

Centre for Peace Studies

Lo afectivo es lo efectivo

Art in the affectionate approach of *Casa Mía* in Santander, Medellín

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To Casa Mía

I wrote this thesis as part of my education in Peace and Conflict Transformation at the Centre for Peace Studies. I want to express my gratitude for the perspectives learned from my professors, peers and in particular by the opportunities CPS created and supported outside the classroom. A special thanks goes to my supervisor Jennifer Hays, for supporting me with her feedback and understanding when I needed longer to process both the data and what it means to work in conflicted areas. Thank you Vigdis, for supporting me to get back on track. Thank you, Matthew and Tord, for your feedback and encouraging comments. Thank you Gioel and Kirsten, this thesis would not been without you and my journey in the upcoming years would be a different one, too. Thank you Charly, Christine, Louisa and Caro for supporting me with our friendship during the difficult days on the way. Danke Omi, dafür dass du in Gedanken immer mit mir reist, auch nach Tromsø, Cambridge, Medellín, Wien und Den Haag, die Stationen dieser Reise. Thanks to Nienke and Balint for helping me on the last meters and thank you to Mark. You have been there all the way, from a distance and very close. Gracias por pensentir conmigo.

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Soy porque somos.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on how art is used in the reconciliation work by Casa Mía, a local civil society organization that drives change in its neighbourhood Santander in Medellín, Colombia. It develops a theoretical frame building upon Bleiker's (2001, 2017) notions of the 'faculties of knowledge' and the 'new thinking space', the work of Cohen (2005) and 'creative placemaking', a concept from urban studies. The data for this research was gathered in April and May 2018 through an ethnographic approach using semi-structured interviews, participant observation and a participatory workshop. The analysis responds to the overarching research question, "How does art enable the implementation of the 'affectionate approach' (*afectivo*) to conflict transformation as developed by the civil society organization Casa Mía in Santander, Medellín?" It follows a local approach by first presenting an in-depth understanding of Casa Mía's approach to peace: the affectionate approach and how it has emerged in the context of Santander in the period from 1994 to 2018. The second part of the analysis identifies key functions and qualities of art that enable the implementation of this approach, using the theoretical framework. It analyses how art functions to engage the different faculties of knowledge to change intra- and interpersonal relationships, starting by the bodily. Followingly, it argues how art allows to access, express and transform emotions. In addition, it discusses how art makes place for creativity and imagination and the significance thereof for personal change. Subsequently, the thesis moves beyond the existing literature by analysing these qualities of art and how they interact in a heart-felt thinking space. Art offers a contained frame for intra-personal reflection where the participant can stay distanced in order to get close. It strips barriers between people so affectionate relationships can develop and transform interpersonal relationships. It argues that art can create a space where meaning is co-created, and interpretations of reality are neither right nor wrong. After this deepening, in a final step the concept of creative placemaking is introduced to discuss the spatial dimension. This shows how Casa Mía uses art to reclaim and destigmatize places. This thesis lays out a transdisciplinary framework with special attention to the local context to understand Casa Mía's slogan *lo afectivo es lo efectivo* and to theorize its art-based approach to peace.

About the author

Liv Kaya Aabye is a dancer, physical theatre practitioner and master's student in Peace and Conflict Transformation at the Arctic University of Norway. She attempts to bridge the theoretical knowledge of Conflict and Peace studies with the practical insights of artists working in conflict settings and peace workers using artistic approaches in the pursuit of a world wherein we 'live well together'.

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1 Introduction

In Spanish there exists the word *pensentir*. *Pensar* means to think and *sentir* means to feel. *Pensentir*, then, is a portmanteau, a combination of the two, of thinking and feeling. To my knowledge, there exists no such word in English, as thinking and feeling tend to be separated or even in dichotomic opposition. The word *pensentir* overcomes this distinction, by bringing feeling and thinking together into one entity. *Pensentir* denotes a fundamentally different way to understand the world, which challenges a dominant either-or mindset concerning feelings (the irrational) and thinking (the rational) by recognizing a union between the two which is more than its parts, without negating the distinct qualities of its components.

1.1 Research interest and case

In this thesis, I am interested in how attention to an understanding of reality which includes both feeling and thinking offers new perspectives on peacebuilding. I do so by examining the work of the civil society organization *Corporación Casa Mía* (My House, hereafter referred to as ‘Casa Mía’) that has developed an ‘affectionate approach’ (*afectivo*) in its 25 years of working with youth towards social transformation in Medellín, Colombia. Casa Mía is part of the neighbourhood Santander, which has been one of the most violent areas in a city ridden by a complex and long-standing armed conflict between paramilitary groups, *guerrilla* fighters, death squads, drug lords and the state. Casa Mía has been recognized by inhabitants of the district as a counter-weight to the violence and an effective force to challenge violence as an acceptable practice among the younger generation (Montayo & Martínez, 2013). In its work, Casa Mía stresses the fundamental importance of affection and reflection and their interaction for reconciliation efforts and therefore becomes an interesting case to study *pensentir* in peace work.¹ Moreover, Casa Mía believes that

When young people step into a conflict they feel estranged, separated and deeply alone [...] The crisis of our society is not just rooted in inequality, poverty and violence, but rather in a crisis of values, in a loss of our sense of community, in the death of our capacity to trust one another. Our society is wounded in body and soul. With urgency,

¹ There is no single valid definition of reconciliation in Peace and Conflict studies. Zembylas (2013) defines reconciliation as “a complex, multi-faceted and long-term process of restoring harmony and transforming hostile emotions between rival sides after a conflict” (Zembylas, 2013, p. 101). In this thesis I explore Casa Mía’s approach to reconciliation that concurs with the definition by Zembylas.

we need to recompose the fabric of affection, fill it with friendship, shared work and happiness (Jiménez, 2016, p. 4)

Casa Mía thus has developed methods to restore affectionate relationships in the community. A mural in front of the church of Santander pictures the history of the neighbourhood, starting with images from the countryside, people moving to the city, a period of violence, artists intervening in that context and a path to a future where kids play in the streets and in nature. The mural, admittedly an artist's perspective, gives a prominent role for art in the transformation of the conflict; and indeed, many civil society organizations in Medellín use art as a method in their efforts to foster social transformation.

Conceptualized as an 'alternative language', art is a central tool in Casa Mía's affectionate approach, too. How does our communication shift if we introduce artistic methods – or as Casa Mía says 'alternative languages' to communicate? How does art cater to implementing Casa Mía's vision to "take young people out of the war and add them to the peace" (Interview A)? The central research aim of this thesis is to understand the role of arts in Casa Mía's work, and in so doing examine how art can foster a different understanding of reality (maybe one more corresponding to the concept of *pensentir*) and thereby serve peacebuilding efforts. The research thus follows a constructivist tradition in the belief that our understanding of the world – without neglecting material realities - shapes it.

1.2 Arts and peacebuilding

The study of art as a tool for building peace has been the focal point of an emerging field in research which combines insights from creative therapy, theatre studies, philosophy and peace and conflict studies. Starting from a realization that conflicting parties and conventional peace building approaches tend to get stuck in irreconcilable narratives which cannot be solved by rational approaches alone, practitioners and scholars from this field have turned to art-based methods as alternative approaches to peace that go beyond the purely rational. Recognizing the bodily and emotional aspects of conflict work, scholars from the arts and peacebuilding field stress the capacity of art to engage these dimensions (Cohen, 2005; MacLeod, 2011; Premaratna & Bleiker, Roland, 2018; Zelizer, 2003). Bleiker makes the argument that an 'aesthetic lens' allows us to become aware of the 'different faculties of knowledge' we have to perceive and interact with reality, including emotions, the bodily and imagination. As art engages us with these different 'faculties of knowledge' it may open 'new thinking spaces' in which the reality

can be re-assessed with the help of all these faculties. However, the literature is not clear on how these different kinds of knowledge interact exactly nor has it detailed how the engagement of each ‘faculty’ may contribute to peacebuilding efforts on the interpersonal and community level. This is a gap my thesis tries to fill by an in-depth analysis of the case.

Moreover, in a discussion of setting the agenda for the field in 2012, scholars at Brandeis University have emphasized the need to make explicit the underlying theory of change of arts-based programs to assess their functioning. In response to this call, this thesis will give special attention to understanding the local context and theory of change in which the affectionate approach and the use of art within it emerges. In addition, the field as a whole focuses on the social and lacks attention to the spatial dimension.² For this reason, I will rely on the concept of ‘creative placemaking’ from urban development studies, to explain the impact of the use of arts in Santander.

1.3 ‘Peace from below’

The field of Arts and Peacebuilding is a niche within the broader field of Peace and Conflict studies. A trend in Peace and Conflict studies has been to move away from a state-centric top-down idea of conflict management concerned mainly with economic and military matters, to a multi-actor model of peace which recognizes the importance of local actors and realities. In this ‘local turn’ that started in the 90s, the idea of ‘peace from below’ became prominent as a means of more effective peacebuilding through sub-national governments, emphasising local ownerships and capacity building (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Schierenbeck, 2015). However, in an assessment of the local turn, Leonardsson and Rudd present several critical voices towards this limited understanding of ‘the local’. The focus on sub-governmental state actors would be used to legitimize top-down peacebuilding efforts instead of attending to a diversity local voices including non-state actors. Instead, the critics describe the local rather as the everyday experiences of local communities and “peace from below” as a means of emancipation by emphasising the voices from below (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015, p. 326). In this vein, Richmond notices the importance of furthering the scholarly understanding of empathetic and emancipatory approaches from civil society actors (Richmond, 2014).

² An exception is Cohen’s article ‘Municipalities and the Prevention of Violence: The Contributions of the Arts and Culture’ (2016). She does, however, not use the concept of ‘creative placemaking’.

This thesis is thus also interesting in these regards, as it provides in-depth insights to how a civil society organization conceptualizes peace and peace work and assesses with the affectionate approach an empathetic and emancipatory approach. Moreover, agreeing with the criticism of a narrow definition of ‘the local’, it highlights the importance of everyday experiences to understand the local dimension of conflict transformation. To understand the local approach and context from a local perspective, the research design adopts an ethnographic approach. I was invited to stay with members of the organization and to conduct my fieldwork for seven weeks in April and May 2018.

1.4 Scope and limitations

There is a tension in the wish to go deep into the understanding of how art works on the intra- and inter-personal level and to account for the embeddedness of arts. Whilst scholars coming from creative therapy tend to have a better understanding of the intra-personal dimension of arts-based approaches than political scientists, they tend to lack attention to contextual factors that influence and limit the use and effectiveness of arts-based approaches. I aim to account for the embeddedness of the use of arts in the affectionate approach. I acknowledge, however, that the context influencing Casa Mía’s work is too complex to be exhaustive in the different factors on various levels limiting and influencing its work. Moreover, the aim is not to provide an analysis of the conflict in Santander, but to identify the most important conditions that influence the artistic practices in the reconciliation work as understood by Casa Mía’s members. Furthermore, I am not a psychologist, and therefore have not the background to evaluate the intra-personal processes suggested in the explanations given by participants nor the theories which I adopt from scholars taking a more philosophical stance on the matter. The findings should therefore be taken as inside-perspectives from the research participants (bringing to our attention valuable ‘voices from below’) and the theoretical considerations as hypotheses that provide a preliminary understanding and can guide future research.

1.5 Contributions of the research project

The thesis strives to deepen the understanding of the interactions between different faculties of knowledge and thereby to overcome a dichotomous understanding of rational and non-rational approaches in conflict work. Moreover, it explores placemaking in the research field. Furthermore, it offers a unique combination of insights from different disciplines (peace and conflict studies, creative therapy, urban development, political sciences, philosophy of

aesthetics) to the transdisciplinary field. However, this contribution is primarily driven by the intention to develop a theoretical framework that deepens our understanding of the case. The ethnographic approach allows me to present in-depth insights from an organization that has been working with art in reconciliation work for twenty-five years in a long-standing and dynamic conflict. By doing so I contribute insights from a Colombian Spanish-speaking organization from a non-Western context to an English-speaking audience.

1.6 Research questions

In this research I aim to answer the following question:

How does art enable the implementation of the “affectionate approach” to conflict transformation as developed by the civil society organization Casa Mía in Santander, Medellín?

In order to answer the general research question and responding to the call to examine the underlying theory of change, I identify the following sub-questions:

1. What is the affectionate approach to peace?
 - a. What kinds of violence is Casa Mía confronted with in Santander?
 - b. How does Casa Mía imagine peace?
 - c. How does Casa Mía work to achieve the above described peace?

2. How does Casa Mía use art to implement the affectionate?
 - a. What kinds of art does Casa Mía use?
 - b. What are the qualities of art that allow Casa Mía to implement the affectionate approach on the intra- and inter-personal and on the community level?

1.7 Structure

The thesis structure is as follows: the second part of the introduction provides a brief background to the conflict dynamics in Santander by outlining the national conflict and the conflict in Medellín. Moreover, I present the existing studies that discuss the work of Casa Mía. The second chapter presents the theoretical framework which focuses on the use of art in conflict transformation. The third chapter presents the methodology, wherein I present the ethnographic approach and the methods applied during fieldwork (participant observation, semi-structured interviews and a participatory workshop). The fourth chapter is divided in two parts. The first part analyses the affectionate approach by Casa Mía and answers the first sub-

questions. The second part analysis the use of arts in Casa Mía's work and answers the second set of sub-questions. The conclusion gives a summary of the research findings and thereby answers the main research question.

1.8 Background to the conflict in Santander

The case study took place in Santander, a neighbourhood in the Northwest of Medellín, the capital of the Colombian province Antioquia. I start with a short introduction to Colombia before zooming in to the streets where Casa Mía is working towards social transformation.

1.8.1 Colombia and its conflict

Colombia is a country with great diversity in its population and richness in landscapes. This diversity is reflected in over 70 languages that are spoken in the country, of which Spanish is the main one. It is the legacy of the Spanish colonization along with the introduction of Christian faith and a history of repression toward the local population. Today, only 3.4% of the population is considered indigenous (Melo, 2017). In recent decades the country has seen increased urbanization, starting in the 1950s. With an almost doubling of the GDP over the past 20 years, Colombia is considered a middle-income country with one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America. Nonetheless, 28% of the population is living in poverty (Brandon, Cunha, Freije-Rodríguez, & Marchesini, 2015; World Bank, 2016a).³

To understand the contemporary conflict requires understanding Colombia's history and its search for identity.⁴ The subtitle of *Historia minima de Colombia* by Jorge Orlando Melo (2017) describes Colombia as a country that has been oscillating between “war and peace, poverty and well-being, authoritarianism and democracy”. This research will focus on of the recent armed conflict between 1964-2016 in which estimated 200 000 people have lost their

³ 28% refers to the national poverty line. According to World Bank, in 2011 4.5 % of the population lived in extreme poverty on less than 1.9 USD per day (World Bank, 2016b).

⁴ Due to the scope of the thesis I only look at the more recent history of the Colombia. For the interested reader in a historical perspective of the conflict, I recommend the book by Bushnell, Montilla & Claudia (2005) *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself*. The authors offer an overview of Colombia's history starting before the colonization of the land until today.

lives and which led to massive internal displacements, forcing 3.9-5.5 million people to leave their homes (Phillips-Amos, 2016).⁵

The civil war from 1946-1957 gave rise to left-winged *guerrilla* groups in the late 60s, including the Leftist National Liberation Army (ELN), the Maoist People's Liberation Army (EPL), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and M-19. These groups financed themselves inter alia by kidnappings and drug trafficking, leading to instability and insecurity. In reaction to the military's lack of significant success in tackling the *guerrilla* groups, and under the mantra of security, in 1968 the government legalized private armies in the name of protection and fight against the *guerrilla*. Phillips-Amos (2016) comments on the situation that:

The historical outsourcing of the fight against the guerrillas to the civilian population created a discourse in which an extra-state armed civilian right wing was viewed as a necessary security measure rather than a terrorist infrastructure, despite the fact that human rights organizations have routinely attributed 70–80 percent of the casualties in the civil war to these same paramilitary forces. (p. 98)

The confrontation between *guerrilla*, the state, drug lords and paramilitaries affected the population both in rural and urban areas, though there are differences in the intensity of how areas have been affected. The paramilitary was officially demobilized and in 2016 a peace accord between the Santos government and the largest *guerrilla* organization, the FARC, was signed. The deal was rejected in a national referendum by a tiny majority of the population, demonstrating the difficulties to find a balance between amnesties, which allow for an agreement with an armed group, and the call for justice. A revised version has been signed in November of the same year and officially ended 52 years of armed conflict in Colombia.

Colombia has been termed a “pre-postconflict zone” by Theidon (as cited in Phillips-Amos, 2016, p. 99). Violence mirroring warfare and persistent corruption in cities that are hypothetically “at peace” is a reality facing citizens, policy makers, activists, and theorists in Colombia and elsewhere (Muggah & Krause, 2009; Spear & Harborne, 2010; cited in Phillips-Amos 2016, p. 99). Nowadays, in the post-peace agreement phase since November 2016,

⁵ Depending on who you ask: the lower number are estimates from the government, the second one published by a human rights consultancy.

violence is still present and in some places resurgent. Dissidents of the FARC have been rearming, EPL and AGC (Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) are spreading at the coast. While the general homicide rate has declined since the agreement, human rights defenders and community leaders have increasingly be targeted. Depending on the source, between 179 and 343 have been killed in the period from November 2016 to August 2018 (Forst, 2018, p. 9). The recent influx of refugees from Venezuela has created extra stress on the situation. Another problem is corruption. For this paper, I am interested in how the conflict dynamics and economic situation described above has influenced the ‘affectionate approach’ designed by Casa Mía to promote human rights and reconciliation and the artistic tools employed for that approach.

1.8.2 Medellín

Like the country, Medellín could be described as a ‘pre-postconflict zone’, having experienced cycles of conflict and post-conflict policies employed by the government and municipality in the past decades. The image of Medellín, though, has changed, from infamously being the hometown of drug lord Pablo Escobar and the most violent city of Latin America in the late 80s and early 90s, to a city of innovation, honoured by awards for its participatory city development and advanced transport systems connecting neighbourhoods across all strata (‘Colombia's Medellín named “most innovative city”’, 2013).

Despite its entrepreneurial and bottom-up organization, Medellín is marked by high levels of inequality. Due to its location, Medellín has been relatively isolated from the rest of the country and developed a strong local economy. Returns from mining were reinvested in the local industry and stimulated an entrepreneurial spirit. But industrialization increased tendencies of inequality and fast-paced urbanization exacerbated the situation. The population rose significantly from 20 000 in 1870 to 140 000 in 1938 and quadrupled until 1951 (Martin, 2014). It increased even more rapidly when the national conflict and later the incorporation of land for large-scale production of coca for the drug industry led to displacements of smaller farmers from the 50s to the 70s. Whilst the city development was intentionally planned in the first decades of the 20th century, the city planners could not keep up with the rapid increase in population. Consequently, new settlements happened unorganized and without much influence of the state, particularly in the higher suburbs of the city, today known as *barrio populares*. Here, the absence of the state led on the one hand to participatory organization of the

communities in the local neighbourhoods, on the other hand created a power vacuum which soon got filled by armed groups competing for power.

In the late seventies and early eighties, independent gangs (*combos*) were seizing power in local neighbourhoods, controlling micro-traffic and asking for protection money (*vacunas*). Armed guerrilla forces extended their struggle into the urban spaces, followed by the paramilitaries, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), who were confronting each other in the neighbourhoods and were incorporating the young men from the combos into their structures. The 'invisible boundaries' that separate the territory of one gang from the next were lines of heavy confrontations for upholding and increasing control where the state was no longer in control. On top of this, Medellín became a centre for drug trafficking. In 1988, the minister of justice ordered the capture of Pablo Escobar and Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, the heads of the Medellín cartel. This led to a bitter fight between the drug lords and the government (Orlando Melo, 2017), increasing the number of homicides per year in Medellín which peaked in 1991 with 6349 people losing their lives and making Medellín the most violent city of Latin America at that time (Martin, 2014).

Quintero Saavedra and Jiménez (2018) comment that “This violence ingrained itself into all social spheres, particularly in the areas where indifference and the abandonment of the state reigns. Our communities have been obligated to live together with a culture of death and fear.” (p. 15).

The culture of death is poignantly visible in the presence of *sicarios*, contract-killers. Like in the other armed groups, most perpetrators and victims have been young men. According to Salazar (as cited in Martin, 2014), an important driver to become a hit man for youngsters was the wish “to be someone” and to be recognized and to make a living “in an emotional way” even if it was just in the neighbourhood (p. 154). Youth gangs and contract-killers in Medellín, according to Martin (2014), were ridden by nihilism and totally depoliticised. Often, they would not know whom they killed, what the profession of the person was and less the reasons why the person had to die.

In his book *No nacimos pa' semilla* (“We were not born to grow”) Salazar depicts the impact the violence and the presents of contract-killers had on the youth, shows how the violence has influenced the language used, the popularization of *parlache*. At first, *parlache*, the slang of the streets and the youth in Medellín, was developed by criminal gangs for having terms that

an outsider could not understand. However, soon these words were adopted by Medellín's youth and became popular among them. Salazar (as cited in Martin, 2014) identifies nine synonyms for killing and many others for topics related to crimes. Expressions like “we were not born to grow, to die we were born”⁶; “we are living the extras”⁷ and addressing a dead comrade with “great, now you are where you belong”⁸ (p. 155) illustrate how deeply a culture of death was part of the context for young people who grew up in the 80s and 90s in Medellín.

There were also economic reasons to engage in criminality. Depending on the victim, the remunerations for a person killed could be either very small or significant; they were used to finance a new motor bike, the prime status symbol in the *barrios populares*, or even a new home in one of the upper-class neighbourhoods. Primarily, however, the income was used to support the family (Martin, 2014). In Medellín, there is a saying, and I heard it in various conversations, which goes like this: “Son, bring me the money, bring it in a good way, if that is not possible, bring it to me” (e.g. informal conversation, 16.05.2018)⁹. To support the family is something that is taken as a given in most households. Job opportunities are scarce, inequality and poverty high and the opportunities to gain money illegally omnipresent. In that way, it becomes hard to resist the persuasion of ‘easy’ money available either as contract killers or in partaking in drug trafficking.

From 1993 to circa 2006, right-wing paramilitary groups were carrying out “social cleansing” whilst the government attempted to “pacify” areas of the city where it had lost control by military operations (Gioacchino, 2018, p. 22; Phillips-Amos, 2016, p. 103). The most infamous and debated ones were called ‘Orion’ and ‘Mariscal’ in 2002; under the government of Alvaro Uribe Velez, circa 1000 military and police forces entered into *Comuna 13* (district thirteen) and led to mass disappearances, deaths of 200-300 mostly young people, forced recruitment and “a general shredding of the social infrastructure” of the neighbourhood (Gioacchino, 2018; Phillips-Amos, 2016, p. 102). The paramilitary was officially demobilized between 2002 and 2006. This has not, according to most of the people I interviewed, led to an end of the conflict. Instead, the conflict has transformed yet another time into more subtle and invisible forms of violence, e.g. prostitution, domestic violence, absent parents and extortions. The intertwined

⁶ *No nacimos pa' semilla; Pa' morir nacimos.*

⁷ *Estamos viviendo las extras.*

⁸ *Bacano, ya estás en lo tuyo.*

⁹ *Mijo, traeme la plata, traeme la buena, y si no se puede, traemela.*

relationships between the state and illegal groups and the historically necessary self-sufficiency of the citizens in the lower-class neighbourhoods have led to a complicated relationship between the citizens and the state.

