

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Diego Felipe Becerra

On August 19, 2011, Diego Felipe Becerra was shot and killed by police officer Wilmer Antonio Alarcón in an upper-middle-class neighborhood in the north of Bogotá, Colombia. He was sixteen years old and had been hanging out with his friends, doing graffiti around the bridge that intersects Avenida Boyacá with Calle 116. They tried to run away when they saw the police nearby, but a few of them were caught by one of the officers. Diego Felipe was among those caught, and although he slipped the policeman's grasp, he was shot twice in the back as he ran. The police took him to the hospital, while the friend who had witnessed the event called Diego Felipe's family. The two versions of events that were subsequently released reveal very different narratives. The police stated that Diego Felipe and his friends had committed an armed robbery of a bus and that Diego Felipe was shot in the ensuing chase. Diego Felipe's friends and family refuted this claim, proving that the gun had been planted at the crime scene and that fake witnesses had been hired to corroborate the cover story. This was a significant task that involved taking various members of the police force to court and persuading the media and wider public, who otherwise were willing to believe that Diego Felipe was a delinquent whose life was disposable and whose death was inevitable, that the victim was a middle-class boy whose only crime was expressing himself on the walls of the city. After years of

intimidation from a corrupt police force that acted with impunity, Diego Felipe's family won the case and Alarcón received a sentence of thirty-seven years, although he still managed to evade the law for a further five years before the case was finally considered resolved in 2021.

There is a close relationship between violence and graffiti and street art in Bogotá. This is a city where the visual landscape displays an impressive quantity and range of graffiti and street art. Despite the different subcultures, styles, and motivations driving their production, they have a collective import and impact on the city and its relationship to violence, not least as a visual reflection of the country's tumultuous history. Their contemporary importance can also be attributed to the case of Diego Felipe. That a boy had been killed just because he was doing graffiti raised the level of public debate about the right to self-expression in the city, catalyzed the political mobilization of graffiti and street artists, and reinforced the widespread recognition of the corruption of the police force and judicial system. While a legal process to regulate graffiti was already under way by then, the case is seen as key to changing the angle taken by the local government under Gustavo Petro's term as mayor because he encouraged the participation of graffiti and street artists as a result. Certainly, the 2013 decree (Decreto 075) and its amendment in 2015 (Decreto 529) recognize all forms of graffiti as cultural expression and commit to supporting their development. Local youth centers and cultural festivals have taken Diego Felipe's name, and August 19 now officially commemorates his death as Urban Art Day, while representations of his tag, Tripido, and his trademark Felix the Cat character pay homage to him at the site where he died and around the capital.

Of course, Diego Felipe was not the first, nor the last, victim of physical violence in the world of graffiti and street art. However, artists across the country draw on his case as emblematic of their right to paint and continue to appropriate the urban visual landscape in order to articulate their multiple experiences and understandings of violence and inequality. Sometimes they are supported by the wider public and seen as voices of uncomfortable truths, while at other times they are reviled as signs of chaos and disorder. Whether positive or not, both the production and the reception of graffiti and street art offer an insight into urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá and how they shape everyday life in the city.

The Complexities of Violence in Colombia

Understanding how people think about violence in everyday life is crucial in part because Colombia is often perceived to be a self-defined "violent

society”; social imaginaries both within and of Colombia are saturated with the idea of violence. During the nine months I spent in Bogotá between 2015 and 2016, I would ask questions like “Do you think Bogotá is violent?” or “Do you think Colombia is violent?” and be met with responses that ranged from laughter at the apparent obviousness of the answer *yes* to exasperation and denial, as people recognized the reputation but argued that Colombia is only as violent as anywhere else, and that there are good things about it, too. The centrality of violence to Colombia has filtered through multiple spaces. Representations of the nation in various forms of art and culture, for example, have reproduced a founding myth of violence, suggesting its permanence and pervasive presence throughout Colombia’s trajectory (Rueda 2008; Suárez 2010; Hunt 2013). Many academics have conducted studies in an attempt to understand the place of violence in Colombian society, to the extent that the country was the first to designate the field of *violentología* to record and analyze the different expressions of violence in the country (Segura Escobar and Camacho Guizado 1999; Cartagena Núñez 2015). The social impact of violence is also a central problem, ranging from the normalization of violence as a mode of social and political interaction to the reproduction of fear and terror as a means of social control (Taussig 1992; Deas 1997; Pécaut 1999; Uribe 2004).

Yet there remains a need to address how people actually respond to narratives and realities of violence. To think about the place of violence in everyday life is to think about the security practices, fears, and frustrations that are grounded in particular places at particular times (Pain and Smith 2008; Ochs 2013; Monroe 2016). Violence has a social impact even away from the direct action of conflict situations, and a range of social actors are implicated in the negotiation, reproduction, and construction of meaning related to violence (Moser and Clark 2001). In this book I ask what it feels like to live in a society imbued with the idea of violence, what kinds of violence people are talking about when they say that it is a violent country, what meanings are given to violence, and whom they implicate. Moreover, I take the answers seriously as examples of vernacular theory, referring to the agency of nonacademics to critically reflect on the world around them (McLaughlin 1996). One of the main challenges in asking such questions is the scale of violence and its multiple manifestations. Returning to Diego Felipe’s story provides an apt illustration of both the multiplicity of violence and how it is woven into everyday life in Bogotá.

First, there is the brutal, physical violence of Diego Felipe’s murder at the hands of the state. In many ways, political violence is part of everyday life in the country and the case can be placed in a wider context of civilians being

victimized. In 2017, a judge declared that the case was an example of an urban *falso positivo* (false positive), a term normally used to describe extrajudicial killings carried out by the army that later appeared as legitimate “hits” on enemy targets. In using the term, the judge was referring to both the murder of an innocent civilian that should have been avoidable and to the attempted coverup, in which the wider police force claimed that the murder was a legitimate response to the threat posed by Diego Felipe according to the false logic that the boy was carrying a gun. In using such vocabulary, the judge connected Diego Felipe’s murder to a tactic that has been deployed by the state in multiple contexts. The best-known falsos positivos scandal emerged in the early 2000s, when soldiers in the state military kidnapped young men from working-class neighborhoods, dressed them as guerrillas, and then killed them in order to boost their kill quotas during the Colombian armed conflict. More recently, the death and abuse of protesters at the hands of the police during general strikes and protests in 2019–2021 reinforced this perception of the state as a violent actor and contributed to widespread condemnation and collective outbursts of frustration. These events took place in a global context where the Black Lives Matter movement was gaining force in multiple countries and the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was revealing itself not just as a health crisis but a social and economic one too.

