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Proxy citizenship and transnational advocacy: Colombian activists from Putumayo to Washington, DC

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Abstract

Proxy citizenship is the mechanism through which certain rights of citizenship—the ability to make claims for redress to a state—are conferred on activists through relationships with NGOs. Focusing on advocacy from within the policy process, U.S. and Colombian NGOs channeled political legitimacy and rights of access to Colombians, whose claims emerge from the experience of governance as articulated through testimony. This process, and its roots within the shared history of the Putumayo region of Colombia and Washington, DC, reveals emerging practices of citizenship claims and transnational political participation. [*citizenship, advocacy, testimony, Colombia, activism, policy, NGOs, United States*]

Proxy citizenship

On November 6, 2008, Colombian activists gathered at a long table in a narrow, brown-paneled meeting room on the fourth floor of the U.S. State Department. They had traveled to Washington, DC, to present the case that U.S. programs had harmed their home state of Putumayo, and they used dramatic personal tales of suffering to argue that U.S. policy was fomenting violence and increasing insecurity and hunger there. A conflict zone that had produced much of the world's cocaine since the mid-1990s, the region had been the object of a U.S. aid package funding aerial fumigation, counterinsurgency army battalions, and development projects. In their presentations, the activists used personal experiences to confront and contest the official policy narratives that circulated about their region: that criminal guerrilla supporters had been transformed into citizens by U.S.-sponsored military campaigns and development programs. Instead, these activists told of devastating personal tragedies, of daughters, sisters, and friends disappeared and killed by brutal gunmen allied with local military commanders and of economic hardship and hunger from food crops destroyed by counternarcotics programs. Through these stories, they argued that the U.S. programs had exacerbated, not relieved, the ongoing economic crises, violence, and impunity in the region.

A chain of relationships and resources allowed Colombians access to these policy-making spaces in Washington. On every leg of their journey, Colombian, U.S., and international NGOs provided substantial political and material resources to facilitate the activists' passage. The Colombians left homes in rural hamlets, traveling by boat and jeep through lands controlled by warring guerrillas and paramilitary forces to the region's largest town, took a daylong bus ride to Bogotá followed by a three-hour flight to Miami, and then passed through U.S. immigration and customs checkpoints. Finally, as a sentry checked their names against a preapproved entry list, they stepped through the metal detectors at the gray marble entryway of the State Department on a blockaded Washington street.

The activism of the group's members—the director of a rural school, head of a peasant association, leader of an indigenous community, member of a women's peace group, and advocate for the disappeared—had brought them into confrontation with the Colombian state but also gained them significant allies among policy advocates. These allies provided training

workshops, vouched for visa applications, paid for plane tickets, brokered meetings, and served as translators. They also vetted potential participants for acceptability and advised on the production of politically acceptable narratives. Through their travels, these activists were marked by the limits of their political possibilities—imposed by their identity as Colombian, rural, poor, women, and indigenous and by their association with crime, coca, and violence. Yet their arrival and participation in intensely restricted zones of political power also pointed to the ways in which transnational activism has transformed the possibilities of state encounters, as these Colombians came to make claims against what was considered the most powerful state in the world.

Access to this space of encounter with the U.S. state was made possible through what I am calling “proxy citizenship,” in which some of the rights of citizenship—the ability to make claims for redress to the state on the basis of experience of governance—are conferred and enacted through relationships and affiliations with networks of human rights NGOs. This advocacy—participation in the formation of particular policies—is made possible through transnational linkages mediated by nongovernmental policy advocates in Colombia and the United States. U.S. NGOs allow Colombian activists to function as their proxies, delegating to them authority, political legitimacy, and political rights of access to a space of confrontation with the state. The Colombians’ claims to partial citizenship emerge from the experience of governance, articulated through testimony as a particular kind of expert policy knowledge. Colombian activists spoke as victims of U.S. policies, experiencing governance via U.S. programs, requesting political changes in Washington, and offering guidance on how these policies should be redirected.¹

This focus on advocacy within the political process generated significant controversy among human rights defenders. While the claims made by Colombian activists and their allies have not produced the demanded shifts in policy and governance, they have profoundly transformed the broader political terrain by contributing to new political alliances and relationships and the subjective experience of political identities. This process represents an emergent form of political belonging produced through networked relationships and centered on the transterritorial power of the United States to exercise governance projects in Latin America. In the case of the Putumayense activists, the experience of the encounter, including the emotional production of testimony before the state, produced new forms of empirical citizenship that were repatriated to Colombia; their experience in Washington transformed how they understand themselves as Colombian citizens and their possibilities for political participation within Colombia.