1.8.3 Santander

Casa Mía works to keep young people from joining one or the other armed groups in the neighbourhood Santander, belonging to *Comuna 6* (district six) in the Northwest of the city. Santander has been one of the most violent areas of the city as eight combos were competing for power, creating many ‘invisible boundaries’ and conflict lines. Santander is one of the areas of the city where mainly former farmers started moving to in the 50s in the hope of economic opportunities or because of the conflict in the rural area. Like in other Colombian cities, locations in Medellín are ranked according to six *estratos* (translatable to both class and location). Citizens pay fees for public services and receive subsidies accordingly. *Estrato* six is the high and expensive end and *estrato* one designates the poorest areas. In 2005, 60.3% of the inhabitants of *Comuna 6* were socio-economically ranked as belonging to *estrato* two (low), 27.1% as *estrato* three (middle-low) and 12.6 % as *estrato* one (low-low) (Municipio de Medellín, 2005).

1.8.4 Research on Casa Mía

Casa Mía has started in the early 90s and was officially founded in 1994. The cultural house Casa Mía in Santander, uses an affectionate approach to promote a ‘logic of co-existence’ to counter a ‘logic of violence’. Casa Mía’s work has attracted the interest of newspapers and of young scholars: three theses and one chapter of a doctoral thesis have been written about their work. Montayo and Martínez (2013), master’s students of Education Studies, offer an in-depth analysis of the methodologies employed by Casa Mía and reflect on what teachers at Colombian schools could learn from these informal spaces of education for the classroom. Solana (2013), a master student of Political Science, uses path-dependency theory and Casa Mía as a source of information to understand how the social order in the district has evolved from 1985 to 2013 (2013). Moreover, two members of Casa Mía, Quintero Saavedra and Jiménez (2018), have written a thesis about the organization which offers an insiders’ perspective on the conflict-dynamics in Santander and the methodology of the organization. They theoretically ground the work of Casa Mía in ideas of social education and the concept of affection. None of the works above focuses on the arts used as a methodology in the work of Casa Mía, though Montayo and

Martínez and Quintero Saavedra and Jimenéz acknowledge its importance for the work. This is the purpose of my thesis.

2 Theoretical framework

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a theoretical framework for studying the role of arts in the promotion of peace in a local context. To begin with, I provide a definition of art-based approaches. Then, I introduce the different social and political functions of art discussed in the literature and possible explanations for why art can be useful in peacebuilding endeavours. I build upon Bleiker's notion of the 'aesthetic lens' and draw upon Lederach's and Cohen's ideas of how the abilities needed for peace work are similar to those abilities practiced in artistic work (Bleiker, 2001; Cohen, 2005; Lederach, 2005). Next, I synthesise their arguments and additional insights from a number of case studies to show that art possess 'placemaking qualities' in two ways: Firstly, it 'makes place' for the 'faculties of knowledge' (Bleiker, 2001) bodily and non-verbal expression, emotions and creativity come to the fore and at the same time offer new 'thinking-spaces' (Bleiker, 2017) for reflection; Secondly, as studied in urban development, artistic practices are used in 'creative place-making' to develop distinctive, liveable places through community engagement (Adorno, 1997) – a process challenged by conflict dynamics but important for the every-day experience of those affected by a conflict.

Arts-based approaches are not only capable of providing a place for sensual, emotional and creative engagement, but are also always situated *in* a particular place and conflicted context. The embeddedness of artistic approaches, however, often gets ignored (Stephenson & Zanotti, 2017, p. 352). In the theoretical framework I therefor present theories that pay attention to this embeddedness. Shank and Schirch are among the few scholars contributing with insights from Conflict studies, offering a theory of 'strategic arts-based peacebuilding' sensitive to different stages of a conflict (2008). Moreover, scholars reflecting on the Art and Peacebuilding field in 2012 expressed the need to be more explicit about the underlying theories of change of art-based programs (White & Cohen, 2012). The theory of change is depended on the guiding vision of peace. In order to understand Casa Mía's affectionate approach, it thus is important to examine its understanding of peace.

2.1 What is art? A definition of arts-based methods

There exist different kinds of arts. Performing arts, for example, involve the body for artistic expression and are usually performed in front of an audience: e.g. theatre, dance and music.

Visual arts use objects that are modelled by an artist, like painting, sculpturing or film-making. Literature is an art form using written words or texts, including prose, poetry and drama. In this thesis I look at all types of arts observed in the work of Casa Mía.

The question of “What is art?” can lead to endless discussions on the prerequisites of trained skills and techniques and intentional authentic expression for something to be considered ‘art’ or for someone to be recognized as an ‘artist’. The way an artist by profession is able to use the arts for social purposes may differ from a social worker wanting to use the arts for building peace. In my working definition I will include both practices by defining arts as “a way of creative, aesthetic expression”. Aesthetics is the philosophy of human sensual perception, interpretation and representation and discusses matters of taste and beauty. Aesthetic expressions do not need to be beautiful. Bleiker (2001), discussing mainly visual art, argues that there exists art that is not aesthetic, but mimetic. In trying to provide a realistic representation of an object, a mimetic art work would lose its significance, as it merely recreates an object but does not offer new interpretations thereof. According to Bleiker, mimetic art work is artistic but not aesthetic. Likewise, not all aesthetic representation needs to be artistic, as long as they concern how humans perceive, interpret and represent reality. This is possibly the reason that some scholars include ritual into ‘arts-based’ approaches. Moreover, ‘creative approaches’, as used for example at Brandeis University, may include other cultural institutions such as spiritual traditions and other important expressive forms.

In this thesis, I will use creative approaches interchangeably with artistic and aesthetic approaches in the sense of arts-based approaches for peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts. Art I define according to the working definition above, as an act that is both aesthetic and artistic. Though different types of art have different characteristics (e.g. to what extent they engage the body or whether communication happens mediated by an object or not) and therefore function differently, I include all art forms used by Casa Mía.

2.2 Social and political functions of the arts

The social and political function of arts have been studied for centuries. In *The social impact of the arts* Belfiore and Bennet (2008) undertake the laborious task of identifying categories and functions of the arts by analysing literature starting from Classical Greece until today. They do so to present a couple of key ideas about the arts and their effects. They come up with the following categories: *Corruption and distractions; Catharsis; Personal well-being; Education*

and self-development; Moral improvement and civilisation; Political instrument; Social stratification and identity construction; and the Autonomy of the arts and rejection of instrumentality. Their categorization indicates the different dimensions of the psychological, political and social nature of the arts. My point is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of social stratification and identity construction, but to acknowledge this connection. The arts have been employed by states to ‘civilize’ their citizens and as a vehicle for propaganda. In a less coordinated process, the distinction between ‘fine arts’ and ‘popular culture’ has reinforced social stratification by privileging the former and limiting access to it. Art has been a political instrument both by the powerful and been used to challenge power from below. The practice of censorship, for example, demonstrates both the power of the state to subdue critical voices expressed through the arts, as much as it acknowledges the power innate in artistic expression from those challenging political power.

Adorno (1997), who fits the last category of Belfiore’s and Bennet’s (2008) categorization *Autonomy of the arts and rejection of instrumentality*, argues in his philosophy of aesthetics that true art negates its instrumentalization. This, according to Adorno, does not negate its political power, but instead is where its true power lies: By resolving all incoherence within its own logic, it exposes the conflicted nature of the reality of the audience. Adorno’s stance on the vital autonomy of the arts is relevant for contemporary discussions on how to best design and evaluate arts-based peace initiatives, as he rejects the instrumental use of art. Belfiore’s and Bennet’s account is a suitable introduction into the literature on the social function of arts and cautions us that art in itself is neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’ but can be instrumentalized by different actors to serve their interests.¹⁰ After having briefly presented the larger social and political significance of arts, having recognized its potential use to intentionally fuel conflict, as well as having highlighted the discussion of whether the true power of art denies its instrumentalization, I from now onwards focus on how art is used for local peacebuilding efforts.

¹⁰ Bergh and Sloboda (2010) present a collection of studies that display that music has been used to fuel conflict: turbo-folk was to bolster myths of superiority and uniqueness of the Serbian people (Hudson 2003; Bohlman 2003); marching music was employed to foster euphoric feelings during active warfare to marshal troops into battle (McNeill 1995); music was used to torture (Cloonan & Johnson 2002) and to plague and humiliate prisoners of war (Cusick 2006; Bayoumi 2005); lastly, *hakkamah*, female praise singers had misused their skills to encourage *jihad* in Sudan (Lacey 2004).

2.3 Creative peacebuilding in the literature

What have been the arguments made so far for the use of arts in peacebuilding efforts? In the beginning of the millennium, a niche in political sciences has used insights from aesthetic theory to derive to better an understanding of world politics. Within the field of Peace and Conflict studies, however, art has only recently gained attention, maybe starting with the publication of Lederach's *The moral imagination: the arts and soul of building peace* in 2005. In this seminal work, he demonstrates how the requirements of a peace worker are similar to those of an artist, including the creative act of creating something new out of the old. Whereas Lederach looks at the peace worker as an artist, Cohen (1997) stresses the role of artists in peace work. She is the director of the minor Creative Approaches in Peacebuilding at Brandeis University in the US and one of the leading scholars in the field. Despite numerous available publications, she describes the field of Arts and Peacebuilding in an article she recently co-authored as "still emerging" (Hunter & Cohen, 2019).

With a synthesis of the main arguments presented in the literature and by situating local arts-based approaches in peace and conflict studies, I will provide a framework for the case study analysis. Doing so, I will make use of the transdisciplinary nature of the field by using and combining insights from various disciplines in a unique way, thereby contributing to the theory building in this emerging field.

To commence answering this question, it is worth reminding us that though an increasing number of case studies have been published on how art has been used for conflict transformation (e.g. Skyllstad, 2000, Margraff 2002, McClain Opiyo, 2015), scholars still lament a lack of theories to situate their work in (Zelizer 2003, 62; Shank and Schirch, 1; Magak et. al 2015, 37). Lederach (2005) uses the arts in his book *The moral imagination: the art and soul of building peace* in a metaphorical and anecdotal manner to demonstrate that peacebuilding is as much an art as a technical matter. Cohen (2005) goes a step further and advocates for art as a place to restore the abilities necessary for co-existence. The abilities Cohen deems necessary for reconciliation processes are *receptivity, creativity, reflexivity, compassion, communication, vitality, trust* and the *ability to embrace paradox*. She argues that these capacities can be fostered through artistic practices and therefore, artistic practices can be helpful for enabling co-existence. Her framework is one of the few that offer a theory for case studies to situate their work in to explain *what* the functions of art is and *how* it is supposed to function. Similarly, Nussbaum (2011) argues for a shift in development work from a GDP-

based assessment of 'well-being' to fostering 'central capabilities', including *senses, emotions, imagination, and affiliation*; capabilities, she argues, that get hampered by violence. Though Nussbaum does not look at arts-based approaches, her theory works analogously to Cohen's abilities-fostering-framework and is employed with a similar logic for theoretically grounding case-studies as arts-based initiatives restoring abilities destroyed by violence and necessary for overcoming it.

The program Peacebuilding and the Arts at Brandeis University is founded on the idea that conflicts are not fought on rational lines alone, but that "In the conflicts that plague our world today, violence too often insinuates itself into the psyches and spirits, the bodies and souls of children and adults." ('Why Creative Approaches?', 2018). Dialogues in which irreconcilable narratives are contrasted against each other might get us stuck in a place where the desired reconciliation seems unattainable through rational practices alone. Zelizer (2003) reasons in his study of creative approaches during and after the violent conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2000/2001. Artistic practices have been developed in response to the need to find different entry points to a conversation, and review of the literature suggests that they mainly do so by engaging *non-verbal communication, emotions and imagination*. In a time where the rational is praised, these other forms of human knowledge are sometimes labelled as 'irrational'. A more apt description; I would argue, would be 'arational' or 'non-rational', as they certainly interact with but are not necessarily in opposition to the *ratio* nor are they thought in rational terms in the first place.

2.3.1 Turning to the 'aesthetic turn' in Arts and Peacebuilding studies

Bleiker (2001) argues in his article "The aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory" for the inclusion of these other than rational faculties of human knowledge for arriving at a more nuanced and richer understanding of world politics. His theory of the 'aesthetic lens' can not only help us to better understand international politics but enables us to arrive to a more nuanced understanding of how artistic practices might open new possibilities for mutual understanding. His work starts with a critique of realism, as "the modern triumph of technological reason has by and large eclipsed the aesthetic from our political purview" (2001, p. 510). The value of aesthetics would be opposed to 'mimetic' theories of representations of the world, that it would not aim to minimize the distance between the object of study and the representation thereof but would recognize it is exactly this inevitable space where politics are taking place. Even if we could provide a 'realistic' image of reality, it would not further our understanding: It would be

like requesting an interpretation of a text only to receive the original again. The representation of reality expressed in an art work holds information about the worldview and identity of the artist. If we are interested in how people perceive conflict, themselves or how they imagine peace, their aesthetic expressions can serve as valuable data about their perceptions, opening the possibilities for researchers to gain an understanding of local perspectives. Moreover, not only researchers might pay attention to these expressions, but people from opposing camps can look at aesthetic expressions and gain access to the worldview of ‘the other’, possibly helping mutual understanding.

Furthermore, Bleiker (2001) theorizes that we can understand reality through the “faculties of knowledge” of sensual perception, imagination, intuition, emotions and rational inquiry as if it was a musical chord (p. 512). Instead, he complains, we would only perceive one tune dominated by our intellect. Bleiker builds on Deleuze (1994) when he argues to develop ‘para-senses’ instead of relying on a ‘common sense’ dominated by reason, thereby multiplying the angles we can take to make sense of reality (Bleiker, 2001). Applied to arts-based approaches in peace work, by including the faculties of non-verbal communication, emotions and imagination these approaches multiply the possibilities to encounter ‘the other’. An encounter in one domain (for example by recognizing shared emotions in someone’s aesthetic expression) might lead to a dissonance with old prejudices and a renegotiation of the idea we have about the other person, arguably leading to a more multi-faceted idea of the other. To move away from black-and-white thinking might open up grey spaces where reconciliation becomes possible.

Bleiker himself made a ‘turn’ in his writing from applying an ‘aesthetic lens’ to the study international politics towards looking at artistic approaches in peacebuilding. In 2018, Bleiker co-authored a book-chapter with Premaratna on the use of theatre and arts in peacebuilding in a book looking at new developments in the peacebuilding field (Premaratna & Bleiker, 2018). The three main arguments they present are: firstly, arts potentially broaden peacebuilding beyond conventional approaches by engaging emotions; secondly, local artistic engagement offers context-specific solutions and thereby can gain more legitimacy and operate “where it matters the most” (p. 92); and thirdly, arts have the potential to bring out multiple perspectives and voices otherwise unheard by including bodily communication and resulting from the ‘multi-vocality’ of the arts. The multi-vocality, Premaratna & Bleiker explain, stems from the possibility to include several voices and perspectives in a work of art and gets reinforced by the

way how it gets interpreted in multiple, sometimes even contradicting ways, with not one interpretation annihilating the other.

2.4 The placemaking quality of art and its embeddedness in a place

After having presented some of the main arguments made for the use of arts in peacebuilding, I now synthesize the different approaches to provide a framework for the analysis encompassing the core functions of the arts and how they operate: firstly, intra- and interpersonally; secondly, on the community level; and thirdly, as embedded in a specific context. I do so by arguing that the quality that encompasses the relevant qualities of art for peace efforts is its ‘placemaking quality’.

2.4.1 The intra- and inter-personal level

I firstly discuss the intra- and inter-personal dimension, where art ‘makes place’ for (1) bodily and non-verbal communication, (2) emotions and (3) imagination. I then assess how by including these different ‘faculties of human knowledge’, art potentially open up new “thinking spaces” (Bleiker, 2001, 2018) wherein conflicts and trauma can be dealt with creatively with simultaneous cognitive and emotional engagement and detachment, strengthening empathy and reflexivity (Cohen, 2005).

2.4.1.1 ‘Speaking the unspeakable’: bodily and non-verbal communication

Art-based methods make place to engage the bodily and non-verbal ‘faculty of knowledge’. Artistic practices offer a more inclusive approach wherein multiple perspectives can be acknowledged and a deeper understanding of what has been expressed can be obtained by attending to the non-verbal ways of expression emphasised by art. In creative therapy art offers a place for victims of violence to heal through bodily engagement, a step necessary for individual well-being and societal transformation.

According to Wood (1992), 63- 83 percent of all communication happens nonverbally, with meaning being conveyed through “the symbolic channels of facial expression, body posture, and eye movement...carry[ing] important information about emotions, energy, and thought” (as cited in Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 235). Most conventional reconciliation approaches, however, work in verbal ways, paying mostly attention to what is said in linguistic terms. The performative arts, in contrast, emphasize bodily expression, in particular artistic practices like

dance and theatre. This allows us to see more clearly the se other layers. Furthermore, artistic practices in general may include actors otherwise silenced. For example, in cultures wherein women are largely excluded from the public domain, they might be allowed to engage in artistic practices. Therefore, arts-based approaches can provide a forum where they can express themselves and be heard and seen by the community and peacebuilding practitioners (and researchers).

The body is the vantage point and point of contact from which we perceive and act in the world. Our understanding of the world is ultimately rooted in our sensual perception of it. Carrie MacLeod (2011) asks in her study of the conflict in Sierra Leone: “How can one possibly make ‘sense’ of an imposed reality when primary senses have been literally amputated?” pointing to the connection of the body and the mind and the vital importance of an intact relationship between the two in order to live comfortably in this world (MacLeod, 2011, p. 88). To reconnect and repossess the body is thus central in healing processes after traumatizing situations. A dance therapist explains how this might work in a therapeutic setting:

The theory underlying dance therapy is that body movement reflects the inner state of the human, and that by moving the body within a guided therapeutic setting, a healing process begins. Emerging inner conflicts and issues from the unconscious to the consciousness of the person are addressed on all levels—physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Seeking the full integration of mind and body, and bringing harmony between all the aforementioned levels of the human being is what dance therapy is all about (cited in Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 238).

Art thus can be a tool to reclaim the body, which might feel alienated by oppression, abuse and violence. Reconciliation work is done on the premise that individual and relational change is needed for social change. By engaging the bodily faculty of knowledge, art can fulfil an important function in “liberating, transforming, and revolutionizing individuals, relationships, and societies” (Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 237).

Next, through non-verbal expression, stories can be told and heard which would be too overwhelming if put into words. They point out that witnesses, victims and perpetrators of violence might not be able to “simply state” what has happened – an approach often tried in conventional peacebuilding efforts (Thompson, Hughes, & Balfour, 2009, p. 304). Therefore, the quality of arts is sometimes described as allowing to people ‘speak the unspeakable’ and

‘think the unthinkable’. Cohen (2005) argues, that it is not only by finding symbolic and bodily ways of expressing that might make artistic-practices accessible for these sensitive stories, but also the bounded quality and formal structures of artworks and ritual. A painting has a limiting frame, a theatre play has a start and an end. Without the frame, Cohen argues, the painful history might be simply too overwhelming to face. However, though art can provide a ‘safe space’, people working with art in conflict transformation acknowledge that arts-based methods can be risky if not also ‘safe space’ is provided by the leading artist or conflict worker. Bodily expression connects a person to where trauma is stored: in the body. Therefore working on the bodily level brings the risk of re-traumatizing people if “pushed into reliving stories they are not ready to revise and no appropriate guidance is provided” (Thompson et al., 2009, p. 304). People employing artistic methods should be aware of this risk, which, in a setting of creative therapy might promise healing, but in a setting with no appropriate guidance potentially “opens them up and leaves them with nowhere to go” (Hayner, 2002, p. 141).

Lastly, the non-verbal quality of art can bridge language barriers, not just in the sense of complementing verbal expression as elaborated above, but also if opposing camps do not share the same mother tongue. Art is thus a particularly valuable tool to work with in a multi-lingual group in a cross-cultural conflict.

Summarizing the main points, arts-based approaches are potentially more inclusive than other approaches as they may draw our attention to otherwise unheard perspectives. Moreover, they bridge across language barriers and work where trauma is stored and use the “wisdom of the body” for healing purposes. In the next section, we will look at the potential of arts-based approaches to attend to emotions, and how they are important for reconciliation work.

2.4.1.2 Inclusion of emotions

Art engages us with the emotional faculty of knowledge. Conflicts are highly emotional: stereotypes of ‘the other’ are charged with feelings of hatred and fear; the experience of being victimized, whether in having experienced sexual assault or not have been able to protect love ones might be connected to painful feelings of shame. Bleiker and Premaratna (2018) argue that emotions are, however, often considered either irrational or of private nature only and thus are often regarded as little relevant to politics and conventional peacebuilding approaches. In contrast, sustainable peace, they hold, is unlikely to be reached unless “the emotional core of conflict is addressed” (Premaratna & Bleiker, 2018, p. 85). Similar to the argument above, they too believe that “artistic expression offers potential spaces where emotional pain can be

expressed, witnessed and communicated” (2018, p.85). The conflict, Premaratna & Bleiker explain, “is then brought down to a level where personal trauma can be narrated and perhaps even be transformed. Trauma thus becomes humanized” (2018, p.85). ‘Humanizing emotions’ can be understood to validate the experience of emotions, disturbing as they might be, as relevant. To acknowledge their relevance, in addition to important endeavours like establishing a rule of law and building institutions, is to take as important how peace is experienced in the every-day of the people who have suffered violent conflict.

The emotional dimension of arts-based approaches can provide common ground between conflicted parties. At a music festival, a feeling of liveliness and cherishing life can be easily expressed across language barriers and cultural differences. Similarly, art provides a possibility to express extraordinary pain (Thompson et al., 2009). Villalón (2016) who introduces a collection of Latin American articles on arts and conflict transformations, holds that “artistic creations and cultural spaces have become means of bearing witness, humanizing horror and its victims, bringing understanding” (Villalón, 2016, p. 4). Arguably, pain and suffering expressed through the arts can be a place for people to connect, as it is an emotion that all can recognize, despite cultural differences. If arts can provide an expression of the suffering of one party which the other can recognize, then arts might provide a place to establish common ground and humanize the other by validating the existence of pain in the other person. Common ground is an important starting point for reconciliation measures and humanizing the other – e.g. by recognizing the other person’s emotions like suffering and joy – essential for overcoming hostilities.