There is a supposed contradiction inherent in Colombia’s status as one of the oldest democracies in Latin America while it is also experiencing one of the longest-running internal armed conflicts and some of the highest levels of violence in the region. Rather than representing a paradoxical relationship, Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein argue that violence is, and has been, integral to democracies in Latin America, and Colombia fits the description of a “violently plural” democratic society, meaning one in which multiple actors, including “states, social elites and subalterns” employ violence “in the quest to establish or contest regimes of citizenship, justice, rights, and a democratic social order” (2010, 4). It is worth noting that the Colombian armed conflict is a struggle that has been marked by human rights abuses committed on multiple sides (including the state), by the impact of the illegal narcotics trade, and by the forced displacement of more than seven million Colombians. The conflict between and the terror imposed by the guerrillas, military, paramilitary groups, and criminal networks dealing in illicit trade have led to political assassination, homicide, forced recruitment, kidnapping, extortion, massacre, sexual violence, and disappearance. This violence sits alongside high levels of corruption and impunity and has affected civilians and different social

groups in both rural and urban areas, while also becoming part of the political scenery (Richani 1997; Sánchez G. 2000; Camacho Guizado 2002; Uribe 2004; Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013). Notably, a peace deal was signed in 2016 between President Juan Manuel Santos's government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the main guerrilla group in the country. Nevertheless, concerns remain, as politically motivated instances of violence continue, including assassinations of social leaders and the above-mentioned police abuse of civilian protesters. These overlapping relationships indicate the blurred boundaries between peace and war (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004) and highlight the everydayness of political violence in Colombia.

The second aspect of Diego Felipe's case that illustrates the place of violence in everyday life is the concealment of the crime. It is not just that political violence is and has been present in Colombia for so long, it is that violence and inequality are embedded in the state, civil, and political institutions that structure society. The hiring of false witnesses, the planting of the gun at the crime scene, and the cover story depicting Diego Felipe as a criminal provide an example of institutionalized corruption within the state law enforcement and legal system and show that the deployment of violence is not only direct. Under a violent democracy citizens might be free to partake in elections, but, for many, it stifles their ability to achieve goals relating to equality, justice, tolerance, and freedom through processes of democratization (Camacho and Guzmán 1989). The strategies that were used to justify Diego Felipe's murder and, subsequently, to disrupt the legal case through intimidation and perjury, reveal a structural inequality that denies civilians basic rights to truth and justice.

In particular, the violent aspects of state formation allow for the reproduction of hierarchical social orders and elite rule, where the poorest are those with the least access to meaningful participation in democratic processes (Giraldo 1994; Pearce 2010; Gutiérrez Sanín 2014). Johan Galtung's notion of structural violence describes the inequality built into social structures and the subsequent forms of exploitation, marginalization and repression that have a negative impact upon the life chances and human needs of particular social groups (Galtung 1969, 1990). It is useful here because it highlights the reality that multiple forms of exploitation and marginalization are embedded in everyday life and overlap with one another. Colombia is the second-most-unequal country in Latin America; a report from Oxfam International (Guereña 2017) showed that the top 10 percent of earners receive 40 percent of the wealth generated, while 14.5 million

people live below the poverty line. There is an urban-rural divide to these national statistics, but within cities the disparities in wealth are also stark. There is a different quality of life in terms of access to employment, cultural opportunities, and social and public services, that depends on social status, frequently marked by geographic location within the city.

Economic inequality of course intersects with other factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and disability, all of which affect the scale and type of violence experienced by people. As reports such as *¡Basta Ya!*, from the Grupo de Memoria Histórica (2013), indicate, women and people of color, particularly from rural areas of the country, have been disproportionately affected by the armed conflict, suffering the most violent war tactics, including forced displacement, forced recruitment, massacres, and rape and other forms of sexual violence. Resisting the stigma of being seen only as victims, though, many survivors of such violence have formed or joined social movements and collectives aimed at demanding their rights, helping others, raising awareness through collective memory practices, and working through trauma using creative outlets. Nor is this violence limited to the armed conflict; from pay inequality to intimate partner abuse to job discrimination and verbal abuse, women and people of color are discriminated against in everyday life, with class playing a significant role in how such violence is normalized and remains “unseen.” The inequalities that emerge from the intersections of urban space, violence, and gender (among other social categories) emerge when viewed through a “gender lens” (Chant 2013). Violence is always embedded within a power structure, so not only are some social groups more likely to be affected by certain types of violence but these kinds of violence are also more likely to be minimized in public discourse. A feminist, critical approach is necessary to draw out these hidden inequalities (Hume 2009).

Diego Felipe’s case also illustrates the politics of representing violence: which events are recognized, from whose perspective, and with what implications. The police sought to associate Diego Felipe with delinquency as a defense for their actions. This in itself reveals an insight into social imaginaries, as the police relied on the well-established fear of crime and the stigmas attached to graffiti and working-class male youth within the media and the wider public to validate their claims. The cover story justifying Diego Felipe’s death by associating him with criminality was initially reproduced uncritically by the mainstream media, and it was only once his middle-class status was revealed that they questioned the police’s narrative. This is what Galtung describes as cultural violence and Pierre Bourdieu as symbolic violence: not only the forms of discrimination that contribute to

inequality but the collective representations and cultural language that allow them to be accepted as the norm (Bourdieu 2004; Galtung 1990). Thus, the perspectives and experiences of violence among the poorer groups in society are often either marginalized or presented as homogeneous (Moser and McIlwaine 2003; McIlwaine and Moser 2007). At the same time, the fear and anxiety associated with everyday criminal activity, but also with social “undesirables” (a term used to discriminate against a number of social subjects, including homeless people, drug users, trans people, and sex workers), are used to justify the state’s repression of civilians in countries across Latin America (Caldeira 2000; Pearce 2010). The success of Diego Felipe’s parents, Gustavo Trejos and Liliana Lizarazo, relied, in part, on their social, cultural, and financial capital in a city deeply divided by social hierarchies, which meant that they could contradict the image of their son as a delinquent because he was middle-class and didn’t fit the stereotype. Furthermore, they could gain access to national and international media outlets, as well as pursuing legal processes, and they make the most of their position by continuing to fight for the rights of others, including those who have been victimized by the police but whose social status denies them recognition as victims worth fighting for.

