Youth Power in Precarious Times

MELISSA BROUGH

REIMAGINING CIVIC PARTICIPATION

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Cover art: Graffiti art by Perrograff (2018)

To my family,

+ to all *guerriller@s simbólic@s*

fighting for a better world.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a response to a defining contradiction of our times: the mainstreaming and commercialization of discourses of participation with the rise of social media on the one hand, and the ongoing political and economic disenfranchisement of the majority of youth worldwide on the other. "Participation" has become an integral part of the cultures, practices, networks, economies, and powers that increasingly structure the contemporary relationship between youth, society, and social change. As the view from the Global North—particularly Silicon Valley—would have it, a participatory zeitgeist swept much of the globe in the last two decades as a defining characteristic of digital communication and of the era more broadly. Some saw this as empowering (e.g., enhanced ability to self-publish and to organize collective action) and others as exploitative (e.g., free labor prone to extractive corporate and government surveillance practices). A casual observer might even conclude that participatory media was invented with the Internet, or at least with Web 2.0, which Tim O'Reilly famously characterized as an "architecture of participation."[1]

Of course, this is not true. Participatory media and communication have been central organizing concepts in Latin America and other parts of the globe for decades, despite often dramatic disparities in technological access. The question of participation is not (and never has been) just about our communication technologies. The productive question of participation lies more broadly in how we cultivate ecologies of participation—which includes communication platforms, practices, cultural and political norms, and institutions that support meaningful participation in public life. This

book is about a city attempting just that in a context of great precariousness and instability—two words that aptly describe the state of much of the world today.

In the contemporary moment, thanks in large part to the far-reaching tentacles of corporate social media, the concept of participation has become so commercialized and institutionalized that, as Christopher Kelty describes, it has become "like a monument one passes every day—so routine, so common it's hard to remember just why it is there."[2] Drawing on the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of the term, he notes that participation implies an effect; it is "the process or fact of sharing in an action . . . esp. one in which the outcome directly affects those taking part."[3] The benefits and drawbacks of participation may be experienced by the individual participant and/or a broader collective or entity of which that participant may or may not be a part—and therein lies the slipperiness of the term.[4] This "slipperiness" makes it rhetorically useful to a wide array of sectors and applications (e.g., participatory marketing, participatory mapping, participatory research, participatory development, and participatory art, to name just a few). The use of the term typically implies agency, empowerment, and some form of democratic practice—whether or not these are actualized.

The episteme of participation was central to the marketing of social media but also reflected a larger international imaginary about the promises of a more democratic digital age. However inaccurate or simplistic, terms such as "Facebook Revolution" or "Twitter Revolution," used to describe social/political movements in the Middle East and elsewhere, captured the predominantly optimistic spirit of the global technological imagination in the early days of social media.[5] There are of course several significant examples from across the globe of civic and political engagement being amplified by the use of online platforms. These include, among others: the high participation of youth in electing the first African American president of the United States (2008); the One Million Voices Against FARC protests in Colombia (2008); the international Occupy Movement (started in 2011); the overthrow of governments in several countries, including Egypt (2011) and the Ukraine (2014); the Me Too movement's elevation of issues of sexual harassment and assault (since October 2017); and the student-led movement March For Our Lives (2018). As Manuel Castells observed, digitally networked communication technologies have helped spawn a "new species" of social movements by offering new infrastructures for faster, more interactive, and more autonomous communication.[6] Additionally, the free/libre and open-source software (FLOSS) movement has helped bring about

an unprecedented (if unequally realized) opportunity for the participatory design of these communication platforms.[7] Indeed, in much if not most of the world, the possibilities for participation in public life are arguably more diverse and more widespread than ever before.

Yet, we can no longer be naive about the fact that social media platforms can be as antisocial as they are social, and that they not only enable but also constrain and curate participation in public life in much of the world today. Social media can be used to mislead and manipulate political participation; and digital algorithms can, however inadvertently, help to perpetuate inequality and further polarize people's political views. In hindsight, cyberoptimist visions of a more participatory age brought about by digitally networked platforms seem not only technologically deterministic but somewhat quaint.[8] However, as the pendulum of public and scholarly opinion swings from general optimism to pessimism about the possibility for digital communication to enhance participation in public life, there is a risk of losing sight of the middle ground. While some scholars suggest that participation has been rendered a nearly useless concept with its widespread proliferation and should perhaps be abandoned,[9] this book contends that it is crucial to recuperate its analytical and practical utility in order to work toward more equitable, just societies. What is at stake is not only the conceptual utility of participation but, more importantly, our ability to understand and better support youth engagement in public life today, and the individual and societal benefits of doing so effectively.

The literature to date has generally failed to connect adequately what we already know about participation from a range of non-digital historical and cultural contexts with what we are learning in the digital media landscape. In this book, I make some of these connections by bridging learnings from the theory and practice of participatory communication (developed in Latin America and elsewhere over the second half of the twentieth century) with more recent work in digital media studies primarily from North America and Europe. I do this through the lens of youth engagement because of the many ways young people in particular have been both willingly and unwillingly inscribed by discourses and practices of participation across government, intergovernmental, commercial, and civil society sectors—and how in some cases they are forging alternative visions of participation.

In most countries, the proportion of adolescents using the Internet exceeds that of the general population.[10] Despite a rapidly growing body of research on this topic, we still lack analytical tools to understand the nuanced relationships between young people's participation in the digital

realm and participation in the material lives of their communities. All too often, adults still tend to approach these as distinct or even disconnected spaces.[11] The aim here is not to characterize youth participation definitively in the ever-changing digital age but rather to develop a productive way of thinking about and supporting it in an era of global discord and precarity. To be clear, this book is not a(nother) proselytizing of participation; nor is it a wholesale, cynical dismissal. It is an effort to identify the analytical and practical value of participation in a way that does not merely perpetuate a Northern universalizing of the concept but rather investigates the cultural and political work of this trope—and its implications for contemporary policy and practice—by drawing on Latin America's longer history of critically theorizing participation.

Toward that end, in this book, I develop a definition of *participatory public culture* based on scholarship from the Global North and South,[12] particularly from studies of participatory communication in Latin America and digital media studies of participatory culture and participatory politics/civics in North America and Europe. I argue that we need to think about participation ecologically, and that we can use the metaphor of polyculture to describe the potential for mutually beneficial relationships between grass-roots and institutional modes of youth participation, or what I call *polycultural civics*.[13] While I focus in this book on the implications of these ideas for youth engagement, they apply to questions of citizen engagement more broadly at a time when both grass-roots and institutional participation are being questioned—and in some cases intentionally undermined—on a global scale.

Medellín, Colombia A Model Participatory City?

In 2013, Citigroup, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the Urban Land Institute named Medellín, Colombia, "Innovative City of the Year":

> Few cities have transformed the way that Medellín, Colombia's second largest city, has in the past 20 years. Medellín's homicide rate has plunged, nearly 80% from 1991 to 2010. The city built public libraries, parks, and schools in poor hillside neighborhoods and constructed a series of transportation links from there to its commercial and industrial centers. . . . The local government, along with businesses, community organizations, and universities worked together to fight violence and to modernize Medellín. . . . In addi-

> tion, Medellín is one of the largest cities to successfully implement participatory budgeting, which allows citizens to define priorities and allocate a portion of the municipal budget. Community organizations, health centers, and youth groups have formed, empowering citizens to declare ownership of their neighborhoods.[14]

From a city known for Pablo Escobar's drug cartel and for having the world's highest homicide rates in the early 1990s to one known for its urban renaissance by the early 2010s, the "transformation" of Medellín is now world famous. Despite marked socioeconomic inequality and continued, though significantly reduced, street violence the government, commercial, and media sectors have branded the city as a model for urban renewal and citizen participation, drawing international attention from researchers, policy makers, corporations, artists, architects, tourists, and the press.

In this same period, Medellín's business, technology, and political leaders were working to fashion the city as a leading digital hub of Latin America. International corporations such as Hewlett-Packard opened regional offices there, in what developers hoped would become one of Latin America's largest information technology districts. The city invested in cultivating "digital citizens" with major government commitments to bridging the digital divide and promoting digital literacy and e-governance.

