necessarily unregulated, but are regulated in an illegal or informal manner.²⁸ It is the interrelatedness of all individuals, both buyers and sellers, that create a complex yet organized environment to perpetuate the industry.

²⁸ Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Jon Shefner, *Out of the Shadows: Political Action and the Informal Economy in Latin America*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2006, 49.

Economic Effects

Economists, politicians, and scholars assert: “in no other country has the illegal drug industry had such dramatic social, political, and economic effects.”²⁹ While a booming industry in itself, the illegal drug trade had negative economic repercussions on the country, as well as grave social and political consequences, which “weakened the country ...by fostering violence and corruption, undermining legal activity, frightening off foreign investment, and all but destroying the social fabric.”³⁰ Impacts of the illegal drug industry on the Colombian economy tend to focus on employment, money laundering, land ownership, and income inequality.³¹ However, it is important to note how ramifications of political violence and social influences, magnified by the drug trade, further affected the economy. According to Holmes and Gutiérrez de Piñeres, “political violence has a greater quantifiable impact on Colombia’s national economy than does the drug trade.”

While in the short run the drug industry created jobs for rural peasants in cultivation and production, the coca boom made the cultivation of alternative crops less profitable, reducing jobs in legal cultivations such as coffee. In Colombia, “coffee is planted on small farms, employing about one million people, while the illegal drug

²⁹ Thoumi, "Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis."

³⁰ Holmes and Gutiérrez de Piñeres, "The Illegal Drug Industry, Violence and the Colombian Economy: A Department Level Analysis," 2.

³¹ Holmes, Jennifer S., and Sheila Amin Gutierrez De Pineres, "Drug, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis," 4.

trade is dominated by few and employs a relatively small number of people. It is estimated the illegal drug sector employs 6.7 percent of agricultural workers while the main legal crop, coffee, employs 12 percent.”³² While there was an immediate boom in agrarian employment, the long-term effect was a decrease in overall employment by almost six percent, as well as the displacement of those who chose not to participate in coca cultivation. More recently, the government’s action to eradicate illicit crops decreased “productivity as the chemicals used to destroy illegal crops make it difficult to grow legal crops.”³³

Another economic impact of the illegal drug trade is the development of a complex system of money laundering³⁴ through the trafficking of smuggled contraband.

The most common method of money laundering is by trafficking contraband. Drug traffickers purchase goods abroad using dirty money, smuggle the goods into Colombia, and then sell them, often at a ‘loss’. The sale of these items...undercuts legitimate businesses because the drug traffickers are likely to sell for less, given they have already gained profit before the sale. ...The industrial and business sectors most affected by smuggling are household appliances, clothing, textiles, footwear, liquor, and cigarettes. ... [T]he more typically trafficked items displace products of the labour intensive and non specialized economic sectors in which Colombia products should have a comparative advantage, further undermining employment.³⁵

These laundering systems impacted legal imports and exports as they became “constrained by contraband. Customs officials spend significant resources and time in the search of contraband, resulting in delays and higher costs in processing trade

³² Ibid., 6-7.

³³ Ibid., 7.

³⁴ Thoumi, "Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis," 108.

³⁵ Holmes and Gutiérrez de Piñeres, "The Illegal Drug Industry, Violence and the Colombian Economy: A Department Level Analysis," 8.

shipments”³⁶. Conversely, Colombian consumers, due to the boom of illegal imports, the overvalued peso, and drop in prices, welcomed the influx of cheap goods from abroad who for decades had confronted a tight foreign exchange constraint,³⁷ and previously could never afford to pay the market prices on foreign imports.

The cartels even laundered money through the Colombian national soccer team. Key players often had close friendships with the ‘Dons’ of the cartels. It is rumored at its height, Pablo Escobar, an avid soccer fan, and his Cartel became the sole financier of Medellín’s regional soccer team *Nacional*. This example demonstrates how ‘dirty money’ infiltrated even the country’s most highly monitored industries, and how “the wealth and resources generated by the drug economy corrupted all institutions of Colombian society [including] the judiciary, the army, the church, and regional and local governments.”³⁸

Thanks to the cartel’s role in financing the national soccer team, Colombia was able to purchase foreign players and coaches, and in 1994 became, for the first time in Colombian history, one of the premiere teams in the world³⁹ creating a sense of pride and hope for citizens in an era of violence, crime, and terrorism. Ironically, the team’s ambition was to change the world’s negative image that all Colombians participate in the drug trade. Unfortunately, the Colombian team was eliminated from the World Cup when team captain Andrés Escobar (no relationship to the Escobar drug family) deflected a shot into Colombia’s own goal scoring the winning point for the United States. Upon returning to Colombia, Escobar was brutally murdered outside of a nightclub in Medellín

³⁶ Ibid.,11.

³⁷ Thoumi, "Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis," 110.

³⁸ Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory: Youth and Violence in Medellín, Colombia*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010, 1.

³⁹ *The Two Escobars*.,Dir. Jeff Zimbalist, Team Marketing, 2010. Film.

by two gunmen, many claim to have been hired by the Cali cartel to kill him because of bets lost in the game's upset. 120,000 people attended Escobar's funeral, and were reminded, once again, the cartels' power over the lives of all Colombian citizens.

Participants of the illegal drug industry ranged from uneducated peasants to chemists, and from illegal smugglers, guerillas, and paramilitaries to legitimate members of society including lawyers, politicians, police, and army members.⁴⁰ With the creation of an intricate system of relations comprising of corrupt business deals and loyal relatives and friends, it was easy for the drug cartels to transport illegitimate money into the state, as well as export over 30 metric tons of cocaine each year⁴¹. The fabricated "social support network provides protection to the illegal industry, mostly at a price, and constitutes the main channel through which the illegal industry penetrated and corrupted social institutions."⁴²

Historically, much of Colombia's violent conflict centered on land distribution, dating back to the era of *La Violencia*, and magnified as the drug industry grew and neoliberal economic policy imposed upon the country. In 1992 tariffs on imported agricultural products were decreased from 31.5% to 15%, and overvaluation of the peso led to a large inflow of capital into the country. Unfortunately, having historically been an absent agent, "the politics of state institutions ... did little to assist or remedy the economic plight of small peasants" affected by neoliberal policies, and "the fortunes of the small (and even medium-sized) peasant property owners steadily declined as a consequence of more open markets and lower protective rates. This undoubtedly aided

⁴⁰ Thoumi, "Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis," 108.

⁴¹ *Pablo Escobar Angel Or Demon*, 2007.

⁴² Thoumi, "Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis," 108.

the expansion of the guerilla movement and also led to an increase in the number of peasants with links to the illegal drug economy⁴³ as they were pushed off their land with nowhere to go. Furthermore, “areas rich in primary export goods have become points of [violent] confrontation because of the importance of controlling these lucrative zones. ... Because coca is a lucrative crop, different armed groups often fight for control over areas of cultivation as a general economic resource.”⁴⁴

At the height of the drug industry’s success, estimates placed drug cartel land ownership at approximately one third of the country’s agricultural land.⁴⁵ Due to disproportionate land ownership, income inequality between the rich and the poor skyrocketed. “The illegal drug trade, while providing short-term financial relief to a small number of peasants in the form of employment, displaced many, and, in the long-run, further distorts the inequalities in Colombia. In the late 1980s and early 1990s approximately 30 percent of the country’s wealth was in the hands of the cartels”⁴⁶. Those who did not participate in coca production in rural regions and wanted to escape regions controlled by armed groups, often migrated to urban slums. Traffickers took advantage of the influx of unskilled and uneducated laborers into cities to find more workers for the industry.

⁴³ Nazih Richani, "The Political Economy of Violence: The War-System in Colombia," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 39(2) (1997): 40-41.

⁴⁴ Holmes, Gutiérrez de Piñeres, and Curtin, "Drug, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis," 159.

⁴⁵ Holmes and Gutiérrez de Piñeres, "The Illegal Drug Industry, Violence and the Colombian Economy: A Department Level Analysis," 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

Political Effects

The drug cartel's existence disturbed Colombia's political landscape as it undermined the legitimacy of the state. In 1982 Pablo Escobar was elected to Congress. His reasons for joining politics is debated as some believe he joined as a means of concealing his illegal activity, while others believe it was based on his desire to help the less fortunate.⁴⁷ Many believe he had a strong aspiration to help the poor having personally grown up in the slums. Others think his generosity towards the disadvantaged was a technique to create a constituency who would unequivocally support him. The population of the slums of Medellín viewed *El Capo* as a god, and believed his word was law. With unwavering support and unlimited money, Escobar aspired to become President of the Republic.