Overall, the case surrounding Diego Felipe Becerra draws together multiple forms of violence and shows how they pervade everyday life and are negotiated by different social groups. This book continues in this vein, as I explore the manifestations of direct, structural, and cultural violence and position them along a continuum through an urban ethnography of Bogotá in 2015–2016. The scale of this approach is a challenge, but it is also intentional. The multiplicity reflects the complexity of violence in everyday life and makes an important contribution to understanding social imaginaries of violence. To listen to people and their own perceptions and experiences of violence is to take them seriously as vernacular theorists and, in doing so, gain a more nuanced understanding of what violence feels like in everyday life. Moreover, it provides an insight into the politics of social imaginaries of violence. The concept of the imaginary is a way of thinking about the social world. It refers to collective representations and shared ways of seeing, but recognizes that power dynamics are embedded in them, which means that questions related to agency and structure also arise. Of particular importance are the ways in which different forms of violence are given meaning, the extent to which they are recognized as a significant aspect of Colombian society, and the implications of their visibility or invisibility for the reproduction of a social order steeped in violence and inequality.

Violence, Graffiti, and Street Art

The relationship between violence and its cultural representation is the book's primary route into understanding social imaginaries of violence. As is clear in the case of Diego Felipe, the collective ways of seeing and understanding violence played a central role. The narratives representing him as a vandal were used to justify the violence against him while the counternarratives challenged them by insisting that he was an artist. The latter were successful; Diego Felipe's parents and the wider community of graffiti and street artists managed to shift the dominant narrative that equated graffiti with violent crime, demonstrating that social imaginaries of violence can change. How they did so, though, provides a deeper insight into the potential of the imaginary and the politics of aesthetics. Alongside the media appearances and court cases that Trejos and Lizarazo initiated, the graffiti artists who challenged Diego Felipe's depiction as a criminal did so by returning to the bridge where he last painted and creating a spontaneous shrine through graffiti writing, slogans, and murals that celebrated his life and joyful personality (Santino 2004). They repaint the bridge each year, using their art to commemorate Diego Felipe in the visual landscape but also to challenge police abuse and assert the right to paint safely for all artists (Griffin 2020).

The role of aesthetics here is crucial. In this book, art and culture are key sites through which violence is negotiated because they draw on the creativity of the collective imagination. Imaginaries are fluid and dynamic; people collectively construct them based on their individual perspectives and experiences. Graffiti and street art represent one space where the social meaning of violence can be negotiated, contested, and imagined otherwise in a public way. As cultural forms, they have long been associated with politics and are perpetually presented as subversive signs of spontaneous popular self-expression. Around the world and throughout history, graffiti and street art have engaged with questions of violence and power in multiple and diverse ways. Writing on the wall has been used to depict folk stories; send warnings or mark territories; express love, desire, or hatred; and share jokes, sexual insults, and obscenities (Reisner 1971; Abel and Buckley 1977; Silva 1989, 2013; Rama 1996; Oliver and Neal 2010). Particularly in contexts of social segregation and polarized politics, the presence of graffiti and street art is seen as a response to the lack of access to alternative means of communication, a way of negotiating ineffectual democracies or more overtly controlling power structures and the mainstream media that reproduce elite narratives (Silva 1987a, 2013; Peteet 1996; De Ruiter 2015).

They are perceived to offer alternative “truths” to dominant discourses and to give visibility to themes that are hidden from hegemonic narratives of violence. Notably, the messages are not always explicit, as there is also a politics embedded in the anarchic rejection of authority and the persistent presence and playful disrespect shown toward the legal and political controls of urban public spaces, as well as the traditional, elitist, and corporate circles of art and culture (Ferrell 1996, 197).

Despite the common politics behind much writing on the wall, the different forms grouped under “graffiti and street art” in this book are important to recognize, as is their relationship to violence. In Bogotá, the walls display a range of subcultural styles and markings, the most prominent being graffiti writing, street art, *grafiti de consigna*, and *grafiti de barrista* (Castro Pulido 2012). These terms were widely used by the artists I spoke to in the city, who frequently identified themselves as either writers or *artistas* (e.g., *de graffiti*, or street—*callejeras*). *Grafitero* is another term that was often used to refer to those who do graffiti (with both positive and negative connotations), although it tended to be used by people outside of the different subcultural worlds. Throughout the book I follow the self-definitions of the people I spoke to and refer to them collectively as artists, as a way of recognizing that they all contribute to the urban visual landscape of graffiti and street art, regardless of the specific form. I also found that the name used to describe what they do was less important to graffiti and street artists than was getting out there and painting, and that there was a lot of collaboration between different kinds of artists. Diego Felipe’s bridge is a case in point, as the diversity of the graffiti and street art there shows that a shared interest in painting the city often overcame differences in styles and subcultures. Nevertheless, it is useful to define and contextualize the range of graffiti and street art that was visible on the walls of the city, particularly as they reflect some of the specificities of Latin American street art.

Internationally, the term *graffiti* tends to refer to the graffiti writing subcultures rooted in hip-hop and its emergence in the United States in the 1970s. It is a specific form of self-expression that involves using spray paint to leave one’s mark—normally a self-appointed name called a tag—in highly visible urban public spaces. Progression within the subculture is represented through the development of the style of writing, where the tag is depicted in more elaborate and intricate lettering, building up to “throw-ups” and “pieces,” incorporating multiple colors, 3-D effects, and characters (Wacławek 2011). Progression is also marked through status, as participants climb social positions that range from the belittled “toy” to the lauded “king,” which refers not only to their artistic proficiency but also to

their ability to saturate the city with their tag, gaining visibility in infamous spaces, such as public transport systems, or reaching spots that are notoriously difficult or dangerous to paint (Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002).

As with other forms of hip-hop (rap, breakdance, and mixing), graffiti writing was traditionally associated with Black and Latino youth culture in marginalized urban neighborhoods in the United States, and is strongly associated with masculinity (Macdonald 2002). Although the subculture was picked up and adapted by different international audiences, leading to multiple variations and appropriations, the relationship to the marginal has remained strong. This is reflected in the Latin American demographic of those who appropriated the subculture from as early as the 1980s, who tended to be marginalized urban youth set apart from mainstream art and culture (Tickner 2008). Graffiti writers, and hip-hoppers in general, are still associated with working-class and lower-middle-class social backgrounds, voicing shared experiences of the social exclusion that is prevalent across Latin American cities. However, the demographic has changed and not only do many women participate in the worlds of graffiti and hip-hop but there is also talk of the odd *grafitero gomelo*, meaning a “posh” graffiti artist. There is also a tension between the “bombers,” who stick to some of the original tenets of the subculture and prioritize coverage of their tag across the city, and those who focus more on elaborate throw-ups and pieces that attract wider public attention and through which they can gain access to art markets.

