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Everyday urban peace: Experiences from a marginalised neighbourhood in Cali, Colombia

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Abstract

Urban violence is a characteristic of urban living in both conflict and non-conflict settings. Its experience is often highly uneven, with marginalised communities most acutely affected, meaning that residents and organisations often have long experience of addressing conflict and violence. However, these efforts are disconnected from formal conflict resolution processes, and remain poorly understood in terms of constructing peace. Drawing on debates from peace and conflict studies, human geography, and urban studies, this article proposes the concept of 'everyday urban peace' as a framework for better understanding how marginalised urban communities respond to conflict and violence. The article applies this framework in the context of a self-built neighbourhood in Cali, Colombia, where poverty and violence intersect with racialised segregation. It explores local residents' experiences and perceptions of conflict, violence and peace, through a conjunctural methodological approach focusing on three key moments in 'post-conflict' Colombia. We argue that 'everyday urban peace' offers new analytical possibilities for better understanding community responses to conflict and violence, by reframing the significance of their everyday activities for peace while taking seriously both place and time in marginalised urban neighbourhoods. This has implications for peace policy and practice, visibilising community efforts in pursuit of broadening the spectrum of formal intervention for peace, particularly in urban settings which are often neglected in these processes.

Keywords

Conjuncture, everyday, marginalisation, peace, urban

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Introduction

It is well-recognised that '[v]iolence … is increasingly a defining characteristic of urban living in both conflict and non-conflict settings' (Gupte and Elshafie, 2016). Latin American cities are acknowledged to be among the most violent in the world (Citizen Council on Public Safety and Criminal Justice, 2021). While the causes of urban violence are multiple and diverse, commonalities across the region include the existence of armed conflicts alongside social and economic inequalities and exclusion from political participation (Hernández-Garcia and Salgado-Ramirez, 2022). The experience of urban violence and conflict is highly uneven: marginalised communities are often most affected, especially where there are multiple and overlapping forms of marginalisation and stigmatisation (Gledhill, 2015). Yet in neighbourhoods where the state response to violence is often characterised by its 'absence' or involvement as a protagonist, residents and organisations have long experience of addressing conflict and violence. However, these efforts are often disconnected from formal conflict resolution processes (Jaramillo et al., 2023), and they remain poorly understood in terms of constructing peace.

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid from diverse disciplines to the role of ordinary people in constructing peace. Everyday peace approaches from peace and conflict studies (PCS) examine micro-scale responses to conflict and violence (Mac Ginty, 2021). Meanwhile, from human geography, peace geographies focus on the everyday to explore the mutual relationship between peace and space (Williams, 2015). However, these diverse disciplinary approaches remain disconnected from each other, and lack an explicit focus on the urban. The recent 'urban turn' in PCS (Ljungkvist and Jarstad, 2021) suggests that urban studies has much to offer research on urban conflict and peace. This article makes a key contribution to these debates, presenting a synthesised framework bringing together everyday approaches to urban peace from peace and conflict studies, human geography, and urban studies, to better understand marginalised urban communities' experiences of conflict, violence and peace.

It applies this framework in the context of urban Colombia, where the 2016 peace agreement sought to end 50 years of conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla organisation. Internationally lauded for its 'territorial peace' approach, which aimed to redress uneven regional development as conflict cause and consequence (Diaz et al., 2021), its implementation was nevertheless undermined by bureaucratic delays and the 2018 election of President Duque. The apparent subversion of the agreement by Duque, whose campaign appealed to 'no' voters in 2016's referendum,[1] was a focus of the 'National Strike' mass protest in 2021, which particularly affected Cali. Colombia's third largest city, Cali has high indices of poverty and violence, concentrated in its most marginalised neighbourhoods housing a significant Afro-Colombian population. These neighbourhoods have felt the indirect effects of Colombia's armed conflict, particularly from migration due to displacement and demobilisation, which interact with multiple social, economic and structural violences. The election of left-wing President Petro in 2022 suggested the electorate's support for his promise to further expand peace negotiations with diverse armed actors; yet 2 years on, this 'total peace' agenda is increasingly viewed as failing.

This conjuncture suggests an opportune moment to study urban peace and conflict in Colombia, in a context where the actual and potential effects of these processes in cities remain underexplored, reflecting their lack of urban focus (Cairo et al., 2018). In this context, we explore how multiply marginalised urban communities experience and respond to violence and peace, through the application of an everyday urban peace framework. In what follows, we explore first how debates on everyday peace, conflict, and violence have unfolded in PCS, human geography, and urban studies, synthesising 'everyday urban peace' as our analytical lens. To examine the historical context of Colombia's peace process and specific outcomes in Cali, we apply a temporally sensitive methodology inspired by conjunctural urbanism's attention to space and time at key historical moments,

zooming in to a specific neighbourhood to explore how national processes affect urban communities. Based on ongoing research in this neighbourhood, we unfold our analysis through three specific moments since the 2016 peace agreement – post-agreement uncertainty in 2018, post-election contestation in 2019, and the turbulence of the pandemic and subsequent National Strike in 2021 – arguing for attention to effects on urban spaces and communities, and their responses through localised peace initiatives. We conclude with a re-articulation of our concept 'everyday urban peace', which offers a new analytical framework for understanding, recognising and building on the agency of marginalised place-based communities along spatial and temporal dimensions. In this way, the framework contributes to debates on urban peace, conflict and violence from PCS, human geography, and urban studies, arguing for the need to build on community practices in support of constructing peace at the local scale.

