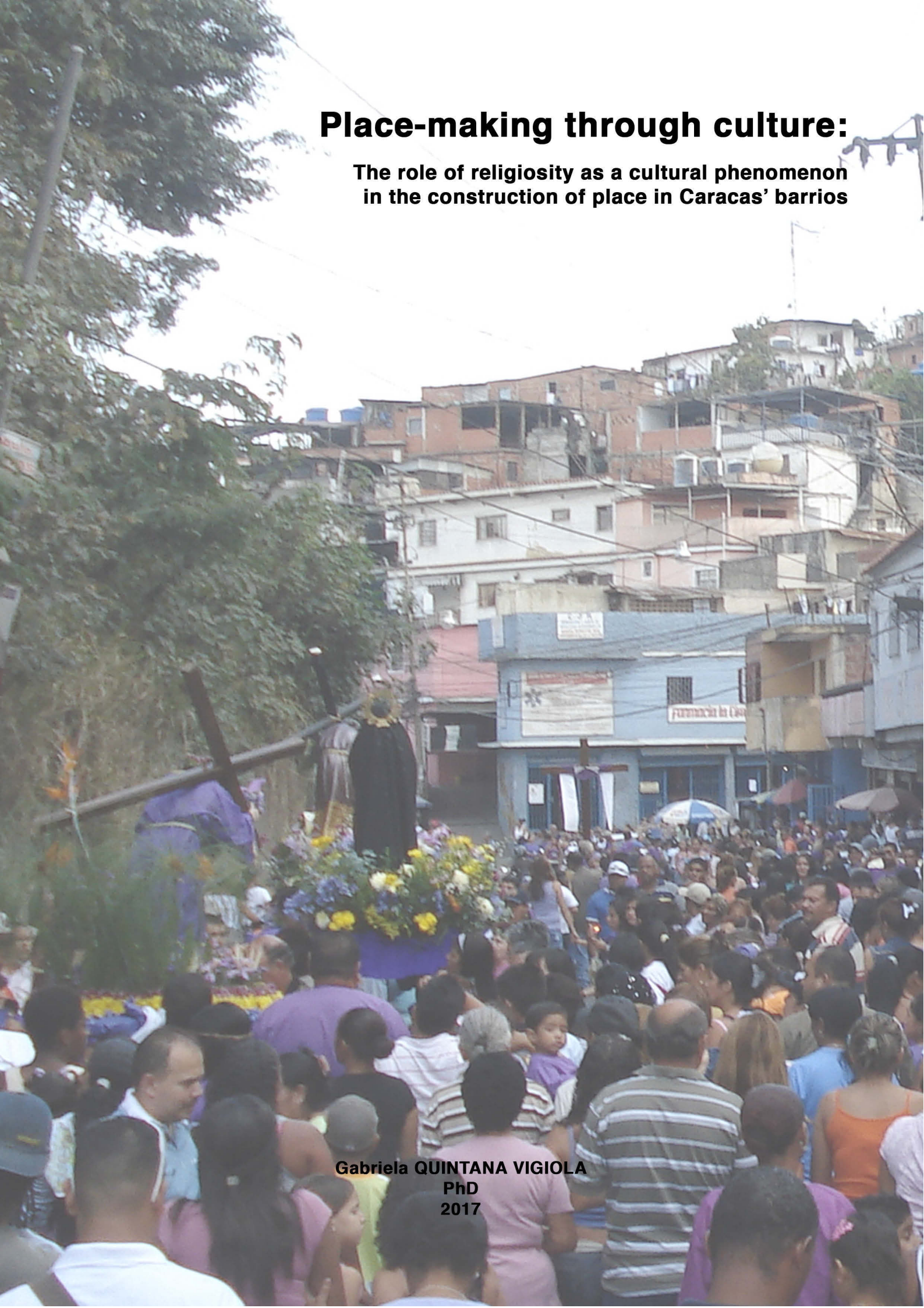
Place-making through culture:

The role of religiosity as a cultural phenomenon in the construction of place in Caracas' barrios



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PhD

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Date:

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PREFACE

Without really planning, or even actually thinking about it, I decided to start my doctorate studies in Venezuela in 2007. That year I focused only on deciding what I wanted to investigate. I knew two things for certain: (1) I did not want to research anything that could relate in any way to criminality or criminal violence (which in the end I realised was unavoidable), and (2) I wanted to engage in people-focused research. From its start, this study was reflective of an emergent design. Looking into the things I was passionate about at the time (and which I am still passionate about), I started asking myself a simple question: *why do people practise yoga in urban spaces that are not meant for this discipline?* This first question led to a lot of thinking about urban spaces and spirituality in general, which subsequently resulted in me deciding that I wanted to research spiritual manifestations in urban spaces.

As can be seen from the title of this thesis, I eventually studied something rather different. However, from that first macro theme, the process of tuning the research led to a narrower focus: understanding different Catholic processions in the urban space of Venezuelan barrios in general. From that point, and as part of my research process, I attended different religiosity and theology courses because it was paramount to get a better understanding of this disciplinary field, even though I was myself a Catholic, and because my Venezuelan supervisor advised me to.

In one of those courses, I met a priest who later became a key participant in my research. He was also studying a PhD that involved religiosity and the built environment, with a strong focus on religiosity. Based on that affinity, the fact that he was living and working at that time in one of Caracas' largest barrios, and the importance to me of having a community member or someone highly regarded in the community who could make it safe for me to enter the barrio, I decided to select that barrio as one of the places to study.

At that stage, I was still thinking about extending the research into other Caracas barrios. However, as I became more involved in the research and got to

know the complexities of the context, I refined the scope to the research questions, objectives and the three areas of study reflected in this final result. In 2008 I started the data collection in the barrios selected, but still wanted to explore all the Catholic processions that took place in them. However, this pilot showed I needed to focus only on Holy Week, which led me to engage in more data collection over the three years from 2009 to 2011. Once the data collection was complete and the analysis was about to start, I migrated to Australia in 2012.

This move changed both my life in general and my PhD studies. I put my PhD temporarily on hold, aiming to get back to it once I had settled, and still intending to finish it remotely through my Venezuelan university. However, due to Venezuela's complex political and economic environment at the time, which deeply affected universities, I decided to transfer my topic to UTS in 2013/2014.

As if migrating was not challenging enough, transferring my PhD was even more so. This process involved my translating everything I had already written from Spanish to English, and explaining to my new supervisors the general Venezuelan context, barrios, our culture, our religiosity and our complexities.

Looking back and looking at this thesis, transferring my PhD was the best decision I could have taken. The process of overcoming the challenges mentioned above enriched the thesis, the analysis, and the understanding of the context, barrios and place-making. Through all the explaining I had to engage in, I became aware of matters I previously took for granted or had not realised existed. Through this whole process, I grew as a researcher and as a person.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I present a story about place-making through culture, specifically about the construction of place in Caracas' barrios through Catholic processions. From a trans-disciplinary perspective, I approach the themes of urban space, meaning as a psychosocial construct, and religiosity as culture. This thesis contributes to the understanding of the underlying complexities of turning spaces into places through studying the built form, the activities in and uses of the urban space, and the meanings associated with it.

The main research question that guides this study is: *What is the role of culture (using Catholicism as a lens) in the construction of place in Caracas' barrios?* In addition, three component questions that align to the three fundamental place-making elements guide the three main stories that build this thesis:

1. How do barrio residents conceive and construct the physicality of the private, public and religious spaces?

2. How do residents use the physical spaces of the barrios to express their religious culture?

3. What psychosocial meanings do residents associate with the spaces through which the Catholic processions move?

To answer these questions, I chose a qualitative approach and a case study design. I interacted with and interviewed organisers and key participants, engaged in participant observation around Holy Week processions, and collected audio-visual data. Using qualitative thematic analysis, I explore from the participants' perspectives their understanding of the construction of their place though culture.

The research shows that cultural manifestations in the urban space are not only a way for people to express their culture. They are also a way for people to reclaim their spaces, build relational places, redefine the flexible private-public boundary, and reshape meaning. This study also revealed the different power

relationships in barrios, and how institutions impact on the construction of place in barrios. Through this place-making story, I demonstrate the importance to understand, consider and enable culture.

1 INTRODUCTION

Think about a *place* in the city you were born that means a lot to you. What makes it meaningful? Most likely, you have had significant experiences in that space, and at the same time that place may define something important about your culture. The physical space, the activities and experiences, the emotions and meanings are the different elements that turn that specific space into a place.

Place-making is understood as the integration of urban space, activities, meaning and culture. This thesis presents the story about construction of place through culture in the urban space of *barrios,* the name locals give to informal settlements in Venezuela. Barrios, as discussed in detail later in this thesis, are squatter settlements that evolved into developed areas and they are an important part of Venezuelan cities.

Through this research, I aimed to understand the relationship between cultural constructs and urban space. Thus, I studied the role of Catholic processions as one of the most important cultural activities in which residents engage in the urban space of Venezuelan barrios. This study addresses three main themes of place-making: (1) urban space and morphology in barrios, (2) Catholicism as a cultural construct that is experienced in the urban space, and (3) the psychosocial meanings of space, community and religiosity, and their role in constructing place.

Cultural activities, such as processions, are a fundamental element in the construction of place, because they are embedded with meaning assigned by the people who use the space, and the city. This study therefore contributes to our understanding of the complexity of the urban space and the cultural constructions that shape its meaning and thereby turn spaces into places.

The topic emerged out of a lifetime process of evaluating the activities in which people engage in cities. As I reflected on these processes, I found that people-centred approaches were useful to assess how spaces are planned and designed, either by people or professionals, as well as to understand how lay

people use or disregard these spaces. Thus, this reflection is based on what makes a city dynamic and alive, which ultimately is its residents. People, through their own cultural backgrounds and traditions, construct the city and its places on an everyday basis.

This chapter offers a general introduction to this research. The first and second subsections introduce the context of the study and the main approaches to place-making. The research questions are then presented and, finally, the general structure of this thesis is described.

1.1. STUDY CONTEXT

More than half the world's population now resides in urban areas (Negrón 2004b; The World Bank 2016; United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2005). In Venezuela, the percentage of urban dwellers is even higher; according to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2013), 89% of its population live in cities.[1] In Caracas, the capital city, about 50% of the population lives in informal settlements (Cilento 2002; Silva, Caradonna & Galavis 2016). Informal settlement areas are commonly known in Venezuela as *barrios*, which are the focus of this research. A wide range of cultural engagement can be found in barrios, including those activities of a religious nature.

In Venezuela, popular Catholicism can be considered the most important cultural aspect of the population (Marzal 2002; Trigo 2008). Worldwide, 88% of the population hold some kind of religious belief; within that group, 32% claim to be Christians (Maoz & Henderson 2013; Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance 2015). Christianity is the largest religion, and 55% of all Christians are Catholic. In contrast, over 80% of Venezuelans are Catholics, which is an extraordinarily high percentage[2] (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance 2015; Pollak-Eltz 1992, 2006). In Catholicism, as in other religions, there are different activities and

[1] According to the United Nations Population Fund (2007), Venezuela has 94% urban population.
[2] This high percentage of Catholics can be also found in the rest of Latin America and a few European countries (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance 2015)

representations through which believers express their religiosity[3] and in Venezuela (as in many other Catholic countries) Catholic processions are a significant cultural expression of religiosity. This thesis focuses only in this Catholic majority; however it is important to acknowledge that not all barrio resident are Catholic and that that minority group is not included in this study.[4]

In this research, *culture* is understood as a system of beliefs, customs, traditions and ways transmitted through generations that provide a particular perspective in understanding the world, and through which people can approach and deal with their everyday lives (Geertz 1973; Kral et al. 2011; Magnusson 2012; Marzal 2002; Trigo 2008). A fundamental aspect of the argument of this thesis is that culture is an inherent part of communities, their meanings and emotional resonance, thus understanding culture becomes essential to develop studies of communities and place (O'Donnell & Tharp 2012; Reyes Cruz & Sonn 2011).

1.2. PLACE-MAKING

This study about place-making is based on the understanding that culture constructs cities/places, and explores this understanding through three themes: the morphology of barrios, the procession as a cultural practice, and the sense of place and meaning that is socially constructed in this urban-psychosocial process. Traditionally, these themes have been studied individually in different disciplines such as urban design and planning, geography, environmental psychology, psychology of religion, anthropology and sociology, among others.

Place-making has a long history and there are different approaches to it. Aside from an overarching and summarising approach, the two main ones are

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[3] Religiosity relates to religious feeling (The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions 1997). Religiosity is how people experience their religion individually and as a community (Duch 2004; Estrada 1986; Idígoras 1991; Mandianes Castro 1989; Zamora 1989). Religion is the relationship between human and a superhuman reality or power in which he/she believes and worships, and to which he/she is somehow linked (The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions 1997; Urdaneta 2005). According to Olson (2011), religion is a cultural construction essential to construct social identity, with political significance in today's world. "Religions are organised systems which hold people together" (The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions 1997, p. xvi).

[4] Considering the included population in this research, when mentioning *the residents* or *barrio people,* I am focusing on the Catholic majority.

space-centred and people-centred. Cresswell (2004), Gieryn (2000) and Pierce, Martin & Murphy (2011) discuss place-making from a holistic perspective, trying to identify the different elements that constitute it without going into it in depth or arguing for the relevance of one place-making aspect over the other. Cresswell (2004) highlights the importance of understanding place, as constituted by the space and the meaning given to it. Gieryn (2000) approached the theme from a broad sociological perspective, discussing the main approaches to place-making. Pierce, Martin & Murphy (2011), taking a geographic perspective, examine the politics behind and embedded in the place-making process.

Since the 2000s, planners, architects and designers have identified place-making as the main aim of their practice (Relph 2016). They state that their approaches are community-centred; however, their main focus is still the physicality of the space (Gehl 2010; Gehl & Gemzøe 2002, 2003; Gehl, Svarre & Risom 2011; Schneekloth & Shibley 1995; Vernon & Tiwari 2009).

In this vein, Gehl (2010), Gehl & Gemzøe (2002), Gehl, Svarre & Risom (2011) and Gehl & Svarre (2013) emphasise the importance of creating places *for* people, arguing that architecture should and does enable people's interaction between public space and public life. Schneekloth & Shibley (1995) highlight the importance of people and communities in the place-making process; however, the authors assign the main role to professionals in the design and planning of the built environment. Similarly, Vernon & Tiwari (2009) in their study about place-making through water-sensitive urban design, acknowledge and incorporate the importance of sense of community in the construction of place, even though their main focus is on physical attributes.

Another approach to place-making research has focused on the sociological and psychosocial spectrums (Agnew 2011; Relph 1976; Relph 2007; Tuan 1977). In contrast to the spatial-centred perspective, while this approach acknowledges the existence and importance of the physical space, it focuses on the different meanings and processes that people experience in the space. From this perspective, the activities, culture, sense of place and meanings take up the primary role, being at the centre of the construction of place.

Few place-making studies have examined informal settlements (Kellett 2003; Lombard 2014) and those that have done so have focused on the physical realm, while acknowledging the importance of people building their environment by themselves, and the importance of meaning, sense of place and culture. This fits in a vast amount of literature on informal settlements from a diverse range of perspectives. Turner (1976) was one of the first authors to discuss informal settlements from a broad perspective, including their origins and the different factors driving their development. Turner (1976) emphasised the impact of government and international agencies on these areas, and the relevance of social and support networks. Authors like Roy (2005, 2009, 2011) and Varley (2013) have discussed the concept of informal settlements from a critical post-colonial perspective, identifying two main approaches: one that diminishes them and highlights their negatives qualities; and another that overvalues the virtues of these spaces and their people. These authors highlight the importance of giving voice to the residents and our own personal experiences as participant researchers to avoid perpetuating *slum-dwellers* stereotypes. This argument informs the approach taken in this thesis, which develops a place-making story based on the research participants' accounts. However, debates about the meaning and construction of concepts of informal settlements are not the focus of this thesis.

Other researchers have focused on the informality, urban structure and form of informal settlements (Davis 2006; Dovey 2015; Dovey & King 2011, 2012; Hernández Bonilla 2005; Marcano Requena 1994; Rangel Mora 2001; Rosas Meza 2009). These studies discuss the physical realm of informal settlements in Southeast Asia and Latin America, their morphology and their construction processes. Other academics have investigated the institutional and historical processes of barrios and slums in Latin America, specifically in Venezuela (Antillano 2005; Bolívar 1998, 2004; Bolívar & Pedrazzini 2008; Gabaldón 2007; Sosa Abascal 1993).

Taking a different perspective are academics who have studied the intangibles and culture of Venezuelan barrios (Guitián 2007; Trigo 1992, 1994, 1995, 2008), identifying that these informal settlements constitute a lot more than just the physical realm. First, significant research coming out of Latin America has focused on the social construction of the barrio urban space, such as meaning,

sense of place and community, and religiosity as a cultural expression (Cerullo & Wiesenfeld 2001; Fernandes 2012; García, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld 1999; Ontiveros 1997; Ontiveros 2006; Távara & Cueto 2015; Wiesenfeld 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2001). Second, these authors investigated the underlying factors related to the anthropological, sociological and psychosocial processes that barrio residents experience in these urban spaces, establishing the urban space as a stage where all these processes take place. In addition, this approach incorporates analyses of the institutional and historical context that have enabled the social life in/of barrios.

Despite the large amount of literature about place-making and the different elements that constitute it, there is still little agreement about what is more important in this process. However, there is a consensus in the literature that place-making is a process that involves the physical space, the activities (including cultural) that happen in it, and the socially-constructed meanings associated with that urban space. The social construction of space implies that the physical space is the result of culture, of common language, of a specific social moment that shape the individuals that build it; it is the result of collective thought in a specific historical time (Lefebvre 1991). The meanings associated with the physical space are also constructed through social interaction and culture; meanings that change through the various and variable activities that take place in the urban space; meanings that are therefore flexible.

This research develops these three place-making elements through three stories; thus, the main focus of this research is not on only one of these three elements, but how these three interconnect in a symbiotic relationship. Place-making is ultimately created by the people who build, experience and use the urban space in a way that is significant to them. Thus, understanding the relationship between culture and urban space is a key theme of the study, because *places* are *spaces* that people fill with meaning.

Moreover, there has been little research into place-making in informal settlements, or into the role of culture, specifically religiosity, in facilitating the relationship between the human/community factors and the built environment, as a fundamental part of the urban complexity. Thus, this research aims not only to

investigate these themes in informal settlements, but also to understand them from a holistic (and combined) perspective.

In summary, this research aims to understand the construction of place through religious processions as a cultural construct, in the urban space of Caracas' barrios. In this thesis I aim to deepen our understanding of the complexity of the barrio urban space, and the role of cultural constructs in creating urban places.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Place-making is about the relationship between the physicality of the urban space, the activities (including cultural-religious activities) that take place in it, and the meanings associated with the urban space. Traditionally, these elements have been traditionally investigated in isolation. I aim to integrate and understand their relationship from a holistic perspective, investigating the underpinning factors and drivers of place-making. Thus, the research question that guides this study about the construction of place in Caracas barrios through Catholic processions as culture is: *What is the role of culture (using Catholicism as a lens) in the construction of place in Caracas' barrios?*

This main research question is guided by three component questions aligned to the three fundamental place-making elements: physical space, activities and meaning. Focusing on Catholic residents, these three questions, listed below, guide the construction of the three main stories[5] that build up this thesis.

1. *How do barrio residents conceive and construct the physicality of the private, public and religious spaces?*

2. *How do residents use the physical spaces of the barrios to express their religious culture?*

[5] The first story about the urban space of barrios is presented in Chapter 4; Chapter 5 discusses the story about the activities engaged in the urban space of barrios, and Chapter 6 presents the story about the meanings associated with the space.

3. *What psychosocial meanings do residents associate with the spaces through which the Catholic processions move?*

To answer these questions, I analyse the various processes taking place in a barrio's physical-spatial urban area on a daily basis and when Catholic processions take place. By interpreting the data collected through participant observation and interviews, I reconstruct the morphological and functional characteristics of the urban space in the barrio holding the procession. In doing that, I also analyse institutional involvement and its impact on the creation of the urban space, unveiling the different power relationships related to and taking place in that space.

I reconstruct the complexity of the urban space in the barrio and the different activities performed in it, focusing on Catholic processions as one of the most important events occurring in this space. Since criminal violence and gangs are additional influences, I analyse how they impact on people's activities and their experience of the urban space, both in their everyday lives and when processions take place. I also examine the institutional role of government and the Catholic Church on how people experience their religiosity.

Finally, I interpret the meaning of space/place as it becomes sacralised through the procession of barrio residents, by analysing the meaning embedded in the processions and the sense of place experienced by the participants. I unveil the underlying meanings that people assign to their urban space through its construction, the activities that take place and the meanings that people hold about community and religiosity.

1.4. THESIS STRUCTURE

This story about the construction of place through culture in Caracas' barrios is presented as three individual consecutive stories that discuss the different aspects of place-making, namely, urban space, activities and meaning. The literature on these topics is covered and discussed throughout the stories as it fits better with the narrative approach of this thesis. Therefore, I made the explicit decision not to include a 'literature review' chapter.

The thesis is structured in seven chapters. This first chapter introduces the topic and the thesis. The second chapter discusses the methodological approach to this research. The story about *how* I conducted this study explains why a qualitative, case study, approach was the most appropriate design to investigate the meanings associated with the urban space and the construction of place through culture. Chapter 3 tells the story about how barrios were constructed and a general approach to informal settlements in a world context. It examines worldwide factors impacting on the development of informal settlements, followed by a specific discussion about the Venezuelan context and the chosen case study. Finally, it explains the initial stages of the settlement of the barrio through the participants' own accounts about their experiences when building their place.

In Chapter 4, I explain how barrios were developed, specifically the barrios included in this research, El Nazareno, La Dolorita and Julián Blanco in Petare, a district in Caracas. This story is about how the morphology and physicality of the different public, private and religious spaces were mainly constructed and developed by the barrio residents. The story focuses on the complex relationship between the public and the private realms, the different levels of displacement that barrio residents experienced, and the relational quality of the urban space, all topics that emerged in the analysis and interpretation of the participants' accounts, and the institutional context.

Chapter 5 presents the everyday, criminal and religious activities (focusing on the Holy Week processions) that take place in the urban space of the barrios. Through this story I develop an understanding of how activities shape people's relationship to place, ultimately shaping the meaning of space, and how Catholic processions as a cultural activity play a fundamental role in the process of reshaping meaning. I argue that the already flexible relationship between the public and private realms is continuously redefined by the activities that take place in the urban space. From the analysis of these different activities came recognition of the barrio urban space as a relational space, and of the different levels of displacement that barrio residents experience. Additional findings that emerged when the different activities undertaken in the urban space were analysed were the entwined and symbiotic relationship between the urban space and the cultural activity, and the process of transferring emotions to the urban space and adopting psychological boundaries.

Chapter 6 is about the different meanings that people give to the urban space through the meaning of the community and the meaning of religiosity. These two meanings not only shape, but also deepen the relationship people have with their place; thus making them fundamental to the construction of place. In this chapter I discuss community relationships, including the complex relationship with thugs, as well as the impact of criminal violence on the community. Additionally, I explore the relationship between participants and their religiosity, as well as between religiosity and thugs, to conclude that the meanings that residents assign to community and religiosity deepen the meaning of urban places.

Finally, Chapter 7 combines the three stories described in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 into the final place-making story. In this chapter, I discuss the findings and insights of the research about place-making. Through this story I conclude that although institutions were not the barrio place-makers, they had an important role in catalysing and promoting, directly and indirectly, the construction of barrios and how people engaged in the activities that shaped, reshaped and deepened their relationship to their place. Also, the displacement, created mostly by the state, could be seen as a positive element in building places, because through displacement and struggle barrio residents created bonds and a rootedness in the community and their barrio.

Through the research I argue that barrio urban spaces are relational. The barrio built form was constructed and developed through family and neighbour relationships and barrio residents use their urban space based on those family and community relationships. Another important finding is that the private and public space relationship is flexible, reshaping traditional perspectives on the boundaries between them. Importantly, the new concept of the *territorial transferral process* arose from this research, highlighting that people transfer emotions towards people and situations to the urban space, at the same time as they adopt thugs' boundaries as their own. Thus, this territorial transferral process also affects the meaning of space. Finally, one of the main lessons of this research is that the socially constructed meaning of a space is flexible.

Meaningful places relate to the experiences we have in a space and how that space/place defines important things about our culture. Meaningful urban

spaces are embedded with emotions, memories, relationships, experiences and meanings, which turn them into places. This place-making study tells the stories about barrios' meaningful places and how they were created and developed over time.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

According to Throgmorton (2003), urban planning is about telling stories embedded with emotions, memories and dreams about the outcomes we want to achieve through our plans and proposals. Urban studies-related research is also stories of the built environment investigated and told in different ways. This thesis tells the story of place-making in the urban space of barrios, and this chapter explains how I engaged with this topic to answer the research questions posed in the previous chapter.

As I wanted to understand the phenomenon of construction of place in barrios through my own experience and participants' perspectives, a qualitative approach was adopted for the research, with *constructionism*[6] the paradigm to inform it. This research is framed around this approach in order to comprehend in a deep and significative sense the relationship between urban space, people and the meanings associated with the space. This qualitative approach is fundamental in getting to know a vital part of Venezuela's barrios through the people's cultural expressions, specifically Catholic processions.

Throughout the process of developing this research from the initial stages to its completion, I made several methodological decisions. These relate to the research approach, research design, methods applied to collect the data and analyse it, and the writing style of the thesis. Figure 2.1 presents a synthesis of these methodological decisions and how they relate to this specific investigation.

[6] Denzin & Lincoln (2005), Guba & Lincoln (2005) and Hatch (2002) discuss constructionism as a research paradigm.

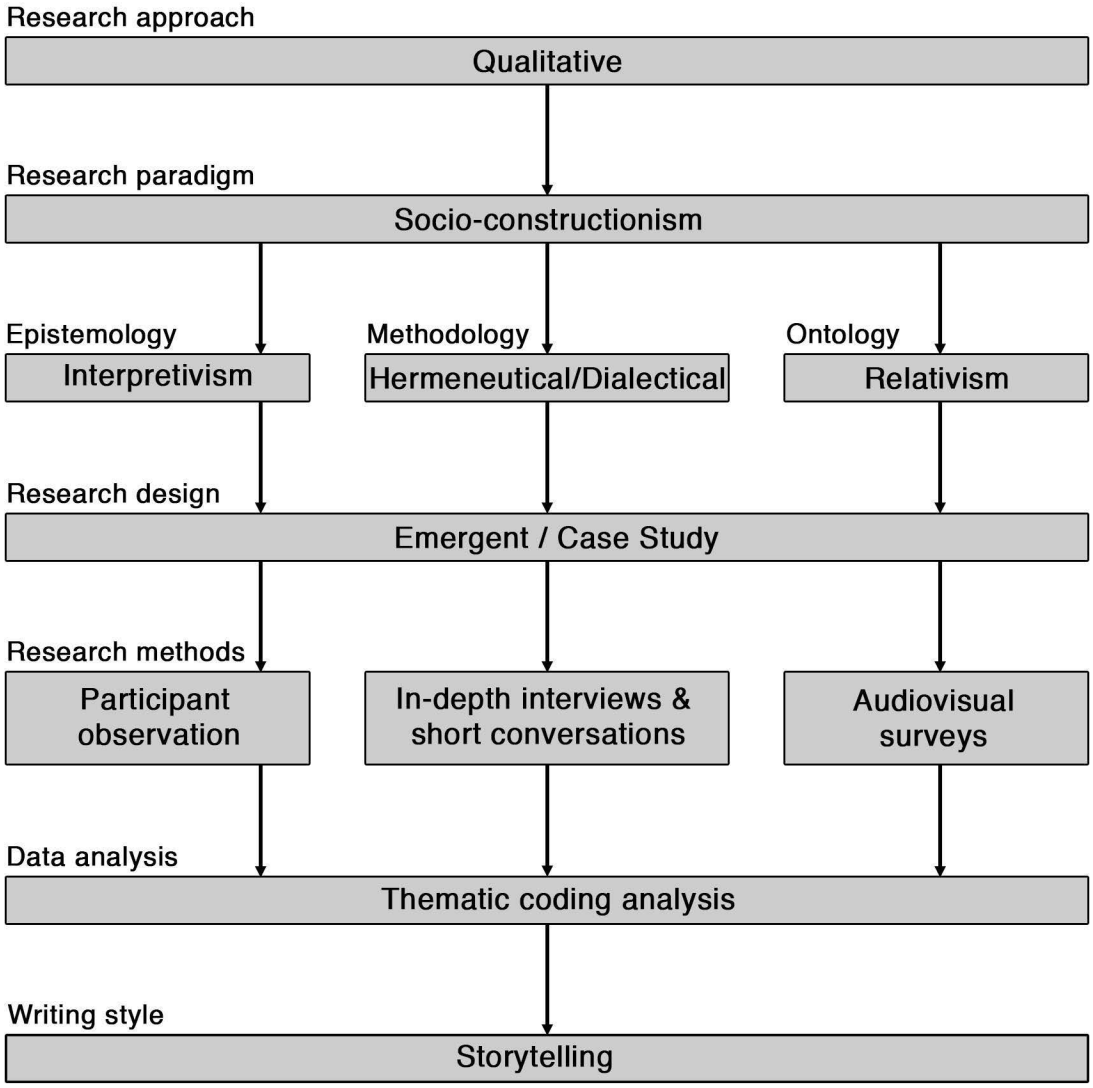

Figure 2.1: Methodological decisions' synthesis

The following sections not only describe the above-mentioned decisions and the research process, but also critically discuss the challenges posed by the various decisions.

2.1 PARADIGMATIC AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Once the focus of this study was fixed on the construction of place through Catholic processions in the barrio urban space, it became evident that the very nature of that construction of place was the meanings associated with culture and

space. People experience an iterative cycle where they give meaning to things, emotions, and their own and other people's actions. Based on this experience that they further interpret, people engage in following actions (Schutz 1962 cited in Bryman 2008). Thus, an approach that recognises that knowledge and actions arise from people's socially-constructed meanings, values and experiences was needed. Qualitative approaches provide understanding, thereby progressively guiding the study and its design (Creswell 2007; Hammersley 1992). A qualitative approach allows researchers to study phenomena in their natural environment and interpret them through the meanings people give them. Through this approach, researchers 'seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, p. 4).

Qualitative approaches are directly related to specific paradigmatic, epistemological, ontological and methodological perspectives (Bryman 2008). The paradigmatic approach to this study is constructionism, as this perspective states that *reality* is constructed over time through social interaction; applying a qualitative approach allows the researcher to 'reconstruct reality as we observe the actors in a pre-defined social system' (Hernández, Fernández-Collado & Baptista 2006, p. 9 translated by G. Quintana Vigiola). Thus, qualitative research is the most appropriate approach to a study such as this, as it suits the investigation of culture and the construction of multiple *realities*. Such phenomena, which have not been researched in-depth previously, include informal institutional processes, among others (Marshall & Rossman 2006). The epistemology of this approach is *interpretivism*, its ontology is *relativism* and its methodology is *hermeneutical/dialectical* (Bryman 2008; Guba & Lincoln 2005; Hatch 2002; Hernández H. 2001).

Creswell (2007) states that the epistemological approach is how the researcher relates to the topic she/he is investigating. Through *interpretivism* the phenomenon being studied is approached from the understanding that the researcher cannot separate her/himself from that phenomenon. This epistemological approach is grounded on interpretations rather than facts, emphasising the relevance of understanding meanings instead of explaining general situations (Bhattacharya 2008). As the researcher constructing this study, I understood that participants have their own interpretations of the topics I discussed

with them, which I then interpreted in turn. That interpretation led to my understanding that culture, place and meanings are socially constructed, through the process in which I constructed the stories of place that form this thesis.

Those socially constructed phenomena relate to *relativism* as the ontology of this research. In this study the nature of reality is understood as the co-existence of multiple truths and multiple realities that are embedded in the different perspectives of the participants (Creswell 2007; Hammersley 1992). These diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives are shaped and reshaped in interaction with others informing their social constructions (Guba & Lincoln 1994). In this research about place-making through culture, culture rises from these constructions that are in continuous transformation *aiming towards consensus* by the constant interaction between human beings (Bryman 2008). Ultimately, culture is an outcome of that social construction and reconstruction of meanings and actions. Thus, it becomes important to highlight that under this perspective, the term *reality* is 'thought of as a culture or at least a cultural situation' (Hammersley 1992, p. 195).

To achieve that understanding and grasp the existing multiple realities and culture, I interacted with the participants in their everyday environment as well as when the religious events took place. Both the participants' and the researcher's constructions and reconstructions conform knowledge and reality (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Thus, a *hermeneutical and dialectical* methodology was the most appropriate approach. As Hernández H. (2001, p. 25) states 'the hermeneutic perspective is adopted when we are interested in exploring what human actions *mean* to their protagonists as to their observants or researchers'. These meanings are explored and understood through the interaction of the participants' accounts and the researcher as an interpreter.

Choosing first the topic and then paradigmatic and research approaches came with several challenges I had to overcome as a researcher. Was I obtaining all the information I needed to develop my research and get a deep understanding of the topic? How do I assess the quality of the data? How do I guarantee the reliability of the information? These questions are fundamental to developing high quality research, and were tackled in several ways: reaching a level of saturation in the data collected, using data and observers' triangulation as a quality control process,

and using multiple techniques and participants to ensure the reliability of the information. All these challenges and how they were addressed are discussed in detail in the sections below.

Other personal challenges that I had to overcome were: fear of the unknown and of dangerous barrios; preconceptions about space and religiosity; the need to have control over research experiences; the unconscious need to impose my opinion and then understanding that there really are multiple truths, the fact I did not want to study criminal violence and, finally, overcoming my belief that academics have to be objective.

Focusing on the research challenges and choosing a qualitative approach, resulted in a shift in me as a person. I had to start understanding that my subjectivity and my previous personal experiences shaped the research from the moment I chose the topic. Being a Venezuelan Catholic, part of whose family came from barrios, allowed me to further understand the emotional and relational processes linked to place. This double interpretation of the data and my desire to go beyond my previous knowledge and the knowledge found in the literature, enriched the process of interacting with the different participants; all this enabled me to evaluate, improve and re-evaluate the research process.

The research process as described above is called *iterative*, wherein theory and findings are in continuous interaction, feeding each other throughout the study (Bryman 2008). This iterative process is therefore dynamic, informing the research from its start and enabling its development as it progresses. The interpretation and evaluation processes involved understanding the multiple realities and truths that the individual participants experienced. Throughout the research, all those were not only acknowledged, respected and valued, but were also integrated to form the stories presented in the following chapters. When working with different people from different ages, genders and backgrounds, I found that contrasting perspectives and experiences enabled rich discussions about place-making to occur, showing the different levels and layers embedded in the topic.

During this research about Catholic processions in Caracas' barrios, I compared and critiqued different literature about sense of place, sense of

community, urban space, religiosity and culture throughout the data collection process. However, this research also involved an inductive process whereby no specific theoretical background was adopted, but on the contrary theory about place in interaction with culture arose from the findings produced from the data collection and analysis (Bryman 2008; Denzin & Lincoln 1994). Thus, the relevant pre-existing theories and literature are presented and discussed against the research findings of this thesis; these are the stories in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Part of the relevance of the inductive and iterative process in this study arose from the need to develop further the theoretical knowledge of other fields, such as criminal violence in Venezuela, and institutions and power relationships. This inductive iterative process enabled deeper familiarisation with the research topic, its nature, and the knowledge and understandings arising from it.

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this inductive research process, an emergent design arose as the most appropriate option as it allowed me as the researcher to develop and adjust the study, including the data collection and analysis processes, in response to initial findings (Morgan 2008). It is accepted from the start of such a design strategy that initial decisions might change during the course of the investigation, making the process flexible and iterative (Morgan 2008; Ruiz Olabuénaga 2012). This process aims to continuously feed the research to enrich and strengthen it based on the successive findings.

Within this *emergent* process, I decided to approach the subject through a case study design, because it leads to the most useful answers to the “how" and "why" questions (Yin 2009). In addition, case studies facilitate in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon, such as culture, in a real-world context, from the perspective of the critical events, specific social groups and / or institutions relative to that phenomenon (Hernández, Fernández-Collado & Baptista 2006; Marshall & Rossman 2006; Morgan 2008; Yin 2009).

Case studies are one of the most common flexible design strategies in real-world projects and scenarios (Robson & McCartan 2015). This flexible design

strategy 'involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence' (Yin 2008 cited in Robson & McCartan 2015, p. 150). Based on my research aim to explore how place is constructed through the meanings associated with cultural activities in the barrio urban space, a case study approach was the most appropriate.

According to Yin (2009), there are three major criticisms of case study design. First, there is a concern regarding the rigour of the data collection and systematisation processes, and the way this negatively impacts the findings. This thesis addressed this criticism by systematically applying the different data collection techniques, for example consistently discussing the same topics with all the interviewees. Also, there was a systematic organisation of the different sources of information gathered using of NVivo as an organising and analysis tool, applied to coding and accessing cross-indexed data.

The second criticism of case study design is the inability to generalise from the research; I acknowledge there are several approaches to generalisation and that, as a case study, the aim of this research is to broaden understanding about the topic of place-making through in-depth analysis of specific local cases. Finally, the last concern is about the long time required to develop case study research. Considering the nature of this study it did take a long time to be developed; however, collecting the data over four years was based on an informed decision of having high quality information within the pre-set timeframe of studying a PhD on a part time basis. More detail on how these concerns were addressed is discussed in the sections below.

In addition to criticisms, there are also challenges when developing a case study design. The two main challenges of an emergent and case study design relate to flexibility and case study selection. During the investigation, the researcher has to be as flexible as the research itself is (Robson & McCartan 2015). This posed a challenge for me as my professional and academic approaches were originally closer to post-positivism where pre-set ideas, answers and objectivity were paramount. Hence, in the initial stages of the research I engaged in a subconscious self-reflective process, which became conscious during the start of the data collection. In this process I understood that I needed to leave my preconceptions

about research in general and the specific theme of the research behind (and my supervisors' preconceptions as well). I had to approach the topic and talk to participants with an open mind, and really listen to what they told me about their experiences and perspectives. This allowed me to understand the process I was about to engage in much better; it also opened up several possibilities and sub-topics that enriched the research that I had not previously considered as relevant to religiosity in the urban space. It also allowed me to understand that my theme was too broad and needed to focus on place-making.

The second research design challenge was choosing the case study to answer the research questions and meet the objectives. Choosing a case study is not only about selecting a unit of study and its specific boundaries; it implies an immersion in the participants' worldview (Creswell 2007; Denzin & Lincoln 2011; Vieytes 2009). Defining which participants, in which community and in which area to develop the study was also an emerging process in which flexibility was vital.

Once the initial research idea had been narrowed down to construction of place through Catholic processions in the barrio urban space, the next question was what specifically I would study and where. At that stage I was open to study all Catholic processions in (maybe) all barrios in Caracas, which would have been an enormous task. However, having to start somewhere, under my Venezuelan supervisors' guidance, I engaged with a priest,[7] Father Jesús, who had studied a theology course with me and who at that time, in 2008, was living and working in one of Caracas' largest barrios, Julián Blanco in Petare. In this process of defining the specific research topic and meeting Father Jesús, two baseline criteria for selecting the case study arose:

1. *Urban morphology*: the case study had to have a barrio morphology. This urban fabric comprises mainly a continuous urban edge and skyline, small compact grain and a paucity of open spaces clearly defined by the building bulk. These open spaces are predominantly used as vehicular roads and pedestrian paths. In Caracas, most barrios are located in the surrounding hills of the main valley; hence the urban fabric is defined by the topography.

[7] Father Jesús León later became the main key participant in this research.

2. *Personal safety:* In order to research and work in barrios, it is highly recommended to approach them with a community member. Venezuelan barrios are very unsafe places. Barrios are also areas with a deep sense of place and territoriality, and are heavily *guarded* by their inhabitants. It is too dangerous for people from other city areas to walk by and through them by themselves, as they are perceived as outsiders. For my personal safety, the second main criteria I adopted in the selection of the case study was knowing a community member or person with a deep connection to a barrio in order to gain safe access to the place. Priests in Venezuela are highly valued and protected; therefore knowing the priest of the barrio and being associated with him granted me access not only to the place but also to different community members.

Based on those two main criteria, and the ongoing process of re-evaluating the research focus and getting to know Father Jesús, I selected Julián Blanco in Petare as a case study. Petare is one of the largest barrio compounds, not only in Caracas but in the whole of Latin America (Silva, Caradonna & Galavis 2016). This initial decision was further modified as the research developed, taking into account meaningful information the participants shared regarding areas with the most amount of processions during the year (and Holy Week), and their massive attendance. Consequently, the study area expanded to three barrios in the Archpriesthood of Petare.[8] The final areas of study selected were Julián Blanco, El Nazareno and La Dolorita.

Rather than following a linear design, the research maintained its strategy of adapting to circumstances and to the findings that arose in the process. Keeping a working notebook as a research technique facilitated the decision-making process, as I could always look back to all my actions, thoughts and previous decisions to evaluate how to keep moving forward with the study. Considering that barrios are a

[8] The Archpriesthood is an ecclesiastic administrative-territorial entity that comprises different parishes. The Archpriesthood works under the command of an Archdiocese. More information about this topic can be found in Appendix A.

very dynamic context, if the research design had not been as flexible as it was, I would have not been able to conduct the study in such a smooth way[9].

2.3 PARTICIPANTS

This section explains the selection of participants, researcher interactions with them and the challenges this presented. More specific information about the participants and their involvement in the research is given in the following section regarding the data collection. This research comprised two types of participants, (1) community and (2) the research team. Each of them played an important role in the development of the study and posed different challenges to be addressed.

2.3.1 Community participants

In this thesis *community* is understood as 'a group of people sharing common characteristics and interests that live within a larger society, from which those features distinguish it' (García, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld 1999, p. 728). The barrio community comprises the community leaders, the thugs and the rest of the residents. Community leaders in Venezuelan barrios emerge as hard working residents that defend the collective interest and who are visible and accessible to the residents, as well as recognised and well respected (Montero 2004; Sanchez 2004). The barrio community leaders are inclusive in the decision-making process, sharing that responsibility with the other residents; at the same time the rest of the community trust the leaders in making decision for the group. In our study areas, the established leaders are some of the founders of the barrios[10]. The community leaders who participated in this research are the lay organisers of the processions, also leading the community (the participants of the processions) in the organisation of the religious activities.