The closed subcultural nature of graffiti writing has become blurred through its relationship with other forms of writing on the wall. In Latin America, graffiti writing is frequently situated alongside street art, despite their differences. One traditional difference relates to the artists behind the different practices, as street artists are more likely to be middle-class, university-educated, or trained in art and design. Another is about form; where graffiti writing still tends to rely on what the artist can create using spray cans and their various adjustments, street art incorporates a range of techniques and aims not for a subcultural form of engagement but rather addresses a broader, undetermined urban audience. Thus, the term *street art* is applied to stenciled images, stickers, murals, posters, and other material adornments, as well as written text, which are united by their position in public space. More than simply appearing in public spaces, street art engages with public space in ways that afford it a political quality (Ryan 2019). Often, this engagement takes the form of an unsanctioned intervention in a particular place, which frames the meaning constructed through the piece (Waclawek 2011; Bengtsen 2013). That street art is unsanctioned

conveys a challenge to the institutionalized and commercialized sphere of art and culture, which is reinforced through the inevitable ephemerality of street art, the frequent anonymity of pieces, and the absence of financial reward. Furthermore, the meaning is embedded in the setting of particular pieces, in that they play with the material landscape and highlight different ways of seeing that place through, for example, juxtaposition or optical illusions (Bengtson 2013; Morrison 2015). The implicit politics of such interventions are complemented by the explicitly political messages of many artists around the world (Herrera and Olaya 2011; Schacter 2013).

Although often eclipsed in more Anglo-American-centric accounts, the development of graffiti and street art in Latin America reflects a rich history of political and artistic engagement in public spaces. As Holly Eva Ryan notes, “street art has been mobilized time and again as an instrument of protest and a means of expression in Latin America. Emerging as a low technology means of mass communication, it has served an important function in circulating political messages, both pro-system and anti-system, among groups lacking access to other information channels” (Ryan 2019, 141). Ryan’s recognition of street art’s “pro-system” use brings into play the nuances of graffiti and street art’s history in the region. While global in reach, graffiti and street art are also highly localized creative practices and they respond to other cultural and artistic trajectories. Street art, in particular, has been shaped by muralism. The Mexican muralists of the 1920s and 1930s are frequently identified as the instigators of this regional trend, as their state-sponsored revolutionary messages (as well as their political critiques, depending on the artist and the time they were working) were intended to educate the public and assert ideological imperatives. They were not producing independent street art in a strict sense, given the extent of their financial backing, the resources made available to them to paint internationally, and the support from the state and traditional art institutions. Nevertheless, their aim to communicate in the streets, educate a broad public, and mobilize an emotional and affective encounter with a wide array of social issues has had a lasting impact across the Americas (Latorre 2008).

Street artists have continued to develop this practice; contemporary muralism is a key part of art in public space and has associations with moralizing and communicating political messages. Paradoxically, it continues to be used both by states seeking to appeal to “the people” or to assert their presence in public space and by social movements and collectives seeking to educate people and to denounce and condemn state politics. In this sense, Latin American muralism has a close relationship to

representations of violence, power, and inequality: some of the key tropes include Indigenous cosmologies and ecological inequalities, anticapitalist and anticolonialist critiques, and the politicization of collective memory to denounce dictatorships and repression. Contemporary muralism and its relationship to street art is complicated, though, as there is a difference between street artists who work individually and muralists within a collective, even if they sometimes work together. Often, art collectives emerge through political and student activism, using murals to disseminate ideas and appeal for political engagement from the public. While creating art in the streets, many of those involved in such collectives see art as part of their political activity, as opposed to viewing themselves as artists. Street artists, on the other hand, tend to see themselves as creating art first and foremost, with the politics more implicitly embedded in the placement, style, or process of production of the piece. In both cases, however, the idea of the street signals a performative process, particularly offering a direct and affective engagement with the audience through pieces that attempt to convey a message or draw attention to a particular issue, but also by facilitating encounters between artists, passersby, and public space.

The aesthetics of political discontent in Latin America are also represented through the graffiti de consigna that marks protest routes in public spaces and decorates the walls of public universities in many cities. There is a long history of such graffiti in the region, from expressions of discontent aimed at the conquistadors to messages of resistance under dictatorships during the 1970s (Rama 1996; Chaffee 1988). In particular, student groups, social movements, and political organizations have incorporated this visual tactic into their political activity, using the streets to communicate through *pintas* (or *pintadas*), a term referring to political slogans and phrases, often including creative wordplay and common sayings, or through publicizing the names of specific (and often left-wing) political parties and groups (Castro Pulido 2012, 33). While student and political activism is strong in the region and so this graffiti is still common in many cities, the Colombian specificity of graffiti de consigna is also related to its use by different armed groups and its definition includes the markings of left-wing guerrilla groups like FARC, Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN, National Liberation Army), and Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19, 19th of April Movement), and, on the other end of the ideological spectrum, Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), the largest right-wing paramilitary organization in the country, now largely dispersed into smaller networks. The markings of different punk and skinhead groups in the form of monikers, swastikas, or anarchist symbols are also fairly

common, and again range from left- to right-wing positions. However, the extent to which these signs are perceived as intimidating, threatening, or extreme depends on which group they refer to, their proliferation, and the spaces in which they are placed.¹

Overall, in this book I focus on examples of graffiti and street art that are, in diverse and sometimes implicit ways, trying to counteract violence and inequality. However, this strand of territoriality and aggression reflects the reality that people mark the walls for very different reasons, some of which seek to encourage a reflection on violence and some of which reproduce particular forms of violence. Graffiti de *barrista*, which represents the fourth main component of graffiti and street art in Bogotá and is common throughout Latin America, occupies a tense position in this respect. It takes its stylistic inspiration from the lettering of Brazilian *pixação*, a unique form of graffiti writing inspired by the lettering on heavy-metal album covers. It is produced by marginalized social groups who eschew the more traditionally artistic graffiti and street art and seek to aggressively assert their visibility in affluent urban neighborhoods and city centers (Caldeira 2012). But even though it is inspired by *pixação*, *graffiti de barrista* refers specifically to the tags of football fan groups, known as *barras*. The tags name the football teams being celebrated and often include the names of the fan groups behind the tag. They represent a celebration of football but they are also used to mark territory, and it is common to see such graffiti crossed out by rival fans as a form of dialogue between different groups (Castro Pulido 2012, 44). In many cases, this confrontational dialogue is symbolic and remains on the walls, rather than turning into physical fights, but it is also a visual reminder of the aggression and hooliganism associated with football ultras around the world.