Having come from a poor background, Pablo Escobar understood the plight of the underprivileged and used his money to build neighborhoods for Medellín's poorest. He bought each family living in the city's garbage dump a house, and created the self-proclaimed neighborhood Pablo Escobar. Escobar is remembered as a Robin Hood figure.⁴⁸ He distributed cash and groceries to the unemployed, built soccer fields in poor neighborhoods, and gave tennis shoes to poor youth.⁴⁹ This earned him the confidence and steadfast support of locals who acted on his behalf.

⁴⁷ *Pablo Escobar Angel Or Demon*, 2007.

⁴⁸ Alonso Salazar J., *Born to Die in Medellín*, London: Latin America Bureau, 1992, 8.

⁴⁹ Roldán, "Wounded Medellín: Narcotics Traffic against a Background of Industrial Decline," 175.

Escobar was denounced for his illegal activities, and removed himself from the House of Representatives in 1983. In the late 1980s the Colombian government attempted to amend the Constitution to extradite *narcotraficantes* to the U.S. to be tried in the American court system. This was the catalyst the Medellín cartel needed to initiate a reign of terror on the state, using its power for terrorism against politicians, journalists, future presidential candidates, and anyone who stood in the way of the cartel's success. Escobar and his cartel were responsible for the bombing of a commercial plane traveling from Bogotá to Cali hoping to kill presidential candidate César Gaviria who had been supporting the constitutional change and Escobar's extradition. Beginning in 1988 with the Bogotá mayor Andrés Pastrana Arango, the cartel began kidnapping political figures. The fear traffickers created successfully quieted the few openly opposing them, and, in 1991, Colombia removed extradition provisions from the Constitution. Days later, Escobar surrendered to authorities and was placed in *La Catedral*, his own luxurious, private prison where he continued to control his business.

The cartels and drug trade do not solely account for Colombia's political disruption. Guerilla groups, such as the FARC, ELN, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, M19, *Alianza Democrática M-19*, and EPL, *Ejército Popular de Liberación* are responsible for much of the violence experienced in Colombia following *La Violencia*. Because much of the land needed for coca cultivation was found in regions controlled by insurgent groups, drug traffickers often "dealt with the traditional land conflict by creating death squads or paramilitary groups to terrorize the local population. ...Drug

traffickers paid the guerilla a 'tax' on their proceeds,"⁵⁰ as well. Thus, the cartels "became a main funding source for right- and left-wing guerilla and right-wing paramilitary movements."⁵¹ It is uncertain, however, as to the relationship between the insurgent groups and the cartels. Some scholars observe, "different FARC commanders interact with the drug trade differently, ranging from pragmatic alliances to ideologically based rejection"⁵². However, it is important to note guerilla groups are not synonymous to 'cartel.' Their level of participation in the drug trade in rural regions is in "extorting a percentage of the commercial transaction of coca and coca paste, just as they do with many other commercial products in the areas in which they operate, be it cattle, petroleum or coffee."⁵³

By 1982 increased income from the coca boom allowed insurgent groups to expand into an irregular army, stage large-scale attacks on Colombian troops, and send fighters to Vietnam and the Soviet Union for advanced military training. They migrated from *los campos* to middle-sized cities and closer to areas rich in natural resources in order to create a strong economic infrastructure.⁵⁴ Both paramilitaries and guerillas began to act as paid terrorists on behalf of the cartels, and, as stated above, were responsible for the assassinations of politicians, judges, political candidates, journalists, and families of those stated. In 1985, the Medellín cartel paid the insurgent group M-19 two million dollars to bomb the *Palacio de Justicia*, and it is suggested was responsible for M-19's

⁵⁰ Holmes, Gutiérrez de Piñeres, and Curtin, "Drug, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis," 167.

⁵¹ Thoumi, "Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis," 111.

⁵² Holmes, Piñeres, and Curtin, "Drug, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis," 167.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁴ Steven Dudley, *Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerilla Politics in Colombia*, London: Routledge. 2004, 47-60.

1985 storming of the Colombian Supreme Court. In nine months, Bogotá experienced over 130 attacks funded by the cartels and committed by the insurgent groups. The end result was a country Escobar completely redesigned to serve his business.

An obvious outcome of political violence and terrorism was that the government had to pump hundreds of thousands of dollars into controlling the groups and cartels, as well as rebuilding cities. Political attention and legislation were diverted to policies aimed at curbing the power of the cartels and armed groups instead of towards economic growth and control of petty slum violence. Additionally, state money was allocated towards the military in an attempt to resist illegal armed groups instead of infrastructure and education, which economists argue does not assist in a country's economic growth. In the 1990s, "the economy saw a dramatic slowing of growth, as measured by the growth rate of the GDP," and "in 1994, the Colombian economy [began to see] a steady decline."⁵⁵ In an era where safety was a primary concern, officials could not focus attention on stimulating and regulating the economy or improving citizen quality of life.

The cartel built relationships with important political figures in Medellín. Escobar funded numerous city projects aimed at making the city more luxurious. His opinion was the important in implementing city policies and determining where government money was spent and invested. Escobar is responsible for the beautification Medellín experienced in the late 1980s, discussed later in the paper. As a result, politicians turned a blind eye to the cartel's illegal activities.

⁵⁵ Holmes, Gutiérrez de Piñeres, and Curtin, "Drug, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis," 170.

Social Effects

Riaño-Alcalá believes the impact of drug trafficking networks was felt at a social level, especially in Medellín. This was in the form of an erosion of social values, the largest increase in armed violence in Colombia's history, and, most visibly, a leap in "the large number of youth recruited into gangs. The second trend was the emergence of public and media representations of youth as a social threat and criminal *other*."⁵⁶

The most severe consequence of the cartels on the social landscape was the advent of *sicarios*, contracted youth assassins. *Sicarios* were most often teenagers from the slums of Medellín who earned between three and five million pesos for each kill, between \$5,500 and \$8,000 dollars in 1990 currency. The phenomena of the *sicario* as a profession, and the huge influx of money into the slums, became key factors responsible for the assassinations of over three hundred policeman, as well as politicians and journalists. In Fernando Vallejo's novel *La Virgen de los Sicarios*, readers are introduced to the phenomena of *sicario*.

*"Of course, you do not need that I explain what is a sicario. My grandfather yes, he would need it. But my grandfather died years and years ago. My poor grandfather died without knowing neither the elevated train nor the sicarios, ...Correct me if I am mistaken. Grandfather, if in any case you are listening to me from the other side of the eternity, I will tell you what is a sicario: a little boy, sometimes a child, who kills on demand. And the men? Generally the men no, here the sicarios are children or little boys, of twelve, fifteen, seventeen years old"*⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory: Youth and Violence in Medellín, Colombia*.

⁵⁷ Fernando Vallejo, *La Virgen De Los Sicarios*, Mexico: Alfaguara, 2008.

This phenomenon primarily affected those from the slums of Antioquía. Marginalized teens learned what it was like to make fast, easy money. As well as promoting violence, the cartels created an attitude where *Paisas* believed they did not have to work hard for money. Teens became enveloped in the consumer lifestyle, and easy money became a replacement for a real profession.⁵⁸ They watched as parents worked under poor conditions and long hours and barely made enough to support their families. Teens, on the other hand, were earning enough money to support their family, support their *novia*, girlfriend, and buy designer brands on the side.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Salazar, *Born to Die in Medellín*, 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

Motivations for Participation

The effects of the drug trade on Medellín's social landscape must be studied in two parts. The first part is motivations to participate. The second is the effects on participants once they join. There are a number of reasons youth felt motivated to work for the cartels or insurgent groups funded by the cartels: economic reasons, support and security, peer pressure, and *narco* image.

Members of the disadvantaged class did not often feel the negative effects of the illegal drug trade. Historically, they did not participate in wealthy aspects of society and never reaped its benefits. Furthermore, their lives were anchored within their neighborhoods. Aside from the news, drug related violence often did not influence them. Moreover, many viewed Escobar as a saint who came from heaven to give them houses, infrastructure, and jobs⁶⁰. Escobar took advantage of the "large pool of unemployed, poorly educated young people in the *comunas*. Without prospects for a legal job, and often with a family background of random violence, they were just what the incipient drug barons needed to develop their business. The appearance of the Medellín cartel in the mid 1970s coincided with a sharp recession in the traditional *paisa* economy. Crime became the only game in town."⁶¹ Traffickers provided youth with what the State promised but failed to deliver: economic opportunities and social services in return for loyalty. They pushed traditional *Paisa* values such as hard work, loyalty, and capitalism,

⁶⁰ Pablo Escobar *Angel or Demon*, 2007.