2.4.1.3 Imagination and creativity

Lederach (2005) explains the core of building peace as the capability to ‘build something new out of the old’. For this, he argues, a creative act is needed. Imagination is one of the faculties of human knowledge discussed by Bleiker (2001) and it is needed for a creative act. Cohen (2005) expands on how arts may foster creativity. An example where arts are used to foster creativity, to imagine the perspective of the other and to explore possible futures is forum theatre developed by the Brazilian theatre maker and educator Augusto Boal; an approach adopted in many (post-) conflict areas around the world.

In forum theatre, actors perform for a local audience a conflict relevant to them, including the undesired but real consequences. The piece is then performed a second time, but this time the

audience is given the chance to intervene and to propose other turns of the story. Alternatively, people might be asked to step in as an actor of one party and be subsequently asked to swap the role with their counter-part from the other side of the conflict. This art form allows participants to jointly experiment with future scenarios in a safe setting and can enable people to literally step into the role of the opposing party and to see and enact the world from their point of view. Imagination is thus used to imagine the reality of someone else, thereby possibly opening spaces for a better mutual understanding. Moreover, imagination is used to imagine in a ‘laboratory for the future’ alternative scenarios of community development.

Furthermore, the generally passive spectators have become what Boal (1998) calls ‘Spect-actors’. In situations where people have been forced into passivity through violence and their possibilities to act as been severely limited, the theatre-setting might be an appropriate field to practice again to become active. Art-making can thus also be understood as a manifestation of agency. This increased agency, Stephenson and Zanotti (2017) hold “can challenge the monopoly of the established reality” and might “suspend the rules governing social life” (p. 344). Arts, they argue, would be able to challenge current imaginaries, and this change on the micro-level would be able to bring about bigger change (Stephenson & Zanotti, 2017, p. 431). An aesthetic worldview, Bleiker (2017) argues, would open up a pluralistic worldview. Similarly, arts-based approaches might open up spaces to imagine alternative futures and thereby possibly encourage people to take steps towards the desired version.

2.4.1.4 ‘Opening new thinking spaces’

After having established from the literature that arts-based approaches can ‘make place’ for bodily expression and perception to stand central, to attend to emotions and imagine the worldview of the other and a common future, we can move on to see that these ‘different senses’ of understanding the world are not isolated from each other. Attending to bodily expression, for example, which can communicate emotions, energies and thoughts that might enable us to better understand the stories told in words. Bleiker (2018) argues aesthetics would open ‘new thinking spaces’ wherein “a communication between the disjointed faculties could take place” (p. 515) without one dominating the other into a “common sense” (p.515). This might multiply the chances for humanizing encounters urgently needed in times when the rational is gridlocked in irreconcilable narratives. He explains with the example of *Guernica*, a painting of Picasso, how an aesthetic experience may allow us “to move back and forth between imagination and reason, thought and sensibility, memory and understanding, without imposing one faculty upon

another” (p.520). Thereby, Bleiker (2017) reflects 16 years later, an aesthetic view can possibly open up new thinking spaces and room for reflection wherein reality (the political world) can be “re-thought”, “re-viewed”, “re-heard” and “re-felt” (p. 260).

Cohen (2005) holds that the quality of this ‘space’ would be one where the heart and the mind can be equally engaged. It is again an argument Cohen makes based on the analogies for capacities needed in peace work and trained in aesthetic experience. Art could train a heart-felt and cognitive space as art train the ability to be fully engaged whilst at the same time detached. A performer, for example, needs to be aware of his or her lines or next steps, follow artists, the space, the audience. The character goes fully into the story, whilst the actor is aware on a meta-cognitive level of what is going on. The simultaneous enactment of both full engagement and detachment may open a space where both the mind and the heart are fully involved in the process. The simultaneous engagement and detachment in a process might enable reflexivity and empathy, both abilities necessary for reconciliation practices. Moreover, “Human beings tend to find the inter-animation of our sensory and rational faculties especially enlivening, causing states of alertness and awareness that are infused with feeling.” (Cohen, 2005, p. 6). To meaningfully understand each other’s suffering, Cohen argues, would require knowledge that is both cognitive and heartfelt. The ‘thinking space’ provided through aesthetic experience potentially has this quality where this needed type of knowledge might emerge.

Bleiker (2017) acknowledges that to open this kind of ‘thinking spaces’ in academia involves risks, as it “is to embrace creativity, and the uncertainty associated with it.” (p. 260). Moreover, it would require from scholars to embrace pluralism, ambivalence, vulnerability and doubt – a space admittedly not easy to be in. Similarly, it might not be easy for peacebuilding practitioners and politicians unfamiliar with the arts to open up to these new pathways of engaging with post-conflict policies and approaches, which engage emotionally and work through the body when serious and ‘hard’ matters are on the agenda (Cohen, 2003). Even more importantly, it asks a step into the unknown for people affected by a conflict to open up to aesthetic experiences which might bring them closer to painful places – be it their own suffering or the one of others known as the enemy - and a peaceful future might be just too far away from the current reality to be easily imagined. It requires courage and a leap of faith and does not promise success (Stephenson & Zanotti, 2017). This is a real barrier to arts-based approaches, as people might not be willing to step into the unknown, even if the known is a conflicted place. To build

something new out of the old, however, Lederach (2005) argues, involves taking a risk and requires a leap of faith.

After having discussed how aesthetic experiences facilitated through arts-based approaches possibly open up new thinking spaces which engage the body, feelings and mind intra- and interpersonally, in the next section I will cover the functions of the arts at the communal level.

2.4.2 Creative placemaking in the community

The term and practice of ‘placemaking’ has been used in urban development studies since the 60s to answer to a so-called ‘placelessness’ of sites with seemingly no or little meaning to its inhabitants. Arts have been used and studied in this practice as ‘creative placemaking’ to develop “distinctive, liveable places through community engagement” (Rapson, 2013, p. 1). Clarke describes creative placemaking as “a discipline that posits the power of the arts to make positive, place-based change” (Clarke, 2018). According to Rapson, this change would happen by a “creative act” in which art is used to connect people to a place (p. 5). Rapson asserts that, “When we’re able to connect to a city or a neighbourhood through an individual or shared cultural experience, there’s a magnetic pull. You want to stay committed. You want to invest. You want to build a future. These are the conditions for civic transformation.” (p .5). An intermediate goal of creative placemaking is thus to make people feel connected to a place. This sense of connection would lead to a dedicated engagement of the community, which might help a place to prosper and make it more liveable for its inhabitants. From a critical standpoint, however, creative placemaking, can have negative effects for the inhabitants of a place. For example, it might initiate a gentrification process of an area, where the arts eventually raise the market value of a place to an extent that the original inhabitants may not be longer able to afford living there.

As urban development literature on arts-based placemaking is not specialized on how their practices would look like in a context of conflict, (although this seems like a promising area of future research), I will not go deeper into their theorizing about arts-based placemaking. Their main concept of ‘creative placemaking’, however, is of high value for this theoretical framework: it draws our attention to the fact that artistic practices can connect people to a place by (re-)signifying it through community engagement in a creative act; and thereby making the place more livable for its inhabitants. There is a similar need, but in a more challenging context, in post-conflict areas: to make a place livable again. This is of dire importance to the people for

whom conflict transformation matters most: the people affected by violence. To engage inhabitants meaningfully in this process or local initiatives brings the promise of ‘local ownership’ of the transformation of a place; local ownership is regarded as an important aspect for successful peacebuilding initiatives. In the analysis chapter of this thesis, I examine how and whether this has been the case for artistic practices organized by Casa Mía in the conflict-ridden neighborhood Santander.

2.5 In place: The embeddedness of arts-based approaches

After having looked at the placemaking quality of the arts by bringing different human faculties to the fore and therefore opening new thinking spaces, and after having turned to the placemaking quality of the arts to engage communities in relating to the place they inhabit in a meaningful way, this section examines how arts-based approaches are always situated *in a place*. On the one hand, arts-based approaches are praised for being necessarily context-specific and therefore potentially attending better to local needs by increasing local agency and local ownership than centralized top-down approaches which tend to be context-insensitive (Premaratna & Bleiker, 2018). On the other hand, there remains the need to define how contextual factors interact with local arts-based peacebuilding approaches (Shank & Schirch, 2008; Stephenson & Zanotti, 2017). For this, a conceptualization of what important contextual factors should be considered becomes necessary. This is the aim of this section. The aim is not, however, to pre-determine what these factors are in the specific context in Medellín, but to enable a discussion between the literature and empirical findings. Therefore, I do not design a list of ‘the most important contextual factors influencing the agency of a local actor in a conflicted context’ which I consequentially examine in the analysis but provide a framework that enables us to look at the context from a local perspective.

2.5.1 Taking into account the stages and intensity of the conflict

A framework offered by Shank and Schirch (2008) addresses the question of *when* different kinds of artistic practice are best to be employed by offering awareness of the different stages of a conflict. It is an example of how peace and conflict studies theory has furthered the theorizing on arts and peacebuilding, a possibility explored by too few until now. Shank and Schirch argue that arts would fulfil four main functions: *waging conflict non-violently*, *reducing direct violence*, *transforming relationships*, and *building capacity* and offer a list of what kind of artistic approach might best fulfil which function. They then go on to demonstrate how one

approach might be helpful at one stage of the conflict but harmful at another and thus request a sensitivity for the intensity and stage of the conflict for artistic approaches being strategically employed. In their model they move from *conflict escalation* (where in the beginning conflict might be positively waged non-violently) to *conflict management* (corresponding to the need of reducing direct violence) to *conflict transformation* (transforming relationships) to *conflict prevention* (capacity building). Shank and Schirch thus offer a theoretical framework which is attentive to the different stages of a conflict and suggest what types of artistic intervention might be best suited when. They request an analysis for implementing art-based approaches ‘strategically’ which is taking into account the intensity and stage of the conflict.

2.5.2 Critique of ‘strategic arts-based approaches’

Authors in line with Adorno, who believe that the power of the arts resides in its autonomy, might challenge the efforts by Shank and Schirch to strategically implement arts-based approaches. Stephenson and Zanotti hold that the effects of artistic interventions are unpredictable. Though they believe that artistic engagement possibly strengthens the agency of local actors in conflicted areas, they follow Marcuse in the belief that “that the true power of arts is when it subduces itself from the prevailing political and social context it is born from” (Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 342). In consequence, an analysis of conflict dynamics would be irrelevant. However, seemingly contradicting the above, they also state that “both agency, imagination and aesthetics [...] are exercised in existing social structures and assumptions whose boundaries they may well challenge, but whose strictures must nonetheless be acknowledged” (p. 344). The arts thus need to be a bridge between the imagination of a “cosmos of hope”, an imagined reality, and the daily realities they try to transform (p. 351). We thus arrive here to a paradoxical situation, where art is considered to be most powerful if it escapes the reality it is embedded in; simultaneously acknowledging its necessary embeddedness; and the need for people to still be able to relate to it. In the analysis, I thus tend to what kind of realities are imagined at Casa Mía and acknowledge that the political and social context remain important to understanding the existence and limitations of their approach.

2.5.3 Arts contextual ambidextrousness

Shank and Schirch turn to Augsburg (1992) to draw our attention to cultural customs that might require more directness or indirectness of peacebuilders for a culturally sensitive communication (Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 233). In a more formalized ‘high context’, Augsburg argues, the stage could serve as a helpful intermediary to connect people to the stories

being told. Moreover, changing names and places could provide a safe distance to not only save face, but actually to talk about people's own challenges and everyday experiences. In a 'low context' with less complex formalities guiding communication patterns, arts could address societal problems more directly. The capacity of arts to respond to both the needs of direct and indirect communication equally well is termed "contextual ambidextrousness" of the arts. International practitioners, Shank and Schirch argue, should thus not only be aware of the stage of the conflict is in, but also what kind of communication the cultural context requires.

2.5.4 Underlying theories of change as part of the context

In a working session on "Strengthening Work at the Nexus of Arts, Culture and Peacebuilding" hosted by Search for Common Ground, one of the biggest peacebuilding NGOs based in the United States, the attendees requested an articulation of the underlying theories of change of arts-based approaches (White & Cohen, 2012, p. 6). The theory of change as defined by a local organization can be understood as part of the local approach and context. To spell out the theory of change is to make explicit how the programs designed are thought to contribute to a desired shift at the individual, relational, communal possibly inter-communal level. A Peace and Conflict studies perspectives illuminates that the theory of change is guided by an actor's understanding of Peace. Richmond (2014) demonstrates in his trajectory of the developments in Conflict Studies how the way peacebuilding is pursued depends on the idea of Peace. In existing studies of arts-based peacebuilding, the answer to 'What is Peace?' is too often merely assumed. To spell out the theory of change requires: an articulation of what in the context is regarded as problematic (e.g. what kinds of violence and problems exist and are targeted) towards realizing a desired goal (the peace envisioned) and how are they thought to best be overcome (the peacebuilding approach/the theory of change) with the capacities at hand (depending on the actor; its possibilities and limitations).

2.6 Application of the theoretical framework to the analysis

To arrive at a deeper and embedded understanding of art in peacebuilding requires analysing how art gets instrumentalized as part of a local peacebuilding approach. The analysis therefore first examines the affectionate approach of Casa Mía. To do so, I start with looking at what kinds of violence are present in the context of Casa Mía and which ones Casa Mía aims to address. Next, I present what kind of peace Casa Mía envisions. Followingly, I discuss the approach Casa Mía developed for achieving the above examined peace, considering the fact

(Kawulich, 2005, p. 2) context. Finally, I analyse how Casa Mía has used art in the implementation of its approach. In this third part I use the framework setup above, looking at how art functions on the intra- and inter-personal level and how on the communal level in the neighbourhood Santander.

Bleiker (2017) cautions us that the ‘thinking space’ unlocked by an aesthetic lens or experience does not only require an openness to something new also excludes, “conceals as much as it reveals” (p. 263). Many of the theories presented here are developed by ‘Western’ or scholars educated at ‘Western’ institutions. Steele (2017) criticizes aesthetic theory for being mostly Eurocentric and argues for moving beyond a ‘Western lens’ (cited in Bleiker, 2017). Similarly, at Brandeis University they realize that most publications stem from the ‘global North’. One way to mitigate this dilemma, Bleiker suggests, is to be open-minded and self-reflective. Though these are needed starting points, they might not help us to see our blind spots. Villalón’s (2016) request for an ‘epistemology from below’ seems to be more promising for including voices until now unheard within the ‘aesthetic turn’ and peace studies. Though this theoretical framework is largely based on theories developed in the West, in my methodology I elaborate how I aim to follow Villalón’s call. Namely, by providing much space to the voices of people from Santander I encountered during the fieldwork to enable a conversation between theory and practice. Though the written account of the thesis starts with the theory -and thereby the academic voice stands at the fore - the theoretical framework has been developed and adopted during the entire research process, moving back and forth between theory and empirics. The next chapter outlines the methodology employed for this thesis.

3 Methodology

The main methodology for this study is ethnography, including the following methods for data collection: participant observation, semi-structured interviews and a participatory workshop with people involved in Casa Mía’s work. The research design thus mixes traditional qualitative methods from anthropology and social sciences and participatory methods developed by participatory action researchers. The purpose of this section is to briefly introduce ethnography and why it has been chosen as the approach for this research project. It also describes the different ways that data has been collected for the analysis. Finally, the limitations, strengths and ethical concerns of the research design are discussed.

3.1 Ethnographic approach

Ethnography is a methodology developed within anthropology and sociology for the study of people. Researchers using ethnography are interested in people and their social interactions and practices and, importantly, how the people under study are making sense of them. For this purpose, ethnographers go to a certain place and conduct ‘fieldwork’. There, they use ethnographic methods including observation, interrogation and participation to provide, as Marshal and Rossman (1989) say, “a systematic description of events, behaviours and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study” (as cited in Kawulich, 2005, p. 2).

Ethnography adheres to an ontology that recognizes the importance of social structures from which follows a need to analyse them to arrive to a better understanding of a situation. Ethnographic researchers tend to adopt an interpretivist epistemology, which is distinct from the positivist approach prevalent in other disciplines where the use of quantities methods is more common. The value of descriptive ethnographic work is grounded in the ideographic idea of cultural science which recognizes the value of understanding the specific or particular (Jorgenson, 2015). In contrast, positivist nomothetic approaches of the natural sciences focus on identifying causalities through repeated empirical observations to derive generalizations. For the latter, ethnography is regarded as useful for exploratory research in the beginning stage of a research project. The exploration and description of ethnographic work from a positivist perspective can be the starting point for a research endeavour, contributing to a scientific, explanatory, nomothetic theorizing (Jorgenson, 2015). Another approach, independent from a positivist stance on theory, developed inter alia by Glaser and Strauss, is to use the data collected by ethnographic work and qualitative methods for deriving ‘grounded theory’ (Jorgenson, 2015). According to Bray (2008), its values lies in the flexible process by which it takes place, “giving precedence to empirical findings over theoretical formulating” (2008, p. 296). As in contemporary research mixing methods and testing innovative research designs has become increasingly popular, there are certainly multiple ways of using ethnography as a useful research methodology.

This research project aims primarily at understanding the specific case under study. The analysis of the case study, however, also abstracts ideas that can deepen our understanding of the arts in peacebuilding more broadly. Moreover, the work is well suited to serve as an exploratory work for those who wish to conduct future research with different designs on specific aspects and arguments of the study.

3.1.1 Objectivity, (inter-)subjectivity and validity

Criteria for validity of ethnographic research and other methodological concerns depend on the epistemological understanding of the researcher, e.g. whether she claims the possibility of objectivity or strives towards it but accepts the intersubjective nature of the understanding of reality.

Kawulich (2005) distinguishes between internal and external validity. The former is concerned with whether one has understood correctly the expressions of the research participants; whereas the latter is concerned with how the data has been interpreted and whether the interpretation is generalizable from the sample selected to the population it is thought to represent. In line with Bray (2008), Jorgenson (2015) argues that working inductively by way of a “logic of discovery” (p. 8) offers advantages in research validity, as one is dependent on accessing the insiders’ realities. Yet, he cautions, an inductive research design also places special demands on the researcher. The definition of the research question, the formulation of the concepts as well as the choice of appropriate indicators need to be developed and refined continuously during the research process while at the same time conducting demanding fieldwork (Jorgenson, 2015). This research project follows an inductive research design to maximise the depth of understanding of local insights. Moreover, for the purpose of strengthening both internal and external validity I make use of Malinowski’s distinction between ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ perspectives.

3.1.1.1 ‘Emic’ and ‘etic’

Malinowski greatly influenced anthropology studies in Europe and Britain with his ground work for the particularizing approach and its concern for the perspectives of natives, or insiders, called ‘emic’, as opposed to the ‘etic’ outsider’s viewpoint concerned with generalizing and theorizing. (Jorgenson, 2015). This distinction is stressed in the section of data presentation and analysis to be transparent about what represents the expressions and opinions of the research participants and what is the interpretation of the researcher.

A clear distinction between the two increases the validity of the study, as the reader can discuss and counter the interpretation of the author. However, as Jorgenson (2015) observes, there is growing consensus in the social sciences since the 1980s that meaning is constructed by processes of social interactions from which meaning is derived intersubjectively. Due to the intersubjective nature of how we conceive reality, this distinction between the emic and etic is never absolute, as even the focus and viewpoint will influence what the researcher presents as

the emic perspective of the local community. The scholarly response to this challenge has been to practice reflexivity on how the positionality of the researcher influences her understanding of the observed. By this, the researcher aims to be transparent in why she accesses and emphasised certain data and maybe overlooks other aspects meaningful to the community being studied. A section on positionality comes at the end of the methodology chapter as a starting point for making explicit how the background of the researcher has influenced the process of collecting and interpreting data.

3.1.2 Gaining access and building rapport

Gaining access and building rapport are part of the key conditions for deciding whether ethnography is the appropriate choice of methodology for a study (Jorgenson, 2015). According to Jorgenson (2015) the most important of these conditions are: Firstly, the perspectives of native members of a situation are of central interest to the research; Secondly, the researcher can acquire access to the people and their activities; and, Thirdly, that the required information can be collected by ethnographic methods such as direct or participant observation, interviews, documents and other sources available in the fieldwork setting. Ethnography is used here to study local reconciliation methods that use art in a dynamic post conflict area: local perspectives are thus central to the research. Gaining access to a research site can be problematic without the support of ‘gatekeepers’, people from the community who can facilitate access into the local setting. Agar (1980) suggests finding a key informant who can assist as literally a key to the group one wishes to study. According to Agar, key informants should be people who are “respected by other cultural members and who are viewed to be neutral, to enable the researcher to meet informants in all of the various factions found in the culture.” (as cited in Kawulich, 2005, p. 12).

I was fortunate to gain smooth and quick access to the community in Casa Mía by being introduced to two of the current leaders of the organization via a friend. She was finishing a participatory action research project for her doctoral thesis with leaders of youth-led civil society organizations, including Casa Mía, when I was looking for a case to study. As she had established bonds of appreciation and friendship with the leaders of Casa Mía, her recommendation opened the door for a skype interview in February 2018 prior the fieldwork. In that conversation, I could feel how the trust towards my friend and colleague transferred to how I was approached and welcomed. The two current leaders of the organization became my key informants and facilitated my access to other community members I observed and talked

to for my research. They offered to let me to stay in their house, which served as an extended office of the organization with young and old people from the community dropping in and out. My hosts are highly esteemed by the community and different groups in the conflict. This trust is based on a record of over more than 25 years of working with actors from all sides of the conflict. They could be described as 'neutral', as Agar (1980) deems important, or as 'all-partial' as they stress the importance of an inclusive approach where every person or group of the neighbourhood can turn to.

After having gained access to a research site, the next step is building rapport. Kawulich (2005) describes building rapport as a time-consuming process involving the establishment of trusting relationships so that community members feel assured that the information gathered and reported will be presented accurately and dependably. She emphasizes that rapport-building involves active listening, "showing respect and empathy, being truthful, and showing a commitment to the well-being of the community or individual" (Kawulich, 2005, p. 14). According to Kawulich, confidentiality and reciprocity are important aspects of building rapport. The first can be assured, by, for example, assuring anonymity of the research participants. Reciprocity, Johansson (2015) argues, is expected as the relationship between the ethnographer and the research participants is structured by a debt; with the researcher having to "pay back" in one form or another for the time, research data or assistance received (Johansson, 2015, p. 55).

In general, the people from Casa Mía and other research participants were generous with offering their time and insights without asking anything in return. Only in a few conversations did I notice expectations of receiving a monetary reward for access to the knowledge and experience shared with me. Except for a minor fund of 250€ for a community workshop (the participatory workshop which as well served as a reunion), I could not offer money and was explicit that my research will probably not result in funding opportunities for the organization. However, raising awareness about the contributions of local peacebuilding initiatives within academia will hopefully lead to more funding for the civil society sector in the long-run, if communicated to policy-makers and possible donors. Changing where money flows in the peacebuilding sector is a mid- to long-term process of which Casa Mía will not likely be a direct beneficiary on the short term. Therefore, reciprocity was practiced in the daily interactions, e.g. by supporting during events, teaching English to some of the young people visiting Casa Mía and by sharing my practice as a theatre and dance instructor. Moreover, facilitating two contact dance/physical theatre workshops allowed me to deepen the relationships with those who

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attended and strengthened mutual trust. I experienced this to be the case, as dancing together opened the interactions for bodily and emotional communication and thereby took place on multiple layers of the persons I was interested in understanding, which would be more difficult to approach in a merely verbal exchange. Thus, artistic practices were used to give something back to the community and in the pursuit of deepening the understanding of how they can help transforming conflicts.

