CITIZENS' MEDIA AGAINST ARMED CONFLICT
DISRUPTING VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA
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LIFE AT THE CROSSFIRE
An Introduction to Colombia’s Violence and Its Context

Se percibía el miedo, pero aun así la vida parecía ser más fuerte.
—Santiago Gamboa, Necrópolis

Armed guerrillas, paramilitaries, and other groups storm and terrorize small towns isolated by Colombia’s impossible geography with a frequency that has granted a perverse everyday-life feeling to such violence over the course of the country’s forty-year armed conflict. The scene is well known in Colombia. The armed ones (los armados) cut off the electricity and dozens, sometimes hundreds, of armed men and women invade a town. In the case of guerrilla assaults, sparsely staffed police stations attempt to repel the attacks. Paramilitary groups operate differently; they enter civilian communities, list in hand, privileging selective assassinations over military attacks.

How do isolated communities react when harassed by armed groups? Is there any type of agency in their response? Do media play a role when communities try to galvanize a response? As the guerrilla-driven conflict worsened in southern Colombia during the mid-2000s, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia], the main guerrilla group operating in the country, attacked the town of Belén de los Andaquíes in southern Colombia. Gunfire, explosives, and the presence of hundreds of armed guerrillas in the small downtown terrified residents. People locked their doors, hid under their beds, and surrendered to the fear and isolation war imposes. In the midst of this chaos, the local community radio station opened a new communication space, where an alternative to the reigning terror could be felt and shared.
By transmitting traditional Colombian Christmas carols (known in Colombia as Villancicos) and asking people to open their windows and turn up the volume, the radio station created a way out of terror. Soon, dozens of unarmed civilians, waving white flags, came out onto the central plaza. The Colombian Christmas music, transmitted by the station and amplified by the church’s loudspeakers and home radios, created a “symbolic shield,” allowing people to overcome the terrifying effects of violence. The radio station opened a communication space and triggered a sense of togetherness and collective agency in the community, successfully, albeit momentarily, countering the fear and isolation wrought by violence. In moments of crisis, when victimized by armed groups, local citizen-controlled media can help their communities overcome feelings of collective terror, helping people to find crucial information about food, shelter, medicine, and other logistical support. In crisis situations, these media also serve as impromptu forums where citizens can discuss responses to the crisis and make collective decisions. During my fieldwork in Colombia, however, I heard citizens’ media producers insist that their long-term peacebuilding efforts have greater impact than their media responses in moments of crisis. This book explores how Colombian communities cornered by armed groups use communication and media to buffer, answer, and in some cases resist the impact of armed violence.

War’s impact on civilian communities goes far beyond the immediate devastation of direct attacks. War gradually erodes the social, democratic, and cultural fabric of communities when civilians are forced to live side-by-side with armed groups for years. The groups recruit the children of these communities and inject massive doses of mistrust, individualism, fear, and uncertainty into the lives of regular citizens. The rule of law is replaced by the use of force, and local democratic institutions are weakened. Armed groups corrupt, co-opt, or threaten local government officials. Levels of impunity increase, and governance and accountability are subsumed by corruption and bribery. Local elections are bought out or boycotted by the occupying groups, and warring factions impose friend/foe ideologies that diminish citizen participation in local decision-making processes. Tanks invade public spaces, soldiers dig sand trenches, and military platoons patrol parks and plazas, severely restricting freedom, mobility, and use of public spaces to create and maintain social bonds. The presence of armed groups and their practice of recruiting informants and support structures erodes solidarities, and the traditional solidarities leave them a vulnerable, impotent, and divided people, violence whenever it emerges on the scene.

Here, I argue that technology and communities can and should use media to help activate participation in community-building as it relates to armed conflict. As processes of peacebuilding occurs, the community’s relationship to violence can be transformed into productive processes of mediating violence. When armed groups use their vast resources to intimidate, tax, and abuse, what do citizens use communication and media to buffer, answer, and in some cases resist the impact of armed violence.
Christmas carols (now in Spanish) are played on loudspeakers in schools and homes, creating a way out of terror. People wave white flags, come out onto their balconies, hear Christmas music, transmitted by loudspeakers and home-grown people to overcome the isolation opened a communication channel and collective agency by humanitarianly, countering the fear and isolation of the victims of crisis, when victimized people and relatives media can help their memory, barking terror, helping people to resist the terror, helping people to resist the collective. In Colombia, I heard and witnessed that a long-term peacebuilding project responses to moments of crisis, making mass media a buffer, answer, and interpret the source of meaning.

Violence gradually erodes the social fabric of communities when civilians are targeted and killed. The groups target civilians and inject massive doses of violence into the lives of regular citizens. New forms of corruption, co-opt, or bypass the rule of law, and impunity increase, and there is a growing sense of helplessness and fear. The occupying groups use violence to control and exploit the communities, undermining processes. Tanks in the streets, military platoons are a constant reminder of the importance of security. Along with the social fabric of social bonds. The presence of armed groups recruiting informants and supporters among local civilians deteriorate traditional bonds of solidarity, togetherness, and trust in communities. Individuals and families learn to mistrust neighbors, friends, and distant relatives, leaving them severely isolated. As isolation and terror mount, feelings of impotence and victimization take over, and the use of weapons and aggression becomes normalized. Resolving everyday conflicts with violence and force is perceived as acceptable and effective. Intolerance of difference increases extremist and sectarian ideologies.

Here I examine how media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) can act as powerful tools to help civilian communities survive conflict and war. When grassroots communication media are deeply embedded in their communities, truly open to collective participation, and responsive to immediate and long-term local communication needs, they strengthen the agency of the community as it responds to armed violence.

As tools explicitly designed to craft symbolic products and processes, media and ICTs occupy a privileged position in helping communities reconstitute symbolic universes that have been disrupted by violence. Through production of their own radio, video, or television programming, civilian communities can begin reconstituting webs of meaning, allowing them to make sense of their experience of war. When communities are able to access their own media and develop their own communication competencies as media producers, they can use citizens' media to narrate, interpret, remembere, and share the lived experience of violence. Citizens' media facilitate communication processes in which civilians recreate traditional solidarities and form new ones, return to public places that have been abandoned in terror, and organize collective actions. ICTs trigger communal processes to bring civilians, one step at a time, out of the isolation and terror imposed by armed violence and back into the public sphere.

During my fieldwork in Colombian armed-conflict regions, I witnessed the phenomenon of citizens' media "stealing" children and youth from war to cultivate ideologies of peaceful coexistence grounded in local cultures. When citizens' media are genuinely open to community participation and situated in local knowledges, languages, and aesthetics, they help keep children and youth away from armed groups. These media cultivate alternative understandings of difference, encourage nonviolent ways of being and interacting, and model nonviolent conflict management.
Media can become powerful tools for empowering civilian communities to strengthen processes of good governance, transparency, and accountability. A local election overseen by a community radio station, or a public budget scrutinized by civic groups in front of community television cameras, increases the legitimacy of public institutions. These media technologies have the potential to transform private political and institutional processes into public sphere events, thereby solidifying people's trust in democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Perverse Economies, Social Movements, and War

Armed conflict in Colombia is not a black or white proposition. Political actions, economic interests, illegal economies, class alliances, and social movements in Colombia create complex scenarios of armed conflict that overlap, intersect, and diverge, resulting in outcomes that can change from moment to moment and region to region. Illegal armed groups, including guerrillas, paramilitary organizations, self-defense militias, drug, emerald, gold, and gasoline mafias, along with legal armies, such as the Colombian army and other security institutions, saturate local and regional social, political, economic, and cultural processes with the logic of war, the normalization of violence and weapons, and authoritarian ideologies.

In the following pages I attempt to describe some of the contexts foregrounding Colombia's armed conflict and the impact they have on the everyday lives of civilian communities in the places where I conducted fieldwork on citizens' media. Instead of attempting to create a complete reconstruction of the history of Colombia's armed conflict, my goal is to paint the scene in rough strokes to provide readers with some background for understanding the social and political contexts of my fieldwork. The following pages are written from the point of view of the civilian communities under siege in regions far from the country's centers of economic and political power. My main sources are the scholarship of Colombian and Colombianist historians, political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, and economists. I attempt to be comprehensive in my search for regional studies of Montes de María, Magdalena Medio, and Caquetá, the three regions where I conducted fieldwork.

In Colombia, grassroots social movements, armed groups, economic and political elites, and illegal economies interact in complex,
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This is for empowering civilian communities, good governance, transparency, and oversight by a community radio station. Civic groups in front of communal legitimacy of public institutions, the potential to transform private into public sphere events, thereby civic institutions and the rule of law.

Movements, and War

A black or white proposition. Political economies, class alliances, and state complex scenarios of armed groups converge, resulting in outcomes that matter and region to region. Illegal paramilitary organizations, self-defense and gasoline mafias, along with army and other security institutional, political, economic, and cultural factors, the normalization of violence and politics.

To describe some of the contexts conflict and the impact they have on communities in the places where I lived. Instead of attempting to create history of Colombia’s armed conflict through strokes to provide readers understanding the social and political contours are written from the point under siege in regions far from the political power. My main sources are Colombianist historians, political scientists, and economists. I attempt for regional studies of Montes de Oca, the three regions where I conducted fieldwork.

Movements, armed groups, economic and political relations interact in complex, ambiguous, and sometimes even contradictory ways that shape regional realities of armed conflict and social/political unrest. The interactions between these disparate actors change over time, creating what French sociologist Daniel Pécaut has called “a kaleidoscopic perception of violence” (Pécaut 2001, 93) in the viewpoint of local communities. As varied armed groups, economic elites, and state actors establish and break alliances in their battles for military power and control of wealth, local communities living in regions of armed conflict experience war’s impact as a constant shifting in the shape of their everyday lives. Based on decades of historical research in Colombia, Pécaut states that, against their will, Colombia’s “population finds itself inscribed in the logics of war” (Pécaut 2001, 18). The recognition of this involuntary conscription of the daily lives of civilians in a war that is not their own is perhaps the most significant lesson to be learned from recent regional scholarship by Colombian social scientists. In the words of anthropologist of violence Carolyn Nordstrom, unarmed civilians experience the terrorizing comings and goings of antagonistic armed groups in their communities as “a time of trial, terror, deprivation, and bereavement” (Nordstrom 1992, 265), and not in politicomilitary or ideological terms. What follows is an analysis of the main elements shaping the armed conflict as experienced by unarmed civilians in the three regions I studied.