Graffiti and Street Art in Bogotá

These subcultures, styles, and signs are the main forms of graffiti and street art that dominate the walls of Bogotá, taking their place among the other visual ephemera in the urban landscape, from street signs and statues to billboard advertisements and political campaign posters. Not only do they sit alongside them but they compete for space, and the sheer quantity and range of graffiti and street art is one of the defining factors of Bogotá's scene. Graffiti de consigna gained particular force in the city during the late 1970s and 1980s, illustrating popular discontent with the repressive governments of the time and disseminating revolutionary ideals inspired by international

1. In particular, the signs of armed groups are more likely to signify their presence and serve as a warning to locals in rural areas than in urban areas.

student movements post-1968. Some of these messages were explicitly political; others used humor and creative imagery to critique contemporary society while maintaining a distance from party politics. Other consignas marked the emergence of the punk and skinhead movements, where young people sought to distinguish themselves from previous generations and rebel against the status quo through music, fashion, and (sometimes aggressive) meetups in public spaces.

Santiago Castro Pulido suggests a gap in the graffiti and street art movement, explaining that the intensification of violence in the 1990s complicated access to public space, as bombings, sicario attacks, and kidnappings became key tactics employed by drug gangs in their confrontations with the state (2012, 33). The early 2000s, on the other hand, saw a boom in graffiti writing and street art. While hip-hop was taking root from as early as the 1980s and 1990s, graffiti writing benefited from visits by international artists and increased access to the internet in the 2000s. Street art also gained force during this time, instigated by key collectives such as Grupo Excusado, who used stenciling to critique global and local dynamics of consumerism, capitalism, war, and politics, from Bush's post-9/11 antiterrorism policies in the United States to the similar discourse presented by the Colombian president at the time, Álvaro Uribe. Complementing the emergence of new groups of graffiti and street artists, magazines and articles about the Bogotá scene began to be published with more frequency, forums were established, and graffiti festivals set up to encourage meetups between artists. Now these are commonplace across the city, with many neighborhoods organizing their own events and establishing their own styles and characteristics.

Other Colombian cities and towns have also developed notable graffiti and street art scenes, of course. In Medellín, for example, graffiti youth projects and street art tours have helped to reframe imaginaries of “dangerous” barrios in the city by showing that these neighborhoods have lively art and culture scenes. As such, they contribute to the urban transformation narrative for which Medellín is famous, marking the city's trajectory from homicide capital of the world in the 1990s to a hub of innovation and enterprise in the 2000s. At the same time, critiques of the state are still visible and denunciations of paramilitarism are frequent in the pintas around the city, perhaps because of the city's conservative political culture and its role in the rise of uribismo as a political force.² Cali, too, has a thriving graffiti and street art scene, so much so that the film *Los Hongos*

2. *Uribismo* refers to the political movement based around Álvaro Uribe and his conservative ideological values.

narrates a friendship between two graffiti artists and describes their experience of the city. In recent years, it has been the site of social upheaval, as the 2021 protests against police abuse were especially strong there, leading to a great deal of repression and the targeting of young people, including rappers and artists. Around the country, therefore, the walls reveal local dynamics but of course artists also travel and so it is common to see signs of international and national artists in other cities and towns around the country, working solo or with local artists. A striking aspect of the country's graffiti and street art scene are the politicomemorial murals that result from collaborations between artists and social movements (or artistic social movements, as described above) and offer an aesthetic commemoration of the violence of the armed conflict that has taken place in specific areas.

Nevertheless, Bogotá has often been at the forefront of graffiti and street art developments, with local artists taking on active roles in promoting the subcultures associated with painting in the streets and expressing their sociopolitical engagement. Another key factor at play is the role of urban governance in the city's graffiti and street art scene. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Bogotá's elected mayors became known for their innovative urban policies that aimed to improve the culture of the city and renew urban infrastructure (Berney 2011). Consequently, spaces opened up for collaborations between graffiti and street artists and the local government, with projects such as the festival Hip Hop al Parque but also the creation of free spaces for painting, including along newly built roads and under bridges. Latin American street art in general is marked by the strength and continuity of artistic production in public space, which can partly be explained by the diversity of styles and subcultures, but also because of the (sometimes passive, sometimes active) acceptance of these art forms from states and the general public. As Olivier Dabène (2020) notes, this permissibility is epitomized by the situation in Bogotá, where the legal status was officially confirmed through the Decreto de Grafiti 075 in 2015, a piece of legislation that, for a time at least, led to explicit support from the local government in favor of dialogue with graffiti and street artists, funding for projects, and protection from the police. Notably, this is the legislation that was developed following the scandal surrounding Diego Felipe's death and reflects the increasing legitimacy of graffiti and street art in the eyes of the state, the media, and the wider urban public.

Specifically, the Decreto de Grafiti 075 recognizes all graffiti as forms of cultural expression, although it still insists that graffiti should be produced only with prior consent of the owner of the building or in sanctioned

spaces.³ To support the development of graffiti as a form of cultural expression, the decree commits the city to providing spaces in which strategies for learning and developing skills related to graffiti may be carried out. If written authorization has been granted by the owner of the building, an artist can paint on private property. According to the decree, graffiti commissioned with public money should last only two years. All spaces under bridges are authorized for painting, while prohibited spaces include pavements, public service infrastructure, public transport, park equipment, protected natural reserves, and sites of cultural heritage (on which much graffiti and street art can still be found). In terms of sanctions, the police can admonish those who are practicing graffiti in an unauthorized space; expel them from the area; make them clean up the graffiti, attend training programs, or do community service; or impose a fine when the site of the graffiti is “irreparable” or the artists have failed to restore it to its previous condition within seventy-two hours. None of these sanctions include detaining the person caught doing graffiti, in the Unidad Permanente de Justicia (UPJ), the youth detention center) or otherwise.

The decree is significant not because it means all graffiti and street art is now produced legally (far from it) but because it frames the legitimacy with which graffiti and street art are, to a certain extent, endowed. The context of visibility and legitimacy demands that graffiti and street art in Bogotá be recognized as cultural practices that move beyond transgressive and illicit activities. Graffiti and street art *also* represent opportunities for personal and professional development, for community and political engagement, and many artists will make the most of them, motivated as they are by the desire to continue to paint in any way possible. This mirrors shifts around the world as graffiti and street art have gained recognition and legitimacy, representing a possible career path for its practitioners (Kramer 2010). Consequently, a challenge has presented itself in relation to definitions and terminology, discussions about which are marked by the tension between *illegal* equating to subversive and *legal* equating to appropriated (Silva 2013; Schacter 2014; Bengtsen 2017).