Medellín is also home to a vibrant citizens' media movement, in which ordinary citizens collaborate to produce locally relevant media both on- and offline. Colombia has been a nexus of such participatory media and communication since the middle of the twentieth century. Its practitioners and scholars (among them, Orlando Fals Borda, Jesús Martín Barbero, Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, and Clemencia Rodríguez) have contributed significantly to international debates about citizen participation, and have developed a diverse range of participatory practices using both old and new media technologies to promote civic engagement and social justice.[15]

The first time I visited Medellín in 2009, I was struck by the myriad ways participation was being invoked by different actors across the city, from grass-roots hip-hop activists to city and state officials. Later, one afternoon in January 2011, I found myself sitting on the corner of a couch in the San Javier Park Library, one of five similar structures renowned for their impressive architecture intentionally located in some of Medellín's poorest neighborhoods. The building had become a recreational and educational meeting space for local youth; they filled the computer labs and appropriated the outdoor patio for break dancing. The wall of windows in front of me looked

out at the heart of Comuna 13 (Subdistrict 13)—a part of the city made notorious by the media for its history of violence and ongoing gang activity. Just down the hill was the end of the metro B line and the beginning of the San Javier Metrocable, one of three gondola lift systems in Medellín that climb through the uppermost reaches of the city's shantytowns. Together, the library and the gondolas stood out against the backdrop of ramshackle brick housing. Heavily branded with the insignia of the Alcaldía de Medellín (the Mayor's Office of Medellín), they were dramatic signs of the local government's efforts to make its presence more visible and impactful in neighborhoods where the rule of law had been trumped by gang and paramilitary politics. The fervor with which the Mayor's Office branded such initiatives was striking, often using taglines such as "*Medellín, un espacio para el encuentro ciudadano*" ("Medellín, a meeting space for citizens") and "*Medellín, gobernable y participativa*" ("Medellín, governable and participatory").[16]

Next to me on the couch sat the hip-hop artist and activist known as JEIHHCO (a stage name combining his first name, Jeison, with hip-hop and Colombia), age twenty-five, and the local graffiti artist known as El Perro (The Dog), age twenty-one.[17] JEIHHCO was sporting classic hip-hop attire: wide pants, a baggy T-shirt, and a large, stiff baseball cap. El Perro carried a backpack of aerosol paint cans and other art supplies. JEIHHCO and El Perro were members of one of Colombia's most active and widely recognized youth-run hip-hop networks at the time, La Red de Hip Hop La Elite (The Elite Hip Hop Network, known as "La Elite"). They joined the network as teenagers and had since devoted the majority of their time each week to organizing the network and developing their skills as both hip-hop artists and activists for peace. In their own way, they had become as iconic of Comuna 13 as the famous Park Library and Metrocable; they were known by many across the city and beyond for their promotion of nonviolence and youth empowerment through the arts of hip-hop.

This was my first meeting with them, and as we concluded our conversation about hip-hop activism in Comuna 13, JEIHHCO did something that I had started to experience as a pattern in Medellín: he offered me the cell phone numbers of senior officials in the municipal government. What I found surprising was that rather than the researchers, nongovernmental/civic organization staff, or other professionals I spoke to, it was most often my youth interviewees who offered to put me in contact with the local government, challenging my assumption that youth—especially youth from marginalized neighborhoods such as this one—had little access to centers of institutional power. As JEIHHCO explained, "If I want to speak with the

San Javier Library Park, Comuna 13, Medellín, Colombia. Source: Alejandro Rojas. **I.1**

Participación. Graffiti art (artist unknown), Medellín, Colombia. Source: author. **I.2**

Secretaría de Cultura Ciudadana [Office of Civic Culture] or Metrojuventud [the municipal department of youth programs], I can call them, they'll pick up their cell phone. This doesn't happen in Bogotá, or almost anywhere else for that matter. . . . [H]ere, there's an administration that is close to [grass-roots projects] but furthermore, La Elite pulls a lot of weight in this city, in the political realm. And this means that our spaces, our process, and our voice are more often heard."

This is true. During my time in Medellín in 2010–2011, I witnessed, for example, how the murder of a young hip-hop artist by a local gang prompted a conversation between hip-hop activists and government officials via Facebook, which resulted in government support for a memorial march and concert that materialized only a few days later. I found all this surprising in a city where youth from places such as Comuna 13 had been heavily stigmatized since the height of narcotrafficking violence in the 1980s and early 1990s. In my fieldwork, I learned that such relationships between youth organizers and the municipal government were not necessarily an exception (even though La Elite had a particularly strong relationship with certain branches of the government) but rather a product of the city's public and political culture at the time. The following chapters explain, among other things, how it is that young hip-hop artists from one of the poorest, most violent areas of a highly segregated city came to hold political and cultural sway as social change agents. It becomes clear this was not (just) about cell phones or Facebook; more importantly, it was a set of relationships and actions between grass-roots youth organizers and institutional actors that made this possible—a phenomenon that I describe as polycultural participation.

A City of Contrasts

Lodged between the Andes Mountains in the northwestern Aburrá Valley, Medellín is Colombia's second largest city and the capital of the Department of Antioquia.[18] It is home to approximately 2.5 million people. Nearly 45 percent of the population is under the age of thirty, down somewhat from the late 1990s, when this segment accounted for approximately 53 percent of the total population.[19] The city is divided into sixteen administrative subdistricts referred to as *comunas* and five surrounding rural *corregimientos* (towns/villages).

Medellín has a dramatic topography and a very segregated urban landscape, which ranges from well-appointed shopping malls, luxury car

dealerships, and high-rise condominiums to the shantytowns in the mountainsides encircling the city. While approximately 80 percent of the population belongs to the three lowest of Colombia's six socioeconomic strata, Medellín is one of Colombia's wealthiest cities and home to some of the country's richest landowners and industrialists.[20] With vast natural resources in the surrounding region and an industrious culture, Medellín has historically been a prosperous, largely self-sufficient city. Its economy first boomed from gold mining in the late nineteenth century, followed by coffee and textile exports; in the mid-twentieth century, it led Latin America as the largest textile exporter.[21] Yet, by the second half of the twentieth century, the city's infrastructure was unable to keep up with the flood of rural migrants coming to the city out of economic hardship, or displaced by natural disasters and the national armed conflict. Informal settlements crawled up the mountainsides, with many residents organizing to demand official recognition of their neighborhoods and the provision of public services.[22]

Medellín has a long history of community organizing, as well as a long history of exclusion. It is a city where, as Mary Roldán describes, "paternalism, civic duty, a tradition of non-partisan public service, and ascent based on merit have always coexisted with exclusion, discrimination, parochialism and selective repression."[23] *Paisas*, as native residents refer to themselves, are known among other things for their local pride; they will often distinguish their history from that of the rest of Colombia, starting with the settlement of the area by Spanish Jews in the late sixteenth century. This different cultural identity is strongly asserted as normatively white, despite the hundreds of thousands of Afro-Colombians and other people of color living in the city.[24] As I discuss in Chapter 3, this is one of several intersectional dynamics that shape participation in Medellín's public culture.

By the 1970s, the rapid decline of the textile and manufacturing industries, which had been weakened by global competition, led to rising unemployment, and the number of unemployed male youths between the ages of twelve and twenty-nine became the highest in the country.[25] The situation was exacerbated by the neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s that further opened Colombia's manufacturing to global competition and mandated public-spending cutbacks through economic restructuring. The weakened economy and high unemployment fueled the growth of narcotrafficking and other illegal markets. The lack of economic and social opportunities weighed heavily on Medellín's working-class youth, approximately half of whom came from single-mother households. Some of Medellín's youth (particularly boys and young men from poorer neighborhoods) joined the

growing number of street gangs and played a key role in the criminal organizations in charge of the cocaine business.[26]

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Medellín became known internationally for its drug cartel, led by the notorious narcotrafficker Pablo Escobar, and for having homicide rates forty times higher than the United Nations' marker of an epidemic.[27] While circumstances have changed significantly since the 1990s, armed violence remains Medellín's unshakeable shadow—a determining yet elusive characteristic that is ever changing, and one that the vast majority of its citizens long intensely to overcome. Violence is one of the first topics many of my interviewees raised, and yet the last thing for which they want their city to be known. It has profoundly shaped youth subjectivities and their struggles for livelihood, empowerment, and dignity in the city. This is especially true among the lower socioeconomic strata, which comprise the vast majority of the city's population.