⁶¹ Salazar, *Born to Die in Medellín*, 7.

and delivered prospects to people who had historically been excluded from formal economy.⁶²

Alejandro Gaviria posits crime becomes appealing, not for the emotional benefits individuals receive within groups, but when they see global criminals' financial returns. In fact, as the cocaine industry grew, petty crime declined as criminals found more lucrative opportunities working for traffickers.⁶³ Traffickers became the prototype of the desirable persona and examples of possibilities for. Furthermore, risks of committing crime decreased as the pursuit of global criminals congested the law enforcement system, making the probability of punishment on the local level less probable, and therefore the appeal greater. Gaviria theorizes the diffusion of knowledge at the local level and daily contact with criminal adults further perpetuated the sharp increase experienced in Medellín. Knowledge spillover refers to the movement of ideas and technologies among different criminal groups or from criminal parents to their children. In the Colombian case, "we can hypothesize that local criminals ... benefitted from the cocaine cartels' expertise in criminal operations. For instance, they may have learned from the cartels how to buy arms in international black markets, how to launder illegal money, and how to identify 'connections' inside the law enforcement agencies."⁶⁴

Next, participation in the drug industry or insurgent groups provided security and support. According to Dennis Rodgers, cities provide anonymity and impersonality that prevent city dwellers from developing empathy for those around them, creating a sense of

⁶² Roldán, "Wounded Medellín: Narcotics Traffic against a Background of Industrial Decline," 174.

⁶³ Alejandro Gaviria, "Increasing Returns and the Evolution of Violent Crime: The Case of Colombia," *Journal of Development of Economics* 61 (2000): 3.

⁶⁴ Gaviria, "Increasing Returns and the Evolution of Violent Crime: The Case of Colombia," 13.

personal insecurity and belonging.⁶⁵ This explains the prevalence of neighborhoods bounded by race in large cities. Immigrants often gravitate towards “smaller universes”⁶⁶ of their own kind as a means of creating a support system, and creating a sense of identity in a world of anonymity. This idea is transferrable to youth in marginalized communities. These outlets offer a sense of security as they continuously protect members. Rodgers eloquently proclaims “social life is not a mass phenomenon, but occurs for the most part in small groups.” Therefore, studies should not be focused on the city as a whole, but on its “smaller universes”. The smaller universe in this study is the small social nooks and groups created or funded by the drug trade.

These groups converted into a “family” for many Colombian youth, a facet of life they stereotypically lacked. And, while they appear chaotic, gangs, as well as the localized guerilla and paramilitary groups, are complex systems based on intricate relationships among members.

As is true of street gangs, social systems function as a whole in relation to their sociocultural context. Each member of the gang affects and is affected by other members and by the context of which they operate. In line with systems’ thinking, street gangs are fundamentally comparative to family systems. The same concepts that are used to describe family systems, such as hierarchies, subsystems and suprasystems, entropy and negentropy boundaries, communication, and homeostasis can also be applied to the street gang.⁶⁷

Ruble and Turner argue gangs function as surrogate families for members who often join because they do not have an alternative family or wish to “escape a dysfunctional situation in their families of origin.” Street gangs act as a family system that provide

⁶⁵ Dennis Rodgers, "Urban Violence Is Not (Necessarily) a Way of Life: Towards a Political Economy of Conflict in Cities," *Urbanization and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. By Jo Beall, Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis, and S. M. Ravi. Kanbur. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010: 3.

⁶⁶ Rodgers, "Urban Violence Is Not (Necessarily) a Way of Life: Towards a Political Economy of Conflict in Cities," 6.

⁶⁷ Nikki M. Ruble and William L. Turner, "A Systemic Analysis of the Dynamics and Organization of Urban Street Gangs," *The Journal of Family Therapy* 28 (2000): 120.

“members with affection, understanding, recognition, loyalty, and emotional and physical protection”, thus creating an environment where youth are willing to kill and/or die for their gang.

Ruble and Turner, however, do not focus their studies on Colombia, as they were primarily concerned with gangs in the United States. The question, then, is why youth gang membership in Colombia had a greater effect on urban space, as well as the state as a whole? Gangs occur around the world in lower-income neighborhoods for a number of reasons. In Medellín, however, drug traffickers like Pablo Escobar, and armed group leaders, took advantage of youth. They appealed to their need for support systems and their desires to participate in the country’s consumer lifestyle, in order to meet their personal ends.

Membership in these groups creates, for many, a false sense of security. Often, in low-income neighborhoods, traffickers act as judges and police, perpetuating a sense of security in a dangerous environment. Carlos Yáñez asserts the state did not take an active role in the lives of urban poor⁶⁸, and John Camaroff from the Harvard Kennedy School maintains those living in slums cannot trust the state, but can trust organized crime networks. In these environments there is a higher rate of violence but the rules for conduct are clearly stated. Organized crime networks are more transparent than the fluid laws the state uses to govern slums. Therefore, those living in slums often have more faith in drug lords than they do in the state. They would prefer to leave faith and control in the hands of the drug lords who they see as reliable actors.⁶⁹ However, Arias and

⁶⁸ Carlos Yáñez Canal, Personal interview, January 4, 2013.

⁶⁹ Camaroff, John, "Longing for the State: Moral Economy, Legal Subjects, and the War on Drugs," DRCLAS Andes Initiative. Harvard University, Cambridge. February 5, 2013.

Rodrigues suggest rule enforcement may not be as uniform as other scholars suggest. While their focus is on dispute resolution in Rio de Janeiro, Arias and Rodrigues make viable points in the Colombian context when maintaining the “very specific process of maintaining order reflects broader trends of continuing reliance on hierarchical and personalistic relationships in [the] political system,”⁷⁰ thus postulating security is allocated to others based on their ties to the leader.

Many Colombian scholars claim that prior to *La Violencia*, a strong sense of Colombian identity existed. However, following the bloody civil war, Colombian identity became severely fragmented. This disintegration only increased as *narcos* and guerilla groups evolved. Government institutions began to promote a “save yourself” mentality, primarily focused on the individual, creating many institutions excluding the poor. Due to the state’s ongoing lack of presence, members of *comunas* were forced to envision and generate solutions to their day-to-day problems that deviated from accepted forms of authority.⁷¹ Two lucrative options were created; armed groups membership, or work for the drug traffickers. Colombians never had the “American Dream”, and corrupt governments did not create opportunities for the poor to ascend in society. This is a principle reason for participation in the informal or illegal sectors of society.

This myth that armed groups and drug traffickers can provide security, as well as a strong reverence for leaders, provided strong motives for membership in these groups. Arias and Rodrigues question how people who have no choice but to live in a dangerous place deal with the ongoing fear of violence, and how this fear plays out in the complex

⁷⁰ Enrique Desmond Arias and Corinne Davis Rodrigues, "The Myrth of Personal Security: Criminal Gangs, Dispute Resolution, and Identity in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas," *Latin American Politics and Society* 48.4 (2006): 54.

⁷¹ Roldán, "Wounded Medellín: Narcotics Traffic against a Background of Industrial Decline," 176.

relationship between those who have control over the means of violence and those who do not. As seen in the documentary *La Sierra*, “the failure of civil society and the state to deal with these issues effectively, especially in the context of poor neighborhoods, has led to the emergence of localized strategies to maintain order that depend on criminals, often elevating them to the status of local heroes.”⁷² We see this with Edson from *La Sierra*, the commander of the paramilitary group *Bloque Metro*. While he is responsible for the death of many people, he also claims to act as judge for his community, resolving disputes between neighbors and fighting for what he believes to be a noble cause.

A further motivation to join is there is safety in numbers. If you join a gang, you supposedly have others watching out for your safety, as well as a “family” who will avenge your death, if necessary. While the elite are more fearful of being the victims of crime, it is the people living on the periphery who tend to be the victims or witnesses of violent crime.

It is common to create *the other* as an enemy in order to formulate a sense of security. If one can identify his or her enemy, the fear of living in constant proximity to violence becomes more manageable. By projecting fear of *the other* onto people like police, it is simple to believe traffickers will provide more security within the community than they will be found outside of the neighborhood. Thus, the slum “seen as dangerous and marginal by society as a whole, is seen as a place of refuge and safety by residents.”⁷³

According to anthropologist Moises Lino e Silva of Brandeis University, a primary motivation for youth participation is peer pressure. Youth already enveloped in

⁷² Arias and Rodrigues, "The Myrth of Personal Security: Criminal Gangs, Dispute Resolution, and Identity in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas," 56.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 60.

the gang lifestyle become the most efficient recruiters. For the majority of youth, life occurred on the street. Many adolescents avoided being at home due to family problems or simply because it is considered boring to be home. Society in these low-income communities is less individualistic, and, therefore, youth often fall prey to peer pressure.⁷⁴

In the absence of state legitimacy, Colombians lacked a belief in the state as a form of representation. In this time period, people rarely trusted those representing them. The guerilla and traffickers become another type of state. The figure of the *narco* leader began to spread. This leader was macho and provided an image of someone who came from poverty to make a fortune. He was not scared of death, lived in the moment, and could have whatever he desired. The culture of traffickers became institutionalized, and passed down to those, especially youth, living in marginality. In fact, many *Antioqueños* were proud of Pablo Escobar for his personal traits.