Land Tenure and Social Violence

In Colombia, disputes around land tenure emerged at the end of the nineteenth century as a pivotal historical process, a significant cause of social unrest, and an instigator of social movements. Each of the three regions studied in this book have been home to instances of large-scale land appropriation, due to such factors as illegitimate allocation of land titles to landowners guilty of bribing corrupt government officials; abusive use of barbed wire; the use of force or threats to expel landowners from small farms close to large haciendas; the use of generalized terror by large hacienda owners to push small landowners from their plots, and then buy their land at bargain prices; and the central government’s lax attitudes toward the regulation of assigning public lands to hacienda owners (Legrand 1986; Reyes 1999; Zamosc 1986, 1997). (In chapter 1, I describe in detail land tenure problems in Caquetá; in chapter 2, I cover Montes de María; and in chapter 3, I describe these problems in Magdalena Medio.) These corrupt and
often violent land appropriation practices can be seen in the examples of the Laranjia hacienda in Caquetá and the Bellacruz hacienda in Magdalena Medio, both existing in regions where I conducted fieldwork for this book.

In the early 1930s Laranjia, one of the largest cattle haciendas in Latin America, began expanding in Montaña, a municipality neighboring Belén de los Andaquíes, home of Radio Andaquí, a community radio station I examine in chapter 1. The hacienda was started in 1933, when more than twelve thousand acres were allocated to Josefa de Perdomo; in 1935 she sold her land to the Lara family (Arcila Niño et al. 2000, 117). Between 1935 and 1950 Laranjia grew by one thousand acres annually; between 1955 and 1965 the hacienda was growing at a rate of six thousand acres every year (Arcila Niño et al. 2000, 57). The hacienda’s name honors the Lara family, who maintained it for several generations. At its peak, Laranjia covered ninety-nine thousand acres and held fifty thousand head of cattle; the hacienda included ports and piers on the Orteguaza River, bridges, an airport, and forty kilometers of road on which the Laras charged a toll to anyone passing through (Jaramillo, Mora, and Cubides 1986, 11). Twelve hundred people lived and worked in Laranjia. The hacienda grew so large an entire Huitoto community was forcefully displaced from their land to accommodate the hacienda’s need to expand (Arcila Niño et al. 2000, 117). Today, one of the two main military bases in the region is housed at Laranjia.

The Bellacruz hacienda, in the department of Cesar, has been a site of conflict and struggle since 1934, when the Marulanda family, who bought seventeen thousand acres of land from the Canadian Royal Bank, began pressuring neighboring small landowners to sell their land. “By 1950, news stories about conflict between the Marulanda family and agricultural unions could already be found in the national press” (Madariaga 2006, 59). By 1956 the hacienda had accumulated more than a hundred thousand acres “full of cattle” (Madariaga 2006, 59). In 1994 the government allocated nearly five thousand acres of what had been the Bellacruz hacienda to the 170 agricultural families that held claims to the land before being forced out by the Marulandas. In 1996 280 of the families who had received parcels of the Bellacruz hacienda in restitution left their lands due to violent persecution and harassment by drug lord Víctor Carranza’s paramilitary forces. The paramilitaries “stole our money, electrical goods and household items, and set fire to our farms and homes” (Madariaga 2006, 59). When police and soldiers did not respond, the Marulandas took matters into their own hands and executed hundreds of people in the nearby town of Marulanda. These events led to the reestablishment of the paramilitary movement 28 years later. [Communique from the Future, forthcoming, p. 330]

In some instances the logic of true utopia is necessary for the impossible utopia to be realized.
practices can be seen in the examples of Quetá and the Bellacruz hacienda in other regions where I conducted field-work.

One of the largest cattle haciendas in the Montañita, a municipality neighboring the town of Radio Andaquí, a community known for its meadows and pastures, is the Bellacruz hacienda. The hacienda was started in the 1950s, and by 1965 it had grown to over thousand acres were allocated to Josefa Niño by the Lara family (Arcila Niño et al. 2000). In 1965 the hacienda was grown to cover ninety-nine thousand acres of land. The hacienda was owned by the Lara family, who maintained a ranch on the estate. In 1981, the hacienda was taken over by the government, and the hacienda was forcibly displaced from their land. The hacienda was then given to the flea market in the department of Cesar, which the Laras charged a toll to any farmer who wanted to sell their produce. In 1986, 11 farmers were relocated to La Miel, in the department of Tolima, thousands of miles from their homeland.

Processes of land accumulation have only worsened. According to a recent study, twenty years ago land estates of more than twelve thousand acres occupied 32 percent of the useful land in the country; today, these large land holdings occupy 62 percent of the land and belong to only 4 percent of the landowners. Also, according to the same study, one in four small landowners has been displaced from his or her land (Semana 2010).

Parallel Realities: Community Activism and Radicals Arm Movements

In response these kinds of illegitimate land appropriations, Colombian peasant communities formed their own grassroots organizations to resist the actions of large landowners and demand rights from the central government. Although it is generally believed that these peasant organizations are leftist, the groups began organizing years before the spread of leftist ideologies in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, Ligas Campesinas [Peasant Leagues], Sindicatos de Obreros Rurales [Rural Workers’ Unions], and Unidades de Acción Rural [Rural Action Units] date back to the 1930s, decades before the proliferation of strong leftist ideologies in Latin American social movements. Later, in the 1960s, Juntas de Acción Comunal (JACs) [Community Action Boards], county-based elected citizens’ committees, played a central role in strengthening peasant social movements. In some cases, a grassroots organization emerged from the status quo before it evolved into a social justice movement. The Asociación
Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos (ANUC) [National Association of Peasants], for example, was created by government mandate in 1966 to address land tenure issues. From its official origin, ANUC evolved into one of the primary leaders of peasant movements for social justice and against land appropriation; in 1971, only five years after its creation, ANUC had almost a million members and more than thirteen thousand trained leaders (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2009, 80).

Other grassroots social movements, such as a strong labor movement led by unions of oil workers, palm workers, and cement workers; urban movements; youth movements; and a more recent women's movement emerged in Colombia during the 1960s and 1970s (A. Delgado 2006; Madariaga 2006; Vásquez 2006).

Without a doubt, grassroots social movements express the agency of Colombian communities. Beginning in the 1930s and continuing through the 1960s and on to today, these community-based movements have organized, marched, spoken out, protested, proposed, met with consecutive governments, signed agreements, complained about the government’s lack of accountability in realizing the agreed actions, organized again, marched again, and so on. Social movements commonly go beyond just demanding land, improved conditions, and social justice for their own constituencies. Magdalena Medio's oil worker unions, for example, are known for demanding (and obtaining) improvements in the educational, health, and transportation infrastructure for their entire region (A. Delgado 2006, 155–57).

Although in some cases and points in history the boundaries may blur, armed social struggles and nonviolent social movements have coexisted as distinct realities in Colombia for decades. However, armed groups tend to make so much noise that social movements are drowned out in the landscape of social justice struggles. Tatiana Duplat, a young historian working with citizens' media, and one of my key contacts during my fieldwork, explained:

One of the main conclusions of my dissertation is that the reconciliation initiative in Ariari was successful on account of a very strong legacy of agrarian organizational culture in the region. Guerrilla organizations emerged and grew in the region very early on, but civilian peasant organizations did not succumb to them; in other words, the agrarian movement in the region during the 1920s was very strong. . . . [Later] persecuted by the Conservative regime, this agrarian movement split in two: one faction remained organized around agrarian unions and the other faction opted for armed
struggle. The faction that opted for armed struggle was the beginning of FARC in the area. Many scholars have studied the armed peasant movements, but they are forgetting or not giving enough visibility to the other reality, that of peasant organizations that continue to this day, with different names, but still very strong; these organizations coexisted with armed groups. Sometimes they confronted armed groups, and sometimes they didn’t, but they were not afraid of armed groups, and they were not entirely cornered. For example, Ariari farmers told me that during the 1960s, even though FARC had influence in the entire region, the guerrillas still had to consult with the directors of Juntas de Acción Comunal [Community Action Boards], Juntas Agrarias [Agrarian Boards], and Sindicatos Campesinos [Peasant Unions]. The director of each group would convene a meeting with the entire board or union and a dialogue and consultation followed. Guerrillas were not permitted to just arrive in a community and impose what they wanted on these communities. This was the state of affairs until the late 1970s. Today it’s a different story, because what you have today is a crossfire. Now it’s no longer about a dialogue with one interlocutor, instead it’s a question of hiding while different armed opponents shoot each other to extinction.... it’s about waiting to see what happens. But in any case, all those other organizational processes still exist and are strong and vibrant; they are our hope for the future, not tomorrow’s future or next year’s future, but a long-term future. (Duplat 2004)

In many cases, radicalized factions, willing to realize social change via the use of force and armed violence, broke away from social movements to form armed groups. This was true in the case of several guerrilla organizations that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s; for example, several of ANUC’s leaders resurfaced as M-19 guerrilleros in Caquetá in the 1970s (see chapter 1).

The main guerrilla organizations in Colombia’s recent history include Movimiento 19 de abril (M-19) [April 19 Movement], Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL) [Popular Liberation Army], Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) [National Liberation Army], and FARC. Born from a radicalized traditional party (the Alianza Nacional Popular, or ANAPO [National Popular Alliance]) and supported by radical students and young professionals, M-19 was the only guerrilla group with a strong presence in Colombia’s urban centers. M-19 negotiated a peace process with then-president Virgilio Barco in 1989. Today, several former M-19 leaders are dynamic political figures in the Colombian Congress and other political spheres.