As Ricardo Campos, Andrea Pavoni, and Yiannis Zaimakis (2021, 8) note, there is a simultaneous institutionalization of street art and a criminalization of graffiti artists. Alternative definitions to try and explain the space that graffiti and street art occupy have been put forward, including a

3. Decreto 075 de 2013 is titled “Por el cual se promueve la práctica artística y responsable del grafiti en la ciudad y se dictan otras disposiciones” (By which the artistic and responsible practice of graffiti in the city is promoted and other provisions are dictated).

notable attempt from Armando Silva (2013) to distinguish between the urban aesthetics that are merely an extension of modern art in public space and the range of urban actions that still hold the transgressive quality that was originally embedded in graffiti. Alternative terminology can also be useful, including the term *independent public art* to describe that which is produced without financial backing or official permission, or *postgraffiti* to convey that the recognition it is afforded now marks it as distinct from the way in which it was produced originally (Wacławek 2011). Without an agreed-upon term, however, the context remains the most important thing to consider when trying to analyze the dynamics of graffiti and street art in a particular place.

In Bogotá there is a significant slippage between subversion and appropriation, resistance and incorporation. The artists (including graffiti writers) in this book almost always participated in both the legal and the illegal worlds of graffiti and street art. They took advantage of the opportunities on offer, be they privately funded or public commissions, while at the same time continuing to work in unsanctioned spaces. Rather than try and select the artworks based on their legal status, then, I chose to incorporate the artists' reflections of their practices, sanctioned and unsanctioned. Furthermore, defining graffiti and street art solely through notions of illegality, resistance, or subversion risks a too-heavy focus on how these notions subsequently decide the extent to which graffiti and street art are deemed "authentic" and "effective" as modes of politics. There are differences between the subcultures, and some writing on the walls does not even belong to a subculture. There is a difference between producing something legally and at ease, and illegally, at risk of getting caught. Painting something that has been seen and approved by someone else is also different from an individual creation. While recognizing the importance of these differences, overall, I consider the legal and illegal as equally valid objects of analysis and refer to these forms of cultural expression in general terms as "graffiti and street art" because it is through their collective dynamic that their intricate and complex relationship to violence and urban imaginaries is revealed.

My focus in this book on the reception of graffiti and street art played a large part in arriving at this method. Audience interpretations are key to the construction of meaning of particular texts, especially if the focus of the investigation is on the sociopolitical dynamics of representational practices (Hall 1980; Stevenson 2002; Martín Barbero and Téllez 2006). In this book, I analyze not just the content but the form, the placement, and the conditions surrounding the production and reception. Though the importance of

analyzing the reception of graffiti and street art has been highlighted, it remains a gap in the literature (Silva 1987b; Peteet 1996; Rowe and Hutton 2012; Burdick and Canessa Vicencio 2015; Lopera Molano and Coba Gutiérrez 2016). A notable exception is the relationship between graffiti and the law, which appears in a number of ethnographies and analyses of subcultural practices (Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002; Schacter 2008), and the role of the media in shaping discourses of graffiti and street art (A. Young 2012; Araya López 2015). However, such approaches tend to focus on the tensions among these different groups, where the authorities and the media spread fear by associating graffiti with more serious crimes, denigrating the practice as youth vandalism and denying its artistic merits, or by imposing disproportionate fines and prison sentences as an exemplary tactic to dissuade other graffiti writers. Nevertheless, perceptions and reactions to the form are changing as graffiti and street art gain more widespread acceptance (A. Young 2012). This is particularly true of Bogotá, where the graffiti decree has contributed to the widely held perception that graffiti and street art are legitimate practices and so are “passively permitted” (Schacter 2014), if only because of the general confusion with regards to whether or not graffiti is legal.

During the reception study, I found that this general acceptance focused the audience’s visual analysis on the content of the artworks and the messages that the artists were perceived to be sending and that the sanctioned work was just as capable of political critique as the unsanctioned work. Thus, I argue that we need to move beyond the rather simplistic dichotomy whereby graffiti and street art in Bogotá are perceived as either popular subversions *or* state-sanctioned forms of artistic expression by recognizing that the meaning of graffiti and street art is constructed through both the production and reception of these forms and depends on its spatial-temporal context. Although I pay attention to the similarities and the differences between them, I also argue that they work together to produce the insights into violence that I explore in the rest of the book, particularly when recognizing violence in its direct, structural, and cultural forms, and through the implicit and explicit politics of graffiti and street artists.

Methodological Approach

In order to explore their connections to multiple forms of violence, in this book I draw on visual analyses of graffiti and street art in different areas of the city, interviews with those who produce graffiti and street art, and a reception study conducted through vox pops and focus groups at a range of

public and private universities. These methods provided a crucial space through which people could articulate their vernacular theories of violence. Through graffiti and street art you can get a sense of what matters to people and what artists think need to be said. This may be explicit or implicit, a denunciation or a subtle appropriation of public space for self-expression. Listening to their perspectives and explanations you can get an insight into their experiences of painting the streets, the violence that they see in everyday life, and the violence that threatens them as they paint. People interpreting graffiti and street art provides even more depth to their role and impact in the city, as people relate what they see on the walls to their perceptions of sociopolitical realities. Finally, the judgments that people make as they assess graffiti and street art reveal that these are cultural forms that do not just depict violence; they are also embedded within everyday social imaginaries of violence in the city, meaning that there is sometimes a violence woven into the ways that people interpret the artworks and those responsible for them.

My research methods were affected by my social position and the personal factors that informed how I collected data and carried out the project. Academic notions of insider/outsider status are problematic because they tend to rely too much on the epistemic privilege of the ethnographer and fail to pay full attention to intersectional power relations that mean researchers are not always in a more powerful position than their supposed subjects (Mannay 2016, 29). In many ways, the fact that I was an outsider in relation to nationality helped me to initiate a dialogue on multiple occasions. The focus groups and vox pop-style interviews conducted in different areas of the city formed the greater part of the reception study. At the Universidad de los Andes, Universidad Libre, Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, and Universidad Cooperativa I asked groups of students to interpret images of graffiti and street art, which I selected for their range of styles and content, and to discuss what they revealed about violence in Colombia. Similarly, on the streets of Chapinero, Ciudad Bolívar, La Perseverancia, and along Calle 26, and on the campus of the Universidad Nacional I asked passersby for their thoughts on nearby examples of graffiti and street art and how they might speak to violence.

The choice of sites reflected my desire to speak to a cross-section of society. Bogotá has a large number of universities spread throughout the city, some of which are public and some of which are private, although the cost of studying in the private institutions varies and so they represent different levels of accessibility. The Universidad Militar is a public university in a wealthy neighborhood in the north of the city and clearly main-

tains close ties to the military—a number of students were in military uniform during the focus groups. The Universidad Cooperativa is private university whose Bogotá campus is based along Avenida Caracas, just north of the city center. Universidad Libre is a private institution that offers nonsectarian and unbiased education, and has a small campus in La Candelaria (where I conducted the focus group) and a larger one to the northwest of the city. The Universidad de los Andes is the most prestigious of the private universities in Bogotá and is next to Las Aguas in La Candelaria.