3.2 Data collection

The fieldwork took place during seven weeks from April to May 2018, during which data was collected using participant observation, semi-structured interviews and a participatory workshop. The following section describes participant observation, outlines the possible degrees of participation by the researcher and argues for why it has been chosen as a method for this research.

3.2.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is one of the main methods of data collection within ethnography. It is used to study what exactly people do, how they behave and interact and how they give meaning to their (inter)actions. The researcher does so by observing people in their natural setting and by participating in those activities (Kawulich, 2005, p. 2). Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) describe participant observation as the process that enables researchers to provide a “written photograph” using their five senses (as cited in Kawulich, 2005, p. 2). This process thus requires from the researcher the same processes of gaining access and building rapport as described in the ethnography section. It furthermore requires active engagement with the activities and people involved and at the same time to keep or return to an observing stance to be able to describe what has been experienced and observed. The researcher jots down what she or he observes in the moment or as soon as feasible after and completes the observation in more extensive descriptions of what has happened; keeping a distinction between observations, interpretations and other thoughts the researcher deems important. The observations are collected in systematic fieldnotes which provide the data for analysis.

3.2.1.1 Degree of participation

Stocking (1983) divides participant observation into three phases: participation, observation, and interrogation; and identifies a shift in emphasis from Malinowski and Mead who put little

weight on participation in the beginning of the 20th century, to modern studies in which the researcher would usually take a participatory stance (as cited in Kawulich, 2005). In other words, older accounts took more of an outsider perspective and developed into a range of degrees of participation of the researcher, who aim at looking at a case from an insider perspective (Kawulich, 2005, p. 4).

Both Jorgenson (2015) and Kawulich (2005) discuss the degree of participation of the researcher. The degree of participation ranges from *non-participation* to *passive participation* (present at some scenes) to *active participation* (active in most or all aspects of life and lastly) to *full participation*. Jorgenson argues that it is the active participation which distinguishes the method from other methods of observational inquiry:

By participating in human life, the researcher acquires direct access to not only the physically observable environment but also its primary reality as humanly meaningful experiences, thoughts, feelings, and activities. Through participation, in other words, it is possible to observe and gather many forms of data that often are inaccessible from the standpoint of a nonparticipating external observer. Participant observation consequently is one of the premier methods for conducting investigations of the realities of human existence in their totality as they exhibit external, physical characteristics and internal, subjective, and personal features as well as intersubjectively and socially meaningful properties. (p. 2)

Kawulich (2005) differentiates the stances of the observer from *complete observer* (= non-participation) to *complete participant* (= full participation), holding that the most ethical way of conducting observation is that of an observer as participant (= passive or active participation), “as the researcher's observation activities are known to the group being studied, yet the emphasis for the researcher is on collecting data, rather than participating in the activity being observed” (p. 9). For Kawulich, it is thus transparency about the intentions of the researcher which renders it ethical. Moreover, she argues, the observer as participant stance would allow the community to control the data provided, as they are aware of being observed. For some research projects this is challenging, especially if they touch upon sensitive topics people might not want to share easily or projects that aim at discovering discrepancies between what people say or think they do and what they are actually doing. The ethical questions in that moment is what has more weight, the science or the self-determination of the people under

study. The researcher thus needs to decide whether the question can nevertheless be addressed in a feasible way respectful to the people who participate in the study.

3.2.1.2 Benefits of participant observation

Bernard (1994) argues that one of the benefits of participant observation is that it eventually reduces the incidences of ‘reactivity’, that is of people acting in a certain way when knowing they are being observed. (cited in Kawulich, 2005, p. 12). The idea behind this is that people may change their behaviour to please the researcher by fulfilling assumed expectations or hide certain aspects of their every-day life they do not want to share. A longer period of participant observation familiarizes community members with the researcher and in consequence they stop being reactive to the researcher’s presence. Moreover, according to Bernard participant observation allows the researcher to develop questions that make sense in the native language and are culturally relevant (cited in Kawulich, 2005); Therefore, participant observation can decrease participant bias and enhance internal validity. Bernard goes further and claims that participant observation lends credence to one’s interpretations of the observation as it allows the researcher to get a better understanding of what is happening in the culture (cited in Kawulich, 2005); thereby increasing external validity. Schensul, Schensul and Le Compte (1999) add that participant observation helps the researcher to “get the feel for how things are organized and prioritized”, and an understanding of local taboos and social interactions (cited in Kawulich, 2005, p. 11). These insights can guide relationships with participants and ease the access to and contact with the community, in so doing easing the research. In accordance with Jorgensen’s (2015) statement before, Bernard closes his list of why to use participant observation with the observation that it may simply be only way to collect the required data for one’s study (as cited in Kawulich, 2005).

During the fieldwork in Medellín, I obtained data through different forms of participant observation. In the seven weeks I lived in the community and took fieldnotes of my impressions during activities at Casa Mía, like organizational meetings, theatre and dance classes at Casa Mía, an open day and community activities of the project “my neighbourhood gets coloured by life” which took place in a nearby park. Sometimes I participated in the classes and helped with minor things in the community arrangements, interacting as a participating observant. As noted above, I offered contact dance and physical theatre classes, which allowed for an exchange of knowledge, created common ground with fellow artists and established trust with other members of the community who participated. In other moments I sat aside and took notes whilst

people were interacting. In general, people were fine with me taking notes and offered their help to explore my research question by showing me around in the neighbourhood and offering their perspectives. Only one time a person explicitly mentioned - half ironically, half seriously - that “he would not trust a woman who does not talk and only takes notes”. I responded that I was interested in how things were done at Casa Mía as there was much to learn from and that I would not write down any names in my notes; my comment seemed to mitigate his suspicion. Depending on my state of mind, I took notes in Spanish, English and German. I noticed that writing in English and certainly in German had the benefit that people (including me) would worry less about their anonymity in front of the community. However, I preferred writing in Spanish as a means for transparency. I often left my notebook intentionally open for community members to see about what and how I was taking notes. Enriching for my understanding for the realities in Medellín were moreover information from informal conversations I had with people outside the immediate context of Casa Mía about conceptions of peace, the conflict-dynamics and political situation of Medellín and Colombia. In the next section I describe more formalized and recorded conversations which were central for gathering data: semi-structured interviews.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

A second main method of ethnographic studies is conducting different types of interviews. The answers of the interview partners serve as data and should help to answer the research questions by narrating the insights, experiences and opinions of the people studied. An interview is a structured conversation guided by the questions the researcher poses to the interview partner. Thereby the interview questions are often not the same as the research question but rather ask for different aspects that are relevant to answering the sub questions and ultimately enlighten and ground the larger research endeavour.

Depending on the research design and what kind of data the interviews should provide, the interviews are structured to a different degree. Possible forms are ranging from long unstructured interviews wherein people are neither interrupted and barely guided by open-ended questions to minimise the impact of theoretical framing at the stage of the process, to highly structured interviews with a fixed set of questions asked in a certain order and requesting answers according to predetermined options, e.g. for quantitative analysis and hypothesis testing. In this research the intention is to examine the local understanding of artistic methods in conflict transformation processes. This requires both a focus on the role of arts and to give space to people to share what they deemed important for understanding the local context,

conflict and work of Casa Mía. Therefore, semi-structured interviews are most appropriate, as they provide a frame with pre-determined questions, but allow for flexibility in the length of answers and the order of posing the questions. Moreover, they make it possible to ask follow-up questions to inquire further where information provided seemed to be relevant for the larger or specific understanding of the research subject.

An interview starts with the researcher briefly presenting the research project and asking for the informed and voluntary consent of the interview partner to make use of his answers for the research project. It is eminently helpful if the researcher records the interview, as it allows her to be most neutral and complete in writing down the answers provided by simply transcribing them later. However, sometimes there might be reasons why people feel uncomfortable with being recorded, for example if the conversation evolves around taboos or if the content may threaten the security of the interview partner or other community members. In these instances, the researcher needs to both listen and write down the answer as coherent and completely as possible. Even if recording the researcher might want to take notes in case of technical problems with the recording device and to remark on gestures and body language which might be of importance for the interpretation of the interview.

In his article “Ethnography and the myth of participant observation”, Forsey (2010) tests assertions that participant observation lies at the heart of ethnographic practice by investigating what ethnographers stated they did in 210 articles from three anthropology journals and interviewing them about what they *actually* did. Though other authors, such as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), would assert that ethnography involves a mixture of “watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews.” (as cited in Forsey, 2010, p. 69), the study demonstrates a tendency amongst ethnographers of equating the methodology with method and ethnography with participant observation. The compelling outcome of Forsey’s study is that the main method of collecting data in ethnographic work is more accurately described as ‘engaged listening’ (Forsey, 2010). He calls participant participation a myth, as he regards the way the method is claimed to be *the* central method as upholding the power ascribed to participant observation and influencing the identity of the researcher. Forsey believes it is important to challenge the tendency of equating ethnography with participant observation, as more often than “written photographs”, the “droppings of talk” and notes of informal conversations and formal interviews would be the base for the collected data (p. 70). In being explicit about this reality, scholars could avoid the confusion among starting scholars and be more precise in what they actually do.

Even if the interviews are presented second in this thesis, they are at least equally important as participant observation and a main tool of collecting data for this study. Moreover, the two are linked in that the data obtained via interviews might be triangulated with observations but also other sources such as internal documents. Furthermore, both methods benefit each other, as interviews can deepen the understanding gained through observation and participant observation might provide us with access to people we want to interview. For example, one artist was not willing to give me an interview before I had participated in a guided tour in his neighbourhood, visited the place he worked in and until I saw him performing. Like Forsey argues, also in this instance the data I recorded was indeed more based on the informal conversations we had than detailed field notes of participant observation. Nevertheless, it was through this continuous engagement as a participating observer that engaged listening could eventually take place.

In total I interviewed 17 people in 14 semi-structured interviews. These include two founders of the organization, three current leaders, three volunteers (also the leaders and artists work largely voluntarily), two young people (above 18) who were part of the processes at Casa Mía, five collaborating artists, a member of the theatre group and a psychologist from the municipality who collaborates with Casa Mía in one of their projects. The duration of the interviews varied from half an hour to 2.5 hours. The interview guide has been designed to explore the interpretation of the philosophy *lo afectivo es lo efectivo* by the interviewee, to understand the context in which Casa Mía has operated with an emphasis on changes in conflict dynamics and external factors, and the role of art in this work. An interview would end by asking if the interviewee would like to add something that they deemed important for the research. All interviews took place in Spanish and were later transcribed and coded in Spanish.

3.2.3 Participatory methods

In the section on participant observation, I discuss the degree by which the researcher participates in the activities of the community. Equally, there exist alternative ways to deal with the degree of participation in the research process by the participants. This section briefly discusses participatory methods derived from a participatory inquiry paradigm, as the third method employed for data collection was a participatory workshop organized on the 12th of April 2018 at Casa Mía.

Whyte (1979) asserts that, while there is no one way that is best for conducting research using participant observation, “the most effective work is done by researchers who view informants as collaborators; to do otherwise, he adds, is a waste of human resources” (Kawulich, 2005, p. 11). To view participants as co-researchers is, for researchers working within a participatory inquiry paradigm, not only a matter of being effective in their work, but also a matter of being ethical and contributing to a shift in power in the production of knowledge. In a participatory inquiry paradigm, different kinds of knowledge are included, and the knowledge gained by the lived experiences of ‘ordinary’ people is valued alongside the conceptual knowledge held by ‘experts’ (Heron & Reason, 1997). It is a research paradigm employed to ‘decolonize’ knowledge and is aligned with the values of pedagogies of the oppressed as developed by Freire (1968). Both in a participatory research and Freire’s ideas of a liberating education, research/education is not done on or about people, but *with* them. Moreover, the knowledge produced should be beneficial and at best actionable for the people involved.

A fully participatory research process is very time consuming, as the participants should ideally be engaged as co-researchers in all stages of the research process, including design and analysis. Due to time and scope constraints, this has not been the case for this research project. Instead, the leaders of the organization were consulted before the fieldwork to adapt the research question and design to their needs and interests and a participatory workshop was organized to invite interested community to jointly reflect about the history of Casa Mía, Santander and the role of arts and affection in the processes facilitated by the organization.

3.2.4 Workshop

The objectives of the workshop were to: firstly, understand the history of Casa Mía from different internal perspectives; secondly, understand how Casa Mía has adapted to the environment and how it has influenced the neighbourhood; thirdly, explore how arts have been used during the 25 years of Casa Mía’s existence; and, fourthly, jointly construct the meaning of *lo afectivo es lo efectivo*. 19 people participated in the workshop and community reunion on the 12th of May 2018. The workshop was initiated by me as researcher and co-organized by one leader of Casa Mía and two researchers based in Medellín from Recrear (Recreate), an organization using and teaching participatory action research with youth in development and community processes. Former volunteers, founders, collaborators and people who had participated in the processes were invited via What’s App, mobile messages and calls both by the organization and me as a researcher upon suggestion and given contacts by the current

director of the organization. People were informed of the purpose of the workshop which would serve as a reunion for the community as well as constitute part of my research project and that it would be followed by a dinner. We started the evening with a joint meditation to mentally land in the place, then energized the group physically with theatrical exercises which invited and expressed the memories they connected with the work of Casa Mía. These memories were then shared in pairs and noted on papers. To achieve the defined objectives, we worked on three assignments. In the first assignment, we constructed a timeline of the history, including the development of the work of Casa Mía, artistic methods used and conflict dynamics. The second assignment was to draw a 'rich picture', depicting Casa Mía's relationship with its neighbourhood in the 90s and today. This method allows the participants to depicture what factors they find important for the history of Casa Mía and Santander. The third assignment was to map the network of Casa Mía. On a map of Medellín, the network of Casa Mía's collaborators and reach of projects was developed. The exercise was developed from the observations and interviews in which it had become clear that Casa Mía had to be understood as part of a network of different actors working towards the same goal. We worked in three teams, each working on all three assignments and guided by one researcher who stayed with one assignment and facilitated the conversation if needed. After the three groups had contributed to the different assignments, we reflected with the entire group on what has been created. These discussions have been recorded and serve together with the physical outputs as data. We closed with a ritual, blowing out and then relighting ten candles which were placed in the middle of the room whilst sharing testimonies of successes and limitations of the work. The accounts provide valuable insights from multiple perspectives into the strengths and challenges of Casas Mía's work of an emotional depth not easily accessible in a face-to-face interview or merely observing day to day interaction (recorded and transcribed); at the same time, the moment of sharing by firstly blowing out a candle until the group found itself mentally and visually in darkness and illuminating the room again with light and stories of 'why it is worth it' was appreciated as a moment of joint reflection, (re)connection and therefore as a reunion strengthening the common efforts.

3.2.5 Internal documents

Internal documents were used to skim for changes in the practice of Casa Mía and to better understand the structure of the organization. I was allowed access to internal documents such as meeting minutes, founding documents, transcripts of interviews conducted by other researchers and shared with the organization, strategic plans, newspapers articles and internal

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communication. As little was revealed about the artistic practices in these texts, they play a minor role in the analysis, however, they have provided a context for the researcher to better understand the organizational and administrative practices of the organization and formulated strategies.

3.3 Data codification

The data has been coded and analysed first using Word and then switching for a matter of practicality and ease to NVIVO. Codes have been developed inductively and refined and redefined during the research process. Though the codes have largely been derived from the empirics, the sub questions have structured the broader categories prior by focussing on ‘the arts’, ‘peacework’, ‘Casa Mía’, ‘the affectionate’ and ‘the context’. A list of the final categories (‘arts’, ‘Casa Mía’ and ‘the context’) and codes is added to the appendix to visualize what codes structured and guided the analysis.

3.4 Positionality

Ethnographic work is conducted by biased humans who serve as the instruments for data collection; that is why, since the ‘reflective turn’ in anthropology in the 80s, researchers practice reflexivity to understand how their positionality in gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class and theoretical approach may affect how they observe, analyse and interpret the data collected (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; de Walt and de Walt, 2002; Kawulich, 2005). In this section I position myself in the research context to invite the reader for a discussion on why I may have obtained and accessed certain information and bodies of knowledge and might have been excluded or remain ignorant towards others; in other words, I explore the question of how my social position may have influenced my knowledge claims (Lichterman, 2017).

I introduced myself or got introduced by members of the organization as a researcher, a master’s student in Peace and Conflict Transformation from Norway interested in the work of Casa Mía and the role of arts in this work. On the one hand, people were willing to help me in my research and sensed the sincerity and dedication for the project; inviting people for interviews enabled conversations and access to information that I would not have been able to approach without this academic endeavour and institutional support in the background. On the other hand, some participants were sceptical about the worth of scientific work for the community and critical about the power imbalances of who has authority to speak about *their* work and conflict – foreign academics, as I represent one, or them. For example, the practice of citing other

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researchers but anonymizing research participants was criticised as a lack of acknowledgement of worth of their knowledge by three interview partners. Nevertheless, as we went into conversation about their concerns and I positioned myself as someone who went to Colombia to learn from their practices and promised to be respectful by being precise in what is their knowledge shared by them and what my interpretations are, they were willing to become my teachers. Still, some might have excluded information or certain opinions they thought I could not handle or understand due to a lack of practical experience. Though I was willing to enter the fieldwork with only loose parameters and without a fixed theoretical framework for the sake of diving into the insiders' perspectives, my understanding of doing ethnographic fieldwork and theoretical discussions on the arts and peace work presented in the theory section have framed how I approached the investigation and consequently the data collected, analysed and interpreted.

Gender and race are part of one's positionality. I am a white woman, identifying as female, born and raised in the countryside in the north of Germany and came to the research as a student from Norway. Norway has been involved as a mediator in the peace negotiations and members of Casa Mía were attending a training in conflict mediation offered by the Norwegian Red Cross. Being a white European and having the recourses to travel from Europe to Colombia, carrying my recording device and laptop and at times using coffee shops for working on my research surely suggested that I belonged to a wealthy or middle class and/or have the privilege of being sponsored by my academic institution. However, living with the community in a low-to-middle class neighbourhood, dressing simply and helping with the daily work helped to level with participants from poorer backgrounds. Being a female researcher in a country characterized by machoism might have made it easier to meet up with male participants for interviews, however, it will also have influenced the way they responded, e.g. by flirting, trying to impress or speaking more openly about their emotions. As a dancer and actress, I identify as an artist and am familiar with speaking about the arts and with fellow artists.

It is not only a static social position that define the interactions of researcher and research participants, but also experiences and characters; the relationships are constructed in the moment and do not exist a priori. In 2016, I travelled for six weeks through Colombia during a four-month backpacking trip from Colombia to Argentina, exploring and getting acquainted with diversity and history of the country. Moreover, I lived in Argentina at the age of 16, and therefore speak Spanish, and had the experience of living in different cultural settings (four European countries, Argentina and India) which had trained me to adapt quickly to new

circumstances and to interact with people from different backgrounds. The people at Casa Mía, in turn, were used to students from the municipal university and have also received international guests. The attitude of the leaders of Casa Mía in treating everyone as part of their community, whether a beggar or Senator, old or young, whether life-long inhabitant or short-term visitor, made it easy to feel and be regarded as both a visitor *and* part of the community. Depending on whom I was talking to, different backgrounds came to the foreground - the researcher, the artist, the one from a village, the student, a facilitator - to find common ground and understanding. Lastly, I received feedback during the research that it is easy to talk freely with me and to gain trust (Interview B, C); which could be because people sense an honest concern, interest and appreciation of their person. This ability or way of meeting people turned out to be incredibly valuable as a resource for receiving sensitive information about difficult topics (as they are related to the conflict) within a short time-frame and an at first relatively unfamiliar context.

It is impossible to discuss all the possible ways my positionality might have influenced the way I could or could not access data and how I have interpreted it. Nonetheless, the section illuminates where the author of this research is coming from, enabling the reader to discuss how this background might have influenced the research findings.

3.5 Limitations

Every research design has its strengths and weaknesses; Above I argue for the approach chosen. In this section I discuss briefly how access to research participants, researcher's and participant's biases, language gap and security and ethical concerns put limits to the research.

Though I spoke to people from various backgrounds (including member of Casa Mía, collaborating artists, (former) participants, people from collaborating) there are people I did not have access to. Their voices are therefore excluded in this thesis. Firstly, I could not interview people below the age of 18. Casa Mía focuses on youth, thus their experiences of how art influences or not influences their understanding and behaviour is important to assess the role of art in the implementation of the affectionate approach. I did speak, however, to people who attended the programs of Casa Mía before they turned 18. Secondly, via my 'gate keepers' I gained access to people who are likely to be positive about the work of Casa Mía and therefore believe in the methods applied. I did not interview people who participated in the projects or were part of the organization and then turned away because maybe they disagreed with the

methodology of the organization. The opinions on Casa Mía of my research participants is thus likely to be more positive than if these voices who might be out there were included.

Moreover, my research interest is the use of art for social transformation. As I specifically asked my research participants about the role of art in the work of Casa Mía, they might have exaggerated the significance of it for the implementation of the affectionate approach. Moreover, in order to satisfy my curiosity about how art can stimulate personal change, in an instance of participant bias they might have attributed personal changes to art that actually had other causes. My research focus, in this case, could have steered them towards imagining a link between their personal development and the use of art at Casa Mía. And to be self-critical, though I attempted to keep a critical distance, the same could have led to a researcher's bias.

Though my Spanish is fluent, it is not native. Augmenting the language gap was the strong slang used in Medellín: I noticed quickly that *Paisas* use particular vocabulary I am not familiar with. While I kept a list with local expressions, in the short time I clearly missed connotations and the nuanced layers of the complex meaning codified in the local language. This lack of understanding might have limited my understanding of what people said and might have led to missed chances to inquire further when an expression I did not understand or misunderstood might have contained clues pointing to relevant information.

Research participants entrusted me with their stories knowing I would write a master thesis based on their accounts. Still, as the pool of people who could represent my research participants is quite small, anonymity cannot be secured if too much information is revealed. Therefore, information that would threaten the security of the research participant or other community members is not shared, even if relevant for the research project.

4 Analysis

As elaborated in the theory chapter, in order to examine the role of arts in peacebuilding efforts, it is important to understand the underlying theory of change that guides art-based approaches. In other words, in order to assess a tool, we need to know which function it is supposed to serve and what obstacles need to be overcome on the way. As a consequence, the first part of the analysis examines the local peacebuilding approach, namely Casa Mía's affectionate approach *lo afectivo es lo efectivo*. It does so by answering the following sub-questions:

- a. What kinds of violence is Casa Mía confronted with in Santander?
- b. How does Casa Mía imagine peace?
- c. How does Casa Mía work to achieve the above described peace?