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[9] Although I am from Caracas and had constant interaction with barrios and barrio residents from the time I was born, I had never been to Petare. Aside from morphology and shared history, each barrio in Caracas is unique; each barrio community is different and, as said in the baseline criteria, they are protective of their space. In addition, although I am Catholic and aware of the different Catholic activities and meanings, and have previously participated in processions, I had never attended a Catholic procession in a barrio, which is a completely different experience from processions in the traditional or modern city, and completely unfamiliar to me.

[10] Founders and other generations are further discussed in section 4.2.1.

Throughout this thesis, the terms *community* and *residents* are used alternatively, as in barrios they are the same. However, I differentiate the community and the leaders when needed. Also, considering the complex relationship with thugs (further discussed in chapters 5 and 6), who are also residents and members of the community, I will discuss them as a separate group when addressing community dynamics. In the case of criminal gangs it is important to mention that they have their own structure, with their own leadership (Moreno 2011a). However, these leaders are not the same as the community leaders mentioned above, and they hold no power in the overall community decision-making process.

The priests, nuns and other clergy in this research are also residents of the barrio; hence they are part of the community. However, they are discussed as a separate group because of their formal role in the institution of the Catholic Church.

The community participants who were directly part of this research comprised the priests, lay organisers of the processions and some procession attendees (residents). These members collaborated through the in-depth interviews and short conversations (further discussed in section 2.4.1).

In qualitative research involving flexible design, *purposive*[11] *sampling* is the usual approach, with saturation being the aim (Robson & McCartan 2015; Yin 2012). Saturation occurs 'when new interviews or observations do not allow deeper and broader understanding' (Vieytes 2009, p. 73 translated by G. Quintana Vigiola). Saturation is relevant to this research, as I wanted to delve into the different meanings associated with urban space in barrios. Thus, reaching the point where I obtained no new or different information regarding the topic led me to believe I had reached saturation. Notwithstanding this, the possibility that I, the researcher, may have omitted other significant meanings, as I did not engage with all procession attendees and barrio residents, has to be acknowledged.

The number, gender and age of the participants was not pre-determined at the start of the study. Since the quality of data that participants provide is more important than the quantity of information, participants were chosen based on their

[11] The terms *purposive* and *purposeful* are often used interchangeably (Gentles et al. 2015).

knowledge of the subject or their experience of the phenomenon (Bryman 2008; Yin 2012). The fact that I had multiple study areas made it vital for me to carefully prepare the participant selection criteria (Creswell 2007). The participants were therefore chosen based on their active engagement in the processions studied, and on their current or previous residence in the selected areas. The participants of this research comprised a balanced proportion of both males and females. As it was not relevant to the study, their specific age was not collected. However, their ages ranged from approximately 16 to 80 years old.[12]

As mentioned in the previous section, the first community member chosen as a key participant was Father Jesús León. He became a fundamental contributor to the initial development of this research, not only because he provided the initial context information, but also because he introduced me to the Julián Blanco community, as well as to the other priests and nuns of the Archpriesthood of Petare. This approach, known as *snowball sampling*, is one of the most common *purposeful sampling* strategies (Merriam 2009). In addition, within the purposeful sampling criteria mentioned above, *random sampling* was applied with the procession attendees.[13] This enabled me to obtain further information about the meaning of the procession and the urban space from members of the general public who were not involved in the organisation of the religious activity in any way.

One of the main challenges of this type of research in relation to the participants is building rapport. Ideally, participants should trust the researcher enough to open their doors and provide significant information. For this the researcher needs to be flexible, honest and share activities and personal experiences with the participants. The researcher also needs to be a good listener, empathetic, patient, active and respectful of others' perspectives (Marshall & Rossman 2006). As Marshall & Rossman (2006) explains:

> … the success of qualitative studies depend primarily on the interpersonal skills of the researcher. (…) Because the conduct of the study often depends

[12] For more detail about the participants please refer to Appendix C.
[13] During the processions I talked to attendees around me. They were randomly selected based on whoever was walking next to me at a time; I ensured I was not interrupting anyone's religious experience.

> exclusively on the relationships the researcher builds with participants, interpersonal skills are paramount. (Marshall & Rossman 2006, p. 78)

Although having different educational and socio-economic backgrounds, sharing Catholicism as the same cultural background with the participants enabled me to share common experiences and start building close relationships with them. This was achieved not only through talking and interacting with them, but also through collaborating and participating in different activities throughout the year related to religiosity. As part of flexible designs, in this case I had prolonged involvement in the research (Creswell 2007). Thus, different types of relationships were built over the years from the pilot stage until the end of the data collection. As Marshall & Rossman (2006) and Vieytes (2009) argue in this type of study the researcher enters the participants' lives and relationships emerge in the field.

However, not all relationships are similar, which poses a challenge in itself. While I remained friends with some participants, even after the data collection was completed, it was more difficult to establish rapport with other community members and the relationship was more distant. This distance had an impact on the depth of personal experience shared by such participants. However, such cases were the exception, and the rich quality of the data collected from the other participants enabled me to understand the underlying meanings and factors involved in place-making, and hence to answer the research questions.

The research was limited to people referred by other participants. Not knowing beforehand who was willing to participate or not from the people referred to me also became a challenge. In all cases, all participants were informed about the research theme and all gave verbal consent to participate. In the random sampling during the procession, the process of informing and getting consent as people were participating in their personal religious experience became a bit more difficult. However, people were always given the option not to participate.

Finally, it is important to highlight that all participants granted permission for their real names to be used in this thesis. They were proud to be part of this research and giving their identities is an acknowledgement of their time and help during the data collection stage.

2.3.2 Research team

The other participants involved in this study were the members of the research team. Initially, I had planned to collect the data by myself. However, as the research progressed and the case study expanded to three different areas, I found I needed research assistants to help me with the investigation. The main role of the research assistants was solely to collect data in the areas where I could not go, because I was participating in a procession in another barrio. The research assistants did not participate in the data analysis and interpretation process.

All the research assistants were Venezuelan Catholics [14] who lived in Caracas. This common background was fundamental for them to be able to relate to the topic and engage with the community in which they were working. However, one of the most challenging aspects of working with this team was that their disciplinary backgrounds were diverse, not all related to social science. To overcome this obstacle, they went through a thorough induction about the topic, the research questions and the objectives. They also had one-on-one sessions with me to discuss the specific area they were going to study, the processions in which they were going to participate, and what data needed to be collected and how. Furthermore, they were trained in how to liaise with the community and key participants.

Another challenge was working with different personalities, with different skills and ways of doing research. Despite the thorough training previously described, one of the research assistants was not able to collect all the required data and to build rapport with the different community members. Therefore, she was replaced with other members in the teams.

2.4 DATA COLLECTION

Case study (qualitative) research is strengthened by multiple data collection techniques, applied in an interconnected way to achieve deep understanding of the

[14] Both practicants and non-practicants.

meanings studied (Denzin & Lincoln 1994; Yin 2012) and establish convergent lines of evidence (Yin 2012). Triangulation can be an effective quality control process in qualitative research (Ruiz Olabuénaga 2012). Denzin (1988 cited in Robson & McCartan 2015) explains that triangulation can be achieved in four ways, two of which were applied in this research: (1) *data triangulation*, collected via more than one method; and (2) *observer triangulation,* which involves having more than one researcher.

This section describes the data collection techniques and the data collection process and the different challenges faces related to them in this research.

It is important to highlight that the spoken language in Venezuela is Spanish, the native language of the participants and research team. Thus, the data collection was carried out in this language, guaranteeing respect of all participants' backgrounds.

2.4.1 Data collection techniques

The data collection techniques chosen are closely associated with the constructs studied, namely, the physical-spatial, the psychosocial meaning and the procession as a cultural activity. These techniques were participant observation, in-depth interviews and short conversations, and audio-visual and photographic survey. They were chosen because their analysis and interpretation helped develop an integrated perspective on the complexity of barrio urban space.

2.4.1.1 Participant observation

Participant observation implies a deep involvement in the social environment being studied (Marshall & Rossman 2006) and to engage in this technique, the researcher needs to enter the social and symbolic world of participants (Nelson et al. 1992 cited in Denzin & Lincoln 1994). Sharing the Catholic symbolic world with the participants, I could fully participate in the various activities required for this research and relate fully to the events before, during and after a procession. This immersion allowed me as a researcher to experience the phenomenon as the other participants did and learn from my own experience (Marshall & Rossman 2006).

According to Junker (2004), my role in this research was *participant as an observer*, in which:

> …the observer activities as such are made publicly known at the outset, are more or less publicly sponsored by people in the situation studied, and are intentionally not 'kept under wraps'. The role may provide access to a wide range of information, and even secrets may be given to the field worker when he becomes known for keeping them, as well as for guarding confidential information (Junker 2004, p. 224)

The community knew and acknowledged that I was researching the issue of Catholic processions in the urban space. I participated in all the activities related to the phenomenon being studied, along with the organisers and other participants. It enabled me to access inside information and experiences in depth. The initial approaches to the research involved getting to know the area in order to establish rapport with the community and to be allowed by them to participate in their religious routines and everyday lives (Figure 2.2). I was able to observe people's actions and activities related to the Catholic processions as they took place, and to the urban spaces in which they took place. By participating in these activities I built relationships with the participants, which in turn enabled me to understand their sense of place, their feelings about the space and the meanings they associated to it.

The purpose of participant observation is to observe people's actions, listening to conversations between participants and with the researcher, asking questions and clarifying situations and behaviours (Bryman 2008). The most common recording method for this technique is field notes, which consist of a systematic and organised description of what is being observed in addition to thoughts, opinions and general comments by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman 2006). In this research, field notes were taken both in text and as voice notes (then transcribed). The latter were primarily used during the procession because of the complexity of writing while walking, talking to people and taking photographs.

The recorded field notes provided rich information about the interaction between people and the urban space during the procession, as well as their

behaviours during this activity. Details were recorded about the streets, the procession path and the preparation for activities, which enriched the analysis and interpretation of the different data collected and led to better understanding of the meanings people associated with spaces that construct place.

Figure 2.2: Me before one procession in which I participated as one of 'the people'. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola.

2.4.1.2 In-depth interviews and short conversations

To understand people's meanings, it is vital to give them a voice. In the case of this research, this voice reflected their perspectives on the urban space and their religiosity. The aim of in-depth interviews is to allow participants to express their thoughts, beliefs and knowledge, about a certain topic or issue relevant to peoples' lives. Through such interviews, a large and varied amount of information can be acquired in a relatively short period of time, and any clarifications can be obtained

immediately (Marshall & Rossman 2006). According to Marshall & Rossman (2006), interviews, along with observations, allow researchers to identify and understand people's meanings.

I thus organised in-depth open-ended interviews, which were structured only by the main topics linked to the three themes I wanted to discuss with key actors (see Appendix B for *In-depth interview guideline*). The interviews aimed to elicit the meaning of the processions as cultural expressions, and to elicit the socially-constructed meaning of the space in which the processions occurred. The interviews allowed me to contrast and compare the data collected (and recorded on field notes) during the participant observation in people's everyday lives and during the different stages of the processions as part of the analysis, so as to reach a deeper understanding of barrio morphology and the life people lead there.

In addition, both the research assistants and I engaged in short conversations with participants during the processions. These short conversations included talking not only to some key participants about specific happenings, but also to other procession attendees who were randomly selected in situ. We enquired about their reasons for attending the procession, the meaning of religiosity and the procession, and their feelings about the urban space. These short conversations with random participants revealed insightful information about their relationship with the event, and helped the researcher understand the feelings it generated. This helped in the interpretation of the meaning people attached to space, and the way these meanings constructed sense of place. It also enabled me to broaden and confirm the accounts of the main participants, enhancing the reliability of the data collected.

During the research I did a total of 31 in-depth interviews, comprising 24 interviews with key community members including priests, organisers and participants, six with the research assistants and one with Father Pedro Trigo, a priest, sociologist, theologian and psychologist with vast experience in the topic gained through living in Petare and working with the community. In addition, the research team had 16 short conversations with procession attendees and key

participants.[15] Both in-depth interviews and short conversations were recorded to guarantee the informed reconstruction of the stories from the participants' accounts.

The in-depth interviews took place mostly in a church, the participants' workplace or their home; the main criteria for selecting the location were quiet and preferences of participants. According to Marshall & Rossman (2006), interviewing people in their homes (or other personal spaces) reduces bias as the participants feel more comfortable, open and in control. Facilitating a comfortable and safe interview environment where the interview was addressed more like a conversation enabled the participants to discuss personal matters freely, to delve into their feelings about the barrio urban space and their spirituality. The challenge of working in the participants' private space was guaranteeing the researcher's personal safety. In this research this was addressed through several strategies: (1) someone always knew my location and schedule, (2) in case of a barrio shootout, somewhere safe where I could stay was agreed beforehand and, most importantly, (3) all the key participants interviewed were highly regarded community members who I trusted and were committed to protect me. This trust was progressively built over the duration of the research. In Venezuela, people are generally caring of others. Protecting someone you know, even if the person is just an acquaintance, is very common. In this case, entering the community with the priest of the area ensured that residents protected and trusted me. However, that initial trust gained by arriving with the priest changed and strengthened through the research process as participants acknowledged me for myself and separated my study from the Church. The investigation benefited, as it enabled the participants to discuss freely the subject I was studying and the questions asked.

As previously described, the short interviews took place during the processions, thus they occurred in public open spaces. Although an ethical question about privacy does arise with this public location, participants were informed of the research and the aim of the conversation and chose to participate openly in the discussion of religiosity, processions and urban space under these conditions.

[15] The interviews and short-conversations recordings and transcripts are available upon request.

According to Marshall & Rossman (2006), one of the most significant challenges of interviewing is the participant's cooperation and sincerity. In this research that challenge was addressed by building rapport and establishing relationships with the participants. My overall participation (the fact that I shared the same culture, collaborated in the preparations of the processions and related events and took part in the religious activities) facilitated the bonding process. Building such trust between researcher and participant makes the interview process more comfortable, open and cooperative.

Other challenges that arose in the interview process included missing some culture- and language-specific clues that may have appeared, and not asking sufficiently relevant questions to provoke and enhance long and insightful answers (Finch 1984 cited in Távara & Cueto 2015). In this case, sharing the same cultural background facilitated the process of understanding the cultural expressions and the Venezuelan slang used during the interviews. However, acknowledging that I came from a different city area with different upbringing made me engage in a critical assessment of my own approach and how to address this matter. As the research evolved, the participants and I overcame those background differences, which enabled me to understand the different layers of their communication.

Another challenge that can be encountered with interviews is the *reliability* of what the participants describe as their social reality (Marshall & Rossman 2006). In this case, the use of multiple techniques of data collection helped to overcome this challenge. Obtaining different perspectives from several participants provided information about the different aspects involved with the construction of place through cultural activities.

In-depth interviews should involve minimal intervention from the researcher (Creswell 2007). Although I had previous experience of in-depth interviewing when working as a research assistant, the *questioning* process in this research presented a challenge initially. My open approach to the topic under discussion meant I had to engage the participant to talk freely yet keep the interviewee on track without leading the conversation or the answers.

In the first interviews, I initially asked general questions, which were intended to be as open as possible; these facilitated the process of discussing the research topics. In these first encounters, when I asked about their thoughts about their urban space, I found the participants' answers referred to freedom of speech and being able to communicate their thoughts. The answer implied a political and social layer. As my research related to the physical public space, I found the need to ask more specific questions, such as: 'What do you think about the public spaces in your barrio? Do you have public spaces? What are they like? How about the physical space, the streets, the basketball courts, etc?' Although I feared I was leading the participant, this process became necessary to address the study's objectives.

Interviewing and listening to the recordings was an important aspect of the iterative process of this research. Listening to myself allowed me to engage in a self-reflective process, which enabled me to improve my interviewing skills significantly. As the research progressed, the interviews became more open and with fewer interruptions on my part. In addition, the interview guideline, as well as the short conversation themes, were improved as the study developed, enabling the participants to understand the research topics better and focus their free talk on those.

2.4.1.3 Audio-visual and photographic survey

Audio-visual and photographic surveys allow the researcher to examine physical evidence, social situations and an individual's or group's actions (Marshall & Rossman 2006). Through photographs, urban spaces can be compared at different times, and transformations associated with each activity can be identified. In addition, peoples' facial expressions were recorded, producing additional evidence for providing context for the feelings associated with the activity and the place. In short, visual evidence allowed me to further understand and present the interaction between people, spaces and the construction of meaning around places.

The research team collected audio-visual and photographic evidence to complement the information obtained through participant observations, the interviews and short conversations. Throughout the research and the different stages of data collection, the research team collected 4831 files of photographs and

videos.[16] The audio-visual data captured the actual interaction between people, the activities they were engaging in and the urban space; such evidence facilitates communicating to a broader audience the physical and social environment in which the phenomenon being studied takes place.

The main challenge related to audio-visual evidence was to define the focus of the data collection and have all the research team members capture the same type of information. Based on the research themes, and on an initial analysis of the photographs and videos I took during the second procession I attended, [17] subsequent audio-visual and photographic survey focused on the urban space on an everyday basis and during the procession: the urban space's morphology comprised the buildings and the open space, the obstructions in the procession path, the physical challenges people had to overcome, participants' and bystanders' actions and the activities engaged in in the urban space.

2.4.2 Data collection process

The data that informed this research was collected between 2008 and 2011 in Caracas, Venezuela. As part of the inductive iterative research approach, the first year of research emerged as the pilot study, which in turn informed the investigation process. Based on the information collected in the pilot, it was acknowledged that for participants the most significant processions during the year were those taking place during Holy Week; at the same time the selection criteria of the areas of study were fine tuned. Thus, in March 2009, the research focus was redefined to study only the Holy Week processions in La Dolorita, Julián Blanco and El Nazareno, all located in Petare.

Given the limited resources, the focus on a specific annual event, and the inclusion of three study areas, the data collection had to occur over a three-year period (2009, 2010 and 2011), so that I could attend each set of processions at least once. For each procession, I organised the data collection in three stages: (1) prior

[16] The videos presented in this thesis can be accessed in the YouTube channel 'Place-making through Culture' (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6LALo0l46jZXDApLpy8mRg). Additional videos and photographs are available upon request.
[17] The story about the processions attended are described in the following subsection (Section 2.4.2)

to the procession, (2) during the procession, and (3) after the procession. The preparations for each event usually extend from three months before the procession to the day before; this was the first stage of data collection. The second stage is the day of the event, including the immediate preparation, the journey itself, and the end of the procession; and the third stage corresponds to the days after the procession, when I obtained further information on the event and the urban space from key participants. Table 2.1 shows a summary of specific activities performed at each of the three stages for each procession and for each of the three years.

Table 2.1: Summary of data collection stages around each procession

STAGE		
1st (Before)	**2nd (During)**	**3rd (After)**
• Conversations with the key participants of the procession (priest, organisers, community members). • Photographic survey of the urban space.	• Participant Observation. • Short conversations with the participants of the procession. • Field notes. • Photographic and audio-visual survey of the urban space and the procession.	• Interview key participants involved in the organisation of the procession.

In order to understand in further detail the story about the data collection process, this sub-section is divided into two: (1) Pilot, and (2) Main research.

2.4.2.1 Pilot:

The pilot phase was developed during the first year of the research, that is, from June 2008 to March 2009. Having a pilot with interviews is a wise strategy to use, as the participants' perspectives communicated during this early phase inform the whole research (Janesick 1994). A pilot test can help a researcher to understand what is really important for the people and community being studied, and thus to redefine the path and focus of the research.

Going through an emergent pilot stage (it was not originally planned as such) made the really meaningful focus of the research evident. Initially I decided to study all the Catholic processions that took place in Julián Blanco. However, the pilot showed that not all processions were equally meaningful and that the focus should be on certain processions in certain areas. The pilot also allowed me to test the data

collection techniques and then to revise and improve the tools used. Finally, the pilot made me question my role as a researcher in this context.

In this stage there were three levels of participants. On the first level was the *main participant*, Father Jesús León, who worked and lived at that time in the Evangelisation Centre[18] of Julián Blanco. He accompanied me throughout the research process in this phase, provided the context's initial information, and introduced me to the lay and ecclesiastic communities in Petare.

On the second level were the *procession organisers*, who provided vital information regarding religiosity, processions and the use of urban space. This category comprised the organisers of the *San Judas Tadeo* (Saint Judas Thaddeus) and of *La Inmaculada* (The Inmaculate) processions, who are members and leaders of the communities of *Antonio José de Sucre* and *Barrio Bolívar* respectively, both in Julián Blanco, Petare. Father Jesús recommended them because of their knowledge regarding these processions and the context of study.[19]

Finally, there were the *priests and nuns* of the different parishes, who confirmed the significance of Holy Week and of religiosity in the community. In this case, Father Jesús recommended them as well, and facilitated our introduction during an archpriesthood meeting. The priests and nuns later became the primary contact between this researcher and the community of each parish.[20]

In the initial steps of this research I became involved with three local processions of Julián Blanco, where Father Jesús lived and worked. These processions not only allowed me to assess what data collection techniques were going to be the most appropriate to understand the phenomenon in question, but also directed me in a self-reflexive process regarding my path as a researcher.

Accompanied by Father Jesús, in July 2008 I attended my first procession in a barrio in Petare, *El Carmen*. As it was my initial contact with the study context and

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[18] Evangelisation Centres are a structure within an ecclesiastic Parish. This is further explained in Appendix A.
[19] For details about this stage's community participants refer to Appendix C
[20] For details about the two main participants providing information about the archpriesthood and its activities, refer to Appendix C

the topic, I approached that experience only with naturalistic observation and by taking field notes.

On a personal level, being in an unfamiliar (and dangerous) context where it was evident people identified me as an outsider, made me question my decision to study Catholic processions in barrios. Knowing I was safe by being with Father Jesús, but at the same time feeling unsafe, started a reflexive process about '*how far do we go with research?'* Although I did not really find the answer to that question, reflecting on it encouraged me to challenge myself and my self-imposed boundaries.

As a researcher, attending this first procession allowed me to identify the initial naïveté with which I approached the data collection, and helped me strengthen the research process. I realised the importance of knowing and understanding the community and the religious activity from the participants' perspectives. As a result, the data collection techniques were redefined. I arranged to include an in-depth non-structured interview with the organisers before the procession to understand the history and activities involved in this cultural activity; after the procession, I discussed what was experienced and the underlying meanings attached to the procession and the barrio. In addition, I chose participant observation as a data collection technique to immerse myself in the phenomenon I was studying.

Once I had adjusted the data collection approach, in October 2008 I became involved in the *San Judas Tadeo* (St. Judas Thaddeus) procession in the Antonio José de Sucre barrio. The initial in-depth interview with the main organiser, Yamileth Espejo, and her mother, who was a strong community leader and one of the original organisers, focused on the construction process of the barrio and its link to the beginning of the religious tradition there. The interviewees also provided an outline of the procession and surrounding activities, as well as an initial statement regarding the importance of the Holy Week processions. Consequently, on the day of the procession, I was introduced to the rest of the organiser team, and participated in some preparation activities and in the procession itself. This experience enabled me to start understanding the dynamics between the people, the urban space and the religious activity. Matters such as territorial boundaries, criminal violence and deep

emotional connection to Catholicism started to arise as central to this research. The follow-up in-depth group interview with all the organisers that took place a week after the procession delved into these themes and their relationship to place. Once again, the organisers highlighted the Holy Week processions as the most important in the community.

The third procession in which I took part was *La Inmaculada*, in December 2008. During the initial in-depth interview with the organisers, we discussed topics regarding the barrio and their religiosity. However, the relevance for the community of the Holy Week processions emerged as the most significant matter. As a result, I decided to focus only on these.

In January 2009, Father Jesús took me to an archpriesthood meeting to introduce me to the ecclesiastic organisational experience, as well as to the different priests and nuns working in this area. After I presented the research topic, the different representatives confirmed the significance of Holy Week processions as the most relevant ones for the ecclesiastic community and barrio residents. They also provided information about the urban typology and the schedule of the Holy Week processions of each area, which enabled me to define the final selection criteria of the case study: (1) a barrio urban typology and (2) the number of processions that took place in the parishes located in that particular urban fabric. As a consequence, the final areas chosen were the Barrio El Nazareno (Parish *Nuestra Señora del Fátima*), La Dolorita (Parish *San Francisco de Sales*) and Julián Blanco (Evangelisation Centre Julián Blanco). These three areas share not only the barrio typology (dense and fine-grain structures with a well defined open space), but also host three meaningful processions - the Palm procession on Palm Sunday, the Nazarene on Holy Wednesday, and the Way of the Cross on Good Friday.

2.4.2.2 Main research:

In accordance with the research design, the study was continually reshaped and refocused during this process, adjustments made from the initial findings that were fed back into the methodological decisions. Following the outcomes that emerged during the pilot and the refocusing of the research to investigate Holy Week processions in the areas of Julián Blanco, La Dolorita and El Nazareno, it

became evident that data could be gathered only once a year. The data collection process was therefore established over a three-year period, from March 2009 to June 2011. I called this stage the main research.

As I could not attend all Holy Week processions in the three different areas because they occurred simultaneously, a research team of research assistants and myself were responsible for the data collection process of this stage. Table 2.2 presents the research team allocation per year per site.

Table 2.2: Research team allocation matrix

	La Dolorita	**El Nazareno**	**Julián Blanco**
2009	**Main researcher**	Research Assistants	Research Assistants
2010	Research Assistants	**Main researcher**	Research Assistants
2011	N/A	Research Assistants	**Main researcher**

Due to limited resources, we could not collect data in La Dolorita in 2011. This limitation was overcome by interviewing José Antonio Silva (a key participant of that barrio) regarding Holy Week activities and changes that year.

In this stage there were four levels of participants. The first level were *key participants*, who accompanied the research team through the participant observation process and shared their experiences, providing significant information and insights about the construction of place in their areas. At the second level there were the *procession organisers and collaborators*, who also provided vital information regarding religiosity, processions and the use of urban space. At the third level were the *research assistants*, who not only gathered data during the processions but also shared their personal experiences of engaging in this phenomenon. Finally, the fourth level comprised the *general participants* of the processions, with whom we engaged to gain even deeper understanding of the research topic.[21]

[21] Appendix C presents all the participants of the main research stage.

As mentioned in the introduction of this section, the main research comprised three sub-stages: (1) before the processions, (2) attending the processions and (3) after the processions. The data gathered in these phases constituted the basis for interpreting, developing and writing the different stories that form this thesis. It is important to highlight that these sub-stages did not happen in a linear way; they all happened in all the years and data was collected in all the areas.

Sub-stage 1: before the processions

The first sub-stage consisted of an initial approach to the priests who represented the parishes selected for the study, and the key community members who were going to accompany us during the data collection process.

After the archpriesthood meeting I met with the main priests of the selected study areas, namely Father Luis Azzalini from La Dolorita, Father Jorge Bravo from El Nazareno, and Father Jesús León representing the Evangelisation Centre of Julián Blanco. In these meetings I engaged in initial interviews where we discussed the depths of Catholicism in barrios and the processions as religious events. We also examined different details about the context of study, focusing on the institutional approach (both ecclesiastic and governmental), and the built environment. In addition, in these initial meetings with the priests, the research team of 2009 and the key community participants were introduced to each other.

I then engaged in in-depth interviews with each key community participant where they openly discussed their personal insights about Holy Week processions and explained their history, importance and the organisation process. These interviews also allowed me to explore and start understanding the meanings associated with the urban space on an everyday basis as well as when the procession takes place.

During this first sub-stage I also participated in other processions and religious activities of the study parishes, to build rapport with participants and to start getting involved with the rest of the community and their everyday activities. I also helped with the Holy Week processions preparation process.

Sub-stage 2: attending the processions

Next, we attended the processions, where we undertook participant observation and short conversations with the general public and with the key participants who accompanied us throughout the activity.

From chatting with the general public during the interviews, I gained a broader perspective on the meaning of the Holy Week processions and the urban space. These conversations enabled me to understand that my previous concern about the possible bias from the organisers could be disregarded, as the information gathered at this stage corroborated what the key participants discussed in the in-depth interviews.

Moreover, the participant observation during the processions provided us with the opportunity to ask the key participants accompanying us about different aspects/issues that we noticed during the activity. As an outcome of these short conversations, I could understand different relevant aspects regarding the complexity of urban space when interacting with this cultural event, for example how the procession stops were decided based on the size of the space.

Sub-stage 3: after the processions

The final sub-stage comprised interviewing the organisers in order to understand further their meanings and discuss in depth what was observed during the processions.

I also gathered the information the research assistants collected and interviewed them to discuss their personal experiences in the processions they attended. Their perspectives on this religious activity provided an unbiased approach to examining the different sensations, limitations and experiences regarding the procession in each particular urban space. Furthermore, they provided an outsider view of the organisation process, which complemented the information gathered with the key participants and organisers.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Fetterman (2008) data analysis begins from the moment the researcher selects a problem to study and ends with the last word of the thesis. The analysis can also be said to start as soon as the researcher learns 'something that affects their interpretation of the data' (Morgan 2008, p. 246). As discussed in previous sections, this research process was iterative and reflexive, each stage informing the next with the findings of the data collected and analysed throughout the study. Thematic coding analysis was the qualitative approach to analyse the data gathered through the interviews, field notes, short conversations with participants and the audio-visual recordings. This approach is not usually linked to existing theories and consists of labelling and coding the data in themes as a basis for further analysis (Robson & McCartan 2015).

In qualitative research, the data can be analysed in two main ways: (1) by similarity, where categories or codes are defined in response to the similarities or differences found, and (2) by contiguity, where the data is analysed based on the relationships of time and space, cause and effect, or the connection with things (Maxwell & Chmiel 2014). In this research both approaches were taken. Initially, the data was analysed by the correspondences between what the interviewees stated and what was recorded on the field notes. From this, the different codes and categories were defined. Next, the different connections between the categories and the specific data in them were established, bringing understanding of the different existing, underlying relationships.

The structure of this thematic analysis aimed at full comprehension of the concept of place-making. The analysis was based on categorising the key elements mentioned by the interviewees. Besides identifying repetition, emphasis on particular themes and the descriptions of experiences from the interviews, the deep connection between people and the procession became evident in the actions and interactions shown in the audio-visual recordings. These recordings added to an understanding of the meaning of the activity studied and of the space in which it occurred. Despite the risk of losing specific information, this approach offered the potential gain of identifying connections and relationships among the data and what the participants told us (Schreier 2014). I undertook thematic analysis not only

categorising to describe, but also to understand the different linkages and meanings embedded in the data.

However, according to Coffey and Atkinson (1996 cited in Maxwell & Chmiel 2014), these codes and categories do not expose the underlying different meanings and relationships in the data; they are just an organisational tool. Researchers make sense of the data analysed through interpretation (Willig 2014). Interpretation 'is concerned with generating deeper and/or fuller understanding of the meaning(s) contained within an account' (Willig 2014, p. 137). To do this, researchers make connections between the different components of the data to answer the questions raised about the perceptions and associated meanings of the participants.

To be able to make these connections, systematisation and organisation is required when working with multiple case studies and/or when analysing and interpreting multiple in-depth interviews (Marshall & Rossman 2006). In order to achieve this, I used the software Nvivo, which enabled me to file and organise all the data collected. At the same time it allowed me to compress all the information in one place, making it easier to code and then to retrieve the coded data.

One of the challenges of coding and categorisation is the risk of losing the initial connections that exist in the original context. By categorising, researchers de-contextualise, thus putting themselves at risk of losing some of the meaning embedded in the original contiguous state (Maxwell & Chmiel 2014). To prevent this from happening in this research, the stories written correspond with the different topics raised by the participants. In addition, when presenting a story based on the interpretations derived from the data, its general context is also discussed.

On the matter of context, Maxwell & Chmiel (2014) highlight that case studies are one of the most prevalent strategies in qualitative research to keep the categories contextualised by time and space. However, when I discuss context in this research, I am referring not only to the tangible space and the specific time the data was collected, I am also discussing the different connections and meanings that the participants give to the different phenomena they are describing. However, as researchers, we have to acknowledge that by selecting parts of the participants' discourse to identify ideas, actions and meanings, we are interpreting and ultimately

deciding based on our own preconceptions, values and knowledge what is most relevant regarding the phenomena we are studying. In this case, because I was part of the culture that was being researched, the possibility of disregarding important aspects of the participants' accounts was reduced.

Another challenge encountered when analysing the data was the entwined nature of the themes in question. Hence, when I was analysing the participants' accounts, the coding process was challenging as some nodes belonged in multiple categories. This challenge could be overcome when presenting the analysis and interpretations as stories that were co-constructed by the participants' reports and by me.

2.6 PRESENTING THE STORIES

In the case study research design, the findings, learning, meanings and significance of the phenomenon are presented through written interpretation, storytelling being one of the most compelling forms of narrative in qualitative research (Creswell 2007). Through writing stories, the researcher should enable readers to experience the feeling of *being there* (Robson & McCartan 2015).

That feeling through storytelling was achieved through descriptions, through specifying the roles of the participants and the researcher, and by acknowledging their experiences not only in the research process itself, but also in relation to the phenomenon being researched. This thesis thus presents different stories that together construct the meaning of place. All these stories have three elements that when combined, and contextualised with the relevant literature, build up the argument to understand the process of place-making through culture: (1) the participants' accounts about and interpretations of religiosity and the barrio urban space, (2) my interpretations of the participants' texts and (3) my personal background and experiences.

In addition, in these stories I acknowledge you, the reader, as another participant constructing your interpretations of the stories I am telling. Thus, in the following chapters when I write 'we', it means you, the reader, and I. Less

frequently, when I write ‘we’ I may refer to the community, priests and other direct participants involved in this research; I mention this clearly if that is the case.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This methodology story showed the decisions made and challenges encountered throughout the investigation process. It presented my position as a researcher, as an urban and place-making storyteller. Highlighting the importance of approaching this research in a reflective, flexible and iterative way, the process also stressed the significance of building meaningful relationships with the participants, as well as of acknowledging my personal background and myself as a Catholic Venezuelan.

This thesis comprises a co-construction of the participants, the reader and myself of different consecutive stories that build up the narrative about place-making through culture in Caracas’ barrios. According to Creswell (2007), case study designs should provide a description of the cases and their history, followed by an analysis of the different themes that arise in order to understand the depth and complexity of the case. The following chapter gives a brief description of the areas of study and the general and specific context in which they are embedded. Then, three stories that delve into the barrio urban space, its activities and its associated meanings are presented.

3 BARRIO ORIGIN: EL NAZARENO, LA DOLORITA & JULIÁN BLANCO

In the past century, the world's population has grown from 1.5 to 7.3 billion (Kremer 1993; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Population Division 2015). This has had a massive impact on urban areas, which in the last few decades have witnessed significant growth; 56% of the world's population now live in cities (The World Bank 2016). This population shift has been at its greatest in developing countries such as Venezuela, where 89% of the population is urban. Most of the future population growth will take place in cities in these developing countries (Davis 2006; United Nations Population Fund 2007)

In Venezuela, a significant component of urban growth has occurred in Caracas barrios, which are an integral part of the urban structure. People living in these areas share backgrounds, culture and stories that contribute to the construction of place. In general, the stories of barrios are filled with struggle, power relationships, support and opposition; it is its people who give significance to these phenomena.

This chapter locates barrios in the global context, focusing on their origin and development as an outcome of poverty. It also explains how economic cycles, waves of migration and the topography formed the specific barrios in the city. This chapter also provides particularities are achieved through giving a general outlook of the origin and construction of barrios in Caracas, and describes the overall approach to the selected case study and the three areas under investigation: El Nazareno, Julián Blanco and La Dolorita. It also provides an understanding of their foundation stories for both the settlement and the early stages of the houses.

The chapter forms the foundation for understanding the stories in this thesis that comprise the three essential aspects of place-making: the current urban space, activities and meanings.

3.1 CARACAS' GROWTH AND THE ORIGIN OF BARRIOS

Informal settlements, the focus of this thesis, is one of the urban fabric typologies in Venezuelan cities. Several authors have used the term *informal settlement* with different connotations, frequently focusing on the legality of the settlement. Usually, it is mostly associated with *slums* (Davis 2006; Dovey 2015; Dovey & King 2011, 2012; United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003; United Nations Population Fund 2007). Other terms that have been used to name these areas are *self-built areas* (Bolívar 1998; Rosas Meza 2009), *popular settlements/territories* (Antillano 2005; de Freitas Taylor & Ontiveros 2006), and *gray spaces* (Yiftachel 2009), among others. In Venezuela these areas are commonly known as *barrios*;[22] thus this is the term used in this thesis to refer to these settlements, unless specific literature is being referenced.

In studying local urban typologies, Marcano Requena (1994) defines the barrio areas as the most serious urban problem in the country, in which growth has been spontaneous and without any type of control. According to this author, these areas are characterised by their discontinuity from the traditional and regulated urban fabric and by the difficulty of the service provision due to their steep topography.

Despite the various, and sometimes negative, perspectives on informal settlements, this section presents a broad perspective on the general context of barrios, including the major push-and-pull factors[23] underpinning urbanisation globally, and the overall drivers of barrio development. The specific story of Caracas' growth and its barrios is then briefly discussed, as the introduction to the stories of this research's case study.

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[22] Not only is *barrios* the commonly known term for these areas, but also residents refer to their place as *barrios*.

[23] Piché (2013) presents the different approaches to understanding the drivers of migration. This thesis adopts the classic approach of 'push-and-pull factors', as I aim to provide a general context and not discuss migration matters in depth.

3.1.1 Barrios' general context

By 2007, slums were home to more than one billion people worldwide, a figure forecast to increase by 40% by 2020 (United Nations Population Fund 2007). Caracas is no exception. Since their beginning, Caracas' barrios have hosted a significant proportion of this growing squatter population. Although slums, squatter or informal settlements have traditionally had a negative connotation linked to illegality and lack of health, tenure and safety (Dovey 2012), these areas 'are growing at a faster rate globally than any other form of urban development' (Dovey & King 2011, p. 27).

According to Dovey & King (2012), there are eight different morphological settling typologies, *escarpments* being one of them. Escarpments are usually the limit to the formal city. While developers consider them too steep to build on, it is on such escarpments, many with a 40% gradient, that the majority of Caracas' barrios are situated (Sosa Abascal 1993). As can be seen in Figure 3.1, barrios' morphology comprise a lot of buildings with small and dense grain, spreading to the tops of the hills, creating a mixed fabric between continuous and dispersed edges (Quintana Vigiola 2008). This typology is characterised by the self-construction of the houses and the inadequacy of most of their infrastructure.

Particularly in Caracas, barrios originated because of the city's very rapid urbanisation process from the 1940s to the late 1960s. In this period, Venezuela's urban population grew from 30% of the total to 70% (The World Bank 2016), because of the predominantly rural-to-urban migration (Gabaldón 2007).

Simultaneously, rural-urban migrations were occurring on a global scale because of different push-and-pull factors. People from rural areas were being 'pushed' in to the cities due to several global and local dynamics. Firstly, rural industrialisation, the mechanisation of agriculture and improved productivity, meant small farmers could not compete with large agribusinesses. As a consequence, rural wages decreased and less labour was needed (Davis 2006; United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003). These phenomena increased rural poverty, which was 'deeper and more widespread than in cities' (United Nations Population Fund

2007, p. 15), and farmers and their families were forced to look for employment in the city. (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003).

Figure 3.1: Barrio urban fabric – view of Julián Blanco. Source: G.Quintana Vigiola

This process was the start of a long-lasting, complex and symbiotic relationship between barrio dwellers, city residents, politicians and government agencies; a relationship that highlighted the physical and social differences and distance between the city and the barrio, at the same time that both areas became mutually dependent (Bolívar & Pedrazzini 2008; Davis 2006; Perlman 2010; Turner 1976)

In the 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank developed global policies of 'agricultural deregulation and financial discipline' which resulted in the further displacement of rural labourers to cities, and to slums (Davis 2006, p. 15).

Pull factors contributed equally to the massive population growth in cities. As the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2003) states, urban areas provided education, social and health services, as well as infrastructure. In cities,

there were also higher incomes and more job opportunities, in both the formal and the informal sectors.

In Latin America (including in Venezuela), the political environment from the late 1950s to the 1970s was volatile, with a shift from dictatorships to democracy. This phenomenon opened a temporary window of opportunity for land invasions (Davis 2006). Caracas experienced massive rural-to-urban migration during this period, as the provisional committee that governed between the regimes of Marcos Pérez Jiménez and Rómulo Betancourt[24] temporarily suspended evictions from barrios. This led to exponential urban population growth, from 30% to 70% of the country's total, most of this expansion in the barrios.

Corruption, clientelism and populism also drove the creation and growth of informal settlements worldwide, including in Venezuela. Politicians both in and running for government not only turned a blind eye to people squatting both public and private lands, but also unofficially aided them with resources such as building materials in exchange for votes (Bolívar & Pedrazzini 2008; Hernández García 2013; Kudva 2009; Trigo 2008).

However, the rural-urban migration was not the sole reason for the rapid growth of barrios. According to the United Nations Population Fund (2007), there is a misconception that excessive rural-to-urban migration is one of the leading causes of urban growth and urban poverty. While natural increase generates most urban growth, it is the 'people displaced from other parts of the city' (United Nations Population Fund 2007, p. 37) who largely cause the growth of slums per se, as happened in Caracas' barrios. This idea is expanded in the foundation stories in Section 3.3, which describe the intra-city displacement experienced by the participants.

Fundamentally, it is rapid and unplanned urban growth that generates slums, especially when accompanied by inefficient governance in looking after the poor (United Nations Population Fund 2007). 'Slums are a physical and spatial manifestation of urban poverty and intra-city inequality' (United Nations Human

[24] Marcos Pérez Jiménez was a military dictator that ruled Venezuela from 1952 to 1958. Rómulo Betancourt was the following president, democratically elected in 1959.

Settlements Programme 2003, p. xxvi). Slum dwellers cannot afford the formal housing market, as there are not enough formal employment opportunities. In addition, governments cannot provide adequate housing supply, leading people to find their own accessible land and affordable housing (Davis 2006; Dovey & King 2011; United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003). Housing policies fail because they do not really address the needs of the poor; they are based on assumptions of how much people can pay for housing. As poor people cannot afford to pay for any housing, but still need easy access to employment and family relationships, they opt for free accommodation, that is, squatting (Turner 1976). Their only option may be land not valued by the market (United Nations Population Fund 2007), such as the escarpments of Caracas.