This analysis draws on more than a decade of research on transnational human rights work in Colombia and the United States as well as what I call “embedded ethnography” during my work as a paid staff member and institutional participant in these processes (Tate 2007:10–13). My project involves ethnographic research with Colombian human rights NGOs, including more than 40 life history interviews with human rights defenders.² Beginning in 2005, I expanded my research to include 35 extended interviews with U.S. human rights defenders, review of declassified government documents, and extended interviews with policy officials.³ Throughout this period, Colombian activists frequently identified me as a U.S. citizen ally rather than as an academic because of my history as an advocate. Prior to entering graduate school, I worked on human rights issues in Colombia in a variety of institutional positions, during which I developed personal and professional relationships with a number of Colombian human rights defenders, some of whom I discuss here. During graduate school, I spent three years as a senior

fellow for Colombia at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), where I was responsible for research, organizing delegations, and developing advocacy strategies. As is the case for other anthropologists who incorporate their shifting positionality into their methodological strategies, my varied experiences have allowed me greater access to some spheres—including the delegation described below—and they inform my analysis (Greenhalgh 2008; Ho 2009; Mosse 2004).

From 1999 to the present, hundreds of Colombians, working with a range of U.S. political allies, including unions, churches, solidarity organizations, and human rights groups, have participated in meetings with U.S. officials in Colombia and in Washington through this process of proxy citizenship. Here, I focus on the November 2008 meetings of the five activists from Putumayo to illuminate significant features of this process for analysis: how advocacy emerged as a priority for Colombian and U.S. NGOs; how activists were able to build political legitimacy through particular kinds of political participation within Putumayo and through their links with national Colombian NGOs; how new forms of policy expertise were produced through testimonial narratives of suffering; and the possibilities and limitations of this process and activists' changing experience of citizenship on their return to Colombia.⁴ Examining this encounter, and its deep roots within the shared history of the Putumayo and Washington, illuminates emerging practices of citizenship claims and transnational political participation. Attention to these processes can open up new realms of political experience to ethnographic inquiry, revealing how transnational activism enables the formation of distinct experiences of political belonging and claims making beyond the nation and its traditional citizen subjects.

Theorizing proxy citizenship

Proxy citizenship emerges from the multiple ways in which contemporary citizenship can be disassembled into particular rights and obligations. Histories of citizenship have documented how the rights and obligations conferred by a state to members of the nation have been expanded to new categories of rights-bearing and claiming subjects, producing new forms of citizenship subjectivities. At the same time, ethnographic inquiry illuminates the ways in which citizenship is unevenly accessible to distinct groups, genders, races, and classes within the same nation-state (Fikes 2009; Mamdani 2001), described as “disjunctive citizenship” in the case of Brazil (Caldeira and Holston 1999; Holston 2008). Migration and flows of labor and capital have created transnational political fields and deterritorialized the lived experiences of citizenship and the legal categories available to migrants (Coutin 2000, 2007; Ong 1999). These processes have led to what Aihwa Ong (2006a, 2006b) describes as “mutations” that disaggregate the component parts of citizenship among mobile populations, the development of political lives in two nations (Glick Schiller 2005:51), and forms of cultural citizenship (Basch et al. 1994; Rosaldo 2003). Histories of U.S. citizenship struggles reveal how the obligations of citizenship—paying taxes, periodic military service, being subject to restrictive legislation—can be, and in practice have been, legally separated from the rights and rewards of citizenship, such as voting, political participation, and entitlement programs (Brodkin 1998). Borrowing from the concept of “partible personhood” (Strathern 1990), proxy citizenship expands these notions to explore the ways in which partible packages of rights and obligations are mobilized through transnational processes of governance and activism. The Colombian activists I discuss here do not carry U.S. passports, vote, pay taxes, or claim any of the other multiple duties and rights of U.S. citizenship. Yet they claim political rights to redress before the state as subjects of governance, legitimated by their relationships with citizen advocates.