Everyday urban peace: Advancing a synthesised approach

Local and everyday peace

The local turn in peace and conflict studies (PCS) emerged in recent decades in response to the deficiencies of liberal peace, theorised by politics and international relations scholars and pursued by the United Nations in places like El Salvador and Mozambique via a 'combination of peace, democracy and free markets' (Richmond, 2006: 292). Questioning whether peace was possible without addressing inequalities inherent in liberal market democracy, critics condemned the ideological and self-interested imposition of 'Western' ideals such as marketisation and austerity in diverse contexts (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013: 774). The failings of liberal peace, evident in Bosnia and Afghanistan, prefaced the local turn in peacebuilding theory and practice, which emphasised bottom-up, context-specific processes and understandings of peace deriving from local groups' priorities and relationships. Drawing on Lederach's (2014) and Galtung's (1969) ideas on 'peace from below', the local turn aimed to improve governance and ownership of peace through strengthening local institutions and supporting communities' agency (Leonardsson and Rudd, 2015).

Building on the local turn, peace and conflict studies' focus on 'ordinary' contexts, exploring highly localised and often mundane processes, led to the conceptualisation of everyday peace. Drawing on sociological theories of prosaic individual and group practices (e.g. De Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1974), everyday peace explores agency among peacebuilding's target populations, who enact sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity through small-scale interactions (Mac Ginty, 2021). Everyday peace examines 'ordinary' people's agency, highlighting individual sense-making processes which resist dominant narratives of conflict and division. Nevertheless, its framing in contrast to international peacebuilding risks essentialising the local, reifying binaries, and prioritising cultural factors over 'historical relations of domination' including class (Iñiguez de Heredia, 2018: 343) and race (Courteyn, 2018). Additionally, the conceptually vague local turn fails to define '[w]ho, what and where is the local' (Ljungkvist and Jarstad, 2021: 2209), limiting its practical application.

Parallel conceptualisations of everyday peace from human geography potentially address these critiques. Arising from critical appraisals of political geography debates on war, conflict, and violence after 09/11 (e.g. Graham, 2009; Gregory and Pred, 2007), and drawing on feminist geopolitics, peace geographies emphasise the spatial and temporal nature of peace (Koopman, 2011; McConnell et al., 2014; Williams, 2015). This suggests that 'war and peace are manifestations of the intertwined construction of geographies and politics … [they are] relational, place-specific processes', which are entangled rather than separate (Flint and Dempsey, 2023: 5). Building on well-established conceptions of space as relational (Massey, 2005), these debates explore the diverse

agencies, spaces, and scales of peace (Flint and Dempsey, 2023), arguing that '[p]eace(s) are always shaped in and through the spaces and times through which they are made' (Koopman, 2011: 194; see also Koopman, 2023).

Peace geographies conceptualise everyday peace as 'a fragile and contingent process that is constituted through everyday relations and embodiments, which are also inextricably linked to geographical processes' (McConnell et al., 2014: 18). The focus on space and place is underpinned by a commitment to 'actually understanding what peace looks like from a subaltern perspective' (Williams, 2015: 18). Methodologically closer to anthropology than international relations, this suggests that '[d]etailed empirical scholarship is critical for understanding everyday social relations and the (re)production of power' (McConnell et al., 2014: 15). For example, Courteyn's (2018: 751) research in San José de Apartadó, Colombia, highlights how local communities understand peace as a refusal to participate in war, but also a form of 'building community through collective work', responding to basic needs of land, shelter, health and education. In other words, (everyday) peace is a process, 'a socio-spatial relation that is always made and made again' (Agnew, 2009 in Koopman, 2023: 178), although it may not always be equally distributed, and may (re)produce unequal power relations (Williams, 2015).

The parallels between conceptions of everyday peace from peace and conflict studies, and geographical debates, make the lack of interface between them all the more curious. Local turn scholars have focused on peace and conflict dynamics rather than theorising spatialities of peace, while peace geographies have maintained a narrow focus on critiquing political geography (Macaspac and Moore, 2023). Nevertheless, both disciplines emphasise the agency of 'ordinary people' in constructing peace (beyond state or international agencies), and are interested in 'the kinds of quotidian work that ordinary people do in making peace amid ongoing physical, structural, or symbolic violence' (Macaspac and Moore, 2023: 42). Given the potential for closer integration of these perspectives, we propose a reconceptualisation of everyday peace which explicitly includes an urban dimension. 'Everyday urban peace' emphasises the city as locus of conflict and peace, thus bringing together the different scalar focuses of these approaches, while also taking seriously the temporal dimension of the everyday, in order to better analyse urban violence and peace.

Everyday urban peace: An emerging concept

While urban studies has long engaged with questions of conflict and violence in cities, only recently has peace and conflict studies turned to the urban. Recent PCS debates argue that the city is a rational entry point for policy and peace intervention, given the specificities of urban environments as conflict theatres (Ljungkvist and Jarstad, 2021). This implies, firstly, attention to how urban spatialities affect and are affected by peace processes. For example, urban propinquity (or proximity) offers a basis for collective mobilisation (Björkdahl, 2013), evoking longstanding theorisations of cities as dense, heterogeneous, and anonymous (Simmel, 1903), and resonating with geographers' attention to place and scale. Secondly, the urban setting offers potential to understand both local and national territorial concerns, exploring 'how the dynamics of urban space interact with traditional notions of state territoriality as well as national and international peacebuilding institutions and practices' (Ljungkvist and Jarstad, 2021: 2219). Thirdly, the city offers an identifiable and manageable unit of analysis, often supported by the availability of specific urban data. While the urban turn in PCS is welcome, in order to conceptualise everyday urban peace, we argue for deeper engagement with existing work on peace, conflict, and violence from urban scholars.

Debates from urban geography focus on cities as sites of conflict and peace through migration, mobility, and change processes. Recalling propinquity, they emphasise encounter, the element of momentary and chance meeting with difference, for its 'vital role in producing space and subjectivity' (Wilson and Darling, 2016: 11). Encounters are part of the nature of cities which bring

together strangers in otherness, a condition of living with difference which may contain possibilities and joy alongside fear and anxiety (Wilson and Darling, 2016: 3–4). This highlights the politics of urban space, as the locus for political relations and terrain for political claim-making by diverse groups, and 'the role of the city as an actor' (Darling and Bauder, 2019: 5). It also suggests understanding the city as part of 'trans-scalar' dynamics, highlighting struggles both within and beyond state-led processes.