EPL and ELN emerged from radicalized peasant movements formed to resist land expropriation; one of the main claims these two
groups made to the Colombian state, and maintained for decades, is the need for agrarian reform. EPL was never able to recruit more than a thousand combatants; in 1991 this organization agreed to demobilize under the administration of President César Gaviria. Since demobilizing, the organization has become a political movement known as Esperanza, Paz y Libertad [Hope, Peace, and Freedom]; however, small, radicalized factions that never agreed to demobilize still operate in some areas (OPPDDHIH 2002, 33). ELN is a 1960s reincarnation of the earlier Liberal guerrillas, led by Rafael Rangel in the Chucurí area in Magdalena Medio. In 2003 ELN had five thousand combatants (seventeen hundred women) (González, Bolívar, and Vásquez 2003).

FARC is a leftist reincarnation of the Liberal guerrillas. It emerged out of the bipartisan political violence between the Liberal and Conservative parties in the 1950s and 1960s. Radicalized factions of the Liberal Party took up arms after the period of social unrest following the assassination of Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948. Over the next twenty years, some of these radicalized Liberal guerrillas became depoliticized and formed gangs of bandits that terrorized farmers (large and small landowners) in rural areas where state institutions are weak. Some other Liberal guerrillas incorporated leftist ideologies and resurfaced years later as Marxist, Maoist, and Trotskyist guerrillas. This incorporation of leftist ideology was the case for FARC, which by 2003 had more than sixteen thousand combatants (fifty-eight hundred women) (González, Bolívar, and Vásquez 2003).

Colombia’s political violence has to be examined from a framework of social inequality. In contrast with many other intrastate conflicts that spiral around ethnic or religious differences in other parts of the world, the Colombian conflict is deeply embedded in the extremely unequal distribution of resources and power in Colombian society (Rappaport 2005, 16). Despite all of its legal and illegal social justice struggles, Colombia “is one of the most unequal countries on the most unequal continent in the world” (García Villegas and de Sousa dos Santos 2004, 34). In 1999 the wealthiest 10 percent of the Colombian population received 45 percent of the country’s total income (García Villegas and de Sousa dos Santos 2004, 35). Colombian economic elites play crucial roles in the escalation of armed conflict; elites maintain control over the country’s natural resources, have the political power to uphold exclusions and inequalities, and inhabit a subsistence and vigilante-type existence, often in the middle or at the ends of the roads. The 1970s and 1980s were years of the peasant-based paramilitary groups and the vigilante-type paramilitaries that developed into the right-wing paramilitary paramilitary groups and the vigilante-type paramilitaries that developed into the right-wing paramilitary paramilitary groups and the vigilante-type paramilitaries that developed into the right-wing paramilitary groups, such as FARC and AUC. As the violence increases and more and more peasants are displaced, the presence of a state of fear or at least a state of vigilance comes to be common; if someone is a vigilante or a bandit, then so be it. These vigilantes, bandit groups, and groups such as FARC and AUC were created from the migratory groups that developed in the 1970s and 1980s to defend their own food (hacienda owners and large hacendados), or the only ones present in the region, or to terrorize agents of the state that they perceived to be weaker and more vulnerable.

Complicating Circumstances of Guerrilla Organizations

The presence of police or other agents of impulse or vigilante groups, such as FARC and AUC, came to create fear among other peasants, such as those involved in the Vigilantes, or vigilantes, and Vigilantes, in turn, created fear among the peasants, and Vigilantes, in turn, created fear among the peasants, who were afraid of the vigilante or vigilante groups, such as FARC and AUC. The fear of vigilante groups, such as FARC and AUC, came to be common; if someone is a vigilante or a bandit, then so be it. These vigilantes, bandit groups, and groups such as FARC and AUC were created from the migratory groups that developed in the 1970s and 1980s to defend their own food (hacienda owners and large hacendados), or the only ones present in the region, or to terrorize agents of the state that they perceived to be weaker and more vulnerable.

As early as the 1970s and 1980s, there were multiple instances of vigilante groups and massive caravans of vigilantes and vigilante groups in rural communities, and armed groups, such as FARC and armed groups, were present in rural Colombia. The vigilante groups, such as FARC and armed groups, were in the rural areas of Colombia for political reasons, but also for economic reasons. They were present to protect the interests of the hacendados and to secure the interests of the hacendados, or the only ones present in the region, or to terrorize agents of the state that they perceived to be weaker and more vulnerable. They were present to protect the interests of the hacendados and to secure the interests of the hacendados, or the only ones present in the region, or to terrorize agents of the state that they perceived to be weaker and more vulnerable. They were present to protect the interests of the hacendados and to secure the interests of the hacendados, or the only ones present in the region, or to terrorize agents of the state that they perceived to be weaker and more vulnerable. They were present to protect the interests of the hacendados and to secure the interests of the hacendados, or the only ones present in the region, or to terrorize agents of the state that they perceived to be weaker and more vulnerable. They were present to protect the interests of the hacendados and to secure the interests of the hacendados, or the only ones present in the region, or to terrorize agents of the state that they perceived to be weaker and more vulnerable.
uphold exclusionary policies, and sponsor and support private armies and vigilante-type justice, among other actions.

Complicating Circumstances:
Guerilla Organizations and Social Movements

The 1970s and 1980s are characterized by the growth of guerrilla organizations and the increasingly complex interactions between guerrillas, civilian communities, and social movements. Guerrilla organizations, such as FARC and ELN, took hold of larger and larger territories, forcing more and more unarmed civilian families to learn to coexist with the presence of armed guerrillas. In rural areas, given the absence of police or other state security, this meant that if a group of guerrilleros came to one’s farm, the best practice was to accommodate them; farmers fed guerrilleros, allowed them access to trails, and roads, etc. Families who were new homesteaders in agricultural frontier regions cultivated a social fabric of solidarity and mutual help; in the words of a Magdalena Medio farmer: “In those days solidarity was common; if someone needed something you had, you shared what you had; if a new homesteader came, we fed them until they could grow their own food” (Arenas Obregón 1998, 39). As newcomers to this type of homesteader society, guerrillas were embraced, and benefitted from the same type of solidarity. In some areas, the guerrillas were widely accepted by the larger communities. As an example of the contradictions and ironies so common to Colombia’s contemporary history of armed conflict: until 1977, FARC enjoyed wide acceptance even among large hacendado owners in Magdalena Medio, because guerrilleros were the only ones persecuting and punishing the cattle robbers and bandits terrorizing agricultural families in the area (Vásquez 2006). This early acceptance allowed guerrilla organizations to grow and become stronger.

As early as the 1950s, guerrilla organizations were supporting civilian communities in their struggle for better life conditions. There are multiple instances of early guerrilla organizations “accompanying” massive caravans of civilian families venturing beyond the agricultural frontier in search for new land to homestead. Known as colonización armada (armed colonization), these caravans present an accurate symbol of Colombia’s historical complexity, with grassroots initiatives and armed struggles journeying together as two sides of the same coin—a coin spiraling on a scenario of urgent search for land.
During the 1960s and 1970s, guerrilla organizations supported peasant and labor organizations, as well as urban social movements that, by that time, had demonstrated clear leftist inclinations. To illustrate the symbiotic interaction between social movements and guerrilla organizations, I quote a testimony from a participant in the peasant movement in Magdalena Medio:

A year after we came here, we were beginning to organize in order to start the legalization of land titles. We built a shelter to have our meetings. Once, we were having a meeting in our shelter, when we saw two men in civilian clothes, coming with one of the land takeover leaders. They waited until we finished our meeting and then they identified themselves as members of the ELN. They gave us a lecture [about the process of legalization of land titles] and because we didn't have any money to travel to the capital to start the paperwork, they gave it to us. Then they came every week, or every month. (Arenas Obregón 1998, 53) 

However, there is abundant evidence demonstrating that guerrilla organizations and social movements are autonomous and independent social processes, despite the mass media trend to conflate them. In some cases, individuals can belong to both, but the idea that a Colombian union is a social movement by day and an armed militia—with uniforms, military training, and so forth—by night cannot be sustained (Bolivar 2006; A. Delgado 2006; Madariaga 2006; García Villegas and de Sousa dos Santos 2004; Ramírez 2001).

The complex interaction between social justice movements and guerrilla organizations continues to this day (Archila and Bolivar 2006; de Sousa Santos and García Villegas 2004; Duplat 2003; Ramírez 2001). Although guerrilla organizations play significant, if variable roles in the actions of social movements, we need to remember that grassroots organizations and social movements have their own agency, their own ideas, their own leaders, and their own reasons for accepting or rejecting guerrilla support. In some cases they accept guerrilla help for utilitarian purposes, in other cases because they are terrified, and in other cases because they cannot say no. During the 1980s and 1990s, guerrilla organizations made supporting social movements' actions one of their priorities. Thus, marches, demonstrations, and strikes were "supported" with weapons and force provided by guerrilla organizations (F. González 2006, 522). Some Colombian analysts state that in certain regions at certain points in history, due to their alignment with guerrilla organizations, social movements were manipulated by the guerrillas, criminalizing communities (Alvarado 1998, 52) and FARC in Magdalena Medio and the worker's movement. While guerrilla organizations, executives and profesionales (right-wing paramilitary leaders) (F. González 1998, 52-53) and Fernán González, "the wars fought by militarized social movements blur the line between violence and social movements blur the line between social movements and guerrilla warfare" (F. González 1998, 53).

According to Pécaut, relationships have shifted from union to submitting to guerrilla strategy (Pécaut 1999, 17). It is no longer the unionist frequently alone in the face of the authorities, or the daily lives of agriculture, or at the centers of power, where organizations, nongovernmental organizations are known to have their own ways to take on guerrilla organizations and paras. In the early 1980s, guerrilla organizations began recruiting at increasing numbers and strengths, the guerrillas' goal was to defend "ourselves" (guerrillas) and "safety, communities (what they call "line of action"). After the guerrillas began to infiltrate organizations began to hire (F. González 1996, 98). FARC and ELN maintain and are present throughout their region, generating and protecting sources of income. In return, "safety fees," known as "paro armado (armed struggle) is legitimate. Some guerrilla organizations deviate from their original intent, from simple to stay home, thus some...
guerrilla organizations supported by guerrillas, criminalized by the state, and lost the support of their local communities (Alvaro Delgado cited by F. González 2006, 520). In regions where guerrillas and social justice movements were too closely allied, such as in the case of the alliance between the palm oil unions and FARC in Magdalena Medio, the negotiations between the company and the workers were greatly permeated by armed violence. While guerrilla organizations murdered and/or kidnapped company executives and professionals and destroyed company infrastructure, right-wing paramilitaries were murdering and disappearing union leaders (F. González 2006, 523). In the words of Colombian historian Fernán González, “the abuse of citizens by the guerrillas, and dirty wars fought by militaries and paramilitaries against the leaders of social movements blurs the lines between social justice actions and violent actions” (F. González 2006, 533).