For the vox pops, I chose distinct areas of the city to try and capture a range of perspectives on the part of the audience, while recognizing the prevalence of different kinds of graffiti in different places. I started during a visit to La Perseverancia, and asked people about their general opinion of graffiti and street art, whether they thought it was political, and how they felt about living in La Perseverancia and their perception of violence and prejudice. I encountered difficulties that included getting people to elaborate on their opinions, particularly in relation to graffiti and street art. Thus, I changed tactics and from then on situated myself in a location where there were clear examples of different kinds of graffiti and street art to which participants could refer. On La Séptima I conducted interviews next to a mural by DJLU, on Calle 26 I interviewed people at the site of a mural of Jaime Garzón by MAL Crew, and in Ciudad Bolívar I collected interviews in Vista Hermosa. I also visited the campus of the Universidad Nacional. The Universidad Nacional not only is the country's premier public university but is renowned for the graffiti and street art on campus (Benavides-Vanegas 2005). As I found out, there are polarized opinions related to the quality or legitimacy of such graffiti and especially its political expression. I am grateful to the student who showed me around, because he helped me to capture a range of perspectives by taking me to the engineering faculty, the sociology department, law and political sciences, economy, agriculture and the postgraduate center, explaining that particular faculties are known for their different levels of political engagement and the ideological tendencies of such engagement. Each of the areas in which I conducted the reception study represented different socioeconomic strata, held different associations with violence (or at least its representation), and contained examples of graffiti and street art that I was interested in talking to people about.

During these discussions (and elsewhere) people made an effort to explain and contextualize things to me, especially in relation to the realities (or their perceived realities) of life in Bogotá and violence in Colombia, and they offered key interpretations of what was going on in the world of the

peace process, local politics, and the contemporary dynamics of graffiti and street art (Monroe 2016, 6). This is ideal for a research project on imaginaries, when you are trying to get at that which is often taken for granted and implicit. Furthermore, some people seemed to be concerned about the image of Colombia that I would get and instead wanted to explain or show me the Bogotá that they knew. Graffiti and street artists in particular would offer to take me around their neighborhoods, showing me places I might not know to go to, as well as offering a way of getting to know an area through their eyes and staying safe within them. The question of security arose on multiple occasions, mostly in the form of people being concerned about my safety, probably related to the fact that I was foreign and a young woman. Categories such as gender, nationality, and race often inform social relations and experiences of urban space. A feminist approach is vital for recognizing the impact of these identity categories in everyday life and for exploring the complexity and nuance of the hierarchies that emerge.

I am also an outsider in relation to graffiti and street art, in that I am not an artist and only participated in painting when invited. The way that I came to understand graffiti and street art was therefore shaped by the explanations provided by local artists, and they were situated within the local context. Although imaginaries of violence could be glimpsed through the everyday narratives, conversations, and discussions that took place around the city, it was through my lengthy interviews with artists that I gained focus on the complex relationship between violence and graffiti and street art, particularly the diverse ways that graffiti and street artists try to challenge violence.

As part of a broader ethnographic approach, interviews can provide key insights into how people perceive the world around them and they can be used to corroborate impressions gleaned from participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 98). More than just using the interview data to affirm or contradict what I observed, I use the interview data to reveal the interviewees' vernacular theories, or critiques, of their social world (McLaughlin 1996). In chapter 1 I explain the importance of listening to people as a way of identifying critical urban imaginaries of violence based on the argument that people are always actively constructing meaning about the social world around them. Alongside the focus groups and vox pops, these interviews represented a way of grasping the multiple layers of meaning that are embedded in graffiti and street art, and how artists theorize by relating these meanings to wider perceptions of the social world and the place of violence therein. Moreover, such an approach follows "[Antonio] Gramsci's insistence that we take seriously the complexity and

specificity of the cultural worlds different people inhabit—and pay serious attention to their own mappings of those worlds” (Crehan 2002, 7).

Actively using my outsider position, then, was crucial in trying to gain an in-depth understanding of both graffiti and street art and of violence, as they are lived and understood in Bogotá. Getting to know the city was a further challenge that was integral to the project, as the urban environment is a key part of the cultural worlds I was interested in. As Jane Jacobs argues, “The way to get at what goes on in the seemingly mysterious and perverse behavior of cities is . . . to look closely, and with as little previous expectation as is possible, at the most ordinary scenes and events, and attempt to see what they mean and whether any threads of principle emerge among them” (1972, 23). My understanding of the city developed through the ways in which I negotiated urban space myself and from observing how others perceived, used, and negotiated different spaces of the city. In addition to interviews and focus groups, where discussions about everyday life in the city took place, this also involved spending a considerable amount of time exploring the city and paying close attention to the everyday practices, narratives, and images that I perceived and experienced. I took photos of graffiti and uploaded them to a blog; I kept a diary recording instances where something related to violence or graffiti had arisen that day and tried to attend any protest marches, talks, or other events related to the topics that interested me. Nevertheless, one of the challenges of urban ethnography is the size of the fieldwork site and its heterogeneity. As I wanted to explore the question of violence, graffiti, and street art across the whole of the city, my approach had to recognize the different kinds of activities in different kinds of spaces, from public squares to residential neighborhoods, and the different social groups that are represented in those spaces and use those spaces. Of course, representing the whole of the city is impossible, but by taking such a broad approach during the period of fieldwork, I subsequently felt in a position to home in on specific spaces that were representative of broader urban dynamics.

Structure of the Book

This book revolves around three main case studies that explore urban imaginaries of violence through the graffiti and street art of specific areas of Bogotá. Before I turn to them, in chapter 1 I conceptualize violence, the imaginary, and graffiti and street art, and frame them within an urban context. In some respects, Bogotá is seen to be relatively insulated from the violence affecting the country. Medellín and Cali, for example, are more commonly associated with the urban impact of drug crime and paramili-

tary networks, while the armed conflict is largely perceived as a rural affair. The capital is also relatively prosperous compared to other regions in the country, although recent statistics note a failure to decrease levels of inequality compared to other cities. Nevertheless, Bogotá is a site of many kinds of violence, related to the conflict or otherwise, and they inform the aesthetics of the urban landscape and the social interactions that take place within it. At the same time, cities are defined by heterogeneity and density, so not only are there specifically urban imaginaries of violence but there are also diverse and competing ways of interpreting violence. Graffiti and street art are key urban practices through which people respond to violence, but their cultural politics are also subject to the same complexities as is the city, as their perceived role depends on who is interpreting them, what form graffiti takes, and where in the city they are found. To “read” graffiti and street art, then, it is important to consider the multiple and sometimes contradictory interpretations of their relationship to violence.