This is exactly the process that took place in Venezuela. Neither the state nor private developers could cope with the high demand for housing and infrastructure rising from this rapid urban development. This phenomenon translated into an inability to cope with the poor who could not access the developing formal housing market in the city (Trigo 1989; Wiesenfeld 1998). Thus, the informal city, as barrios were originally referred to, emerged in marginalised spaces in an unstructured manner and without any initial structural and physical consolidation (Rangel Mora 2001).

3.1.2 Caracas' barrios growth story

The foundational core of Caracas is located on the western side of the San Francisco Valley,[25] bordered by one river on the west, Caroata, and one on the east, Catuche.[26] To the north, the city core is bounded by El Ávila Mountain, and by El Guaire River to the south. In its first two centuries, the city's growth was slow and within these defined boundaries. At the same time, other small towns were founded in the San Francisco Valley, such as Catia in the west and Petare in the east (Figure 3.2).

[25] The San Francisco Valley is the area where Caracas was founded.
[26] These rivers are currently underground.

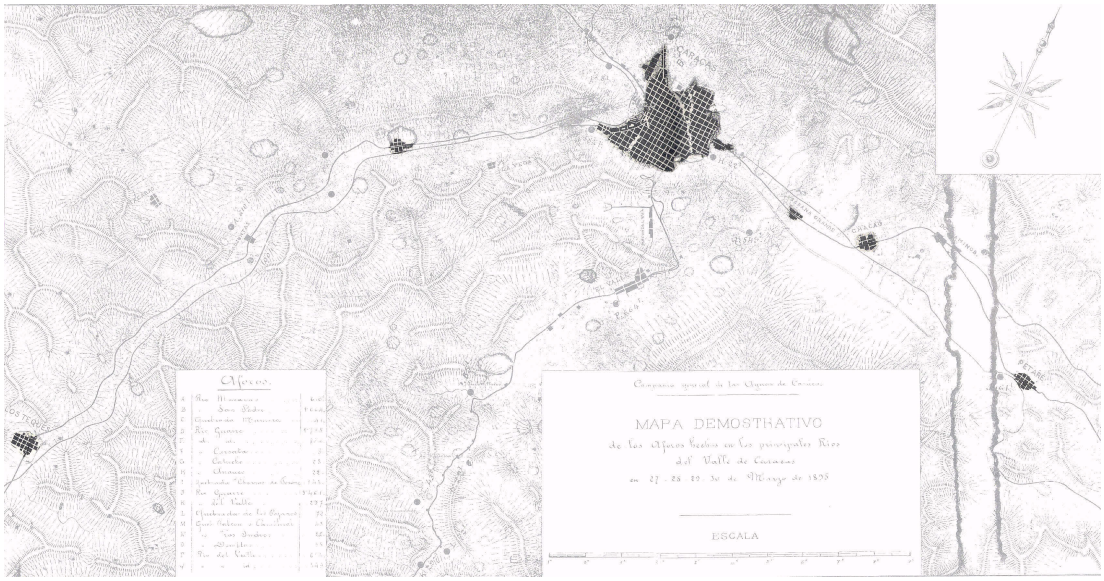

Figure 3.2: Indicative map of Caracas in 1873. Source: Irma De-Sola (1969)

In the late 19th century, the city grew slightly beyond these boundaries, mostly to the south and west of the city centre. Venezuela's notable economic growth at the beginning of the 20th century based on the discovery and exploitation of oil, resulted in city expansion. However, the majority of this growth occurred after 1940, becoming an urban explosion in the 1950s when private developers urbanised various agricultural plantations covering the centre and eastern parts of the valley (Figure 3.3). At the same time that these expansion areas were being developed, barrios also started to grow. Labour was needed in the city to construct its expansion, but the housing market did not cater for this incoming population.

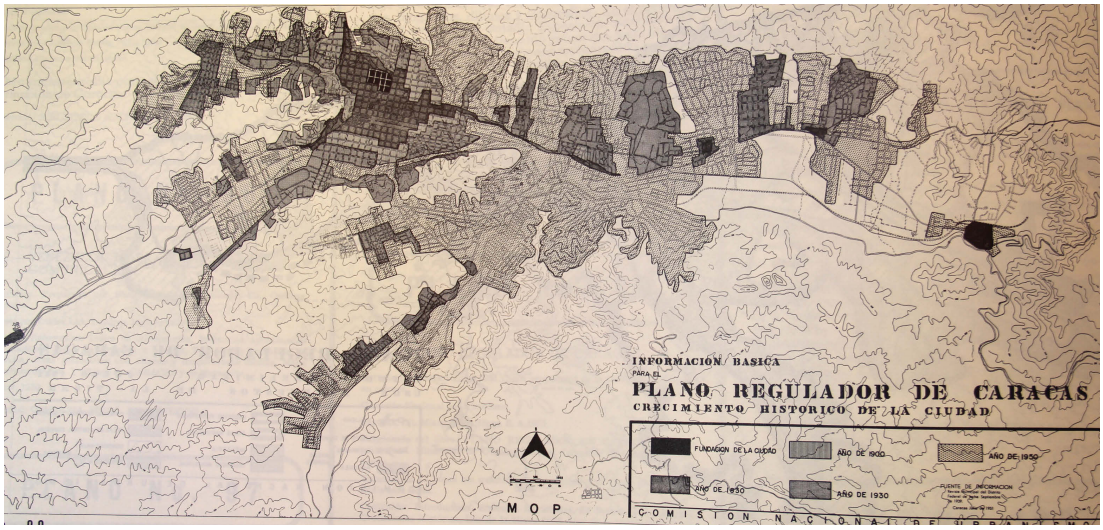

Figure 3.3: Historical growth of Caracas 1954. Source: Irma De-Sola (1969)

3.1.2.1 Caracas' barrios

In the early stages of the city's development, barrios were located in the vicinity of Catia, and along the creeks running from El Ávila to El Guaire, in the undeveloped interstitial spaces of the new suburbs. Also, but at a slower pace, the surroundings of Petare grew as barrios. Catia and Petare are located respectively at the western and eastern boundaries of the San Francisco Valley. In concordance with what was happening worldwide at the time, from the mid-1960s the valley was already fully built-up and the hills around Petare started to host an increasing population and one that was growing at a very fast pace (Figure 3.4). People from Venezuelan rural areas, other countries and other places in the cities migrated to these barrios, which were built on public land, and in some cases in non-agricultural private land that was considered non-developable. Socially, this new population who settled in barrios were openly received by previous squatters (if there were any). In many cases new migrants settled close to family, friends, or residents from the same place of origin. In this sense, the squatting process was relational: new migrants chose the location for their home based on the locations of residents with whom they had some sort of prior relationship (Trigo 2008; Turner 1976).[27]

Despite not having land tenure or any other legal security, barrios in Caracas almost quadrupled the area they occupied between 1960 and 1980 (Bolívar 2004; Bolívar & Pedrazzini 2008) and from the 1980s they started to densify. As the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2003) stated: 'Latin America had had a "miracle decade" in the 1970s; but the 1980s were known as the "lost decade" as one financial and monetary crisis after another buffeted these insecure economies.' (p. 36). Venezuela was not exempt from this global process; in addition to the lack of effective housing policies and the clientelism and populism exhibited in unofficial support from some political parties and the government, the significant lowering of people's spending power was indeed one of the main drivers of the densification of the barrios (Ontiveros 1997).

Barrio residents became a fundamental, yet replaceable, part of the work force of the city. Barrios hosted the *cheap* labour the city needed for construction

[27] Relational spaces are discussed throughout the thesis in the following sections and chapter.

and to fill low-wage jobs (Bolívar 1998; Perlman 2010). However, they remained the *grey area* of the city; barrios were not acknowledged in the cartography nor in urban plans, and officially they were not provided with proper housing, infrastructure nor services. There was a clear division between the city and the barrio; *us vs. them*; the barrio was definitely not a part of the city.[28]

From the 1970's, but particularly in the 1990's, a significant interest in urban development strategies that focused on the acceptance of and intervention in informal settlements to improve the quality of life of their residents, arose worldwide (Giménez Mercado, Rivas Gómez & Rodríguez Vásquez 2008; Lombard 2014; United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003). In this context, the Programa de Rehabilitación Física de Barrios (*Barrios' Physical Rehabilitation Program*) was formulated and launched in the late 1990s (Machado Colmenares 2012).

This program not only acknowledged the existence of barrios, but also recognised that barrios were a critical part of the city, the physical realm of which lacked basic infrastructure, services and facilities. Most importantly, the program recognised that barrios were there to stay. The Venezuelan government and the World Bank started this collaborative program in 1999 to work with barrio communities and built environment professionals to improve the quality of life in barrios. However, little improvement was achieved in many barrios, thus after a change of management in 2005, without any further explanation, the government decided to abruptly drop the program (Castellano Caldera & Pérez Valecillos 2003; Giménez Mercado, Rivas Gómez & Rodríguez Vásquez 2008; Hernández Ponce & Reimel De Carrasquel 2004; United Nations Population Fund 2007).

[28] During one in-depth interview with Marcelina we were talking about seeking medical care when she mentioned she *had to go to the cit*y to get it; my immediate response also highlighted her *going to the city*. This example shows how this division between the city and the barrio still exists in peoples' imaginary; both a barrio resident and I, an urban researcher, felt and expressed that differentiation.

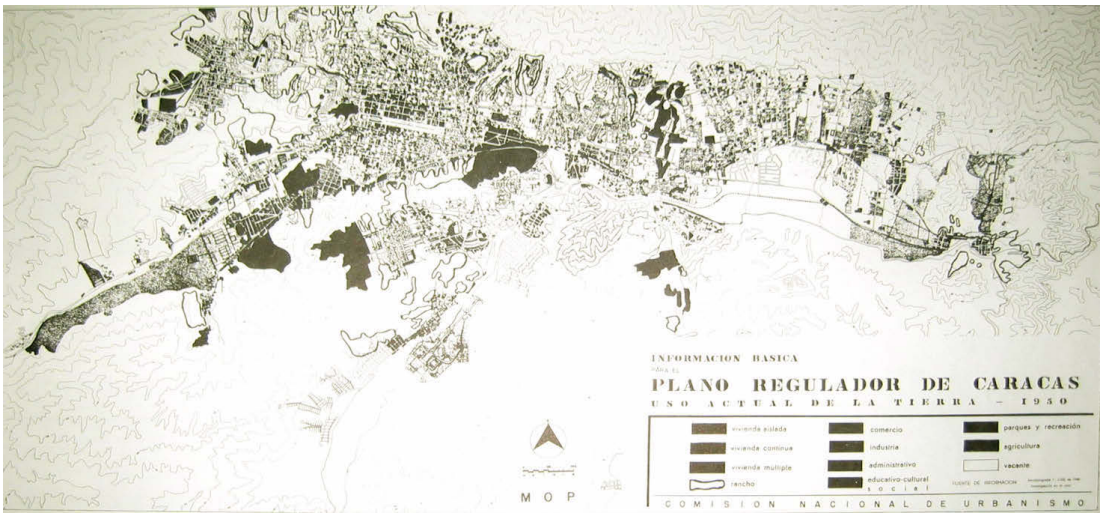

Figure 3.4: Caracas land use map - 1960. Source: Irma De-Sola (1969)

Also in the 90's, there was a worldwide interest in land regularisation and developing policies to deliver secure land tenure. However, it became evident that these did not really end nor address poverty, nor *solve* informality (Roy 2005). Nevertheless, the Presidential Decree # 1,666 for *Regularisation of Land Tenure in Urban Barrios* was launched on 4th February 2002, the start of a formalisation process that has evolved over the years[29] that included the *Special Act of Integral Regularisation of the Land in Urban Settlements* in 2006, and was followed by the *Special Act of Integral Regularisation of Urban and Peri-urban Settlements* in 2011. (Bolívar 2004; Fernández Cabrera 2012). The 2011 Act has as a main objective the regularisation and allocation of land tenure to barrio residents on both public and private lands. However, due to the complexity of this process, there has been little progress to the date considering the amount of land titles given vs. the amount of population in barrios.

As described before, the barrio's origin, growth and development have been very complex processes, which have occurred in an equally complex formal and informal governance structure.

[29] The efforts of giving land tenure to barrio residents on municipal lands had already begun a few years earlier at a municipality level. However, these efforts were isolated and had no regulatory framework guiding them (Bolívar 2004).

3.1.2.2 Barrio governance

Venezuelan barrios are governed through both formal and informal structures. The formal governance involves different official levels of government (federal, state and local) and two civic structures. Informally, community leaders and the Catholic Church as a support institution determine the happenings of the barrio.

Venezuela is a democratic country, the political structure of which comprises three different levels of government, as follows:

1. the *federal level*, which rules the whole country at a macro level, is led by a president elected by the people. The president holds executive power. The National Assembly, also elected by the people, holds the legislative power, and the Supreme Tribunal of Justice holds the judicial power.
2. the *State level*, which implements policies for intermediate-scale infrastructure, state police forces, strategic planning and other areas at this scale, is headed by an elected governor (reflecting the minimal autonomy of States), and
3. the *municipal (or local) level*, headed by a democratically-elected mayor. Municipalities are comprised of civil parishes.[30] This level of government deals with local planning matters and has more independence from the State government compared to the Australian context.

Caracas, the capital city of Venezuela, has a complex political-administrative structure. It comprises five municipalities, Libertador, Chacao, Sucre, Baruta and El Hatillo, the last four of which are located in the State of Miranda. The areas of study for this research were all located in the Municipality of Sucre.

Aside from this government structure, throughout Caracas there is a formal civic governance structure implemented in 2006 by former president Hugo Chávez called the *Consejos Comunales* (CCs) [Communal Councils], in which decision-making power was '*given'* to the people (Castellano Caldera & Pérez Valecillos 2003; García-Guadilla 2008; Goldfrank 2011; Hernández Ponce & Reimel De Carrasquel 2004; Lovera 2008; Machado M. 2009; Mansilla Blanco 2014;

[30] The civil parishes are a secular structure that differs from the ecclesiastic parishes.

Wiesenfeld & Sánchez 2012). The CCs are directly connected to the Presidency of Venezuela and have been legally supported since 2006 by the Communal Councils' Act, and since 2009 by the Communal Councils' Organic Act.[31] Both Acts state that CCs are participation entities that link different community associations and enable people to manage projects and public policies that respond to communities' needs (Machado M. 2009). The Venezuelan CCs have the highest participation rate in comparison to the rest of Latin America (García-Guadilla 2008; Goldfrank 2011). Since they were established, 36 per cent of the Venezuelan population have been involved with these entities, which have focused mainly on infrastructure and housing problems (Machado M. 2009).

Although CCs appear to be a participation ideal come true, they are in fact highly politicised entities, rather than real empowering organisations. From their conception, the CCs were directly linked to Chavez's political agenda, segregating any other vision that opposed his (García-Guadilla 2008). Furthermore, CC members were requested to join the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela – PSUV* [United Socialist Party of Venezuela],[32] and *abandon* other projects to fight for the *cause*[33] (García-Guadilla 2008; Machado M. 2009). The underlying objective of CCs therefore was and still is to further centralise power, as it is the Presidency of Venezuela that legitimises (or not) any CC, and, taking into consideration the political agenda, allocates the resources to them or not (García-Guadilla 2008; Lovera 2008; Mansilla Blanco 2014).

Historically, Venezuela has been a divided society, with several forms of social exclusion (Lander 2005). Once Chávez came to power, this division deepened and was transformed. As Brading (2014) explains, a substantive element of Chávez's discourse was 'us' vs 'them'. As soon as this ideological change under Chavez began, the divisions between the government and the opposition grew. Chávez's discourse to and about *el pueblo* led to a deepening of social divisions, creating the *chavistas* (el pueblo) and the opposition, middle and upper classes

[31] In Venezuela there are two levels of Acts: ordinary and organic. The Organic Acts have a higher status than Ordinary Acts.
[32] Political party led by Hugo Chávez.
[33] The *cause* refers to Chávez's political agenda; the *revolution*.

(Lander 2005).[34] This division brought a black and white perspective to Venezuelan society; one was either for the government or against it. There was also a minority group called the 'ni-nis', who claimed they belonged to neither side.

From the community[35] perspective, the inefficiency of the CCs resides in the lack of technical guidance and support, not only to prioritise, design and develop proposals, but also to engage other non-Chavista community members to participate. Additionally, there is a high level of distrust and poor performance reflecting the existence of corruption within the CCs, as occurs broadly in the Venezuelan government and society (Lovera 2008; Machado M. 2009; Wiesenfeld & Sánchez 2012).

In parallel to the CCs, and in some aspects overlapping, the *Comités de Tierras Urbanas (CTU)* [Urban Land Committees] were created in 2006 under the implementation of the *Special Act of Integral Regularisation of the Land in Urban Settlements 2006* with the aim of empowering residents in the process of land regularisation and tenure, as well as the process of physically improve the quality of life of their barrio (Fernández Cabrera 2012). Despite these committees claim to be independent from the government, they are also highly politicised. The community representatives of both CCs and the CTUs are elected by the residents under regulations established in the corresponding Acts; these elections have no external supervision. Considering the underpinning political quality of these entities and the political diversity of barrios, the wider community is not really represented in these, nor does it really participate in the decision-making process.

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[34] On a societal level, chavistas are usually seen as uneducated and poor. According to other definitions, they are groups of people funded or directly linked for financial reasons to the government, in most cases because of corruption. However, the chavistas as a group cover a broader spectrum (Valencia Ramírez 2005), to include groups that are also well-educated and well-organised.
Based on the initial definition of chavistas as poor and uneducated, and the opposition characterised as the middle and upper classes, these social divisions have taken on a spatial aspect (García-Guadilla 2005). In Caracas, some associate the chavistas with people who live in barrios and opposition members with people who live in middle-income suburbs. However, this does not reflect the spatial distribution of these two groups. During this study on barrios, some participants brought up their political opinions, which showed very strong opposition to the government. The most vocal were the priests. However, it must be emphasised that not many residents raised the political issue at all, as it was not central to the topic for this research.

[35] In this case, the *community* refers to the different CCs' members that participated in the researches developed by the different authors cited regarding this topic.

The Venezuelan state is a complex entity that is made of different levels of government, agencies with varied power-bases, and institutions allied with civil society. The component parts of the state often have conflicting interests and may pursue contradictory actions. These agencies may seem homogeneous as they are centralised entities; however, as Sassen (2008) explains: 'these emergent assemblages begin to unbundle the traditional territoriality of the national, albeit in partial, often highly specialized ways' (p. 67). Thus, when discussing the state and its role in place-making I am not referring to is as an homogeneous entity, but as a complex multi-layered body.

Besides these formal official and civic governance structures, Venezuelan barrios also have an informal and unstructured civic level of organisation, which is led by established community leaders and accompanied by the Catholic Church (which could be seen as institutions of civil society). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the leaders are members of the community that are respected and valued by the wider community, regardless of their political perspective. These community leaders were not elected, but emerged in circumstances of struggle when leadership was needed such as when the barrio started developing. The stories of the barrio and its community leaders are presented in section 3.3 and the following chapters.

3.1.2.3 Barrios' recent development

The barrios' growth over the years has been proportionally larger than Caracas' expansion, to date occupying around 25% of the urban area. As the barrios took over more territory at a faster rate, their construction was rapid and large scale. When the ratio of the barrios' population density to total area (p/Ha)[36] (see Table 3.1, column 6) is compared with the ratio of barrios' population density to developed areas (p/Ha) (see Table 3.1, column 7), it is clear that Caracas' barrios expanded by occupying both developable and non-developable areas. Despite the expansion of the total barrio area, the suitable areas for construction remained limited. Thus, the developed part of the barrios grew a lot denser over time, as did the density per dwelling. The population growth rate in barrios greatly exceeded

[36] p/Ha stands for *people per hectare*.

those in other formal areas of Caracas to the extent that while in 1966 around 30% of the urban population lived in barrios, by 2014 almost 50% of residents inhabited these areas.

Table 3.1: Caracas and its barrios in numbers. Source: Elaborated based on Silva, Caradonna & Galavis (2016)

(1) Year	(2) Total area of Caracas (Ha)	(3) Total area of Caracas barrios (%)	(4) Caracas barrio population (%)	(5) Net barrio building density (bd/Ha)	(6) Barrio pop. density - total area (p/Ha)	(7) Barrios pop. density – in develop. areas (p/Ha)	(8) Barrios pop. density - per building (p/bd)
1966	7,732.72	17.24	31.86	129.55	381.65	715.82	5.53
1984	14,842.43	20.89	37.99	128.45	319.74	693.97	5.40
2000	16,908.14	23.27	45.76	132.44	319.81	745.29	5.63
2014	18,049.77	24.78	46.88	135.31	309.74	772.42	5.71

As occurred in other cities around the world, when the Caracas barrios started developing they had neither the infrastructure nor the facilities that the *formal* city had. The houses were built out of tin, wood and cardboard. However, barrios are evolving and living entities. As their residents advanced their lives, they also continuously developed the barrio. They upgraded their built environment bit by bit. Over time barrio people built infrastructure such as roads, stairs, walkways, electricity networks, piping systems and sewage with their own resources. They also graduated from tin and cardboard dwellings to houses built with bricks, reinforced concrete and metal structures.[37]

Nowadays the two largest barrio conglomerates in Caracas are Catia and Petare. Petare, considered among the largest barrios in Latin America (Silva, Caradonna & Galavis 2016), hosts two areas of the chosen case study, Julián Blanco in North Petare and El Nazareno in South Petare. La Dolorita is officially considered as another barrio separate from Petare (see Figure 3.5). However, because of its proximity and direct links, some participants consider it as part of Petare. Moreover, from an ecclesiastic institutional perspective, the parishes that

[37] This evolution is further developed through the research participant stories later in this chapter.

look after these three areas are all part of the Archpriesthood of Petare. Therefore, to simplify the discussion of this case study, I include La Dolorita as part of Petare.

Figure 3.5: Location of Petare and La Dolorita in Caracas. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola based on Google Maps satellite image.

3.2 CASE STUDY: EL NAZARENO, JULIÁN BLANCO AND LA DOLORITA

Petare's urban morphology is very diverse; it comprises different typologies of urban fabric, but the barrios form the majority of these urban areas. As previously described, the urban fabric of Petare's barrios is composed of a very dense built environment with narrow open spaces defined by very compact and fine-grained buildings. As in the rest of Caracas' barrios, Petare has a very high-density, mostly low-income population.

Petare is located in the Municipality of Sucre, which is part of the Miranda State. The case study is located in the civil parishes of Petare, La Dolorita and Filas de Mariche.[38] The case study is located in the Archpriesthood of Petare.[39]

[38] More information about the Venezuelan and Caracas' political – administrative structure is provided in Appendix A.
[39] From an institutional perspective in Caracas, the Archpriesthood of Petare would be equivalent to the Municipality of Sucre; as their broader umbrella level would be the Archdiocese of Caracas and the Major Municipality of Caracas respectively.

Considering that one of the foundations of this research is religiosity as a cultural construct, it became more relevant to base the areas of study according to the Catholic political-administrative distribution of the city. This decision to focus on the ecclesiastic boundary was made for two main reasons: (1) civil parish boundaries do not match religious ones, and (2) religious processions can transcend civil parish boundaries.

In total, the Archpriesthood of Petare comprises nine ecclesiastical parishes, and includes three evangelisation centres and three vicariates, which are entirely spatially and administratively defined by the Archpriesthood and the Archdiocese.[40] The importance of incorporating the evangelisation centres and the vicariates lies in the fact that they provide further community and religious support to the formal parishes, which are large both in territory and population.

The specific parishes that comprised the selected areas of study were: (1) Parish Nuestra Señora de Fátima in El Nazareno, (2) Parish San Francisco de Sales in La Dolorita and (3) Evangelisation Centre Julián Blanco in Julián Blanco. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the criteria for selecting these areas were: (1) the morphological features, selecting areas only with *barrio* characteristics, (2) personal safety, that is, having contact with a key community member and the priest of the area and (3) selecting areas with more Holy Week processions. Figure 3.6 shows the location of the selected areas of study within Petare.

The El Nazareno barrio is located in the south-eastern area of South Petare, which itself is located southeast of the colonial town centre and south of the suburbs of Palo Verde and Lomas del Ávila (both characterised by modern urban fabric). To the east, South Petare is surrounded by steep topography, and to the south it is bordered by the Guaire River and more steep hills. Its date of origin is imprecise; however initial squatter dwellings can be identified in maps from the 1950s. The ecclesiastic parish was established in 1957, the third oldest parish in Petare, which indicates that this barrio was one of the first settlements in Petare.

[40] For further details about this ecclesiastic structure, refer to Appendix A

The Julián Blanco barrio is located to the northeast of North Petare, which itself is located northeast of the colonial town centre. The Francisco Fajardo Freeway borders North Petare to the west, separating it from the modern suburb of La Urbina, and to the north, separating it from the Metropolitan University and the modern suburb of Terrazas del Ávila. The Petare-Santa Lucía National Road, the Santa María University and industrial areas bound North Petare to the east. The suburbs of Palo Verde and Lomas del Ávila form North Petare's border to the south.

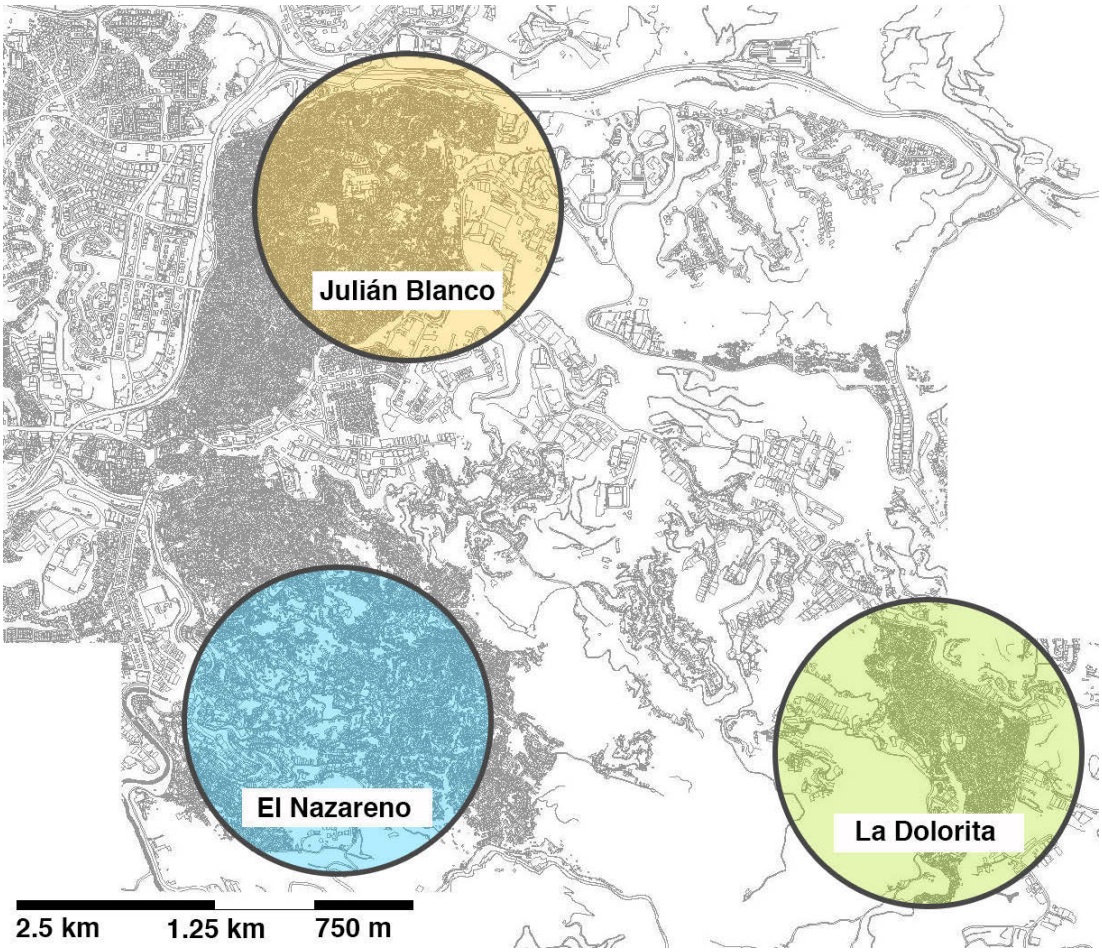

Figure 3.6: Selected areas of study: El Nazareno, Julián Blanco and La Dolorita. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola based on base map from the Institute of Urbanism – UCV database.

According to Infocentro Julián Blanco (2010) and participants' reports, the area was founded between 1960 and 1970, and was the last to develop in North Petare. The ecclesiastic parish is located to the southwest of North Petare, close to the colonial town centre. It was established in 1964, initially serving all North Petare,

including the Julián Blanco area. The Julián Blanco Evangelisation Centre was created later.

The La Dolorita barrio is located about 2 km to the east of South Petare. The Petare-Santa Lucía National Road bounds it to the east and steep topography surrounds it on all other sides. To the north, south and east, along the National Road, industrial areas limit La Dolorita further.

Unlike El Nazareno and Julián Blanco, whose land was public, La Dolorita is located on what was previously three private estates, La Dolorita, El Refugio and La Lira (Gómez Castillo 2007). The first squatters arrived in 1960, but it started to consolidate around 1964, and had mains water supply, a public plaza and school by 1967 (Instituto de Patrimonio Cultural 2008). The estates' barracks were kept until 1975. During this period La Dolorita's population boomed due to migration from other barrios and the consolidation of the surrounding areas of La Dolorita as industrial areas and sources of employment. The parish of San Francisco de Sales was established just a few years later, in 1979, to minister to this growing population.

The three areas of study differ in specific location, places of origin of their residents (discussed below) and dates of foundation. However, they share fundamental characteristics that enabled me to identify them as one case study. The three areas of study originated under the same socio-political-economic conditions, through processes of struggle, displacement and *placement*. They also share the physical morphology characteristic of *barrios*; and the activities that take place in that urban space.

As seen in Figure 3.7, El Nazareno, Julián Blanco and La Dolorita are located in areas with very steep topography, between 20 and 40% gradient in most places. Their urban morphology is characterised by a road network that adapts to the hills but that is scarce due to the steepness; this network is complemented by a complex pedestrian system that reaches most buildings. There is no formal lot structure. The houses and other facilities are small-grained and attached to each other, having no frontal nor lateral setbacks, forming a well defined urban edge. The open spaces found are mainly the streets and the unbuildable hills. The urban morphology of these areas and the processes through which they were socially constructed are described and analysed in the following sections and chapters

through the interpretations of the accounts of the participants and the inclusion of images and maps that complement their stories.

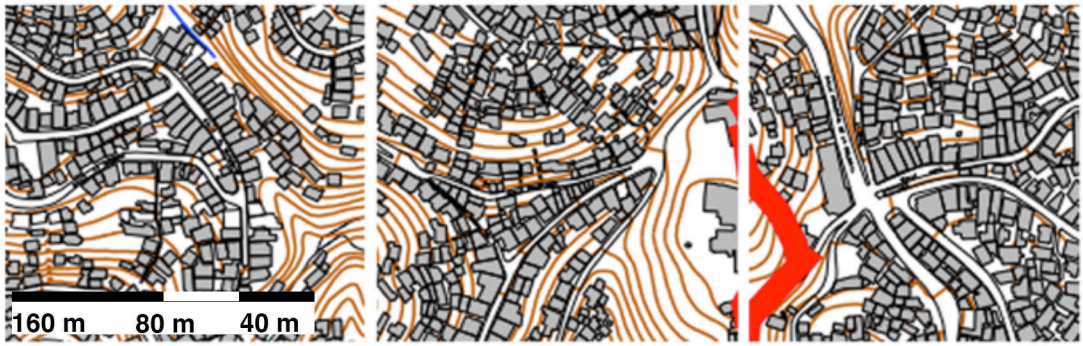

Figure 3.7: Urban morphology in El Nazareno, Julián Blanco and La Dolorita. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola based on base map from the Institute of Urbanism – UCV database.

In addition, Catholicism is the shared cultural phenomenon of their communities, and the three areas are part of the Archpriesthood of Petare, meaning they share ecclesiastic guidelines and the umbrella institutional leadership. Thus, these three areas are analysed as one case study, understanding that the place-making process comprises the urban space, the activities and its meanings mediated through culture.[41]

The foundation stories presented below show a personal and critical perspective on the origins of these three areas. The displacement, struggle and bonding stories experienced by the participants depict the initial stages of the barrios' urban space, both public and private.

3.3 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REALM: THE FOUNDATION STORIES OF EL NAZARENO, JULIÁN BLANCO AND LA DOLORITA

The stories of El Nazareno, Julián Blanco and La Dolorita are closely linked by the experiences of their residents. People in these barrios share a history that can be divided into the foundation of the barrios and then their subsequent

[41] The differences among the three areas of study are highlighted throughout the thesis when required.

development.[42] The foundation stories comprise two main stages, squatting on the land and then settlement. The singularity of each stage shows the complexity of these areas, their communities and their relationship to space.

Accompanying the foundation process mentioned before, building a *rancho*[43] and its subsequent development into a *house* is paramount to understanding the construction of place in barrios. As explained in Section 3.1, the need for shelter drove the creation of barrios; hence the private realm became a fundamental aspect of the stories of place.

3.3.1 Public realm foundation stories

As mentioned before, barrios originated mainly because of migration from different parts of Venezuela and neighbouring countries. People went to Caracas needing a place to settle and found land on the outskirts of the city to make a home. This process was the start of the displacement stories that barrio people have lived throughout their lives. Initially, there is a first level of displacement that occurs when people do not find education and employment opportunities in their places of origin; that first level of displacement is *from their place of origin to the city*.

When people from rural areas (and other countries) arrived in Caracas and found they could not access the established housing market, they had to adjust and start squatting on private and public land. The fact that the government had no effective public housing policies and the private industry had no product accessible to low-income migrants created the second level of displacement, *from the city to the barrio*.

Most of the people who arrived initially in El Nazareno had migrated from Portugal; others came from nearby rural areas and others still from barrios on the western side of Caracas. International migration is an important element in the growth of urban population and slums. Political instability and repression were among the most significant push factors that drove people away from their countries of origin to Latin-American cities, and then into barrios (United Nations Human

[42] The development stories are presented in Chapter 04.
[43] A rancho is the Venezuelan term for shack.

Settlements Programme 2003). Different international events from the 1940s to the 1960s, for example, the Spanish Civil War followed by the Franco government, the Estado Novo (New State) government in Portugal and the Second World War, forced hundreds of thousands of people out of Europe. Venezuela, a prosperous country with a thriving economy at the time, attracted many of these international migrants as a good place to build a new life. However, some of these migrants, like the internal rural migrants, could not afford the formal housing/land market and built their houses from scratch on squatted land.

In the case of Julián Blanco, residents had diverse backgrounds; the majority came originally from Spain and Colombia, the far east of Venezuela and other Caracas barrios. Colombians, as an example, were mostly escaping a situation of extreme violence and increasing inequality.

The participants in this research also encountered a third level of displacement, *from barrio to barrio*. This displacement relates to intra-city migration, as discussed in the previous section.

> María (M): (…) cuando Caldera empezó a sacar a la gente de los barrios, porque (…) iba hacer unas casas por ahí… Entonces, todos tuvimos que salirnos de ahí ¡porque nos mandaron a desocupar!
>
> *M: (…) when Caldera[44] started evicting people from barrios, because (…) he was going to do some houses around that area… Then, all of us had to move, because they told us to vacate!*

The unintended role of the government as a catalysing force starts to emerge. Eviction policies have been a common approach to deal with squatter areas all over the world, the means to '*solve'* the slum problem (Davis 2006; Dovey & King 2011). At the time, between the 1940s and 1960s, in Venezuela, some of these eviction and bulldozing programs were accompanied by the provision of

[44] Rafael Caldera was president of Venezuela twice. Mrs María was referring to his first period, from 1969 to 1974.

housing in *superbloques*[45] (Davis 2006; Turner 1976). However, these approaches were ineffective as they were not accompanied by community development programs nor could the amount of housing provided cope with the rapid population growth.[46]

In Caracas, the Caldera government[47] had a contradictory approach; eradication of the barrios was the way to build social housing and 'solve' this housing problem. Although this may have seemed an adequate solution at the time, it not only disregarded the barrios as established areas but also provided no support to the people who squatted there in the first place. The outcome of this policy was the further development of other barrios, as migrating to and squatting in another area became the only option available to those who had been evicted.

This third level displacement process was generated not because of market pressures, but because of government policy, and it highlights how the state became a vital contributor to the establishment of barrios. In the study areas of this research, it becomes even more evident with the foundation and settling of La Dolorita in the early 1970s. As mentioned previously, La Dolorita developed through the migration of residents evicted from surrounding barrios.

> Guillermo (GU): vivíamos (…) donde se conoce como el Barrio Píritu (…) Nosotros salimos de allí (…) por la construcción de la Universidad Metropolitana (…) bueno sacaron ese trayecto de ahí… pasa la autopista y construyeron luego la Universidad Metropolitana
>
> *GU: we lived (…) where it's known as Barrio Píritu, (…) We left there (…) because of the construction of the Metropolitan University[48] (…) well, they took out this path there… where the highway is and then they built the Metropolitan University.*

---

[45] Superbloques are massive public housing high-rise buildings built by the Banco Obrero between the 1940's and the 1960's in different Venezuelan cities as a solution to slums.
[46] Worldwide, slum evictions are still a common practice, which happen in order to satisfy private industry needs/longings and government's need for beautifying and social control (e.g. to fight crime) (Turner 1976).
[47] In this period the Banco Obrero had changed its approach and the superbloques were no longer built.
[48] The Universidad Metropolitana (Metropolitan University) is a private institution where only the more wealthy can afford to study; it opened its Terrazas del Ávila premises in 1976.

Mr. Guillermo (GU) moved as a child from North Petare[49] to La Dolorita. His family's move from one barrio to another was caused by the government repossessing squatted land to build infrastructure that would favour both the private sector and the city. The Metropolitan University was one of two private educational institutions, the construction of which has had a great influence on this area. The infrastructure project under discussion here was an interchange that connected Caracas to the Metropolitan University[50] and at the same time gave the general public easy access to Terrazas del Ávila, a suburb that was developed afterwards; it also functioned as a loop to return to the city centre (Figure 3.7). This project was executed without acknowledging the people who lived in the area. The easiest way for the government at that time to build it was to evict people from the public land on which they were squatting without dealing with their relocation.

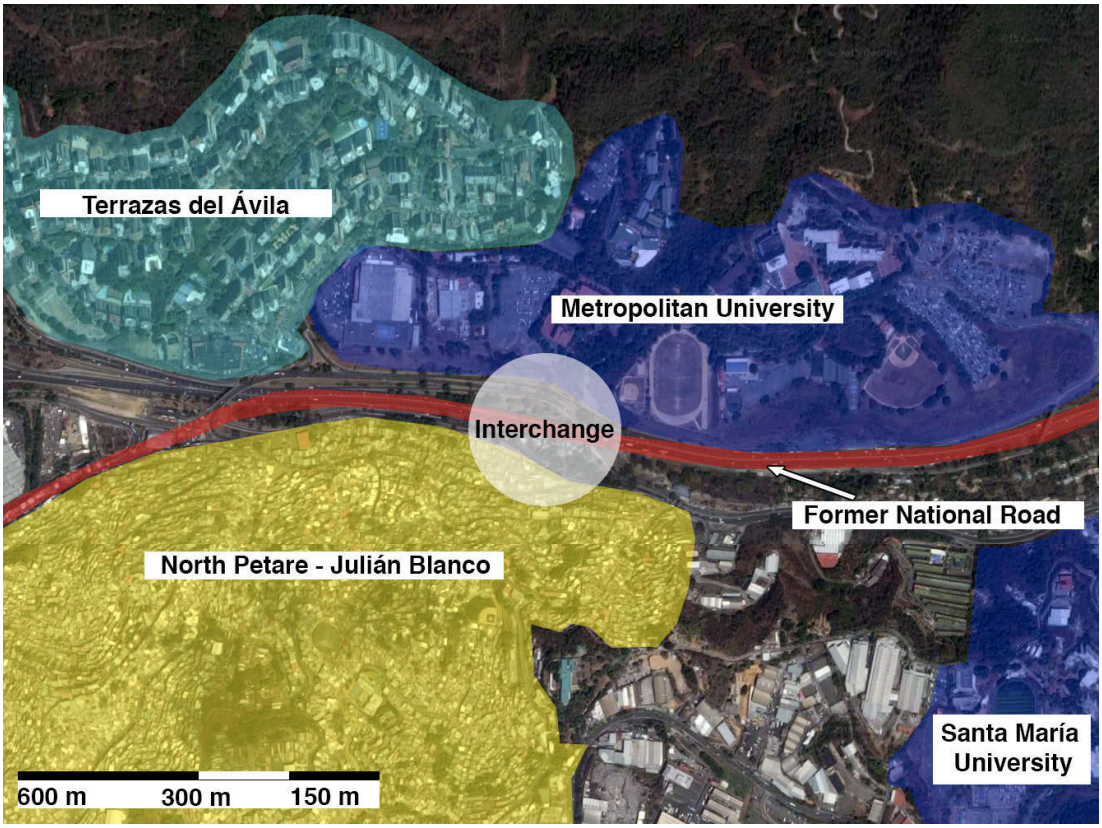

Figure 3.8: North Petare and context. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola based on Google Maps satellite image.

[49] Barrio Píritu is located in the Julián Blanco area. In the late 1960s, part of this barrio was demolished for the freeway interchange in question.
[50] At that time the area of Petare and where the Metropolitan University is located on the other side of the National Road (Figure 3.7) were considered the outskirts of the city.

Once again the government's role in the creation of barrios as disadvantaged areas is evident. The state favoured wealthy and private organisations and the formal city over barrio residents. Through its actions, the government often reminded barrio residents of their lack of rights to the land, and that they could be evicted at any time. Additionally, the displacement driven by economic and political agendas forced people to move, thus perpetuating the lack of land security and disadvantage, as evident in Mr Guillermo's statement quoted above.