In particular, a focus on micro-scale interactions reveals the multiple, 'unstable and non-linear' trajectories that contribute to 'developing resilience and moving towards peace and assertion in a slow, gruelling fashion' (Bhide, 2020: 61). Based on residents' life histories in a marginalised neighbourhood in Mumbai, Bhide (2020: 59) shows how over nearly three decades, residents experienced 'multiple and overlapping forms of violence, generated through intersections of forces that are global, national, societal and local'. Amid threats of violence from local criminal organisations, state-led evictions, deficient services, and drug addiction, residents nevertheless mobilise individually and collectively to improve conditions in their neighbourhood. Yet while some forms of violence (e.g. state-led) diminish, other (structural) forms persist or emerge, such as water shortages amid negotiations between the local mafia and state. But while 'multiple violence continues to be a facet of everyday life' (Bhide, 2020: 66–7), paying attention residents' actions *over time* underscores their agency in small-scale, localised moves towards peace, while attending to historical and political conditions.

Temporally sensitive approaches may be particularly relevant in contexts where endemic and regular violence disrupts notions of agency (Walker, 2010). In place where (racialised) violence is so extreme as to represent a form of 'social death', individual agency to effect change is circumscribed (Alves, 2019: 656). In such contexts, the insidious effects of everyday violence may limit residents' responses to coping strategies, including fear and silence. Das's (2006: 1) seminal study of community imaginaries after the collective violence of India's partition shows how such an event 'attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary'. The relationship between historically significant events and everyday life may not be discussed directly among communities, but hidden within prosaic processes and relationships; the researcher must, therefore, examine 'the engagement with suffering and healing that ordinary life reveals' (Das, 2006: 14–5). Even within silences, an everyday lens may reveal residents' 'negotiation, creativity and endurance … which can be seen both as heroic and ordinary' (Walker, 2010: 13). In contexts of racialised geographies, this suggests the ordinariness of resistance alongside 'black suffering', as McKittrick (2011) argues.

We propose the concept of 'everyday urban peace', synthesising approaches from PCS and human geography via urban studies' concern for spatial and temporal experiences in violent cities. Building on conceptions of everyday peace which highlight agency through ordinary people's peacebuilding activities, PCS's more recent emphasis on the city as nexus for state and local territoriality aligns with urban geographers' focus on the city's trans-scalar potential. As a 'contested and ambivalent socio-spatial formation', cities are sites of local, national, and international governance, but also mobilisations against these processes (Darling and Bauder, 2019: 5). Building on temporally sensitive approaches, we argue that 'everyday urban peace' requires deeper understanding and visibilisation of prosaic experiences of conflict and violence over time, both within and beyond formal processes. More specifically, everyday urban peace suggests understanding community-based responses to urban violence in marginalised neighbourhoods by taking both place and time seriously, including an understanding of the historic conditions and trajectories of marginalisation and violence in a given neighbourhood. This requires interrogating (spatialised) community responses developed over many years, which may contest or support formal peace efforts, and respond to longstanding conditions of marginalisation and structural violence, as well as physical violence. Conjunctural urban analysis offers methodological potential for this.

A conjunctural approach to everyday urban peace in Cali

Conjunctural urban analysis

Drawing on a nearly decade-long[2] research engagement with residents and organisations of neighbourhoods in Aguablanca District, this paper applies a temporally sensitive methodological approach inspired by urban studies' renewed interest in conjunctural analysis. Early political economy approaches to conjunctural analysis highlighted contradictions deriving from the structural conditions of a specific historical moment, giving rise to political action (Koivisto and Lahtinen, 2012). Methodologically, conjunctural analysis suggests interrogating moments 'during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape' (Hall and Massey, 2010: 57). Hart (2018) applies conjunctural analysis comparatively, to focus on spatialised power relations at international, national and regional scales. Similarly, Peck's (2017: 9–10) 'conjunctural urbanism' balances attention to contextual complexity at city level with national, international, or global scales, 'moving in and out from immediate (or proximate) contexts to the (constitutive) contexts of those contexts'. In other words, conjunctural urban analysis is interested in exploring the relationship between the general and the particular across both space and time (Leitner and Sheppard, 2020).

In post-agreement Colombia, conjunctural analysis supports interrogating categories such as 'transition', 'post-conflict', and 'development', enquiring into 'the material and political conditions of their production' (Grajales, 2021: 1055) alongside their meaning in localised urban settings (Alves, 2019). Increasing attention is being paid to Colombian communities' role in social and spatial reconstruction (Alba-Niño, 2024), particularly given the failed participatory aspirations of formal approaches like territorial peace (Lombard et al., 2021; Valencia et al., 2024) and urban transformation (Griffin and Young, 2023). While the present conjuncture represents years of negotiation between the national government and the FARC, long predating the most recent talks (which started in 2012 and concluded with the 2016 agreement), it is difficult to understand the urban implications of this moment without zooming in to the micro-scale.

Here, we focus on a specific neighbourhood in Cali, Barrio El Prado,[3] a majority Afro-Colombian neighbourhood in the city's Aguablanca District. In Cali, where racialised segregation compounds marginalisation to materially affect residents' experiences of conflict and peace, 'particular dynamics of armed conflict and structural conditions of racial precarity blur the lines between the urban and the rural, peacetime and wartime' (Alves, 2019: 659). This derives from the poverty, unemployment, lack of access to health and education, and violence that characterises Afro-Colombian neighbourhoods, compounding the trauma of conflict-induced displacement. In other words, the peace process has made little difference to the violent conditions in which Cali's marginalised residents live, and its significance is filtered through other dynamics. Here, we explore three key moments in the context of the neighbourhood, based on a series of collaborative research engagements, to present a spatialised and historicised account of Colombia's current 'post-agreement' conjuncture.