As drug traffickers became social role models for an extensive sector of society, violence increased dramatically. “Their actions and attitudes started being widely emulated and imitated. So, by instilling their values in a large sector of the population, drug traffickers may have played a crucial role in the erosion of morals mentioned above.” Traffickers like Escobar were proud of their *Bandido*, bandit, personas, placed little value on human life, and resorted to violence as the sole method of conflict resolution. Men like Escobar became cultural heroes, and their method for conflict resolution slowly became the norm. He was the leader of consumerism in Colombia; lived in a mansion, owned numerous cars, and even built a private zoo of imported exotic animals from all over the world. Escobar had every opportunity to leave the business and

⁷⁴ Moisés Lino E Silva, Personal interview, February 28, 2013.

join mainstream society as a politician. However, Escobar did not want this. What he wanted was epitomized on the inscription of his tombstone: “*Fui todo que quise ser, un bandido.*”⁷⁵(I was all that I wanted to be, an outlaw). Pablo Escobar, and his cartel, lived outside of the law. Their actions were determined by greed. This mentality had a top-down effect on the people of Medellín, and created an attitude that illegal work was a respectable replacement for legal hard work.

⁷⁵ *Pablo Escobar: Angel of Demon*, Film.

Effects of Participation

The next aspect for analysis is the cartel's effect on the city's social landscape once one is involved. Because the era of narco-terrorism created an age of self-censorship by journalists who feared to report the truth, it is often speculated fiction holds more validity about daily life than newspapers.⁷⁶ Therefore, one can learn a great deal about life in the peripheries of society, both the poor and traffickers, through fictional works such as *La Santa Muerte* by Homero Aridjis,⁷⁷ whose focus is drug trafficking in Mexico, and *La Virgen de los Sicarios*, by Fernando Vallejo,⁷⁸ a story of a *sicario* from Medellín. Literature allows one to observe the effects of the international drug trade as low as the local level in slums, and as elevated as the *narcos* themselves.

A common theme in *La Santa Muerte* and *La Virgen de los Sicarios* is the varying borders and barricades in society between typical citizens and the marginalized. The two metaphysical worlds, the world of the typical citizen and the world of the marginalized, coexist together in the physical world, where there are limits and specific passages between the two.

The physical limitations between the two metaphysical worlds consist principally in the movement between the two, the difficulty doing so, and those who may pass between them. Furthermore, "they are built around communities by official planners, who

⁷⁶ Santiago Gamboa, "Secret Histories: On the Creation of the Colombian Identity Through Crime Fiction," *Boston Review*. October 14, 2012

⁷⁷ Homero Aridjis, *La Santa Muerte*, Mexico: Punto De Lectura, 2006.

⁷⁸ Fernando Vallejo, *La Virgen De Los Sicarios*, Mexico: Alfaguara, 2008.

devise new ‘districts of a single class’: the rich and the poor have to be isolated from one another. Here, barricades constitute a tangible demarcation between legally acquired wealth and legal, semi-legal, or illegal survival.”⁷⁹ While the marginalized have an easier time passing from their world into that of the typical citizen than does the average citizen passing into the other, a person living on the periphery of society will never be fully accepted into the “world” of the typical citizen. On a daily basis, people from the slums commute to the city to work. However, it is claimed by mainstream citizens, in order for an average resident of the city to enter a slum without drawing negative attention, he or she must know somebody who lives there.

Social and political borders interconnect the physical barricades between the two “worlds”. Women who sell gum and cigarettes in Parque Lleras or taxi drivers travel back and forth between the two worlds on a daily basis to make a living. However, this does not assume they become accepted members of mainstream society. They cross over as visitors and each night return home. In 1982 Colombia saw Pablo Escobar’s attempt to “cross borders” when he was elected to Congress.⁸⁰ However, he was denounced for his illegal activities and removed from politics shortly thereafter, proving even traffickers existed on the periphery of conventional society.

Furthermore, the riches of the cartels created a boundary where the majority of people in a society could not pass. Physically, they had luxuries people mainstream society could not afford, including extravagant parties with expensive drugs, shows, alcohol and expositions. Rules and laws of the real world were suspended from those

⁷⁹ Ruggiero and South, "The Late-Modern City as a Bazaar: Drug Markets, Illegal Enterprise, and the 'Barricades,'" 62-63.

⁸⁰ *Pablo Escobar: Angel of Demon*, 2007.

living in the peripheries. The common relationship of traffickers with politicians, policemen, and other important actors in society played a significant role in their connection between their world and mainstream society, allowing them to live without conforming to the same standard of living expected of typical members of society.

Furthermore, fictional literature illuminates the importance of popular religion in the eyes of participants in justifying one's actions. Popular religion, while being far from "a stable entity [is] reformulated by its users in a process of continuous reinterpretation or invention."⁸¹ Alonso Salazar notes three elements of Antioqueño traditions "deeply rooted in adolescent gangs: the desire for money, a religious sentiment, and the law of vengeance. That is why they say: 'money is life'; [or] 'I'll do anything for money.'"⁸² *La Santa Muerte* introduced a cult that originated in Mexico with veneration for violent death. The Catholic Church condemns it, but many continue to practice it. *La Santa Muerte* is used by those on the limits of society, as they need to find consolation in places outside of the Catholic Church. Because of this, the majority of followers live outside of the law; including prostitutes, *sicarios*, or drug dealers. They include those whose actions cannot be justified by the Church, but need a way to maintain some kind of spirituality. In the way these people live on the border between two worlds, their religion exists in a similar way.

As in Mexico, this is manifested in Colombia through the veneration of *La Virgen María Auxiliadora*, the virgin saint of the *sicarios*, to whom they pray to keep them safe

⁸¹ Susanna Rostas and André Droogers, eds, *The Popular Use of Popular Religion in Latin America*, Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1993, 1.

⁸² Salazar, *Born to Die in Medellín*, 117.

and for their kills to go well.⁸³ Furthermore, Vallejo notes *sicarios* do not go to Church and follow the guidance of a priest. They often use religion to meet their necessary needs. A priest or other leadership figure, therefore, is not necessary in the practice. According to sociologist Carlos Yáñez Canal, one of the strongest characteristics of Latin America is the need for survival. This is reflected in how those living on the limits of society use religion. They lack a notion of a fixed future and their ethics and values are different, placing importance on the present instead of the future. This “leads to a different sense of the value of life and death: ‘Live life for today, even if you die tomorrow’.”⁸⁴

Jesús, a 19-year old in the documentary *La Sierra* is a member of the paramilitary group *Bloque Metro* that controls the entirety of the *comuna*.⁸⁵ As he passes a statue of the Virgin Mary, he touches it, kisses his hand, and crosses himself. Yet, when asked if he thinks he will die young, his response is: “*Claro!*” (Of course). This raises the question as religion’s purpose for these people. Some argue it is to provide a sense of hope for a better future. Others argue it functions to comfort those who believe in the afterlife. However, in the slums of Medellín where the concept of the future is blurred, religion is used as a tool for fueling the current situation and justifying one’s actions in the present.⁸⁶

Numerous scholars assess the role of popular religion as a tool for practical problem solving. When the concept of a fixed future does not exist, *comuna* residents turn to religion as a means of providing the necessary resources for survival or

⁸³ Vallejo, *La Virgen De Los Sicarios*.

⁸⁴ Salazar, *Born to Die in Medellín*, 120.

⁸⁵ *La Sierra*, Dir. Scott Dalton and Margarita Martinez, 2005.

⁸⁶ Carlos Yáñez Canal, Personal interview. January 4, 2013.

explanations for a current way of life.⁸⁷ They experience death on a regular basis, and violence is the accepted method for conflict resolution. Because of this, decision-making is based on current affairs instead of future consequences. Therefore, “conditions of poverty foreshortens the future. The very poor, not knowing where the next meal will come from, get the habit of living so entirely in the present that they do not imagine the future at all.”⁸⁸ Anthropologist Mary Douglas noted the possibilities of looking forward and looking backward as being limited by social conditions, and an individual’s actions are determined by their expectations of the future. Hence, if an entire society becomes uncertain about the concept of future, they will develop a culture that ceases to participate in socially structured rules and obligations.