Even more than a physical process, settlement is also psychological, because the barrio consolidated and the community began to strengthen (Wiesenfeld 1998). The people who lived in these barrios were forced to move there because they lacked the economic means to access the formal housing market. However, despite their history of displacement and insecure land tenure, these new spaces became places of opportunity where people could have families and get established. The barrio equalled stability.

This sense of stability did not mean real security, which is why people moved from place to place in the hope that the next area would be the stable one. When Yudith's (YU) family arrived in Petare, it became their home, from being a temporary space to a permanent one. Despite the stories of uncertainty and feelings of continuous displacement, barrios also translated into stories of *placement* and hope. As Dovey & King (2011) and García, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld (1999) demonstrate, these processes lead to solidarity in the community.

The process of rootedness started to take place, and building the barrios became a family matter. The physical construction of the barrio is transmitted generationally.

> GU: bueno yo llegué aquí (…) de unos… doce años, once años, cuando esto se empezó a fundar... (…) Luego… me casé, tengo mi familia ahí. Tengo a mi esposa, mis hijos y hasta nietos.
>
> *GU: Well, I arrived here (…) when I was… twelve, eleven years old, when this was starting to be founded… (…) Then… I got married, have my family there. I have my wife, my kids and even grandkids.*

The decision of where to settle and raise one's family in the barrio was closely linked to human relations; family, friendships, neighbourly relationships, and shared places of origin. As in the case of many other settlers, Mr Guillermo's father's decision to move to La Dolorita was because someone recommended that area. Hence, despite the apparent randomness of squatting and settling there were clear and concrete underlying reasons for choosing where to settle. This choice was based on a combination of convenience and access to opportunities, less probability of being evicted, and existing relationships. Both functional and emotional reasons were vital in the choosing of place.

The importance of staying in *the* place and bringing up one's family there is a reflection on the relational-based decisions[51] barrio residents make. In this instance, it does not matter how disadvantaged the place is, or what the current conditions[52] may be, the human relationships are more relevant. As Turner (1976) argues, living in slums near to relatives can provide a supportive environment. In general, the idea of being around family, friends and acquaintances who have already settled in these areas is a pull factor for slums (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003). The social and support networks are paramount when deciding where to build a life with one's family, even more so in disadvantaged conditions of social inequality and displacement. The initial relational quality of barrios is not unique to Caracas' barrios. However, the shared cultural background and the support from the Catholic culture and institution enhance this relational quality.[53]

The argument presented above highlights how the place is constructed not only through formal or physical interventions, but also (and mostly) through interpersonal relations. The barrio identity coincides with the relationship network (Trigo 2008). The barrio as a meaningful place becomes the life-world of its residents. Through understanding the importance of barrio relationships we can also understand how the personal, relational and community levels mediate the meaning of space.

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[51] Venezuelans are relational people; their actions, emotions, experiences and decisions are based on and related to the relationship network. This concept is further explained in Trigo (2008)
[52] Topic developed in Chapter 4.
[53] This phenomenon is developed in the following chapters.

As people settle and feel 'safe', the barrio becomes their home. Despite the city being the original and ultimate goal, the barrio becomes the new reference point, the place they want to be (Trigo 2008). Rootedness grows, leading to the barrio development.

3.3.2 Private realm: from rancho to house

Barrios originated from people's primary need for shelter. In the squatting process most of the vacant space was used to construct houses, accompanied by other shared community spaces, such as religious buildings. The remaining space was used mainly for mobilisation. Consequently, private residential space is the dominant land use.

Houses in barrios originated as shacks that Venezuelans call *ranchos* (Figure 3.8). Ranchos are usually built out of mud and other waste materials such as timber, cardboard and tin. Ranchos are considered the first development stage of barrio houses (Rosas Meza 2009). The rancho is a very unstable structure, reflecting the residents' unstable lives. The uncertainty created by the threat of potential displacement, the fear of eviction, and all the economic and social instability participants experienced were evident in this early housing development stage.

Historically, ranchos had to be built over and over again in different places because of the displacement the state perpetuated. As Turner (1976) explains, the fear of continuing evictions prevents people from upgrading their shacks; but once the family feels somewhat stable and secure they start investing in the improvement of the house. In Caracas, when people settled in the barrios, those fragile shacks started to evolve into houses. As Marcelina (MR) stated, there is a fundamental difference between a *rancho* and a *house*. Usually, barrio residents are really proud of their *houses* because they built them themselves with a lot of effort from scratch. Transitioning from the rancho to the house involves an improvement process from flimsy structures to buildings constructed with reinforced concrete, brick walls and cement floors (Wiesenfeld 1998). This process is known as *consolidation of barrios*, where the original unstable squatted settlement becomes a permanent area in the city.

Figure 3.9: Rancho in early development of Barrio Bolívar in Julián Blanco[54]

The barrio consolidation is an achievement and indicates the psychological security of residents finally feeling settled even though they do not have land tenure. This feeling arises because their house is a tangible object that translates into a feeling of security and stability. Evolving from a *rancho* to a *house* shows the rootedness and evolution in the physical space as a reflection of the rootedness at relational and psychological levels. The consolidation of the house reflects the feeling of 'placement' and belonging. With this rootedness, the barrio becomes

[54] This photo was downloaded from a publicly accessible Facebook group dedicated to Petare that is currently inactive. The original link to the photo was: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=225512320837857&set=pb.225512067504549.-2207520000.1401328447.&type=3&theater

'ours' and the city belongs to 'the others' (Trigo 2008). Consequently, the barrio culture starts to grow, creating its own identity.

3.4 CONCLUSION: FOUNDING THE PLACE-MAKING STORIES

Caracas' barrios sit in a global context of displacement, struggle, poverty, strong supportive relationships and settlement. This chapter told stories common to squatters around the world, while also indicating that each of the three places in this study has unique qualities.

As presented in this chapter, slums are areas of concentrated urban poverty, a mix of low incomes, poor quality and overcrowded self-built housing, lack of land tenure and lack of infrastructure (United Nations Population Fund 2007). Moreover, slums, and barrios, are also about disadvantage and displacement that institutions promote: displacement from other countries and rural areas to the city, from the city to the barrio and from barrio to barrio. However, stories of relationships, rootedness and community bonds also comprise the foundational stories of barrios.

Venezuelan barrios share similar stories with other slums in the world. However, Caracas barrios are unique in their combination of their residents' places of origin, their Catholic culture and the various drivers that are specific to this place.

The three barrios within this case study have shared stories that start with people squatting while looking for better opportunities and being close to employment. They also share the urban structure, the very high density and the very steep and difficult topography that shape the space. Most importantly, they share Catholicism as their cultural background.

Slums are the 'fastest growing form of new urban development' (Dovey & King 2011, p. 11). Most barrios have evolved into serviced neighbourhoods with different levels of land tenure. In Venezuela, as elsewhere, data about these areas is hard to find because governments initially ignored them, and afterwards because barrios became far more complex and hard to access. This research collects and co-constructs the residents' stories about the development of their barrios, their culture and activities, and their meanings.

4 BARRIO DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT URBAN STRUCTURE

The development of the barrio and the construction of place linked to the barrio comprise this first story. This chapter provides the contextual background to understanding both the physical environment and the relationships that occur in this setting, thus delineating how place in barrios is ultimately a relational space. This is a story that explains the complexity of the process that built the barrios on several levels, ranging from the physical aspect to institutional intervention.

Understanding how barrios come to be constructed leads to a realisation of the different interconnections and meanings embedded in people and communities at a deep psychosocial level. In more detail, understanding this construction process, along with all the struggle, investment, displacement and place-making it involves, allows us to comprehend the sense of place, territoriality and community that residents feel. This comprehension leads the way to understanding the deep meanings that come to be associated with barrios and their culture, strengthening the path to answering the research questions regarding the use of space and the religious expression, the meaning of space, and the construction of place.

Residents' stories of their construction of the barrio are imbued with sacrifice, struggle, displacement, decisions, a perception of lack of options, rootedness, close family relationships, personal and financial investment, happiness, enjoyment and other complex feelings and contextual factors. All these are reflected in the complexity of the morphology and community ties of this urban area. Even though people had to start from scratch, a common element of the participants' stories was their aspirations, and their desire to improve their quality of life. These aspirations gradually materialised into the fully consolidated and densely developed and populated areas that now exist, that resulted from the interaction of the private and public realms.

The story depicted in this chapter answers the first research question: *How do barrio residents conceive and construct the physicality of the private, public and religious spaces?* This chapter discusses how the private and public realms

comprising the urban space of the barrios were developed over time, from their foundation through to their consolidation. This chapter also addresses the interdependent relationship of these two realms and examines the construction of religious space. These form an important cultural aspect of the barrios' relational space and of the place-making process developed over time, by their residents, and through these residents' shared Catholic culture and religious experience.

4.1 PRIVATE REALM: FROM RANCHO TO URBAN SPACE

As explained in the previous chapter, the consolidation of the house reflects 'placement' and rootedness. The description and stories about the development of their homes are what comes first in the participants' accounts. Although they focus on the private space as an individual and personal realm, the houses are highly significant in the construction of the urban space in that the private spaces and the building bulks define the open, public realm. The more consolidated and dense the private space is, the more consolidated and communal the public realm becomes.

This relational quality is fundamental in the development of the house; it is a private matter that nonetheless shapes and reflects back onto the public space. The private space is a relational space from within; it is all about family and relationships. As the private shapes the public, keeping family and relationships close, the public space and how it is used is also relational. The public realm is not only an outcome of the private realm, but is also an extension of it.

The *densification* process follows *consolidation*. Understanding the process of consolidation whereby the house grew from a *rancho* to a solid place, and the process of densification where the house defines and interacts with the public realm, sets the background to comprehending the current barrio morphology, the activities that take place in it, and the meanings associated with it. It allows us to realise the psychosocial relationship with the barrio and the community, to understand the processes of sense of place and appropriation, that is, the place-making process.

4.1.1 From house to urban space: densification process

Today, in well-established barrios such as the three areas examined in this study, there is almost no vacant space to build new houses. Thus, barrios are now growing vertically, in a process of densification (Bolívar & Pedrazzini 2008; Rosas Meza 2009). While most barrio buildings currently have a mean of three stories, in El Nazareno, for example, self-constructed buildings of five storeys can be found (see Figure 4.1). The construction of a barrio house is progressive through the years. As in the consolidation stage, this phenomenon mainly occurs because families keep on expanding, and people who want to stay in the barrio for economic and/or personal reasons usually want to stay close to their relatives.

The evolution and expansion of buildings both horizontally and vertically has had an enormous impact on the open public spaces. Not only have the latter been diminished by the encroachment of private space, new typologies of space have also emerged. The construction of semi-public spaces has emerged through the construction and expansion of houses. Having multiple entrances per structure to allow semi-independent living for different family units has made the organisation and legibility of the public space more complex. The densification process has also changed dramatically the proportion of built space to open space, further impacting residents' perspectives on their barrio.

> Lisbeth (L): son casas en una calle principal, y son casas una pegada a la otra. (…) Aquí hay… una desproporción de casas y de construcciones.
>
> *L: it's houses on a main road, and it's houses one attached to the other. (…) Here there is… a disproportion of houses and buildings.*

Perceptually, not only the public space appears to be taken over by the private, but there also seems to be an oversupply of houses in relation to the barrios' open space. Most consolidated barrios have dense, continuous edges that clearly define the open areas of the vehicular and pedestrian paths, the intersections, and the public spaces. The denser areas are usually located closest to the main streets, not only because of accessibility but also because these are the areas where the barrio founders first squatted and where they built the main roads.

Figure 4.1: El Nazareno view from a participant's house. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

However, today even consolidated barrios include ranchos; well-established barrios in particular continue to host the different development stages simultaneously (see Figure 4.2).

Father Quitelio (Q): (…) Luego te metes por las escaleras (…) y realmente hay una situación… mala. (…) ¡infrahumanas!. Que a lo mejor son cuatro chapas (…) ¡y ahí viven todo!

Q: (…) Then you go through the staircases, (…) there's really a bad… situation (…) subhuman! That perhaps you have four tin walls (…) and they live everything there!

Although consolidated barrios have some well-constructed houses, many residents do not have even the minimal resources to achieve this aim. As Father Quitelio said, some families still live in precarious conditions. Different families, of different socio-economic status, often live in the same area; these families share their urban space and their community and will continue to develop their houses over time.

Figure 4.2: Different development stages in Julián Blanco. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

4.1.2 The barrio house as a relational space

The development of the private space from rancho to house, and then the densification of the urban space, is achieved over generations. Understanding the different generations that comprise the barrios provides further understanding of the various dynamics and meanings of space and community.

Today, three or four generations can be found in barrios. The first generation is *the founders,*[55] who escaping from evictions or rural poverty and seeking stability and employment, moved to and settled in the area. They built the barrios from scratch: the houses, the infrastructure, and the community. For these people their pride in and attachment to the place and its different elements are deep and meaningful:[56] they have seen and enabled the evolution of the barrio through the years. The second generation comprises *the founders' children*, who arrived with them and helped in the construction of the place. The third generation are teenagers or young adults, *grandchildren of the founders*, who grew up in an already established barrio. They know through stories and photographs about the difficulties and challenges their grandparents and parents faced and the effort they put into building their houses and indeed the barrio itself. However, they did not experience these challenges themselves. The fourth generation are the children of the founders' grandchildren, mostly under 12 years old. All these generations have built both the public and the private spaces as relational places.

As noted previously, most barrio houses today are solid and robust, not the flimsy original rancho (Wiesenfeld 1998). For the younger generations, used to these robust structures and the stability of their barrios as an established residential area, the difference between a rancho and a house is the façade and finish of the building, not the sturdiness of the structure. Barbara (BA) is a young third-generation barrio resident whose perspective on the elements of the barrio diverges from that of the founders. Her meaning of rancho is rather different from theirs because she did not go through the rancho-to-house consolidation process; she

[55] The founders are the first settlers and arrived between 1950 and 1970, depending on the date of origin of the barrio.
[56] The discussion of psychosocial processes such as attachment and sense of place is developed in Chapter 6.

experienced only the latest stage of enlarging the house vertically and beautifying it (Rosas Meza 2009).

The fact that residents improve their houses over time reflects their acceptance of living in the barrio. With this materialisation, the longing to be part of the city and the perception of the barrio as only a temporary place starts to fade. Improving and formalising the house also means that the family is becoming established. According to Trigo (2008), this is a double association with the improvement of the house: physical and psychological stability. Moreover, at the same time that the house is being formalised, although not planned, the barrio and its urban structure are going through the same formalisation process; the houses shape and define the urban space.

Participants' stories highlight how all generations have been involved in the development of their houses, because it is a family process. Brick by brick the founders and the second generation upgraded their ranchos into houses, providing their families with an established place of residence. Next, in collaboration with the younger generation, they continued with this development to host new and expanding family units. However, this was not only a matter of expanding the house; it involved providing a semi-independent life.

> M: Y ahora los mismos nietos míos se han tenido que venir a vivir en la parte alta. Porque nosotros vivimos aquí juntos pero no revueltos, cada quien por su cuenta, pero es la misma casa.
>
> *M: and now my very own grandkids have had to come live here upstairs. Because we live here together but not mixed, each of us on their own but in the same house.*

Usually, barrio houses have evolved into several storeys, each of them giving independent access to each family unit. This process of developing the barrio started through the desire to keep family close. The consolidation of the barrio is based on the construction and location of family relationships. Thus, the barrio has become a relational space. The urban space, the place, is conceived and constructed through the relationships within and arising from the private sphere. It is

first an emotional and psychological construction, which then takes tangible form as the house, which then impacts and shapes the public space.

4.2 PUBLIC REALM: THE DEVELOPMENT STORIES OF EL NAZARENO, JULIÁN BLANCO AND LA DOLORITA

Like the houses, the physical aspect of the public space in the barrios has gone through different stages of development since the initial settlement by squatters. The lands on which people initially squatted and that became the barrio were undeveloped and mostly a natural environment. The barrio development was gradual and continuous. Once the barrios started, they grew into slums, with dirt roads, and no services or infrastructure. After residents settled in the barrio, basic infrastructure was put in place; followed by the construction of the public spaces.

In terms of the public space in the development of the barrio, two main sub-stages can be identified: (1) the beginning of development, and (2) the developed barrio. There are elements common to both stages and they all play a significant role in the growth process, such as the relationship to the natural environment, and the infrastructure, comprising water supply, sewage, and roads. However, as each barrio became more consolidated, other features such as public spaces (streets, intersections and roundabouts) and facilities (such as chapels, shops and community centres) started to take up primary roles in the development of the place. Neighbour relationships also played a vital role throughout this process and in the barrio history. These relationships are connected to the various barrio spaces. This section addresses the evolution of the natural environment, infrastructure, roads and public spaces, and their link to place-making.

4.2.1 Natural environment

When the barrios were first being constructed, the natural environment was a fundamental part of people's lives. The people had to conquer this land and develop it in order to build all the components of the barrio. The founders, the first generation of residents, saw the growth at the same time as they were part of it.

Their natural environment was their primary reference, and it has remained a vital cue to their memories.

> M: cuando yo llegué aquí… sapos, culebras y barro!!! (risas). Yo tengo 30 años aquí en este barrio, y esto era un barro neeeegroo, negro, y gamelote, y sapos, culebras y… mucho gusano…
>
> *M: when I arrived here… toads, snakes and mud!!! (laughter). I have 30 years here in this barrio, and this was blaaaaaaccccckkkk mud, black, and grass, and toads, snakes and… a lot of snails…*

Their current relationship with the natural environment differs radically from this nostalgic idea of nature from the time of the barrio origin. Today the natural environment is a hazard. The current perception of the natural environment relates directly to the physical characteristics of the terrain, how it affects construction possibilities and the potential and existing risks associated with those possibilities (see Figure 4.3). Some residents have a deeper understanding of the terrain and the slope, and their impact on everyday life. For them, this aspect of the natural environment is more relevant than it was for the founders at the time of the barrios' establishment, because new residents usually build higher up the slopes, where there is more risk of landslides.

> M: Y ahora eso se les derrumbó eso cuando llovió, (…) un poco de ranchos (…) … y menos mal que les avisaron un día antes y no hubieron muertos (…) ¡Y vinieron a parar aquí al Nazareno! ¡Allí habían 110 personas!
>
> *M: and now all that fell apart when it rained (…) a lot of ranchos (…) and thank God that they were told a day before and there were no dead (…) And they came here to the Nazareno![57] There were 110 persons!*

Although established residents are aware of the instability of the land, and disapprove of squatting on this hazardous ground, they do not interfere when new squatters build there because they usually do not know the new squatters well, and

[57] Referring to the community house in Julián Blanco

such interference may create conflict. The established community therefore just observes the new development from a distance and helps the new residents in case of an emergency. Community relationships arise again as one relevant aspect in barrios. In spite of having diverse nationalities and building in acknowledged dangerous places, barrio residents are supportive in adversity and help each other. The community stays together, and neighbours cooperate. The community spaces become places for the residents to deal with diverse situations, and there is always an awareness that these buildings are for community use only. In other words, the collective sense of ownership emerges and dictates that these spaces may not be used permanently as a private space for people who have lost their houses. The community protects its space as a shared place.

Figure 4.3: Landslide in Julián Blanco. Source: Alcaldía del Municipio Sucre (*Council of Sucre Municupality*)

Moreover, residents are not the only ones who know yet ignore the risks of constructing houses on this land. The government also enables the use of these unsafe spaces.

Father Jesús (JE): (…) Aunque ese terreno es altamente peligroso (…) la gente tiene necesidad, y la complacencia de los partidos políticos de buscar (…) votos, hace que la gente se monte y después pague las consecuencias.

JE: (…) Even though that lot is highly dangerous (…) people have needs, and the complacency of political parties to look (…) for votes, makes people go there and afterwards live the consequences.

Politicians are more interested in retaining votes (by ignoring unsafe development) than they are in protecting public safety. Housing needs and the lack of enough public housing supply force people without economic resources to find any housing solution they can for their families. Squatting in consolidated barrios or close to them guarantees easy access to infrastructure, transport and facilities such as education and health. However, all the safe land is already occupied, and unoccupied land is usually unstable, contaminated and/or on main roads, which usually entails high risk.

4.2.2 Infrastructure: water supply and sewage

According to Antillano (2005), at the beginning of the construction of the barrio, basic infrastructure such as roads, transport, water supply, and sewage was non-existent, reflecting the inequality between these areas and the *formal city*. This is another way that the state exacerbates the disadvantages experienced in barrios.

Nicolás (N): no había servicio de cloacas, no había… (…)
María (M2): había una cosa muy linda que estos días estábamos hablando, por ejemplo aquí, los domingos… los domingos nos íbamos para lo que llamamos acá Terrazas del Ávila, a La Llovizna… íbamos allá las mujeres a lavar, íbamos allá a pasar el día, porque ahí viene el agua que viene de ahí de arriba… allá la gente a lavar… bueno, total que eso era una fiesta que había ahí… (…) siii, uno lavaba semanal allá porque aquí no había agua. Uno compraba y traía del trabajo las pimpinas que usaba uno para cocinar, para cocinar no más… a lavar allá.

N: there was no sewer, there was no… (…)

M2: there was a pretty thing that we were talking about these past few days, for example here, on Sundays… on Sundays we went to what we call Terrazas del Ávila, to La Llovizna[58]… we, the women went there to wash our clothes, we went there to spend the day, because from there comes the water that comes from up there… there people to wash… anyway, that was a party what happened there… (…) yessss, you washed because there was no water here. One bought and brought from work the ceramic water bottles that one used for cooking, only for cooking… there, to wash.

Living conditions in barrios initially were harsh and complex, characterised by scarcity and struggle, uncertainty and fear, as well as by hope, strength and will. Barrio founders looked at all this struggle as an opportunity to build a life and to provide for their families. It was also a chance to create community bonds in a quasi-rural form. Not having their basic needs satisfied encouraged people to be creative, and to be creative together. The individual could not have coped with the scarcity, the threat of eviction, and the lack of fundamental infrastructure; however, as a group they could cope. In this way, the community started to grow and strengthen. As Ontiveros (1997) states, these families interacted because of the needs that arose from the conditions and situations they experienced when settling in this new, undeveloped, place. Overcoming as a group the lack of infrastructure evidences the first challenge and willingness to develop joint and collective spaces.

According to the literature, the processes of constructing basic infrastructure was fundamental to bringing the community together and to making a living in this place [59] (García, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld 1999; Ontiveros 2006; Trigo 2008; Wiesenfeld 1997b, 1998).

Today, the perception of 'water supply' varies from barrio to barrio. In general, people acknowledge they have water supply even if the service is deficient. As well-established barrios, all three areas of this study have all the public services and facilities needed at this local scale. Water supply via pipelines exists, but this

[58] La Llovizna used to be a natural place in Terrazas del Ávila.
[59] The participants did not share these stories regarding the origin of the communal spaces and services. They mainly focused on the stories regarding the original natural environment and the construction of the private space.

does not apply to new squatters, whose living conditions vary. From the participants' perspective, one of the most important indicators of poor quality of life is the lack of water supply, constructing, as they said, 'a subhuman level.'[60] The subhuman condition evident in the development of the private space also applies to the public space. As Betzy (B) reflects on this subhuman condition she acknowledges that despite there being a pipe system in the most consolidated areas of El Nazareno,[61] residents there do not have a proper water supply. Due to the state's failure to maintain dams and main pipes, water cut-offs are very common and occur for long periods, leaving water tankers as the most effective suppliers.

In the case of Caracas, barrios are the first to be affected by the water cut-offs. This demonstrates once again favouritism towards the city over the barrio, and how discrimination and disadvantage operate at different levels.

> María (M3): [hablando de la construcción del tanque] donde está el tanque era un cerro, un cacerío (…) eso lo bajaron todo e hicieron plano para el tanque. (…) El gobierno las sacó, y la gente se salió. (…)Y sacaron todo eso para hacer el tanque para el agua del barrio… que fue lo menos que hicieron: ¡el agua es para la universidad!... ¡No tenemos agua! (…) sacaron el barrio para el tanque, pero era mentira, era para… sus sectores.
>
> *M3: [talking about the water tank construction] where the tank is located was previously a hill, a hamlet (…) they put it all down and flattened it to build the tank (…) The government took them out and people left (…) And they took it out to build the water tank for the barrio… and they did all that but: the water goes to the university!... We don't have water! (…) they took the barrio out because of the tank, but it was a lie, it was for… their areas.*

That disadvantage Betzy identified also comes through in the last quote from Mrs. María. In Julián Blanco, the government's discrimination is not only through the

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[60] Quality of life is a subjective concept based on the comparison between our expectations and our reality. People in barrios came from very poor conditions and migrated to these lands looking to build themselves a better place, to live closer to the city and its opportunities. Usually, they find their quality of life is quite good. From that benchmark, when they compare themselves with people with worse living conditions than theirs, they acknowledge that the minimum services their barrio has, are the basic needs for a humane life.

[61] As happens in all three areas of study

water rationing, but it is also strongly emphasised through the demolition of barrio areas to provide large infrastructure for surrounding formal city suburbs, manipulating the community to benefit their agendas and those of the private sector.

These stories of disadvantage that were (and are) continuously lived in different aspects of people's lives were a vital part of the background on which they built their barrio and their communities, thereby constructing their sense of place and belonging. Having a government that constantly showed its unreliability drew residents to find support from each other and other important institutions, such as the Catholic Church. This also encouraged the community to solve their issues without any official support, hence strengthening their bonds and their attachment to place.

As in the case of the water supply, sewers are also scarce in barrios. Where they do exist, their quality is low and not enough to meet the demand of the many barrio residents. Nor are the connections between them well developed because residents built most of them themselves. As a consequence, sewage runs along the streets with vehicles and pedestrians. Barrio residents are used to this and disregard its importance and how it might affect their health, their everyday life and their cultural activities.

When the government implements new barrio sewer projects developed by technical teams, the outcome is usually a poor quality system overall that exacerbates the existing sewage problem for the barrio community.[62] However, as people are used to this situation, maintaining the status quo is not problematic. Part of Venezuelans' culture is to adjust quickly to change and new conditions, in this example, as in many others, to their disadvantage.

4.2.3 Infrastructure: road network

At the beginning, the road network was almost inexistent. Only a few streets and some pedestrian pathways allowed people to move around the settlement.

[62] Due to lacking enough financial resources and due to corruption, the investment the government makes in developing small infrastructure projects is minimal. Thus, the use of low quality materials and superficial interventions are the standard approach.

Notwithstanding this, there was always a main road at the outermost boundary of the barrio that connected it to the city; access to the city and all the opportunities it provided was one of the most important criteria for barrio settlement and development.

When barrio development began in Petare, the only roads were: (1) some scarce internal main roads in the lower part of the barrio, (2) the National Road, which linked Caracas' colonial centre and suburbs with small towns located in the east beyond the San Francisco Valley, and (3) the Petare-Santa Lucía Road, which connected the National Road with small towns located to the south-east of Miranda State. The Petare-Santa Lucía Road still surrounds Julián Blanco and La Dolorita to the south-east.

As with the natural environment, the infrastructure in the developed barrio and the inhabitants' perceptions of it changed radically from what they had been at the beginning. The development of the movement network was gradual and accompanied the development of people's houses. As with most barrio elements, residents created and implemented these networks with little or no intervention from the government.

The developed barrio road network comprises vehicle and pedestrian paths. Both are vital elements of residents' mobility within, to and out of the barrio. There are main roads, local streets, alleys, staircases and walkways and they have a broad range of functions in people's everyday lives. The different activities that occur in these spaces and how the spaces are perceived, highlights the relevance of the street in people's sense of place and in the meaning residents give to the barrio itself.

The road hierarchy in barrios is very clear: (1) the main road that connects the barrio to the city and runs along the contour of the mountain, (2) local alleyways that connect the main roads to steeper places and to the pedestrian network, and (3) the walkways and staircases that provide the link to the majority of the houses.

The barrios' compact and dense urban morphology in addition to their steep and complex topography means the space dedicated to main roads is limited; it is even more difficult to have several main roads. When a main road goes through the

barrio, its width varies and its shape constantly changes, usually allowing at most two lanes.[63] Where it does open up, these openings become the roundabouts and open public spaces for people to share, socialise and enjoy their leisure.

> José Miguel (JM): (…) el terreno totalmente accidentado (…) subidas, bajadas (…) más angosta aquí que allá (…) pero aquí también suben carros, ¡hay que estar pendiente de todo!
>
> *JM: (…) the terrain is completely rugged (…) uphills and downhills (…) a bit narrower here than there (…) but here the cars also come up; we have pay attention to everything!*

The physical characteristics of the terrain and hence the barrios shape how people behave and feel there. Residents develop the barrio morphology, yet it also defines how they live. A transactional and symbiotic relationship between people and space is revealed. The space seems to dominate the ways in which people relate to the barrio, to their everyday lives and ultimately to their culture.

The space also impacts on how people appropriate it both from a psychological and physical perspective, determining how the community as a whole relates to it. A few people from the community parking their cars in a two-lane street without footpaths is one kind of appropriation. This appropriation limits other community members in their use of the street, this relational space, forcing both drivers and pedestrians to juggle with other cars and people walking on the streets (see Figure 4.4).

Another limitation that impacts residents' use of the streets is the heavy traffic and congestion. Besides the cars parked on the streets[64] and people walking alongside motor vehicles, there are buses, motorcycles and trucks using these main roads on a daily basis, especially during peak hour. This impact can be seen not only on the usage of the street, but also on quality of life in general. Public transport

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[63] 3.5m wide in average

[64] Unlike the city, barrios have no time limits or parking prohibitions during peak hours or other heavy traffic times.

is inadequate,[65] so residents spend long hours going to the city and back to the barrio. This modifies the link between the people and their barrio, weakening their sense of attachment and place.

Figure 4.4: Pedestrian and vehicular traffic in La Dolorita. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

> BA: (…) lo que no me gusta de vivir en El Nazareno es que es muy alto (…) parece que uno nunca fuera a llegar (…) es lejos de El Nazareno a lo que es el centro de Petare donde está el metro y eso (…) las colas son infernales para uno salir de ahí en la mañana.
>
> *BA: What I really don't like about living in El Nazareno is that it's too high! (…) it seems that you're never going to arrive (…) it's far from El Nazareno to Petare's*

[65] When discussing public transport with participants the deficiency in the system became evident. However, public transport did not arise as important in the construction of place.

centre where the subway is and all that (…) the traffic jam to get out of there in the morning is hell.

The topography is associated with distance, which is associated with time. The fact that by living on a mountain you have to drive and climb up and down to access the city and its services becomes a major psychological issue for residents. Although the topography and the distance have been the same since the barrio began, the fact that there is more traffic makes the space seem farther away and more troublesome. The psychological approach of rationalising the time it takes to go the city and back home is to blame the space and the physical conditions instead of the traffic, which is fluid and changeable.

This situation was observed in all three areas of this study. In the mornings, the traffic moved mostly from the barrio to the city; in the afternoons it was the other way around. Large numbers of people moved in these directions to access their jobs, educations centres, government and private organisations, and other large facilities and services that are not available in the barrio, and then to return home. This enormous movement puts such pressure the existing roads that massive and very slow traffic jams are frequent and the low quality infrastructure of the road begins to fall apart.

Residents largely use the main roads for this commuting. Both public and private vehicles drive on these streets every day. Although the government paved the main roads, their quality is questionable. Thus most roads are in poor condition and are not really adequate for such heavy traffic, making life even more challenging for barrio residents.

Barrio streets are also generally poorly maintained. This affects not only vehicles and traffic, but also pedestrians who are forced to walk on the streets because of the lack of footpaths. This affects not only their everyday lives in terms of mobility and accessibility, but also in terms of recreational and relational activities. Since barrio streets are a vital public space, their condition impacts on people's activities and their ways of relating to others. It also has a substantial impact on residents' cultural activities, such as Catholic processions.

The road network is complemented by pedestrian walkways of alleyways and staircases; these have become the primary movement system and the main connection system in the barrio (see Figure 4.5). They were constructed as the barrio grew and they continue to be constructed in an ongoing process. This construction of public space never ends and it enables the development of the house itself. The staircases and the alleyways are important public spaces in the barrio, as well as being a primary enabler for the construction of private space. Thus the development of private and the public space is mutually dependent.

People built these pedestrian paths at the same time as their houses, so there is a stronger sense of place in them than in the main roads. For the inhabitants, these staircases and walkways are not only a way to access their houses and other spaces in the barrio, they are also a way to connect with other residents. As the barrios were built as a relational space rather than a functional one, the elements comprising the barrio urban space have as their primary function the bringing of people together. The vast complexity of the pedestrian network is a reflection of the dynamics of the place.

> JM: Escaleras por todas partes y atajos que comunican a una parte de la calle con otra y que uno no conoce. (…) ¡A parte que todas son iguales! (…) solamente los que viven por ahí las podrán conocer completas (…) por todos lados hay conexiones. Hay entradas que no puedes saber si es entrada a una casa o a 10, ¿no? por la disposición también de la vivienda ...
>
> *JM: Staircases everywhere and shortcuts that communicate one part of the street with another that one doesn't know (…) Besides all of them look the same! (…) only people living there could completely know them (…) there are connections everywhere. There are entrances that you cannot know if it is the entrance to a house or 10, no? Also because of the house's layout …*

The pedestrian world is comprehensible only to barrio residents. This complex network that people created reflects how they live their lives. This intricate system leads to unforeseeable small open space clusters that in most cases are relational spaces. When families grow, they expand into the public space, and they extend from the core to occupy nearby spaces. These small open space clusters

are visible mostly to those who are part of these tight family/neighbour nests. For outsiders, it is simply an unknown: it is in and through this complex pedestrian network that barrio residents express physically their feelings of belonging, attachment and territoriality. They state with this space, 'This is for locals only.'

Figure 4.5: Semi-public staircase in La Dolorita. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

It is through the pedestrian network particularly that the 'us' versus 'others' starts to show. This not only applies to 'the barrio' versus 'the city' and 'barrio people' versus 'others', but it also begins to identify each barrio as a separate entity. This pedestrian labyrinth is disclosed only to the residents living there, to its people. This is a quality that is enhanced by a lack of identifiers; superficially, all places look the same.

These relational clusters are semi-public spaces, reflecting the complex public-private space relationship (see Figure 4.5 and 4.6). From José Miguel's quote we can identify this symbiotic relationship between the public and the private space. He mentions the housing layout as one of the causes of this complex staircase-walkway network. However, the house and the pedestrian paths work in conjunction to create the different typologies of barrio urban space: private, public and semi-public.[66]

Usually located in staircases and less frequently in pedestrian paths, the semi-public space in barrios is the enclosed open space among a group of houses that serves as the in-between of the private and public space. A group of neighbours or family whose home's front doors directly face this semi-public space control it and access to it. As many other spaces in the barrio, these semi-public areas have well defined boundaries and were not originally planned nor designed as such. Usually a group of neighbours with strong and close relationships agree upon *semi-privatising* this open space.

Although these spaces usually have clearly defined physical boundaries, they are also delimited by ephemeral social boundaries (Guitián 2007). According to Rangel Mora (2001), these spaces are closely related to people's activities and cultural values. The private-public space relationship varies depending on the activity that takes place in the barrio. Thus, the concept of private and public and its reflection in the urban space is very dynamic. There is a fuzzy line between these

[66] Oldenburg (1999) presented the concept of *third spaces* as those places where people interact and socialise between home and work. This might seem a useful concept to define semi-public spaces, however, in barrios all public spaces have this quality. As presented in this part of this story and further developed in section 4.2.4 and Chapter 5, the whole barrio, and its flexible urban space boundaries, become this socialising - relational space.

constructs; hence the meanings associated with these spaces become difficult to separate one from another.

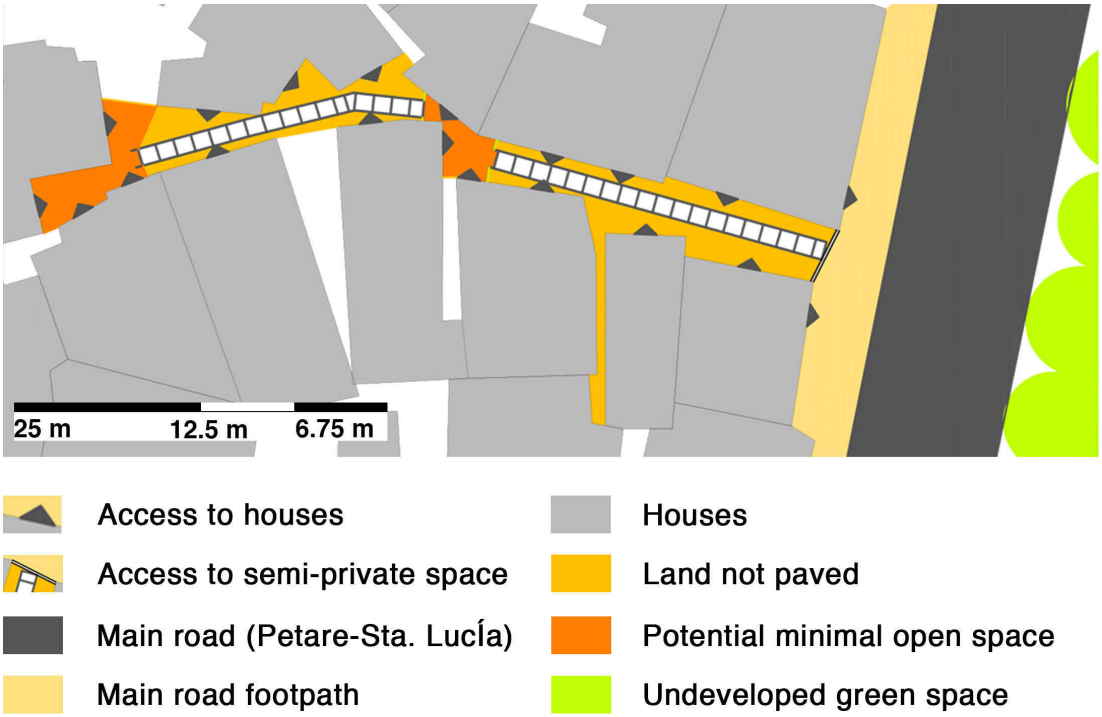

Figure 4.6: Illustration of semi-public space configuration (same staircase as Figure 4.5).[67] Source: G. Quintana Vigiola based on base map from the Institute of Urbanism – UCV database.

This fluidity between public and private occurs both in the staircases and walkways, as well as on the main road. However, it is related mostly to pedestrian activities. When walking, people from outside and inside can easily interact making this physical boundary psychosocially flexible. This flexibility has an impact on the different activities that take place in the streets, and on the perception and utilisation of the street as a main public space, as a space of encounter. The utilisation of all streets as a pedestrian space is embedded in the resident's lives; this highlights the importance of these streets in the creation of meaning, in becoming one of the most important elements in the construction of place.

[67] Figure 4.6 is an illustration on how the staircase shown in Figure 4.5 might be structured. I did not develop a detailed urban-morphological analysis of the totality of the areas of study, including this semi-public space. I developed Figure 4.6 based on my previous knowledge built through my extensive work experience in informal settlements; however, the accesses to the houses in this figure are not a real representation of this particular space.

This exemplifies urban design insights from other contexts. According to Jacobs (1995), 'the streets moderate the form and structure and comfort of urban communities' (p. 3), and are a fundamental element of the city that makes sociability possible. Cities cannot exist without the street as a public space (Gehl 1989; Gehl & Gemzøe 2003; Kostof 1992). The street goes beyond its connectivity function.

Due to the lack of other accessible public spaces, and the lack of private open space, the streets in barrios are the front yards of all houses. Houses open up their doors to the streets, the tangible limit between private and public vanishes, and the street becomes a communal extension of the private space. The streets are the way of connecting people and creating spaces. As mobility is one of the major concerns for residents due to the various limitations they encounter, this section is presented as part of the infrastructure sub-section. However, the streets and pedestrian paths are a significant aspect of the public space network.

4.2.4 Public spaces

Borja & Muxí (2001b) state that the 'public space is very much a political determination, but it is also a social product' (p. 72). In Venezuela, public administrations did not plan barrios public spaces; the political approach was to enable squatting. The community built most of their public spaces from scratch and through a minimal degree of collaboration the common areas were created. In Venezuelan barrios, public spaces are literally a social product.

The public (open) spaces were built mostly from private space leftovers. As previously mentioned, the relationship between the public and the private spheres in barrios is essential. This relationship is demonstrated in participant's accounts, where the private space is constantly highlighted but the public space is not spontaneously discussed.

As identified in previous sections, the close relationship between people and their spaces enables not only the creation of a sense of place but also a sense of community. Through the construction, development and use of the different spaces found in barrios, residents also build strong bonds that endure in time. These spaces, both open and enclosed, can each be both private and public.

Hernández Bonilla (2005) argues that the most important public spaces for the residents of squatter settlements are the spaces of everyday life, where neighbours' social encounters and closeness within the community are of most importance. Although some barrios have a large public space and a few of very small public squares, the main public spaces in the Caracas barrios are usually their main entrance or the centres where the shops are located. Streets and intersections are also a vital public space as explained above, as are the sports facilities, usually basketball courts.

These public spaces are usually distributed throughout the barrio where the topography allows it. In addition to the limited diversity of such spaces, the actual number of public spaces found in barrios is also low, but they do exist. Participants tended to highlight this lack of public space in barrios.

> JE: ¡Sí hay espacios públicos! Lo que pasa es que la gente no los vive como tal, ni los aprecia, y se deja apropiar el espacio público, (…) el terreno público es de todos y no es de nadie.
>
> *JE: There are public spaces! What happens is that people don't live them as such, they don't appreciate them, and they let it be taken, (…) the public area belongs to everyone and to no-one.*

Even though Father Jesús is Julián Blanco's priest and is highly involved with and valued by the community, he has not been part of the barrio development. He is simultaneously an outsider and a local. He highlights that public areas belong to everyone and no-one, so although there are spaces that everyone can access and use, residents do not use them. This 'lack of belonging' can be seen as one of the factors that led to gangs' appropriation of public space for criminal activities; at the same time residents do not use some public spaces because of criminality, which has become a self-reinforcing cycle. However, he acknowledges that in Julián Blanco there are public spaces, but that residents place little value in them on a conscious level.

Cruz María (CM) highlights how La Dolorita has no town squares, and that previous attempts to build some were in vain. However, La Dolorita does have

several open spaces, including two town squares. Although these are small, they serve the community and are regularly used. This area also has a massive sports centre that residents use constantly (see Figure 4.6). However, some participants disregard the importance of this facility that acts as a major public space in the area. Figure 4.7 highlights the nodal public spaces in La Dolorita, and Figure 4.8 zooms into one of those main nodes.