The first moment, which took place from September 2018 to March 2019 (funded by the University of Sheffield's Max Batley fund, with the involvement of Hernández-Garcia and Lombard), coincided with the early days of the peace agreement's implementation, a period of great uncertainty. Small-scale, pilot research explored residents' views of the agreement via two focus group discussions and six semi-structured interviews, with a mix of longstanding and newer residents (including displaced and demobilised individuals). The focus group discussions involved 12 participants, nine male and three female, aged between 21 and 65. The second moment occurred in November 2019, a year into Ivan Duque's presidency, with a mandate to undo many of the peace agreement's provisions. A symposium was organised at the local Pontificia Universidad Javeriana

Cali (led by Tobar, supported by Lombard) with seven community leaders from Aguablanca, including two leaders from El Prado. This facilitated a discussion about conflict and violence, community opportunities and peacebuilding initiatives. The third moment was February 2021 to June 2022, following the COVID-19 pandemic whose effects were still unfolding in Colombia, including the subsequent National Strike or 'social uprising' from April to July 2021. A series of in-depth interviews were undertaken with five social leaders in Aguablanca, including two from El Prado (in a project funded by the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Cali and led by Tobar, with the involvement of Hernández-Garcia and Lombard). The interviews explored economic opportunities and challenges; political representation and participation; and socio-cultural aspects and struggles. Additional material came from conversations with leaders during the National Strike (Tobar et al., 2021).

In all three research engagements, discussions were recorded and transcribed, facilitating thematic analysis by individual members of the research team, which was then discussed further among the whole team and revised as necessary. Documentary evidence relating to these moments also informed the analysis, including documentation relating to the peace process, municipal policies, pandemic reports, and media coverage.[4] For each moment, the analysis below explores the historical context; effects on the neighbourhood, particularly focusing on conflicts and their spatialised consequences; and the community's response. To contextualise this, we briefly outline Colombia's conflict history and introduce the setting of the neighbourhood in Cali.

Colombia's post-agreement conjuncture in Aguablanca District, Cali

The Colombian civil conflict has influenced the country's urbanisation (OECD, 2022). In the case of Cali, forced displacement and dispossession in rural areas have shaped the city. As departmental capital, Cali's growth from the mid-twentieth century was due initially to economic migration, then conflict-induced displacement from the 1990s, particularly of Afro-Colombian communities from the Pacific region. Of Cali's population of 2.2 million (Alcaldía De Cali, 2021), it is calculated that nearly 30% is Afro-Colombian (DANE, 2022), many of whom live in Aguablanca District. Aguablanca is a large area of former marshland housing self-built neighbourhoods in the east of the city, with a population of 455,790 (DANE, 2018). Although many neighbourhoods have consolidated and formalised, the district remains stigmatised due to high levels of poverty and marginalisation. This racialised stigmatisation can be understood as part of a broader pattern of discrimination rooted in Colombia's colonial era and slavery (Alves, 2021; Lombard et al., 2021). Stigmatisation is also seen in the attribution of Aguablanca's high levels of violence to its informal characteristics and criminal activity (Herrera Giraldo et al., 2023). Such narratives obscure structural forces of violence, including securitisation and police brutality (Alves, 2021), in areas where residents are as likely to be victims as perpetrators.

El Prado is representative of Aguablanca's neighbourhoods in many respects. In the early 1980s, economic migrants and displaced communities from conflict-affected departments Chocó and Nariño appropriated formerly agricultural land owned by local elites. Despite eviction threats, the neighbourhood was constructed through self-help processes, and over time, the installation of water, sanitation, and electricity improved living conditions. By 1990 El Prado was formally recognised and most plots legalised. Yet the neighbourhood suffers periodically from extreme violence: in 2017, there were 18 homicides in an estimated population of 8,300, giving a homicide rate of 216 per 100,000. Perceptions of violence perpetuate El Prado's stigmatisation as a place 'with an abundance of delinquents or thieves who plague the neighbourhood and damage the image of the area' (Murillo and Urrea, 1999: 15). Yet residents have mobilised at different moments to confront these issues. In El Prado, local community-based organisations work actively to improve residents' living conditions, particularly focusing on violence and its effects on (young) inhabitants. In this

context, we explore experiences of everyday urban peace in Colombia's post-agreement conjuncture through a focus on the three moments identified above.

Everyday urban conflict and peace in post-agreement Colombia

Uncertainty around the implementation of the peace agreement in 2018

Following the 2016 agreement, opinion in Colombia appeared polarised between supporters of full and immediate implementation, and critics who feared the peace process would result in impunity for conflict actors, particularly FARC members seen as being 'rewarded' with seats in the Colombian congress. This polarisation was reflected in the narrow 'no' victory in the referendum on the agreement. Nevertheless, although the referendum result supposedly reflected the divisions between isolated rural (and small town) conflict-affected areas which voted 'yes', and the better-connected urban centres – apparently less directly touched by the conflict – which voted 'no', the reality of voting patterns was more complex (Diaz et al., 2021). Indeed, in Cali the 'yes' vote won by 54.27% to 45.72% (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, 2023). While the rural locus of the civil conflict meant that its impact on cities like Cali has been largely indirect, residents' knowledge of conflict dynamics has been acquired via relatives or acquaintances in affected rural areas. Additionally, rural-urban migration by internally displaced people, and to a lesser extent demobilised ex-combatants, has been significant in neighbourhoods like El Prado, driving population growth at different times. Nevertheless, such migration dynamics often remain relatively invisible in urban settings, due to fears of stigmatisation or insecurity. The rural focus of the 2016 peace agreement (Cairo et al., 2018) bolstered this impression of cities largely unaffected by conflict.