By channeling their experience of U.S. transterritorial governance projects in Latin America through relationships with U.S. advocacy allies, Latin American activists can participate in claims making before the U.S. state. These Colombians are not claiming rights on the basis of a legal relationship with or as residents of a particular state but are demanding redress from that state as subjects of its governance. In the 2000 U.S. aid package known as Plan Colombia, the largest single initial program expenditure was \$600 million for military training and supplies destined for the “Push into Southern Colombia,” targeting the Putumayo region. U.S. resources were used to train and equip the Colombian Army and fund coca eradication via aerial spraying of chemical herbicides as well as to support rural development and local government and human rights programs. Fundamental policy decisions, including program design, implementation strategies, and funding levels, were decided in Washington with the authorization but minimal participation of the Colombian state. The regime of governance experienced by residents of Putumayo is not military or colonial occupation but, rather, governance by proxy, a particular form of neocolonial governance exercised by the United States in relation to Latin American states. Thus, proxy citizenship is a form of citizenship rescaled to encompass the relationships of proxy governance throughout the “Americas” as well as through the individual, emerging from felt experience and changed self-identity as a subject of governance (Greenhouse 2002:196).

At the same time, access to the state required a process of legitimization from strategically placed U.S. allies, involving “encounters between actors from vastly different, yet connected, social and political spaces” (Cowan 2008:250). These actors were themselves part of a historical shift from solidarity to advocacy as a central logic of transnational campaigns. NGOs emerged in many political arenas and contexts as primary interlocutors with the state, replacing such structures as labor unions and other collective organizations. Humanitarian and human rights NGOs, especially, have played a critical role in the production of particular forms of political subjects and claims making in the post–Cold War era, increasingly regulating the ways in which foreign nationals are able to participate in political life within the United States and Europe (Fassin 2010; Redfield 2006; Ticktin 2011). Professionalizing human rights defenders have increasingly channeled activism into advocacy, as a foundation of liberal democratic notions of citizenship and political participation and as part of the depoliticizing and technocratizing aspect of NGO practice (Englund 2006; Merry 2006; Tate 2011). This complex political field requires delineating a spectrum of political practices organized around two poles: activism—actions intended to affect political change broadly defined, including transformation of the institutional organization of power relations and structures—and advocacy—practices designed to affect particular policy processes.

A cohort of largely white, middle-class activists and advocates, who had developed a repertoire of practices and institutions in the 1980s in opposition to U.S. policy in Central America, turned their focus to Colombia in the late 1990s (Tate 2009). While U.S. activists continued to base calls for solidarity on shared identities as religious believers, human rights activists, and union supporters, revolutionary political solidarity—a core principle of the Central America movement (Perla 2008)—was unavailable, given the post–Cold War decline of the Left and guerrilla practices of criminality and brutality (Chernick 2005).⁵ U.S. activists came to articulate their political solidarity through proxy citizenship, allowing Colombian activists to participate in policy formulation rather than building grassroots support for wholesale political transformation, and they distanced themselves from forms of political solidarity that had previously shaped political practices and affinities. While my analysis here focuses on human

rights campaigns, the shift from labor solidarity to labor philanthropy in the case of campaigns to support unionized Colombian Coca-Cola workers (Gill 2009)—what other analysts have called “solidarity charity” in the case of coal workers (Chomsky and Striffler 2008)—traces a similar process of political transformation.