Figure 4.7: La Dolorita multi-sport field. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

> B: (…) ¡no hay parques, no hay plazas! ¡Creo que todo se hace en la cancha deportiva!. (…) ¡es una sola cancha donde se hace todo!
>
> *B: (…) there are no parks, there are no squares! I believe everything is done in the sports court! (…) it's only one [basketball] court where everything happens!*

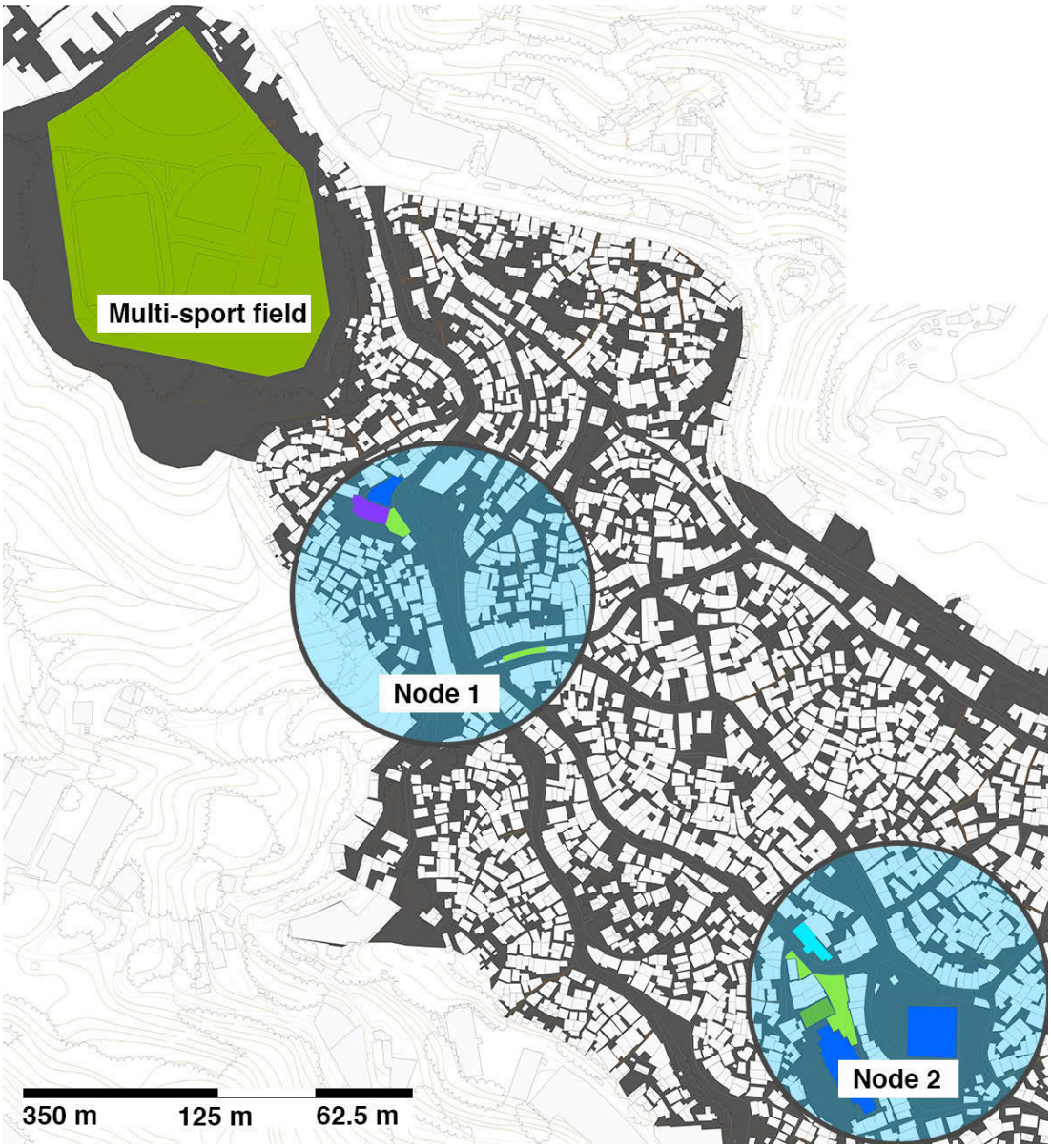

Figure 4.8: La Dolorita nodal spaces and facilities. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

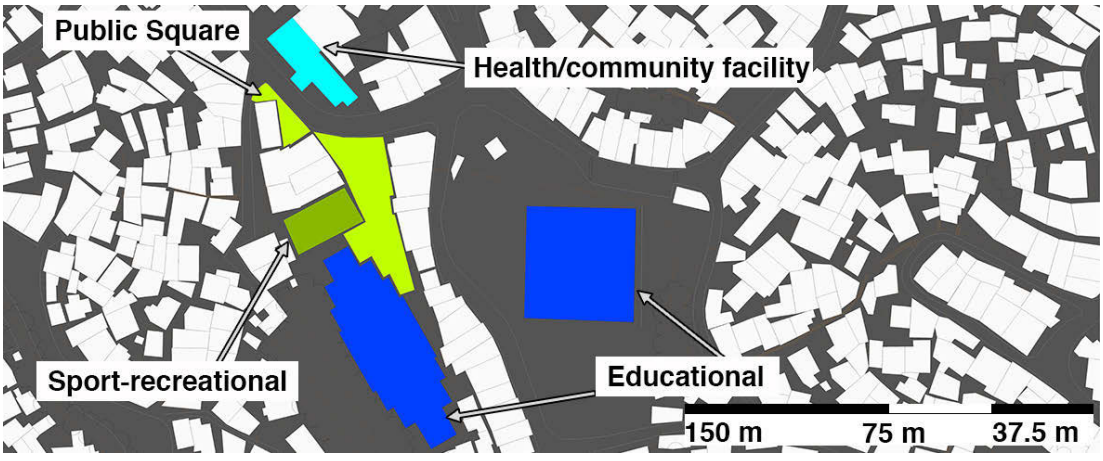

Figure 4.9: Node 2 zoom. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

Betzy from El Nazareno describes how her area has no public spaces. There is only a multi-purpose sports field where all community activities take place. However, like La Dolorita, El Nazareno has other public spaces, such as El Morro. El Morro is a massive multi-purpose space the community uses for everyday activities, such as exercising, and for major cultural events, such as the Good Friday Catholic procession.

This public space is so significant that people from other barrios make reference to it. El Morro is a landmark, yet not all residents acknowledge it. El Nazareno resident Barbara mentions El Morro as a leisure space. However, she perceives it secondary to the multi-purpose sports field. This shows how despite having several public spaces, residents do not recognise them as such. When they do, they take them for granted and diminish their importance to the community.

The Arch of Julián Blanco (Figure 4.9) is one of the main public spaces in the area and the principal access point to this barrio. In El Nazareno, the Obelisk marks the entrance (Figure 4.10), while in La Dolorita the entrance is marked by the combination of the sports centre and the liquor store. Most barrio entrances have a landmark with which people identify and they are usually nodal points where activities and residents congregate. These are spaces that usually comprise a combination of retail and community facilities. Since most of barrios main roads, plus several staircases and other pedestrian paths lead to this space, these entrances also become a transport and pedestrian interchange. These are places of interaction, where residents meet neighbours when shopping, when arriving at the barrio or when just walking by to other sectors. When they meet, they stay in the area and socialise, thus strengthening the community bonds.

Other important types of public spaces in Venezuelan barrios comprise intersections and roundabouts. Roundabouts are cul-de-sacs where different types of activities happen depending on their size. In Julián Blanco, there are several cul-de-sacs because of the steep topography. However, the largest is known as *the Julián Blanco Roundabout* (see Figure 4.11). Here, buses, trucks and cars can turn around and head back to the barrio entrance, defined by the landmark Arch. The roundabout also connects to several staircases and walkways that disperse people to many houses. The roundabout is multifunctional, being widely used by all

members of the community for different activities, including an informal basketball court created by the young community members by putting up a basketball ring.

Figure 4.10: Julián Blanco's Arch. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

Figure 4.11: The Obelisk in El Nazareno. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

Mrs Ñaña (Ñ) says that this roundabout has no limits, meaning that this space belongs to the whole community and not to particular groups, because it hosts several everyday and occasional activities for all community members. This area is a place of social interaction and encounter. In the absence of formal

squares, these wide open spaces that connect to people's houses and movement network become the barrio's major public open space.

Figure 4.12: Julián Blanco Roundabout. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

Basketball courts form the last type of significant community public space for residents, with both positive and negative meanings attached to them[68] (Figure 4.12). These have for the most part been proposed and built by the government as a response to criminality in the barrios, the rationale being to give teenage males a healthy space in which to interact (Quintana Vigiola 2015).

However, the basketball courts are not always safe and healthy spaces. For example, the court at El Nazareno has a small police station nearby; hence the place is safe and the community can share it and use it freely. This shared use is also emphasised because the community does not have any other suitable public

[68] The positive and negative meanings of basketball courts are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

spaces for people to meet and enjoy different activities and cultural events. In contrast, La Dolorita and Julián Blanco have alternative spaces for public gatherings, and there is no police station nearby the basketball courts, hence they are often abandoned or left to particular groups, such as criminal gangs.

Figure 4.13: Basketball court in Julián Blanco. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

Although people may not use some of these spaces, they do acknowledge their importance to the community's development. Historically, in addition to creating informal basketball courts on pre-built streets (as in Julián Blanco and in El Nazareno) when people are constructing their private space, in most cases they also leave land lots for the construction of basketball courts, community centres and chapels.

> JE: (…) sí son gente de una cierta cultura, pues de repente cuando invaden apartan para canchas, para escuelas, o para canchas (…)

JE: (…) if they have a certain culture, maybe when they squat they set aside for basketball courts, for schools, or for basketball courts (…)

When participants discussed the topic of public spaces with me, they often associated public spaces with community facilities and other social services. When elaborating on this topic, they focused most often on the community centre and health care facilities. These community buildings are considered public, spaces for everyone, and their importance to the community is highlighted by the fact that space to build them was specially set aside.

4.2.5 Public services and community facilities

Most established barrios have primary medical facilities, both primary and high schools and community centres. When these were discussed with residents, schools and community centres emerged as paramount[69] in importance. Although other facilities were mentioned in the participants' comments, they were not regarded as important. When services such as health care facilities were mentioned, these were used as reference points to locate the schools. The communities usually build their own community centres, while the schools are provided by the state or other non-profit organisations, typically affiliated with the Catholic Church. However, most of the schools are undersupplied with staff and resources; hence they are open fewer hours than the other schools in the city.

In barrios, community centres and schools are used interchangeably based on local needs. This unofficial multi-purpose interchangeability between the community centres and the schools managed by *AVEC*[70] and *Fé y Alegría*[71] allows residents to use these areas regularly, enabling appropriation and consequently generating a sense of belonging and place. These spaces are a vital part of the construction of place in barrios. The meaning associated with the barrio when

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[69] Participants also often associated retail with public services and facilities. Although they do not emphasise on this, they acknowledge they have shops. The most common retail found in barrios is bakeries, convenience stores, small hardware shops and most importantly to the locals: liquor stores.
[70] AVEC stands for Asociación Venezolana de Educación Católica (Venezuelan Association of Catholic Education)
[71] Fe y Alegría is an international non-profit organisation linked to the Jesuits, focused on education and development.

discussing the public shared space incorporates these buildings as part of the development of people's families and the community in general.

In addition, the fact that the schools are managed by non-profit Catholic organisations deepens the relationship the residents have to the Catholic Church and to religiosity itself. In Venezuela, and especially in these schools, religion is embedded in the curriculum. Thus, religiosity as a cultural aspect is transmitted in the family and reinforced through schooling. The close relationship between the community and the Church is always marked by these educational and community spaces. Community centres can serve as education facilities at different levels, such as schooling for undocumented children[72] who cannot access the formal public education provided by the government.

> N: … al principio, cuando no teníamos mucho… el padre agarró y la puso [a la casa de la comunidad] de colegio de los 'indú'… porque habían muchos niños 'inducumentados' por aquí (…) luego el Padre consiguió con el Alcalde de que los niños pudieran ir a clases pues, o a otro…
>
> *N: … at the beginning, when we didn't have much… the Father took it [the community centre] and used it as the school for the 'indu'[73]… because there where a lot of 'inducumnented'[74] children around here (…) and then the Father achieved with the Mayor that kids could go to school, or to another…*

The relationship between the Church officials and the community is also emphasised. Priests are most of the time committed to the development of their communities from a holistic perspective, rather than just the religious one. The quotation above shows once again the solidarity within the community and the different bonds existing within the group.

Although the literature states that well-established communities start individualising and loosening their bonds (García, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld 1999), in

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[72] These undocumented children are usually the kids of Colombian migrants that may have crossed the border illegally or stayed in Venezuela without the proper legal status.
[73] Word game with the shortened word of 'indocumentado' (undocumented), and hindú that is the Spanish word for Hindu.
[74] Idem

sensitive situations the residents of barrios continue to help each other. As seen in the above discussion of the natural environment (section 4.2.1), in times of need people come together. This is characteristic of the barrio culture. The barrios social capital is built through close connections and trust where cooperation and collaboration is paramount (Putnam 1995, 2000). Helping out neighbours is a part of how barrio residents live their everyday lives, a primary aspect of how they construct their sense of community, and consequently their sense of place. Thus, the fundamental role of the institutions of civil society (Church and neighbour cooperation) is also an indicator of the healthy levels of social capital in barrios.

Community centres in barrios grow as the barrio grows. Residents develop them by themselves with little or no institutional support, thereby offering a large variety of activities for the community. Mrs María's words *'it kept growing, well… That's why I say "well, people have faith in El Nazareno"'* ['fue creciendo, pues. Por eso yo digo "bueno, la gente tiene fe en El Nazareno"'] (Mrs. María, 20 April 2011). Regardless of the specific words, the most relevant aspect is that the progressive development of the community centre was achieved by the residents' own efforts, helping to construct the community space (Figure 4.13). Although people do not make reference to the communal spaces to the extent they do to the private space, it is evident that the community spaces are relevant to the residents, even more so when associated with religiosity. Religiosity is the shared cultural element that brings people from very diverse backgrounds together, and it is physically reflected in the built environment.[75] The sense of community and place is highlighted by the investment people put in this place and thus in the development of the community.

The multiplicity of uses allocated to each part of the community centres emphasises the active role this space plays in the community's everyday life. Ranging from day-care to medical care, the community centre of Julián Blanco is widely used for the development and improvement of its residents. However, this community centre, its activities and its staff are not enough to meet the high demand in the barrio.

[75] Religious spaces are discussed in the following section.

Community members are actively involved in their community's development, which is enhanced when the member is a founder or a leader. Mrs Ñaña is both a founder and a leader in Julián Blanco, and she describes how '*they*', the community, *obliged* her to be a part of the official community group. There is pressure from the group towards leaders, who in reality voluntarily agree to be active members in the development and cultural activities. The leaders are always looking forward to improve the community, and the community look up to their leaders to achieve these improvements.

Figure 4.14: El Nazareno community centre in Julián Blanco. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

This symbiotic process between leader and community occurs when the group has a tight and trusting relationship (Sanchez 2004). In barrios, this strong sense of community occurs because of the different struggles that they experienced together. These struggles were accompanied by a lack of any real governmental support, as well as segregation and disadvantaged conditions. This leads

community members to rely on each other and express that reliance in both the psychological and the physical spheres. The construction of community facilities, managed mostly by community members, is a strong physical expression of the community bonds.

These communal spaces, along with the Church's spaces, are the places to build bonds and improve the community. The community uses the Church's spaces as part of these interchangeable community places. The close relationship between the Catholic Church and the community allows this flexibility. The Church's role in community development, and the community's role in religiosity, is expressed in the urban space.

4.3 PUBLIC REALM: CONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS SPACES

The construction of religious/community places is an important part of barrio evolution. Participants highlighted the significance of the construction of religious spaces, where different activities take place and get organised. Despite the unplanned nature of community and public spaces, the religious land use has traditionally been one of the priorities, along with the development of the private space.

Community members and the Catholic Church together have built churches, chapels and religious community centres, sometimes with support from the government and private organisations. The community has allocated land and built these spaces, thinking of them as everyday shared spaces. The involvement of the community in their development shows part of the deep meaning of religiosity and Catholicism for barrio residents, as well as the profound meaning of the urban space.

The construction of religious spaces has two main aspects. First, there is a close relationship between the community and the space, and second, there is the institutional involvement. Both simultaneously support and hinder the development of religious spaces.

4.3.1 Community and religious space

Barrio communities are both disadvantaged and challenged, so having places to freely express and experience their culture and religiosity became paramount. At the same time as building the private space and bringing infrastructure to the barrio, residents organised themselves to save land and resources to develop religious spaces.

Both historically and currently, barrio residents have sought and appropriated both open and built spaces to dedicate to religious use. In the case of Julián Blanco, community members appropriated a local dumpsite[76] in order to secure a space to build a barrio chapel, demonstrating the level of organisation and collaboration to obtain these religious places. In order to claim the land and prevent squatting, residents brand the religious space with a landmark. Usually a cross, this landmark indicates the location of a chapel and encourages people to respect this shared cultural space. This continuing custom of guarding land for religious uses shows the importance of the relationship between culture and the physical space.

In barrios, the attachment of a sacred meaning is usually generated over time the more the space is used for religious purposes, eventually becoming a tradition. Father Azzalini (FA) from La Dolorita highlights the relevance of El Morro in El Nazareno as a religious space. When El Nazareno was being developed, the Lumen Dei,[77] in collaboration with the community, took over this space and protected it from external squatters. Over time, the Church and residents claimed this space by erecting a massive cross (Figure 4.14). With the continuous use and sacralisation of these urban spaces, as is the case of El Morro, they become part of the people's culture, more than just a place where cultural events occur.

When the urban space in barrios has been fully constructed, residents have saved and invested whatever money they could to purchase ranchos or houses where they could build a chapel or religious/community centre. In addition, when

[76] The waste disposal problem is increased with these actions, because community members do not have an alternative before taking this space for another use.
[77] The Lumen Dei is the congregation in charge of the Parish Nuestra Señora del Fátima in El Nazareno.

residents leave the barrio, they tend to sell their homes or land[78], and if it is to the Church or to the community for religious purposes, they sell at a lower price, thus showing commitment to their belief. These transactions are usually formalised by creating as a safeguard a *civil association,*[79] stating the structure belongs to the whole community and not to a group of individuals. The importance of religious space as community space is evident from the legal process undertaken to protect its status, something that does not always happen with private residential spaces. Occasionally, the community also gets support from private organisations, through friends and acquaintances, which shows how religious spaces are also relational spaces.

Figure 4.15: The Cross of El Morro in El Nazareno. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

[78] Barrio residents do not have the rights to the land, but they would still sell it.
[79] This is a form of an official community organisation.

Saving, acquiring and safeguarding land to dedicate to religious uses also shows their importance. The significance for people of having spaces where they can organise, practise and share their religious beliefs becomes evident. However, having the space does not guarantee its development. Despite barrio residents' concern about religious spaces, their development is mediated by institutions. The Catholic Church, government and private industry have an essential role in what happens with the barrios' religious urban space.

4.3.2 Institutional involvement

The initial point of contact for a community that wants to develop a religious space is the Church. The usual practice is for residents to approach priests and other Church representatives with the aim and hope of building a chapel or other structure in their barrio. However, the Church's involvement is also mediated by different factors, such as the charisma[80] of the congregation, the decision-making process, and the availability of resources.

In El Nazareno, the Catholic *Lumen Dei* congregation manages the Parish Nuestra Señora de Fátima. It is a fairly new congregation that originated in Panama, and their approach to religion is based on the Opus Dei. Their charisma is to transmit religion and evangelise as closely to the bible as possible**.** They strictly obey different rules and dogmas of the Church, such as kissing the priest's cross that hangs around his neck, and ladies wearing a shawl to cover their shoulders when entering the church. Non-compliance with the congregation's rules would mean being excluded from their religious and community activities.

The way the congregation approaches religiosity and the community has a massive impact on how the community relates to its religiosity and to different Church activities. According to participants, such restrictions deter part of the population from engaging in some religious activities in this parish, losing congregants to other nearby parishes. However, this does not stop these

[80] Charismas can be understood as paradigmatic approaches to religiosity; each congregation has its own perspective on how to approach people and religion, as well as how to evangelise communities. Examples of these approaches are: educational, community service and aid to the ill.

congregants from participating in processions, as the social expression of their religiosity, or maintaining the intimate, internal expression or their religiosity.

The Julián Blanco Evangelisation Centre is led by the *Claretians*. The Claretians approach is to help those in need and attend the sick. Through the practice of mercy they reach out to the community, inviting members to engage with the Church and to help others. The evangelisation centres and vicariates work under the command of the parishes.[81] Despite sharing with the parish the goal of reaching out at a community level, the evangelisation centres and vicariates are not allowed to make decisions on their own. The Evangelisation Centre Julián Blanco works under the Parish Sagrado Corazón de Jesús.

There is no fully established parish in Julián Blanco, which impacts on the religious activities and community engagement. Religious events are primarily under the community's control; in this case, community members are empowered and lead their own religiosity.

In La Dolorita, the Catholic congregation that leads the Parish San Francisco de Sales is the *Salesians of Don Bosco*. They have an educational approach to religiosity, and they are happy to incorporate people's traditions into the different activities organised by the institution, which is represented by the priest. In addition, they welcome every member of the community, regardless of whether they claim to be Catholic or not. The Salesians do not impose strict rules such as a dress code in church; on the contrary, they encourage people to attend, and from there they begin the evangelisation process.

Here, therefore, people's approach to religiosity is freer and more welcoming. Community members usually work together with the Church on their Catholic traditions and residents take part in a variety of workshops and activities that the parish offers.

The differences and unique style of each congregation in each of the barrios in these case studies, suggest that the Church's role in developing religious activities and spaces in barrios varies based on congregations. Despite some effort

[81] For more information, see Appendix A

at the archpriesthood level, the institution does not seem to have a common approach.

> Javier (J): la comunidad sí está preocupada por la creación de una iglesia cercana a ellos. (…) tienen unos terrenos ubicados (…) el Padre Salazar les dice 'bueno, antes de ustedes tomar la decisión, hablen con nosotros, coméntennos para ver si es el sitio indicado o no. Pero lo importante que se organicen' (…)
>
> *J: the community is concerned about having a church close to them (...) they found some lots (…) Father Salazar tells them 'well, before deciding, talk to us to see if it's the right place or not. But the important thing is that you guys get organised' (…)*

This ambiguity appears in many ways. In some barrios, priests encourage residents to be proactive and empowered in finding spaces for religious ends, and yet at the same time they may adopt a patriarchal attitude. This is a demonstration of power, with the Church the ultimate decision-maker on the matter of ecclesiastic places. The role of the congregation and the level of hierarchy within the archpriesthood has an important impact on this process. Strong parishes, with strict priests and congregations, such as Nuestra Señora de Fátima in El Nazareno, and San Francisco de Sales in La Dolorita, usually dictate and decide what happens with religious spaces, hence exerting an important influence on shaping the barrios' built environment.

In areas like Julián Blanco, however, where a variety of non-permanent priests are present in the evangelisation centre, the community is the main decision maker. Frequent changes of priests and seminarians impede the process of getting to know the community and their traditions, leaving residents to take charge of their religious activities and spaces. Although this power shift encourages the community to be more active, it also has impacted on the everyday and occasional religious activities, in that the number of participants and the level of organisation have dropped. The decision-making process regarding the development of religious spaces depends to a large extent on the ecclesiastical congregation, its charisma, and on the local priest as an individual.

The process of developing religious spaces in barrios is also determined by the urban space itself and by financial resources. On some occasions, the Church

has the will and the money to develop new ecclesiastic spaces. However, the lack of available land prevents this from happening. As an example, in Julián Blanco, the Catholic Church wanted to upgrade the evangelisation centre to a parish because of population needs, but the church[82] could not be built because there was no available space. The built environment becomes a fundamental factor in the development of activities, in how culture is shared and experienced, thus impacting people's meanings and ultimately the construction of place.

On the other hand, sometimes the community or the Church has the space to develop a religious community centre, but lacks the financial resources to do this. In these cases the government plays an important role in the construction of the religious space. However, the complex relationship between the chavistas, the opposition[83] and the Church determines the support different levels of government provide, depending directly on the political party or on specific individuals in positions of power. Historically, chavistas in governmental positions have had conflicted relationships with the Catholic Church, whereas the opposition has favoured it.

In the case of Petare, when Enrique Mendoza[84] was Mayor of Sucre and Governor of the State of Miranda, he provided substantial financial, legal and manpower support to the Catholic Church. Throughout his tenure, land was allocated to the Church and community and as a result chapels, parish churches and community centres were built. Mendoza also contributed through the legalisation and protection of open religious urban spaces, such as El Morro in El Nazareno. Mendoza had a strong religious background, and under his mandate he

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[82] Having a church is a required element of having a parish.

[83] In Venezuela there are two major political forces that can be summarised into the chavistas, comprising Chavez's followers and political associates; they are also commonly referred to as the government because they have been in power since 1999 when Chavez won the presidency. The second group is called the opposition, which regardless of whether they were in government or not, they are referred to that way, because they opposed the *chavistas*. This is discussed further in Appendix A.

[84] Enrique Mendoza was one of the opposition leaders after Chavez won the presidential elections in 1999. He is a member of the social-Christian political party COPEI (Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente – *Independent Electoral Political Organisation Committee*). Mendoza was Mayor of the Municipality of Sucre from 1989 until 1995, and then Governor of the State of Miranda since 1995 until 2004.

donated this land to the Catholic Church and designated it as religious public open space.

It becomes evident how institutions help shape the urban space and the different facilities and services in the barrio. In this case, the government, in collaboration with the Church, provided residents with a much-needed open public space. While acknowledging the contribution this particular politician made to the barrios by collaborating with the Church and the community because of his religious background and beliefs, it is likely there were also more political reasons behind his actions. In Venezuelan barrios, where Catholicism is so embedded in people's culture and everyday lives, supporting the Church, its spaces and activities enables politicians to build rapport and bond with the community. Thus, it encourages residents to vote for them.[85]

Contrary to Mendoza's approach, when the chavistas won the municipal and state elections in 2004, they withdrew all the support these government institutions gave the Church. This had a deep impact on people's culture.

> FA: (…) [los chavistas] comenzaron a revisar… ¡seis años se tardó la revisión! ¡Y todavía no hemos avanzado! Y se había ya firmado y el dinero está depositado en fideicomiso en Banesco, pero no se puede desbloquear mientras no esté autorizado por todo… ¡toda esa burocracia!
>
> *FA: (…) [the chavistas] started checking… it took them six years to check! And we still haven't progressed! And we had already signed, and the money was already deposited in a trust in Banesco,[86] but it can't be released until it's authorised… all this bureaucracy!*

During the period from 2004 to 2008 when the chavistas ruled both the Municipality of Sucre and State of Miranda, they not only stopped supporting the Church, but also took over existing religious community centres to provide other

[85] In the particular case of Enrique Mendoza, having a political agenda may have not been the underpinning reason behind his actions towards the Church. Even long after being away from the political sphere, he still attends the Holy Week processions in El Nazareno; he also still supports the Church as an individual.
[86] Banesco is a Venezuelan bank.

local services. In Julián Blanco and El Nazareno, they took community centres from the residents to implement a Barrio Adentro.[87] In addition, the executive power, which also opposes the Catholic Church, has the power to engage in similar actions. This could be seen as a new form of insecurity perpetuated by the state on barrio residents. Even the paternalistic and populist government of today continues to use its power to determine what happens with barrio urban spaces. These public spaces become an ideological tool that both the state and the Church use to favour supporters and evangelise residents.

Many barrio residents perceive the current government's approach to religious spaces as more evidence that it discriminates against and displaces people by imposing its power against residents' wishes; leading barrio residents to experience *cultural displacement*. The insecurity, the discrimination and the displacement barrio people have lived with since the start of the barrio have all contributed to shaping the barrio physical space, identity and culture.

4.4 CONCLUSION: COMPREHENDING BARRIOS' URBAN SPACE

Barrio urban space is a complex construction that has radically evolved over time. Barrio residents have invested time, money, and effort in transforming vacant land into a liveable place, into their home. Understanding the vital processes and factors involved in the construction of the urban structure where people live enables us to interpret the different meanings attached to place.

Barrio private and public spaces not only originated through a symbiotic relationship, they have also continued to interact with and impact one another. As the private spaces have developed and been reshaped over time, so have they impacted on the public space morphology and people's perceptions of it. Thus, barrio urban space is a dynamic and flexible entity that continues to evolve.

In addition, the boundaries between the public and the private are flexible, defined by people's socialisation and interaction. Through this flexibility and

[87] *Barrio Adentro* is a health program implemented by the Venezuelan government in 2003, to reach people in disadvantaged conditions.

socialisation processes, a new category of urban space have arisen in barrios: the semi-public. Simultaneously, these have enabled people to interact in other ways and a categorisation of 'us' versus 'them' emerged as a consequence of these new spaces.

The public and private realms are filled with inequalities. The house structure, access to services and the infrastructure in place are not the same for all residents, with some living in well-serviced areas, and others in precarious and subhuman conditions.

Although residents built the barrio urban space, different institutions influenced its development in several ways. The non-government organisations (NGOs), the Catholic Church and the state all helped shape the urban space. Simultaneously, there has always been a complex relationship between institutions and barrio residents over the construction of the barrio.

NGOs (usually associated with the Church), and the Church itself, have provided a lot of support to barrio residents. They have built religious spaces, schools, and other community facilities and centres. They have collaborated with the community in non-religious matters, which has strengthened their already close relationship with the community, in addition to reinforcing Catholicism as a meaningful element of barrio residents' lives.

On the other hand, the state has had an ambivalent approach. Through the displacement processes, the state encouraged new squatter settlements; by not providing official resources and ignoring their existence, governments stimulated the barrios' unplanned growth and development. Although the state also provided some services and facilities, those have been unevenly distributed.

Over time, barrio residents have experienced different levels of physical displacement, with the state being the main instigator in many cases. In this chapter I identified an intangible level of displacement, which I call *cultural displacement*, whereby the state does not give priority to residents' culture and spaces. This layer of displacement undervalues participants' backgrounds, choices and decisions about their culture and urban space.

Despite the negative impacts these processes of displacement and disadvantage have had, they have also had a positive impact on barrio residents. Through these, people created stronger bonds, and fraternal relationships emerged. The community learned to stick together in times of need, becoming a supporting and welcoming entity.

This first story highlighted how barrio urban spaces are ultimately relational spaces. People squatted in places recommended by friends or close to where their families lived; people located their shacks close to family or friends; they developed and expanded their houses to accommodate family growth. Essentially, the decision-making about the development of the barrio was based on the residents' relationships.

A strong sense of community and rootedness to place arose in the barrios through these relationships. Community bonds were created through the development of the urban space. New ways of socialisation emerged, generating a barrio culture. Barrio public spaces, such as staircases and streets, enable social interaction and relationships, as they are created by people so that they can connect to each other.

In conclusion, the barrio urban space is a complex phenomenon created through relationships, institutional mediation and diverse power relationships. All these elements have impacted how the space is shaped and how people relate to it. The perceptions of and meanings associated with the space have been constructed over time as the barrio developed. However, the physical space is only one element of what constitutes place. The activities that take place in the barrio play an important role in the meanings people give to it. These activities are depicted in the following story.

5 ACTIVITIES IN THE BARRIO URBAN SPACE

'Can't you see we all fit here?'
José Antonio, La Dolorita, 10 April 2009

The barrio urban space is a complex entity that has been built over time involving enormous effort and deep emotions. The interaction among the different levels of the private and public space spectrum contributes to the construction of place. In addition, the various activities engaged in in the public space help define the meanings associated with these urban spaces and with the community.

The activities range from the general to the particular, from the daily to the occasional. This second story builds upon the story depicted in Chapter 4, aiming to answer the second research question: *How do residents use the physical spaces of the barrios to express their religious culture?*

Thus, this story is shaped around three different parallel clusters of activities: (1) everyday, (2) criminal, and (3) religious. Although these activities seem dissimilar, the everyday, the criminal and the religious activities are closely linked and have a significant impact on each other which together comprise positive and negative psychosocial collective constructions of space. Comprehending how these activities relate and how people engage in them provides another understanding of how people develop their sense of place and community, thereby allowing us to gain further insight into place-making processes. Acknowledging that everyday and criminal activities are vital in the construction of place, this chapter focuses mostly on the religious events.

5.1 EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES

Everyday activities became a significant topic in the understanding of the construction of the barrio as a meaningful place. The main aspects of people's daily usage of the urban space relate to sharing with other community members, playing, exercising and practising sport. These everyday activities are the positive uses of

the barrio urban space that lead to attachment and enjoyment of it. Through these activities, people create bonds and their sense of community is strengthened.

As explained in the previous chapter, public spaces in barrios are relational spaces. The scarce sports courts, the streets, intersections, and pedestrian paths are the places where residents congregate, interact and bond. People of all generations, gender and ages use these spaces intensively on a daily basis.

This intensive use keeps the urban space activated, which further encourages residents to utilise it, even at unusual hours. Spaces such as the Arch in Julián Blanco are places of economic, transport and social interchange. The market is set up in these spaces; shops and some medical services also tend to be concentrated here. In addition, these spaces are where all the barrios main roads and pedestrian paths usually meet.

Furthermore, despite the impact of the topography on the shape of the urban space, children use the streets, intersections and roundabouts as playgrounds. Playing in the barrios' open spaces involves practising different sports like baseball and basketball, or hide and seek among cars, or, as Video 1[88] shows just sliding down the hill in a plastic fruit box. All these informal and playful activities show how barrio residents adapt to the physical complexities of this type of urban space.

Cultural events, community festivities and meetings also occur in these spaces, and so they become places of community bonding. In barrios, these activities tend to extend beyond the public realm into the private. Houses become part of the community dynamics, because there are not enough public meeting places. The larger houses sometimes host community meetings; others open their doors and invite people in when a cultural event such as a procession takes place. The boundary between the private and public spaces vanishes temporarily during some cultural and community activities, as discussed below. The barrios' quality as a relational space is taken to its limit. The relational quality extends beyond physical aspects to how people use their urban space. In these moments, private and public spaces become one joint communal place.

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[88] Video 1 link: https://youtu.be/nZ_dInZClO4

There are not enough community facilities and public spaces for people to gather and engage in cultural activities. Some of these, like many private spaces, can be adjusted to accommodate different activities, and thereby become flexible spaces. The flexibility of urban spaces in barrios allows residents to appropriate the space in various ways. The meaning of the space changes depending on the activity that takes place in it, and as a result, the meaning is also flexible.

Highly-used spaces, such as activity hubs, sports fields and intersections, encourage people to feel safe and take part in activities in the public space (Borja & Muxí 2001a; Rountree & Warner 1999). However, when all community members, including the local thugs, share public spaces, the thugs often take over the space and become its only everyday users. Although the thugs sometimes use public spaces to hang out and play sports, their main activity in these spaces is related to criminal violence, limiting other community members' use of them. Thus, criminal violence emerges as another institution that mediates people's use of the space, their lives and the construction of place.

5.2 CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES

There is an inherent dichotomy in a barrio's urban space. Everyday activities are positive uses that lead to enjoyment and appropriation of the space and a deep sense of place. These constructive activities also lead to territoriality. Territoriality, however, relates equally to negative uses of the urban area, such as criminal activities. The barrio urban space hosts both the positive and the negative.

Criminal violence emerged during this research as an important, parallel, ongoing activity that co-exists with people's everyday lives, and criminal activities are highly significant in barrio dynamics. While only a small number of community members engage in these activities, they affect everyone's lives, as well as community cultural events. As a consequence, criminal violence is embedded in people's decision-making processes, perceptions and uses of the barrio urban space.

Violence and criminality are directly related to the different gangs that live in and *rule* the individual barrios (Moreno 2009a). Gangs' internal and territorial

organisation not only determines how they behave and move around, but also influences how the rest of the community live their lives and interact with each other. This sub-section focuses on criminal activities that affect residents' lives and the impact these activities have on resident's lives and perceptions of the barrio urban space.

5.2.1 Criminal activities in the barrios urban space

The two most significant criminal activities in urban space are: (1) hanging out and scheming, and (2) shootouts. Criminal activities and criminal violence in barrios are mostly engaged in by males between the ages of 10 and 25 years old (Moreno 2011b). They form different gangs based on where they live and hang out, in addition to the relationships between them.

These male teenagers gather in the urban space designed almost exclusively for them: the basketball courts. Although these gang members use these spaces to play sport, they also appropriate them to engage in other activities such as scheming, dealing and using drugs, and consuming alcohol. Gangs use these urban spaces intensively. As Moreno (2011a) and Trigo (2008) state, in Venezuela basketball courts become the nests of delinquency.

> JE: (…) Esa cancha (…) la gente poco la usa, porque dicen que la tiene controladas las bandas… de la delincuencia.
>
> *JE: (…) that basketball court (…) few people use it, because they say that delinquent gangs control them*
>
> JM: [acerca de El Parquecito] ¡Es casi que el centro de las bandas de por ahí!. (…) tal vez son lugares que toman como que las bandas y se pasan ahí los malandros, y todo esto.
>
> *JM: [about El Parquecito] It's almost the centre of gangs around the area! (…) they are maybe places that gangs appropriate and thugs hang out and all that*

The thugs assign a profound meaning to the basketball courts they use every day. These spaces have a deep positive meaning for gang members, but a mostly negative meaning for other community members. Thus, the sense of place and the meaning of the space change from group to group within the barrio. The appropriation and meaning of the public space can also vary on a temporal level; it can change from weekday to weekend, from month to month, and year to year. Meanings associated with the urban space are not static; they are not either negative or positive all the time. Associated meanings fluctuate over time. In this way, the flexibility of the urban space is psychosocial (intangible) as well as physical (tangible).

Criminal violence in barrios is mostly associated with shootouts, which, despite not occurring on a daily basis,[89] are a very common criminal activity in barrio urban public spaces. Shootouts can happen anywhere at any time of the day. However, they usually occur at night around the barrio's meeting places: the basketball court or the main intersections. From there they can spread out into other spaces, because when shootouts start, gang members tend to flee and spread, thus taking criminal violence to other places like main streets and staircases. In this way, gang violence puts all community members at risk.

People in barrios live in fear: fear of being mugged, fear of being caught in a shootout, fear of being murdered. Criminal violence impacts on how the community moves around and uses the urban spaces. In other words, fear of criminal violence drives residents' lives in the barrio. Criminal violence became an institution that displaces the community. Gangs have taken over the barrios' urban spaces, deeply impacting on people's everyday lives.

5.2.2 Criminal activities' impact on residents' everyday lives

The impact of gangs and criminal violence in barrio residents' everyday lives fit in two linked categories: (1) displacement and (2) territorial boundaries. These

[89] In barrios, there are quiet and violent periods. The latter are related most times to the release, imprisonment, hideout or killing of gang members. The length of these periods is not fixed; cycles of violence can last for several months. Also, it is important to highlight that during the quiet season a shootout or murder could also occur, however, they would not happen on an everyday basis.

two elements influence how residents and outsiders move in the barrios, how they relate to neighbours and how they relate to the urban space. Criminal violence is constantly modifying the use of the urban space, hence constantly changing the meaning of the space.

5.2.2.1 Displacement: fear of using urban spaces

In the previous chapter, I highlighted three levels of physical displacement that barrio residents have experienced: (1) *from rural area/regional town to the city*, with lack of opportunities in the place of origin being one driver of displacement; (2) *from city to barrio*, a market-driven displacement that happened because migrants could not access the housing market and had to squat on undeveloped land; and (3) *from barrio to barrio*, driven by government intervention by evicting residents, forcing them to relocate in other barrios.

Criminal violence, gangs and residents' fear compose the driver of the fourth level of physical displacement in barrios: *out of urban-public spaces*. The fear generated by criminal violence has had an effect on people's use of and relation to urban space. Experiencing a shootout or any other kind of criminal violence drives people to change their routines and paths to avoid places where gangs meet.

Through their experience of shootouts, people start to identify spaces as safe and unsafe according to whether the gangs are using them at the time. This fourth level of displacement in the barrio leads residents to find new spaces or to cluster activities into the *safe* spaces. This supports the argument presented in the previous chapter, that people perceived that they did not have enough open public spaces and facilities.

5.2.2.2 Territorial boundaries

Displacement in barrios is closely related to territorial control. The international literature agrees that gangs have strong ties to the territory in which they operate, with definite (but sometimes invisible) boundaries (Bangerter 2010; Brantingham et al. 2012; Briceño-León 2007; Herrera Rodríguez et al. 2016; Sotomayor 2016). However, a large amount of the literature focuses on territory as fundamental to the gang's identity, leaving aside the topics of security and control

(Sánchez-Jankowski 2003); whereas both perspectives are paramount to understand territory in the context of place and community.

Gangs have unspoken behavioural rules linked to specific territorial boundaries, which when broken lead to gang wars and shootouts. It was tacitly understood during the interviews that people associated the fear they felt for gangs with their feeling about particular places. Places where criminal activities were very likely to happen became places that residents feared, demonstrating a process that we could call *territorial transferral*. This process deeply impacts the construction of the meaning that people give to the urban space.

This urban-psychosocial *territorial transferral* process is grounded in the understanding that people generate emotions and feelings towards others, and those feelings are transferred to the urban space. In this case, fear of criminal violence is transferred to the territory as fear of space. In this instance, this urban-psychosocial process has two different layers of understanding and transfer: (1) *emotional transferral*, where fear of specific thugs or gangs are transferred to the urban space, and (2) *boundary transferral*, where the community adopts thugs' territorial boundaries as their own.

The first layer of the territorial transferral process consists of the association of emotions towards a person or group with the urban space. In the case of the barrios, when people transferred their fear of a thug or gang to an urban space, the process expanded to assign negative associations with place. This collectively constructed negative meaning leads to spaces being stereotyped and stigmatised, with an immense impact on people's lives.