According to Pécaut, Colombian regions in which patron–client relationships are historically normal and legitimate easily transition to submitting to guerrillas, seeing them as just a new type of patron (Pécaut 1999, 17). It is important to keep in mind that communities are frequently alone in their dealings with guerrilla organizations. In the daily lives of agricultural families living in regions far from national centers of power, where the central government, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and human rights organizations are known only for their absence, these families have to find their own ways to survive.

**Drug Mafias and Paramilitaries**

In the early 1980s, guerrilla organizations, emboldened by their increasing numbers and strength, shifted goals. Before this time, the guerrillas’ goal was to disseminate leftist ideologies in poor farming communities (what these organizations called “a political/ideological line of action”). After the shift in the early 1980s, however, guerrilla organizations began to prioritize military and financial goals (De Roux 1996, 98). FARC and ELN attempted to extend their military power throughout their regions of influence, and to gain control over alternate sources of income, including illicit drug economies, kidnapping, and “safety taxes,” known in Colombia as vacunas (vaccines). Guerrilla organizations devised a new form of demonstration known as the paro armado (armed strike), in which the FARC and ELN ordered people to stay home, thus stopping all local social and economic activities.
and paralyzing local economies. In order to finance their military infrastructure, FARC and ELN began taxing not only large hacendada owners, but also small farmers, shop owners, and even market vendors. As a result of this shift, there is abundant evidence of the general population’s escalating rejection of *guerrilleros* and increased negative attitudes toward the guerrilla organizations (González, Bolívar, and Vásquez 2003; Vásquez 2006, 319).

Illicit drug economies grew parallel to the growth of guerrilla organizations in different regions of the country. In 1981 coca and marijuana plantations covered 62,000 acres; by 1998 coca, marijuana, and poppy plantations covered 272,000 acres (Tokatlía 2000, 37). In the two decades from 1980 to 2000, the illicit drug economy brought 40 billion dollars into Colombia. The impact of illicit drug economies on the armed conflict in the country is overwhelming. Drug economies and organized crime permeated and corrupted state institutions, including the armed forces and the police, the judicial system, and also legal economies, sports, and even beauty pageants. Yet, even more devastating, drug traffickers made enormous quantities of money available. This liquid cash flowed into armed groups, allowing them to multiply their armaments, recruit more combatants, and intensify the violence. Tokatlía describes how “the bourgeoisie, the guerrillas, and the paramilitaries established marriages of convenience with organized crime to meet their tactical needs” (Tokatlía 2000, 40). Colombian drug traffickers’ “functional polygamy” (Tokatlía 2000, 40) provides the war with a never-ending source of income. Illicit drug economies, according to Pécaut, alter and influence all social sectors and dimensions of war (Pécaut 2001, 116).

At the same time that public opinion turned against the guerrillas, drug traffickers began buying large landholdings in territories with strong guerrilla presence. By 2000 drug traffickers owned 15 million acres of farmland in 40 percent of the country’s municipalities (Tokatlía 2000, 37). These new landowners were unwilling to accept the type of guerrilla bullying that communities had learned to live with. In response, they formed their own militias to exterminate the guerrillas in their territories. Many traditional hacendida owners supported these new ways of resisting guerrilla harassment by hiring their own private armies and imposing weapons-backed regional regimes. These landowner militias are the birthplace of many radical right-wing paramilitary militias that sought to exterminate not just guerrillas, but anything and anyone perceived as being an organized political threat to the paramilitary organization’s existence. The massacre of six hundred members of the department of Cauca’s paramilitary nacional, 2002. Anyone not Catholic, and heterogeneous in race or human rights activism became a militaria (Vásquez 2006; Vásquez 2003, 202).

**Paramilitary Violence**

While guerrillas sought to overthrow state institutions their militaries and organize their communities, paramilitary forces sought to destroy them and generally terrorize the population. Between 1992 and 2002, 4,757 violent actions were carried out by paramilitary groups (González 2000, 103). During the same period, 13 percent of civilians were murdered, and 13 percent of children between 1992 and 2002 were affected (Pérez and Vásquez 2003, 103). During the same period, paramilitaries murdered 13 percent of civilians. Leaders of grass-roots organizations, peasant leaders, trade unionists, students, teachers, human rights defenders, community leaders, and journalists were killed. On the other hand, paramilitary groups demanded regular support (in some cases, even before 1980, before the paramilitaries were formed) from local communities throughout the country. They extorted hundreds of thousands of dollars from the local population through a system that included extortion, threats, and violence. In some areas, paramilitary groups were able to control the government, the police, and the justice system, thereby gaining the support of the local population. As a result, paramilitary groups were able to carry out violent acts with impunity, often with the support of local authorities. This support allowed paramilitary groups to maintain their control over the local population and to increase their power and influence. As a result, paramilitary violence became increasingly widespread and pervasive, with devastating consequences for the population.
to finance their military operations, not only large hacienda owners, and even market vendors, but also evidence of the general population's participation in drug trafficking and increased negative perceptions (González, Bolívar, and Vásquez 2003, 40). Colombian drug traffickers (Ortiz, Catalán, and Vásquez 2000, 40) provide substantial financial support to political candidates, and have a significant presence in many local elections. One study found that drug traffickers owned 15 million hectares of land in just 10 of the country's municipalities (Ortiz and Catalán 2000), and were willing to accept bribes from local officials in exchange for protection. These traffickers had learned to live off the land, using the resources to support themselves and their families. Hacienda owners supplied them with food and ammunition by hiring their workers and providing them with support. This led to a rise in organized crime and a decline in the rule of law.

Leaders of grassroots organizations have been singled out as targets by paramilitaries, weakening social movements and undermined dissent. On the other hand, given the popular exhaustion with trying to meet guerrilla demands, paramilitary organizations began to enjoy popular support (in some regions, and at some times more than others). In 1980, before the emergence of paramilitary and self-defense groups, there were twenty-one homicides per hundred thousand inhabitants in Colombia, three times higher than the homicide rate for the rest of Latin America. Paramilitary violence in the 1980s and after multiplied that figure by four, until it reached a rate of eighty homicides per hundred thousand inhabitants (Romero 2003, 27).
The emergence of radical right-wing paramilitary groups brought devastating consequences for unarmed civilian communities (González, Bolívar, and Vásquez 2003). Caught between the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the Colombian armed forces, and the mafias, unarmed civilians experienced increased paralysis and less freedom of action. According to De Roux, in Magdalena Medio “the conflicting camps demand that [unarmed] people declare their allegiance to one or the other [of the armed groups]” (De Roux 1996, 99). In Colombia today, rather than battling over ideological differences, armed groups are fighting for the control of territories, civilian communities, and sources of wealth, and “terror is the most frequently used tactic to secure territorial control” (García Villegas and de Sousa dos Santos 2004, 51).

Armed groups regulate everything about the daily lives of citizens in the communities they control. They control comings and goings, how many groceries and medicines are bought at the market and kept at home, interactions with neighbors and friends (in some cases armed groups monitor even the flirting of young women [Meertens 2001, 139; Pécaut 1999, 20]), parties and drinking, and even love-making. Guerrilla organizations solidified their position in civilian communities by acting as a parallel state, mediating everyday conflicts between locals, regulating land tenure disputes, and taxing legal and illegal economic operations. Paramilitary occupation is accompanied by the imposition of a set of cultural values that are based on conservative Catholicism, “family values,” and heteronormative morality. In regions controlled by paramilitaries, miniskirts on young women are prohibited, as is long hair on young men; piercings and tattoos are not allowed; families are forced to decorate their houses with lights at Christmas time; youth are not allowed after dusk in traditional meeting places, like parks and plazas; even certain musical genres are prohibited (salsa is banned due to its social justice lyrics) while other musical styles, such as Norteño and vallenato music, are privileged; and gay bars are forced to close down (Martha Cecilia García 2006, 298; Madariaga 2006, 69).

Paramilitary monopolization of power in certain regions (including Magdalena Medio and the Colombian Caribbean, two of the three case studies in this book) is rooted in collective fear and intimidation. Colombian anthropologist Maria Victoria Uribe describes the feeling of “shifty and slimy terror that builds on a foundation of rumors about what people living in the rural places of terror see and hear, and what they believe they see and hear” (Maria Victoria Uribe 2007, 118). The other side of this coin is that the paramilitaries become attractive in their recruitment and social recognition (Uribe 2007, 341). Colombian sociologist María Virginia Uribe notes that the “entrepreneurs of coercion” are not isolated from the state organizing in the administration, intelligence, offered as a commodity of value” (Romero 2003, 17), and that the paramilitary organizations later evolved into a state of countering what they may perceive as privilege given to ethnic, cultural, or class grounds (Uribe 2006, 547).

**Weapons of the Weak**

All these players—the guerrillas, mafias, and armed groups—draw on local traditional economic elite, both legal and illegal resources of wealth. Access to the resources of their operations is constantly negotiated; the mafias, and armed groups relate to war, and sign truces in the gold and emerald mines, oil, and cocaine and heroin production (gas pipes and refineries), can be merchants in coffee and coca plantations. The presence of all the elements of legal or illegal economies tied to natural resources, is a significant tool of war (Pécaut 1999). According to Ethnographers, the lack of factoring (cooperatives) is four times more likely to result in violence” (quoted in Nordstrom 2002), outlining their ethnographic work on the impact of war and globalization in Sri Lanka, Carolyn Nordstrom (2002). Given the instability, dislocation, and high poverty, Colombia’s territories can be an excellent place for guerrillas and paramilitaries to grow and thrive (Nordstrom 2002).
Military groups brought violence to the communities (González 2006, 341). Without the guerrillas, the state, and the mafias, unarmed civilians have greater freedom of action. The paramilitaries, on the other hand, maintained allegiance to one or the other of the warring camps. In Colombia today, paramilitary groups, armed groups are competing with one another to control communities, and sources claim they have even used terror tactics to secure territory (González and Santos 2004, 51).