Anthropologists posit rituals occur when there is uncertainty about outcomes or actions having to do with the future. They appeal to a higher authority, and give practitioners certainty in vague situations. Traffickers and gang members use religion and cult-like rituals for similar reasons. When one’s survival is entrenched in ambiguity, rituals to a higher power provide a level of hope. Both the traffickers in *La Santa Muerte* and Alexis in *La Virgen de los Sicarios* turn to God, the Virgin, or cult figures to provide security in an insecure environment.

Next, Dr. Yañéz Canal claims the two most important people for *sicarios* are their mother and the Virgin Mary. Understanding the close relationship with religion and the Virgin further elucidates the relationship *sicarios* have with their mother. According to Salazar “God the Father has been dethroned. The Virgin Mary knocked him off his

⁸⁷ Rostas and Droogers, *The Popular Use of Popular Religion in Latin America*, 5.

⁸⁸ Mary Douglas and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers*, Berkeley: University of California, 1982 85.

pedestal.”⁸⁹ Colombian theologians suggest a number of reasons for this. The first being the mother figure is tolerant and permissive, and contracted killers find comfort in the idea of a motherly figure that forgives for regularly committed sins. A male god is one to be feared who punishes those for their sins. A second theory is based on stereotypical family structure slums. The traditional family unit is broken down. “It could be said, without wishing to make a general rule of it, that a large proportion of teenage gang members come from homes with absentee fathers. This absence may be either physical, or a lack of their active presence in the family.”⁹⁰ Without a present father figure, the mother becomes the presence gang members turn to for respect and faithfulness. Thus, the idea of a male god has been diminished, and replaced with his mother. This creates an accord between how traffickers, *sicarios*, gang members, and others working in the illicit sectors of Medellín create solitude for themselves in a chaotic environment.

This shift from traditional religion to religion for the purpose of justifying one’s actions had long-term effects on the social landscape of Medellín. While religion is one of the most important identity creating factors, it was removed from traditional institutions. This opened the doors for the creation of new rituals and beliefs, as well as new religious figures such as the aforementioned *Virgenes*. As new figures and representations of figures were created, they also created new roles, rules, and expectations for daily life. *La Virgen María Auxiliadora* supported, and even promoted, violence as a means for conflict resolution or employment. She provided safety to those putting themselves in danger to kill another. Institutionalized Catholicism did not provide this kind of support nor tolerated these kinds of actions. Thus, while a predominantly

⁸⁹ Salazar, *Born to Die in Medellín*, 118.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

Catholic city, Medellín experienced a great divide in religion and religious practices among the classes.

Effects on Urban Space

The illegal drug trade, while an underground industry, had tangible effects on the physical makeup of cities, most notably Medellín and Cali. This is due to relationships traffickers, citizens, and politicians had with their city.

When asked: “How did the drug industry affect Medellín?” it is common to hear that while the drug trade had many negative consequences, it had some positive ones, as well. “Like other Colombian traffickers, Escobar poured his money into land and buildings. Construction in Medellín quadrupled in the 1980s with money from the cartel drug mafia.”⁹¹ Historically Bogotá, the nation’s capital, and Medellín, the country’s industrial center, were in competition. Members of the cartel pumped money into building up their city in order to compete with Bogotá, creating what Stienen describes as violence silenced by beauty.⁹² While on the surface Medellín was becoming more beautiful and luxurious, its social fabric and licit economies disintegrated.

The cartels re-designed the city. They beautified it and made it more luxurious. Residents who previously lacked the resources to buy luxurious items suddenly could. People began competing for the biggest houses and most expensive cars. Medellín’s upscale neighborhood *El Poblado* shot up in this period as *Paisas* began

⁹¹ Robert J. Kelly, Jess Maghan and Joseph Serio, *Illicit Trafficking: A Reference Handbook*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005, 119.

⁹² Angela Stienen, "Urban Technology, Conflict Education, and Disputed Space," *Journal of Urban Technology* 16 (2009): 109.

fighting for the most luxurious and modern apartments, and *Parque Lleras*, Medellín's hot spot for restaurants and bars, was filled with surgically altered female escorts on the arm of well-tailored men and expensive imported cars. However, Medellín's transformation was purely cosmetic. Physical, social, and educational infrastructure was broken. Today, when asked, most *Paisas* are proud of their city's beauty. Even those opposed to the drug trade praise the ways in which the cartels transformed Medellín into Colombia's most beautiful and luxurious city.

Many of the Medellín poor and marginalized experienced an "accelerated modernization."⁹³ Thoumi argues Colombians do not stereotypically feel responsibility towards the state, "and are instead happy to ignore its judicial and policing systems."⁹⁴ Thus leading to a lack of credibility towards personal or social sanctions and further stimulating the importation of these illicit goods. With this "accelerated modernization" the poor and marginalized suddenly had the money to buy goods they previously could not afford. Furthermore, entire neighborhoods, previously occupied by the upper and middle-classes, were abandoned as residents moved to enclosed complexes to escape violence. A wave of migrants moved from *comunas* to nicer neighborhoods and visited public spaces they previously avoided. *Sicarios*, *prepagos*, and other youth from slums were earning large sums of money and could afford to participate in the consumer lifestyle promoted by the *Capos*. This created a boom in the Medellín economy in terms of luxury goods, real estate, and the automobile industries.

⁹³ Stienen, Angela, "Urban Technology, Conflict Education, and Disputed Space," 111.

⁹⁴ Thoumi, "Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis," 110.

“Medellín jolted alive”⁹⁵ as nightclubs sprung up on the outskirts of the city, malls in the city selling lavish imported goods, and imported car dealerships in expensive neighborhoods such as *El Poblado*. It became trendy to show off one’s wealth, and the economic boom experienced by the city reflected this. The landscape physically changed, as well, as adobe farmhouses were converted to concrete bunkers with security cameras, haphazardly planted flowers were transformed to well-manicured lawns with miniature golf courses, roads were paved, and sports utility vehicles with bullet proof windows filled the streets Traffickers even imported bulls and bullfighters from Spain for public fights.⁹⁶ “Medellín became addicted-not to cocaine, but to the effects of cocaine- to the money, scandal and power created by cocaine, to the novelty of consumption and the eruption of late twentieth-century capitalist culture made possible by cocaine.”⁹⁷

Next, Stienen emphasizes architecture’s role in creating a desired environment in terms of urban life. She claims “throughout history, architecture provided means to establish military control, to separate social groups, and arrange comprehensive order, on both an aesthetic and political level.”⁹⁸ Violent confrontations in the city’s public spaces between drug-related criminal gangs, leftist guerilla groups, and right-wing paramilitary groups created a “fragmentation of the city’s social-spatial pattern.”⁹⁹ Large, enclosed, and closely monitored apartment buildings were constructed for the upper and middle-classes, but “controlled gang territories in the low-income districts appeared like spots in the urban landscape. They expressed new spatial appropriation in Medellín: while the

⁹⁵ Roldán, Mary, "Wounded Medellín: Narcotics Traffic against a Background of Industrial Decline," 169.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 170.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 171.

⁹⁸ Stienen, "Urban Technology, Conflict Education, and Disputed Space," 109-110.

⁹⁹ Ibid.,111.

upper and middle classes withdrew from open public spaces, enclosing themselves or privatizing the spaces they wished to access, the dangerous classes invaded public spaces, appropriating the streets, the public squares, and the inner city.”¹⁰⁰

Teresa Caldeira’s *City of Walls* analyzes the Latin American phenomena of these enclosed condominiums she refers to as fortified enclaves. “They are privatized, enclosed and monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and work. Their central justification is the fear of violent crime. They appeal to those who are abandoning the traditional public sphere of the streets to the poor, the marginalized, and the homeless.”¹⁰¹ These fortified enclaves are noteworthy as they perpetuated social and spatial segregation, an already prominent characteristic of cities, and transformed how people of different backgrounds related to each other in the city’s space. Historically, in much of Latin America, the middle and upper classes concentrated in the center, while poorer residents were relegated to the outskirts. However, “recent transformations are generating spaces in which different social groups are again closer to one another but are separated by walls and technologies of security, and they tend not to circulate or interact in common areas” completely remaking the “cognitive map of social segregation in the city.”¹⁰²

“These spatial changes and their instruments are transforming public life and public spaces. In cities fragmented by fortified enclaves, it is difficult to maintain the principles of openness and free circulation that have been among the most significant

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 112.

¹⁰¹ Teresa P.R. Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*, Berkely: University of California Press, 2000, 213.