> YU: (…) Y esa calle, eh, la llamaban *La Calle del Mal* (…) ¡[otros malandros y policía] mataron a todos esos muchachos que eran dueños de la calle!
>
> *YU: (…) and that street, eh, people called it* Evil Street *(…) they [other thugs and police] murdered all those kids who were the owners of the street!*

The perception of safety and the rationalisation of the urban space usage become a deciding factor in how non-delinquent community members relate to the urban space. The quote above clarifies how activities in urban spaces can lead to

the negative stigmatisation and categorisation of a place. There is an underlying understanding that criminal violence is the major happening on that street and that thugs own that place. Even after the thugs were murdered, the name and the feelings associated with that street remained. This is an example of *emotional transferral.*

This quote raises another question: *Who owns the urban (public) space? How are the private and public defined in barrios?* The concept of public spaces in barrios goes beyond their physical openness or accessibility. Publicness relates to the actual possibility of using barrios' open spaces. Gang members who are part of the community unofficially decide when and who uses the urban space. Power relationships that lead to this privatisation of the urban public space become evident. In this case, *power* is determined by the ability to take someone else's life. As a consequence, these *public* spaces in barrios become in reality *semi-private* places ruled by gatekeepers, whose decisions about who may use the space is based on relational criteria. The barrio urban space is therefore a relational space not only in its construction and development but also in establishing how it is used.

Although basketball courts are the clearest example of the privatisation of the public space, this privatisation also extends to streets and pedestrian pathways. The gangs themselves do not usually prevent non-delinquent community members from using a barrio's urban public spaces. Rather, the community imposes its own self-limitation because of the *emotional transferral* process. *El Parquecito* is one of the most significant examples of this process. *El Parquecito* is a basketball court in Julián Blanco used solely by the criminal gang of the area 364 days a year. Despite this being the most central open public space in the area, accessible through various roads and pedestrian paths, close to public transport and minutes away from the main entrance to the barrio, people avoid even walking by this space.

The second layer of *territorial transferral* involves the community adopting as their own the unspoken yet acknowledged territorial boundaries that apply to gangs. A gang's territorial boundaries originate from usage and attachment and to reflect power. The strong sense of belonging leads gang members to appropriate the space and claim it as their territory. Frequently territoriality is also associated with the place where the thugs were born or raised, or where they live at the time of

joining the gang. Consequently, the territory extends not only to the gathering place, but also to the whole barrio where they live.

> Q: Yo me juro que ellos tendrán sus normas (…) ¡Y ellos lo respetan!. Y en el momento que tú no respetes esa decisión lo tienes… ¡frito y ya! (…) O sea, yo he visto experiencias de gente que le dicen a los muchachos '¡No pases por ahí, porque tú sabes que ese terreno prohibido para ti!' (…)
>
> *Q: I swear they must have their rules (…) And they respect them! And the moment you don't respect that decision you have it… you're screwed and that's it! (…) I mean, I've seen experiences of people telling the kids 'Don't go that way, because you know that's forbidden territory for you!' (…)*

Territoriality leads to unspoken yet known territorial boundaries that gang members cannot cross. The consequences of challenging them are usually fatal. All community members know the areas' territorial boundaries. The *boundary transferral process* originates when the fear residents have towards thugs expands to other barrio gangs. People fear that just being from the same area of an *enemy gang* is enough reason for other thugs to harm them. This fear therefore spreads from the specific criminal gang to being associated with the territory where that gang lives, and community members start limiting their movement into other barrios.

> L: (…) Entonces ya en la población, en la zona se crea el temor de desplazarse de una zona a otra, porque simple y llanamente hay rencilla entre las bandas. Entonces 'yo como soy de este sector aunque yo no esté en la banda, es probable que estos al saber que yo soy de allá, bueno hagan lo que… me maten o equis'. Entonces, está ese temor en algunos sectores. No hay desplazamiento sino a cosas necesarias y después se regresan
>
> *L: (…) Then, in people, in the area there is fear of moving from one area to another, simply because there is a quarrel among gangs. Then 'as I'm from this area, even though I'm not involved in the gang, it's likely that by knowing I'm from there, they, well, do what they… they kill me or whatever.' Then, there is this fear in some areas. There is no movement but just to do necessary stuff and then they* [people] *return.*

Thus people adopt the gangs' territorial boundaries as their own. These community boundaries are flexible and defined within people's imaginations. However unspoken or intangible these limits may be, they feel very real to the residents. The *territorial transferral process* defines how people relate to their barrio, demonstrating that ultimately the activities in the urban space dictate how this urban space is socially constructed.

The following section discusses communal religious activities that occur in barrio urban spaces, focusing on Holy Week processions as one of the most relevant activities that shape the construction of place.

5.3 RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Távara & Cueto (2015) argue that communities create bonds through their invested effort in the development of the community. Despite their different backgrounds, people tend to amalgamate their customs, driven by their shared struggle and disadvantage. As discussed in the previous chapters, Catholicism is the cultural element that all barrio community members share, bringing them together despite their diverse places of origin and cultural backgrounds. Religiosity is embedded in people's culture and everyday lives.

Individual and private religious practices aside, it is the Catholic Church, the community or both that organise several religious activities in barrio urban space. The two primary activities that these groups engage in are evangelising and expressing their faith through processions and other group activities. Evangelising means discussing the word of God while attempting to bring people into the Catholic religion and its practices. Clergy and community members deeply involved with the Church go door-to-door talking to people and inviting them to different Catholic and community activities. Reaching out to people keeps the barrio urban spaces in continuous use for religious activities. Other everyday religious uses of the urban space related to evangelisation and stimulating faith are developing street art, praying by street altars and in chapels; and education and youth programs led by the Church. Although all these activities are engaged in as a group, they focus on individuals.

Processions are yearly community events that occupy the barrios' urban space as a demonstration of people's existing faith.[90] Barrios have several processions during the year, comprising those dedicated to specific saints or patrons, and the Holy Week processions. Participants highlighted the Holy Week processions as the most meaningful communal religious activities that occur in the barrio's urban space and they are an important aspect of the story about how this cultural activity draws the community together and influences the construction of meaning.

Several topics become significant in the discussion about Holy Week processions as an activity in the barrio urban space. Firstly, this section presents the general structure and meanings of the Holy Week processions. Thereafter the decision-making process about the processions is described, incorporating the power tensions between community and Church in relation to this activity and the use of space. Finally, the third topic is about the procession path itself and the physical and psychosocial interaction among the space, the procession and the people.

5.3.1 Holy Week processions overview

Although barrios host a variety of processions, it is the Holy Week ones that are the most significant Catholic event that barrio residents share, bringing them together more powerfully than any other procession. The processes of preparing, developing and participating in the processions have several aspects to them that are significant in the construction of meaning of this cultural event, its interaction with the urban space and hence the meaning of place itself.

Holy Week constitutes the week before Easter, comprising the different celebrations from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, also known as Resurrection Day (*The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* 1997). Some participants include Friday of Sorrows in this week's celebrations. Table 5.1 presents a typical Holy Week structure.

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[90] For more general information about processions and their meaning in Catholicism, refer to Appendix A

Table 5.1: Holy Week structure

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				Friday of Sorrows		Palm Sunday
Holy Monday	Holy Tuesday	Holy Wednesday	Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday	Good Friday	Holy Saturday	Easter Sunday or Resurrection Day

According to Pollak-Eltz (1992), Venezuelans do not attend Holy Week processions that much or with much passion. However, this research showed that in Caracas, this phenomenon is different. In the past few years, attendance at processions has decreased in some areas. However, a significant proportion of barrio residents continue to participate passionately in this cultural tradition, while bearing in mind that processions usually vary from place to place and some are more 'popular' than others.

In well-established parishes in other types of urban areas,[91] there are activities and processions every day from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. In barrios, Holy Week processions are primarily on Palm Sunday, Holy Wednesday and Good Friday. These cultural-religious events in El Nazareno, La Dolorita and Julián Blanco started during the *development* period around the mid-1980s. The commencement of the processions followed the settlement of the different congregations in the barrios and the creation of the parishes. These processions concentrate the cultural/community feeling and highlight the significance of religiosity in people's everyday lives. In barrios there is also a transactional approach to processions, a factor reported by participants.

Worldwide, Palm Sunday celebrates with the Palms procession the triumphal arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem, an event that is consecrated with palms carried in procession that priests bless. As seen in Video 2[92], this is a festive procession that

[91] Areas with traditional and expansion urban fabrics, which are two types of Venezuelan urban fabric mentioned in Chapter 1
[92] Video 2 link: https://youtu.be/DSMVrQkI9b8

usually takes place in the morning. People attend this procession mostly to obtain a palm that has been blessed, which transfers the blessing to any space they put it in.

But in contrast to other Catholic countries, on Holy Wednesday Venezuelans celebrate the procession of the Nazarene, using an image of Jesus dressed in purple carrying the cross (see Figure 5.1). This procession originated in the 17th century in the Church of San Pablo in Caracas (Acosta Rojas 2014) and it enables people to thank Jesus for all the favours He has granted them.[93] People engage in a trade with God, where they ask for favours often related to health, and in return they 'pay the promise' by dressing up in purple and/or walking barefoot throughout the procession (as shown in Video 3).[94]

This Holy Wednesday procession has a deeper meaning for Venezuelans than other processions because they feel they can *interact* with God. People negotiate with Jesus, ask for protection and feel blessed just by walking next to him and experiencing his suffering, which is similar to their own. The urban public space becomes the stage of this interaction. The procession of the Nazarene is a great part of Venezuelan Catholic culture, as well as a strong cultural tradition. People do not question the origins or the reasons behind it. For participants, processions and this people-God-urban space interaction are not questioned. They take part in this practice because it is the tradition, because it is part of their culture.

The Palm Sunday and Holy Wednesdays processions have both a cultural and functional layer attached to them. People participate in these processions as well as in the interactions and negotiations with God because it is a tradition transmitted through generations for centuries. Participants perceive, as Catholics in general also do, that having a blessed palm consecrates the space where it is put, and that *asking for favours* and *paying promises* in the Nazarene procession are common and accepted practices. Although these events seem to emphasise a transactional approach to processions, there is still a spiritual layer to them. Good Friday processions highlight this transcendent connection between people and processions.

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[93] This could be related to a favour granted throughout the previous years or several years before.
[94] Video 3 link: https://youtu.be/QeUfUP9PcAc

Figure 5.1: Julián Blanco's Nazarene with community leaders. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

According to *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (1997), on Good Friday Catholics commemorate Jesus' crucifixion; there is no mass, just

communion. In Venezuela, on Good Friday there are two processions, one following the other. The first one is the Way of the Cross, which is enacted either with images or with community actors. In barrios, teenagers involved in youth programmes enact this procession (Figures 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4). The three areas of study hold this Good Friday procession, however they vary in scale and attendance. Video 4[95] shows Julián Blanco's Way of the cross, which in addition to the enactment by the young community members also incorporates the Nazarenes from all the different areas of the barrio. Video 5[96] shows the procession in La Dolorita, in which more people participate, as believers from the whole parish attend. Finally, Video 6[97] shows the Way of the Cross in El Nazareno; this procession is larger because more resources are invested in it, and because it has a metropolitan impact.

After the Way of the Cross' last station (the crucifixion), the procession ends and links with the Holy Sepulchre procession, which brings the image of the dead Jesus to the church. These two processions have different objectives, behaviours, feelings and meanings. The Way of the Cross symbolises what happened to Jesus in his last hours. People share the experience with Him in this process; it is an environment of curiosity and pain. As showed in Video 7[98], the Holy Sepulchre procession is more intimate and self-reflective even when there are thousands of people surrounding one. It is about respecting that Jesus died for the people. There is usually silence and candles.

[95] Video 4 link: https://youtu.be/g-3oyXhSS6E
[96] Video 5 link: https://youtu.be/kvmpnjLG3i0
[97] Video 6 link: https://youtu.be/XYfACPFfNcg
[98] Video 7 link: https://youtu.be/B1Dh0ylqRII

Figure 5.2: Way of the Cross - Station 1. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

Figure 5.3: Way of the Cross - Station 1. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

Figure 5.4: Way of the Cross. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

In barrios, these three processions originally followed the Catholic religious traditions, but as the years have passed, the barrio communities have taken these traditional approaches and made them their own, adapting them to their particular conditions. Here, the processions are updated in accordance with each community's requirements and participation. Religiosity is a dynamic cultural construct that changes over time. Often these changes relate to the characteristics of the activity in the urban space, thus modifying the relationship people create with the place during the procession. As a consequence, the meaning of the space is transformed, making meaning a flexible construct as well.

5.3.2 Procession decision-making processes

For Holy Week processions to happen, several matters need to be decided. Ranging from the specific time, path and stops to the organisers and participants, the decision-making process often involves negotiation between community

organisers, the Church and the wider community. The gangs are not involved in this decision-making process. However, given that the thugs identify as Catholics as do the majority of the barrio residents, they also trust the leaders to make the Holy Week procession decisions.

Of all the issues that need to be resolved, the procession path is the most important decision to make in relation to the urban space. Determinations as to where the procession will start, through which streets it will go, at which houses and public spaces it will stop, and where it will end all affect people's participation and involvement in this activity. They also affect bystanders and other communities. Since this religious activity defines all other activities in barrios' urban space, the decision about the route affects how the whole barrio urban space is used on procession days. The role of the urban space as a dynamic entity interacting with the procession defines the Catholic event and other activities. Understanding the dynamics of this decision-making process and its outcomes enables further comprehension of this cultural layer of meaning of the urban space.

The decision-making process in barrios can be organic and unstructured. Sometimes instead of following an established process, decisions are made based on relational criteria. This is characteristic of places like Julián Blanco which has no strong clerical leadership at any time.

Since the Holy Week procession paths were first established, they have remained virtually unchanged. However, the organisers, usually comprising community leaders and priests, meet on a yearly basis several months in advance of the procession date to re-evaluate the path and the various resources needed for the procession. Despite the procession path being re-evaluated and decided months before to the event, the organisers always leave room for last-minute modifications in response to community requests or special situations, such as the Bishop visiting the barrio. Depending on the request, the organisers may reshape the procession path, or the planned stops. These changes may relate to visiting an ill person or blessing a new settlement or a street characterised by violence.

In Catholicism, there is the belief that all the areas traversed by the procession are blessed and temporarily sacralised. Thus, whatever negative

situation[99] barrio residents may be experiencing changes and improves when the procession takes place. This process of sacralising the space not only modifies its meaning but also resolves everyday problems.

Therefore, introducing changes into a well-established tradition usually comes with tensions and frictions within the organising parties. Incorporating new ideas can create conflict because of power shifts in the organisers' dynamics. This happens especially when newly-empowered members suggest modifications. In relation to this, several important topics can be highlighted: the community-Church relationship during the decision-making process; the inclusion of new areas vs. keeping traditions untouched; consideration of the wider community and their physical limitations and psychological boundaries; and the final agreement reached in the community.

In Julián Blanco, where the community has such a strong influence on the development of the religious events, changes can be introduced more easily than in other barrios where the Church has the final say. However, the tensions and topics mentioned above persist. As an example, in 2011 the Nazarene's procession path was changed to include the new squatter settlement: *La Invasión*. Keeping in mind that this procession was the one related to prayers for good health and a halt to violence in the community, one new community member made the initial decision to change the regular procession path to bless the area by having the Nazarene pass through it. However, in spite of this new person pushing this proposal, she did not ultimately decide this change. The final decision was made in consensus with the community leaders and the priests. Mrs María, one of *the founders* and traditional community leaders, let us know through her account how tensions rose in the community because of this issue. She said local priests had to be consulted about the decision. However, as seen in the previous chapter, they were not the people in charge of Julián Blanco, a community which is very collaborative and inclusive. The founders, who are held in the highest respect and usually decide on cultural events, often involve other community members and the priests and incorporate their suggestions into the final decision.

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[99] For example: extreme poverty, lack of affiliation to the Catholic or any other Church, or criminal violence.

The barrios' founders usually have a deep knowledge of their barrio and its people, giving them the legitimacy to decide on behalf of the community.[100] The founders quickly control the tensions that may arise in the community or between the community and the priests and they liaise with the many different people involved in this event. However, there are also new leaders coming up who are not that easily accepted by established leaders (Montero 2004). These community members sometimes want to incorporate changes in the events, such as including new settlements. Their aim is not to change the tradition, but to be more inclusive.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, having an evangelisation centre with a clerical educational role, the priests and seminarians serving the community in Julián Blanco are not permanent. They rotate constantly, so they do not have the chance to become established in the community or to take a directive role in the religious activities, as happens in other barrios. In Julián Blanco, it is the community that leads the decision-making process and dictates what will take place in relation to their cultural-religious traditions. In more structured areas like El Nazareno and La Dolorita, the procession paths and stops change very little, if at all. When the Church incorporates modifications, these usually relate to some personal requests.

In all the three barrios, however, part of the planning process for the procession path and stops is to give residents the option of asking for the procession to walk or stop by their door. In addition, the procession usually goes by or stops in front of houses where people who are ill live. The procession also stops in meaningful everyday places, like the bakery, because it supports the community and the people in need. The community value these spaces and services. This accommodation to residents' requests and values shows the same solidarity and resilience that has characterised barrio communities from their beginnings.

The impact of the congregation in the development of the procession is most noticeable. In barrios like El Nazareno and La Dolorita, where the Church is directive and has strong authority, the processions are meticulously programmed and organised. The priests make all the decisions and inform the community about

[100] In general, barrio leaders are usually good decision makers, as it is the case of Julián Blanco. However, this is no rule of thumb; there are exceptions to this quality.

the details of the event. Participants just receive the information and adjust to it. On the other hand, in barrios where the community has the lead, the procession is usually more disorganised, because multiple organisers are involved in it.

As Father Jesús says: '*This is a new way of doing church'* ['Esto es una nueva forma de hacer iglesia']; where the community takes an active role in and commitment to their religious experiences. Although this could be seen as innovative and empowering, the negative impact on barrio residents' cultural expression is evident. Despite significant participation in Julián Blanco, people in El Nazareno and La Dolorita attend their processions and other events in far greater numbers. They are better organised, leaving no questions about the activities and the times that they will occur. As participants explained, in Julián Blanco, the lack of organisation discourages residents from attending, because there is no clear guideline for the events.

The urban space is another significant factor in deciding the path of the procession, and in fact its influence is larger than either the Church or the community. In barrios, the morphology of the urban space is so specific that it determines categorically how the procession will happen.

In general, two main activities are considered when determining the path, namely where to move and where to stop. The procession consists of walking from a start point to an end space, with several stops along the way. The spaces where these two types of actions are engaged in need to have different characteristics. For the procession movement, the main criterion is having a space where people can walk as comfortably as possible while carrying or rolling the religious image; whereas the main physical criterion for the stops is space.

The urban space and the topography of the place is a substantial determinant of how this cultural-religious activity takes place. The procession usually goes through main streets as they connect the different areas of the barrio, the barrio entrances and the pedestrian paths, making this the most accessible path for most residents. Main streets also enable parents to bring prams, elderly people to walk easily, and other participants to carry or roll the saint (Figure 5.5). Staircases are used in peculiar situations where there is no other viable alternative. This is the

case with one sector in Julián Blanco, where the community house that hosts the religious image is located in an area accessible only by pedestrian paths.

Figure 5.5: Different generations at the Nazarene procession in La Dolorita. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

The dimension of the urban space made up of the private and public spaces that the residents built also defines where the procession stops take place. The rationale behind the decision-making process can be as simple as the reply of José Antonio from La Dolorita when asked why one of the stops was in a particular place: *'Can't you see we all fit here?'* ['¿No ves que aquí cabemos todos?'] (Figure 5.6). The urban space shapes the cultural event. The space where the procession concludes is determined by the size of that space. Usually, the procession ends in a sports field or large open space that can host large numbers of people while also allowing them to see the religious activity. In this case, the urban space is not just a

setting or a stage. The urban space becomes an active constituent of the cultural activity.[101]

Figure 5.6: Procession stop at street opening in La Dolorita. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

5.3.3 Procession path

The procession path comprises streets, intersections, parks and sports facilities. During the procession, there is a continuous interaction between the activity, the people and the urban space. This interaction comprises both physical changes in the urban space and actions while the procession occurs. Temporality is a noticeable element of this interaction. Beyond the understanding that this activity takes place on only a few days a year, there are other layers of time related to this event.

Another important phenomenon during the procession is that the urban boundaries discussed in the previous section are redefined, revealing a significant process in the dynamics of the barrio residents. This redefinition of boundaries allows us to add another layer of temporality to the meaning of the urban space.

5.3.3.1 Interaction of people-procession-space

The interaction among people, the procession and the barrio urban space spans several weeks before the procession to an indeterminate time after it. There

[101] In other non-Holy Week processions in contrast, criminal violence and personal safety also have an impact on the procession path.

are four ways in which people interact with the procession, each of them representing an important element in the meaning of the urban space. These ways of interacting are: 1) enhancement of the urban space, 2) overcoming challenges and obstacles, 3) people-to-people interaction, and 4) passive and negative participation.

5.3.3.1.1 Enhancement of the urban space

When a resident knows the procession is coming by his/her door, the family starts improving both the public and the private space for the event. Before the procession, residents start refurbishing their houses, painting the façades or beautifying them somehow if they have the financial resources to do so; people build temporary altars or decorate their windows, doors, and their street (Figure 5.7). These changes are a few of the positive impacts the cultural activity has on the barrios' urban space and morphology. In spite of the fact that this specific religious celebration is the driver of these physical changes, their temporality sometimes transcends the event itself.

People in barrios accommodate their urban spaces for the processions. The changes can start weeks or days before the procession and last several years after the event, as do house improvements. The urban space of the procession path is filled with stages, crosses, flowers, altars and candles. A few days before the procession, the organisers start modifying the urban space to prepare it physically for the Catholic event. However, these changes are temporary and last only a few hours or days after the event.

> BA: Bueno, cuando no hay procesión todo es igual, pues, una calle normal, común y corriente. Cuando hay la procesión, sí se cambian algunas cosas, pero más que todo son las tarimas. Porque de verdad que… el espacio y el recorrido… yo creo que es esencial (…)
>
> *BA: well, when there is no procession everything is the same, well, a normal street. When we have the procession, we do change a few things, but mostly the stages. Because truly… the space and the path… I believe are fundamental (…)*

Figure 5.7: Altar at house in Julián Blanco. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

The above quote shows that the preparation of the stages is one of the most important changes undertaken by the organisers in the barrio urban space. Most everyday barrio activities are put on hold, both criminal and non-criminal, to allow this traditional cultural event to take place. The streets and sports fields are prepared for the participants to carry or roll the images and for the actors to enact the Way of the Cross. This quotation reveals the importance to participants of the urban space in this activity. Without the urban space, this cultural activity would not take place, which unveils the meaning of space mediated by a cultural activity. The urban space goes from *normal* to '*fundamental'* [vitally important].

The Catholic procession as a cultural activity embeds a deep meaning and sense of belonging, as shown by the different interactions between people and the space that occur in the urban space during this event. However, despite the processions' positive elements, there are also challenges presented by the structure of the barrio urban space.

5.3.3.1.2 Challenges and obstacles in the urban space:

The barrios' urban space is usually narrow and well defined. The private space creates urban walls that enclose the public open space, making a clear path for the procession. However, during these religious events, people need to adjust to this narrowness and occupy the street from edge to edge.

In this minimal space, they also have to overcome other obstacles while walking in the procession. Parked cars, holes in the pavement, and lack of footpaths are just some of the impediments. There are motorbikes driving through the space along with the procession, and cars and buses waiting for the procession to pass. These obstacles in conjunction with the topography slow the procession and make it unique in comparison to processions in the formal areas of the city (where topography is more manageable and traffic is better controlled (See Figure 5.8 and Videos 8[102] and 9[103]).

Another obstacle in the urban space is sewage. However, there is a particular interaction with it. Unlike other obstacles that participants tend to dodge, as shown in Video 10[104] most fit people jump over the running water. For others it is normal to just walk over it. In processions such as the Nazarene, where people tend to walk barefoot and carry the Nazarene figure or a massive cross, penitents and promise payers disregard this health hazard and focus on their religious experience.

Despite the fact that the well-defined public urban space creates a clear procession path, that same space and the different elements in it also become a challenge that participants need to overcome. Thus, the urban space embodies a duality. However, no matter how many difficulties participants have to endure, the positive impact of the urban space in the definition of the procession path becomes more important to people in the process of creation of meaning.

[102] Video 8 link: https://youtu.be/jN9z1hAm064
[103] Video 9 link: https://youtu.be/NPNiCQI-q-A
[104] Video 10 link: https://youtu.be/_nXBIHDTaO0

Figure 5.8: Obstacles on Palm Sunday procession path in La Dolorita Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

5.3.3.1.3 People-to-people interaction:

There are different types of interactions among people during the Holy Week processions. However, the most relevant to participants relates to the interaction between organisers and the rest of the community during the procession. As part of the procession's organisation, organisers involved with the Church create a human chain around the images or the Way of the Cross actors. The intention is to give room to penitents while carrying the image, and to the actors to enact each station. It also dictates the pace of the procession. The human chain keeps the rest of the procession's participants in order during the procession.

This chain also decides who is allowed inside.[105] This can create tensions among community members. With the procession path's space so limited and defined by urban walls, it becomes difficult for the human chain to keep breathing room inside it for the penitents and the image. In these narrow places there is always a struggle between organisers and participants, between the spectators pushing inwards and the human chain pushing outwards (See Videos 11[106] and 12[107]). There is both a physical and psychological impact on this process. People struggle to walk and keep pace; community members feel the human chain does not allow them to use the space freely when in the procession. On the other hand, organisers in the human chain express frustration, as they are targets of complaint and lack of recognition for the effort they put into keeping the procession organised and going.

This physical and psychological struggle lasts only as long as the procession. Once the procession reaches the final urban space, participants appreciate the organisers' work and feel the space belongs to everyone. The organisers also feel appreciated and once again as any other member of the community. In this dynamic process among community members, the limiting space becomes a participant that shapes how people interact and how they relate to the urban space. Those physical limitations encourage residents to claim their place, demonstrating their connection to it.

5.3.3.1.4 Other ways of participating and interacting with the procession

In addition to the active participation mentioned above (walking, carrying, and decorating the urban space), people interact with the procession in other ways. In processions there is also passive participation. People living on the main roads go to their balconies, windows or doors to watch the procession go by (Figure 5.9). Some of them wear traditional purple clothes that link them to the procession. As shown in Video 13,[108] in most cases, bystanders stop whatever they are doing to

[105] On particular occasions the human chain participants allow elderly people, pregnant women and others with limited mobility to be inside the chain.
[106] Video 11 link: https://youtu.be/Ad3AtVo6Shc
[107] Video 12 link: https://youtu.be/bLNJL4tNdlY
[108] Video 13 link: https://youtu.be/0tTaJ3x7RYY

watch the procession pass. Whether they are drinking, talking, shopping or something else, when the procession comes they remain silent, turn down the music if they have it on, and cross themselves.

There are also groups of people who interact in a negative way with the procession. Drunks and non-catholics may talk or yell abuse at the participants; however, this has no significant impact on the procession.

Figure 5.9: Participants in the Way of the Cross procession on Good Friday in El Nazareno. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

In addition, there are people who want to go to the procession but cannot because of health or other major reasons. They usually open their front doors to allow the procession to come to them, a process that leads to a re-shaping of the public and private boundaries, as discussed in the following segment.

5.3.3.2 Urban space boundaries

The physical and psychosocial boundaries of the urban space change during the procession. On the tangible level, the differentiation between private and public space breaks down. On the intangible level, psychological barriers are broken, enabling residents to walk with the procession through different areas and spaces. The loosening of those psychosocial boundaries partly relates to how criminal gangs

and thugs use and interact with the space when the procession occurs. The changes in these physical and psychosocial limits consequently change the meaning of the space, as it is explained below.

5.3.3.2.1 Private-public space boundary

As discussed in the previous chapter, the barrios' urban fabric is characterised by a fine grain and dense structure, with continuous urban edges and well-demarcated open spaces. Open spaces are usually whatever is left over from the built-up private space. However clear the enclosed/private-open/public space relationship may be, the psychosocial barrier defined by these physical boundaries fade with religious activity.

During the procession, some people open their houses to allow the procession in. When the procession is just walking by an opened house, participants do not enter it. However, they interact with the house while the family interacts with the procession. The private space is made public despite people not physically entering it. In cases where the procession actually stops at a house,[109] this interaction is further emphasised. Part of the procession enters the person's house to bless it and make it part of the path. At that moment that private space becomes public. Although not all parishioners go inside the house, after the priest, image and other participants leave the house and continue with the procession, the doors remain open and the procession-private space interaction continues. In places where there are semi-public spaces, they also become public.

The ephemeral social limits Guitián (2007) discusses, become evident with this interaction. Clear physical boundaries lose their psychological strength. The procession emphasises the pedestrians' continuous interaction with private spaces. The interaction goes beyond a couple of friends or neighbours connecting, it involves the whole procession with all its participants. This phenomenon indicates there are various intangible layers interacting with the physical boundaries between the clearly defined public and private spaces. Depending on the activity that takes

[109] As discussed in the previous section this happens mainly because the family requests it or because there is an ill person.

place in the urban space, the boundary between public and private adjusts to accommodate the happenings in the space.

5.3.3.2.2 Criminal gangs and processions: redefining territorial boundaries

Criminal gangs define another layer of the re-shaping of the psychological barriers in the barrio urban space. Section 5.2 discussed criminal activities in the urban space and how they affected people's everyday lives. In relation to that impact, the question of *what makes an urban space public* arose. So too did the concept of *territorial transferral process* emerge, comprising two different layers, *emotional* and *boundary transferral*. This process and the psychological limits people have developed are modified when there is a procession in the barrio urban space.

Thugs usually interact with and respect religious and community spaces, although they do not regard these spaces as sacred to the same extent that the community as a whole does. However, criminal gangs tend to keep their delinquent activities away from these places. In public spaces *shared* for everyday (criminal and religious) activities, the thugs tend to either withdraw from or get involved with a religious activity when it occurs. Criminals thereby respect not only the physical space but also the community's intangible shared cultural space.

This respect for the cultural activity makes the privatisation of urban spaces discussed in the previous section vanish, enabling the wider community to use spaces, such as the basketball courts. The gatekeepers allow their free use, as the community demands and claims these spaces. Power relationships shift with the religious activity. Gangs are no longer the ones holding the power; the community in conjunction with the Church holds it.

> JM: (…) con cara de susto dicen que ¡no!, porque… las bandas tienen problemas (…) Sin embargo, asisten a la procesión (…) '¡Vamos a la procesión! Y vamos a la procession.' ¡Asustados, apurados! (…) pero ¡fueron!
>
> *JM: (…) with a frightened face they say no!, because the gangs have issues (…) however, they come to the procession (…) 'Let's go to the procession! And let's go to the procession.' Frightened and in a hurry (…) but, they went!*

Tradition and culture is stronger than fear. Sense of community and sense of place driven by the religious activity become evident. Claiming a particular urban space as a tradition and a vital part of the cultural-religious event is an expression of the sense of belonging to that place. As an example shown in Video 14,[110] *El Parquecito* in Julián Blanco shifts from being a semi-public feared space to a public community place. The emotion towards this place changes when the procession takes place. People claim it as theirs.

Another important aspect of boundaries and the procession path relates to religious and community traditions. Having the same space in which to finish the procession is a tradition that the community demands be kept, as happens with El Parquecito in Julián Blanco and with El Morro in El Nazareno.[111] Despite the differences between these two spaces, the first being a space for delinquents and the latter a community-religious park, both are meaningful to people both on an everyday basis and when the procession occurs. The meanings can differ from one to the other; however, in both spaces the sense of place strengthens with the procession.

The 'out-of-urban-public-spaces' displacement compounded by people's fear of gangs and thugs vanishes when the procession happens. Through these religious activities people start claiming these spaces, thus overcoming displacement. In Julián Blanco, the meaning of the basketball court changes from a fearsome place to a safe space. Although some people still fear going there, they attend the procession because the community appropriates that space during that activity. People's transferral of the emotions they feel towards thugs to specific places ceases during the religious event.

The boundary transferral adopted from the thugs' boundaries also disappears. The limits people impose on themselves about walking from one sector

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[110] Video 14 link: https://youtu.be/5pRS8PbzwQQ

[111] The reasons why these spaces were chosen as the end space for the procession were not discussed with the participants of this research. As in other cases in this study, we could assume that the reason was the size of the space which enabled all procession participants to fit and enjoy the end of the procession. However, when asked about why the procession ended there and not elsewhere, the main reason was *because it is the tradition*. This is a matter that could be addressed in a follow up study.

to another cease during the procession. People may still be afraid, but that does not stop them from crossing the intangible and/or invisible limits of the sectors. The only people who cannot move freely are the thugs.

> Leonardo (LE): (…) uno de esos malandros… paga promesa. Llegó con su gorrito… allí morado (…) ¡él cargó! [la imagen] (…) ¡Ah! ¡y eso sí!, que, 'bueno, yo lo acompaño desde aquí hasta San José y desde San José hasta acá otra vez, pero yo desde aquí para allá no puedo pasar.' Porque tiene culebras, tiene no sé qué…
>
> *LE: one of these thugs… paid a promise. He came with his purple hat*[112] *and he (…) carried! [the image] (…) Ah! but the thing was 'well, I'll walk with it from here to San José, and from San José to here, but from this point forward I cannot go.' Because he had* snakes,[113] *has, don't know what…*

This quote highlights two relevant aspects: (1) thugs attend processions and participate in them as any other community member, and (2) the territorial boundary for thugs persists. Gang members share the religious culture with the rest of the community, respecting the spaces and traditions, and some even participate in them. During the procession the rest of the community does not exclude young teens and men from criminal gangs; they are welcome to be part of this peaceful and shared environment. The sense of belonging that criminals never felt (Moreno 2011b) is experienced in this space. During the procession thugs are just like any other participant; they walk, carry the image and share with others in a non-criminal way. However, they never cross their gang's territorial boundary.

The respect and involvement thugs have for religious spaces and activities such as processions show the deep meaning of Catholicism as a cultural construct in Venezuelan people. Despite the differences regarding place of origin and whether people are involved in criminal activities or not, Catholicism is the most commonly

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[112] Purple is the traditional colour to wear on Holy Wednesday, because it is associated to the Nazarene.
[113] *Snakes* is the Venezuelan slang word for having problems with another thug or gang. Usually it means that another thug wants to kill the person with the *snake*.

shared cultural construct among barrio residents, one which allows a public use and appropriation of the urban space.

5.4 CONCLUSION: RE-SHAPING THE URBAN SPACE

The dimensions of barrio urban spaces are continuously re-shaped, depending on the various activities that take place in them. This process comprises changes of meaning mediated by psychosocial and temporal layers. Meanings of place[114] change continuously from negative to positive and vice versa due to the flexibility of the urban space. Simultaneously, elements such as the streets, staircases, topography and open spaces define the activities that take place in the urban space. They also have an impact on the procession decision-making process. Participants understand the urban space as *fundamental* in their everyday lives and cultural events, demonstrating its deep meaning to them.

Public-private boundaries in barrios are constantly modified through the activities that take place in the urban space. People open their houses to neighbours, making the private-public limit flexible. Residents offer their homes to host community events when enclosed places are needed. Community bonds deeply impact the everyday use of space. During religious activities, the flexibility of the boundary is enhanced. Even strangers can access or interact with the private space, demonstrating the relevance of this cultural event in the psychosocial construction of place. The flexibility of the public and private space boundaries occurs because of the different relationships that exist among community members. Barrio urban space is a relational space in the different contexts of everyday, criminal and religious activities.

Criminal violence, and the state's failure to ensure personal safety, generates the fourth level of physical displacement that barrio residents may experience: *out of the barrio urban (public) space*. With criminal activities, the public space becomes privatised. Thugs play a tacit gatekeeper role and hold the power to determine usage of the barrio urban spaces. The process of *territorial transferral*

[114] The meaning of place is discussed further in the following chapter.

emerges, involving two layers, *emotional* and *boundary transferral*. The first associates the fear of thugs with the urban space, limiting as a consequence how people experience their barrio. The second involves residents adopting thugs' boundaries as theirs because they fear being attacked by other criminal gangs. The relational quality of barrios is an important element in the construction of the boundary transferral process. Barrio residents adopt thugs' boundaries because they believe gangs from other barrios may associate them with their barrio's gang. This is because of the unspoken understanding that the space and the community are constructed through fraternal relationships.

This psychosocial territorial transferral thus has a tangible aspect to it, showing how people move in the physical spectrum. Although this transferral is a significant part of barrio residents' lives, when the procession occurs these limitations and displacement temporarily vanish, leaving the urban space one in which people can move freely and safely. During processions, this psychological privatisation of the space vanishes, giving all community members access to all urban spaces. When a cultural event takes place, the power shifts from the criminal gangs to the community and the Church, and the urban space changes its meaning from an unsafe and fearsome space to a safe public place. This emphasises the relevance of culture as a re-shaping element of the urban space.

Despite the diverse levels of participation and interaction, Holy Week processions are the cultural events that bring the whole community together, leading to the psychosocial processes of belonging and appropriation. The meaning of the religious activity and community bonds extends from the people to the place, creating an understanding that the different links within the community are tied to the co-construction of the place. Processions also sacralise the barrio urban space. People believe processions have the power to improve negative situations and the urban space, thus impacting even further on the meaning of space.

El Parquecito in Julián Blanco appears to be one of the most significant examples of Holy Week processions reshaping meaning of the space. The whole community uses this *unsafe* space one day a year on Good Friday because of the tradition of ending the procession at that basketball court. That day the basketball court becomes a safe community space the whole community can claim as theirs.

Catholicism is the shared cultural construct among all barrio residents, including thugs, who participate in this religious event. *El Parquecito* becomes a place of encounter, a place where the community shares a feeling, a space, and their culture.

In conclusion, the meaning and appropriation of the barrio urban public spaces vary from minute to minute. In barrios, the constructs of belonging, attachment and place are constantly modified and mediated by the different activities that occur in the urban space. That meaning and appropriation of the barrio are also related to how the community interacts and to the construction of the sense of community and belonging. There is a close link between sense of community, sense of place and the social construction of place. The next story, in the following chapter, delves into the meanings associated with community and religiosity as a cultural construct, to enable a better understanding of the meaning of space and the place-making process.

6 MEANING OF BARRIOS' URBAN SPACE

"[the street] that day is more mine! More of our people's!"
Mrs. Ñaña, Julián Blanco, 30 April 2011

Barrio urban spaces have both positive and negative associated meanings. These transactional meanings between people, the urban space and its activities continuously reshape that significance of space and the place-making process. Beyond the fact that the meanings of community and religiosity enable the different activities that happen in the barrio urban space, they also continuously interact and re-shape the construction of place. Drawing from participants' accounts, this third story aims to answer the third research question: *What psychosocial meanings do residents associate with the [urban] spaces through which the processions move?*

The social construction of space has been previously investigated by authors such as Lefebvre (1991), who argues that spaces are social products, reflecting how social relations of production are maintained and reproduced in particular places. Lefebvre (1991) discusses how culture and history are as much part of the conception and production of the space, as the architect who designs it. However, his account is primarily a structuralist one about how space is produced and differentiated, that neglects the significant role of human agency, in particular how people assign meaning to the spaces they use.

Wiesenfeld (2001) argues that in the broad *sense of place* and *meaning* literature there is a gap regarding the underlying process of the social construction of place *meaning*. Additionally, a real understanding of why and how places are meaningful is lacking. Kyle & Chick (2007) state that a theory of meaning is incomplete because there is no understanding of what is transacted in the process of meaning-making. This thesis aims to fill that gap by interpreting what makes the urban space of barrios meaningful to their residents.

As discussed in the Methodology chapter, I focus on the socially-constructed meanings people give to their urban space through interaction and experience. As Low (1996) states:

> (…) the social construction of space is the actual transformation of space through people's social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting-into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning (Low 1996, p. 862)

In other words, the social construction of space is the psychosocial conversion of the space to a meaningful place through everyday experiences and social interactions. According to Cresswell (2004), there are two elements of places that are socially constructed: the materiality of the space and the meanings people assign to it through experiences. These experiences and interactions of and between people and the urban space over time through activities are paramount to the construction of meaning and sense of place (Eisenhauer, Krannich & Blahna 2000; Lombard 2014).

In this instance, the community and its entwined relationships and feelings are inherent to this social construction of place (Karplus & Meir 2014). As Wise (2015) states, 'sense of place' and 'sense of community' have an inherent relationship. Sense of community takes the form of solidarity and *collective action* when a strong sense of place exists (Agnew 2011; Nicholls 2009; Wise 2015); however, I argue later in this chapter that they grow in parallel. Places are relational spaces that enable the culture and social relationships (Nicholls 2009). Socialisation is an important part of sense of place; meaningful places are where people, meeting each other in their everyday lives, create their social construction of place.

> How people engage and interact with others give meaning to these spaces—constituting the making of place. When needs are fulfilled and shared emotional connections are spatially referenced, this combines psychological, sociological and geographical approaches to achieve a multidisciplinary understanding of community. (Wise 2015, p. 921)

In the case of barrios, the relationships and interactions among community members, including thugs, as well as the interactions that arise during Catholic processions, are important drivers of the construction of place. Sense of place is imbued with meanings and emotions, framed by culture (Altman & Low 1992; Hay 1998; Relph 1976; Tuan 1977). Conferring meaning to a space is a reflection of

people's cultural and social experiences (Eisenhauer, Krannich & Blahna 2000), making place meaning a dynamic construct. Massey (1994 cited in Gustafson 2001) states that places are not static, they can acquire different meanings over time. These meaningful places are not exceptional, they are just ordinary everyday spaces in which people have relevant experiences (Manzo 2005).

Meaning directly relates to the experiences and emotions attached to the activity that occur in the space (Cresswell 2004; Agnew 1987 cited in Gustafson 2001; Stedman 2003), where 'both negative and positive experiences contribute to place meaning' (Manzo 2005, p. 81). In places such as El Parquecito in Julián Blanco, ambiguity is present and meaning is malleable through activity, thus creating flexible meanings. Both negative and positive experiences and emotions are linked to this place. Residents rate it as dangerous and full of death; however, through positive cultural experiences, such as the Good Friday procession, people revisit and re-possess the place, even if temporarily. One place can mean different things to different people in different moments. 'The spaces, objects and things take on a meaning through use and time' (Petit cited in Pol 1996, p. 48).