Medellín's history of armed violence has been widely stigmatized, sensationalized, and commodified in both journalistic and entertainment media in and outside of Colombia; the resulting reputation has had many negative economic and social consequences for the city's inhabitants.[28] To be clear, the history of violence is not the only factor that has motivated or affected youth participation in Medellín. Although youth have organized around civic, political, recreational, and cultural topics largely independently of the issue of violence, it has significantly shaped the context of much of this organizing. It is also one of the factors that helped to constitute and spread a pervasive discourse of participation. While I do not wish to overemphasize it, this story of participation requires addressing the historical context of violence at both the local and national level. Over the course of this book, I trust readers will see there is far more to learn from Medellín beyond the topic of violence, particularly as societies around the world face their own contexts of precariousness.

Armed violence in Medellín is imbricated in the longer history of Colombia's civil war, which, from the period known as La Violencia (The Violence, 1946–1958)[29] to a tenuous peace agreement reached in 2016, drove hundreds of thousands of displaced people from the countryside to Medellín and Colombia's other cities. Decades of ongoing conflict over land disputes and political control between state (dominated by the elite), right-wing paramilitary, and leftist guerrilla actors—most notably the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC) and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, ELN)—rendered Colombia home to the largest population of

internally displaced people in the world until it was surpassed in 2014 by Syria.[30] This has increased rates of unemployment and strained public services and urban planning in Colombia's cities. Rather than offer a comprehensive review of this long and complex history of violence in Colombia, I focus here on the period that most heavily shaped the contemporary context of youth participation, the time frame stretching from the rise of narcotrafficking in the 1970s to 2011, the end of the second Compromiso Ciudadano (Citizens' Commitment) administration (and the year in which I carried out the majority of my field research). This period encompasses a fracturing, reshaping, and rehabilitation of public life in the city, in which young people played key roles.

Starting in the 1970s, Colombia's internal conflict was exacerbated by the prolific rise of narcotrafficking. Through networked partnerships between smugglers such as Escobar and North American mafia organizations, by the mid-1980s, Colombia had become the epicenter of narcotrafficking and the primary supplier of cocaine to the North American market.[31] The culture and politics of narcotrafficking (which included bribery, kidnapping, and murder to exert power) caused a crisis in Colombia's political and justice systems. Crime bosses such as Escobar gained control of parts of the police forces and justice systems through bribes and the threat or use of violence. They also infiltrated the political system through traditional means at several levels; in 1982, Escobar was elected to parliament in his effort to fight legislation permitting the extradition of narcotraffickers to the United States. He was expelled shortly thereafter due to efforts by the Minister of Justice Rodrigo Lara Bonilla and influence from the U.S. government.[32]

Youth, mainly poor youth, became central protagonists and victims of the armed violence, some as gang members and hired hitmen, others as innocents caught in the crossfire. By the end of the 1980s, more than 150 gangs were officially documented in metropolitan Medellín, and the actual number was likely significantly higher.[33] Yet, narcotrafficking and gangs were not the only drivers of armed violence. From the mid-1980s onward, the power of state institutions continued to erode in the face of increasingly complex webs of allegiances between a variety of armed actors vying for control. As the social and political fabric weakened, gangs, urban militias, and paramilitary activity (classifications that sometimes blurred and overlapped) proliferated. In the 1980s, urban militias were primarily comprised of youth and children associated with left-wing guerrilla groups such as the M-19, FARC, and ELN, and justified their activity as a response to community demands for security. Urban militias began carrying out "social

cleansing" campaigns, acted as a de facto police force in the poor parts of the city, and solicited bribes from local business owners in exchange for their protection.

Also during this time period, right-wing paramilitary groups developed across Colombia through various alliances between local businessmen, politicians, drug traffickers, and others interested in curbing the power and influence of leftist guerrillas. They carried out targeted murders and death squads, and enforced conservative values in the areas they controlled, often in collaboration with state actors. In Medellín and elsewhere, paramilitary groups also became involved in drug trafficking, ultimately controlling much of the drug trade after the fall of Escobar's cartel.[34] They frequently operated through existing criminal gangs primarily of youth and children; this made it possible for authorities to deny the presence of paramilitaries in the city and to blame the violence on youth gangs.[35]

The corruption and social cleansing campaigns themselves spawned other "self-defense" (vigilante) groups. The lines between criminal gangs, militias, and paramilitaries increasingly blurred—as did the distinction between private and public security forces, as off-duty, rogue policemen perpetrated masked killings and accusations of politicians' links to illegal paramilitary activity became frequent.[36] Gerard Martin reflected, "It was as if another Pandora's box had been opened, in addition to narcotrafficking, *la guerrilla*, and the paramilitary phenomenon. In reality . . . all of these phenomena ended up interconnected in one way or another."[37] The result was that, according to Ana María Jaramillo and Alonso Salazar Jaramillo (who was also Medellín's mayor from 2008 to 2011), "in this period one can't speak simply of the absence of the state, but [rather] of its illegitimate presence. The levels of corruption implicated [the state] as yet another factor in the conflict. The configuration of a *parainstitutionality*, which carried out a marginal 'justice,' transformed the state into an enemy of the citizens."[38] In many ways, this applied at both the municipal and national levels; the police force in Medellín was run by the national government, and corruption and *debilidad institucional* (institutional weakness) could be found at all levels of government.[39] On the other hand, in some cases, Medellin's drug lords, namely Escobar, financed recreational activities, housing, schools, and other infrastructure in their local communities, partially filling certain roles neglected by the state. Escobar was seen as an altruistic *patrón* (an almost saintly patriarchal figure) in certain neighborhoods of the city; narcotrafficking brought resources to these communities that the state had failed to provide.

Escobar was ultimately killed in a gun battle with the Colombian National Police in 1993. In the years leading up to his death, his cartel had been weakened by government and paramilitary activity and by the fact that paramilitary networks (and some guerrilla networks) had come to control an increasing portion of the illegal drug trade. The fall of Escobar shored up the strength of narco-paramilitary bosses and their hold over the majority of the drug-trafficking business in Medellín, which resulted in a period of declining homicide rates as their power went relatively unchallenged.[40]

Yet, by 2000–2001, the influence of the national armed conflict was felt locally in Medellín, as guerrillas and narco-paramilitary factions fought for territorial control of strategic parts of the city, such as key transportation and trade routes. This has been described as the urbanization of Colombia's armed conflict.[41] Again, youth were a heavily recruited asset, as they represented potential fighters—many already trained—who had local knowledge and were accustomed to a culture in which life was seen as expendable. Territorial struggles between guerrilla groups and the paramilitaries who eventually dominated also became battles over—and between—youth gangs as the violence escalated again. In 2000, some estimated that roughly eight thousand youth were linked to gangs in Medellín.[42]

State or state-sanctioned violence played a central role in these dynamics.[43] Most dramatically, in the early 2000s, a series of operations were carried out by the Colombian military, the goal of which was to eliminate the guerrilla groups the FARC, the ELN, and the Comandos Armados del Pueblo (People's Armed Commandos) from their strongholds in the city. These operations became notorious for the excessive use of indiscriminate force against civilians. One of them—Operation Orion—was launched in October 2002. It was carried out under then-President Álvaro Uribe, a native of Medellín who had previously served as the region's governor. Operation Orion took place in Comuna 13, the epicenter of the conflict in Medellín at the time, and home to JEIHHCO and El Perro.