Research with residents of El Prado in 2018 reflected both hope and uncertainty about the consequences of the agreement in Colombia. Diverse voices from the focus group discussions, which included both longstanding and newer residents of mixed ages and genders (although predominantly male), give a sense of this:

> 'I hope from the agreement that at least there will be equity in the territory of Colombia, the whole of our country … starting with education'.

> 'I think that instead of calling it a peace agreement, for me it would be more like reconciliation, living in a reconciled country, and … many things would improve'.

> '[I hope that] many opportunities open up in the country, in the business and social sectors, in politics'.

These focus group participants' recognition of the potential for educational, social, political, and economic change suggest acknowledgement of the agreement's promise to diminish (if not entirely end) violence in conflict-affected areas. However, other residents in these discussions were more sceptical, suggesting that, '*Nothing is going to change*', and that, '*The new government will destroy the agreement*', revealing fears about slow implementation affecting conflict actors' reintegration. These diverging views, reflective of the neighbourhood's internal heterogeneity, also show how moderate optimism relating to the agreement was tempered by uncertainty around the pace and effectiveness of implementation.

Such scepticism about the process is underscored by the effects of ongoing violence in Aguablanca's neighbourhoods, paradoxically linked to previous peace processes. In common with other neighbourhoods in Aguablanca, El Prado has a history of receiving internally displaced people; it has also previously received demobilised incomers, particularly following paramilitary demobilisation in 2003–06. This latter process was perceived by residents to have led to an increase in violence and social problems, due to the installation of '*oficinas de cobro*'[5] in the neighbourhood,

and youth recruitment to criminal organisations. There was therefore anxiety that the 2016 agreement would lead to further such waves of migration, due to Cali's status as regional capital, and its proximity to the conflict-affected Pacific region, as one focus group participant suggested: '*For us in Cali*, *we are the centre of the Pacific*, *we are the capital and we receive all the displacement here*'.

Nevertheless, a longstanding female resident highlighted the neighbourhood's readiness to welcome newcomers: '*El Prado is a neighbourhood of colours*, *a neighbourhood of incomers … one way or another they arrive*, *looking for an opportunity in the city of Cali*'. She linked the neighbourhood's capacity to accommodate newcomers with the community's organisational capacity: '*We are organising some meetings*, *El Prado is very well organised*, *and this has shielded us in one sense … the neighbourhood welcomes newcomers one way or another*, *supporting them to feel safe*'. She explicitly associated this organisational capacity with the history of community mobilisation in the neighbourhood: '*One thing that has become entrenched in El Prado*, *from around 1996 roughly*, *is that community work became stronger … this offers newcomers something that doesn't exist elsewhere*, *a sense of belonging to the territory as a community … this enables good relationships and good coexistence*'. In this sense, the strength of relationships and coexistence (*convivencia*) as a response to (potential) conflict is related to the social and physical construction of the neighbourhood, similar to Courteyn's (2018) suggestion that everyday peace is entangled with neighbourhood materialities.

Specific examples of this can be found in programmes provided by community-based organisations. Activities organised by the Community Action Board (JAC)[6] supported by local organisations in the neighbourhood's community centre, primary school and public spaces have centred on recreation (e.g. football games) and different campaigns on health, finance, and environmental issues, such as cleaning up local green spaces, explored further below. A focus group participant explained how the physical improvements in the neighbourhood had improved quality of life there: '*This is the best neighbourhood in Aguablanca*, *this is one of the neighbourhoods with a local clinic*, *church*, *school … We have no reason to envy other neighbourhoods*'.

Faced with the indirect effects of Colombia's civil conflict, some longstanding residents in El Prado emphasised a narrative of self-organisation and readiness to welcome incomers, based on the material and social construction of the neighbourhood through the efforts of its residents. However, others remained sceptical of the agreement's potential to affect ongoing violence in the area. Nevertheless, in Colombia's early post-agreement conjuncture, a narrative of peace as inclusion, linked to residents' agency in constructing their neighbourhood, was apparent. This does not diminish the need for better attention and resources from the municipality, to address the neighbourhood's social, economic, and infrastructural problems, for which local organisations continue to lobby. Yet it does suggest a recognition that peace is built locally (or place-based), from the bottom up and on a daily basis, supporting the understanding of everyday urban peace as an ongoing and spatially embedded process linked to the material surroundings of a community.

The consolidation of Duque's government in 2019

The presidential election of Ivan Duque in June 2018 represented a victory for sceptics, who saw it as an opportunity to challenge the peace agreement. Following installation of Duque's government in August 2018, research in late 2019 offered a snapshot of its first 18 months. Representing the Centro Democratico party, Duque positioned himself in opposition to the outgoing Partido de la Union por la Gente (Social Party of National Unity) headed by Santos, the architect of the peace agreement. Duque, whose campaign had questioned the peace agreement's legitimacy, quickly set about challenging its implementation, for example, making repeated objections to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), a key transitional justice mechanism. Despite its initial successes,

implementation was increasingly subject to critique and delay, leading to fears of stagnation. In this climate, assassinations of social leaders increased dramatically, alongside murders of demobilised combatants, in rural and urban areas. The slow implementation of the peace agreement saw some former guerrilla members engage in 'new businesses' such as criminal gangs (*bacrim*) and dissident guerrilla factions (*disidencias*). Consequently, a resurgence of the polarisation that has characterised Colombian history was feared (Bell et al., 2021).