The second part answers the main research question by analysing how art serves the implementation of this approach, again by responding to the following sub-questions:

- a. What kinds of art does Casa Mía use?
- b. What are the qualities of art that allow Casa Mía to implement the affectionate approach on the intra- and inter-personal and on the community level?

The data will be presented interwoven with the analysis for sake of not getting too repetitive.

4.1 Casa Mía's affectionate approach to peace

In summary of my arguments so far, the theory of change is part of the local context. It emerges from a local understanding of: firstly, what problems need to be tackled; secondly, what a desired future might look like; and, thirdly, - considering the possibilities and limitations for action - what is the best way to foster the desired change. The first part of the analysis identifies the local understanding of: firstly, the kinds of violence present in Santander that need to be overcome; secondly, the peace imagined; and thirdly, Casa Mía's approach to achieve this desired peace. The purpose is not to evaluate the local approach, but to examine it in order to understand how the arts allow the implementation of the affectionate approach of Casa Mía.

4.1.1 Forms of violence and obstacles to overcome

In this section, I present the kind of problems the inhabitants of Santander are struggling with and which are regarded by Casa Mía as obstacles to achieving the further below described peace. As the conflict dynamics changed over the past 25 years so did Casa Mía's approach in order to address the most pressing problems during each period. In "hot phases" of the conflict in the 90s and in the beginning of 2000, the homicide rates have been considerably higher than in the time of the "tense quietness" experienced today (discussion of timeline during the workshop and interview D, E). However, interview partners have regarded all of the kinds of violence mentioned as still being relevant today. A detailed analysis that tracks these changes is beyond the scope of this thesis and I will here merely provide a summary of the challenges discussed by the research participants.

My interview partners observe that the inhabitants of Santander suffer many direct forms of violence, including homicides, domestic violence, sexual exploitation and drug abuse. Moreover, growing up, people experience a lack of access to quality education, economic opportunity and suitable access to public healthcare. Many people in Santander would be working informally and are contract by the hour, providing little economic and social security (Interview F). These structural factors reveal malfunctioning institutions in the sectors of education and public health. The weaknesses of governmental institutions are apparent the domains of security and rule of law, too, where the absence of effective control by the state has allowed for the influence of paramilitaries, guerrilla groups, drug cartels and other criminal groups. Examples of the insecurity and extra economic strain faced by inhabitants include a thriving micro traffic (selling of drugs and illegal items) and the group in control of a micro-territory demanding *la vacuna*, protection money (Interview A, G, C, E). Other problems mentioned were the absence of parents, a deep sense of loneliness, and heightened levels of aggression, fear and distrust (Interviews H, A, C, E, D, B).

Cultural factors discussed in the interviews are machismo, *narco-culture*¹¹ and nihilism. According to the interviews, *machismo* informs gender-specific stereotypes, objectifies women and foster beliefs that ultimately justify and enable violence against women (Interview F, E, H, I). In an hour-long interview, a former director of Casa Mía elaborates how *narco-aesthetics* inform other forms of violence. The dominant *narco-culture* provides harmful role models to young people, with its focus on money and legitimation of the use of violence (Interview F). Moreover, another interviewee adds, *narco-culture* would “pervert the minds”, because it defines being successful as having power over someone (Interview C, but also Interview F and G). In the book *No Oyes llorar a la tierra* (Don’t you hear the Earth is crying) about a project co-produced by Casa Mía the emergence of a *narco-culture* has been interpreted as a manifestation of neoliberalism and individualism with its focus on money and competition (De la Cruz et. Al, 2015). Lastly, the spread of nihilism as the rejection of any meaning in life demonstrates how deeply the long-standing conflict and presence of lethal violence has affected cultural norms and beliefs. In the interviews and in the conflict context of Medellin, nihilism has been associated with a numbness and indifference towards the conflict and life and the acceptance of violence as a means to achieve one’s goals. The phrase in Medellin’s youth-slang

¹¹ *Narcotraficante* = drug lord, “*el narcotrafico*” is the drug trafficking industry, often used in a personified way

parlache No nacimos pa' semilla (We are not born to grow) was mentioned in several conversations and exemplifies an expression of a nihilistic worldview.¹² Quintero and Jiménez succinctly summarize the effects of the different forms of violence:

This violence ingrained itself into all social spheres, particularly in the areas where indifference and the abandonment of the state reigns. Our communities have been obligated to live together with a culture of death and fear. (2018, 15).

The presentation of the different forms of violence discussed exhibit a broad understanding of the concept of violence by people working at Casa Mía and an awareness of its many dimensions and embeddedness in the context. The next section will examine what kind of peace Casa Mía is working towards.

4.1.2 How does Casa Mía imagine peace?

The following section examines what kind of peace Casa Mía is imagining, as the peace envisioned guides the local approach chosen for realizing the peace imagined. I discuss three dimensions of their conceptualization of peace: *No matarás*, conviviality and *buen vivir*.

4.1.2.1 *No matarás*: You Will Not Kill¹³

Central to Casa Mía's definition of peace is a belief that runs deeply through their work, namely that life is sacred. Following that principle, the preservation of life is at the core of Casa Mía's work. It was the departure point when a group of young people started in the early 90s "with the objective to find consensus and agreements which allow for pacific solutions, to stop the advance of war and death in the neighbourhood of Santander and the Northwest of Medellín" (Quintero Saavedra & Jiménez, 2018, p. 19). One of the bigger projects Casa Mía initiated in 1998 together with the pastoral care of priest Óscar de Jesús Vélez Betancur is called *no matarás*, "You Will Not kill". According to an online newspaper article, the trust of Betancur in the possibility of "healthy conviviality and dialogue between young people prevented that many became part of one of the 'gangs' or illegal armed groups." (Velásquez, 2009)

¹² For an in-depth analysis of the impact of nihilism on youth culture and the conflict in Medellín see Martin (2013).

¹³ «You Will Not Kill» a reference to the Ten Commandments of God given to Moses.

One of the members who witnessed the beginnings of Casa Mía identifies the early objective of Casa Mía as “to pacify this neighborhood, stop the violence, [and to] search for alternatives so that the youngsters don’t kill each other” in an environment where “nine gangs were competing for control over the territory” and “every three months someone fell” (Interview A). The basic principle of “don’t kill” can be interpreted as a limited and negative version of peace concentrating merely on preventing direct violence. In contrast, in the context of Santander, a member of Casa Mía elucidates, to stop killing implies “to transform a culture of death and fear to a culture of life and reconciliation”. This has been especially true in the “hot phases” of the conflict, which, according to the timeline created during the workshop, took place in the early 90s and during another peak termed “the chaos” from 2007-2010, when three members of the organization died. Thus, the effort to “stop killing” needs to be understood in a context wherein violence is omnipresent and young people nihilistically claim that they “have not been born to grow”. To exclude, in this setting, the possibility of taking someone’s life as an accepted means to an end requires a major transformation of reality.

4.1.2.2 Conviviality

Another key concept to Casa Mía’s understanding of peace is conviviality, which goes beyond an imperative to stop killing and looks at ‘how do we live well together’. Two leaders of Casa Mía understand conviviality as “abilities for life” (Interview F, D). F elaborates, defining conviviality:

as the ability to co-exist with the other in a non-violent way. However, it is not merely co-existence, but there is the theme of solidarity, of responsibility regarding problems and common issues, it has to do with participation in the decisions that affect the entire community. It is complex; it is co-existing with the other in a non-violent way. It is also solidarity and participation. (Interview with F)

The concept of conviviality according to Casa Mía thus entails ideas of solidarity, responsibility and participation.

Solidarity is a concept I came across regularly in the civil society circles in Medellín. In the philosophy of Casa Mía, solidarity is rooted in the idea of ‘compassion’. People at Casa Mía contrast their understanding of compassion to a distanced feeling of pity igniting an action. Instead, they understand compassion as “passion with the other” or “the shared passion for life”, like the ‘code of honor’ on the walls of the first floor of Casa Mía reveals. (Interview D and

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mural). The emphasis is thus again on life. Together with suffering it is being shared with the other. This solidary pact is thought to be inclusive. Casa Mía includes everyone as being part of the community and entitled to conviviality. “We think of the community not only as people who have never fired a weapon. For us, it is the complexity of the community: armed actors, violence. All are part of the community and that is why we don’t make a distinction” (Interview F).

Peace only exists between people. This makes it inter-subjective. It exists between subjects and therefore changes according to which subjects are included. Inter-subjectivity implies that our understanding of the world is dependent with whom we interact and how we interact. This is illustrated in Casa Mía’s project *soy porque somos*. It means “I am because we are”, derived from Mandela’s Ubuntu approach in South Africa. Someone from the organization explained to me that Ubuntu entails “how I define myself since I belong to a collective and how the collective defines itself since I am part of it” (Interview F). Peace is thus understood intersubjectively and only achievable if all actors are included. This creates a shared responsibility for who is participating and to participate¹⁴. According to the people I spoke with from Casa Mía, an all-inclusive approach to peace is necessary for a peace to be truly peaceful.

4.1.2.3 Buen Vivir

The notion of *buen vivir* does not only include all humans of a community, but humans as part of nature. The concept was named in three of the interviews I conducted and was elaborated on in an interview made available to me which examines the role of *buen vivir* in the work of Casa Mía (Interview D, A, C, Internal document *Buen Vivir*). One of the members distinguishes between *buen vivir* and *vivir bien*. According to her, *vivir bien* means “to have everything, at the cost of everyone”, whilst *buen vivir* would mean “to have the necessary with everyone” (Interview D). The first version implies a critique on the capitalist model, which benefits a few at the expense of many. The second version would require being “in harmony with everything that surrounds you” (Interview D, C). C asserts that being in harmony with nature or the other first requires being in harmony with oneself (Interview C). Gioacchino describes the use of

¹⁴ Casa Mía’s inclusive understanding also informs their view on systems of justice, a topic I will not deepen here. In Medellín, negotiations over whether the government should come to a political agreement with the many illegal armed groups in the city, not only with the paramilitaries (officially demobilized) and guerrilla fighters are ongoing.

buen vivir by Casa Mía as a deep ecological approach appropriated from an indigenous Cosmo vision and adapted to the urban context (submitted September 2018, forthcoming). She explains that in the original Aymara term *suma qamaña* would translate to “living well together”. *Qamasa* is the gerund of co-habiting: it implies the energy and vital strength to live and share with others. *Suma* refers to “lovable, beautiful, pleasing, and generous.” The term suggests a positive, enriching co-existence with others, humans and with nature equally, through a celebratory exchange that is “charged with affectivity and caring” (Albo 2011 cited in Gioacchino).

In summary, Casa Mía’s vision of peace starts from the imperative not to kill but is much more comprehensive and ambitious. It seeks an active affectionate connection between all people of the community and their living in harmony with nature. In this section I have examined the complex version of peace Casa Mía is working towards and thereby answered the question “What kind of peace does Casa Mía envision?” In the next section, I will elaborate on how Casa Mía is working towards the kind of peace they imagine: that is, I will present their ‘affectionate approach’.

4.1.3 The affectionate approach to ‘living well together’

In this section I analyse what Casa Mía’s approach is to achieve the above-described peace. In the examination of what goal Casa Mía pursues, it was noticeable that they barely use the word ‘peace’.¹⁵ Likewise, the goal stated on the Facebook page of Casa Mía does not mention peace, but to “to generate processes of restauration and reconciliation between human beings and between them and nature, out of the affectionate.” (‘Corporación Casa Mía’, n.d. emphasis added). This is to say that Casa Mía describes its objective in a dynamic manner, revealing that it understands peace as a process, or processes. The processes Casa Mía focuses on are restoration and reconciliation, meaning its approach concentrates on both interpersonal relations and individual change.

¹⁵ On their webpage, the objectives stated are “to promote conviviality, citizens’ culture and the value of/for life”, “construct and reconstruct ties characterized by affection and solidarity between/within communities” and “to create bridges between victims and perpetrators”. The vision of Casa Mía communicated on its webpage is “to be taken as a referent for its work in favor of the conservation of life, for the promotion of respect for human rights regardless of ideological position” (online). Neither in this more extensive list of objectives, is the creation of peace literally stated.

Casa Mía facilitates restoration and reconciliation processes. It works mostly with young people, though the organization is open for all generations and offer specific programs for older people, too. Young people in the conflict “have done much harm to the community” one of the leading figures of Casa Mía stresses (Interview A). Online Casa Mía does not elaborate on the meaning of ‘restoration’. But its understanding of peace and its projects suggest that community members who have harmed the community are supposed to assume responsibility for their actions. Reconciliation approaches emphasize the importance of interpersonal relations for building peace. Reconciliation approaches are theoretically rooted in the idea that even bigger structures are ultimately built by individuals and that their behavior and worldviews determine these structures (Cohen, 2005).¹⁶ According the leaders of Casa Mía, the primary philosophical principle ‘The affectionate is the effective’ orients Casa Mía’s approach to facilitating these processes. *Lo afectivo* translates to ‘the affectionate’ whilst *el afecto* translates to ‘affection’. Together with social education, ‘the affectionate’ represent the two fundamental pillars of Casa Mía’s work (Quintero Saavedra & Jiménez, 2018).

An assessment of the affection approach serves to later assess how the arts serve to implement it. In addition, the examination of the ‘affectionate approach’ is in itself valuable, as peace and conflict studies has given little attention to the emotional dimension of conflict transformation work from a civil society actor’s perspective. This section suggest it can be an important aspect of local peacebuilding efforts.

4.1.3.1 Love as the essence and connection

I got different response to “What is the affectionate?” One of the young people who participated in Casa Mía’s processes ‘warned’ me that to talk about the affectionate is “to enter into the sphere of what the being is” (Interview B). One of the collaborating artists and volunteers at Casa Mía understands affection as “something primordial, it is the essence of the human being” (Interview J). One of the current leaders defines affection as something essential, namely as “a form of being (*ser y estar*) reaching others” (Interview D). She purposefully uses both *ser* and *estar*. Both words translate in English to ‘to be’ but are distinguished in Spanish. *Ser* describes the essence of a thing or person whilst *estar* describes the timely appearance of something or

¹⁶ Cohen argues that, though reconciliation approaches acknowledge the importance of structural forces, they emphasize the importance of interpersonal relations for building peace, and thereby prioritize agency over structure (Cohen). From an emancipatory lens, to stress agency is a political act shifting power towards people and local actors.

someone and is subject to change. She thus combines here affection as the core and behaviour of an individual, but also as the core of an interaction between people. These definitions of *lo afectivo* given by the people I interviewed point to an understanding that affection is at the core of human beings and that it is what can connect people to each other.

4.1.3.2 *Amor eficaz*: ‘effective love’

Quintero Saavedra and Jiménez (2018) have researched how the phrase *lo afectivo es lo efectivo* emerged in the context of Casa Mía’s work. As long-term members of Casa Mía, their answers present an inside perspective on the philosophical foundation of their approach. They recognize several ways affection has been contemplated by philosophers like Spinoza and Deleuze. However, they insist that Casa Mía does not draw its inspiration from these philosophical traditions, but that its methodology is based on the notion of ‘effective love’ (*amor eficaz*) as advocated by the priest and revolutionary Camilo Torres Restrepo. Torres bases his understanding of love on the Christian imperative to ‘love your neighbor’. According to Torres, to be ‘true’, this kind of love needs to be ‘effective’ in the sense of actively and effectively responding to the needs of others. He criticizes love interpreted in the form of ‘charity’, which would leave a majority with too little and remain largely indifferent in face of inequality and injustices (cited in Quintero Saavedra and Jiménez, p. 19). In contrast, the ‘effective love’ that Torres envisions requires a transformation of a system that benefits the well-being of the majority. Love, as advocated by Torres, demands a struggle to end structural violence.

The slogan *lo afectivo es lo efectivo* of Casa Mía was coined by Father Oscar Vélez, a priest who belonged to a religious current called *Golconda*. *Golconda* was inspired by Camilo Torres and represented a church committed to social transformation in Colombia. According to Quintero and Jiménez, in the 70s and 80s this liberation theology had great influence in the *barrios populares* in the Northwest of Medellín. Camilo Torres became the founder of the National Liberation Army (ELN) who took up arms in their struggle for justice. Father Oscar, in contrast, had other role models besides Torres inspiring him: leaders of non-violent resistance like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and especially Henry David Thoreau. One of the founders of Casa Mía refers to Thoreau as an encouragement to “finding a simple life”. He connects this longing for a simple life to their history, lamenting that the “tragedy is that we were farmers with indigenous and black roots, we lived a quiet and simple life, and got prostituted by the luxury of the drugs traffic.” (Lodoño, personal conversation, cited in Quintero Saavedra and Jiménez, p. 19). A longing, according to my taxi-surveys and several

conversations,¹⁷ he shares with many inhabitants of Medellín. The priest Oscar Vélez shared this longing but nonetheless decided to follow his role models to encourage and design a non-violent struggle to social transformation.¹⁸ The notion of affection Casa Mía bases its methodology on is thus a love with direction, a love prompting action. In the face of violence Casa Mía believes that tranquillity can't be achieved by retreat but by transforming the violence. Here, the inter-subjective nature of peace shows.

25 years later this understanding still resonates in the answers of participants and leaders of the organization alike. Most descriptions of affection were descriptions of actions in which affection manifests. These include to “trust”, “to respect”, “to see the talents of the other”, “to listen”, “to take into considerations the dreams and to generate possibilities” and “to hug”. But they also include descriptions of materializations of love. For example, in “the house painted with colors and equipped with computers and a television” (Interviews B, K and L and responses during the closing circle at the workshop). Love is to respond to needs such as trust and respect, but also to material needs.

4.1.3.3 Perspectives on human nature

Ideas about the nature of human beings are important for an understanding of how an affectionate approach works. One person working at Casa Mía told me “there are no bad people, there are people who have made bad decisions” (Interview A). This positive image of human nature in a context of longstanding violence is remarkable. Moreover, it allows for a hope for change, as peoples' positions and actions might change if they are re-connected to their good core. Reconciliation work in this case would concentrate on making people aware of their good nature and thereby conscious of how their actions contradict their being. Another member of the organization mentioned both a drive to death and drive to live that are operating in human beings and that the violent conflict would bring to the fore the “worst of the human condition” (Interview C). I interpret this to mean that he thinks of human nature as both good and bad. An affectionate approach here would be to nourish the good parts of the human and provide tools to keep the negative emotions or the drive to death in check. One vital aspect, according to this

¹⁷ When moving in the city by taxi (about 35 times), I usually used the opportunity to inquire informally about the drivers' views on the conflict dynamics in the city and asked them about their conceptions of peace. The answer given often was “una vida tranquila” – a quiet life.

¹⁸ This story reflects the importance of international role models of peace movement, human rights and deep ecology leaders for the founders of Casa Mía.

person, who had been part of the armed struggle, is “to recognize that we are not perfect, and from my imperfection I cannot demand perfection of the other... who is the one to judge the other? And we realized and started to create from the question of love, from affection” (Interview C). To recognize our weaknesses in order to not project them is an important part of keeping the negative drives in check. This would allow to recognize the other as human and therefore as essentially the same, both in their good parts and in their negative ones. Whether good or bad or both, Casa Mía believes that connecting to one’s emotions and heart is essential for enabling intra-and inter-personal change. Thus a tool to implement an affectionate approach needs to connect us to our emotions, both positive and negative.

4.1.3.4 The heart as a space for change – within and with the other

The heart is the place where Casa Mía believes personal and inter-personal change is possible. The worksheets it uses for the reflection processes with young people have a heart on the bottom, with the words ‘from the heart’. The artist I interviewed who defined affection as the core of the human being adds

There is nothing which is transformed if it does not go through the heart. It does not make any sense to belong to a corporation or participate in many workshops or activities within the arts if you do not allow that they sensitise you in the primary organ, in this first place, where you really do the work is in the heart. If there is no affection, things just stay superficial, they come and go, they are forgotten; but if they go with the heart, there is a change. (Interview J).

The people at Casa Mía use ‘the heart’ as a symbol for something which is essential to their work. The quote above points to a bodily experience of what the heart stands for. Though it is difficult to define what the ‘heart’ stands for (this is why people use symbols and metaphors to refer to it) I suggest the heart is a symbolic representation of the experience of *amor eficaz*, hence it is both an idea and an emotionally and sensually felt experience. This experience is necessary for change. In order to allow for in change, we need to open up to get in contact to our heart.

This understanding might teach a lesson about ‘empowerment’, a concept widely discussed in civic peacebuilding. Arguably, the belief that change commences from within might be the reasoning that the activities of Casa Mía are voluntary, and both members of the organization and young participants stress that it is necessary to let the participants decide how far they go.

Obligating participation would produce little effect, if the will to change needs to come from this space within. This also explains why Casa Mía does not push people into and in their programs but invites them and offers to accompany. Arguably, this is a very fine line, as they might want to encourage, but not to manipulate or persuade. This is to assure the freedom of people to decide on their own processes. This seems to come from a fundamental belief that the power of people to change lies within them and not with the person ‘empowering them’. Empowerment in Casa Mía’s understanding originates from within a person; hence, an organization like Casa Mía can only facilitate that a person might find ways to access that power, but cannot give it to them directly. This requires from the people of Casa Mía to be both engaged and detached in their work, so they can enable possibilities but also let go of the outcome.

I have discussed the heart as a place for changing one’s self, but it is also a place for changing our relationships with others. Interpersonal change requires people to meet in an ‘affectionate way’. It would “heal the cracks in the society and family relationships by holding the pain also of the other, to have the power to stand up and to also catch my contrary, including those I don’t talk with and to also be affectionate to them.” (Interview E). Art as a tool to implement the affectionate approach needs to open up this ‘heart-space’.

4.1.3.5 An insider’s view on how to assess the affectionate approach

I elaborated on the emic perspective on the affectionate approach - but how does Casa Mía know that it works? In four interviews, the answer was given that if one person had changed due to the work of Casa Mía, its work could be regarded as ‘effective’ (Interviews F, D, M, K and L). This common answer signals that the question has been discussed. It was explained, on the one hand, by a relational approach in which a deep transformation of one person would influence others in a kind of ripple effect (Interview M, two informal conversations). On the other hand, they consciously set a modest goal for the evaluation of their work, resisting to promise a major shift in a short timeframe (Interviews F, C) and insisting that literally one young person less on the street is a major achievement (Interviews K and L, A, F). If one life is immeasurably valuable, it arguably raises questions how to - or better, to what end - quantify the effect of their work. The leaders of the organization understand their work as steps to make on a long way, using a time-horizon of 200 years to evaluate their work (Interview C, informal conversation D and B). And this, one of them comments referring to an anthropological study, would be rather ambitious in the light that cultures would need 400 years to be changed

(informal conversation C). Casa Mía thus believes that cultural change is a long-term process and assess their projects accordingly.