¹⁰² Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*, 213.

values of modern cities.”¹⁰³ The character of public spaces transformed, as did citizens’ experience of their city. The elite secluded themselves while *mafiosos*, *prepagos*, and *sicarios* flaunted their wealth in previously exclusive neighborhoods. Public spaces no longer related to the modern ideals of commonality and universality. Instead they became spaces of separateness and promoted the idea that social groups should be isolated from those they perceive as different. Public space was seen not only as dangerous but also as lacking in status, and money ceased to be the barrier between the classes.

These enclaves do not solely serve to provide middle and upper classes with protection from perceived violence. Caldeira suggests status is directly associated with one’s residence. As income ceased to define the difference among classes, middle and upper-income residents used these enclaves to show off status.¹⁰⁴ The irony is in order to publicly signify oneself in cities; it is necessary to hide behind walls and retreat from public space. Fortified enclaves are self-contained universes possessing everything necessary to survive without leaving the community, and “valorize a private universe while rejecting the city.” Enclaves further affected public space as business owners stopped building new establishments in areas once considered upscale but later abandoned by the elite, as well as created fewer spaces for contact between people from different backgrounds thus creating a sense of fear and intolerance of “the other.” “While *comuna* dwellers perceived the city as a place where the centrally settled, better-off inhabitants threatened to devour and extinguish them, the latter perceived the *comunas* as the source and embodiment of violence in Medellín. *Comuna* dwellers melded with the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 214.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 263.

sicarios (assassins), milicianos (militia members), and pandilleros (gang members)-predators who undermined the integrity and boundaries of propriety and social place.”¹⁰⁵

Organization of space is an important concept when considering not just the physical landscape of a city but the social landscape, as well. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá notes “in Colombia, the institutionalized presence of fear, and the oppressive militarization of all aspects of life have profoundly altered interpersonal relationships and the use of public space.”¹⁰⁶ This paper previously discussed the use of space to segregate the classes, thus perpetuating ideas of “the other” in terms of class relations. Furthermore, people make connections with their space. This changed with the re-organization of the city. The middle and upper classes feared areas that were originally theirs. The marginalized were excited to explore new spaces they once were excluded from. While fortified enclaves became a solution for the upper and middle classes in terms of escaping perceived violence and unwanted interactions with “the other,” they lost connections to the spaces that had once held importance to them.

¹⁰⁵ Roldán, "Wounded Medellín: Narcotics Traffic against a Background of Industrial Decline," 173.

¹⁰⁶ Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory: Youth and Violence in Medellín, Colombia*, 136.

The Collapse of the Medellín Cartel

In 1992, with increased pressure from the United States, the Colombian government revoked the anti-extradition amendment of the Constitution, and went to *La Catedral* to retrieve Escobar. However, warned of this plan, he escaped. The Colombian government created a search squadron aided by *Los Pepes* (*Los Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar*, "People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar"), a search group financed by Escobar's rivals including members of the Cali cartel. Escobar was on the run until December 1993 when he was caught and killed on the rooftops of a neighborhood in Medellín.

Following the death of the cartel's leader and incarceration of many of its members, Medellín experienced a rapid increase in unemployment, felt the hardest in the *comunas* where the vast majority worked in informal markets. As previously mentioned by John Camaroff, those living in slums often trust leaders of criminal networks as their expectations and laws are clearly stated. With the death of *El Patron*, the laws ruling society on the periphery ceased to be enforced. Former workers of the trade, including bodyguards, drug runners, and *sicarios*, turned to random acts of robbery, kidnapping, and violence to make money creating complete chaos in the city.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 175.

Roldán cites philosopher Thomas Hobbes' theory that society demands a social contract in order to function. "In the absence of a common contract that ties people to restrictive rules, and in the absence of authorities who are able to enforce that contract, there exists a 'war of all against all.' When the social contract fails, people revert to violence of the state of nature, that is to feud, retaliation, and revenge."¹⁰⁸ This occurred in Medellín. People continued to desire fast money but were not constrained by the cartel's rules in order to earn it. This created a power shift. Youth gangs expanded their activities into smaller drug trafficking groups, other forms of organized crime groups, or delinquent gangs. The city was divided in territories led by warring factions, creating chaos and a new form of uncontrollable violence.¹⁰⁹

Roldán notes specific evidence for the leap in violence following the fall of the Medellín cartel. *Comuna* members found themselves victims of extreme and un-systematized urban violence. As a result, many adolescents formed "clean up" campaigns for their neighborhoods, introducing a new form of violence Medellín had not previously experienced. These clean up brigades were at first wildly supported in neighborhoods as they were viewed as the forces eradicating the *comunas* unwanted and violent elements. However, many group leaders became power hungry and began to perpetuate the chaos and violence instead of preventing it.

Various scholars discuss whether Escobar's assassination was a mistake on the part of the Colombian government. Previously, there was one boss, one industry association, and one mob. It is easier to come to an agreement with the "Boss" than it is

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 174.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 3.

to go after a business managed by 200 people, making it much more difficult to curb the various forms of violence.¹¹⁰

Those living in the *comunas* were hit the hardest with the sudden end to the cartel's power. "Even those engaged in licit activities in poor neighborhoods suffered as the ready supply of cash that had kept the local economy buoyant increasingly dried up."¹¹¹ Insurgent leftist and right wing paramilitary groups based in *comunas* thrived as the newly unemployed forces turned to armed group participation for employment. Roldán reports an interview with a Medellín taxi driver when asked: what's the best way of reducing unemployment in Medellín? He responded: "Take those guys out of jail. *Esos manes* (those guys i.e. narcotics dealers) knew how to create employment."¹¹²

On the other hand, the government now had ample resources to focus its attention on other issues plaguing the state. The first objective was to search for guerilla and paramilitary leaders and the pacification of insurgent groups. President Álvaro Uribe, who served from 2002 to 2010, made it his personal goal to eradicate internal conflict in Colombia. In 2004 Uribe successfully demobilized almost every paramilitary group in the country, the majority in *Antioquía*, thus creating a city ready to recover and earn its future title as "Most Innovative City in the World".

This was not the end of the drug industry, however. Following Escobar's death business continued to blossom.¹¹³ By the 1990s, the Cali cartel had replaced the Medellín cartel as Colombia's principle cocaine trafficking organization. In fact, following the fall

¹¹⁰ *Pablo Escobar Angel Or Demon*, 2007.

¹¹¹ Roldán, Mary, "Wounded Medellín: Narcotics Traffic against a Background of Industrial Decline," 175.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 179.

¹¹³ *Pablo Escobar Angel Or Demon*, 2007.

of the Medellín cartel, 80 to 90 percent of cocaine imported to the United States came from Cali.¹¹⁴ However, the U.S. successfully blocked trade routes through the Caribbean. The cartels shifted the trade trajectory towards Mexico. This involved contracting Mexican traffickers to smuggle both drugs and contraband across borders in the Southwest. The Colombian shift from Caribbean to Mexican smuggling routes empowered Mexican traffickers. Mexico now leads Latin American in terms of drug-produced violence.¹¹⁵ Over time, there was a coca production shift from Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia to Brazil, and a rise in independent trafficking organizations in other countries such as Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. There was also a rise of two new Colombian organizations based on the Northern Atlantic coast and the Valle del Cauca.

¹¹⁴ Donald R. Liddick Jr., *The Global Underworld*, Westport: International and Comparative Criminology, 2004, 31.

¹¹⁵ Liddick Jr., *The Global Underworld*, 32.

Projects Implemented to Counteract the Effects

At the height of the cartel's power, architecture was used as a means of segregating the classes. However, by the mid 1990s, Colombian politicians and architects united in an attempt to promote urban and rural development, and assume control of the city by building and modernizing public urban space using architecture. In 1995 the city's (and country's) first metropolitan railway (*el metro*) was built

directed at transforming the inner city into the city's showcase and producing 'order, cleanliness, and security.' At the same time, the Metro's operating company sought to bring in a *Cultura Ciudadana*, a set of conventions for dealing with violence, exclusion and difference. The Metro company started to promote a code of behavioral rules in the city... aimed at 're-civilizing the city's inhabitants.' The main target of the Metro company, however, was to contribute to the rebuilding and strengthening of the state.¹¹⁶

Its declared aim was to deconstruct the social walls segregating the poor from the rich.

The *metro* started with two major lines, one running north to south, and the other from east to west, connecting low-class neighborhoods with upper-class ones.

Some scholars claim the *metro* was not constructed to integrate the classes, but to win back the city's public space for the elite.¹¹⁷ The *metro* replaced the cheaper bus option for public transportation making it more difficult for people from the slums, such as street vendors, to venture to nicer neighborhoods for work. The irony, however, is the *metro* did not prevent *sicarios*, *prepagos*, or the youth feared by mainstream citizens

¹¹⁶ Cerdá, "Reducing Violence by Transforming Neighborhoods: A Natural Experiment in Medellín, Colombia," 1046.