In Aguablanca District, anxiety about the abandonment of the peace process was mirrored by narratives of state abandonment. A recurring (although contested) theme in debates on marginalisation in Colombia (Ballvé, 2013), the idea of state abandonment was evident in community discourses in El Prado in 2019. Leaders and residents interviewed at the time suggested that the local state was characterised by a lack of visible presence, inadequate knowledge of the community's needs, and inappropriate or politicised responses. Proposed local authority initiatives disregarded the community's needs, such as the offer of a youth swimming programme in El Prado, which does not have a swimming pool. The state was viewed as appearing when it needed something, whether statistics or votes, rather than in response to community necessities.

This scepticism was particularly salient amid increasing violence in the post-agreement era. As shown above, beyond the indirect effects of the civil conflict, a multitude of other conflict and violence dynamics affect marginalised neighbourhoods in Cali, related to wider issues including increasing social, education and economic inequalities, and the presence of criminal organisations linked to national and transnational criminal networks. In the post-agreement era, these other violences became increasingly visible. In Aguablanca, criminal dynamics shifted from small-scale, localised gangs operating at the neighbourhood scale, to the permeation of criminal organisations throughout the district, controlling different areas and sectors to support sales and trafficking of drugs (Alves, 2019). Local youth became increasingly vulnerable to recruitment due to the lack of other educational or employment opportunities, alongside the prospect of better remuneration from criminal activity than from other options.[7]

These dynamics preoccupied residents, who linked them to the narrative of state absence. As one leader put it, '*The strategy is very clear*, *whoever needs to sell [drugs] will sell them*, *as long as there are clients and there's no one else selling the same thing*, *and if the state is not present to offer the opportunities that it should – education*, *employment*, *sport*, *culture – well obviously*, *these actors have the power and they are present in the community*, *and they use different types of strategies*'. The resulting violence and insecurity is often spatialised: leaders mentioned *oficinas de cobro* and *fronteras invisibles*[8] as expressions of territorialisation by armed actors, alongside destruction or occupation of public space or infrastructure as wider manifestations of insecurity.

Responding to this situation, local community-based organisations in El Prado have pursued strategies of negotiation with state, armed, and other actors. One leader explained how they negotiated with the state to access resources through inclusion in decision-making spaces, via a local campaign which aimed to educate residents about the benefits of participating in the Community Action Board. The campaign led to the election of local residents to the board, with the objective of participating in decision-making about the neighbourhood and accessing resources to benefit the community. However, participation of board members in the municipal Planning Committee, which has responsibility for resource distribution, proved more complicated due to the presence of established interest groups who monopolised decision-making. Members of the local board therefore approached different municipal departments individually in order to secure resources, with some success including the incorporation of 62 local young people in the 'Peace and Citizen Culture Ambassadors' programme, a post-conflict training and employment programme run by Cali's Department of Peace and Culture.

The counterpart to negotiating with the state as a powerful (although erratically present) local actor is negotiating with armed actors. The presence of armed actors was acknowledged by

respondents as a reality. As one leader put it, '*Violent actors were already in the zone*, *we can't change this*, *it's not up to us*'. Faced with this reality, local organisations have followed a strategy of negotiating with these actors to identify and work with young people in violent situations, to support their reintegration into the community. In this way, negotiation is a pragmatic response to working with young people in the presence of armed actors and the uneven presence of the state. Armed actors are one of a number of groups that local organisations work with, including private companies and universities, as part of a strategy of forming alliances with different institutions for the benefit of the neighbourhood.

Thus in El Prado, the effects of everyday urban violence have been as significant as those of the civil conflict. At the same time, the dynamics of this violence is different from that of the 1990s and 2000s, when the neighbourhood was stigmatised as one of the most dangerous in Cali, as outlined above. Then, the violence was associated with the presence of Colombian drugs cartels, which although globally connected, were locally embedded. Nowadays, violence is associated with the lack of opportunities for young people who may themselves be victims of crime or drug addiction, who are recruited by gangs with links to powerful transnational criminal organisations. These issues are exacerbated by the weak state presence and response in Aguablanca District. Nevertheless, it could be said that the role of the state in El Prado, although characterised by apparent absence, is complex and multi-faceted. It is notably present in some institutions mentioned favourably by leaders (such as schools, and the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, or Colombian Institute of Family Welfare) but characterised as corrupt, clientelist and top-down by others. Additionally, young people in El Prado are increasingly at risk of police violence, which has further complicated the relationship between the state and the community, particularly in the context of recent social unrest. This suggests that, rather than state absence, it is the '"intermittent, selective, and contradictory" governance of marginalised urban areas' that characterises the role of the state (Auyero and Berti, 2015 in Griffin and Young, 2023: 7). In this context, everyday urban peace processes can be detected in community efforts to target violence beyond civil conflict, including pragmatic negotiation with diverse groups at the local scale, responding to the changing configuration of actors and dynamics involved.

The turbulence of the pandemic and National Strike in 2021

The context of 2021 was dominated by the 'social uprising' or *estallido social* that resulted from the National Strike, which occurred in the year after the outbreak of the COVID pandemic. As elsewhere, pandemic outcomes in post-agreement Colombia were largely determined by prevailing conditions of inequality, which combined with widespread disillusionment about the slow implementation of peace, motivated tens of thousands of (predominantly young) protestors to take to the streets of Colombia's main cities, including Cali. The consequences of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in Aguablanca's neighbourhoods were devastating, particularly in terms of food security and disruption to already precarious livelihoods, and this exposure of pre-existing inequalities arguably resulted in the explosion of discontent seen during the National Strike. The protests, which started on 28 April 2021 in response to proposed national tax reforms, led to months of social unrest. Alongside demonstrating about the lack of access to educational and employment opportunities, protestors criticised the ongoing violence in post-agreement Colombia under Duque's administration. The social uprising saw demonstrations all over the country, leading to an estimated 50 deaths and thousands injured among protestors (Álvarez-Rodríguez, 2022).