These incidences of indiscriminate violence inflicted by the state in densely populated, urban residential zones were particularly traumatizing to residents and further fueled their distrust of the state.[44] Not surprisingly, these operations were frequently referenced by my youth interviewees from Comuna 13 as a milestone in their politicization. Operation Orion eradicated the primary competitors of the paramilitary crime bosses, whose networks and associated gangs filled the subsequent power vacuum. By 2003, narcotrafficking had shifted from the organizational structure of the cartel to more localized, low-profile paramilitary bosses-cum-drug lords

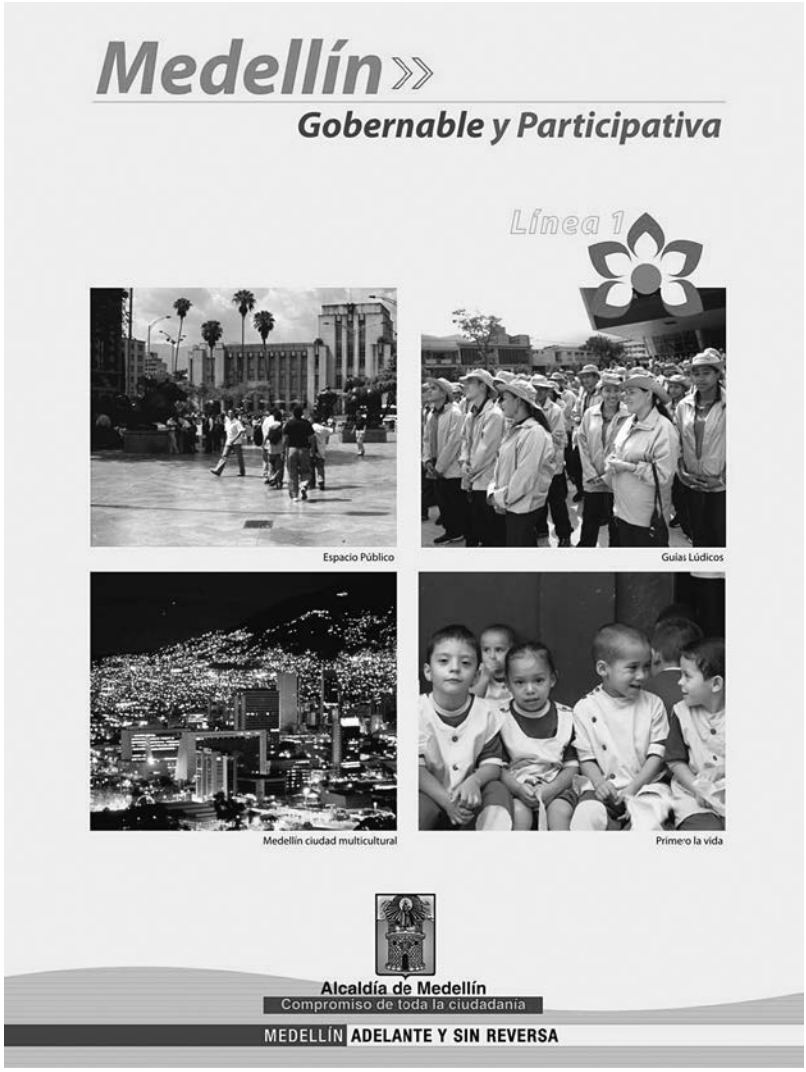
operating more covertly.[45] Due in part to fewer challenges to their control, and to a controversial demobilization of some paramilitaries, the city experienced a period of relative peace in the years 2003–2008, with homicide rates falling significantly.[46] In 2008, the extradition of the crime boss known as Don Berna and several other powerful narco-paramilitary commanders to the United States left another power vacuum; territorial struggles once again escalated, doubling the homicide rate. However, homicide rates remained lower than they were in the 1990s.[47]

From Precarious to Participatory

Medellín had historically been ruled by a small and close-knit group of political and economic elites engaged in clientelism and paternalism. Yet, the failure of the local government and its traditional party leaders to stem the violence in Medellín propelled the need for citizen—particularly *youth* citizen—participation to the forefront of policy discussions at both the local and national levels in the 1990s, where it came to be understood by many as key to reducing the violence and created opportunities for nontraditional actors to be more directly involved in governance.[48]

Youth organizing had surged in the 1990s in response to the impact of the violence on young people and the absence of effective local government in the most affected parts of the city. With a heightened interest in the role that youth could play in rehabilitating the city's social fabric, governmental, international nongovernmental, business, and local civil society organizations partnered in various ways to help develop infrastructure and programs for youth in poor parts of the city, and to strengthen civil society. This included the Consejería Presidencial para Medellín (the Presidential Council for Medellín), created by President César Gaviria (1990–1994) to weaken the ties between the Medellín cartel and the city's low-income youth, to foster more legitimate political participation, and to strengthen civil society.[49]

The involvement of local civil society organizations in these efforts set a precedent for their participation in local governance and helped to foment a political movement led in part by some of the civil society participants. This ultimately formed the base (and much of the leadership) of the independent party Compromiso Ciudadano, which was a unique alliance of local business leaders, academics, student leaders, and other grass-roots activists. Sergio Fajardo and the Compromiso Ciudadano party won the 2003 mayoral election on a platform based largely on discourses of civic participation and education; the first of five "strategic lines" in its develop-



"Medellín, governable and participatory," Medellín Mayor's Office Development Plan 2004–2007. Source: Alcaldía de Medellín. **I.3**

ment plan for the city was entitled "*Medellín, governable y participativa.*"[50] It was the first time an independent party had held the mayor's office. The crisis thus created a political opening for new actors independent of traditional party politics to enter into local government.

Fajardo's administration was composed in large part of former grassroots organizers and other nontraditional power holders who had extensive

experience in participatory practices. Fajardo himself was an academic whose relative political neutrality helped him to lead the diverse coalition that comprised Compromiso Ciudadano. Alonso Salazar, his successor from the same party (2008–2011), was also a scholar, journalist, and community activist; he had written extensively about youth in the context of narcotrafficking and was active in civic movements in the 1990s.[51]

Addressing socioeconomic inequality was a central agenda of this coalition. Yet, instead of this being seen as a threat to the business class of Medellín, the crisis caused by the inequality—and its expression through narcotrafficking—meant that addressing it had become a pressing necessity, even for traditional economic elites, some of whom joined the Compromiso Ciudadano administration. Compromiso Ciudadano explicitly aimed to appeal to citizens of all classes, and emphasized bridging the divide between the local government and Medellín's middle and lower classes without alienating its elites. They developed a discourse of *corresponsabilidad* (shared responsibility) for the city, emphasizing transparency and good governance, as well as inclusivity and citizen participation—thus appealing to some members of the elite business and political classes, as well as their popular base. Fajardo stated, "The point was to bring together a fragmented society and show respect for the most humble."[52]

Under these two Compromiso Ciudadano administrations (and, in some cases, building on initiatives started under previous administrations), the municipal government partnered with both the private and public sectors to implement a variety of initiatives to stabilize the city, strengthen public culture, promote government transparency and citizen participation, and restore the public's faith in local governance.[53] This approach was dubbed "social urbanism," which, according to Kate Maclean, struck a balance between elite and more progressive interests.[54] (From the perspective of its business elites, the rhetoric and investments of Medellín's social urbanism would help lead to, among other things, greater foreign direct investment, which in fact they did.[55]) Youth participation was also a strategic focus of several of these initiatives, and was seen as an indispensable resource for reducing violence. The administration launched a citywide participatory budgeting process through which residents aged fourteen and older help determine how a percentage of the city's annual budget would be allocated for the development of their neighborhoods, which I analyze in Chapter 4.

The administration also invested heavily in public education, allocating approximately 40 percent of the entire city budget to improving access,

infrastructure, and teacher training.[56] Through public–private partnerships, they expanded public Internet access and created impressive physical public spaces with computer labs, such as the *parques biblioteca* (library parks), in some of the most impoverished and violent sectors of the city. In addition to a gondola lift system (developed under the previous mayor, Luis Pérez, but opened during Fajardo's administration), outdoor escalators further solidified Medellín's growing reputation as an innovative hub of urban planning that was using public infrastructure to help stabilize the poor neighborhoods on the periphery and integrate them with the city center.

Analysts disagree on which factors were primarily responsible for the significant reduction in violence that corresponded with the Fajardo administration (2004–2007), when homicide rates were at their lowest in decades; most seem to agree that an important factor was Don Berna's continued control of Medellín's underworld and the lack of a significant challenge to his network, rather than the controversial 2006 demobilization of paramilitary groups or the investments of social urbanism alone.[57] What is clear is that the reduction in violence was one of several conditions that made it possible for the administration to carry out the large public works projects that helped Medellín earn its reputation for innovation and transformation, and to create spaces for greater public participation.

The case of Medellín thus offers many angles from which to understand participation as a multivalent resource in the digital age. Several global discourses about (youth) citizen engagement, digital and participatory cultures, democratization, and social change converged in Medellín. This book focuses primarily on the years between 2004 and 2011, which correspond to the two Compromiso Ciudadano administrations, when most of Medellín's so-called transformation took place and when the public focus on youth and citizen participation was at its height.

This book does not reduce the case of Medellín to an ideal or easily replicable model for urban transformation or youth participation. The city's particular history—including its relative (albeit highly concentrated) wealth and its history of violence—makes it exceptional in several ways. However, gang dynamics, poverty, and the disillusionment of youth with traditional political institutions are conditions faced by numerous major cities worldwide, in both the Global North and South.[58] Therefore, this book navigates a path from Medellín's contextual specificity, and its particular struggles and successes, to broader lessons that can inform challenges faced across the globe.