¹¹⁷ Stienen, "Urban Technology, Conflict Education, and Disputed Space," 120.

from commuting to nicer parts of the city. The result is a city whose public spaces were cleared of low-income citizens working in the informal sectors but not the “dangerous” or thus creating the false image of a safer and more exclusive environment.

Castro and Echeverri argue the contrast. While they note similar cases of economic, social, and physical exclusion, they highlight programs and projects implemented by the city as a way of integrating the classes and decreasing violence. Medellín employed a number of holistic projects such as the construction of “new networks of public facilities for low-income neighborhoods,... looked to construct the best possible buildings in some of the cities poorest neighborhoods, claiming the symbolic value of architecture as a physical expression of new public policies for education and culture, and integrated urban projects in areas of elevated marginalization and violence.”¹¹⁸ Castro and Echeverri believe the city’s intentions were to re-introduce the city’s public spaces to the people, and architecture was used as a means of improving standard of living of those in the slums, thus giving them options aside from violence for success.

Another venture by the city was to construct a housing project along the Juan Bobo stream. This region was previously crowded with informal settlements. This project’s purpose was to expand public space in the area, as well as legalize 100 percent of the settlements, 80 percent of which had been illegally constructed.¹¹⁹ In 2004, a cable car system running from the *metro* to the settlements on the slopes was constructed “aimed to improve the quality of life and accessibility in these communities.” This

¹¹⁸ Lorenzo Castro, and Lorenzo Echeverri, "Bogota and Medellín: Arcuitecture and Politics," *Architectural Design* 81.3 (2011): 100.

¹¹⁹ Castro and Echeverri, "Bogota and Medellín: Arcuitecture and Politics,"103.

gondola made travel time from the city center to neighborhoods on the steep hills of Medellín drop from over two hours to minutes.¹²⁰ Other improvements were made in peripheral neighborhoods such as “additional lighting for public spaces; new pedestrian bridges and street paths; “library parks”; buildings for schools, recreational centers, and centers to promote microenterprise; more police patrols; and a family police station next to the gondola station.”¹²¹ “The strategies mentioned above were part of a broader policy of social urbanism that sought to generate a qualitative leap forward from the traditional understanding of neighbourhood improvement, [and]...to provide the city with a network of public spaces that improved pedestrian mobility, allowing people to meet and move through a quality public realm.”¹²²

In a study conducted at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University in New York City, between 2003 and 2008, neighborhoods in Medellín which received intervention by the State experienced a decrease in the homicide rate 66 percent higher than neighborhoods which did not, and a 74 percent drop in violent crime. Residents of these neighborhoods also became more willing to trust and rely on police and state officials. Finally, in neighborhoods with intervention programs, residents experienced a growth in perceptions of collective efficacy. Cerdá et al speculate *comunas* receiving State sponsored support were turning away from the model of thinking imposed by the cartels more quickly than the ones that received nothing.¹²³ They also suggest the benefits of these projects were felt outside of their neighborhoods. For example, the

¹²⁰ Rico, *International Business Times*.

¹²¹ Cerdá, "Reducing Violence by Transforming Neighborhoods: A Natural Experiment in Medellín, Colombia," 1046.

¹²² Castro and Echeverri, "Bogota and Medellín: Arcuitecture and Politics," 103

¹²³ Cerdá, "Reducing Violence by Transforming Neighborhoods: A Natural Experiment in Medellín, Colombia," 1051.

metro improved resident access to employment opportunities outside of the *comunas*, and attracted new businesses to disadvantaged communities.

Riaño-Alcalá notes a social project implemented in 1999 by a group of youth leaders from the slums and five state organizations and NGOs. The project was a community wide art project implemented in *Barrio Antioquía. The Skin of Memory: Barrio Antioquía Past, Present and Future* was implemented in an attempt “to respond to the social emptiness and absence of mourning by using art, ritual, and community commemoration.”¹²⁴ Women and youth from the *barrio* collected objects symbolizing and representing memories from their community. These objects were mounted on a “bus turned memory-museum” that ran through the entire sector as well as at the neighborhood subway stop. “The project emphasized the processes of mourning and reflecting about the past, through the selection of artifacts that symbolized a significant personal memory for residents.” Each person who donated an artifact to the project wrote a letter stating their hope for the future of their *barrio*. The leaders of this project received over 2,000 letters. This project transformed community members into witnesses of violence and what Riaño-Alcalá describes as scribes. The other aim of this project was to erase the distrust the cartels had created among community members.

These projects and buildings highlight the arguments referenced by Hawthorne and Kimmelman. Architecture and social ventures reduced violence by generating the idea of the common good, increasing reliance on police, creating access to employment opportunities, stimulating the formal economy, and promoting education. Medellín jolted

¹²⁴ Riaño Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory: Youth and Violence in Medellín, Colombia*, 167.

alive in a new way. It was these projects that allowed Medellín to revert to the booming urban center it was prior to the birth of the drug industry, as well as drop its homicide rate by nearly 80 percent. An article from the *International Business Times* claims the key to Medellín's success has been the implementation of projects and programs aimed at increasing investments, as well as integrating low-income neighborhoods into the city center. Mayor Aníbal Gaviria said "the [ULI] contest gave his city a global platform to exhibit its growth and its ideas for improving civic life," with the hope of attracting foreign investment to Medellín, as well as Colombia as a whole.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Rico, *International Business Times*.

Future of Medellín and predictions for Colombia

In spite of Medellín and Colombia's dark past, there appears a bright future. Colombia has an advantage over the rest of Latin America as it is one of the few countries in South America that never had dictatorial rule and has a legitimate electoral system respected by its citizens. Second, "for much of the twentieth century, the coffee culture not only supported the country's international accounts but also sustained the growth of a comfortable bourgeois urban society and a stable small farmer economy. Colombia's entrepreneurial class, based on five separate urban manufacturing centers of a million inhabitants or more each, has long been known throughout Latin America for its dynamism."¹²⁶ As a result, in the 1980s economic crisis, Colombia was one of the few Latin American countries not to default on its foreign loans. Finally, Colombia has successfully held together a country whose geography is not simply "vast, but daunting," and has effectively created a common sense of identity among people of various races, histories, and backgrounds.¹²⁷

Between 2003 and 2006, Colombia successfully demilitarized its paramilitary groups, and on October 15, 2012 began peace negotiations with the FARC.¹²⁸ In May 2012, the United States entered into the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion agreement aiming to "improve the investment environment, eliminate tariffs and other barriers to

¹²⁶ Philip McLean, "Colombia: Failed, Failing, or Just Weak?" *The Washington Quarterly* 25(3) (2002): 124.

¹²⁷ McLean, "Colombia: Failed, Failing, or Just Weak?" 124.

¹²⁸ "Un Sueño Llamado Paz," October 15, 2012.

U.S. exports, expand trade, and promote economic growth in both countries. U.S. exports to Colombia include machinery, oil, agricultural products, organic chemicals, and plastic, [and] U.S. imports from Colombia include crude oil, gold, coffee, cut flowers, textiles, and bananas.”¹²⁹ According to the U.S. State Department,

Colombia has made progress in addressing its security, development, and governance challenges. The country's National Consolidation Plan seeks to re-establish state control and legitimacy in strategically important areas previously dominated by illegal armed groups through a phased approach that combines security, counternarcotics, and economic and social development initiatives. U.S. policy toward Colombia supports the government's efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions, promote respect for human rights and the rule of law, foster socio-economic development, address immediate humanitarian needs, and end the threats to democracy posed by narcotics trafficking and terrorism.

Additionally, Colombia successfully lowered its poverty rate from 47.7% in 2003 to 37.2% in 2010. While uncertain as to what correlations the decline of insurgent violence and the illegal drug trade had on this change, it is a hopeful sign of the country's recovery, nonetheless.¹³⁰

Colombia was plagued with violence for almost half a century, and experienced its most brutal period no less than two decades ago. While the illicit drug trade stagnated the country's growth in most sectors, hope is not lost. Colombia is regaining confidence worldwide, and foreign investors are beginning to look once more towards Colombia for business. Political terrorism has vanished, and what remains of insurgent groups have crouched back to rural areas where they, once again, do not threaten the country's democracy and national security. While there are still rare cases of attacks, one as

¹²⁹ United States of America. U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. *U.S. Relations with Colombia*. October 23 2012. Accessed December 12, 2012.

¹³⁰ World Bank, Colombia, Accessed December 12, 2012.

recently as August 2012¹³¹ by FARC, there are current negotiations taking place for insurgent demobilization, as well.