These changes have altered the daily lives of citizens across the country. From school comings and goings, to the market and keeping the family home (in some cases armed in defense of one's home) (Meertens 2001, 139; Pécaut 1999, 69, 118). In some regions, sexual and economic opportunities are diminished by the imposition of conservative Catholicism, biblical prohibitions, and the absence of opportunities for love making. Guerrilla infiltration of civilian communities begets new rules; loitering in public places, like parks and schools, is prohibited (salsa is banned due to its association with dance styles, such as Norteno and Salsa), and bars are forced to close early (Pécaut 1999, 69).

In certain regions (including the banana belt, the coca belt, and the coffee belt) the paramilitaries are frequently held responsible for fear and intimidation. The paramilitaries are often the spokespersons for the mafias, who spread fear and intimidation through the use of paramilitary tactics. The consequences of paramilitary infiltration are often felt in the form of increased crime rates, as well as increased unemployment and poverty. The paramilitaries are often seen as a threat to democratic institutions, and as such, are viewed with suspicion by many Colombians.

In Colombia, the paramilitaries are often viewed as a threat to democratic institutions. The paramilitaries are seen as a threat to the rule of law, and as such, are viewed with suspicion by many Colombians. The paramilitaries are often associated with the drug trade, and as such, are seen as a threat to the health and well-being of the Colombian population. The paramilitaries are often associated with the destruction of the environment, and as such, are seen as a threat to the future of the country.
Vaupés), the northeast (Arauca), and the northwest (Antioquia, Córdoba, Santander, Cesar, and Bolívar) (see map on page 62 of United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime 2007). The gold mines of Bolívar and the emerald mines of Boyacá are magnets for armed groups that battle for their control. Via “safety taxes,” extortion, and kidnapping, guerrillas and paramilitaries profit from coal and oil extraction ventures in Cesar, Arauca, Casanare, and Santanderes; from banana extraction companies in Urabá and Antioquia; and from large cattle estates in Magdalena Medio and Córdoba (Pécaut 2001, 101–2). In Colombia, war and wealth are two sides of the same coin. Economic resources distributed throughout the national territory function as magnets, attracting warring factions. Armed groups know that military control of a wealthy region means significant income in the form of kidnap ransom, bribes, extortion, and taxes imposed on national and international corporations, landowners, cattle barons, illicit drug farmers, laboratories, and traffickers. A recent report on human rights violations in the country states, “the financial resources that feed the war seem endless” (OPPDDHIH 2002, 21). Whether armed groups seek to win the war or whether they are merely trying to keep profits coming into their coffers is a question always in Colombians’ minds. The relationship between war and wealth is complex. War creates opportunities for profit making in wealthy regions. Citing Christian Dietrich’s work on the diamond trade, Nordstrom explains these complex linkages between war and wealth: “These aren’t wars over resources per se. Instead, war facilitates the looting of resources” (Nordstrom 2004, 192). Thus, war itself is a stimulant of shady economies linked to natural resources. Colombian unarmed civilians watch traditional elites, guerrillas, paramilitaries, and mafias profit and become wealthier from these corrupt economies, while their own conditions of life worsen.

It’s easy to see civilians as passively accepting the controls imposed by guerrillas, paramilitaries, drug traffickers, and armed forces. However, domination does not necessarily mean hegemony. As Colombian historian Mauricio Archila says, “in the apparent acceptance of armed actors by the people, there is not only fear, but also hidden codes of survival that at any moment can become public discourses of open opposition. . . . These survival codes become the way people preserve the fabric of their societies, build invisible solidarities, and allow for the sudden emergence of multiple quotidian acts and small claims of resistance” (Archila 2006, 504).

Colombian unarmed civilians live in a complex mesh created by armed groups of force, and cultural values. Relations between guerrillas, paramilitaries, and innocents are constantly shifting and subject to the next. Allen Feldman argues that Northern Ireland produced its own form of resistance and the conditions of reproduction were applicable to the Colombian context and other forms of violence.

From the work of anthropologists of violence, we can learn that the lived experience and the edge of their emotional control cannot be understated (Klein 1995). Extreme experiences and omniscience are produced by war paralleling the one-dimensional agency (Nordstrom 2004, 191). Extreme and chronic violence becomes the specific forms of individual experiences that communities cornered by armed groups have been pushed to the edge of. As Allen Feldman describes the “war of Northern Ireland, . . . extreme, chronic, and disempowered, they found . . . they were deprived of the right to die in peace. . . . they politicized the prison” and “resisted the war against themselves. . . . they politicized their own deaths: “Political agency is an act that may not have a trajectory, but that is meaningful by virtue of its act” (Nordstrom and Kooiman 2002, 33). In Colombia, around Medellín, for example, other less visible, yet equally powerful social formations, show political agency, in the form of solidarity and collective actions of togetherness and resistance. They seek to build, despite...
Colombian unarmed civilians experience armed conflict as a complex mesh created by armed actors who impose their military logic, use of force, and cultural values on civilian communities. Power relations between guerrillas, paramilitary groups, mafias, and the armed forces are constantly shifting from region to region and from one moment to the next. Allen Feldman observes that chronic violence in Northern Ireland produced its own ideological and material formations and thus the conditions of reproduction of antagonism. Feldman's analysis is applicable to the Colombian case, where one form of violence triggers other forms of violence (Feldman 1991, 5, 20).

From the work of anthropologists and ethnographers of violence, we can learn that the lived experience of violence pushes people to the edge of their emotional and psychic strength (Nordstrom and Robben 1995). Extreme experiences of chaos, uncertainty, and powerlessness produced by war parallel extreme experiences of empathy, courage, and agency (Nordstrom 2004). I draw from Feldman's idea that extreme and chronic violence becomes its own formation to suggest that specific forms of individual and collective agency emerge in communities cornered by armed groups, precisely because the community has been pushed to the edge (Feldman 1991). In Feldman's analysis of Northern Ireland, as Republican activists became progressively disempowered, they found new ways to express political agency; when they were deprived of the street as a political space, imprisoned activists politicized the prison cell; when they were deprived of this space, they politicized their own bodies; subsequently, they politicized their own feces and urine, then their body orifices, and finally their own deaths: "Political agency is relational—it has no fixed ground—it is the effect of situated practices" (Feldman 1991, 1). In the words of anthropologists of violence Carolyn Nordstrom and JoAnn Martin: "Resistance may thus be encoded in a wide range of cultural practices that are meaningful by virtue of their opposition to a dominant culture" (Nordstrom and Martin 1992, 7).

In Colombia, around the blatantly visible realities of armed conflict, other less visible, yet equally or perhaps more significant realities of political agency, in the forms of social movements, grassroots initiatives, and collective actions of resistance, shape the experiences of Colombian communities. Pécaut writes of Colombia, "I see everywhere, even in combat zones, all kinds of efforts and initiatives to escape war and try to build, despite the violence, new forms of solidarity and of…"
and peacebuilding. Both "active journalism" and mass media and peacebuilding. Both “active journalism” attempt to produce balanced, non-polarizing coverage that can help to improve conflict-susceptible societies. In “edutainment for peace,” governments and non-governmental organizations attempt to use mass media and entertainment media in the form of short films, posters, and literature to persuade audiences to support peacebuilding efforts. The recent “It’s your decision: peace or war” public relations campaign is a good example. In the Philippines, for instance, the Rahan Building," governments and non-governmental organizations emphasize mass media, while community media, such as the radio station in Serikin, focus on the last category, most media research suggests. Community media as technologies that combine the power of media and technology for peacebuilding, is to help fill this gap. My goal in this writing is to explore the role(s) of community and citizens’ media in contexts of armed conflict (Department for International Development 2000; Hiebert 2001; Howard 2002; Loewenberg and Bonde 2008; Ndong’a 2005; Radio Netherlands 2008; Rodríguez 2004, 2008; Rodríguez and Cadavid 2007; Shamas 2011; Spitalnik 2002). My goal in this writing is to help fill this gap. I want to explore what community radio stations are doing in places where unarmed civilians are trapped in the crossfire of warring groups; how local community television stations represent their communities when they are engulfed in armed violence; how grassroots video-production collectives respond to the impact of armed conflict. Based on an analysis of forty projects in eighteen countries, a recent initiative of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) mapped the field of media and peacebuilding. This study found six main uses of media and communication in peacebuilding: (1) conflict-sensitive journalism; (2) peace journalism; (3) edutainment; (4) social marketing for peace; (5) regulation of media inciting conflict; and (6) citizens’ media...
and peacebuilding. Both "conflict-sensitive journalism" and "peace journalism" attempt to produce accurate and responsible journalism in which journalists operate with an awareness of the role that news coverage can have in polarizing societies or de-escalating conflict. They differ in that conflict-sensitive journalism strives to maintain journalistic impartiality, while peace journalism is overtly peace and solution oriented. In "edutainment for peace," media producers use entertainment media in the form of soap operas, songs, dramas, and so forth to persuade audiences to support peacebuilding goals. ¹⁶ "Social marketing for peace" uses mass media campaigns to "sell" peace to audiences; the recent "It's your decision" campaign, developed by a well-known public relations firm to promote the peace accords in Northern Ireland is a good example. In the phenomenon of "media regulation for peacebuilding," governments and regulatory agencies attempt to prohibit inflammatory language and images that could incite violence. "Citizens' media for peacebuilding" refers to the use of community/alternative/citizens' media to restore social fabrics and relationships torn by armed conflict. The first five categories reported on the USIP map emphasize mass media, while only the last category focuses on local, community media, such as those featured in this book. Except for this last category, most media recorded on the USIP map involve communication processes in which senders attempt to persuade massive numbers of listeners, viewers, or readers with peacebuilding messages. These approaches, informed by media effects theories, are framed by narrow views of media technologies as persuasive tools. Seeing media exclusively as tools for mass persuasion obscures the rich potential of media as technologies that can be embedded in communities, creating tremendous opportunities for networking, reaching, communicating, and connecting in all directions. Placing media technology in the hands of local communities multiplies communication spaces, loci of interaction, and sites in which meaning can be produced, exchanged, reinterpreted, hybridized, and so on.