Methodological and Analytical Notes

A common problem in discussions of youth participation in the digital age is that participation is easily conflated with interactivity online, resulting in analyses that are technologically deterministic and overly celebratory of social media and other digital communication, while under-attending to the surrounding social infrastructures, cultures, practices, and relations of power that shape their use and imbue them with meaning. Describing digital media platforms as "participatory media,"[59] for example, conflates the technical capabilities for interactive networked horizontal communication with the actual human act of participating—anthropomorphizing communication infrastructures that may or may not be used in participatory ways. This may seem a semantic splitting of hairs, but we risk diluting the utility of the concept of participation for promoting the social, cultural, political, and economic practices that can advance democracy and social justice.

I first learned about participatory media in Chiapas, Mexico. Chiapas became famous on the world stage as the site of the 1994 uprising of the Zapatistas, an indigenous rights movement that pioneered Internet activism. But older communication technologies also played an important role in that movement. I was drawn there in summer 2000 by the opportunity to intern with the Chiapas Media Project, an organization that supported Zapatista-affiliated indigenous communities to produce their own video documentaries. In this pre-social media context—and for decades prior—the term "participatory media" typically referred to a collaborative process of media production used by community-based organizations and social justice advocates, among others, to involve disenfranchised groups in conceptualizing, producing, and sharing their own media. Participatory media was being used in communities around the world to put communication technologies in the hands of those whose perspectives were rarely, if ever, represented in commercial broadcast media or in institutional decision-making processes. In Chiapas, participatory videos documented, for example, the government-backed privatization of land farmed by indigenous communities, indigenous women's experiences of gender inequities, and Zapatista communities' collective organic coffee farming for economic autonomy.[60]

Only a few years later, I was surprised to find that independently of this history, the terms "participatory media" and "participatory video" were becoming part of mainstream and commercial Web 2.0 discourse in the Global North. One of YouTube's first advertising initiatives was called Par-

ticipatory Video Ads. The company's 2006 press release read, "The new Participatory Video Ad is a user-initiated video advertisement with all of the YouTube community features enabled. Consumers can rate, share, comment, embed, and favorite advertising content that they find interesting, informative and entertaining. Rather than interrupt a consumer's experience, we have created a model which encourages engagement and participation."[61] This was certainly a different deployment of the concept of participatory media than what I'd witnessed in Chiapas. Suddenly, everything was seemingly "participatory," even advertising.

As a scholar and practitioner of participatory media for several years prior, I found these developments both exciting and troubling: exciting because I knew from experience that participation in and through communication media can be empowering to marginalized individuals and communities, and troubling because with the commercialization of discourses of participatory media and culture, the critical valence of participatory media was dissipating—and yet remained as important as ever. The analytical tools needed to support youth participation productively in public life today require a careful parsing of the capacities potentially afforded by digital media platforms from the actual human practices in and around them that determine the modes and impacts of participation. This is one of the central aims of this book. This book resists binary debates that see digital technology as having revolutionized or destroyed public participation. Instead, the following chapters invite readers to reimagine participation in public life, inspired by the case of Medellín.

Participation has most often been studied in disciplinary silos, focusing on political participation (e.g., in political science), civic participation (e.g., in sociology, political science, urban studies, or development studies), cultural participation (e.g., in cultural or media studies), or communicative participation (e.g., in digital media studies, development communication, communication for social change, or participatory communication). This book traverses these fields in search of a more nuanced and at once more powerful understanding of participation for the contemporary moment.

As Florencia Enghel and Martín Becerra note, the fields of communication studies and media studies in the Global North have tended to take a patronizing view of Latin American scholarship, positioning it historically as an "offspring of its Western predecessors" rather than valuing it on its own terms.[62] What's more, the burden of cross-regional scholarly engagement has tended to fall on the Global South. While a comprehensive review of relevant Latin American scholarship is not the aim of

this book, I consider how Latin American understandings of participatory communication can inform digital media scholarship in the Global North and, reciprocally, how digital media scholarship from the United States and other parts of the Global North can inform the Colombian/Latin American context. I also draw from Latin American science and technology studies, although this book does not perceive technology (alone) as determining of public participation in the contemporary moment. The long history of theorizing and practicing participation in Latin America, despite deep structural inequalities and technological divides, attests to this.

Indeed, one of the aims of this book is to push back against technocentric discussions of participation that have become predominant in the last decade in both the academic and popular press in the Global North. It pushes readers to think about participation in a multidimensional, nonbinary way in which digital communication technologies are but one resource within a sociopolitical ecology. To that end, this book takes more of an ecological perspective than is typical in studies of digital media or participatory communication. Ecological approaches in the social sciences often aim to account for the multilevel, complex relationships between different actors, systems, discourses and values, resources, technologies, and so on that constitute and structure a given environment.[63] Similarly, I analyzed discourses and practices of youth participation in Medellín across multiple sites and levels of society—from the grass roots to the city government, as well as the national and international context—and how these were interrelated. This included discourses and practices that were noninstitutional (i.e., grass roots) or institutional, and on- and/or offline. In other words, I tried to understand the cultural, political, economic, and communicative life of youth in the city across different societal levels and sociocultural geographies as an interconnected system. An ecological approach helped me to think about participation as a resource that is constituted by a system of actors, institutions, and networks—a resource that can be wielded as a form of governmentality or resistance.[64] I found that these two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, one of the factors that made youth activism in Medellín potent was the existence of some governmental and other institutional entities that facilitated youth participation in public life but did not overly try to control or appropriate it.

Over the course of a year spanning 2010–2011, I studied participation in Medellín using several qualitative methodologies, primarily ethnography. I carried out more than a hundred semi-structured, open-ended interviews (including some group interviews) with members of grass-roots youth

groups, civil society organizations, and city and national government (in Bogotá, Colombia's capital).[65] I took extensive field notes and photographs, and reviewed existing research and other materials, including graffiti, videos, and songs produced by the youth collectives in Medellín. I attended formal/public events, such as conferences (including the annual conference of the Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación, the Association of Latin American Researchers of Communication, ALAIC), participatory budgeting meetings, a hip-hop festival, and a protest march. I complemented these with other methods, including an audience survey, observations of youth collectives' activities, and participatory research workshops led by local researchers at the University of Medellín.[66] My understanding of the longer period of 2004–2011—the focus of this book—is informed by all of these methods, as well as a review of historical documents and existing scholarship by primarily Colombian scholars. I studied several more cases of institutional and noninstitutional youth participation than I had room to include in this book; I included here the cases that offer the most significant insights about participation, those that challenge dominant assumptions and/or that helped illustrate how participation functions as a resource within a broader sociopolitical ecology.

My analysis here is greatly informed by research published in Spanish by Colombian and other Latin American scholars. In most cases, translations of their work are my own, except where noted. I carried out nearly all interviews in Spanish, so excerpts that appear in this book are my translations. I asked my Colombian friends and colleagues to review many of these translations; any remaining errors are my own.[67] Language (especially local vernacular) and cultural differences were undoubtedly a barrier to my understanding certain nuances and their historical and contextual significance. In other cases, my foreign status facilitated the research. For example, my appearance as a foreigner meant that crossing the "invisible borders" patrolled by armed gangs in some parts of the city was less perilous for me than it might have been for some local residents who could be perceived as having conflicting affiliations. Additionally, many of my youth and other interviewees were eager for outsiders to acknowledge and study their lives and work, and for exposure outside of Medellín. They were therefore generous with their time, and conscientious in sharing information and offering their own analyses. My analyses reflect these invaluable contributions.

Critical anthropologists (such as James Clifford, Clifford Geertz, Elizabeth Bird, and Renato Rosaldo) problematize the subject position of the

foreign researcher and the ways in which power is (re)produced through the creation of scholarly knowledge. This understanding emerged in response to the problematic history of ethnographic practices and its roots in colonial ideology, which upheld the Western white male as the author of knowledge about peoples and places entirely foreign to him, silencing indigenous voices and reinforcing relations of marginalization and subjugation.[68] To address some of the epistemological, political, ethical, and translational problems of being a foreign researcher, I collaborated with Colombian researchers from the University of Medellín, the University of Antioquia, and the University of the North (Uninorte). They informally advised me on my selection of cases, helped me to understand the Medellín context, directed me to invaluable existing research, generously shared their contacts, and invited me to collaborate with them on some participatory research workshops that informed my analysis.