4.1.3.6 Empowered by love to assume responsibility

Before I explained how love drives action and in this section, I will describe how this driver results in taking responsibility. Perhaps what stood out most for me was the incredible power of people at Casa Mía to take a position of responsibility and act, where many might feel too overwhelmed and powerless to do anything but look away and try to avoid any confrontation with the situation in Medellín. The idea of justice I encountered in Casa Mía is that people take responsibility of their actions. For the restoration process, this could mean that young people who have harmed the community do social work in caring for the younger children or by cleaning and renovating the parks, remaking the place where they before were doing their illegal activities into a meeting place for the community. In this process they get the chance to demonstrate that they can contribute to the community and that they care. It can be a moment of encounter of the community with the former perpetrators of violence. Such an encounter is a crucial step towards including them back into the community.

However, how does someone who was before indifferent, blind or not capable of taking responsibility get empowered to assume responsibility? The capability to take responsibility, one research participant shares, connects with affection. Someone who witnessed the most violent period of the neighborhood and lost dear ones to it and since the beginning has been active with Casa Mía explains the power to act as follows: “So, it was like giving the possibility to defend life in one moment, and this you can only do if; firstly, if you are convinced you can do it; and, secondly, you have to put the protection of the life of the other first. And all this has to be done from/with love, because if you don’t have love to be able to do it, well, you can’t do it.” (Interview A) Love in this understanding, thus both helps to want and be able to change, and the will and power mutually reinforce each other. John Paul Lederach promotes the realization of interdependence as a pillar to building peace (1997). It is in the feeling of connection that love causes a sense of responsibility to awaken. We cannot separate our own behaviour from the influence it has on the other if we understand our own lives being connected to the other. The belief that “I am because you are” is thus instrumental to promote a sense of responsibility. This responsibility might feel overwhelming. A participant of the workshop explains that “even with all the difficulties, the heart works, and from there we can create

(Circulo).” It is in the heart where people at Casa Mía find the strength to take up this responsibility.

4.1.3.7 Love needs to be understood and to understand: reflected love

Reflection plays a crucial role in Casa Mía’s work and is based on social education, the second pillar of their methodology next to affection. ”In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), a work that greatly influences the understanding of social education at Casa Mía, Freire argues that the purpose of liberating education is to make the oppressed conscious of their oppression in order to challenge it. Though social education and affection are conceptualized as two distinct pillars of Casa Mía’s approach, they are practiced and understood together. One person used a quote from Gramsci to denote that affection without intelligence can even be dangerous “the one who wants to console, to be affectionate, is in fact the most ferocious of the executioners. Even in affection it is necessary to be above all intelligent.” (Interview C) When planning events, for example, Casa Mía must be aware of the situation on the ground in the place where they are planning to hold the event and take the relevant steps to ensure security, otherwise they may be putting participants at risk. After reflecting on their own practices and the need to regulate their desire to help with intellect, Casa Mía came up with a number of principles: For example, not to raise expectations by promising something it would like to give to the community, but cannot hold. This would be detrimental for the trust-relationship with the people from the neighbourhood. An instance of this is that they have learned “to separate emotions and money”, when considering to offer financial help to people of the community and make them dependent and Casa Mía financially unsustainable (Interview D, H). A volunteer who works with the children at Casa Mía provides another example. She explains how understanding can lead to easier compassion and care. When she gets to know about the circumstances at home of children who are particularly aggressive it is easier for her to be patient with them and to support them more in a way they need (Interview H).

4.1.3.8 *Un sueño posible*: Casa Mía – ‘A possible dream’

The importance of dreaming, or imagination, is vital in the work of Casa Mía. It uses it as a method to identify the life projects of young people and to help them realize their dreams. The work of Casa Mía in its entirety has been termed ‘a possible dream’. As one interview explains:

It is something logical, if you respond with violence, the other responds with violence.

But if you respond to him with love, the other one disarms. If I came to kill the other,

but if the other disarms me with a hug and says, “let’s talk”. Thus, it is a very powerful tool, to disarm the other with love, through affection. (Interview E)

This quote may seem naïve. Several anecdotes told by members of Casa Mía, however, illustrate instances in which this tool has indeed been regarded as effective. One interviewee explains that he heard that someone else was planning to kill him. Together with other members of Casa Mía he was thinking how to find a solution to the situation. They knew that the person as a child had wanted to become a pilot. They send a beautiful model of a plane to him and invited him for a talk. They got together and spent time talking about their dreams for the neighbourhood - and reconciled (Interview A). Another example of this practice is that their house is usually unlocked, with doors open. It is a leap of faith they offer to the community in order to establish trust.

Casa Mía works on the ‘possible dream’ today and places it in a horizon of a 200-years process (Interview A, C). The vivid imagination of this dream of a future peace is arguably another driving force for Casa Mía today. One participant of the projects at Casa Mía comments during the closing ritual at the workshop that

Casa Mía has constructed a consciousness of peace in everyone here, when we are here, we feel happy, and good, we feel fine in this space, and when I have been in this process, it helped me a lot to be able to depart from my problems, the two hours I was here were the two hours I was looking forward to most of the day when I arrived here, I felt free, fresh, and that is thanks to you, because you were helping me a lot in that moment. (Workshop, ending circle).

In this sense, Casa Mía is realizing the version of peace they would like to achieve by living it in the day to day. To be able to do so requires imagination and, as elaborated in detail in above, affection.

4.1.3.9 Money, power and affection

In this section I display how Casa Mía’s emphasis on affection is also a result of the limitations it faces. Casa Mía emphasis In a conversation, one of the leaders of Casa Mía explained to me why Casa Mía would use an affectionate approach to “add the young people to the peace” (informal conversation 15th of April). There are three reasons for young people to join one of the armed groups: “money, power and affection” (ibid). As described in the background

chapter, economic need and the longing to climb the social ladder by obtaining goods or status could be an incentive for young people to find income in illegal ways. Secondly, to own a weapon would give power to a young person. The power to kill someone can be understood as the ultimate power over someone. Quintero Saavedra and Jiménez explain that one of the strategies of Casa Mía to counter the attraction of power by having a weapon or belonging to an armed group is to shift the emphasis from “having power over someone” to “having power over yourself”, or, in their words, to promote a shift from a desired “power” to desired “sovereignty/autonomy” (2018, p. 24, also mentioned in Interview C and interview B). According to one of the founders of Casa Mía, “the sovereign subject is a subject full of love, whilst the powerful is filled with hate [...] The big struggle of Casa Mía has been the construction of the sovereign subject” (cited in *ibid.*). Thirdly, they explain to me that a reason for young people to join a ‘gang’ is the search for recognition and affection. In the different armed groups, young people would find a group to which they can belong. A former *guerrilla* fighter affirms that there was solidarity and celebration in war, too (Interview C). The attraction of belonging to a violent group due to the need for affection and recognition needs to be understood in a context of absent parents (due to the conflict or because of long working hours) and people suffering from a feeling of solitude. Many young people would not find enough affection at home and would therefore search for it outside of it. If money, power and affection are the reason for young people to join violent groups, Casa Mía understood that without financial resources, their strongest power to prevent young people joining one of the groups would be to embrace them with affection. Everyone I interviewed stressed the power of affection that is driving and felt at Casa Mía; a power I certainly felt in an extraordinary and humbling extent during my stay with them.

4.1.4 Conclusion analysis part one

To conclude, according to Casa Mía, affection is regarded as an ‘effective love’ that drives action. It impels people working at Casa Mía to protect lives and they enact and stimulate it in reconciliation and restoration processes that they design to prevent youth from taking up arms and to help them to get out of illegal groups. With their relational approach, they aim to transform relationships in a community characterized by fear, indifference and violence, turning them into affectionate bonds of solidarity, trust and hope. The heart is understood as the source that empowers people to act and to believe that they ‘can do it’. Affection is the way in which people can connect to their core and the other; thereby finding consolation in being together, even in suffering. To be truly empowering, to be affectionate, cannot be forced upon

someone but needs to be chosen by the individual. The affectionate approach by Casa Mía is informed by liberation theology and pedagogy, with a strong emphasis on reflection. The idea and practice at Casa Mía is that the intellect should assist affection, for example, to harness emotions when they can have negative effects (e.g. making people depended on assistance, but also for transforming fear and hate).

Casa Mía regards reflection and dialogue as fundamental to restore relationships through the heart: reflecting and understanding why someone behaves in a certain way can make it easier to engage with that person in an affectionate way. An affectionate approach thus requires a constant dialectic between the mind and the heart. The idea that personal and relational changes are possible enable and demand taking responsibility for one's actions. Affection will guide this responsibility to protect life and to care for the other. Here lies the potential to transform relationships which contribute to 'living well together'. In a context of a 'culture of death' characterized by nihilism and indifference, to connect to one's power to love and affirming the worth of life (both one's own life and the life of the other) requires a major personal and interpersonal shift against systematic pressure of cultural violence.

The affectionate approach emerges from the context and the understanding that young people are attracted to join armed groups by three main things: money, power and affection. As a civil society organization without much financial resources, and as individuals who have decided to let go of violence as a source of power, Casa Mía adopted *affection* as the primary strategy. However, even if reconciliation work is successful in bringing about an inner shift in a young person engaged in violence or at the risk to get involved in illegal transactions, structural pressure like the need to generate income might be too strong to bring about behavioral change from violent to non-violent action. Casa Mía recognizes both the limits and the strengths of their approach and choose to focus on the latter. In the next section, I will examine the role of arts in the implementation of the affectionate approach to peace.

4.2 Art in the implementation of the affectionate approach

In this second part of the analysis I answer how art enables the implementation of the affectionate approach. The presentation of data and application of the theoretical framework in this second part of the analysis aims at examining the relevance of art in the work of Casa Mía and to illuminate the theory by providing concrete examples. Moreover, the examination of the case allows me to add new aspects to the theory. First, I provide an impression of the cultural

space and what kinds of arts Casa Mía uses in its work and present how Casa Mía has conceptualized the arts within its approach. Next, I analyse the data gathered during fieldwork and build on the systematization of Jiménez and Quintero Saavedra. I firstly look at the intra- and inter-personal level at how art used in Casa Mía's work engages the participants with the different faculties of knowledge (the bodily, the emotional, the imaginative) and stimulates new thinking spaces (Bleiker, 2001, 2017). Secondly, I discuss how creative placemaking at the community level works towards achieving the envisioned peace.

4.2.1 Art used at Casa Mía

Art has been used in the work of Casa Mía since its beginning and are evident in all projects they execute. In 2013, art has been more formally included as one of the pillars of Casa Mía's work with the establishment of the "school of arts for conviviality" (Interview D). One of the leaders, who is a musician, states "arts is one of the most important instruments of the corporation within its methodology" (Interview F; also C, D, J).



Mural close to Casa Mía, saying "though you are from another neighbourhood, your life is important to me; sculpture expressing sorrow or death made out of clay during the community day on the 6th of May 2018; "and what is art if it does not serve the community", part of a public wall of painted bricks, picture taken in Comuna 13 when visiting collaborating art collective AgroArte

As an organisation with a social mission, Casa Mía understands art as "art for", as for a purpose, at least if used within their work (Interview E, F, D, B, I and J). People working at the organization do recognize other uses of art, however, themselves regard it as an instrument which can serve them in their struggle to promote life, conviviality and *buen vivir*. The arts they use, either themselves or by collaborating artists, include dance, theatre, music, clowning, mimes, murals, sculpturing, hip hop, juggling, acrobatics, painting, and others. During my seven weeks of fieldwork, I have witnessed how arts have been part of the everyday at Casa Mía, e.g. in the citing of poems, someone playing guitar, people singing, someone painting, kids dancing, almost always music coming from somewhere. Moreover, the physical space of Casa Mía exhibits it as a cultural space. The first floor welcomes the visitor with a mural of a

giant labyrinth, the Minotaur and Ariadne from Greek mythology, symbolizing the youth of Santander being lost in a labyrinth in which the minotaur (violence) is threatening them. Casa Mía personified as Ariadne offers them a thread to lead them out of the maze. The ‘reflection room’ on the second floor at Casa Mía is painted with notes and geometrically formed music instruments; on the ceiling there is a mirror, seemingly inviting to change perspectives. Next to the ‘reflection room’ is a recording studio allowing to record the musical talents of Santander’s youth. On the third floor there is a workshop space in which the theatre and dance classes take place and a room next to it with a table tennis plate and stored juggling equipment. Furthermore, I observed a hip hop theatre performance in a nearby park in which negative forces in the neighbourhood were contrasted with the salvaging force of Jesus hosted by Casa Mía¹⁹; theatre and dance classes (in changing roles as participant, observer and teacher); the painting of the first two floors of Casa Mía by an invited mural artist; a diversity of creative practices during a community day on the 6th of May at Casa Mía including games, sculpturing, painting of a mural, clowning, hip hop, dance, face painting for kids, planting and decorating a vertical garden made out of used soft drink bottles commemorating lost dear ones; artistic tools employed in mini workshops during the breaks of a several week long football tournament as part of a project called ‘My neighbourhood colours with life’ (a project executed by Casa Mía, other civil society organizations, students and the municipality of Medellín). Also, in the participatory workshop I co-facilitated for my research and as a community reunion, we used artistic tools. For example, the collective drawing of a rich picture of the relationship between Casa Mía and the neighbourhood and sculpturing memories of moments experienced at the organization with our bodies.

4.2.2 Art as part of ‘alternative languages’ at Casa Mía

In this section I present the conceptualization of art by Casa Mía. Jiménez and Quintero Saavedra mention art as part of the “alternative languages” (including sports and games as well) which are used in Casa Mía to promote a non-narrative based dialogue (2018, p. 22; also mentioned in interviews D and F). Moreover, they detail that their affectionate approach works on different levels, stretching from the intra-personal to the interpersonal, the social and the ecological. These levels are: *The bodily, the emotional, the intellectual, the spiritual, the and*

¹⁹ Though liberation theology has shaped Casa Mía’s philosophy and Christian values might influence individual members, Casa Mía is a non-faith-based organization.

the biodiverse (2018). In their categorization they place the arts within the bodily sphere but link it to the other spheres by recognizing that “our bodily awareness strengthens the intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions which allow the establishment of new social relationships and new pacts with nature” (p. 22). In their conceptualization, social transformation thus emanates from the bodily. Therefore, they stress the importance of “bodily awareness”. However, they do not elaborate on the interactions between the different spheres and how art operates on all these levels, nor how it explicitly contributes to the reconciliation efforts of the organization. The way Jiménez and Quintero conceptualize their affectionate approach as operating on other-than-rational levels is congruent with what has been included to the place-making argument, which stresses the quality of arts to foster different kinds of knowledge (emotional, bodily, imaginative) and to open new thinking spaces (Bleiker, 2017). Their intention to ‘find non-narrative based dialogues’ is in line with the analysis of conflict transformation scholars advocating arts-based approaches who observe people being stuck in irreconcilable narratives, preventing successful reconciliation (Zelizer, 2003). By including the spiritual and the biodiverse they go beyond the spheres considered in the theoretical framework and most scholarly work on arts and peacebuilding.²⁰ This is a gap I try to fill by combining the answers and observations from the fieldwork and the theoretical framework offered in the theory section.

4.2.3 Art and the implementation of the affectionate approach

The affectionate approach emphasises the inter-intra personal dimension of reconciliation work. As described above, the emotional dimension and need for reflection are essential elements of that approach. Adopting Bleiker’s (2001, 2017) notion of the ‘aesthetic lens’ to the arts and peacebuilding field, I have argued that art engages us with different ‘faculties of knowledge’ and thereby may open ‘thinking-spaces’ in which we can expand our understanding of reality, thereby possibly transforming it. Below I will analyse the qualities of art allow people at Casa Mía to engage with the following faculties of knowledge: the bodily, emotions and

²⁰ If studies include these dimensions in peacebuilding they tend either to stem from studies of indigenous cosmologies or deep ecological approaches. The statue of a *taita*, the shaman of indigenous people in the Amazon, in the entrance to the house of the leaders of Casa Mía suggests that they have been influenced by indigenous traditions of Colombia.

imagination. This enables people to reflect on their intra- and inter-personal relationships from different entry-points; fostering the protection of life, conviviality and *buen vivir*.

4.2.3.1 First faculty of knowledge: Bodily

As the primary of the three faculties of knowledge discussed in this thesis, I first look at the quality of art to engage the bodily and connect us to our senses.

Sensitizing

The body is understood as the “first map” at Casa Mía from where we connect to the world (Quintero Saavedra & Jiménez, 2018, p. 32). They thus ascribe primary importance of the body to inform our understanding of the world. A theatre artist at Casa Mía described the body to me as the pivot from where we perceive and act in the world (Interview J). Three people call arts “sensitizers” (Interview J, D and F), pointing to an awareness that we ultimately perceive and understand reality through our senses and that arts can help to sharpen them. Theatre and dance practices, for example, bring bodily awareness by paying attention to what is happening in the body; visual arts draw our attention to how we see; playing music or singing train us to listen. Without neglecting the importance of the script, the theatre teacher I interviewed stresses it is “the body [which] needs to provide a solution to all the conflicts which are present on the stage as the pivotal point” (Interview J). According to him, conflicts are thus experienced bodily, and the stage is a place to become aware of it. “If we would bring more consciousness to how we perceive and what we perceive”, he adds, this “might allow for a different lecture of reality” (Interview J). To better understand the world around us, we thus need to be in contact with how we perceive the world, and we perceive the world in the first instance through our senses, which can be sharpened by the arts. Arts here function intra-personally as ‘sensitizers’. Linking the rational and the bodily, this argument is central to why arts are used as a method for conflict transformation, building on a constructivist understanding that a changed understanding of reality indeed changes reality itself.

4.2.3.2 Second faculty of knowledge: Emotional

Art connects us to the emotional faculty of knowledge. Emotions are central in the affectionate approach of Casa Mía, as “Emotions allow for affectionate connection and building of trust and solidarity” (Quintero Saavedra & Jiménez, 2018, p. 23). This section distinguishes three types of processes that art facilitates. First, art allows people to connect to their emotions through the body. Secondly, it can enable expressing them verbally or non-verbally. This is key for a third

process of transformation and shows that the non-verbal and non-narrative based form of expression is a key quality of arts that enable this.

Connecting: Thinking the unthinkable

In this section I look at art as a tool to facilitate an intra-personal process of becoming aware of one's thoughts and emotions through bodily and non-verbal expression. An ability of the arts discussed in the theory section is to "think the unthinkable" and to express what would be difficult to express in words (though the voice is a bodily expression as well) (C. Cohen, 2005b; MacLeod, 2011; Shank & Schirch, 2008; Thompson et al., 2009). During the fieldwork I witnessed how non-verbal expression can manifest in the body and in an object. For instance, at the community day, a collaborating organization offered a clay-workshop. Someone from the community sculptured a face apparently expressing pain and sorrow (field notes, 6th of May). This aesthetic expression of something that came from within him made it possible to externalize his inner world into an art-piece. In consequence, he could look at that sculpture and become more aware of his emotions and thoughts. Moreover, he shaped the sculpture. Pain and sorrow, especially in conflict situation, can be overwhelming emotions. However, in the moment of creating a sculpture capturing an aspect of this possibly overwhelming situation, the person found a way to give form to it. This moment can be interpreted as transforming a overwhelming situation to feeling sovereignty over one's emotions. The idea of dance therapy, I have presented in the theory section, is that "body movement reflects the inner state of the human" (Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 237). In the same way, other aesthetic expressions, like the moulding of a piece of clay, reflect the inner state of a human, too. By engaging in this artistic act, he arguably "moved inner conflicts and issues from the unconscious to the consciousness" (Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 237). Art made place for non-verbal expression and thereby increased awareness of emotions and thoughts, which are difficult to see clearly otherwise. Art can thus stimulate a conversation between the bodily, emotional and cognitive 'faculties of knowledge' intra-personally.

Expressing: Speaking the unspeakable

From thinking the unthinkable can follow expressing and seeing the unspeakable. By giving difficult feelings or trauma a form in an aesthetic expression, they are brought to a level where they can be narrated. Communicating painful emotions and experiences and having them witnessed is an important part in healing trauma and "humanizing emotions" (Premaratna & Bleiker, 2016, p. 85). When the person at the community day sculptured a face, the community

members could watch. Observing both the object and the person during the process (was the person calm, crying, laughing, nervous, angry?) provided information about what the person was expressing non-verbally. Awareness to the bodily widens our spectrum of information about the other and therefore can enhance our understanding of how and who the other is. The ability of arts to enable an enriched and more inclusive reconciliation approach by including non-verbal communication was confirmed in multiple interviews (Interview D, F and C). A social worker at Casa Mía told me that “Art provides the possibility to listen to that what the voice is not able to say. For example, when a boy dances, the question is “What are you expressing through that dance?” (Interview D). Moreover, she continues “*you can see the personal concerns, vision, a way of reading the world, all this comes to the fore, it comes to the fore with painting and with all kinds of artistic manifestations.*” (Interview D). She observed how the aesthetic expression expresses something of the person who creates an art piece. Her explanation shows how members at Casa Mía use the aesthetic lens Bleiker and creative therapists argue for in their reconciliation work.

There are at least two reasons for a civil society organization working in conflict transformation with youth to use the arts: Topics around violence and taboos, such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, are topics difficult to talk about. Moreover, Casa Mía works a lot with children, who might be less able to verbalize their experience, thus non-verbal expressions become particularly relevant. Important here is the finding that it requires someone posing the question “What are you trying to express?” Arts can thus provide more information about the other, however, in order to foster mutual understanding or better understanding of the young people Casa Mía is working with, it is necessary that someone is paying attention. The focus of Casa Mía to instrumentalize arts for reconciliation efforts in this instance is thus necessary for the arts being effective to include non-verbal communication into reconciliation processes.

Machismo is an example of a cultural context that limits the expression of emotions. To be emotional is unmanly, which make it more difficult for men to get in touch with and speak about their emotions. Especially those emotions which are regarded as showing weakness. I observed a workshop that took place during the breaks of a several week-long football tournaments organized by Casa Mía and other organizations. Young men were invited to take a stone and to paint it in the colours according to how they felt during the match. This little action was the opening to talk about emotions, which was mentioned as uncommon for men in a macho culture (fieldnotes, date). To recognize and reflect about one’s emotions was

subsequently discussed as a first step to handle difficult emotions like anger, fear, solitude and aggression. In another example, three visual artists of a collaborating feminist graffiti collective told me how also the expressions of female identities are limited by *machismo* (Interview I). By being regarded as sexual objects, the women would be denied their own sexuality as independent sexual subjects. To the extent that they would lose ownership over their own virginity, or availability. As a consequence, it would be more difficult for women to connect to their sensuality. Therefore, the collective chooses to paint women experiencing pleasure, in order to help women allowing themselves to connect to their own sexuality and sensuality. This could be understood as empowering them to be sovereign beings over their own emotions and desires. Moreover, sexual violence is inter alia justified by the objectification of women. Thus, to strengthen the identity and recognition as sovereign subjects, weakens the cultural norms underlying sexual violence. In both cases, allowing for conversations to evolve around the painting of stones and murals can initiate a reflection on sensitive topics in an environment where cultural norms hamper the ability to express emotions.