It is all too evident that technology in general, and communication technologies in particular, are regularly used to inflict injury on human bodies and terrorize communities (Chalk 1999; Kabanda 2005; Radio Netherlands 2008). Allen Feldman’s work on Belfast residents’ experiences of visual technologies (cameras, videos, photographs) as terrorizing weapons (Feldman 2000, 59), and Jeffrey Sluka’s analysis of instances in which art and media are used to justify violence (Sluka
1992) reveal how communication technologies can reinforce war machines. However, we know less about ways unarmed communities use communication technologies to resist war and terror. Using layered media ethnography and in-depth interviews, I document the uses of media technologies (community radio, television, video, and digital photography) by unarmed Colombian communities in regions engulfed by armed violence. This book is the product of several years of fieldwork with citizens’ media producers, conducted between 2004 and 2006, in regions of Colombia occupied by leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary groups, the armed forces, and drug trafficking mafias.

My findings were contrary to common perceptions of the dominant role of local media in contexts of war. I did not find journalism and news to be a priority among Colombian citizens’ media; instead, media are used to open communication spaces where cultural processes, art production, and storytelling can repair torn social fabrics, reconstruct eroded social bonds, reappropriate public spaces, and strengthen strategies of nonviolent conflict resolution. In the following chapters I explore the ways people whose lives and communities are eroded by armed violence use citizens’ media to resist and overcome the negative impacts of war.

The end of the cold war left a geopolitical landscape in which armed conflict predominately happens within national borders. In recent years, interstate conflicts have largely been supplanted by conflicts between states and armed antagonist groups, such as extreme leftist or rightist guerrillas, ethnic and/or religious factions, or resource-based mafias (e.g., cocaine, heroin, and diamonds) (Wallensteen and Sollenberg 2000). From 1989 to 2005 ninety intrastate conflicts were recorded worldwide, while there were only seven interstate conflicts and wars on record (Harbom, Högbladh, and Wallensteen 2006). Traditional interstate wars are generally waged among official armies, while these new intrastate conflicts increasingly target civilians (Appadurai 2006). Current conflicts involve issues of identity (e.g., ethnicity and religion), politics, and resources. The effects of armed violence from these conflicts are increasingly felt in civilians’ everyday lives and the cultural and social fabric of their communities (Rothman and Olson 2001). “Civilians accounted for fifty-two percent of all war related deaths in the 1960s, but eighty-five percent in the 1980s” (Colson 1992, 280). Colombia’s armed conflict follows this trend; out of 21,355 violent actions occurring between 1990 and 2000, only approximately 40 percent were attacks on civilians. The remaining 60 percent were attacks on civilians. Only 90 percent of these were by armed forces, guerrillas, or paramilitaries. Sexual assault, torture, use of weapons of war, and terrorizing unarmed civilians (González, Bolívar, and Várez 2006) are Nordström’s words, “The violence...which power-loaded scripts
crossfire, and how civilian violence has on the cultural fabric of
citizen journalism, alterna-
State conflict and violence.

From Alternative Media

Many different terms are used and used by citizens’ media, part of media, grassroots media, and “libres, the Spanish term for free media that alter, Rafael Roncaglio, and city. Each term emphasizes a different concept with specific theo-
meanings media that alter, to keep, maintain their independence. Additionally, the term “autonomous media” approaches. In contrast, the practices of individual and collective communication and social change.

In my 2001 book, Fiss coined the term “citizens’

political scientist Chantal citizenship, I proposed “citizens” more than alternative or counterpublics of reconceptualizing the term for the public life. In her argument, M
only approximately 40 percent were combat actions, while 60 percent were attacks on civilians (including assassinations, disappearances, sexual assault, torture, uses of civilians as human shields, kidnapping of civilians, use of weapons such as mines, and recruitment of minors) (González, Bolívar, and Vásquez 2003, 100). In intrastate conflict, terrorizing unarmed civilians becomes the goal of armed groups; in Nordstrom’s words, “The victims themselves become the template on which power-loaded scripts are inscribed” (Nordstrom 1992, 266).

My work here is driven by the urgency of cultural analyses of armed violence and conflict resolution in these new contexts of intrastate conflict and violence. We must recognize the impact armed violence has on the cultural fabric of civilian communities caught in the crossfire, and how civilians use culture, communication, and art to disrupt this violence.

From Alternative Media to Citizens’ Media

Many different terms are used to label media technologies appropriated and used by citizens’ groups and grassroots collectives, including alternative media, participatory media, community media, radical media, grassroots media, autonomous media, the French term médias libres, the Spanish term medios populares, alterative media (a term meaning media that alter, coined by Peruvian communication scholar Rafael Roncagliolo), and citizens’ media (Kidd and Rodríguez 2010).[^17]

Each term emphasizes a different aspect of these media and connects with specific theories of media democracy. For example, the term “autonomous media” emphasizes that these media generally try to maintain their independence from political and economic powers, and additionally, the term connects with political economy of media approaches. In contrast, the term “alterative media” emphasizes processes of individual and collective empowerment, and connects with communication and social change theories.

In my 2001 book, Fissures in the Mediascape (Rodríguez 2001), I coined the term “citizens’ media.” Drawing from the work of Belgian political scientist Chantal Mouffe’s theories of radical democracy and citizenship, I proposed “citizens’ media” as a term more appropriate than alternative or community media. Mouffe argues the necessity of reconceptualizing the term “citizen” as foundational to democratic life. In her argument, Mouffe breaks away from theories of liberal...
democracy that define citizenship as a status granted by the state, and proposes that a “citizen” should be defined by daily political action and engagement:

The radical democratic concept of citizenship “implies seeing citizenship not as a legal status but as a form of identification, a type of political identity: something to be constructed, not empirically given.” ... Thus, citizens are not born as such; citizenship is not a status granted on the basis of some essential characteristic. Citizens have to enact their citizenship on a day-to-day basis, through their participation in everyday political practices: “The citizen is not, as in liberalism, someone who is the passive recipient of specific rights and who enjoys the protection of the law.” (Rodríguez 2001, 18–19, quoting Mouffe 1992, 231, 235)

Mouffe’s “citizen” is a creature drawing political power from his or her daily participation in democratic processes, not simply someone whom the state has granted the required status to engage in political actions (Mouffe 1988, 1992). Mouffe understands citizens as individuals in permanent interaction with their contexts, gaining and generating power from social relations in their neighborhoods, workplaces, families, churches, and so forth. Citizens combine this fragmentary power to enact everyday political actions that shape their communities to reflect their personal and collective visions of utopia. For Mouffe, a citizen is a person who uses his or her quotidian power to activate social and cultural processes, which in turn move the citizen’s community toward the future he or she envisions.

I then defined “citizens’ media” as those media that facilitate the transformation of individuals into “citizens,” as understood in Mouffe’s redefinition of citizenship. Citizens’ media are communication spaces where citizens can learn to manipulate their own languages, codes, signs, and symbols, empowering them to name the world in their own terms. Citizens’ media trigger processes that allow citizens to recodify their contexts and selves. These processes ultimately give citizens the opportunity to restructure their identities into empowered subjectivities strongly connected to local cultures and driven by well-defined, achievable utopias. Citizens’ media are the media citizens use to activate communication processes that shape their local communities.

Throughout this book I use the term “community media” to refer to radio and television initiatives that have been granted a community broadcasting license by the state. I reserve the term “citizens’ media”
to refer to community media that purposely cultivate processes of transformation and empowerment in their producers and audiences.

The Colombian Mediascape

Commercial radio in Colombia was born in 1929 (Ferreira and Straubhaar 1988); by 1941 Colombia had seventy-one commercial radio stations. From the start, Colombian commercial radio replicated corporate media models imported from the United States, using a system based on media advertising to boost sales. According to Ferreira and Straubhaar, these early commercial radio entrepreneurs, "generally ham radio aficionados, some having been educated abroad, imported not only new technology, but also a mercantile spirit, organizational style, programming patterns, and even [their corporations'] names from the United States" (Ferreira and Straubhaar 1988, 288). For example, in 1930 a company with the anglicized name Colombian Radio and Electric Corporation owned HKF, Bogotá's first commercial radio station; in 1932 a second commercial radio company continued the trend of anglicized names by calling themselves Colombian Broadcasting, and in 1936 a company started with the name Santander Broadcasting (Ferreira and Straubhaar 1988, 289).

Caracol, Todelar, and RCN, today's main Colombian commercial radio networks, began developing in the 1950s. These networks, plus the public Radiodifusora Nacional, reach a vast majority of the country's broken geography, making radio the main information and communication technology in the country.

Since the early decades of the twentieth century, Colombian mass media have been saturated with social and political conflict. By the 1920s a significant number of national and regional newspapers had appeared on the Colombian mediascape; these newspapers, along with the commercial radio ventures of the 1930s, were owned by wealthy Colombians deeply entrenched in traditional politics. Each Colombian newspaper and commercial radio station had a known political leaning, either with the Liberal Party or with its legendary opponent, the Conservative Party. During La Violencia, a period of political violence between Liberals and Conservatives that lasted from 1948 to 1953 and left two hundred thousand Colombians dead, Conservative newspapers and radio stations not only supported Conservative leaders with selective information and news, but also fueled
violent conflict among their readers and listeners. Liberal radio stations and newspapers followed suit. Colombian media scholar Mario Murillo describes the ways party leaders used the airwaves to intensify the country’s political polarization:

Such was especially the case with the famous *Radio- periódicos*, or “radio-newspapers,” the news programs developed by the radio programmers of the mid-1930s. The Liberal leader and President, Alfonso López Pumarejo, a reformist behind the so-called *Revolución en Marcha*, or Revolution on the March, launched the first of these *Radio- periódicos* in 1934 with his program, “La República Liberal.” He was quickly answered by his Conservative nemesis, Laureano Gómez, in 1936, when the future President launched his own radio station, “La Voz de Colombia.” The intense air wars that resulted from these and other politically driven broadcasts led to a 1936 decree prohibiting the transmission of political news over the airwaves.