Henry Giroux writes that thinking across porous intellectual and cultural borders "allows one to critically engage the struggle over those territories, spaces, and contact zones where power operates to either expand or to shrink the distance and connectedness among individuals, groups, and places. . . . At stake here is the possibility of imagining and struggling for new forms of civic courage and citizenship that expand the boundaries of a global democracy."[69] This study represents multiple, though not exhaustive, border crossings, including geographical, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual. My "partial view"[70] is informed not only by my privileged subjectivity as a white, highly educated researcher from the United States, but also by my background as an advocate and/or practitioner of participatory media and communication for social change in the United States, Kenya, Tanzania, Mexico, and other postcolonial contexts. It is also informed by my more recent work as a professor at a Hispanic Serving Institution and an Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander Serving Institution with a large percentage of low-income, first-generation college students. Lastly, it is shaped by my commitment to participatory research, which informed some of my fieldwork.[71] Working across this range of contexts has forced me to reckon with the complex relationship(s) between voice and privilege, two factors that greatly shape participation and its outcomes. This book is in part a product of that reckoning.

Throughout this book, my use of the terms "citizen" and "citizenship" are not confined to the legal status conferred by nation-states. Rather, I share Chantal Mouffe's position that we must constantly challenge normative conceptualizations of the citizen as a unified subject, and instead see it

as a fluid, historically contingent, and contested articulation of social relations.[72] Similarly, in this book, I use a broad definition of "politics," which incorporates not only traditional, institutionalized forms of politics but also discourses and actions explicitly concerned with relations of power and representation.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I trace the proliferation of participation, focusing on digital media and international development as two of the sectors most heavily invested—both economically and discursively—in participation. I argue that scholarship has tended to frame participation within binary debates about empowerment versus exploitation and authenticity versus co-optation, and that the proliferation of discourses of participation has weakened its analytical and practical utility. This necessitates a rethinking of public participation in general and of youth participation in particular. I propose the concepts of *participatory public culture* and *polycultural civics* as analytical tools for doing so, and demonstrate their application in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 illustrates that digital technologies and other tools used to enhance participation in public life will not be effective unless they are understood and implemented ecologically, which includes paying attention to the power relations that shape participation. This is evidenced by a comparison of two vastly different approaches to cultivating digital citizenship in Medellín: Ciudad Comuna, a grass-roots citizens' media project, and Medellín Digital, the municipal government's digital citizenship initiative. Contrasting these cases shows how participation and digital citizenship can be enacted in distinct ways, with different power implications. The ideologies, practices, networks, and even software choices (i.e., open vs. closed platforms) of these initiatives result in different conceptions of digital inclusion, citizenship, literacy, and participation that have fundamental implications for how we cultivate participatory public cultures.

There is an undercurrent of historical amnesia in digital culture that incessantly fixates the frame of reference on the future rather than acknowledging what we can learn from the recent or even distant past. Chapter 2—and the book as a whole—resists this tendency and shows how the past can, and should, continue to inform our understanding of the digital present. Bridging decades of learnings from participatory communication with more recent digital media studies, I argue that analyzing three qualities in

particular (horizontality, dialogue, and openness) helps to uncover relations of power and locate agency in the design of projects that enlist the digital to enhance public participation. Chapter 2 illustrates how digital communication is one resource that can function as a sort of "fertilizer" in an ecology of participation.

In Chapter 3, I consider how youth collectives offer alternative visions of youth citizenship, forged in the context of disillusionment and the delegitimization of traditional institutions and spaces of participation—contexts all too familiar to youth in many parts of the world today. I analyze some of the conditions that enable prosocial participation in public life, and how these can be cultivated by youth themselves as they develop their own tactics of participation. I focus first on the case of the youth-led hip-hop activist collective La Elite and the grass-roots tactics they have developed for promoting youth participation in public life. I explore how their tactics challenged the social and cultural dynamics of violence that had constrained public space, public life, and public participation for many young people.

Chapter 3 also shows that participation cannot be defined homogenously or fostered in just one way; efforts to achieve impactful participation must take into account historical, cultural, economic, and other differences between participants. This is illustrated by the Afro-Colombian cultural collective Son Batá, whose youth participants experience a marginalized, peripheral citizenship with particular barriers to participating in public life. Their participation necessarily began with a resignification of their subjectivities as youth citizens.

Widening the lens on this ecology of participation, in Chapter 4, I consider relations of power and the productive tensions between these grass-roots youth groups and state strategies of participation. In particular, I examine the case of participatory budgeting, a governing process that is increasingly popular internationally that invites citizens—including youth aged fourteen and up—to take part in deciding on local resource allocation. Participatory budgeting in Medellín shows how the institutionalization of participation may serve as a form of governmentality but may *also* expand participatory public culture, particularly for youth. The synergies and productive tensions between state strategies and grass-roots tactics of participation form a robust civic polyculture. This finding challenges overly simplistic binary claims that position grass-roots participation as "authentic" and institutionalized participation as "co-opted."

In Chapter 5, I review what these cases tell us about cultivating youth engagement in public life and the role of digital communication in

supporting participatory public culture and polycultural civics. I take stock of the extent to which these grass-roots tactics and state strategies did in fact promote a more participatory public culture (especially for youth) in Medellín between 2004 and 2011, and the key factors that contributed to this—in particular, the degree of synergy and interdependencies between grass-roots youth participation and institutions of the state and civil society during this period. While Medellín's cultivation of polycultural civics can inform and inspire efforts to do so elsewhere, I note that the branding of Medellín's "transformation" has been somewhat hyperbolic; the city continues to face many of the challenges that have historically constrained youth participation in public life. Youth/citizen participation clearly is not a panacea for all of the challenges of structural inequality and violence. Yet, all of the youth interviewed for this study had experienced positive outcomes of their public participation, across individual, group, and community levels. I discuss the broader relevance of all of these findings that could be applied in other contexts, in both the Global North and South, to cultivate impactful youth participation.

Beneath the Buzzword

Youth Power in Precarious Times challenges techno-universalist discourse in the Global North by centering practices and perspectives from the so-called periphery, where innovation transpires that is often and necessarily driven by different contexts and values.[73] At a time of rapid change in communication architectures, it is urgent to find ways for knowledge produced outside of the techno-elite and other privileged circles in the Global North to inform more directly how participation is conceived and how it is either limited or enabled through various communication platforms.

Existing studies of Medellín that consider public participation tend to focus on whether government initiatives to promote it have been successful at reducing armed violence in the city; their findings are mixed.[74] This book does not focus exclusively on the question of violence, nor does it see public participation as determined primarily by institutional strategies. Instead, it highlights the indispensable role of citizen (particularly youth) networks in helping to cultivate participatory public culture, and focuses on the relationships between these grass-roots tactics and institutional strategies.

This book reflects my experiences as both a practitioner and scholar of participatory communication and digital media. It is the result of my efforts to grapple with the slipperiness of the concept of participation, and to find

an antidote to the technocentrism of much of the rhetoric of youth empowerment in the digital age. It is my hope that it not only advances debates about youth participation, but is also, as my Colombian friends might say, *propositivo* (proactive, proposing action). I offer this to help recuperate and redefine the concept of participation, digging beneath the buzzword to see the conditions that enable prosocial participation in public life and how it might bring about more equitable and just societies.