This focus on the nuances of urban imaginaries of violence, and particularly the contradictions embedded within them, frames the empirical chapters. In chapter 2, the first case study, I return to the idea of the everydayness of political violence by focusing on Calle 26, a major transport route in the city center and the site of official and unofficial representations of the collective memory of violence and peace. Here, graffiti and street art intersect with memory and the state in complex ways. There are many commemorative murals and denunciations along this route, drawing attention to the multiple forms of violence that imbue national imaginaries. Of particular note are the references to state violence and civilian victims, which appear to consolidate graffiti and street art as critical art forms that challenge mainstream political and media discourses of violence through their interventions in public space. Nevertheless, this is also a space where the state has endorsed many of these representations, particularly through arts council funding and commissions. The mediation of representations of violence, peace, and memory thus represents a dilemma for artists, and their negotiations reveal a broader concern with the ambiguous impact of multiple narratives of violence in the urban imaginary, including the risk of normalizing violence.

In the second case study, chapter 3, the explicit denunciations or representations of violence that are concentrated in the city center contrast with the graffiti and street art in more peripheral or marginalized spaces of the city. The visual landscapes of two such areas, La Perseverancia and Ciudad Bolívar, reflect the politics of beautification. Artists engage their local communities in decorating the walls around them to challenge the everyday

violence of stigma and prejudice associated with more working-class neighborhoods. The deployment of public space as a key site for encounter and appropriation attempts to counter the socialized segregation that marks the city and offers an insight into the everyday spatialization of imaginaries of violence. However, the continued impact of criminal networks, state absence, and corruption complicate their transformative aim and undermines the romanticism of some beautification narratives. In my conversations with graffiti and street artists, a more complex picture emerged of how they perceive and experience censorship, how they negotiate depicting more explicitly critical messages, and their expectations of aesthetic transformation in the neighborhoods.

In the third case study, chapter 4, a similar tension between romanticism and demonization emerges through the interpretations of graffiti and street art in La Candelaria, the historic center of Bogotá, where the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty are brought to the fore. In many ways, graffiti and street art are celebrated and endorsed by the mainstream media, state institutions, and the wider public. Notably, a common trope of the artworks is a critique of the everyday violence of indifference and inequality in public space, which suggests that this wider engagement with graffiti and street art could have the potential to shift imaginaries toward challenging such violence. Nevertheless, the praise of graffiti and street art has produced another kind of aesthetic hierarchy, reinforcing hegemonic notions of taste and art. In particular, only some forms of graffiti and street art—which can also be interpreted as only some graffiti and street artists—are celebrated and taken seriously, while others are denigrated and dismissed. This dynamic reveals that urban imaginaries of violence are characterized by normative assumptions about citizenship, appropriate behavior, and aesthetic desirability in ways that end up reproducing violence and inequality.

This somewhat pessimistic impression of urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá runs through all of the case studies. The contradictions embedded within people's interpretations of violence, graffiti, and street art draw attention to the everyday reproduction of social hierarchies, the complicity of the state as a perpetrator of violence, or as violent in its absence, and the structural inequalities that undermine the possibilities of nonviolence. However, that is not to diminish the importance of graffiti and street art as forms of political engagement and cultural practices that reflect and encourage vernacular theories of violence. Instead, in the book's conclusion I discuss the relationship between aesthetics and violence, contextualizing the case studies within more recent events of violence in the country.

Overall, I highlight the importance of listening to people in order to understand the social impact of violence in everyday life and how people respond to it in creative ways.

Indeed, graffiti and street artists are core participants in the study, as vernacular theorists and political actors. Since Diego Felipe Becerra's death, they have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to mobilize and defend their right to the city. In 2013 a badly timed image was released showing Justin Bieber doing graffiti on Calle 26, escorted by the police. This was only two years after Diego Felipe's death, and the hypocrisy on display riled graffiti and street artists across the country. They responded with twenty-four-hour "graffiti-thons" and on Calle 26 covered over Bieber's graffiti, challenging the police to intervene and reveal the double standards that meant repression for local artists and protection for international artists. This trend has continued; in 2014 the brief and ultimately overturned impeachment of Gustavo Petro meant that the conservative Rafael Pardo was interim mayor for one month. Within a week, there was controversy, again around Calle 26, as artists noticed the police painting over the graffiti and street art along this free space. Again, there was uproar and graffiti and street artists from different subcultures (Diego Felipe's parents alongside them) "retook" Calle 26. There was even a public backlash and the police eventually had to backtrack and help the local graffiti artists who had come out to paint, providing water and access to the tunnels and walls along the main road.

Then, in 2016, Enrique Peñalosa started his second term as mayor. Although his attitude to graffiti and street art remained ambiguous in the runup to the election, just a few weeks after taking office the newly appointed security secretary publicly associated graffiti with vandalism, street crime, and the deterioration of public space, stating that the new administration would take a zero-tolerance approach to it. A statement from the mayor's office later clarified that the artistic murals would be kept, but this is a distinction that is not made in the law, which focuses on the right to use particular spaces rather than on aesthetic criteria. Peñalosa's approach, therefore, was widely recognized as markedly different from that of Petro's administration. At the very beginning of Peñalosa's term, a stretch of wall along Calle 26 was painted over in pale blue, covering the graffiti and street art that had been there. Images and messages of indignation peppered social media outlets, accusing Peñalosa of getting rid of the graffiti even though it was in an authorized space—and in the color of his campaign, too! As it turned out, it was just the beginning of a new mural that had been commissioned under Petro's term in office, but the frenzied

reaction from artists and other members of the public revealed the perceived instability behind graffiti and street art's newfound status as cultural capital, the general expectations of Peñalosa's administration, and the fierce defense of people's right to the city.

A final example confirms the importance of graffiti and street art's relationship to violence and the political activism of artists. In 2018 a collaboration between the street art collective Puro Veneno and the Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado (MOVICE, National Movement of Victims of State Crimes) produced a mural asking "Quién dio la orden?" (Who gave the order?) It depicted the names and faces of the high-ranking military officials associated with the *falsos positivos* scandal and the figure 5,763, the staggering number of civilian victims of the state crime. Not only was the mural censored by the police, who stopped it before the group had even finished painting, but the military took the two groups to court. The military demanded that the groups delete, within forty-eight hours, any images they had of the mural, whether physical designs or posts on social media, and attempted to ban them from recreating it or similar images in future. Rather than capitulating to their demands, other artists and social movements across the country have taken the image and continue to reproduce it in the face of censorship. Not only that but the court order has since been overturned, demonstrating the potential force of artistic representations of violence in the search for justice.