Protests were particularly massive, frequent and conflict-ridden in Cali, leading to months of disruption to daily life, with areas of the city effectively paralysed, businesses closed, and fuel scarce. Aguablanca District was acutely affected by violence, street closures, and food shortages.

While police presence diminished, residents were affected by illegal blockades erected during the protests, apparently by protestors, although the involvement of other groups (including criminal actors) was also suspected (Pardo, 2021). As a result, many of Aguablanca's residents were forced to pay to leave or enter their neighbourhoods. Reduced mobility, along with other disruptions including internet outages, resulted in shortages of basic goods. These were largely mitigated by community-based organisations, as an extension of local pandemic response which unfolded alongside some limited municipal programmes (Anciano and Lombard, 2024). The situation was also expressive of the struggle for spatial control by diverse actors in the zone.

The protection of the Parque El Tronco, an important public space in El Prado which remained undamaged in the protests, is particularly significant for understanding everyday urban peace. During the National Strike, it was feared that the park would be vandalised due to clashes between young protestors and the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD), which had characterised protests in other areas of the city, leading to the destruction of urban infrastructure such as the Metro Cali MIO mass transit bus system and local police stations. However, despite widespread disturbances in adjacent neighbourhoods, El Prado´s central Parque El Tronco remained untouched. Respondents suggested that young residents consciously avoided destroying this local public space during the protests, as they were aware of its local social and cultural value, as well as the economic cost associated with its construction.

Parque El Tronco was constructed in 2017 via a community initiative to deal with a drainage channel flowing through the neighbourhood. The Community Action Board, alongside local organisations, petitioned the municipal utility company to culvert the channel. This allowed the construction of the park above, with resources from the municipal Planning Committee, and participation of neighbourhood youth, who helped, for example, by levelling the uneven ground. The transformation of this space has in turn helped to transform the stereotypes of marginality which characterised the neighbourhood. The park, with a children's playground, football pitch, and basketball court, has become an important space for socialising in the neighbourhood, and a site for seasonal events such as markets and Christmas celebrations.

Parque El Tronco is now a reference point, a landmark in the neighbourhood and the surrounding area, as outlined by a community leader: '*It is a meeting place for all*, *it has become a fundamental space*, *not only for El Prado*, *but a reference space for other neighborhoods*; *for example, at the end of December*, *there are always events in this space that bring together people from other sectors*, *basically from all of Cali*'. In this way, the park represents a public space that is used, appropriated, and cared for, but also a strategy for building community, reducing violence, and articulating local actors, as the same leader highlighted: '*The best thing has been the satisfaction of seeing how our families and our children can go out into the street in a calm space*, *in a space where violence no longer abounds*, *unlike previous years*'. This contrasts with the insecurity of the area before the park was constructed, when it was used by local gangs for criminal activities; indeed, one leader recounted how gang members had threatened the young people involved in the park's construction.

In more recent years, residents have been engaged in other place-making practices including organising football tournaments on the park's pitches, maintained by local youth groups; constructing a local community garden in an abandoned plot, previously used for drug dealing and rubbish dumping; and creating murals throughout the neighbourhood, with positive messages about living there. These processes represent the reclaiming of public spaces previously appropriated for violent or criminal activity, thus delegitimising the symbolic force of violence that spatial and territorial controls, including blockades (among other more prosaic forms such as invisible borders), represent. Amid the conditions of uncertainty and turbulence which the pandemic and National Strike layered onto the existing unsettling of the peace process and everyday violence, such actions provide a place-based expression of local coexistence and consensual peacebuilding through community work.

The maintenance of local public space in neighbourhoods such as El Prado, particularly in conditions of conflict represented by the pandemic and National Strike (in turn responding to the peace process), expresses its physical and symbolic importance to the community. Given the widespread destruction during protests in Cali, the city most affected by vandalisation of urban infrastructure, it was remarkable that the Parque El Tronco was not touched. While neighbourhood youth participated in the protests, leaders (including Community Action Board members) were in communication with them, highlighting the risk of damaging the neighbourhood's material and symbolic achievements, attained through years of struggle. One leader recounted how, '*During the National Strike*, *[the park] was a space that was protected by young people*, *especially by those who are unemployed and not studying*. *Participants in our programmes occupied the park so as not to allow the entrance of groups who wanted to vandalise what was there*'. After the situation had calmed, local police whose station had been vandalised asked leaders if they could set up a temporary base in the park; however, the leaders refused due to concerns about effects on the neighbourhood, particularly given police violence during the protests.

This suggests that the neighbourhood's material conditions, the result of community transformation of urban space over many years, foster a sense of ownership and care among (young) residents. Meanwhile, the leaders involved understand peace as a consensual process fostering the capacity to integrate experiences and revitalise social fabric worn down by violence. These experiences generate intergenerational encounters in which the material surroundings are expressive of the community's struggles, and ultimately of a peace (however fragile) based on dialogue and negotiation. This is particularly pertinent in the context of police brutality experienced by youth from Aguablanca. While some have suggested that the protests were part of a post-conflict context in which civil mobilisation is newly permitted (Kirby, 2021), for residents of neighbourhoods like El Prado, such mobilisation is always accompanied by the underlying risk of violence, whether enacted by the state or other actors. Focusing on everyday urban peace in this context therefore offers a way to explore place-based and spatialised community responses to conflict, while not losing sight of conditions of physical and structural violence, including existing marginalisation, stigmatisation, and state violence.