NOTES

Introduction

1 Tim O'Reilly, "The Architecture of Participation," O'Reilly Media, June 2004, http://archive.oreilly.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/articles/architecture_of_participation.html.
2 Kelty, "From Participation to Power," 227.
3 Kelty, "From Participation to Power," 229.
4 Cornwall, "Historical Perspectives."
5 Allagui and Kuebler, "The Arab Spring"; Gladwell, "Small Change."
6 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 15.
7 See, e.g., Brough et al., "Mobile Voices." On free/libre and open-source software, see Chapter 2.
8 Eubanks, *Automating Inequality*; Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*; Srinivasan and Fish, *After the Internet*; "Once Considered a Boon to Democracy, Social Media Have Started to Look Like Its Nemesis," *The Economist*, November 11, 2017; Amanda Taub and Max Fisher, "Where Countries Are Tinderboxes and Facebook Is a Match," *New York Times*, April 21, 2018; "Cambridge Analytica CEO Claims Influence on US Election, Facebook Questioned," Reuters, March 20, 2018; Negroponte, *Being Digital*; Rheingold, *Smart Mobs* and "Using Participatory Media"; Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*.
9 See Allen et al., "Participations."
10 ITU, "ICT Facts and Figures 2017," accessed June 6, 2018, https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2017.pdf.
11 Ito et al., *Hanging Out*; Third et al., "Children's Rights."
12 I use the terms "Global North" and "Global South" with some reservations because they are at once hard to define and an overly simplistic binary categorization. Yet, they are slightly less deterministic than the designations "developed" and "developing" countries, which they have generally come to replace. All of these terms are grounded in a Western-centric paradigm that

fails to account for shifts in global geopolitics such as the People's Republic of China emerging as a new hegemon with its own vibrant digital technology sector. Similarly, while I reference Latin America as a whole throughout this book, I do not mean to homogenize a large and diverse region. A notable amount of the research and practice of participatory communication has been developed in various parts of Latin America (see Barranquero, "Latinoamérica"; Gumucio Dagron, *Making Waves*; Gumucio Dagron and Tufte, *Communication for Social Change Anthology*; Huesca, "Tracing the History"; Rodríguez, *Citizens' Media*). However, a detailed analysis of the differences across Latin American contexts is not within the scope of this book.

13 Throughout this book, I use the terms "polycultural civics" and "civic polyculture" (described in Chapter 1) interchangeably.

14 Urban Land Institute, "City of the Year: Statement from Urban Land Institute," accessed November 1, 2013, http://online.wsj.com/ad/cityoftheyear.

15 Coryat, "Challenging the Silences"; Gumucio Dagron, *Making Waves*; Martín Barbero, *De los Medios*; Riaño, *Women in Grassroots Communication*; Rodríguez, *Citizens' Media*.

16 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

17 I anonymized all youth interviewees in this study with the exception of these two highly visible youth activists, who preferred I use their actual stage names in the recounting of this meeting.

18 Departments are country subdivisions or administrative regions in Colombia.

19 DANE, "Estimaciones de población 1985–2005 y Proyecciones de Población 2005–2020," accessed November 2017, http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/poblacion/proyepobla06_20/Municipal_area_1985-2020.xls; DANE and Municipio de Medellín, "Proyecciones de Población"; Bernal, "Contexto," 28.

20 The Colombian government uses six strata to describe socioeconomic status, where *estrato 1* is considered very low, *estrato 2* is low, and so on.

21 Martha Arias Sandoval, "Medellín Vive en Estratos 1, 2 y 3," El Colombiano, September 15, 2012, http://www.elcolombiano.com/BancoConocimiento/M/medellin_vive_en_estratos_1_2_y_3/medellin_vive_en_estratos_1_2_y_3.asp; Lowenthal and Rojas Mejía, "Medellín"; Roldán, "Wounded Medellín."

22 Villa Martínez, "Medellín"; see also Naranjo Giraldo, "Medellín en Zonas" and *Entre Luces y Sombras*.

23 Roldán, "Wounded Medellín," 129.

24 Uribe, "La Territorialidad."

25 Roldán, "Wounded Medellín."

26 Salazar and Jaramillo, *Medellín*. The authors point out that these gangs were not formed by narcotraffickers, but rather emerged out of social and familial associations in the context of increasing economic hardship and the failure of civic and political institutions. They took on new forms as they adapted to and became key players in the narcotrafficking and other illicit economies. See also Bernal, *Contexto*; Martin, *Medellín Tragedia y Resurrección*.

27 Amnesty International, "Colombia: The Paramilitaries in Medellín: Demobilization or Legalization?," August 31, 2005, http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/019/2005; Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Reducing Urban Violence: Lessons from Medellín, Colombia," The Brookings Institution, February 14, 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/02/14-colombia-crime-felbabbrown.

28 As Gerard Martin writes, "Every national and international newspaper of repute sent a war correspondent to Medellín" (Martin, *Medellín Tragedia y Resurrección*, 266). Hollywood examples include the HBO series *Entourage* (2004–2011), in which the protagonist endeavors to make a dramatic film about the Medellín cartel, and Netflix's web drama *Narcos*, based on the story of Pablo Escobar and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's activities in Colombia. Visitors to Medellín can take Pablo Escobar tours, although these are frowned upon by the tourism bureau for the obvious reason that they perpetuate a negative portrayal of the city. Karen Catchpole, "Selling Pablo," *Slate*, October 18, 2013, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/roads/2013/10/pablo_escobar_tours_are_drawing_tourists_to_colombia_the_south_american.2.html.

29 During La Violencia, the warring Liberal and Conservative parties (the two traditional parties of Colombia) attempted to consolidate power, carrying out armed violence primarily in the countryside. For discussions of the ways in which Colombia's history of narcotrafficking may be traced back to La Violencia, see Chernick, *Acuerdo Possible*; Pécaut, *Crónica de Cuatro Décadas*; Castells, *End of Millennium*.

30 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that there are approximately 7.6 million internally displaced people in Colombia, and that internal displacement continues, despite the 2016 formal ceasefire and peace agreement. UNHCR, "Forced Displacement Growing in Colombia Despite Peace Agreement," March 10, 2017, http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/briefing/2017/3/58c26e114/forced-displacement-growing-colombia-despite-peace-agreement.html; UNHCR, "Colombia," accessed May 28, 2019, http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/colombia.html.

31 Castells, *End of Millennium*; Salazar and Jaramillo, *Medellín*. In 1986, some forty of the sixty tons of cocaine entering the United States came from Colombia (Pécaut, *Crónica de Cuatro Décadas*).

32 As Castells explains, the extradition of drug traffickers to the United States was just one of the various ways in which the U.S. war on drugs played a determining role in the history of narcotrafficking, its criminalization, and the response of the Colombian state (*End of Millennium*). See also Salazar and Jaramillo, *Medellín*.

33 Salazar and Jaramillo, *Medellín*.

34 For more on the history of paramilitarism in Medellín, see Martin, *Medellín Tragedia y Resurrección*; Salazar and Jaramillo, *Medellín*; Amnesty International, "Colombia"; see also Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory*.

35 Amnesty International, "Colombia"; Tubb, "Narratives of Citizenship."

36 Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory*; Martin, *Medellín Tragedia y Resurrección*; Roldán, "Wounded Medellín," 144. At the national level, the conflict between the government, leftist guerrilla groups (most prominently the FARC), and paramilitaries also became imbricated in narcotrafficking. Both guerrilla and paramilitary groups used it to finance their campaigns, and international aid (primarily from the United States) flowed heavily to Colombia's military to fight the so-called war on drugs.

37 Martin, *Medellín Tragedia y Resurrección*, 137, original emphasis.

38 Salazar and Jaramillo, *Medellín*, 92.

39 Martin and Ceballos, *Bogotá, Anatomía de una Transformación*, 104.

40 Doyle, "Explaining Patterns of Urban Violence"; Martin, *Medellín Tragedia y Resurrección*; Roldán, "Wounded Medellín."

41 Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory*; Villa Martínez et al., *Rostros del Miedo*.

42 Vélez Rinón in Amnesty International, "Colombia." According to a survey of demobilized paramilitary fighters published by the Mayor's Office, the primary reasons youth joined paramilitary groups were economic necessity, threats against their lives, and personal vengeances. Alcaldía de Medellín, *Programa Paz y Reconciliación*.

43 This includes not only the Colombian state, but also the U.S. government. The U.S. military aid program Plan Colombia, launched in 2000 to help the Colombian government combat narcotrafficking and guerrilla activity, contributed to the intensification of the war on drugs and the resulting displacement of people from surrounding rural areas to the urban shantytowns of Medellín.

44 Eleven military operations were carried out in Comuna 13 in 2002. Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *La Huella Invisible de la Guerra*, 76; Cañas et al., *Dinámicas de Guerra*; various interviews in Medellín, 2010–2011.

45 Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory*, 181. Most paramilitary groups in Medellín at this time belonged to the narco-paramilitary network the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, AUC). Former members of the AUC later testified to having collaborated with military and police forces during some of these operations, including Operation Orion. Cañas et al., *Dinámicas de Guerra*, 56; Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *La Huella Invisible de la Guerra*, 78. See also Amnesty International, "Colombia."