The emotional relationship between people and space created through time and use is *place attachment* (Cresswell 2004; Stedman 2003), which is essential to creating a sense of place (Anton & Lawrence 2014; Cresswell 2004; Hay 1998; Kyle & Chick 2007; Shamsuddin & Ujang 2008). The role of place attachment relies on creating positive bonds with the urban space and the community that lives in it (Brown & Perkins 1992 cited in Brown, Perkins & Brown 2003). Through interaction, urban spaces can facilitate urban social identification processes and ownership (which relates to attachment) (Valera 1996), which, as Pol (1996) argues, promotes the transformation of spaces into *meaningful spaces*, either by an individual or a social group.

The sense of place and meaning are intertwined constructs, where the presence of feelings associated with the space becomes fundamental to the construction of place. Place attachment and sense of community are associated or embedded in the concepts of meaning and sense of place. Ultimately, places are composed of the physical space, the activities that happen in it and the meanings people give to the space (Cresswell 2004; Gustafson 2001; Hay 1998; Hidalgo &

Hernández 2001; Jorgensen & Stedman 2001; Kudryavtsev, Stedman & Krasny 2012; Löw 2013; Maines 2000; Manzo 2005; Relph 1976; Shamsuddin & Ujang 2008; Stedman 2003; Tuan 1977; Ujang 2014; Ujang & Zakariya 2015a, 2015b; Wiesenfeld 2001).

Building on the knowledge established in this research on the barrio urban space (Chapter 4), and on the activities that occur in it (Chapter 5), the focus of this chapter is to comprehend the associated meanings people give to their place, understanding that meanings and sense of place are socially constructed through experiences and human interaction in a particular context (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977; Wiesenfeld 2001). This thesis aims to contribute to the comprehension of meaningful places and place-making through understanding the three different elements comprising place (space, activity and meaning), by focusing specifically on Venezuelan barrios.

This chapter explores the meanings associated with the community, religiosity and the urban space, demonstrating the relevance of personal relationships and culture in the construction of place in barrios. The first section highlights the significance of the sense of community, and the complex personal relationships within the community, especially with thugs. The second part of the chapter discusses the importance to barrio residents of religiosity and processions, progressing from the mere activity to the centrality of the religious experience in people's lives. Finally, this chapter brings together the meaning of community and religiosity to discuss how they shape the meaning of the barrio urban space.

6.1 MEANING OF COMMUNITY

What the community means to barrio residents is directly linked to sense of community, that is, the relationship (feelings, bonding and attachment) between an individual and his or her social structure (McMillan 2011; Pooley, Cohen & Pike 2005; Talen 2000). A sense of community is created through informal social interaction and bonds with others, comprising additionally the emotions and feelings people create towards the place (Vidal et al. 2013). Francis et al. (2012) state that sense of community is a construct that links people and place. However, not all

communities are linked to a territory or physical space (Talen 2000), which explains why sense of community is not necessarily related to a neighbourhood or built or natural environment. Sense of community is about relationships between people.

Nonetheless, much evidence shows that sense of community is linked to physical space. For example, research by Távara & Cueto (2015) in a slum in Peru showed that sense of community was linked to the geographical and physical space, perhaps because poverty and disadvantage forced people to stay in the area and create bonds. As in Venezuela's barrios, it is in this space that the processes of change, crisis, conflicts, achievement and so on have taken place. It is also a space that has been tamed, to make it appropriate for and habitable by people. This contributes to the sense of community because its members have invested a great deal in this place; for this reason, the majority do not want to leave it (Távara & Cueto 2015).

Feelings towards the barrio are mediated through residents' sense of community, and all the processes leading to that sense. Sense of community is characterised by four components: (1) *membership*, consisting of the feelings of belonging to a group while embedding emotional security, belonging and identity, personal investment, and a system of shared symbols; (2) [mutual] *influence*, through participation, which leads to full integration into the group; (3) *integration and fulfilment of needs*, meaning personal and collective needs are fulfilled; and (4) *shared emotional connections*, comprising frequency and quality of interaction, shared history and investment in the community, and spiritual bonds among others (McMillan & Chavis 1986). Sense of community depends on the type of relationships built over time; history becomes a central factor in the creation of flexible emotional and affective bonds (García, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld 1999). Both everyday moments and times of struggle and scarcity reinforce the group's sense of belonging, while strengthening its boundaries (García, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld 1999; McMillan 1996; McMillan & Chavis 1986).

In Chapters 4 and 5 – stories 1 and 2 about the construction of the barrio and its activities – I established that barrio residents had a strong sense of community. These chapters depicted several elements that lead to an

understanding of how the barrio community is shaped and the meaning of that community to its people. These elements were:

- Community bonds originate and are reinforced through continuous displacement and other struggles that residents experience together, in conjunction with the lack of government support. As barrio residents could not rely on the state and suffered continuous discrimination and disadvantage, they had to cooperate with and rely on each other and the Catholic Church.
- Barrios are relational places. The barrio is constructed through personal relationships, leading to rootedness.
- Barrio residents invest money, time and emotions as a group in the construction of the barrio.
- There is a strong sense of territoriality that shows by physical means the difference and boundaries between insiders (local residents) and outsiders (thugs from other barrios and people from the city).
- Activities change group dynamics, promoting either more inclusion or more exclusion; this strengthens (through everyday and religious activities) or weakens (through criminal activities) the sense of community.
- Community members participate in and influence the decision-making process of cultural events, such as the Holy Week processions.

All those elements reflect some of the components in McMillan & Chavis' (1986) definition of sense of community. However, in the case of barrios, the community and its shared sense of community show more complexities than those described above. As Wiesenfeld (1996) explained, communities are socially constructed through complex and often conflicting processes; much of the conflict and negative emotions come from within, from the community members (Talen 2000; Wiesenfeld 1996). This makes the construct(ion) of community a multifaceted and dynamic matter. The complex relationships that take place in a physical environment also shape the meanings and emotions that are associated with, and often transferred to the space (as discussed in the territorial transferral process concept).

Complementing the processes discussed in the previous chapters that build and impact on residents' sense of community, their complex and contradicting

relationship with thugs constitutes an important phenomenon that mediates people's bond to their barrios. Through understanding the relationship with barrio delinquents, we gain a deeper comprehension of barrio residents' sense of community.

6.1.1 Relationship of thugs and other community members

The participation of thugs in Holy Week processions was discussed in Chapter 5. The community includes them in this activity because they share the same religious culture; they are welcomed to the community through this event and they find a sense of belonging there.

However, there are underpinning factors to this phenomenon. Interaction with thugs in barrios involves both fear and affection.[115] As Mrs. Ñaña, Mrs. Marlene (MA), Mrs. Doris (D) and Mrs María relate, they have known the teenagers that make up the local criminal gangs since birth; they are teenagers to whom these women taught Catholicism and tried to help, albeit without much success. They are saddened when they hear or see that they have become thugs, even more so when these youngsters get killed because of their delinquent activities. Similarly, these teenagers look up to these women, because they represent the mother or family that many of them never had (Moreno 2007; Trigo 2008). Thugs ask for their blessing[116] when they meet, they help them with little tasks and warn them when there is a threat of a shootout. Thugs respect and look after their female community leaders.[117]

> MA: ¡Mira!, tantos niños que han pasado por mis manos (…) cuando me ven me dicen: 'Señora Marlene, ¿Cómo está usted?'… Se esconden así [gesto como escindiendo algo en la espalda – una pistola] (…)

[115] Fear and the effects of criminal violence in the community were discussed in Chapter 5; this section focuses mostly on the positive sentiments between the community and the thugs.
[116] Traditionally in Venezuela kids ask their parents and grandparents for blessing every time they meet. This is also done with respected elderly community members.
[117] Venezuela has a matriarch society, where the mother stands as the central figure of the family and the community. This topic has been researched by (Moreno 2007, 2011b; Trigo 2008).

MA: Look! So many children that I've had in my hands (…) when they look at me they say: 'Mrs. Marlene, how are you?'… And they hide something like this [body movement as hiding something behind her back – a gun] (…)

Ñ: (…) '¡Ñañita, te presto mi pistola…! ¡La cuido!' ¡Esas cosas las he tenido que vivir! (…) Y sabes, si voy con bolsas entonces ellos me ayudan.

Ñ: (…) 'Ñañita, borrow my gun…! I take care of you!' Those things I've had to experience! (…) And you know, if I'm carrying bags then they help me out.

Everyone in the barrio, not only female leaders, knows the thugs and their families. As a result, and despite their unease and their fear of violence and gangs, the residents interact with the local thugs on an everyday basis and in relation to everyday matters. The wider barrio community do this not only because these thugs live in the barrio, but also because they are actually a part of the community (Moreno 2009a; Távara & Cueto 2015). Ultimately, they are viewed as a neighbour's kid, or a daughter's husband or through the lens of some other type of close relationship. Because of these community ties, barrio residents sometimes ignore the fear generated by thugs, and find a way to approach them. Despite the fear involved, these everyday interactions mean thugs also feel part of the community. Paradoxically, barrio delinquents protect the barrio and its residents, thereby reflecting their membership and emotional safety. There is an intrinsic sense of security which enables people to relate to thugs. This complex network of relationships allows the differentiation between outsiders and insiders, which in turn leads to territoriality and the protection of their own; this is demonstrated when barrio thugs warn people before shootouts occur. Most of these thugs were born and raised in the barrio, hence the strong sense of community and sense of attachment to the place that they exhibit.

Q: la gente de la comunidad era la única gente que podía pasar de un sector a otro… y que los malandros no les hacían nada, sino al contrario, les acompañaban ¡porque eran gente de respeto total!, porque los malandros también necesitan que personas les traten humanamente, porque, bueno, muy pocos malandros están, como, tan deshumanizados que no quieren conservar algo de eso, ¿no?. Entonces claro, para ellos era esto tan importante que

bueno, esto como '¡no me toques a esta persona por nada del mundo, porque, porque me importa mucho a mí!' (…) Pues, o sea, ese tipo de cosas… es lo que digo que no es tan, tan fácil ahora.

Q: The wider barrio community were the only ones who could walk from one sector to the other, and that thugs wouldn't do anything to, on the contrary, they accompanied them, because they were people to respect! Because thugs also need to be treated in a human way, because there are very few thugs that are so dehumanized that don't want to keep some of that, no? Then, of course, for them that was so important that they said 'don't touch that person at all, because, he/she matters a lot to me!' (…) Well, those kind of things… is what I say is not as easy nowadays.

Although thugs feel they are members of the community, and people acknowledge that, residents' fear towards thugs has greatly increased. Younger thugs are proud of being criminals, they show this openly to the rest of the community, and this has had a significant impact on residents' relationships. According to Moreno (2007), in Venezuela there are generational differences among thugs, and some of the younger ones are more daring and detached from the barrio and the community (García, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld 1999; Moreno 2007; Távara & Cueto 2015). Some of the priests interviewed, such as Father Quitelio, confirmed this detachment from the community and the place.

However, community leaders[118] stated clearly that thugs do not mess with them; as seen in previous quotes, they actually respect the clergy. The difference between the perspective of community members, what is found in academic literature and what the priests perceive arises from the fact that community leaders, especially the women, are more involved with the community, its dynamics and its people than the priests, who have only temporary roles in the barrios. Additionally, female leaders have established long-lasting emotional relationships that shape their approach to other community members, including the thugs, and to the barrio itself. This

[118] In this case both female and male

highlights once again the importance of understanding the relational nature of barrios, which translates to the urban space.[119]

Nevertheless, fear still exists, leading to an unstable and complex dynamic, filled with contradictory feelings of fear and affection within the community. These contradictory feelings also lead to disparate behaviours. On the one hand people approach and relate to thugs in their everyday life. However, the community also puts them aside, segregates them, and deals with them with caution and detachment. Community members acknowledge thugs to be part of the community, but at the same time they categorise them as a different group. Thus, barrio delinquents can be categorised as a group within the community. This exclusion can be described as the second type of intangible displacement[120] that happens in barrios: *from the community to thugs*. This entails mostly a psychological displacement. On a psychosocial level, people try to avoid gang members as much as possible, preventing thugs from becoming involved in community activities. In addition, when discussing these activities with thugs, the female community leaders ask them to behave and not to engage in criminal activities during a communal event, thus highlighting that from a community perspective they are not fully integrated into it. On a spatial level, as explained in Chapters 4 and 5, residents do not use spaces where thugs hang out, which points to a spatial segregation of gangs and their members. In Caracas' barrios, communities are becoming fragmented because of criminality and the fear it creates.

The complexity of this dynamic is further exemplified by the feelings of exclusion and inclusion on the part of and towards thugs. Thugs feel part of the community at all times, but some residents exclude them on an everyday basis. However, during special religious events, such as the Holy Week processions, gang members are invited and included in the cultural events. As discussed in Chapter 5, everyone[121] shares the same religious beliefs and traditions. This highlights the latent opportunity to bring thugs and the rest of the community back together as one community. Usually, when an activity that unites the community takes place, thugs

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[119] As it is further discussed in Section 6.3.
[120] The other four types of displacement are summarised at the end of Chapter 5.
[121] It needs to be acknowledged than in barrios, there is a very small minority of community members that adopt other religions different than Catholicism.

are welcome to participate peacefully in them. They become not just approachable people, but also an integral part of the community. In the case of the young delinquents, this integration helps to strengthen their sense of community. Adolescents have a stronger sense of community in environments where they feel they have a voice and are listened to and supported by adults (Evans 2007).

6.1.2 Other effects of criminal violence on the community

Criminal violence has other effects on barrio residents. When shootouts occur, the private-public boundaries become flexible once again, reshaping the use of the urban space. In addition, violence deeply impacts on the younger generation's sense of community and place, enhancing their desire to leave the barrio.

6.1.2.1 Opening the doors to other community members

In barrios everyone knows who everyone is and what everyone else does. All residents recognise the founders, the priests, the thugs, and all the community members. Sense of community also arises when shootouts occur in the urban space, modifying once again the relationship between the public and private.

> YU: (…) Yo… de broma no me conseguí entre una balacera. ¡Y nos salvamos porque fuimos a botar la basura, dejamos la basura tirada en la calle y nos metimos en una casa! (…)
>
> *YU: (…) I… almost was in the middle of a shootout. We were saved because we were going to dump the rubbish; we left it there in the middle of the street and went inside a house! (…)*

The permeability and changeability of the public-private space surfaces; the territorial boundaries change. During shootouts, people in barrios open their doors to neighbours in distress to protect them from the gangs. In this moment, the private space becomes semi-private, because even if the other person is a stranger, the house owner provides shelter during crisis. Community support and cooperation, and hence a sense of community, are embedded in barrio residents. The priority is to help each other in times of distress. As shown in previous chapters, even though

individualism can be found in the barrio development, in times of struggle the community comes together. In this case, criminality becomes a driver to strengthen sense of community among non-criminal barrio residents.

6.1.2.2 Leaving the barrio because of violence

As Brown, Perkins & Brown (2003) state, fear of crime diminishes attachment. Although this phenomenon cannot be seen in the initial generations of the Venezuelan barrios, it arises with younger generations, as shown in this research. Criminal violence may not affect older generations' sense of place and attachment, but it may have a negative effect on fourth generation residents. Young residents look forward to moving, whereas the founders and second generation cannot see themselves living elsewhere.

The reason to leave is a longing for a better quality of life. This does not mean being close to education and employment opportunities; nowadays it is about fleeing from criminal activities and shootouts; protecting children from being surrounded by this environment and preventing them from joining a gang. This is in addition to the desire to live in a properly serviced area.

> GU: (…) todos queremos como salir, ¿no? (…) ¡Salir y vivir mejor! (…) Porque si, si te hablamos de hace aproximadamente diez, quince años atrás, esto aquí era (…) una maravilla, porque no había tantos problemas como hay ahora, tanta delincuencia, tantos vehículos (…)
>
> *GU: (…) we all want to leave, no? (…) Leave and live better! (…) Because if, if we talk about 10, 15 years ago, this here was (…) wonderful, because there weren't these many problems as we have now, such high delinquency, so many vehicles (…)*

As discussed in Chapter 5, criminal violence becomes another factor that mediates people's use of space and that displaces people from their barrio. This forms the fifth level of physical displacement: *out of the barrio*. As Mr. Guillermo said, people want to flee the barrio, they want to leave in order to look for better

opportunities,[122] meaning a place with less violence. We can see here that violence is once again the segregating influence.

In cases when people can and do leave the barrio, the barrio is always part of them; they do not turn their backs on it entirely (Trigo 1989). People who leave the barrio always come back, to visit family and friends, as well as to attend Holy Week procession. Even when the family no longer lives there, people return for cultural events as Jesús (JN) does. The roots are still there, the sense of community is still there. The barrio itself is a cultural artefact. Contrary to what Ontiveros (1997) claims regarding the need for barrios to regain a sense of belonging, this research shows that it has not been lost; even young generations have a deep sense of belonging. Participants of this study who go back do so because of their deep connection to place.

As barrios can be understood as cultural artefacts, their sense of community and belonging are transmitted generationally. Not only did the participants of this research confirm this; my personal story as a fourth generation Caraquenian enabled me to re-interpret the story about barrio meaning. My great-grandmother migrated from a rural area to Caracas; my grandmother moved to a better barrio; my father left the barrio and made it into the city. I was born and raised in a formal city area. However I always went back to the barrio to visit my grandmother, without being conscious until my adulthood it was a barrio; for me it was just going to my family's place. Sense of place and community is transmitted generationally.

As Chigeza, Roos & Puren (2013) argue:

> A strong sense of community contributes to a sense of place and vice versa. Places are frames that enable or disenable the satisfaction of needs of community members. Places contribute to the fulfilment of needs of people and in shaping a sense of community, especially in cases where communities have to contend with the negative effects of forced removals. A sense of community is promoted by the effective expression of communities' needs for survival, maintaining intergenerational relations as well as community connections, which

[122] Most of the time, although young residents want to leave the barrio they do not have the means to achieve this.

act as a buffer against adversities. A sense of community is supported by the reinforcement of needs and a shared history and values. (p. 99)

Although the focus of this research is not on sense of community, participants' accounts have shown that barrio residents maintain a strong sense of community, which leads to a sense of place.

Linked to sense of community and sense of place are the meanings of religiosity and Catholicism; both are fundamental parts of the meaning of the barrio urban space. The following section addresses this topic.

6.2 MEANING OF RELIGIOSITY AND PROCESSIONS

Religiosity relates to how people experience their spirituality and their religion.[123] In Latin America, Catholicism can be considered a cultural phenomenon (García García 1989; Idígoras 1991). In Venezuela, religiosity is part of people's structure because it is part of their cultural and value system; it is a family tradition that usually is not questioned. From an early age, people learn *how things are*: what they are meant to do, how they are meant to dress for Catholic events, how they are meant to behave.[124]

> FA: … lo religioso es parte importantísima de la cultura, de la historia, de las tradiciones, de la vida social (…) el elemento religioso convoca. ¿No?
>
> *FA:… the religious it's a super important part of culture, of history, of traditions, of social life (…) the religious element summons, no?*

Catholicism in barrios is a socially-constructed cultural tradition; hence its meaning is linked to the community and to the place. Barrios are heterogeneous because their people come from different places; different countries, cities, areas and barrios. This diversity makes barrio Catholicism rich because they incorporate

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[123] For more information regarding religiosity and religion refer to Appendix A.
[124] Venezuelan people have a choice whether to be or not part of these Catholic traditions. However, as it is a cultural phenomenon, they usually (subconsciously) choose to be Catholic and to participate in the different religious events.

the most significant meanings of each group to make one new tradition based on common beliefs. Holy Week processions clearly demonstrate this phenomenon. Creating their own traditions leads to appropriation and deep meanings. Barrio residents can claim these new traditions as their own, thus making them a fundamental part of their lives. Barrios and people's traditions are modified and *improved*, showing resident's religiosity, which is as dynamic as the place in which this religiosity takes place.

Chapter 5 depicts how barrio processions bring people together, strengthen their bonds, reshape and reinforce the sense of place as spaces are reclaimed from criminal gangs for the religious event. The aim of this section is to enhance the understanding of what religiosity means to barrio residents. Discussing people's personal religious experiences enhances our understanding of the meaning of religiosity and its relation to sense of place and construction of place.

6.2.1 Participants and their religiosity

Barrio residents experience their religiosity deeply, both individually and communally. However, every person experiences his or her own Catholicism in different ways, this being the underlying reason why there are different levels and ways of participation in the cultural events. For the main participants of this research, such as the organisers, Catholicism is '*the centre of [their] life*' ['es el centro de mi vida'] (Doris Pereira, 9 April 2009). For some women, religiosity is a way of escaping domestic violence, which in barrios is both very common and accepted. For others, Catholicism is only that part of the tradition during Holy Week, in which they *must* participate.

Attending and participating in Holy Week processions is a way for people to manifest their profound religiosity with their neighbours, strengthening their sense of community. As Getz (2007 cited in Van Winkle & Woosnam 2014) stated, festivals are a fundamental part of community life as they enable participation in a 'shared cultural event' (Van Winkle & Woosnam 2014, p. 23). These festivals, which include religious events, enhance the sense of community through a shared purpose, and the sense of belonging and the shared emotional connection with other community members (Távara & Cueto 2015; Van Winkle & Woosnam 2014).

Eleazar (E): (…) Se saludan mucho. No sé si viven cerca, pero uno entonces caminando se saludaban (…) se conocen mucho. Y debe ser también por la actividad religiosa que hace que la gente se compenetre más.

E: (…) they greet each other a lot. I don't know if they live close by, but then walking they said hi to each other (…) they know each other a lot. And it must be also due to the religious activity that makes people come closer together

As Eleazar noticed, the community already has strong connections built through being neighbours, which are enhanced through their religious activity. Holy Week processions bring the community closer together as they are invited to experience their faith together and to enact their religiosity and their community membership in a very proactive way.

D: las procesiones es una manera de invitar a los vecinos, a… todas las personas de la comunidad, a vivir nuestra fe (…)

D: processions is a way of inviting neighbours… inviting all the people in the community, to live our faith (…)

Processions are events where personal and community feelings come together in one deep sentiment, lived out in the urban space. Catholic Holy Week processions go beyond people expressing their culture. They are truly about highlighting a shared background, a shared event, about reaching out to people and filling the urban space with further special meaning that can be achieved only through this cultural manifestation.

B: [acerca de las procesiones] (…) no es un caminar con una imagen por las calles (…) sino es el mismo Jesús con su cuerpo, alma, sangre y divinidad… derramando sus gracias por las calles de la comunidad

B: [about processions] it's not just a walk with an image through the streets (…) it's Jesus himself with this body, soul, blood and divinity… spilling His favours on the streets of the community.

Processions and the deep religiosity barrio residents experience allow for another process of transferral, where the positive meaning embedded in this cultural phenomenon is transmitted to the urban space. The urban space becomes sacralised and blessed through the procession, complementing the deep meaning people give it on an everyday basis. As explained in previous chapters, the barrio urban space means a lot to people because of the relationships built there through the construction of the space. However, through culture, this sense of place is greatly enhanced.

Processions are more than an expression of people's faith; as established in the previous sub-section and as Mrs. Ñaña highlights in her account, Holy Week processions are a commitment to the self and the community. Processions are an expression of the rootedness of the religiosity in the individual and of the individual in the community and their barrio. In Venezuela, Holy Week processions occur in every town and in every parish, so people could attend anywhere. However, as Mrs Ñaña says, she *has* to experience them in Julián Blanco, underlining the close relationship between the deep meanings of religiosity and the significance of place.

As mentioned previously, these deep meanings of religiosity are closely linked to the barrios' strong sense of community. Processions are a joyful event where families and generations are brought together. Participation allows the people to express their positive feelings and emotions for the event itself, but also to share their religiosity with their loved ones. Families and communities create positive bonds through Catholicism. Participants become immersed in the event, expressing their intimate connection to Jesus, their spirituality and their community.

> L: (…) ¡me llena muchísimo! (…) uno, recibe mucha, ¡yo lo siento así!, espiritualidad al estar en el Viacrucis, que fue lo que Jesús vivió, te llena muchísimo (…) uno ve y uno se siente con la satisfacción de que la gente también lo vive (…)
>
> *L: (…) it really fulfils me a lot! (…) you receive a lot of, I feel it this way!, of spirituality when being in the Way of the Cross, which is what Jesus lived, it fulfils you a lot! (…) you see and feel the satisfaction of people around you experiencing it (…)*

The meanings of religiosity and community start to merge into a single, unified meaning. Processions and all they involve are meaningful to people. They are imbued with deep, intimate and positive feelings of fulfilment. These positive emotions linked to Catholicism are also experienced by the gang members. As discussed in Chapter 5, barrio delinquents also participate in Holy Week processions as an expression of their religiosity.

6.2.2 Thugs and religiosity

The relationship between thugs and religiosity can be approached from two angles: 1) the meaning of religiosity to thugs, and 2) the community-thug relationship mediated through religiosity.

Understanding the meaning of Catholicism for thugs is not an easy matter. It was evident when observing the participants during the processions that they were present and participating in these religious events. However, when I approached one thug to ask him about his spirituality and reasons for attending the procession, the answer was that he was paying a promise,[125] but that I should not ask.[126] Moreno (2007) says that people's relationship with religiosity and God is transactional and based on convenience (asking God for favours) but is not a regulatory-moral matter. However, this research shows this type of relationship does not apply to all community members, or to all thugs. Thugs also show a deep connection to their religiosity.

> Father Trigo (T): (…) al inaugurar El Nazareno, (…) digo 'esto una de las cosas que tenemos que hacer, es ¡vamos a cantar El Nazareno!'. Bueno, claro ahí el que mejor cantaba El Nazareno era un malandro. Bueno, ¡para el malandro el honor de haber cantado El Nazareno de Ismael Rivera delante del Nazareno!, bueno, bfff… Eso cuando nos veía se quedaba ese hombre pero ¡contentísimo!, o sea, ¡era la ocasión de su vida! (…)

[125] "Paying a promise" is discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.3.1
[126] This response was recorded as a field note, as the person interviewed asked not to be audio-visually recorded.

T: (…) when El Nazareno was opened, the Centre, (…) I say 'this is one of the things we have to do, is let's sing El Nazareno!' Well, of course that the one who sang best El Nazareno was a thug. Well, for him it was an honour having sung El Nazareno by Ismael Rivera[127] *in front of El Nazareno!, well, bfffff… That when he looked at us that man stayed but ecstatic!, I mean, it was the time of his life! (…)*

Participants described their perception of how thugs construct religiosity and its meaning to them. Although barrio delinquents did not express their feelings in words in an interview, their actions, as described by other participants, hint at the significance of religiosity to them. Father Trigo had strong positive relationships with community members, including thugs. His statement that a delinquent was honoured to be part of this community-religious event illustrated the deep and meaningful religious connection this person experienced.

Being part of the community and of the same cultural environment, thugs grew up with Catholicism as part of their lives. Religiosity may not have been as integral to them as to other community members, but they did acknowledge Catholicism and processions as a fundamental element of barrio and community life. The respect described in Chapter 5 towards Holy Week confirms this.

Part of this significance was revealed during the Nazarene procession on Holy Wednesday in 2011. As soon as the priest and the image arrived at the Julián Blanco Roundabout, where the procession starts, the thugs that were hanging out there[128] immediately turned off the music to allow the procession to start. Even when the priest indicated that we were not going to start yet and that they could leave the music on for a while longer, the young teens replied: '*"No, no Father don't worry!" and they just turned it down.*' ['"¡No, no Padre no se preocupe!" y agarraron y la bajaron'] (Gabriela Quintana, 30 April 2011). When discussing this anecdote with Mrs. Ñaña, she enhanced my participant observation experience by discussing how she approached that group of teens prior to our arrival at the roundabout.

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[127] Puerto Rican composer and singer.
[128] Some participants of this research who live in Julián Blanco and know the different community members identified the group of teenagers as the barrios thugs.

Several important elements arose from Mrs. Ñaña's account regarding the interaction between the community, thugs, religiosity and place. First of all, Mrs. Ñaña expressed the fear she experienced just thinking of addressing *'those people'* ['esa gente'] (Mrs. Ñaña, 30 April 2011). As explained in the previous section, fear, segregation and displacement are always present when interacting with young delinquents in barrios. Secondly, the sense of belonging in the community and respect thugs have for female leaders emerges, pleasantly surprising even Mrs. Ñaña. This type of process adds to the continuous reshaping of the group and the feelings associated to the community. Finally, thugs' respect for the religious event and the institution also becomes evident.[129] They stop all their activities (even non-criminal ones) as soon as the priest arrives; this is the initial step for barrio residents to claim the physical space for this cultural-religious-community event.

As previously discussed, there are different levels of meaning of and attachment to the religious phenomenon. Respecting processions shows a layer of meaning that expresses religiosity as an element that *you do not mess with*; there is something sacred about the religious activity and the community that participates in it. Mrs María also mentioned this when discussing how thugs mugged her son and how after finding out he was a priest they returned his things *'They took it back quickly because they don't want to mess with priests because it is a jinx'* ['Lo fueron a llevar rápido porque ellos ¡no quieren nada con curas porque que eso es pavoso!'] (Mrs. María, 20 April 2011). Regardless of the specific words, what is relevant is the underlying significance of the religious element for different community members, including thugs.

The deep significance of Catholicism and community for barrio residents combine to reinforce the feelings that residents have for their place. The process of spaces becoming places is enabled through the meanings of community and religiosity.

[129] Merging Mrs. Ñaña's experience with my own as a participant,

6.3 CONCLUSION: MEANING OF PLACE

As outlined at the beginning of the chapter, a sense of place comes from the relationship between space, the activities that take place in the space and the meanings people associate with the space. The meaning of place in barrios is constructed through the combined meaning of community and religiosity.

These stories have been a reflection on the fact that the various situations of displacement and struggle, the shared cultural background and the activities that take place in the urban space have all built the strong sense of community.

This last element of the place-making story highlights the themes of sense of community and meaning of religiosity, to help us understand how they relate to and construct place. Firstly, we have understood that members of the barrio community hold strong contradictory feelings about and enact contradictory behaviours towards each other, and hence towards the urban space. There are both fear and affection for thugs, which creates ambivalent relationships that affect the meaning of the urban space. The concept of territorial transferral is reflected in this flexible and ambivalent meaning of space, where spaces can be either or both positive and negative, depending on the people present and the activity taking place there.

Additionally, a second type of intangible displacement arises, which is mainly psychological: *from community to thug*. Thugs see themselves as full members of the community, but from the community's perspective, they are not fully integrated. Criminal violence encourages inclusion and exclusion at the same time. When shootouts happen, community members open their doors to others to provide shelter, thereby bringing the community together. On the other hand, thugs are excluded most of the time, except when religious activities take place. These community relationships impact the private-public space boundary, as well as the use and appropriation of the urban space, thus impacting further on the feelings related to place.

Religiosity is seen as an important matter for thugs; they not only respect the event, but also participate in it, with the same connection to the procession and the community as any other participant. The religious element strengthens the sense of belonging and sense of community, highlighting the association between the

meaning of the community and the meaning of religiosity. Processions themselves represent an important, meaningful and emotional shared value that brings the community together. Moreover, processions enable a positive transferral process, associating the favourable feelings towards God with the urban space. Catholicism in barrios is a deep and integral cultural phenomenon; it is a flexible construct transmitted and appropriated generationally, both individually and socially.

These three stories demonstrate that barrios have three different layers through which meaning is constructed. The first layer is built on action and according to the community dynamics arising from the physical construction and development of the place. It embeds the continuous effort put into building the barrio and its significant spaces. This evolving history deeply connects people to their space. The second layer of meaning is shaped by the activities that people engage in in the urban space, establishing that the meaning of the space is flexible and dynamic. It can radically change from day to day, from action to action. The use of the space redefines the relationship of people with place and meaning. The third and final layer is the one constructed through other underpinning meanings, such as the meaning of community and the meaning of religiosity.

Barrio culture and the meanings associated with it are unique because of the people's heterogeneity. There are people here with several different cultural backgrounds who have learned to live together in a fraternal manner. Residents of Julián Blanco, La Dolorita and El Nazareno come from the northeast and southwest of Venezuela, from small towns and rural areas in the inland of the State of Miranda, and from Colombia, Portugal and other countries. These different backgrounds are present in the buildings and in some of the particular religious events that are not shared among all barrios. However, despite Julián Blanco, La Dolorita and El Nazareno being very different barrios with diverse people and religious institutions, they share values and meanings. The processes of sense of community and sense of place can not only be found in all of them, they are also experienced in similar ways. The meanings are shared, and the religious cultural element in all cases continues to tie the community together, enabling them to use their public spaces freely.

Closely linked to all the above, the rootedness connected to the barrio, its people and their Catholic activities becomes a fundamental aspect of the meaning associated to the barrio urban space. As Carmona et al. (2010) explain, rootedness is an unconscious expression of sense of place.

> Ñ: [contando que vivió temporalmente en otro lugar] ¡pero yo necesitaba mi Julián Blanco! Porque allí es donde está mi gente, la que yo conozco, la que ha envejecido conmigo, y ¡así!
>
> *Ñ: [telling us she temporarily lived in another place] but I needed my Julián Blanco! Because there is where my people is, the ones I know, the ones that have grown old with me, and that's it!*

The connection between sense of place and sense of community becomes evident. Sense of place is built over time and is closely linked to the people who compose that community. When Mrs Ñaña expresses the deep sentiment about growing old with *her people*, she is referring to the people who moved in at the same time as her to the barrio, that generation of founders who squatted and settled in this place. She is also referring to their children and grandchildren. Sense of place is linked to that relational rootedness. Bonds are an essential aspect of sense of community, and the sense of community shapes feelings towards place (Vidal et al. 2013).

The meaning of the space is dynamic and complex. The different layers of meaning are present simultaneously, making it impossible to define what came first; whether it was the meaning created through building the space, the meaning given through the activities, or the meanings of community and religiosity. There is a cyclical interaction among people, space and culture that cannot be separated. These three elements are embedded in each other and cannot be divorced from each other. They became one flexible and significant entity. As found in this research, place-making is possible through the combination of these three vital elements.

That special meaning with which the streets are imbued on an everyday basis is complemented when a procession takes place. Processions sacralise the

urban space they pass through. Through culture, the sense of place is modified and enhanced.

> Ñ: Pero ¡sí! ¡es diferente! ¡es mi calle! pues, o sea, ¡es mi vida! ¡Sí! ¡Esa calle.. el principal sobre todo!… Ahí crecieron mis hijas, ahí se reventaron las rodillas, todas esas cosas, bueno. Yo siento que esa calle es siempre igual, pero ¡ese día más! ¡ese día es más mía! ¡más de nuestro pueblo! O sea, no mía porque eso sería como exclusivismo, sino ¡más de todos! ¡más de todos!
>
> *Ñ: But yes! It's different! It's my street! well, I mean, it's my life! Yes! That street… the main one mostly!... There my daughters grew up, there they scratched their knees, all those things, well. I feel that that street is always the same, but on that day more! that day is more mine! More of our people's! I mean, not mine because it would be like exclusiveness, but more of everybody's! more of everybody's!*

This last quotation sums up all the meanings and how they construct sense of place in barrios. It is clear that when Holy Week processions take place, the appropriation of the urban space deepens, and thus the street changes its meaning.

7 CONCLUSION: PLACE-MAKING

'the basketball court belongs to the community one day a year'
Gabriela (Field Note 2011)

In built environment related disciplines, such as planning and urban design, place-making is often associated with the quality of urban spaces and the role of planners and designers in creating *place* and *sense of place* (Gieryn 2000; Gustafson 2001; Kudryavtsev, Stedman & Krasny 2012; Lombard 2014; Nicholls 2009; Pierce, Martin & Murphy 2011; Schneekloth & Shibley 1995). Different social-science disciplines, such as geography, sociology and anthropology, have also been interested in studying this construct and understanding the underpinning elements that convert spaces into places. There is still a lack of agreement on what place means and what constructs place (Agnew 2011; Anton & Lawrence 2014; Cresswell 2004; Hay 1998; Kyle & Chick 2007); one point of agreement, however, is that there are psychosocial issues tied up in creating sense of place, which in turn are vital to understanding the concept of place (Agnew 2011; Karplus & Meir 2014; Relph 1976; Relph 2007; Vernon & Tiwari 2009).

Place can be defined as the relationship between physical attributes, people's conceptions of the space and the different activities that occur in it (Canter 1977). Theories developed by Lefebvre (1991) and others about the production of space, are based on a cognitive approach where people's perception and representation of space are the centre of analysis. However, place is most commonly understood by constructionist approaches as the socially-constructed spaces to which people are attached and to which they give meaning (Cresswell 2004; Lombard 2014). Thus, from a broader perspective, place-making refers to how people transform the spaces in which they live, how they attach meaning to these places and how they create daily relationships in them over time (Gieryn 2000; Lombard 2014; Scheekloth & Shibley 1995; Schneekloth & Shibley 1995).

Based on her research into the construction of place in Mexico's informal settlements, Lombard (2014) explains that the place-making process occurs on three different levels: physical, social, and cultural. The first level starts with

acquiring the land and building on it, from the first shack to the development of a more formalised house. In this vein, Kellett (2003) states that people building their houses with their own hands is fundamental to place-making in informal settlements, not only because of its materiality but also because of the meanings generated through this building process. Lombard's second level identifies that place-making in informal settlements is also created through religious practices; however, she focuses on the construction of Catholic spaces and the imposition of the Catholic Church as a dominant institution in Mexico (Lombard 2014). Social place-making is also generated through building primary schools as a reflection of the importance of schooling to residents. In her research, Lombard (2014) finds that physicality is still predominant in this social aspect of place-making; these physical structures represent the values of the society in question. The third and final level, cultural place-making, focuses on the (vernacular) architecture and on the community giving names to the different urban spaces, bearing in mind that this cultural aspect continues to relate significantly to the physical realm of place-making in its reflection of the residents' culture.

Place-making in barrios, however, involves more than the construction of the physical space and the way in which it reflects both the social and cultural aspects of the community, an approach which is founded in the aforementioned cognitive perspective. Thus, through this thesis I engage in a lesser-explored route to understanding the concept of place and the place-making process: meaning and culture, not discussing cognition but affect. The case study sits within a broader post-colonial approach where people's power over their environment is acknowledged and valued (Roy 2011; Varley 2013). Hence, I focus on people's perspectives and emotions; I give residents and procession participants a voice to understand the meanings they give to space.

Throughout the chapters of this thesis, the physical, (psycho) social and cultural aspects of place-making that I have addressed highlight how the urban spaces of barrios are socially constructed through materiality, activities and meanings. The first story (Chapter 4) answered the research question: *How do barrio residents conceive and construct the physicality of the private, public and religious spaces?* The second story (Chapter 5) addressed the second research question: *How do residents use the physical spaces of the barrios to express their*

religious culture? These stories focused on the morphological characteristics and physical conditions of the urban space, as well as on the everyday and religious activities (concentrating on the Catholic Holy Week processions) taking place in them. The third story (Chapter 6) answered the third research question: *What psychosocial meaning do they (the barrio residents) associate with the spaces through which the processions move?*- through analysing the meaning embedded in the processions and interpreting the sense of place experienced by the participants.

Finally, by unveiling the underlying factors that drive place-making, this concluding chapter aims to build on the previous story to complete the answer to the main guiding research question: *What is the role of culture (using religiosity as a lens) in the construction of place in Caracas' barrios?* This chapter recapitulates the main findings and the lessons of the research; and finally, it provides a brief concluding reflection and identifies four possible next steps.

7.1 FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS FROM THESE STORIES:

Place-making is about people constructing place: practitioners, academics, institutions, cultural leaders, community members, thugs, everyone. Place-making is about the physicality of the urban space, its use, its activities, its relationships and its meanings. Ultimately, place-making is about space, people and culture.

Barrio urban spaces are complex entities that comprise a diverse range of actors, activities, dynamics and emotional relationships. Throughout this thesis, four main topics arose as vital to understanding the place-making process in the barrios of Caracas. Firstly, institutions and criminal violence surfaced as important mediators of the construction of place and of the different levels of displacement the barrio residents have faced throughout the years. Secondly, the research showed the flexibility of the private-public boundaries and how people experience those depending on the activities taking place in the urban space. In addition, the *territorial transferral process* emerged as a way of understanding the underlying processes shaping the uses and meanings of the barrio urban spaces. The third topic highlights that urban spaces in barrios are relational. Finally, the meaning of the

urban space emerged as flexible and ambivalent, where both the positive and negative construct *place*.

Throughout these four themes, the various power relationships that exist in barrios emerged, which is another important finding of this research. These power relationships permeate through the different barrio dynamics and shape the barrio urban space. As shown in figure 7.1, the four main actors that are involved in place-making in barrios are all interconnected and influence one another in different ways. Historically the state and the Catholic Church have been closely related in Venezuela. Depending on the ideological alignment between the Church and the political party that is in power, the Church influences (or not) political decisions, and also financial resources are allocated (or not) to the Church, defining the power relationship between these two institutions.