Conclusion

This article has explored the possibilities and challenges for everyday urban peace, taking into account the agency of place-based, marginalised communities along both spatial and temporal dimensions, through a conjunctural analysis of the experiences of residents and leaders in El Prado neighbourhood during Colombia's post-agreement era. In 2018, early in the implementation of the Peace Agreement, El Prado's community expressed both hope and scepticism about the Agreement's implementation and consequences. The election of a new national government opposed to the peace agreement opened a new era of uncertainty around peace. This was compounded by the turbulence of the pandemic and National Strike in 2020–2021, responding partially to widespread disillusionment around the formal peace process. For a neighbourhood like El Prado, these national dynamics must be understood primarily at the local scale, in a context characterised by diverse forms of violence and inequality, and an acute lack of social and economic opportunities for residents, particularly young people. Even if the peace agreement led to an initial reduction in the effects of the civil conflict, it made other violences in this context increasingly salient, including the presence of armed actors and their strategies of territorial control, with negative consequences for the urban environment and residents themselves, compounded by racialised marginalisation.

Nevertheless, community initiatives in the neighbourhood which initially sought to address environmental and infrastructural deficiencies relating to its self-built characteristics have evolved into localised, embedded strategies for peace, although these are small-scale and often barely

visible. These initiatives can be seen in the processes of neighbourhood improvement and management, both long and short term, that seek implicitly or explicitly to address the spatialised effects of violence, indirectly from the civil conflict (as in the *oficinas de cobro*), but also deriving from structures and processes that interact with and supersede this (such as the 2021 protests). These processes have strengthened the community and its representative organisations, which despite the many difficulties of the context in which they operate, continue working to transform the neighbourhood and its living conditions, in ways which are more or less visible (such as the participation in the Community Action Board, and the creation and protection of the Parque El Tronco). This includes strategies of cooperation and negotiation with formal and informal structures and actors, in support of reducing violence and seeking peaceful coexistence despite the very real risks for those involved. These processes, led by the community, articulate basic needs with solidarity initiatives, such as interventions in public space which foster inclusion, while also enabling the transition of the *barrio* from informal to consolidated neighbourhood.

We argue that such activities can be captured by our synthesised concept, everyday urban peace, which contributes to understanding how marginalised urban communities experience and work with and against processes of peace and conflict at multiple scales, from the national to the neighbourhood, in urban contexts. As an analytical framework, it could be applied beyond Colombia to any context of urban violence (in both 'conflict' and 'non-conflict' situations). In support of this, we highlight its significant aspects. Firstly, everyday urban peace activities may occur in the context of formal peace or conflict resolution processes, but often predate or supersede these, although they may also interact with them if strategically relevant. Secondly, everyday urban peace is place-based and therefore largely driven by residents of (marginalised) urban neighbourhoods, often drawing histories of self-build and struggles for service provision. Thirdly, and related to this, everyday urban peace often occurs in conditions of marginalisation and segregation, which contribute to its lack of visibility, but also underpin its symbolic value. Fourthly, everyday urban peace seeks to address everyday physical and structural violences, which may derive from but also transcend the violence dynamics of civil conflict, requiring flexibility and creativity in response to changing local conditions. Finally, everyday urban peace cannot be understood without close attention to both (urban) place *and* time, suggesting a temporally sensitive approach deriving from a long engagement with specific communities and neighbourhoods, which our conjunctural methodological approach enables.

This novel conceptual framework contributes to debates on urban conflict, violence, and peace from PCS, human geography, and urban studies. By bringing together different disciplinary approaches, 'everyday urban peace' offers new analytical possibilities for better understanding community responses to conflict and violence, reframing the significance of their everyday activities for peace while taking seriously both place and time in marginalised urban neighbourhoods. The methodological approach also emphasises the significance of the micro-scale to conjunctural urbanism. This has implications for peace policy and practice. Everyday urban peace visibilises community efforts in pursuit of more inclusive discourses around peace, particularly in urban settings where the indirect effects of civil conflict coalesce with structural and physical violence. Paying closer attention to the initiatives pursued by marginalised communities suggests broadening the spectrum of formal interventions for peace, for example, through the re-signification of public spaces. Bringing together apparently disparate actions over time and place allows for their possible articulation with formal processes at the municipal level.

This is especially important in contexts characterised by overlapping conditions of marginalisation and racialised stigmatisation, as in Cali, where everyday structural violence precludes formal peace processes. In such contexts, the temporal analysis offered by everyday urban peace is essential for understanding the structural historical conditions underpinning the current conjuncture, as well as possibilities to resist this, symbolised by longstanding, deeply embedded community

organisations. Amid the optimism and setbacks that have characterised Colombia's 'post-agreement' conjuncture, we suggest that ongoing attempts to construct peace must respond to the urban specificities of cities like Cali, alongside the rural areas affected by the civil conflict, if they are to succeed.

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Notes

1. The October 2016 plebiscite asked citizens to express their approval or rejection of the peace agreement negotiated between the Colombian government and the FARC in Havana. The unexpected 'no' victory (by 50.22% to 49.78% 'yes' votes) led to a renegotiated agreement, which was ultimately accepted in parliament.
2. The authors of this paper have collaborated on research engagements in the neighbourhood since 2016, although Lombard's research involvement predates this (see Lombard et al., 2021).
3. In order to preserve anonymity, the names of places, people, and organisations have been changed.
4. Additionally, our understanding of the context benefitted from multiple informal conversations, exchanges, and repeat visits facilitated via research engagement over several years.
5. This term (which could be loosely translated as 'collection office') refers to commercial units managed by criminal organisations offering 'criminal service outsourcing', including debt collection, kidnapping, and murder, similar to the '*oficinas de sicariato*' described by Herrera Giraldo et al. (2023: 7).
6. The Community Action Board (Junta de Acción Comunal) is a formally constituted, elected neighbourhood committee with responsibility for the planning and provision of public services at the neighbourhood level, mediating between the local community and the local government, in the interests of the community.
7. Additionally, available job offers are not well-matched to the skills and capacities of young people in the area, who often lack formal educational qualifications.
8. 'Invisible borders' are territorial demarcations established by criminal actors to delineate between different territories, often relating to gangs. Crossing such borders can risk injury or death at the hands of gang members, and they often therefore impede ordinary residents' daily mobility.

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