Unfortunately, Escobar's reign tarnished the minds of teenagers and young adults living in slums. Many believe the cartels created a mentality of fast and easy money, as well as promoted a lifestyle of violence. People who could not have nice things turned to killing or robbery, actions justified by their *narco* role models. *Prepagos*, young female escorts, and *sicarios* started in the era of the *narcos* and continue to exist to this day. The cartels created a world of *desconfianza*, distrust, emphasized in the economic sector as well as the social.

However, as national security becomes less of a priority on the government's agenda, legislation can turn its focus to education and infrastructure in the hope of counteracting the negative effects the cartels had on society. Pulling people out of poverty is one way to curb violence, and, as shown, Colombia successfully reduced the number of citizens living in poverty from almost 50% to 37% in seven years. According to the World Bank, Colombia currently has a gross enrollment ratio for primary school students of 115.4%, 1.4% higher than the average upper-middle class country and 5.2% higher than Latin America as a whole.¹³²¹³³ While it will take a number of years, social and educational programs can be used to eradicate the effects the *narcos* imprinted on the minds of the underprivileged.

¹³¹ Katharina Wecker, "'FARC' Attack Leaves Southwest Colombia Without Electricity," *Colombia Reports*. August 10, 2012. Accessed December 12, 2012.

¹³² World Bank, Colombia, Accessed December 12, 2012.

¹³³ Total is the total enrollment in primary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of official primary education age. GER can exceed 100% due to the inclusion of over-aged and under-aged students because of early or late school entrance and grade repetition. (WorldBank)

Medellín specifically experienced an amazing rebirth following the height of the cartel's power. *Narco* money was used to beautify the city, and created the mentality that Medellín was competitive with Bogotá. This belief did not die with Escobar. The state implemented projects and acknowledged the necessity to include marginalized residents into city life. Colombian cities were historically centralist with attention focused on the upper classes. At the cocaine industry's height, Medellín experienced an economic boom as classes who did not historically participate in the consumer lifestyle began to spend money. An inherent lesson Medellín learned from this history is to include the lower classes in consumerism in order to stimulate the economy. This is emphasized in the numerous social projects and changes in architecture implemented throughout the city.

Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia, studied the effects of violence and memory making on youth in the *comunas* of Medellín. Memory is an interesting and important element to study when examining the long-term effects of violence on communities and how they fashion their lives in the aftermath of the cartels' violence. It is the tool humans use to

Cope with violence and construct themselves as subjects. ...The circulation of memories in condition of war is much like the daily traffic movements of a city like Medellín. It requires a competence and intuition for the safe paths and detours one ought to take according to changing conditions of risk. Like traffic patterns, armed violence sometimes confines the individual to their homes or blocks, at other times displaces them by force. At other times, violence destroys the physical and social referents that are attached to places.¹³⁴

The cartels transformed the image of youth from *comunas* in Medellín as both the victims and perpetrators of violence. To this day, people continue to negatively project youth these as "the other". The upper and middle classes use memory to perpetuate their

¹³⁴ Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory: Youth and Violence in Medellín, Colombia*, 1, 12.

fear of “the other”. Conversely, it has been used by those living on the periphery to embrace or reject the identities created in the era of the cartels. “Youth are not mere ‘objects’ subjugated by violence, and their processes of cultural production are not exhausted by or restricted to violence.”¹³⁵ Riaño Alcalá suggests memory is used by youth to “make sense of the impact of violence on their lives and to locate themselves within broader social worlds.” Medellín residents continue to live with memories of their lived experience and level of participation in the era of the cartels. The era of violence continues to be fresh in people minds, and people must find a way to deal with their history.

One technique *comuna* members use to cope with their experience of violence is to express their memories in the forms of superstitious stories about ghosts, the devil, or spirits. This revitalizes the Colombian custom of oral tradition, but also creates an agent to circulate feelings of fear.¹³⁶ Riaño Alcalá hypothesizes fear of curses becomes the strategy for controlling social life, as well as a sensorial response to an experience. By retelling ghostly stories, *comuna* residents project feelings of fear towards supernatural entities rather than on everyday life. It is a tool for passing down cultural rules, regulations and local knowledge. Stories about ghosts or haunted houses scare inhabitants to avoid certain regions that were historically violent. While these stories incorrectly pose the danger as supernatural, they nonetheless convey perceived perils of the region.

It is important to understand the ways fear regulated daily life in Medellín. Even following the era of danger, fear of youth, public spaces, or certain neighborhoods continues to exist in the minds of *Paisas*, perpetuated by stories or myths. By transferring

¹³⁵ Ibid., 153.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 132.

fear from one's environment into ghost stories, citizens became capable of maneuvering through their city once more. Riaño-Alcalá describes this as "culture of fear."¹³⁷ In this culture, fear regulates all facets of daily life, and residents must find a way to navigate daily communication, social interactions, and physical movement. Ghost stories are one example of how "social agents reconfigure their cultures and re-signify their imaginaries of fear to respond to the presence of terror and suffering in their lives," as well as how "subjects actively shape their culture in an attempt to come to grips with their experience of violence." Similar to religion and, this is one technique to maintain a sense of control in an uncertain environment marked by violence.

Ghost stories are not the only tool used to create a sense of control in this environment. Oral narratives about lived experience are used to show how fear and violence is constructed in these communities. However, it is not the subject of oral narratives but the telling of the narratives that is important. They create sensory place to project feelings of fear, uncertainty, and mourning.¹³⁸ Living in constant onslaughts of violence prevents the construction of channels for mourning. Many members of society, jaded with constant experiences of violence, prevent members to come to terms with their losses. "When societies go through prolonged periods of violent conflict that wash away the issues and taken-for-granted texture of everyday life, collective anxieties remain as an emotional sediment that might turn to hate and vengeful actions and reaffirm the ideologies that sustain these behaviors."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ibid., 137.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 148.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 165.

However, retellings of lived experience only endure two or two and a half generations as those telling their stories can only recount them to their children or grandchildren. After this, they cease to be living testaments and instead convert into second hand accounts subject to hearsay and faulty memory. Those who lived through the violence can testify to it, but even individual perceptions of the violence alter recollection. Individual perceptions of the original narrators' memories further distort the account creating a mythical or unreliable tale. It is uncertain, however, how the cultural practice of telling stories, as well as their evolution over time, is assisting or hindering post-*narco* social development. The key factor is they act as a coping mechanism and a continuing reminder of the past.

Conclusion

This study investigates Colombia and Medellín's past, present, and future. It examines the factors that produced the world's most violent city, identifies the tools and techniques used by city officials to counteract the consequences of the cartel's actions, and predicts the future success of these projects. Previous literature on this topic examines the negative effects of the drug trade on the Colombia's economy, politics, or society, or on Medellín's current role as "City of the Year." However, what lacks is an assessment of the relationship between the two. The cartels are to blame for the escalation in violence and stagnation of the economy. However, as examined in this paper, the disintegration of the cartels provided Medellín officials an ambition for recovery, as well as placed center-periphery social issues at the top of the agenda. Cities are often characterized by issues of crime and violence due to the marginalization of lower classes frequently ignored by the center. As noted by Jorge Melguizo: Medellín became aware of its problems, recognized them, and faced them head on.

This study identified consequences of the cartels actions on Medellín and linked these with the city's responses. This study, however, is incomplete, as Medellín only recently begun implementing these programs and projects. The first of these undertakings only began as early as 1995. Medellín still experiences high levels of inequality, as well as urges to earn fast and easy money to participate in the consumer lifestyle. It is unsure whether social programs or improvements in education will counteract this. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct more case studies at the local level examining neighborhoods

that have received intervention versus neighborhoods who have not, It would also be essential to consider if these neighborhoods are experiencing a shift in resident participation from the informal to formal economy. Studying the following will aid in measuring whether Medellín has, in fact, recovered from its dark history.

This research will be useful to evaluate if the Medellín methodology to curb violence can be translated to other dangerous cities in the world. Medellín's situation consisted of social unrest instead of political turmoil, and it should be noted this method would not be successful in violent cities experiencing political unrest due to civil war. However, an investigation should be done to assess whether cities like San Pedro Sula in Honduras and Caracas in Venezuela, the most dangerous city in the world and third most dangerous in Latin America respectively,¹⁴⁰ can apply Medellín's techniques to control and reduce violence. Careful examinations should be done to measure the extent to which social programs and infrastructure combat violence, and if this will be effective if transferred elsewhere.

¹⁴⁰ "San Pedro Sula Otra Vez La Ciudad Más Violenta Del Mundo; Acapulco, La Segunda," *Seguridad, Justicia Y Paz*, February 7, 2013. Accessed April 7, 2013.

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