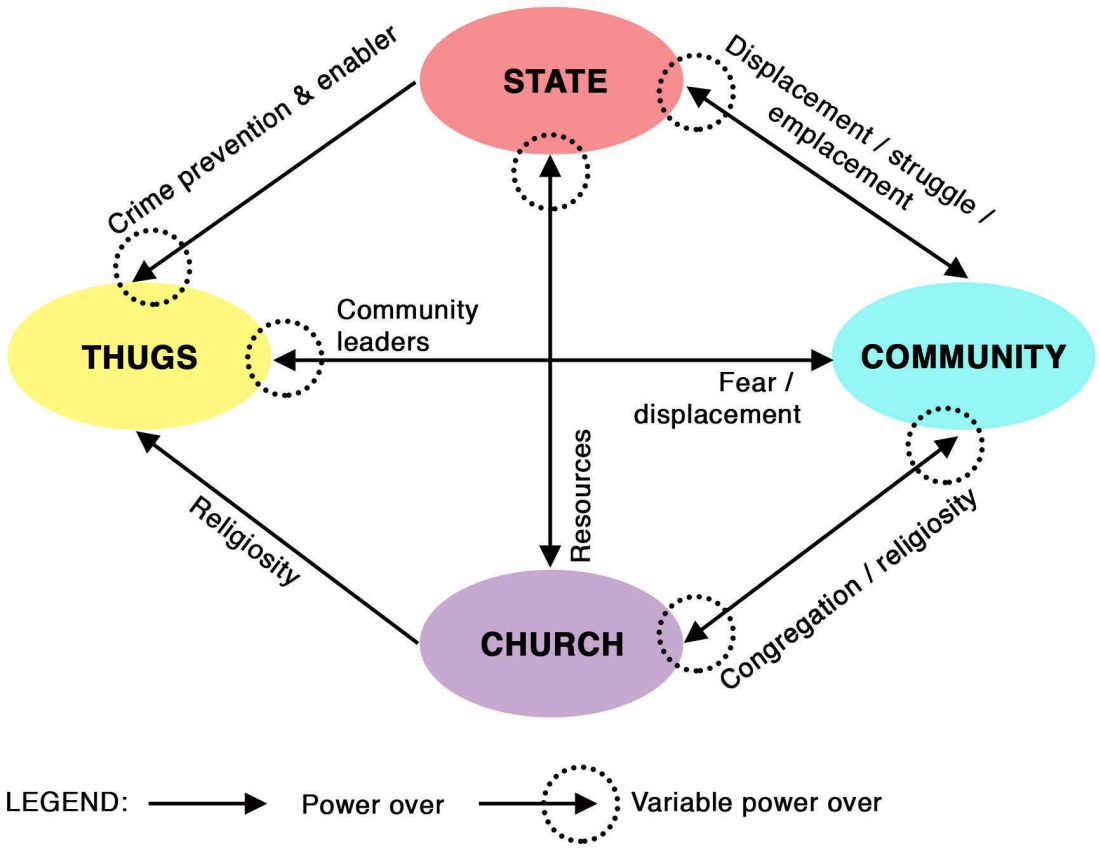

Figure 7.1: Power relationships in/over the urban space of barrios

When examining how institutions have shaped place in the barrios, the power that the state and the Catholic Church have over the community became evident. The state continuously displaced the community, forcing them to struggle and find their own place. After settling in that place, the community has had variable power over the state/government, by sometimes demanding and obtaining resources in exchange for political support. Simultaneously, the Catholic Church sometimes guides or dominates the community and their relationship to cultural spaces and the barrio itself. Depending on the congregation and the level of empowerment with which people experience their religiosity, the power relationship varies, favouring in some cases the institution and in others the community.

Institutions also have power over thugs, and thugs show respect for religiosity. Catholic events take priority over criminal activities in barrios. This makes evident the impact the Catholic institution has over thugs. As discussed in Appendix A, the state also has power over thugs, both by fighting and by enabling criminal activities. On the other hand, the physical displacement created by thugs and fear over the community and the intangible displacement from the community to thugs unveiled the shifting power among these groups. Also, the discussion about the private-public relationship and the territorial transferral process showed the impact thugs have on the community.

When thinking about place-making and power relationships in barrios it becomes evident that these relationships have impacted how the physical space was constructed, the different activities that take place in the urban space and the meanings associated with the place. The findings from this research show the underpinning drivers of place-making in Caracas's barrios. Understanding the barrio urban space's physical and functional processes, as well as people's feelings, experiences and culture is the first step to approaching place-making from a holistic and comprehensive perspective.

The following subsections present the findings and insights arising from this research: 1) institutions and displacement shaping place, 2) the relational quality of the barrio urban space and the importance of understanding the built form and the networks that built it, 3) the public-private relationship and territorial transferral

shaping the conception of boundaries in the urban space, and 4) the importance of understanding meaning.

7.1.1 Institutions and displacement stories shaping place

As argued in this thesis, official and non-official institutions have shaped the development, physicality and use of the barrio urban space. The Catholic Church and other NGOs have historically been the main supporters of barrios. These institutions took a fundamental role in aiding the place-making process. Along with the community, the Catholic Church built several religious, educational and community spaces, which have fulfilled some basic needs. This cumulative process has shaped the barrio urban space, contributing not only to the development of the built form and its functionality, but also to the preservation of open public spaces such as El Morro in El Nazareno. The construction and preservation of these areas are fundamental to the place-making process because they enable residents to transform their urban spaces into meaningful places inspired by one of the most important cultural elements they share, Catholicism. In this place-making process, the Catholic Church also encourages the strengthening of the community and its bonds. The different evangelising activities and promotion of cultural-religious events bring people together, thus reinforcing the positive meanings residents associate with their barrio.

On the other hand, the various levels of government acted as one of the major drivers of place-making in barrios, as they enabled barrio development through displacement and disadvantage. The contradictory actions of the Venezuelan government, such as slum evictions and demolitions followed by the suspension of these policies, followed by their reinstatement, along with inadequate programs to provide for the poor, led to the construction of slums in Caracas. The failure to acknowledge the barrios' existence in the official planning system and turning a blind eye to them, also boosted their unplanned growth and expansion.

At the same time, politicians contributed to the physical construction of barrios by providing material resources to the residents in exchange for votes, and the different levels of government provided some of the limited and inefficient infrastructure and facilities that exist in barrios. Historically, the approach of the state

to barrios has been ambivalent; on the one hand, the government ignores these areas or wants to get rid of them; and on the other, it looks after them by investing resources (however minimal) to make them marginally liveable. In the past few years, the Venezuelan government has made further efforts to supply basic infrastructure and facilities for barrios. However, due to the massive deficiencies in these areas and the limited budget the government has allocated to barrios, significantly improving their liveability has become very difficult. The resources needed to improve barrios surpass the current capacity of the state.

This conflicting and ambivalent relationship between the government and the barrio residents has resulted in residents experiencing displacement throughout their lives. In this thesis I have identified three levels of physical displacement generated by the government and two levels generated by criminal violence, all of which have psychosocial implications and deeply impact the place-making process. These levels are (1) from place of origin to the city, (2) from the city to the barrio, (3) from barrio to barrio, (4) out of the barrio urban (public) space, and (5) out of the barrio.

Different push and pull factors drove barrio residents *from their places of origin to the city*, such as agricultural policies, the prospect of employment and education opportunities, as well as the opportunity to squat generated by political instability. In conjunction with this rural-urban migration, the inefficiency of the state in catering for new migrants, especially the poor who could not access the formal market housing, drove the second level of displacement, that is, *from the city to the barrio*. These new city migrants needed shelter, and found a place in the barrios, thereby starting the barrio place-making story. State policies also drove the third level of displacement, *from barrio to barrio*. The implementation of slum clearance policies forced barrio residents to look for a new place to live, which usually meant squatting and settling in another barrio, though, causing further growth and expansion of the barrios in Caracas.

The fourth level of physical displacement emerged once people had already settled in the barrios. Fear of criminal violence forced residents *out of the barrio urban (public) space*. Because of criminality, barrio residents feel they do not have free access to the public spaces they built. The fifth physical level of displacement

also relates to the fear that gangs generate. Younger generations aim to move *out of the barrio* to escape from the criminal violence that surrounds them in their everyday lives.

Fear is also linked to one of the two intangible levels of displacement discussed in this thesis, namely, *from the community to thugs*. Community members fear thugs and exclude them from their everyday lives. Barrio residents exclude delinquents from ordinary activities, segregating them and causing a clear division of *you* and *us*. However, this displacement ceases when shared cultural-religious activities take place in the barrios' urban space.

Cultural displacement is the other intangible level of displacement that the community experiences. In the eyes of many, especially religious leaders, the Chavista regime was responsible for this process because of ideological differences between them and the Catholic Church (as discussed in Appendix A). Barrio residents' culture is devalued and undermined when the state ignores cultural backgrounds in decision-making about barrio urban spaces and activities.

Although displacement is usually perceived as a negative construct, it can be an opportunity for *emplacement* and *place-making*. These displacement stories led residents to create and build their barrios; their urban space; their place. Through this construction process opportunities for solidarity and community building also emerged. People come together in times of need, as well as when they have a shared goal as important as finding a place to settle and bring up their families. The community as a group is built at the same time as they construct their physical space. As argued in previous chapters, shared displacement stories encourage bonding. Place-making, in this case, is driven originally by the negative situation of displacement, but it is developed through community bonds and shared goals, which in time allows the space that they are building to become meaningful.

These community bonds, the feeling of finally being settled in *a place*, and the physical development of the barrio, creates rootedness. Residents' rootedness in their barrio has developed thanks to the (lack of) institutional intervention, to the different displacement levels and stories and through the time, effort and emotions invested in constructing the place. People are attached to their barrio and assign

meaning to it through the roots that have grown from the community relationships and the development of the physical space.

> Ñ: ¡Yo no cambio mi barrio por nada!, porque… ¡me siento segura!… dentro de lo que cabe, pues…
>
> *Ñ: I wouldn't change my barrio for anything! Because… I feel safe!... well, considering…*

Notwithstanding the infrastructure, education, health, connectivity, and violence problems barrio residents encounter on an everyday basis, their barrio is their home. In this instance, place-making is engaged in through the attachment barrio residents experience; attachment that links to rootedness and that is strengthened by the progressive construction of the physical space and the community bonds. As previously discussed, government and cultural institutions are both directly and indirectly involved with place-making in barrios. These agencies play several roles in the construction of place; they are facilitators, directors, disrupters, enablers and supporters. However, one of the main insights of this story is that people can create their own spaces without significant institutional support. Hence, institutions are not vital in the construction of place. Moreover, it is ultimately the people who attach meaning to urban spaces.

Another insight is that barrio residents are resilient, and when empowered they can achieve great things. Barrio people have been the main constructors of their place. Throughout the stories comprising this thesis, the question of how communities build the social capital needed to implement and shape effective place-making strategies has been answered. In barrios, people became organised through struggle, need and bonding. The empowered community, in collaboration with the Catholic Church on some occasions, constructed their environment, their place.

7.1.2 Public-private flexible relationship (physical and psychological)

Through this thesis' stories I established the symbiotic relationship between the public and the private; how the construction of the private space shaped the urban public spaces in barrios, and how the latter also impacted on the development

of the private realm. However, I also found that the public-private relationship in the urban space of barrios is flexible, linked not only to physical boundaries, but also to how residents use their urban spaces. The public-private dichotomy is present in both the tangible and intangible.

As the construction of the barrio urban space is progressive and developed mainly by the community, a large diversity of places exists. While the house is the fundamental private space and the streets are the most important public space, the construction of pedestrian (relational) spaces led to the emergence of semi-public and semi-private spaces. People expressed their relationships through how they built these private and public places. Through these expressions of personal relationships, residents make clear how they interact and when, who has a relational priority over whom, who is “us” and who is “them”.

However, these defined boundaries and diversity of spaces are flexible depending on the activities that take place in the barrio urban space. On main roads, people open their windows and doors to neighbours to socialise and interact; anywhere in the barrio, children use the streets as their *private* front yard; young teenagers have basketball rings in roundabouts and appropriate them to play sports; residents open their houses to host community meetings; during shootouts community members provide shelter for neighbours; during processions people let other participants into their houses as part of the religious event. The clear physical boundary between public and private is psychosocially redefined.

Thugs and criminal activities also redefine the psychosocial boundaries and use of the public space. When thugs appropriate and claim public spaces such as basketball courts, they privatise that place and the community can no longer use that *public* space freely. Thugs decide who uses those places and when, depending on the type of relationship they have with the person. On the other hand, when religious events such as processions take place in barrios, criminal gangs yield their power to the community, allowing the public space to belong to everyone.

One of the main findings arising from this research is the concept of *territorial transferral process (TTP)*. *Territorial transferral* is the urban-psychosocial process in which people transfer emotions and feelings they have towards other

people and activities to the urban space, thereby affecting how they use and experience their place. This concept emerged from interpreting the processes underlying the activities in barrio urban spaces, based on participants' accounts. TTP is another vital element in how place is constructed and conceived in Caracas' barrios. This process involves a profoundly important social aspect of place-making that surpasses how people interact and relate; it addresses underlying meanings and feelings associated with social relationships and space. TTP is a social construction that offers deeper insight into understanding place dynamics and the underpinning causes of how people use and appropriate (or not) their urban spaces and why.

TTP captures the complex tangible (physical and use) and intangible (psychosocial) boundaries that constrain a barrio's urban space. However, through positive activities, such as Holy Week Catholic processions, this TTP can be *paused* or (temporarily) altered. When processions take place in the urban space, barrio residents feel free and safe to use their public spaces and to cross over into other sectors. At this moment, people transfer their good feelings for God and their culture to the urban space. At this moment, the meaning of the space shifts to become positive.

Another insight arising from this thesis is the understanding of how people conceive the private-public boundaries in their lives and what elements allow those limits to change temporarily. Perhaps it is about understanding that this flexibility could make private-public categories unnecessary, or understanding that in these places there is no actual boundary but that the private-public relationship is a continuum that is fluid over time. It is about reconsidering what 'private' and 'public' means. Academics have studied the boundaries and definitions of the private and public space from many different theoretical perspectives (Borja & Muxí 2001a; Gehl & Gemzøe 2002; Gindroz 2001; Guitián 2007; Jacobs 1995; Kostof 1992; Krier 1981; Lo, Yiu & Lo 2003; Negrón 2004a; Rangel Mora 2001; Urban Design Associates 2013). Despite coming from different disciplinary backgrounds, including sociology and urban design, these authors define a very distinct limit between the private and the public, in some cases acknowledging the semi-public and semi-private categories. Their approaches are mostly focused on the physical realm, rather than on people's understanding of the private-public issue.

Yet another finding arising from this thesis is an understanding of the temporal and relational fluctuation of the public and the private. When people define their own private-public boundaries, they are carrying out an act of place-making. This process is closely linked to the territorial transferral process. The understanding of how emotions are transferred from people and situations to the urban space and how thugs' boundaries are adopted by the community as theirs, becomes fundamental.

7.1.3 Relational urban spaces

Urban spaces in barrios are ultimately relational; they are conceived and constructed and experienced based on human relationships. From the time of settlement, the barrio urban space developed based on family and neighbour relationships. Both the private and public spaces are conceived and built in a relational way. Functionality and connectivity are *planned* based on who lives where. Where does my mum live? Where is my sister located? Where do the people with whom I built this barrio reside? Despite those not being conscious design and planning questions, barrio residents based their decision-making on the answers to these and other related questions.

The growth and proximity of the houses, as well as the construction of pedestrian pathways, are not only a reflection of the community relationships, they also help with community socialisation, strengthening existing bonds further. The urban space itself becomes both a social construct and a social construction, and an enabler of social life. There is a symbiotic relationship between barrio residents' relationships and their urban space, where both construct each other. The morphology of barrios may seem messy and without order, but there is a relational rationale behind it that explains how it was *organically* and incrementally conceived and how it evolved. Social relationships shaped the built form, both in land occupancy and vertical growth. This finding demonstrates the need to understand the nature of existing relationships and how these relationships built the urban space.

The use of and activities undertaken in the urban space are similarly relational. Everyday, criminal, and religious activities are closely linked to how

people relate to each other. Bonds, fear, closeness, segregation, positive and negative emotions, and positive and negative dynamics, all dictate how the place is constructed and experienced. Thus, these diverse relationships among people deeply impact the place-making process, becoming a fundamental aspect of it. The closeness of the houses, the high building density, the continuous urban edges and the very well defined open spaces encourage neighbours to interact, their children to grow up and play together, and cultural events to be open and inviting to the whole community.

Similarly, the meaning associated with the barrio urban space is also relational, as the meaning of community and the different social processes that construct it profoundly impacts on place. The place-making process is thus a relational process.

7.1.4 Flexible meaning of the urban space

Throughout this thesis I presented three different layers of the construction of meaning: (1) barrio residents co-creating and co-constructing their urban space with their own hands turns it into a meaningful place; (2) meaning is flexible (positive or negative) depending on the activities; and (3) the meaning of community and religiosity shapes and deepens the meaning of place. These three layers are fundamental place-making elements.

When put together, these three place-making layers show us that meaning is dynamic and flexible; places can embed both negative and positive meanings at the same time. All activities and spaces are meaningful, and meaning, like energy, can change form and is constantly re-interpreted: it is flexible and transforms itself but never ceases to exist. In this research, community and religious meanings transcend the positive and negative. These meanings are transferred to and experienced in the urban space, thus constructing place.

This research showed that social relationships and cultural activities with all their complexities, shape and reshape the meaning of space, and thus the place-making process. Understanding that '*the basketball court belongs to the community one day a year'* (Gabriela - Field Note 2011) (See Figure 7.2), opens up the

understanding that place-making is not only an institutional decision, nor just the design and construction of a physical space; it is a dynamic urban-psychosocial process that transforms everyday life.

The main insight from this thesis is the understanding that place-making is ultimately about the meaning that people associate with urban spaces to transform them into places. These meanings are constructed in three layers that involve an ongoing and progressive process of creating, shaping and deepening meaning. Being hands on in the construction of the barrio creates meaning, activities shape the meaning, and cultural events deepen and strengthen that meaning. Another insight is the acknowledgement and understanding of the different activities that shape those meanings and, most importantly, the need to consider and incorporate people's culture to reinforce those meanings.

Figure 7.2: Community in El Parquecito on Good Friday. Source: G. Quintana Vigiola

7.2 FINAL REFLECTION AND NEXT STEPS

This research has shown the fundamental role of religiosity as a cultural phenomenon in the construction of place in Caracas barrios. The construction of religious spaces has been an important matter to residents since the barrio was settled. The Catholic Church has helped not only with this process, but also with the preservation and construction of other important community urban spaces. In addition, Catholic processions as a cultural activity engaged in in the barrio urban space, enable the community's appropriation of spaces that otherwise are taken by criminal gangs. Moreover, this activity brings people together, strengthening community bonds and their sense of place. This sense of place and the profound meaning people associate with the barrio urban space is also deepened by the residents' meaning of religiosity.

Also, power relationships emerged as another important insight: understanding power is necessary to comprehend the different dynamics underpinning place-making. As previously discussed, power relationships in barrios are not static. Power in and over the urban space of barrios shifts in a gain-lose dynamic that depends on the political regime, the activities engaged in in the urban space, and the time. Power relationships are complex and change over time, so there is a need to understand the historical context of power relationships and how they shape and re-shape the place-making process in informal settlements.

This thesis not only enhances knowledge and broadens the comprehension about Caracas barrios, and the place-making elements and process. This thesis also is useful to barrio residents to increase their awareness of their own social capital. Through understanding the different power relationships in and over the urban space, and among the community itself, there is the potential for barrio people to empower themselves and approach in creative ways social problems such as criminal activities. Also, through the findings and lessons, this research urges the Catholic Church to take ownership of their role and responsibility they have towards the community and the criminal matter.

By understanding how meaning and place are socially constructed, this thesis also raises awareness regarding the complexity of informal settlements, and

increases our understanding of how community works. Additionally, by giving myself and barrio residents a voice, I have tried to overcome the narrow stereotyping of informal settlements as wholly negative or wholly virtuous places that Varley (2013) discusses.

Based on the findings and insights presented in this chapter further research should be aimed at deepening and expanding the understanding about place-making, especially that focused on informal settlements. Place-making in barrios is organic and unstructured and usually not related to the formal processes of planning and urban design. Constructing the barrio is not just a story about deficits; it has also empowered people and strengthened their sense of place. Informal settlements are the fastest growing areas in cities over the world. Developing further and deeper understanding of the underpinning causes, elements and dynamics of place-making is important to better address the challenges and opportunities in these areas.

The concept of territorial transferral process needs further investigation, not only focusing on its negative impact, but also on positive territorial transferral processes. These concepts and phenomena (place-making, power relationships and TTP), as well as how they interconnect and impact on each other, could shape comparative analyses of both formal and informal areas.

This study focused on Latin-American urban informal settlements, specifically Caracas' barrios; however, there are informal settlements all over the world that have evolved in different contexts. Further (comparative) research on the concepts explored in this thesis is needed to understand the implications of differences in:

- societal structures (e.g.: patriarchal and matriarchal; and multicultural societies);
- economic and political pressures (e.g.: wealthier and poorer states, other ideological regimes, and other government structure)
- and cultural phenomena (e.g.: other dominating religions and other non-religious cultural shared elements)

Finally, looking at longitudinal studies developed by Perlman (1976, 2006, 2010) that investigate the topic of informal settlements in Brazil and its communities

in two different times highlighting the changes barrio people have experienced over the years, lead me to understand the importance of going back to Caracas and the areas of study for a follow-up study. Considering the significant political, economic and social changes that Venezuela has already experience in these past six years since I finished the data collection and migrated to Australia, it is fundamental to return and investigate how those changes have impacted people's way of living, religious experience and meanings of the barrio urban space.

* * *

This story has led us through a path of understanding from an integrative perspective that place-making is a combination of urban space, activities, meanings and culture. As suggested in the introduction of this thesis, what makes a place meaningful to people is the significant experiences in that space. What makes it meaningful is that *that specific place* defines and reflects something important about those people's culture.

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APPENDIX A: GENERAL CONTEXT

This appendix presents some background elements that are important to understand where this research is situated in the broader institutional context. The topics discussed are the Venezuelan political environment, the Catholic Church and associated religious elements, and criminal violence in Venezuela, specifically in Caracas.

A.1 VENEZUELAN POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Venezuelan political environment is quite complex. The aim of this section is to introduce the reader briefly to the general political context during and after the Chavez era (post-1999), and an overview of the Chavistas–Opposition relationship.

A.1.1 Venezuelan political environment – the Chavez era and after

Venezuela has historically been a populist state funded by the significant resources and revenue from its oil reserves (Davilaa 2000; Rodríguez Rojas 2010). On the 27th February 1989 a civic uprising broke out in Venezuela, and people from the barrios came down to the city, driven by the deep economic crisis triggered by the government's neoliberal policies (Faria 2008; García-Guadilla 2005; Rodríguez Rojas 2010). Most experts regard this day as a turning point in Venezuelan political history.

After two failed coup attempts in 1992 and several years of discontent, Venezuelans voted in 1998 for Hugo Chávez, who positioned himself as the advocate for the radical change for which Venezuelans yearned (Davilaa 2000; Parker 2005; Rodríguez Rojas 2010). Chávez's anti-capitalist stand was based on bringing to an end a long period of corruption and bad economic policies, the underlying causes of poverty (Faria 2008). Chávez's charismatic approach was to

engage with *el pueblo* (the people), building rapport as a leader and leading people to identify with him.

As Brading (2014) discusses,

> Chávez's victory in the December 1998 presidential elections would not have been possible without the support of social, political, and economic sectors that also wanted change in Venezuela's deeply fragmented society. (Brading 2014, p. 53)

However, after his election, Chávez started expanding his revolution, and divisions emerged among his supporters. In late 1999 a change in the constitution was approved via referendum, deepening and radicalising the political shift Venezuela was experiencing. After a coup attempt in 2002 and an oil strike in 2003, the Chávez government took a more radical anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist stance (Chávez 2011; Rodríguez Rojas 2010). Since then, Venezuela has had a radical left-wing government promoting the idea of '21st Century Socialism'.

From its beginning, '21st Century Socialism' has had a confusing ideological-doctrinal base (Rodríguez Rojas 2010). According to Chávez (2011), and translating his terminology from Spanish, this socialism involved the creation of a socialist economic and productive model, with social property and new ways of social production and distribution. This model included a new political-administrative-territorial approach whereby the *comunas* (communes) were the basis for this *socialist revolution*. Hence, Venezuela currently has two different structures, the traditional and the socialist commune, operating in parallel.

In 2013, Hugo Chávez died and his successor Nicolás Maduro was elected president. From the beginning of Maduro's term, the political environment has been very unstable, reflecting and perpetuating the deep economic crisis in Venezuela. The failure of basic infrastructure, lack of medicines, difficulties in accessing food, the significant different between the official and the black market dollar exchange rate, the inability to access overseas currency from the official market, high murder rates and other severe criminal violence issues, among others, are just a few of the problems Venezuelans currently experience (Utrera 2016).

A.1.2 Chavistas vs. opposition

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Venezuela has historically been a divided society, situation that was deepened during Chavez's ruling. This division ran through all levels, political and social. In the political-economic-power sphere:

> the Coordinadora Democrática (Democratic Coordinator-CD) is the dominant bloc against which the Chavistas and the Venezuelan state are allied in struggle. The CD is made up of the traditional political parties, some high-ranking military officers, the Catholic Church hierarchy, the long-standing national labour union coordinating body, the national and international private media, organised big business (the Federación Venezolana de Camaras y Asociaciones de Comercio y Producción-FEDECAMARAS), and the executives of the state-owned oil company (Petróleos de Venezuela, SA-PDVSA) (Valencia Ramírez 2005, p. 80).[130]

The quotation above describes how the Catholic Church was part of that anti-government bloc. As analysed in Chapters 4 and 7 of this research, the Catholic Church and Chávez's government were not only opposed to each other, but were actually engaged in a power struggle. Traditionally, the Venezuelan government provided financial resources to the Catholic Church. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the Chavista regime withdrew that support.

On a societal level, chavistas are usually seen as uneducated and poor. According to other definitions, they are groups of people funded or directly linked for financial reasons to the government, in most cases because of corruption. However, the chavistas as a group cover a broader spectrum (Valencia Ramírez 2005), to include groups that are also well-educated and well-organised.

Based on the initial definition of chavistas as poor and uneducated, and the opposition as the middle and upper classes, these social divisions have taken on a spatial aspect (García-Guadilla 2005). In Caracas, some associate the chavistas with people who live in barrios and opposition members with people who live in

[130] After the oil strike in 2003, Chávez fired all the white-collar workers of PDVSA, including the high rank executives; these are the ones to which the author is referring.

middle-income suburbs. However, this does not reflect the spatial distribution of these two groups. During this study on barrios, some participants brought up their political opinions, which showed very strong opposition to the government. The most vocal were the priests. However, it must be emphasised that not many residents raised the political issue at all, as it was not central to the topic for this research.

A.2 RELIGIOSITY AND CATHOLIC CHURCH

As stated throughout this thesis, the Church has played a fundamental role, along with the community, in the place-making process. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (1997) states that religions are cultural systems; religiosity is a cultural fact, as it is how people experience their religion and religious feeling. *Popular Catholicism* is a cultural system that is transmitted generationally through socialisation processes, and communicates the *truth* of religious choice as a perspective to viewing and understanding the world (Marzal 2002). In Latin America the expression of the Catholic faith is the people's most characteristic cultural element (Idígoras 1991).

Popular religiosity and official religion co-exist. The *popular* is not in opposition to the *institutional*; they complement each other (García García 1989; Ramos Guerreira 2004). This section explains the integration among the institutional, the conceptual and the experienced religiosity, as shown in Catholic sacred places and processions, and in Catholic Church and its structure in Venezuela.

A.2.1 Catholic sacred spaces and procession

Maldonado (2004) states that *sacred places* form a type of popular religiosity because they are the spaces where people express their religiosity, thus they have special significance. Maldonado (2004) argues that the experience of the *sanctuary* corresponds to the experience of *hierophany*, which is 'the manifestation of the divine or the sacred, especially in a sacred place, object or occasion' (*The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* 1997, p. 428).

The place-popular religiosity relationship is reflected in architecture as well as in urban space (Zamora 1989). The spaces in which religious behaviour is expressed, both individually and collectively, are traditionally the home, the church, the chapel and the sanctuary. However, the streets are also an important space where people can experience and express their religious feeling.

Díez (2004) states that the simplest definition of a sanctuary is 'a sacred place' (p. 268), but it falls short of all that a sanctuary implies. He therefore suggests that these spaces be defined as 'a holy place where the human meets the numinous, the supernatural and the divine' (Díez 2004, p. 269). Díez argues that generally they are in natural places, where humans can build temples or buildings that serve as home for the divine.

This thesis focuses on barrio urban spaces, showing that the religious activities that take place in them also allow them to be sanctified and to complement other spaces such as churches and community centres. One important way in which residents express their religiosity and sacralise these streets is through processions.

According to Flores (1986), there are two types of processions, depending on the location of the image of the Saint[131] being venerated. The first type occurs in a village or community, and is embedded into a specific festivity, such as Holy Week. Usually these processions follow the path to the town square or a slightly longer journey, and have an urban character. This interurban path has known breaks or stops where different altars are prepared, varying in style depending on where they are set up. The second type of procession is a pilgrimage, which implies the inclusion of a shrine. Generally this type of journey is between one town or community to another.

Mobility is particular to processions. The sacralised place is neither static nor specific; rather, the urban space where the processions take place is continuously sacralised by the worshipped image, the priests, and the parishioners participating.

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[131] Mandianes Castro (1989) states that saints are one of the two most common expressions of popular religiosity. The saints are a direct conduit with God through Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and other saints who are closer to people's everyday lives.

A.2.2 Catholic Church and its structure in Venezuela

The Catholic Church worldwide has a hierarchical structure. Archdioceses in each country or major city set up specific goals and strategies, which are further developed at the diocese and archpriesthood levels. As mentioned, the case study for this research was located in the Archpriesthood of Petare in Caracas, which covers an area of almost 140km^2 and has nine parishes, three evangelisation centres and three vicariates.

Some of the specific efforts of the Archpriesthood of Petare are youth management, education and training, as well as alleviating crime through religion. The Archpriesthood Council takes all the general decisions on what needs to be done to achieve these goals, including organising cultural activities such as Holy Week.

Building on the above, each parish is in charge of organising specific events, such as the processions, as well as other activities based on the congregation's charisma. At this level, parishes are free to organise the evangelisation process of the existing community and of new squatters in the barrios. Yet, despite sharing with their parish the goal of reaching out at a community level, the evangelisation centres and vicariates have limited impact in their actions, as they are not allowed to make their own decisions.

All these institutional levels are closely related to the community, and deeply influence how the community evolves a local culture, with religiosity as a fundamental cultural element. Organising processions with community groups is an important way the shapes the community and its environment as a whole.

A.3 CRIMINAL VIOLENCE IN VENEZUELA

According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2003), crime is a socially-constructed phenomenon that relates to the formation of family, community and the group, going beyond the individual. Criminal violence arose in this research as an important element that deeply impacts barrio residents' everyday lives and their relationship to their place. This section addresses the

general Venezuelan and Caracas' context of criminal violence and explains current institutional responses to criminality.

A.3.1 Venezuela's and Caracas' criminal violence context

Venezuela is one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Since 2004 neither the National Institute of Statistics [132] of Venezuela nor any other governmental institution has released criminality or murder rates to the general public (Moreno 2011b). However, the Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia (2016) [*National Observatory of Violence*], a non-governmental organisation established to assess and publish the statistical data regarding violence and criminality in Venezuela, reports that in 2016 the country's murder rate was 91.8 deaths per 100,000 habitants.

Caracas has the highest murder rate in Venezuela. The Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia (2014) reports that there were 122 murders per 100,000 inhabitants in Caracas in 2014. In 2016 that number increased to 140 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, making it the most dangerous city in the world (Overseas Security Advisory Council 2017). But, the type and frequency of crime varies according to the socio-economic status of the victim and the place of residence. Crimes such as express kidnapping (whether they lead to murder or not) most commonly occur in medium-high or high-income suburbs, whereas gang shootouts occur in *barrios*.

In this context, gangs emerge in the barrios as the result of various factors, including the low probability of being caught, repeated poverty cycles and gang members wanting to provide a better life for themselves and their families. Also, perceived lack of opportunities resulting from the lack of a good education, poor employment opportunities and/or a combination of the two are factors leading gang's formation (Briceño-León 2007, 2008; Briceño-León, Villaveces & Concha-Eastman 2008; Cedeño 2013). However, more powerful than these factors is growing up in an environment of violence, family rejection, lack of maternal

[132] The National Institute of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) is the official governmental organisation that manages statistical data such as the census.

protection and care, and other forms of abandonment (Benda & Toombs 2000; Moreno 2011a, 2011b). Gangs in Venezuelan barrios were not initially established as traditionally-organised crime rings, but as groups of young teenagers looking to make connections, gathering together and executing minor crimes, such as mugging and pickpocketing (Moreno 2009b). However, as these gangs developed and became more organised, criminality became a well-regarded profession within the barrio environment because it provided both money and status. The power, acknowledgement and respect[133] was attractive to youngsters coming from unstable home, and they have become a growing problem in Venezuela (Moreno 2011a, 2011b).

A.3.2 Responses to criminality

In Venezuela there has been an ambiguous response to criminality from both the government and the police force. Ineffective crime management strategies range from major national policies to small-scale interventions, at the same time that the government enables civic militia groups to operate.

In 2009, when the national government established public safety as one of its national priorities (Iglesias 2009), 11 plans and policies relating to public safety had already been launched. From 2009 onwards another nine policies were developed, without any positive results (Cedeño 2013; Hidalgo, Asencio & Pérez Macías 2014; Núñez 2006).

Given that firearm-related crime rates increased exponentially from the late 1990s (Hidalgo, Asencio & Pérez Macías 2014; Núñez 2006), most of these plans and policies related to firearm control. By 2015, the most important measures were the *Disarm and Control of Weapons and Ammunition 2014 Act* and the 'Plan Patria Segura' [*Safe Country Plan*] (Ley para el Desarme y Control de Armas y Municiones - Venezuela 2014; Cedeño 2013; Hidalgo, Asencio & Pérez Macías 2014; Ministerio del Poder Popular para Relaciones Interiores Justicia y Paz 2013). However,

[133] The concept of *respect* for violent delinquents is related to not being dominated or controlled by others. To expand refer to Moreno (2009a, 2011c).

firearm-related crimes increased instead of decreasing, because of firearm illegal trafficking, usually led by the police and the military (Gonzalez 2009).

The police were seen as part of the violence problem (Antillano 2009; Gabaldón 2008; Human Rights Watch 2012; Reel 2006), because they addressed the rapidly increasing gang wars and shootouts with violent abuse and executions (Antillano 2009; Gabaldón 2008; Moreno 2011b). State and local governments have tried to address this police violence by implementing some legislative and regulatory reforms, including extra police forces (Cedeño 2013), encouraging police crime prevention techniques (Lea Noticias 2013), increasing salaries and introducing stronger disciplinary measures for policemen (El Universal 2013); this has resulted in a slight improvement in controlling the gangs and the criminal rates in the barrios.

In 2015, on the other hand, the Venezuelan national government launched 'Operación Liberación del Pueblo' [*Operation Peoples' Liberation]*, a new security operation that allowed police forces to detain gang members illegally and even execute them (Human Rights Watch 2017; Smilde 2016b; Utrera 2017). This program resulted in a large number of people being killed; its efficacy is also questionable, since the murder rate in the country increased after its implementation (Smilde 2016a). Part of the inefficiency lies in the fact that the thugs have wide networks that tell them in advance when the police are coming, so an unforeseen outcome of this program is that the gangs became more organised (Smilde 2016a; Utrera 2017).

Different levels of government have implemented urban-social-infrastructure, such as sports fields and basketball courts, to address crime. The rationale behind this was to provide male teenagers with healthy spaces in which to interact and, according to representatives from the Municipality of Sucre, it decreased homicides by 45% (El Nacional 2015). However, providing a physical space is not enough; sports and social programs are required, in conjunction with other crime prevention and law enforcement strategies (Cameron & MacDougall 2000; Hartmann 2001; Palmary & Moat 2002).

The Venezuelan government seem to promote criminal violence in several other ways. Despite the lack of strong evidence regarding government funding for

criminal gangs, experts in Venezuelan criminal violence discuss the different ways in which this financing may happen.

According to Andrés Antillano, Head of the Department of Criminology in the School of Law at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, the police feed criminal gangs with ammunition and guns (Bujanda 2015). López & Molina (2013) argue that the state not only fails to eliminate armed groups, it provides them with human, material and financial resources. In this case, the authors are referring mainly to the *colectivos*, civil militia groups supported by the Chavez government. There are different perspectives regarding these armed groups: one is that the government arms and funds the *colectivos*; another believes that the militia groups get their arms through informal channels (Gurney 2014).

However these groups are funded and armed, there is no doubt that the government privileges them. One example of this is that despite the implementation of gun control and disarmament laws, the *colectivos* were allowed to keep their guns (Gurney 2014; López & Molina 2013).

APPENDIX B: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW OUTLINE

General topics and guiding questions discussed:

1. **About the interviewees' personal history.**
    - Name / Age / What do you do for living? / Where do you live? / How long have you lived in this area? / Why did you move here?

2. **About the place / urban space**
    - History and evolution of where you live / Do you consider that there are public spaces in your neighbourhood? Why? What are they? / What do you think about streets and their intersections? / What activities are engaged on a daily basis on the street – sports' court - intersections? / Meaning and attachment to urban space – residence.

3. **About religiosity**
    - Do you consider yourself a religious person? Why? / How do you express your religiosity? Has this changed over time? / How do you express your religiosity in the public space? / Do you attend processions? Since when? Why? Which ones? / What is the meaning of religion - religiosity to you?
        a. <u>About Holy week</u>
        - What do Holy week and its processions mean to you? / What differences and similarities do you find between the Holy Week processions and those that occur in your barrio at other times of the year?

        b. <u>About the organisation</u>
        - When do you start organising the activities related to the processions of Holy Week in your barrio? / What is you specific role in the organisation of the procession activities? Since when have you been involved in those and why?

c. <u>About the procession</u>

- For how long has this procession taken place in your barrio? / Has the path changed over time? How? Why? / Tell me about the involvement of people and other organisers

4. **About meaning: urban space + religiosity**

- What does the space where the procession occurs mean to you in an every day basis and when the procession is taking place?

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Pilot study community participants:

- María (M2) - Julián Blanco; La Inmaculada
- Nicolás Pulido (N) - Julián Blanco; La Inmaculada
- Yamileth Espejo (Y) – Julián Blanco; San Judas Tadeo
- María (M3) - Julián Blanco; San Judas Tadeo
- Olga (O) - Julián Blanco; San Judas Tadeo
- Marlene (MA) - Julián Blanco; San Judas Tadeo
- Marcelina (MR) - Julián Blanco; San Judas Tadeo

Pilot study Archpriesthood participants:

- Nicolás Bermúdez Villamizar (NI) - Auxiliary Archishop of Caracas; deeply involved with El Nazareno
- Cruz María (CM)– Secretary; lay community member of La Dolorita

Main research participants:

Table C.1: Main research participants

	Key Participants	Procession Organisers - collaborators	Research assistants	General participants
La Dolorita	• Father Luis Azzalini (FA)– Parish leader • Mr José Antonio Silva (JA) – community member	• Father Luigi - priest • Community members ○ Cruz María (CM) ○ Guillermo Rodriguez (GU) ○ Mary García ○ Pulido family (organise the palms)	• Duga Picharde (D) • Amy Higuerey (AM) • Thais Wilson (TH)	• Procession attendees
El Nazareno	• Father Jorge Bravo – Parish leader • Ms Doris Pereira (D) – community member	• Camilo Pérez – Director of Good Friday Procession • Brother Raúl Salazar – Youth group leader Youth group ○ Yudith Garefa (YU) ○ Barbara Hernández (BA) ○ Betzy Hernández (B) ○ Lisbeth Jardín (L) ○ Alexandra Velázquez (A) ○ Jesús (JN) ○ Joaquín Peralta ○ Camila ○ Maryorie Velázquez ○ Yarelis Ochoa	• Eleazar Coello (E) • Javier Maita (J)	
Julián Blanco	• Father Jesús León (JE) - responsible for Evangelisation Centre 2009 • Father Pedro Trigo (T), expert on barrio culture and religiosity, deeply involved with Julián Blanco	• Father Quitelio (Q) – responsible for Evangelisation Centre 2010 and 2011 • Father Carlos Prieto (C) • Seminarian José Miguel Camberra (JM) • Seminarian Leonardo Regalado (LE) • Seminarian Norbis Castillo • Community members ○ María (M) – (Julián Blanco) ○ Mrs María 'Ñaña' Zapata (Ñ)	• Javier Maita (J) • Franklin Liendro (FL)	

Key participants:

The key participants comprised the leading priests and community leaders, who became crucial to the development of the research. The priests became the point of contact between the researchers and the community, enabling the researchers to participate openly and freely in all the procession activities. Furthermore, they provided vital information regarding details of Holy Week processions in general, as well as specific details about those taking place in their areas. They also shared their experiences of working in the barrios and their experiences of place. The insight they provided of the latter was mediated by their background and knowledge, which differed from those of the residents, as the priests are allocated to these places for a determined period that could range from two to 10 years.

The community leaders accompanied and protected the research team during the data collection process; from the initial organisational activities through the processions themselves and to the final events that took place after them. In addition, they commented on and answered our enquiries relating to the different activities that were taking place, thus providing meaningful data to help us understand the relationship between the procession and the urban space. Through in-depth interviews, the community leaders also shared their emotions, thoughts, experiences and meanings about their barrio and their religiosity. Importantly, they also introduced the research team to other community members and other organisers.

Another key participant of this research was Father Pedro Trigo, who had been continuously involved with the Julián Blanco community and the Archpriesthood of Petare for more than 30 years. Besides having a deep knowledge of the community, he provided a critical perspective on the topic based on his vast experience as a priest, theologian and social science researcher.

Procession organisers and collaborators:

Included in this category were the organisers of the Holy Week processions in each of the three study areas. They were targeted as participants with the help of the key participants of each place because of their knowledge regarding this cultural

event and the context of the study, as well as their close involvement in the processions.

The La Dolorita and Julián Blanco procession organisers were also community leaders in their barrios, having lived there for more than 30 years. They had also been involved with this religious activity since it started in each sector. Their local knowledge of their barrios and their activities was profound, enabling me and my research team to comprehend the different complexities embedded in the barrios urban space and their associated meanings at a level that would otherwise not have been possible.

On the other hand, the procession organisers and collaborators of El Nazareno primarily comprised a group of young people from the community who were involved with the Church and its activities. They not only helped organise the events, but were also a vital part of the re-enactment of the Passion of Christ in El Nazareno on Good Friday, one of the most important Holy Week processions in Caracas. Despite their youth, they provided important information to help us understand the interaction between the people, their religiosity and the urban space, in addition to sharing their own meanings of space. This last contribution in particular allowed me to interpret the relationship to place of a younger generation.

Research assistants:

The group of research assistants that participated at some stage of this study comprised five people of different genders and ranging in age from 22 to 34 years old. As previously mentioned, they provided their insights on the procession and the urban space, in addition to expressing their personal experiences of this cultural activity.

General participants

Members of the general public who were interviewed during the processions constituted this category. These participants were randomly selected and approached as we were walking in the procession, engaging them in just short conversations. All these participants remained anonymous.

Including these participants allowed me to understand the perspective of ordinary people regarding the procession as a religious and cultural event, as well as

in relation to the urban space. This approach was taken to balance any bias in the perspective of the organisers.