(M. Murillo in press)

Mainstream commercial radio and newspapers have a long history of being used as loudspeakers for political elites.

Today, Colombia’s radio sector includes a variety of radio broadcasting licenses: commercial radio, public interest radio, and community radio. Public interest radio licenses can only be assigned to public institutions, such as public universities and schools, police and the armed forces, local governments, and indigenous *cabildos*. Community broadcasting licenses are assigned to nonprofit community organizations. At the time of writing, Colombia had 656 commercial radio stations, 167 public interest stations, and 651 community radio stations. Although radio signals reach the entire national territory, almost five hundred Colombian municipalities (approximately 50 percent) still do not have their own radio station.

Radio Sutatenza, commonly known as the first alternative radio station in Latin America, belongs to the category of public interest radio. Founded in 1947 by Colombian priest José Joaquín Salcedo, Radio Sutatenza disappeared in 1990 after a forty-three-year run (Ferreira and Straubhaar 1988, 296). Radio Sutatenza’s main goal was to create a radio school for illiterate adults in rural areas. To accomplish this, unschooled peasants were organized into what Sutatenza called “radio schools”; these literacy groups gathered around a radio receiver to listen to lessons on writing and reading and to complete work booklets and homework. Radio Sutatenza did not encourage peasant voices to participate in a limited to one-way, vertical relationship with the notion that Radio Sutatenza had a powerful tradition of altering the worst, unfair to the true political, like the Bolivian mine worker Dagron 2001; O’Connor 2007.

Colombian television media took shape in Violencia, the near-civil war that ended in 1985 when General Belaunde and Liberal leaders acquiesced to the military regime as a way out. However, the increasingly popular television began to alienate the leaders of the left, Conservative and Liberal, of the general by refusing to give time to Rojas Pinilla decided to change the medium with which to communicate. Brought television to Colombia.

Brought to the country, television took hold and remained a popular medium for days, the general’s speeches, not the rest of the program. Interestingly, some of the day’s most popular actors and intellectuals and artists took on the early days of Colombian television, including original scripts about the sun, from Kafka and the best of the writers. This explains part of the parodic television drama and part of the success (Rodríguez and Téllez 1989).

The fact that Colombia’s initiative, and not a corporatist one associated with the Latin American countries, became the medium. The origins of Colombia.
peasant voices to participate in radio production and was therefore limited to one-way, vertical communication. In my view, to maintain the notion that Radio Sutatenza was a pioneer in Latin America’s powerful tradition of alternative/participatory media is inaccurate, and worse, unfair to the true participatory media pioneers of Latin America, like the Bolivian miners’ radio stations born in 1949 (Gumucio Dagron 2001; O’Connor 2004).

Colombian television maintains its own ties to armed conflict. La Violencia, the near-civil-war period mentioned above, came to an end in 1953 when General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla overthrew the Conservative regime and installed a military junta. Initially, Conservative and Liberal leaders acquiesced to the imposition of Rojas Pinilla’s military regime as a way to put an end to the bloody conflict. However, the increasingly populist policies introduced by Rojas Pinilla began to alienate the leadership of the traditional parties. Little by little, Conservative and Liberal newspapers and radio networks isolated the general by refusing to give him airtime or journalistic coverage. Silenced by the traditional Colombian media outlets, without a mass medium with which to communicate with his constituents, General Rojas Pinilla decided to create his own mass medium, and in 1954 brought television to Colombia.

Brought to the country to serve as the general’s loudspeaker, television took hold and remains a public medium to this day. In the early days, the general’s speeches were the main programming component, but the rest of the programming grid had to be filled somehow. Interestingly, some of the day’s most creative stage directors, scriptwriters, and actors were brought in to help fill the rest of the programming slots. Left on their own with almost complete creative license, these intellectuals and artists took their new roles to heart and filled the early days of Colombian television with fascinating productions, including original scripts as well as adaptations of everything under the sun, from Kafka and Marguerite Yourcenar to Latin American writers. This explains in part the idiosyncratic identity of Colombian television drama and particularly of today’s Colombian telenovelas (Rodríguez and Tellez 1989).

The fact that Colombian television began as a government initiative, and not a corporate profit-driven venture as in most other Latin American countries, left an imprint on the development of the medium. The origins of Colombian television can be traced back to
the country's only military government, and as a result, it has never been entirely privatized. For decades, up until the late 1990s, television was controlled by the state, which rented slots of time to commercial television producers. In 1998 the Comisión Nacional de Televisión [National Television Commission], an autonomous public entity formed by commissioners to represent a wide diversity of Colombian society, assigned commercial television broadcasting licenses to several media corporations. By 2008 only Caracol and RCN had survived, providing the only national commercial television channels. At the time of this writing, Colombian public television includes three national channels (Señal Colombia, Canal Uno, and Señal Institucional), eight regional channels, and forty-one nonprofit local channels (seven of which are university channels). Commercial television includes the two national channels mentioned above, one satellite television provider, and sixty-nine cable television providers (Comisión Nacional de Televisión 2006, 7). The two commercial channels and three public national channels reach almost the entire national territory. In 2005 close to 91 percent of all Colombian households had at least one color television set (Comisión Nacional de Televisión 2006, 8).

In addition to the broadcasting of public and commercial television stations, community television comprises an important component of the Colombian mediascape. By 2008 the National Television Commission had assigned 553 community television broadcasting licenses (Comisión Nacional de Televisión 2006, 7).

Community Media

In 2008 the Colombian mediascape included 651 community radio stations, 553 community televisions, and 26 indigenous radio stations. These incredible numbers can only be explained by the tenacious efforts to democratize the airwaves made by Colombian media activists. The initiatives of media activists seeking to consolidate a strong base of community media began during the early 1980s, led by several communication and media NGOs with strong connections to national and regional social movements.22 During the two previous decades, these NGOs worked closely with labor, peasant, youth, women's, and indigenous movements, helping them set up and run their own media. They employed a variety of communication strategies, including newsletters, newspapers, comic books and fotonovelas, loudspeakers, theater, and video, among others.

In 1985 these NGOs formed the Popular Communication Network, a loosely affiliated group of community communication festivals until 1986, which brought media activists from everywhere in the country together to share their experiences (frecuencia radio). Even though no community radio existed in Bogotá in 1987, was a national phenomenon and it was the second festival of its kind in the country. The first track community radio and its relation to education, cultural movements, and social movements. The first track community radio production (Popular 1988, 16).

By 1989 media activists organized the First National Conference of Radio, where participants established a legal framework for community radio. From 1989 to 1994 media activists held annual national meetings centered on sustainability and community radio. In 1994, the Ministry of Communication organized the First National Conference of Community Radio Organizations (Arenas 1988, 11). Some of the activists worked from within key institutions as the Ministry of Communication and the University of Antioquia.

Although no community radio stations existed in the city, community radio stations such as Aires del Pacifico [Airs of the Pacific] in Guapi and MAMR [Movimiento de Acción Mamacuatiense de Radio] in 1993. Around the same time, the community radio station Comuna del Barrio [The Neighbor] in Bogotá, run by popular reporters in Santa Fe neighborhood, distributed on cassette tape.
In 1985 these NGOs formed the Colectivo de Comunicación Popular [Popular Communication Collective], an umbrella association of loosely affiliated groups that organized annual community communication festivals until 1989. These festivals opened a space where media activists from every corner of the country could meet and share their experiences (frequently for the first time) in Bogotá, the capital city. Even though no community radio or television projects existed in the country at that time, the main theme of the second festival, held in Bogotá in 1987, was community radio. During the previous festival, many participants had expressed an interest in community radio; thus, the second festival was organized around two tracks in response. The first track included a theoretical discussion of community radio and its relationship to participatory media, political power, and social movements. The second track consisted of a series of community radio production workshops (Colectivo de Comunicación Popular 1988, 16).

By 1989 media activists had coalesced to form a strong group that organized the First National Encounter of Community and Cultural Radio, “where participants agreed on the urgency of pushing forward a legal framework for community radio” (Salazar Arenas 1988). From 1989 to 1994 media activists maintained the early momentum with annual national meetings and regional events, where discussions centered on sustainability and management of community radio stations, media production training, and the need to develop stronger community radio organizations and networks (Osses Rivera 2002; Salazar Arenas 1988, 11). Some of the key media activists behind these initiatives worked from within the walls of state institutions, in entities such as the Ministry of Communications’ ENLACE project, and the Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA) [National Learning Service].

Although no community radio legislation existed in the country at the time, community radio pioneers were beginning to experiment. Aires del Pacífico [Airs of the Pacific], a community radio station in Guapi in the Colombian western Pacific region, began broadcasting in 1993. Around the same time, media activists launched La Voz del Barrio [The Neighborhood’s Voice], a radio program produced by popular reporters in Santander, eastern Colombia. In several of Bogotá’s working class neighborhoods, media activists launched La Fiesta de la Palabra [The Word’s Party], a series of audio productions distributed on cassette tapes and played on city buses. These pioneering
media activists were strongly influenced by Latin American communication scholars, including Jesús Martín Barbero, José López Vigil, Rosa María Alfaro, and Mario Kaplún. Latin American community media organizations such as ERBOL (Bolivian community radio network), ALER (Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica [Latin American Association of Radio Education]), CIESPAL (Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina [International Center for Higher Studies of Communication in Latin America]), and CALANDRIA (a Peruvian community communication NGO) also lent a helping hand (Colectivo de Comunicación Popular 1988).