Transforming: Facing a conflicted self, accepting the other and celebration

Arts can create a place to face, accept and transform negative emotions. Artistic practices, I have argued, are a place to get in touch with our senses and emotions and to move parts from our unconsciousness to a place where we can consciously connect to them within a new thinking space. This space will arguably both be filled with ‘positive’ feelings and attitudes, as well as with ‘negative’ ones. One participant of the theatre classes shares that theatre had allowed him “to do catharsis” and “to let go of certain fears and complexes” (Interview E). He and a mural artist I interviewed used catharsis to refer to the process of expressing their emotions and stories, to become aware of them and to have them witnessed by the others (Interview E and I). These processes helped them letting go of their fears. A young man shared with me what had been important for him in the processes he underwent by participating in one of the projects of Casa Mía, which had helped him to reconcile with his family and get out of drug consumption. “What was great is that the people tolerated us, though we were weird - we all were weird there, in Casa Mía. One did not know who was worse off, but though we were really bad, nobody was met with disrespect. It was like this, everyone controlled themselves.” (Interview B). Perhaps, because they experienced to be able to communicate their weaknesses and still be accepted as part of a group. In other words, to show their weak spots did not result in rejection, in consequence, they could accept them. Art provides a place to communicate conflicted emotions, Casa Mía provides a place where these are held in an affectionate way. Particularly in the face

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of absent parents, the arts and Casa Mía might provide a valuable space to face weaknesses within and to find acceptance.

For another interviewee, facing his conflicted self is an essential part of accepting the weaknesses of others:

to recognize that we are not perfect and from recognizing my imperfection I cannot demand perfection from the other. We have to learn to live together with the miseries of the others, because in comparison to mine, they are negligible. My miseries are so profound, so what are the patterns to judge [...] and we realized and learned this and started to create from a question of love, from the affectionate. (Interview C).

A possible interpretation of this statement is that by facing and humanizing his own negative sides, he was able to humanize the other. Stimulating practices in which people can recognize each other in their humanity is central to reconciliation work. In situations wherein different parties have been violent to each other like in Santander, it requires to connect to the own dark side in order to be able to recognize the humanness of the other, even in the acts which caused harm. In this regard, providing room for violent parts of biographies to surface through art in a reflective space can foster mutual understanding. Maybe in this emotional and cognitive space forgiveness becomes possible as the meaning of forgiveness shifts to – at least partly – to reconcile with oneself. Fostering understanding even of violent acts of the other might break the chains of vengeance my interview partners identify as sustaining violence in the neighborhood (Interview A).

To face one's negative side is necessary to be able to connect in an affectionate way and to “start to create from a question of love” (Interview A). To be able to connect to the heart, people at Casa Mía and associated artists have argued, one needs to overcome a numbness and indifference of people (Interview D, informal conversation N). Numbness and indifference, however, are coping mechanisms in the face of violence. By numbing all emotions, it is possible to suppress negative ones – but in consequence also the positive emotions are gone, which are necessary for affectionate connections. Thus, if art can enable people to deal with their negative emotions, by making them visible, by bringing them in an aesthetic expression to a level where they become manageable, they might allow people to dare to feel again. In consequence, they might be able to reconnect to their heart, too, allowing for affectionate relationships. In conclusion, art can provide a place to connect to and to reflect on a conflicted inner landscape.

Thereby, they can firstly help people to deal with their own difficult emotions and find acceptance of their weaknesses within; secondly, by confronting their own negative side, they might learn to accept the weaknesses of others, too; and thirdly, by finding a way to dealing with the conflicted sides of themselves, they might generally allow to be sensitized, weakening numbness and indifference and enabling affectionate relationships.

Transformation also takes place in the expression of positive emotions. Arts helps to celebrate life. One of the leaders of Casa Mía argues that the capacity of arts to bring about experiences of joyfulness influence the future choices of a person. The choices we make, he argues, are dependent on the memories which inform them. He believes “to have experience joy means [for them] to have been in contact with themselves” (Interview A). This importance of feeling joy to connect to oneself needs to be understood in a context where violence has overshadowed positive memories from many childhoods. In this sense, arts can connect people to a light-heartedness and positive side in themselves, a part of which otherwise might be eclipsed by violence. His comment on future choices can be interpreted the way that the experiences with this positive side brings into perspective the possibility of choosing for a way which can be life-affirming and joyful, a way of being in the world they could experience through the arts. Art thus fosters an understanding that life can be beautiful and is valuable, a message at the core of the affectionate approach which aims to transform a ‘culture of death’ into a ‘culture of life’.

4.2.3.3 Third faculty of knowledge: Imagination

Arts stimulate imagination and creativity. In this section I discuss how the capacity to imagine and create has been regarded as important for the reconciliation work by Casa Mía. Firstly, art can allow someone to escape the ugly world and experience tranquillity. Secondly, the capacity of art to convey beauty can provide new perspectives on reality. Thirdly, art can connect people to their talents which can empower them to (re-)imagine what they want to do in life.

Escaping the ugly world

In one interview, a person who had been part of the armed conflict and who had lost family members due to the violence in Santander shared how arts have been a place for him “to retreat from the ugly world” (Interview C). To be immersed in art can thus be understood as a repose from a violent reality into an imagined place. In this instance, art might not change the conflict, but allow people in a conflicted area to withdraw for a moment from that reality. The consumption of drugs is a major problem in Santander, which in some cases serves a similar

purpose, however, with far more disastrous effects on the consumer and on the conflict dynamics. Art can fulfil this need to retreat into an imaginative world where the painful reality can be forgotten for a while, offering in this respect a healthy alternative to drugs. In this instance, they allow to experience ‘tranquillity’, a state many people I talked to associated with the experience of peace.

De-centring perspectives

The same interviewee mentions the possibility that an aesthetic experience does not only offer a place to escape a violent reality, but that in that imaginative beautiful place a new perspective on the reality might be developed (Interview C). Beauty is an elusive notion and the role of beauty is difficult to capture, possibly a reason why it has been little studied in the peacebuilding field. However, the interviewee describes eloquently the social role beauty might play. He tells me the story of how they invited young guys from the neighbourhood to listen in silence to classical music from Beethoven, Bach, Mozart and Tchaikovsky. They allowed them to smoke marihuana and to “be comfortable as you want”, but to listen in silence. During that hour, some of the young men started crying. Afterwards someone described what they had experienced as “a journey into their interior”. My interview partner explains

It is the encounter with beauty which succeeds to transform culture. Which tools of beauty do we have? The cinema, culture, music, and here they find music and they start questioning themselves. [“What does beauty do to people?” I ask] It brings them to a superior state, where they can look at themselves from above themselves. Because our problem is that we look at ourselves as the centres of the universe. Beauty, arts lifts you to see that there are other things beyond yourself and which consummate your totality, generating a sensation so profound in you that you can see that in this place you are not capable of being aggressive. It thus changes your behaviour, by changing the habitat. (Interview C)

Here, the strength of the arts does not lie in their instrumentalization or politization, at least not in the first place, but just in the opposite. His story suggests that art might lift us to another place where we can experience – sensually – a reality that transmits something profound-maybe harmony, maybe peace. From this imagined place we can then look with a distance at our conflicted self and environment. The quality of arts thus lies here in in their potential to convey beauty and beauty possibly changes our perspective on our self and the reality around

us. Alongside the function of art to decentre someone and look at a distance at her conflicted self, the next section elaborates on how art can also help young people to shift perspective by deciding what should be the core in their life.

Visualizing talents and shifting power

Art can visualize the talents of people and can help them to be in contact who they want to be. Moreover, art helps Casa Mía to promote positive role models, in which the definition of ‘power’ shifts from “power over someone” to “power to choose what I want to do and who I want to be” (Interview A). In consequence, art can provide guidance and create resilience against the seduction of accessing ‘easy money’ and joining one of the violent groups.

For example, I observed how one child was continuously disturbing other children during the activities he participated in. One volunteer told me that his at times aggressive behaviour probably stemmed from a problematic situation at home (Interview H). Whenever he got the chance to dance, however, he would be fully concentrated and fully participating in the classes. Seeing him dance was a joyful experience. Hence, creating spaces for him to dance was a way to make visible how he was not only a problematic kid but could also bring joy to the community. This mechanism Casa Mía calls “to make talents visible” and is an important element of their approach (Interview A). In these moments when he was connected to his talent and what he enjoyed it was seemingly easier to feel affection for him, and thereby probably nurtured an affectionate relationship of other community members with the child.

In several interviews and informal conversations, the arts were mentioned as a way to get in touch with an authentic and ideal self (Interview F, D and A). One volunteer states that “arts help me to imagine and to experience how I want to be.” (Interview D) A member of the organization explains:

[...] it is a case of creation, [...], something which brings me to what I really want to be and do in my life. And this is conceived via an articulating element which transforms this reality which is choking and excruciating me. And it brings me to a reality which is an ideal reality, a world I want. And in the middle of this is an articulating element which is art or culture. Thus, here is where I can transition. (Interview A)

As mentioned before in the story of the boy who loves to dance, Casa Mía uses art as a tool to show the talents of young people. Moreover, for example with the recording studio, Casa Mía

tries to support young people in developing their talents (Interview A). Thereby, art assists them in helping young people to find a purposeful project in life. Having clear what they want and who they want to be arguably stimulates them to focus on realizing their dream. One possibility is that young people started to identify as artists themselves, as “everyone had their art form or was learning one” (Casa Mía, 2015). Moreover, having positive experiences through the arts and discovering what they like, thus stimulates the imagination by experience of who they want to become and be.

These positive kinds of identification and experiences would help young people to choose a non-violent path in moments of crisis. Two leaders of Casa Mía explained to me in separate interviews that in the face of poverty, exclusion and lack of opportunity, a young person would get to a point where (s)he needs to create. This creation could be for good or for bad. Within a culture where violence has become an often used means, to turn to violence to access ‘easy money’ had become an often-chosen path (Interview A). What path the young person takes would depend on the instruments and memories at hand. Thus, the experience of joy and knowledge of own talents could help young people in these crucial moments. (Interview C) In this interpretation imagination depends on and is guided by our memories and skills at hand. Moreover, what young people would be able to imagine also depends on role models which can guide them.

Art helps to create experiences and role models which promote a different interpretation of power. Casa Mía stimulates the image of the ‘autonomous artist’ as an alternative role model to the image promoted by *narco*-aesthetics, which idealizes the “guy with the gun, with the moto and the most beautiful girl in the neighbourhood” (Interview F). In the document “Casa Mía in the planate”, Jiménez describes the efforts of the organization “not to change one power for the other, we intend to change the essence of power in all its manifestations, this is the motor of our work.” (Jiménez, 2016, p. 5). Casa Mía tries to tackle the desire of young men for power by discussing with participants the difference of “having power over” and “being autonomous and having power to choose who I want to be” (Interview A and Jiménez and Quintero Saavedra, 2018). In this understanding of power, art increases the agency of people as it allows them to become more aware of their emotions, thoughts and desires and thereby being able to choose for themselves what is the path they want to take. If art empowers people to develop as sovereign beings who can make choices based on an awareness of who they are and want to be,

then art strengthens the ability to escape from cultural structures which impose an identity associated with violence.

To conclude this section, art can bridge a conflicted reality and a desired future. This imagined reality can either be experienced as a fantastic imaginary space, or by connecting in the now to what brings joy and purpose into the everyday, thereby signalling a path into a desired future.

4.2.4 Art and a new thinking space: Opening a felt and reflective space

By examining the work of Casa Mía and building on the theoretical framework, I have explored the qualities of art that stimulate the engagement with different faculties of knowledge, namely senses, emotions and imagination. I have assessed how they link and may provide new perspectives from which the understanding of reality can be reassessed from a new thinking space which is sensually felt, emotionally engaged and reflective. Doing so, I have argued how arts help to implement the affectionate approach by Casa Mía in Santander. By paying attention to how the ‘disjointed faculties’ interact, I have moved beyond the theory provided by Bleiker (2017). Bleiker stresses the importance of the interaction between multiple senses. However, he does not elaborate how these interactions take place nor has he detailed how they may stimulate intra- and inter-personal processes which further reconciliation processes.

In this following section I reflect on the reflective space Casa Mía opens via the use of art. I aim to get to an even deeper understanding of how art changes the way we are able to think about the world. I do so by presenting the explanations given by artists and participants I interviewed and by adopting aspects of the theoretical framework, foremost the idea of ‘contextual ambidextrousness’ of the arts presented by Shank and Schirch (2008) and Bleiker’s aesthetic lens, to explain more in depth what we have explored so far.

4.2.4.1 Arts creating distance necessary for reflection

An actor I interviewed stressed that arts would constantly pose the questions “Who and how am I?” (Interview J). In consequence, artistic practices would be a way for people to get to know themselves better. Drawing upon creative therapy theory, I have argued that one explanation is that arts surface what is moving us subconsciously. Moreover, I have presented the believe of Casa Mía, that young people who know who they are and want to be are less receptive to the persuasions of the drug trafficking industry and other armed groups. Bleiker (2001) and my interview partner D explain that an aesthetic expression always reveals about

the subject choosing that expression. Hence, an art piece or gesture of a dance can be read as an interpretation and representation of the performer's worldview. The lines between the object created (a sculpture, a mural, a song) and the subject who created it are getting blurred, but still they are separated entities. In that way it becomes possible to reflect and talk about the art piece, but also to actually talk about oneself or the artist. One interviewee illustrates this with a story:

At a clay-workshop a woman made a dove. After she'd had finished, the two looked at the dove and the woman started to tell how the dove reminded her of her brother who had died. She told everything about the relationship they had, what it meant for her to make this dove. She would not have told this story without the clay, without the possibility to make the dove, it would have been more difficult that she would have told that story. Thus, I believe it changes the way we tell stories. (Interview D)

The aesthetic expression mediates in this case an intra-or interpersonal conversation, creating what Shank and Schirch (2008) call a 'safe distance' between the two. Shank and Schirch have argued for this kind of mediated conversation in their explanation of how arts can serve a 'high context' culture to allow to 'save face' and to adopt a more formalized way to communicate. The exercise of painting a stone at the tournament, has thus allowed the men to talk about their emotions in a "safer" manner, than talking directly about themselves. There have been several examples given by interviewees making the same point, that a conversation was generated by an object, which might not have emerged otherwise (Interview D, F, C). It is certainly difficult to talk about experiences related to violence or about topics which challenge dominant stereotypes, such as talking about emotions for men or about their sensuality for women. In these cases, the ability to create a 'safe space' is relevant, disregarding the general communication patterns of that society. Moreover, for any kind of reflection, there is a need for distance, too. Thus, in creating a distance between a person and her aesthetic expression, art enables reflection. To stimulate reflection is central to Casa Mía's methodology, where affection and reflection are married. Art thus aids Casa Mía to implement their affectionate approach by enabling reflective processes.

4.2.4.2 Arts creating closeness necessary for affection

One person, more a social worker than an artist, described her experiences with the art as follows: "Arts generate a kind of sensitivity and the power to do away with all these boundaries which impede that we communicate with the other. So what arts do is to take away all of this and let be what is. That is to say, to be able to be who one is." (Interview D) According to her,

this would be particularly true for improvised arts. She thus describes a quality of the arts which, via the senses, takes something away which obscures the view – for us and others – of the core of oneself. As presented in the analysis of the ‘affectionate approach’, the current leaders believe that this ‘core’ is capable of affectionate relationships, and thus they understand that all the work they do need to ‘go through the heart’ in order to be effective. One participant of a six month-long project at Casa Mía has experienced how the work of Casa Mía had brought about a shift in the young people of Santander. He reflects on how the young people of the neighbourhood changed during the project, in which artistic practices were used to create reflective spaces: “it was like taking a blindfold from your eyes and realize that the people are not bad; it is that the society had us this way. We all changed, bettered, in comparison to before [...] Really, for me the change came when I understood that the people weren’t bad and I wasn’t bad either” (Interview B). He thus realized, that in the core, he was a good person, and that people he was afraid of before, had their good sides, too. Without discussing whether the core of human nature is good or bad, how can we explain that art allows for an authentic expression of the self, as argued by the social worker, which possibly allows people to recognize affection within them and enable to see good in others, too?

The boundaries the social worker talks of are described by the participant as socially influenced preconceptions we hold of the other (same argument made in Interview A). Moreover, emotions like fear and hate can stand in the way to perceive the other detached from this emotional layer that creates a distance between two people or a person and his/her own being. An aesthetic experience can bring us closer by allowing us to access our view of reality – including ideas about ourselves and the other - from different perspectives offered by ‘multiple’ senses. If one ‘sense’ is not able to connect to the other person – for example the rational sense in a conversation where two people are gridlocked in irreconcilable narratives or– another ‘sense’ might offer an opening in which a *direct encounter* can take place. A member of Casa Mía told me the story of man who commanded over 80 young people. In one of the marches organized by Casa Mía, he participated, dressed up like clown and playing a drum (Interview A). Arguably, by taking off his uniform and showing this artistic side, other community members might have been able to relate to him, as his biography as a ‘dangerous man’ went to the background and the co-creation of the parade and celebration came to the fore in the moment. This way, art may offer different entry points to meet, and overcome a one-sided ‘common-sensical’ image of the other, thereby revealing what is *as well*. In this interpretation, adopting the aesthetic lens offered by Bleiker (2001), arts allow not to strip away the layers to see ‘the

truth' but to be able to become aware of the layers and *also* see what else is. According to Casa Mía, there will be a person with dreams and capable of affectionate relationships. Revealing this part which Casa Mía calls the essence may enable the change experienced by the participant who realized that he and also others were not bad but could show each other respect and co-exist. The multi-faceted reality revealed through the art may contribute to reconciliation work in two ways: Firstly, it may offer new entry-points to relate to the other and in consequence trigger a reassessment of the limited view held before; secondly, as one learns to see the world para-sensically, with every sense offering their unique and maybe contradicting insides, one has to accept multiple truths within. As this struggle to embrace paradox is navigated within, this may analogously lead to an easier acceptance of the different interpretations of 'truth' held in the community, thereby enabling co-existence and – if in appreciation of all contributions – conviviality.

Another aspect of arts creating closeness already discussed, is the argument that arts can work as 'sensitizers', connecting us to the senses of the body as the primary ways of perceiving the world. In this understanding, arts allow us to get closer (in contact) with our emotions, too. Furthermore, I have argued how artistic practices may counter a numbness into the ability to 'feel again', thereby arguably allowing for a connection intra-personally between the cognitive, the senses and the emotions; as well as enabling people to establish affectionate relationships. These are different ways in which art can allow for closeness, or connectedness, intra- and interpersonally. Shank and Schrich (2008) have argued that art can offer a more direct communication pattern common in 'low context' cultural contexts, which requires little formalized communication. Above I have argued, how the different ways of becoming close (to our body, to our emotions, to the other) are necessary for "recomposing the fabric of affection" (Jiménez 2016, p. 6).

4.2.4.3 The 'contextual ambidextrousness' of the art allowing for affection and reflection

The 'contextual ambidextrousness' of the arts, their capacity to respond to the needs of direct and indirect communication equally well, is thus not only relevant for international practitioners to adopt their approach according to context (Shank & Schirch, 2008). It is relevant for allowing a distance between a subject and the reality which enables reflection and a closeness or connectedness which enables affection. Sometimes, to get close, we need to stay distanced. For example, for connecting to potentially overwhelming emotions, people might better deal with

them in the contained form of an artistic expression, brought down at a ‘narratable level’, instead of looking at them directly. The dialectic between reflection and affection is at the heart of the ‘affectionate approach’ by Casa Mía. Art can make place for both equally well.

4.2.5 Allowing for multiple interpretations of reality and co-creation

In the theoretical framework, I have introduced the argument of the ‘multi-vocality’ of the arts, meaning that several views can be represented in one arts piece. The answers of my interview partners illustrate how art cannot only be inclusive in the representation of reality, but also in its interpretation. Followingly, I discuss the relevance of this quality of the arts for the implementation of the affectionate approach.

4.2.5.1 Opening possibilities for multiple interpretations of reality

Several people I interviewed described the arts as a conversation starting with a question: “The beautiful and interesting with art is, that it is not an explicit message: it is a dialogue starting with a question. And as it poses a question, there is not only one answer; and as there is not only one answer there are infinite answers and together they generate a collective reflection.” (Interview A; but also D, J, C and E). Arts thus allow for various interpretation of the aesthetic experience, with not one perspective claiming hegemony on truth. When we look at a piece of art, in theatre for example a frozen sculpture (a method asking people to form a sculpture with their body which then ‘freezes’), and ask “What do you see?” we could do so to better understand that piece of art. The point my interviewees however are making, is that the answer to the question “What do you see?”, or the interpretation of the art, tells something about the person looking at the arts. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer, but multiple answers. The acceptance of multiple answers is arguably an acceptance of multiple truths which co-exist. Moreover, the aesthetic experience in this way may also provide an understanding of diversity whilst at the same time providing common ground by grounding a dialogue in a shared experience. It might set a stage for a dialogue open to different perspectives. However, whether several interpretations are permitted might also depend on who is hosting the reflection of the aesthetic experience. Casa Mía believes art “teaches how we complement each other” (Interview C) and intentionally uses it to teach how people in Santander complement each other. The quality of art is that it allows different interpretations of reality to co-exist and thus can teach about different interpretations of life.

4.2.5.2 Empowering by co-creating

Thus, in this instance the power of arts does not lie in conveying a clear message, but exactly in leaving open the room for interpretation. The second pillar of Casa Mía's approach is social education. Instead of teaching children a singular curriculum with pre-determined right answers, Casa Mía tries to provide instruments which allow for personal reflection and choice in what is important to learn for each person (Interview K and C). This is how its members imagine true empowerment of a person by strengthening their ability to choose for themselves "who and how they want to be" (Interview A). Arguably, a child might more strongly 'own' the insights gained if they are completing 'the answer' by paying attention to how a message – an aesthetic expression - resonates within them. In this sense, the object and subject co-create the aesthetic experience. Therefore, the subject – the child/person – is instrumental in what can be learned from it. This is one reason why their approach requires people to join voluntarily and is a reason why they cannot determine how many people will change due to their programs (Interview F and D). In the end, it is a shared conviction of participants and leaders of Casa Mía, it is up to each person whether he or she will change (Interview K, L, B and F). Since art can be interpreted in many ways - in a co-creation between the aesthetic object and the subject involved perceiving- it is a suitable tool for this personalized and empowering type of educating Casa Mía aspires.

On the intra and interpersonal level, art can change how we relate to our self and the other, by activating the bodily, emotional and imaginative faculties and bringing them in interaction with the intellect; thereby enabling affectionate relationships and reflective processes. Changing relationships is at the core to reconciliation work. Moreover, arts are open for multiple interpretations and demand an active participation of the creator and recipient who co-create the aesthetic experience. Therefore, they are suited for an empowering approach. This is how art facilitates the implementation of the affectionate approach on the intra- and interpersonal level.