46 While homicide rates fell by nearly 50 percent between 2002 and 2007 (Francis Fukuyama and Seth Colby, "Half a Miracle," *Foreign Policy*, accessed October 10, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/25/half_a_miracle), the demobilization process—an initiative of the central government—has been widely criticized by observers in and outside of Colombia for being ineffective at reintegrating former paramilitary soldiers, and for continuing to mask relationships between Colombian elite and paramilitary actors. See Amnesty International, "Colombia"; BBC, "Fuego Cruzado en Medellín," October 17, 2002, news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_2337000/2337667.stm; Arthur Bright, "Report: Colombian Army Head Collaborated with 'Terrorist' Paramilitaries," *Christian Science Monitor*,

March 26, 2007, http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0326/p99s01-duts.html; Fukuyama and Colby, "Half a Miracle"; Paul Richter and Greg Miller, "Colombia Army Chief Linked to Outlaw Militias," *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 2007, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-mar-25-fg-colombia25-story.html.

47 Hugh Bronstein, "Colombia's Medellín Hit by New Wave of Drug Violence," Reuters, October 20, 2009, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN20434908.

48 Velásquez and González, *¿Qué Ha Pasado?*, 89, 93; Botero, *Medellín 1890–1950*; Franco, *Poder Regional.*

49 Moncada, "Urban Violence, Political Economy," 230.

50 Alcaldía de Medellín, *Plan de Desarrollo 2004–2007*. *Compromiso* translates as "agreement," "commitment," or "engagement." *Ciudadano* as a noun translates to "citizen," but as an adjective, it often refers to "civic." Compromiso Ciudadano can therefore also be translated as "Civic Engagement" or "Citizens' Commitment." The rise of Compromiso Ciudadano and other nontraditional political parties elsewhere in Colombia was facilitated by national reforms in the late 1980s and the 1991 Constitution, which helped to deinstitutionalize the traditional Colombian party system and devolve certain powers from the central state to local governments (Moncada, "Urban Violence, Political Economy," 228; Tubb, "Narratives of Citizenship," 634). Compromiso Ciudadano's platform was also inspired by approaches to urban transformation in Bogotá; see Martin and Ceballos, *Bogotá, Anatomía de una Transformación*; Tubb, "Narratives of Citizenship."

51 See, most notably, Salazar, *No Nacimos pa' Semilla*.

52 "The Trouble with Miracles," *The Economist*, June 7, 2014, https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2014/06/07/the-trouble-with-miracles. Medellín had a history of local business elites engaging in urban planning and development, and in some of the efforts in the 1990s to combat the violence. See Moncada, "Urban Violence, Political Economy"; Maclean, *Social Urbanism*.

53 Fajardo, "Medellín, la Más Educada." Much of this was financed by the locally based *Empresas Públicas de Medellín* (Public Companies of Medellín, EPM), a publicly owned utility company and one of the region's wealthiest, in addition to other public–private partnerships.

54 Maclean, *Social Urbanism.* For further discussion of the role that Medellín's business elites have played in the city's transformation, see Moncada, "Urban Violence, Political Economy," and "The Trouble with Miracles," *The Economist*.

55 Moncada, "Urban Violence, Political Economy"; Tubb, "Narratives of Citizenship."

56 Alcaldía de Medellín, *Del Miedo a la Esperanza*.

57 Various interviews, Medellín, 2010–2011; personal correspondence with Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, February 9, 2014; Doyle, "Explaining Patterns of Urban Violence"; Amnesty International, "Colombia"; Human Rights Watch,

Smoke and Mirrors; Tubb, "Narratives of Citizenship." Gerard Martin argues, however, that Don Berna's power has been exaggerated (Martin, *Medellín, Tragedia y Resurrección*; personal correspondence with the author, January 15, 2014).

58 For relevant examples in Mexico, see Reguillo, *Culturas Juveniles*, and danah boyd's study of teens' online activities in the United States, which found that gang dynamics were similarly shaping the mobility of youth of color in Los Angeles, as well as their on- and offline participation in social/public life (boyd, *It's Complicated*).

59 See, e.g., Rheingold, "Using Participatory Media."

60 See the Chiapas Media Project (accessed January 28, 2020, https://chiapasmediaproject.org).

61 YouTube, "YouTube Unveils New Advertising Concepts," August 22, 2006, http://www.marketwired.com/press-release/youtube-unveils-new-advertising-concepts-697771.htm.

62 Enghel and Becerra, "Here and There," 113.

63 Researchers have taken an ecological approach to studying cities since at least the early twentieth century, e.g., the Chicago School sociologists. More recently, scholars in communication studies such as Sandra Ball-Rokeach and associates, and Lewis Friedland, have developed frameworks for analyzing communication ecologies (Ball-Rokeach et al., "Storytelling Neighborhood"; Kim and Ball-Rokeach, "Community Storytelling Network"; Friedland, "Communication, Community, and Democracy"); see also Mercea et al., "Protest Communication Ecologies," and Treré, "Social Movements as Information Ecologies." On media ecologies, see Postman, "The Humanism of Media Ecology," and Clark, "Theories."

64 Rose et al., "Governmentality"; see also Chapter 4.

65 All interviews were anonymized to protect participants' identities, except in cases when interviewees were highly visible public figures. The majority of my interviewees were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six. This enabled me to capture their reflections on several years of their adolescence and youth.

66 These collective memory-based participatory research workshops were designed to reach a greater balance of power in the research process, improve validity, and avoid extractive research. For details, see Acosta Valencia and Garcés Montoya, *Proyecto Comunicación*; and *Colectivos de Comunicacion*.

67 I am particularly indebted to Clemencia Rodríguez and Camilo Pérez for reviewing many of my translations.

68 Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority."

69 Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 2, 6. See also Leonard and McLaren, *Paulo Freire*; Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*.

70 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."

71 See Chapter 3. See also Brough et al., "Mobile Voices"; Chambers, "Participatory Rural Appraisal"; Cornwall and Jewkes, "What Is Participatory

Research?"; Fals-Borda and Rahman, *Action and Knowledge*; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

72 Mouffe, "Feminism, Citizenship," 376, 378.

73 This book draws inspiration from others who have done the same, such as Anita Say Chan's study of Peru in *Networking Peripheries*. See also Medina et al., *Beyond Imported Magic*, and Takhteyev, *Coding Places*.

74 See, e.g., Maclean, *Social Urbanism*; Moncada, "Urban Violence, Political Economy"; Doyle, "Explaining Patterns of Urban Violence"; Tubb, "Narratives of Citizenship."

Chapter One

1 Mark Zuckerberg, Video address to Facebook users, Mark Zuckerberg, Founder and CEO of Facebook, April 20, 2009, https://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=186119950483.

2 Interestingly, Facebook chose Colombia as the first Latin American country to launch its free internet.org service, an initiative that drew criticism internationally for violating net neutrality. Helen Murphy and Luis Jaime Acosta, "Facebook's Zuckerberg brings free Internet to Colombia, mute on China," Reuters, January 14, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-colombia/facebooks-zuckerberg-brings-free-internet-to-colombia-mute-on-china-idUSKBN0KO0BS20150115. Facebook, Inc. "Second Quarter 2018 Results Conference Call," July 25, 2018, https://s21.q4cdn.com/399680738/files/doc_financials/2018/Q2/Q218-earnings-call-transcript.pdf; Kelty et al., "Seven Dimensions."

3 "Cambridge Analytica CEO Claims Influence on U.S. Election, Facebook Questioned," Reuters, March 20, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-cambridge-analytica/cambridge-analytica-ceo-claims-influence-on-u-s-election-facebook-questioned-idUSKBN1GW1SG.

4 Flock Associates Ltd., "Flock Associates—Mountain Dew: DewMocracy Integrated Campaign by BBDO Worldwide," September 10, 2013, https://youtu.be/1K779wr5994.

5 For more on the conflation of participation and interactivity, see Jenkins and Carpentier, "Theorizing Participatory Intensities."

6 Andrejevic, *iSpy*; Staples, *Everyday Surveillance*.

7 Laurie Ouellette and James Hay argue, for example, that rhetoric of participation has been conflated with consumer empowerment, naturalizing the latter as a mode of citizenship; Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living through Reality TV*. Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*, 215.

8 Cornwall, "Historical Perspectives"; Dagnino, "Citizenship"; Banet-Weiser and Lapsansky, "RED Is the New Black"; Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living through Reality TV*.

9 Shifman, "Meme," 200.

10 Barber, "Participatory Democracy."

11 Bishop, *Participation*; Brough, "Participatory Culture"; Carpentier, *Media and Participation*; Kelty, "From Participation to Power"; Velásquez and