Since these early days, Colombian media activists have prioritized the development of regional activist networks in order to create a national media democratization movement powerful enough to make demands of the Colombian state. Thus, the meetings and experiments above germinated regional networks in Santander, Bogotá, and the Pacific region. To this day, regional community radio and television networks make up the backbone of the Colombian media democratization movement.

In the early 1990s, during the same time period that activists were experimenting with community media, Colombian social movements achieved the most important transformation in the Colombian legal and political framework in recent times: the signing of the new Colombian Constitution of 1991. A turning point in Colombia’s contemporary history, the new constitution brought to fruition years of grassroots organizing and mobilizing that began in the 1960s and 1970s. Colombia’s new social contract, as articulated by the Constitution of 1991, embraced the idea of the Colombian nation as a complex dialogue between multiple and diverse identities, eschewing the idea of “nation” as a monolithic entity founded on one language, one religion, one identity, and one culture (Wills Obregón 2000). Among the many constitutional articles guaranteeing rights and access, Article 20 guarantees the right of every Colombian to “establish their own mass media.”

Article 20 of the 1991 Constitution provided the crucial legal leverage media activists needed to demand that the Colombian state establish and sanction legal frameworks for community radio and television. Using Article 20 as their main argument, media activists pressured the government to implement measures to support the constitutional right of every Colombian to found their own media. Four years later,
President Ernesto Samper's administration passed Decree 1447 of 1995, giving the green light for the Ministry of Communications to begin assigning community radio licenses. In 1999, under President Andrés Pastrana's administration, Acuerdo 006 was approved, legalizing community television (Téllez 2003). These two legal reforms are at least partially behind the explosion of community radio and television in the last twelve years.

Given the proliferation of community media in Colombia, heterogeneity is the norm. Community radios and television stations come in every style and form, from banal replicas of commercial radio and television, to fascinating experiments in citizens' media and participatory communication. As is common in countries with multiple community media outlets, many of Colombia's so-called community radio and television stations are nothing more than loudspeakers for a local priest or political lord. However, among the more than one thousand legal community radio and television stations operating in Colombia today, I have found some of the most creative, courageous, and wise citizens' media I have seen since I started doing research on this topic in 1984. Documenting and analyzing a few among these many exceptional examples of citizens' media is the main purpose of this book.

A note about the celebratory tone of this book: my goal is to convey to the reader my own experiences as I discovered that, in the midst of situations in which armed groups impose silence, terrorize civilians, and make entire communities feel hopeless, a handful of exceptional Colombian men and women figured out how to use radio, television, video, and photography to overcome the impact of war on their communities. In this sense, when I am responding to the things I witnessed in my fieldwork, this book is shamelessly celebratory. My enthusiasm, however, does not blind me to the vulnerabilities and weaknesses in Colombian community media.

All Colombian community media, even those I deem worthy of the label "citizens' media," face multiple challenges and limitations. A great number of stations granted a community broadcasting license do not even come close to understanding what community communication is all about; their founders simply saw a good opportunity to make a buck or get their hands on an effective persuasion tool. Even those media that understand the value of community media have multiple Achilles' heels. No one in Colombia has figured out how to make community media financially sustainable. To generate enough
revenue to finance their operations, community media leaders sell local advertisements; form paid membership clubs among listeners and viewers; organize community events such as raffles, contests, and concerts; form alliances with NGOs and social movements exchanging public relations and media services for money; sell media services (e.g., production of video, photography, print materials, and institutional campaigns; or media training for employees) to state institutions and community organizations. Despite all these entrepreneurial strategies, Colombian community media are constantly on the brink of going bankrupt.

As a result, community media are run by a continuous revolving door of volunteers and/or badly paid staff members who, in part due to their precarious situation, are commonly co-opted by political and economic interests. Continuity is one of the major challenges in the Colombian world of community media. Highly trained volunteers leave for better-paying jobs, forcing the medium to go back to the drawing board and carry on with mediocre programming. Media with intensely creative producers frequently establish chaotic accounting and administrative practices, and conversely, media with efficient administrators sometimes scare away those with creative and artistic souls.

In regions of armed conflict, the vulnerabilities of community media multiply. Frequently, these media are permanently testing the boundaries of what armed groups will allow; at times they are silenced, paralyzed, attacked, or co-opted. On occasion, crossing invisible boundaries brings fatal consequences, and several community media producers in different parts of the country have been assassinated. Although I try to touch on more specific weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the chapters that follow, these weaknesses are not the focus of this book. I did not want to write a book about yet another thing that doesn’t work in Colombia. I wanted to write a book about the few things that do work; about something that succeeds, despite all the challenges, limitations, vulnerabilities, and risks. As Pécaut says, many more Colombians are involved in building peace than in waging war (Pécaut 2001, 19). Among those building peace, and working against all sorts of obstacles and limitations, are the Colombian citizens’ media producers, artists, and activists featured in this book.

The first chapter takes us to southern Colombia, where the Andean mountains fade into the Amazonian plateau. Nestled between frigid and pristine forest, the region known as the Southern Andes is home to three different communities. The Andean region has been a hub of coca cultivation, but now the region in the heart of Colombia is a prime area for the production of coca for domestic consumption. In the process, the coffee economies, the drug economies, the land occupations, and children of the wars are able to coexist.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the northern region known as the Amazonian region and its critical social and political transformations. The arrival of large-scale military operations in the Amazonian region has affected everyday life, economic activities, and the environment. The paramilitaries and their links to political and economic elites have produced a culture of fear and mistrust in the region.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the southern region known as the Andean region and its critical social and political transformations. The arrival of large-scale military operations in the Andean region has affected everyday life, economic activities, and the environment. The paramilitaries and their links to political and economic elites have produced a culture of fear and mistrust in the region.

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In chapter 3, we explore the Andean region, where the Andean mountains fade into the Amazonian plateau. Nestled between frigid and pristine forest, the region known as the Southern Andes is home to three different communities. The Andean region has been a hub of coca cultivation, but now the region in the heart of Colombia is a prime area for the production of coca for domestic consumption. In the process, the coffee economies, the drug economies, the land occupations, and children of the wars are able to coexist.
and pristine mountain rivers and the border of the Amazonian rain forest, the municipality of Belén de los Andaquíes is surrounded by natural beauty. This chapter traces the history of this southern Colombian region and documents how, since colonial times, extractive economies and consecutive waves of immigrants have encoded the region in the popular imagination as an empty frontier without an identity of its own. Since the mid-1970s, the region has seen the arrival of coca economies, drug traffickers, and left-wing guerrilla organizations. In this complex scene of warring factions, state neglect, drug economies, and stunning natural wonder, a community radio station and children’s audiovisual school create communication spaces that are able to counter the impact of armed violence on civilians.

Chapter 2 moves to the opposite side of the national geography: the northern Colombian Caribbean. Here, at the end of the 1990s, the region known as Montes de María had some of the worst levels of social and political violence in the country. The chapter recounts the arrival of left-wing guerrilla organizations and right-wing paramilitary militias in this rich agricultural area surrounded by wealthy cattle estates. The presence of these two illegal armed groups disrupted everyday life and eroded the traditional Caribbean culture of exuberant expressiveness and strong collective solidarities. The presence of armed groups in this territory imposed a culture of fear, isolation, and distrust in the agricultural areas and urban centers of Montes de María. Thousands of farming families were displaced from their land by force, fleeing in terror from the crossfire of army, guerrilla, and paramilitaries. The chapter analyzes how, in this context where war has saturated much of the social fabric and social relations, a local media initiative known as the Communications Collective of Montes de María constitutes a parallel cultural milieu. In order to serve as an alternative to a cultural environment that sanctions sectarian sensibilities, intolerance of difference, and the use of force, the Communications Collective operates a media school, allowing students to learn radio, television, and video production, and more importantly, a different ethos of peace.

In chapter 3 we continue the journey toward the center of Colombia, where we discover a water world in which amphibious human communities have developed a symbiotic relationship with the overpowering Magdalena River. The chapter documents Magdalena Medio’s location at the very center of the country and its status as one
of the country’s most marginalized regions. While the exploitation of natural resources (such as oil, gold, and African palm) in the region yields profits that merit standards of living equivalent to those in European countries, most residents of Magdalena Medio live in extremely impoverished conditions. Since the 1960s, leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries, and drug and oil mafias have ravaged the region, which is home to one of the strongest networks of citizens’ radio stations in Latin America. The chapter analyzes how a network of nineteen citizens’ radio stations is used to strengthen good governance, government transparency and accountability, citizen participation in local decision-making processes, strong public spheres, and the art of mediation in this neglected region.

Chapter 4 articulates views, experiences, and ideas gathered from the testimonies of dozens of Colombian citizens’ media pioneers from all reaches of the Colombian geography. Here, these brave media producers tell us how they have learned to use community radio, the Internet, and television in contexts of armed conflict. Although the first three chapters illuminate some of the most salient initiatives, three case studies do not exhaust what citizens’ media pioneers have to say. In this chapter I document how Colombian citizens’ media have dealt with the pressures imposed by armed groups and how citizens’ media leaders are able to articulate their goals and objectives in efforts to disrupt the normalization of the use of force.

In the concluding chapter, I develop a theory of citizens’ media in contexts of armed conflict based on the evidence and analyses of the previous chapters. Here I present a dialogue with two very different bodies of research and theory. First, I draw from anthropological studies of war to understand how unarmed civilians under siege experience armed conflict by armed groups. The lived experience of terror imposed by war is complex and felt in many different ways, as it erodes social and cultural fabrics and imposes isolation, fear, and mistrust on the communities in its throes. Citizens’ media can play equally complex and varied roles in these contexts of armed violence, as they disrupt violence and terror and help unarmed civilians overcome the impositions of war.

Second, I draw from theories of communication as performance to suggest that efficacious citizens’ media in war zones are those that help trigger lived experiences alternative to terror, isolation, and fear. Here I privilege citizens’ media that make it possible for people to feel,
share, and experience an alternative to the terror imposed by war over community media used to inform, persuade, or disseminate pre-designed messages to their audiences. Citizens' media that regard communication as performance, rather than as information dissemination or persuasion, are better positioned to disrupt violence in contexts where unarmed civilians are cornered by war.