After having analysed in depth how arts work on the intra- and interpersonal level, in the next section I will zoom out and look at how Casa Mía has employed the arts on the community level. In the analysis so far, it became evident how intra- and interpersonal processes interact, which is in line with Casa Mía's understanding of the intersubjective nature of peace. For example, facing a conflicted self can ease the contact with another person and the acceptance of a group of the vulnerabilities of a person can help that person to accept her own weaknesses,

too. The next section adds a territorial dimension, while the intra- and interpersonal processes described above are taking place simultaneously. However, the focus is now on the artistic practices Casa Mía has brought to the streets of Santander and how this has influenced the way people relate to the neighbourhood.

4.2.6 Creative placemaking in Santander

In this last part of the analysis, I look at how the artistic methods used by Casa Mía enable communal and place-based change in Santander. Creative placemaking is a concept from urban development studies which describes how art can change the relationship of people to a place. It does so by (re-)signifying it through community engagement in a creative act, thereby making the place more livable for its inhabitants. Adopting this perspective, I will argue that the arts used by Casa Mía bring people together, bring joyfulness, assist them in reclaiming and destigmatizing places from the conflict, help them to redefine participation more broadly and allow them to realize a more inclusive approach in which a desired future can be imagined together. Through these processes, arts-based methods change the relationship between people in Santander to their neighborhood and amongst each other, thereby nurturing a ‘culture of life’ amidst a ‘culture of death’.

4.2.6.1 Bringing people together

One function of arts an interviewee mentions with a smile is “to bring people together”. “Why?”, I ask. “Because we need a reason to meet”. “And why not just meeting? Or another reason?” “Because it is better with arts” (Interview G). Another member of Casa Mía tells me, that they would bring the arts to connect to people and to break the ice (Interview F). During the community day, people were attracted to join as there were games, food but also musical performances, people dancing and clowns entertaining. In the example of the tournament, soccer brought people together and the breaks were used for arts-based workshops on conviviality. This way people with less affinity for arts might find access to art-based programs. Moreover, art is not the only tool Casa Mía uses, and people working with Casa Mía have in mind that some community members are more receptive to different tools, like sports or games (Interview K, D, A and F) In many instances, however, Casa Mía uses arts to attract people. Cohen argues how the stimulation of both sensual and cognitive faculties are experienced as particularly exhilarating (Cohen, 2005). This might explain why my interviewee says meeting others would simply be better with arts. By conveying a feeling of ‘liveliness’ art can bring

people together. This is the first step necessary for implementing the ‘affectionate approach’ as well as for allowing people to take part in a creative act which is essential to creative placemaking.

4.2.6.2 Reclaiming places

The body may be used in an act of resistance. Several people voiced how lively they remembered the marches with music and arts through the streets in the 90s when people were afraid of going out of the houses because of the intense violence in the neighbourhood. They interpret these moments as instances wherein arts were used to resist fear, to show solidarity and to spread hope (Interview D, B, A and E). The importance and devastating effect of fear on the community has been mentioned in a number of interviews (Interview E, D and A). Cohen and Nussbaum argue that the experience of violence curtails the abilities people need to live a good life (Cohen, 2005b; Nussbaum, 2011). To be able to act in any way is an ability often impaired by violent conflict as it may leave people feeling afraid and powerless. To go out on the streets and make music and celebrate in such a moment can thus be interpreted both as an instance of bodily resistance, in which people reclaim the power to act and inhabit their neighbourhood via their bodies and as part of a regaining abilities important for living well. The quality of the arts is here to help people moving from an imposed passivity to the ability to act; an activity which manifests in and emanates from the bodily. The parades through the neighbourhood have also a spatial place-making aspect which will be discussed below in more detail.

As mentioned, the ‘marches for life’ organized by Casa Mía have been interpreted as parades in which people have bodily resisted fear. The importance and devastating effect of fear on the community has been declared in four interviews and arts have been described as a tool to act amidst fear, to express it and thereby to find a way to deal with it. In an instable environment where an atmosphere of fear paralyzes social activities in a neighbourhood, to go out on the streets and make music and celebrate is thus an instance of bodily resistance. In this act people reclaim the power to act and inhabit their neighbourhood via their bodies (Interview E, D and A). As pointed to above, this does not only take place on an intrapersonal level but also has a creative placemaking aspect in which art functions to reclaiming a space. Research participants emphasised the importance of the parades in ‘hot times’ when homicides rates were peaking and in areas which are regarded as particularly prone to host violent activities (Interview B and E). According to the conflict-stages and intensity-sensitive theory of Shank and Schirch, the

intense times of conflict require artistic practices which help to stop the fighting. Casa Mía did organize events in tense times and places, however, the organization of events is more difficult and dangerous then and can even be lethal (informal conversation 4.5.2018). Thus, it is necessary for an organization to be able to assess the possible dangers with going on the street, which is easier for local organisations which are part of a community. When Casa Mía works in sites outside of Santander, I was told that they would co-operate with other organizations and follow their advice.

Even at the same time and in the same neighbourhood, there are parts which are more or less secure. It is thus not only important to notice the overall intensity and stage of a conflict, but to know where in a community illegal transaction and violence are taking place, too. This is how they can possibly be targeted and reclaimed. The scale of a city is too big to map all the sites which are prone to host violent activities on the micro scale. Local civil society organizations have the most detailed insights of the conflict in their neighbourhood (informal conversation with people working for the municipality, 29.4.). For example, parks have been mentioned as places where micro-trafficking (drug dealing), illegal cockfights and trading of stolen goods are taking place. One of these parks was chosen as a site for a collaboration between Casa Mía, the municipality and other organizations in a project titled 'I am painting my neighbourhood with life'. It consisted of a series of movie screenings, football tournaments and various arts-based workshops. Gaining access to the park requires finding an agreement with the informal group(s) controlling it. Because of Casa Mía's long-standing reputation, it places them in a special position to gain access. This is one of the reasons why the municipality engaged in the collaboration and it indicates their expectations regarding Casa Mía's insights in who is controlling the micro-territory and Casa Mía's position to negotiate access. Similarly, Casa Mía's involvement meant that the people controlling the park could be convinced that the project was eventually benefitting the community to which they belong. But it also raises expectations regarding Casa Mía's influence on state actors. So, when an incident occurred between men who were illegally selling in the park and the police, this jeopardized the project as these expectations were challenged. I witnessed a mediation between the men and the different partner organizations at Casa Mía. From the mediating role of Casa Mía, it became clear how they need to continuously navigate and manage their relationship to these different parties with sometimes conflicting interests. It shows the somewhat paradoxical situation that in order to reclaim space, Casa Mía needs to first negotiate access and re-negotiate as the context changes. Casa Mía's position is key but also vulnerable. Making agreements with

groups associated with criminal activities is illegal, yet their inclusion in the project is essential for the success of the project (the project ‘I am painting my neighbourhood with life’ as well as the ultimate project to build an inclusive peace in Santander) and thus in the interest of all parties involved (informal conversation, 4.5.2018). It is in this negotiated space that reclaiming can take place, using arts to create a safe and relatively neutral space to transform how people relate to the park.

4.2.6.3 Destigmatizing places

Casa Mía uses the arts to celebrate life which can destigmatize places. A long-term resident of Santander stresses the importance of the jollity and blithesomeness arts can bring to people and to the neighbourhood. He tells that “Casa Mía did a lot of marches for life, people came from a lot of places to be part of the march which as accompanied by artists, full of colours, with jugglers, musicians, people who like nature, who worked with children.” (Interview A) The effect of the marches for life would be that they could “show that the war was not as important, as the joy broke with the violence” (Interview A). The parades, for a moment, transformed the atmosphere of fear to one of joy. This is a valuable function of arts: They directly influence the lived experience of people who inhabit a conflicted area by bringing a gai shared experience to the foreground. By moving the conflict to the background for an instance, there is a timely shift from a ‘culture of death’ to a ‘culture of life’ wherein people celebrate life. In so doing, they arguably create positive memories and allow for positive associations with a place. Arts can thus change the experience of people of a conflicted place by bringing moments of joy to it; thereby providing lived experiences of what a ‘culture of life’ could feel like and creating positive memories of the place.

Casa Mía destigmatizes places in Santander by introducing arts. On a walk with one of the leaders of the organization, we passed a mural showing an elderly lady and a boy gesturing a peace sign and a thumbs up and the words “Santander – the best corner of Medellín”. The mural is placed on a wall next to the football field *La Tinajita* which used to be one of the most violent places in the neighborhood, as the spheres of influence of several groups intersected on that field. The mural was painted by the *Casa de la Cultura*, in a project called ‘Santander – the best corner of Medellín’. Casa Mía and several other organizations co-organized. The idea of the project was to destigmatize the entire neighborhood Santander, which its inhabitants knew as “the most dangerous corner in the most dangerous city of the world” (Interview D). Stigmas, my guide explains, would foster processes of exclusion which could encumber the desired

positive transformation of a place. Positive associations, on the other hand, would stimulate that people would take care of the place. Hence the purpose of the project was to transform Santander as a place associated with the war and ugliness of which people felt ashamed of to having an image as “the best corner of Medellín” (Interview D). They did so “by bringing cultural acts, with troubadours, singers, musical groups, parades, we dressed up” and observed that “people started to create a sense of identity, that people felt esteem ” (Interview D). The sense of identity and self- esteem are thus linked via an artistic act to the place.



Mural “The best corner of Medellín: Santander” placed next to the soccer field La Tinajita. Picture taken by the author.

The processes she describes and the ideas behind them follow the same logic as creative placemaking discussed in urban development, through which people connect to a place in a creative act and therefor start caring about it. However, with the substantial difference, that not placelessness gets challenged, but the stigma of a place which had been very violent and now suffered from the image of violence in the aftermath of armed conflict. The feeling of esteem related to a place might lead to a situation wherein people want to invest more in the neighborhood and a changed image may attract investments of small businesses. However, if people want to change but do not find alternative opportunities to make a living, it is difficult for them to get out of illegality (Interview G, A, D and C). Like one research participant told me, “whether you choose for an arm or poetry, if the bellies are hungry, the answer is easy” (informal conversation, 20.05). Maintained violence can in turn re-enforce the image of an

unstable place and decrease the attractiveness for outsiders and possible investment. Moreover, there is the image of the drug lord (and in some eyes this also true for the *guerrilla*) of taking from the rich and giving to the poor (Interview F). People feeling connected to the neighborhood may thus not necessarily turn away from violent means. To counter the role model of the benevolent gangster, the projects of Casa Mía are combined with a message on the sacredness of life and offer room for reflection of how people imagine their neighborhood they desire. Violence is mostly not part of the desired future. Casa Mía and creative placemaking can influence the will of people to change themselves and the neighborhood. Economic opportunities and access to the services functioning state institutions, which greatly influence whether they can do so, however, are influenced by other actors. Nevertheless, the artistic acts introduced in the neighborhood can foster processes in which people relate in a positive way to the place they inhabit and foster de-stigmatization of a place. This can be instrumental to change attitudes towards violence in the community, but other factors will determine whether this change can materialize. The nurtured esteem and the creation of a positive sense of identity, however, are valuable experiences for the participants and as discussed above, may influence intra-personal development, too. Art thus is a community engaging tool by Casa Mía, which they use for the de-stigmatization of places in the neighborhood and the neighborhood in its entirety.

4.2.6.4 Resignifying participation

Casa Mía aims at promoting conviviality and one of the aspects of conviviality is the participation of all members of the community. In the search for an inclusive approach, Casa Mía has promoted a broader concept of participation:

Of course, this is why we talk about art as an alternative language, and art is a form of participation in the community, too – and this one has to understand. Because traditionally participation has been understood as assisting in reunions, voting and these kinds of forms, but those are just some of the many that exist. The modification and the intervention of the physical space is a form of participation; a mural is a form of participation as you are intervening in the space which is collective. And you are intervening with a message, with an aesthetic form which moreover is political.
(Interview F)

Besides describing party politics and power to control a place with the use of force, the people I talked to at Casa Mía understood the political as the power to define the everyday experience of people. To take part in the parades, to perform in the parks or to paint a mural are ways to co-create an experience in the community or to modify the place. These are thus also ways to participate. Broadening the concept of participation also changes the idea what does it mean to contribute to the community. People who have not economically contributed to the well-being of a place and community have been more vulnerable to violence – both to commit and to suffer violence. For example, I was told how “crazy people” and drug addicts were specifically targeted and killed (Interview C). To highlight different forms of contributions to the community raise the esteem also for people who, for personal or structural reasons, cannot financially contribute to the neighbourhood. Appreciation of the community counters the violence committed against them and may open new possibilities, as people might be more willing to help to better their situation and the esteem they receive might bring them confidence to change, if they can. However, as discussed in the paragraph, a changed perspective of the community is only one part of a bigger picture, in which structural poverty and other barriers make it hard for people to change not only themselves but the reality surrounding them. Recognizing these limitations, art is a tool Casa Mía has that - in combination with reflective practices guided by the affectionate approach - broadens the concept of participation and thereby allows to implement a more inclusive approach and to promote conviviality.

4.2.6.5 Including and visualizing the multiple perspectives which make Santander

Casa Mía imagines peace to be inclusive, and art is one of the tools it has to implement an inclusive approach. Casa Mía uses arts to visualize that Santander is constituted by every inhabitant of the place and thereby promote and practice the idea of conviviality in the sense of “Ubuntu” or “I am because we are” (Interview F).

The following moment gives an impression of one of the methods Casa Mía used for this purpose I witnessed during fieldwork. At one day of the project ‘I paint my neighbourhood with life’ in the park, a collaborating artist from a graffiti collective brought a huge paper. On this paper, children and youth, but also older members of the community, were invited to paint and write a card to Medellin. The task was to express the wishes they had for the city and the neighbourhood. The result was a colourful image of how Santander could look like and what the inhabitants asked for from other actors or what they themselves could contribute. In fact,

the painted imagination of a perfect Santander expressed at the same time individual wishes and the different perspectives everyone had on what is needed for living well together in Santander, as well as a joint vision for the place. One of the members of Casa Mía defines ‘Ubuntu’ followingly

‘Ubuntu’, or ‘I am because we are’ describes how I define myself because I am part of a collective and how the collective defines itself because I belong to that collective. In these terms, one understands that collectives are constituted by people and it is important that everyone participate in this construction. (Interview F)

The creative method of painting a ‘card to Medellín’ is a good example of how the multivocality of art -its ability to express various perspectives in one arts piece – can be used to teach a fundamental principle of the peace imagined by Casa Mía conviviality. Moreover, the exercise allows children and grown-ups alike to participate and therefore offer an approach inclusive across generations. Casa Mía calls the joint imagination of the future of Santander *un sueño compartido*, ‘a shared dream’. Next to helping individuals to imagine a desired future, Casa Mía and its collaborators facilitate that people of Santander have an idea of “who and how they want to be” as a collective. Similar to the mechanisms discussed for the individual, this can stimulate the neighbourhood to work towards this desired future. Again, whether they succeed in doing so, is dependent on other contextual factors which Casa Mía does not influence with their work. In this creative placemaking example, people have engaged in a creative act to imagine the future which involves young and old community member, creating an intersubjective understanding of peace. The peace imagined through visual arts is placed in the city of Medellín, in Santander, and thus connects the people involved in the practice to the place and intertwines their dreams with the place they inhabit. Arts, I have argued, function as a tool to engage people from the community in a joint imagination of peace in the neighbourhood. This way, they allow Casa Mía to implement its affectionate approach who work to realize the collective dream.

In this last part of the analysis, I have argued have Casa Mía uses art for creative placemaking. By bringing people together, sharing joyful moments, destigmatizing places, broadening the definition of participation and together imagining a peaceful Santander, arts can change the relationship between people and the place. This way, they influence how the inhabitants of Santander relate to their neighbourhood in a more affectionate way. Affectionate relationships amongst people and towards the neighbourhood change the everyday experiences of Casa Mía

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to a more liveable reality. Moreover, it can stimulate people to invest themselves in the creation of a peaceful neighbourhood. This the intermediate goal of Casa Mía's affectionate approach and a relevant dimension for social change. However, social change depends on other dimensions, too, such as economic opportunities and functioning state institutions. Moreover, also armed groups use the arts to strengthen their influence in the neighbourhood, for example by promoting *narco*-aesthetics; thus, art is not only used for positive change in the neighbourhood. Peacebuilding is a multi-dimensional endeavour. Casa Mía takes the responsibility for doing their part, and creative placemaking help them to implement their 'affectionate approach'.

5 Conclusion

This thesis gravitates around the question: What has been the role of art in the implementation of an 'affectionate approach' to peaceful co-existence, as developed by the Colombian civil society organization Casa Mía in Santander, Medellin? In order to answer this question, data was collected following an ethnographic approach with participatory methods that place the local context at the forefront. For the analysis, I synthesize existing literature and develop a theoretical framework using both arts and peacebuilding literature, as well as drawing upon a concept from urban studies and planning. I build on Bleiker (2001, 2017) who calls for a broadening of the senses to include imagination, emotion and intuition and conceptualized a 'thinking space'. In addition, I use Cohen's description of the different functions of arts and their workings. Furthermore, this thesis puts a special focus on the spatial dimension and employs the concept 'creative placemaking' to study the function of art to resignify, destigmatize and reclaim space.

A number of sub questions have been answered in order to answer the overarching research question. The first part of the analysis elaborates Casa Mía's affectionate approach to peace. It describes the different forms of direct and indirect violence present in Santander ranging from drug abuse to *narco*-culture. In turn, Casa Mía's imagined peace is described in a number of principles. To begin with, they hold that life is sacred to overcome a culture of death and nihilism. It signals that Casa Mía's peace moves beyond a negative definition. It stresses conviviality, which looks at more than absence of violence and asks: "how do we live well together"? Casa Mía's peace is inclusive, rooted in solidarity and compassion and inherently

intersubjective. Finally, the concept *buen vivir* highlights that its notion of peace includes the natural world, as well as the social.

Achieving this peace is considered a set of processes that enable intra- and interpersonal change. Casa Mía's approach, *lo afectivo es lo efectivo*, captures a deeply held belief that an effective approach to peace must be affectionate. This idea is rooted in a vision of human nature as intrinsically good which may be suppressed and obscured by an environment of direct and indirect violence. Focusing on the heart as a symbolic place for change from within and between people implies a holistic view of inter and intra-personal change required for peace. It involves all the different emotional and mental layers that compose a person. And it underlines the need to overcome fear, indifference and violence with affectionate relationships of solidarity, trust and hope. From this it also becomes clear why the affectionate approach cannot be implemented top-down or enforced but requires voluntary and intrinsically driven participation to achieve empowerment. From the analysis, it becomes clear that reflection and imagination play a central role in fostering this holistic view and envisioning an alternative reality. Throughout their work, Casa Mía relies heavily upon the use of artistic practices in order to achieve this vision of peace.

This brings us to the second step to answer the overarching research question namely, how does art enable the implementation of the affectionate approach? The arts are considered part of alternative languages that promote non-narrative based dialogue. The affectionate approach does so by operating on different levels: the bodily, the emotional, the intellectual, the spiritual, and the biodiverse. A central question to this thesis then is: What are the qualities of art that allow it to implement the affectionate approach? I argue that art makes place for bodily and non-verbal awareness and communication. It does so firstly by sensitizing participants and increasing awareness for how we perceive the world and connecting to emotions. Arts allow for thinking the unthinkable by facilitating a process to deal with inner conflicts and issues and make place for non-verbal expression. Beyond becoming aware, it may enable a person to speak the unspeakable and share these processes allowing for a change in inter-personal relationships. Besides expressing emotions, arts can also allow for channeling difficult emotions into something beautiful as opposed to causing damage. Another function of art is that it allows participants to face both positive and negative aspects of life. It provides a contained space which allows people to face weaknesses and find acceptance. By going through these processes together, artistic practices facilitate connecting people by seeing each other more fully and acknowledging each other's suffering. Secondly, art functions in different ways to stimulate

imagination and creativity. The possibility to escape the ugly world and imagine an alternative, beautiful, place responds to a deep need for tranquility and peace. Furthermore, arts can make visual talents of people and empower by promoting alternative role models and autonomy in choosing “who I want to be”.

Having identified the different functions of art in Casa Mía’s work I propose a more in-depth understanding of which qualities enable it to do its work and how the different faculties of knowledge work and interact. Art enables expressing emotions whilst maintaining a safe distance between a person and her expression which allows for reflection. At the same time, art may strip barriers between people allowing for a closeness where affectionate relationships may develop. This brings together speaking the unspeakable, seeing each other more fully, and collectively imagining alternative realities. Art can provide a contained, frame in which this can be managed. I argue that this expands the meaning of ‘contextual ambidextrousness’, to include staying distanced in order to get close. A central quality of art that enables Casa Mía to implement its affectionate approach is its multi-vocality. The possibility to open possibilities for multiple interpretations of reality that are neither right nor wrong. This means that the process of finding meaning is one of co-creation and therefore empowering. It stimulates an awareness of interdependency in the act of interpretation which simultaneously relies upon an autonomy in developing individual insights.

Finally, I move to the spatial dimension of artistic practices. Arts as used by Casa Mía bring people together and enable reclaiming and destigmatizing places. In this process it redefines participation and promotes Casa Mía’s inclusive understanding of peace. Creative placemaking shows how activities which connect people to a place in a visible creative act indirectly challenge aspects of the conflict.

This analysis has adopted the language of Casa Mía when describing the affectionate approach. It is, however, not naive toward the limitations of this approach. Transforming a culture of death, nihilism and *narco*-aesthetics can promote a vision of peace. But its materialization is strongly dependent upon a range of economic and institutional factors. If people are hungry, what do you choose, arms or poetry? Furthermore, the local approach of this thesis has hinted at a dialectic between purpose and circumstance. The financial situation of the organization has stimulated its creative use of methods and focus on particular aspects of the peace process, which in turn informs its understanding of the conflict and vision of peace. The organization is guided by the idea that the value of life is immeasurable which also makes it difficult to quantify

outcomes and express the value of its work in economic terms. Yet such a translation can be important to gain access to funding and decrease the organization's dependency upon voluntarism. Building on the fieldwork observations and the insights shared by my research participants I have provided: firstly, a more nuanced understanding of how the different 'senses' simulated by arts-based methods interact; secondly how the bodily, emotional and imaginative interact with the cognitive faculty in a heart-felt and reflective space (thereby overcoming the dichotomous distinction of rational and non-rational approaches); and, thirdly, how the engagement and interaction of these different dimension may serve reconciliation purposes.

In the beginning of this thesis I introduce the notion of *pensentir*, a Spanish word denoting how feelings and thoughts interact and together form our understanding of the world. Casa Mía uses art to bring the affectionate and reflection into conversation every day.

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Interviews

Conducted in April and May 2018

Interview A, Interview B, Interview C, Interview D, Interview E, Interview F, Interview G, Interview H, Interview I, Interview J, Interview K, Interview L, Interview M, Interview N

Appendix

Categories