The Colombian political claims examined here are produced through *testimonio*, the emotional recounting of experiences of suffering that activists have historically used as a central mobilizing practice, particularly in Latin America (Gugelberger 1996; Beverley and Zimmerman 1990). Over the past four decades, *testimonio* has been strategically deployed in transnational social movements between the United States and Latin America as part of leverage politics, to help mobilize U.S. citizens to act on Latin Americans’ behalf. During the 1970s, the “boomerang” model employed *testimonio* to inspire U.S. activists to pressure their government to push for Argentine reforms (Keck and Sikkink 1998), and, in the 1980s, Central American activists used a “signal flare” strategy to inspire U.S. citizens to demand change from their government (Perla 2008). In an important shift, Latin American activists now speak directly to policy makers in an effort to change U.S. policies. *Testimonio* circulates within policy-making spheres as a form of expert policy knowledge while still adhering to conventions of the genre, involving particular forms of emotional expression as well as the presumed implication of the listener in political commitments through the newly acquired comprehension of suffering. *Testimonio*’s value as expertise is generated through its ontological status as a report of conditions “on the ground” in hidden, inaccessible, and dangerous sites (Carr 2010), authentically representing individual life events as well as producing a collective history representing communal experiences and interpretations. *Testimonio* as policy knowledge, however, contradicts the conventional construction and authorization of expertise through statistics, data, and other putatively objective forms of expert analysis (Andreas and Greenhill 2010; Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Greenhalgh 2008; Redfield 2006; Rosga and Satterthwaite 2009). The eruption of these accounts in policy forums has paradoxical effects: Accepted as legitimate policy knowledge by some, *testimonios* are delegitimized by others as anecdotal and lacking analytical rigor. The production of *testimonio* in policy arenas can be employed by state actors to demonstrate their inclusive, democratic practice, while the content of testimonial claims is largely ignored in policy creation, as officials, empowered through the institutional and discursive power of “state speech” (Butler 1997), co-opt and capture activist encounters for their own projects of configuring state power and legitimacy.

Institutionalizing proxy citizenship

In this case, I examine the practice of transnational advocacy through the alliances established between U.S. and Colombian NGOs to bring Colombian activists into encounters with U.S. policy makers. These relationships are necessarily reactive, emerging in response to U.S. policy initiatives, in this case, the creation of a major U.S. aid package to Colombia in 2000. During the 1990s, despite significant levels of political violence within that country, U.S. military aid was dedicated to counternarcotics operations and did not generate significant interest or opposition within the United States. For their part, Colombian activists during this period focused on Europe as the primary site for solidarity campaigns, lobbying the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva for action on the Colombia case and developing relationships with activist groups throughout the continent (Tate 2007). U.S. and Colombian groups converged in opposition to increasing official U.S. intervention in Colombia. Growing military assistance, dating from a military-to-military agreement signed in 1998, made the Colombian intervention seem like the latest in U.S. proxy wars, in which abusive militaries have

received assistance in exchange for political acquiescence (Grandin 2007). For many progressive Colombian and U.S. analysts, growing military assistance undermined an incipient peace process then being developed with the country's largest guerrilla groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), and implicated the United States in political violence by paramilitary groups linked to state security forces.

Within Colombia, a number of human rights groups based in major cities expanded their political repertoires to include policy advocacy, in part as a result of a fraught process of professionalization that transformed volunteer organizations associated with social movements during the 1970s and 1980s into NGOs. Beginning in the 1990s, international funding and training initiatives facilitated the growing dominance of legal and professional staff within the human rights movement; their international work focused on the United Nations (Tate 2007). MINGA, the Bogotá-based organization mediating Putumayo activists' access to Washington NGOs, typified this process in its organizational structure, paid professional staff, and activities. Founded in 1992, the group combined legal services with grassroots activism in conflictive regions, including educational and human rights workshops, cultural activities, and human rights reporting. MINGA's international work focused on consciousness- and fund-raising tours in Europe; the shift to advocacy in the United States generated significant controversy among the staff. The growing legitimacy and profile of Colombian activists in Washington was demonstrated when MINGA's executive director and three other activists won the 1998 Robert F. Kennedy Award for human rights and Nancy Sanchez, MINGA's Putumayo researcher, won the 2003 Letellier Moffit Award.⁶

The delegation was organized to demonstrate the work of small, fragile, but significant networks of small-town activists, particularly the Women's Alliance of Putumayo (hereafter, the Alliance). While the region has been widely characterized as an "outlaw" region by U.S. and Colombian politicians, in fact, Putumayo residents have been deeply enmeshed in long histories of political organizing and have diverse connections to national and transnational networks (Ramírez 2011). The Alliance was founded in 2003 in response to the escalating political violence in the region; its work focused on documenting abuses, offering education workshops, and developing support networks for local women. Four of the five delegation members belonged to the Alliance. Ana, a diminutive, soft-spoken rural schoolteacher in her late fifties, was one of many who constituted the primary links between isolated hamlets and the capital. Blanca, a stout woman whose broad hands revealed a lifetime of hard labor, had been a leader of family members of the disappeared who were searching mass graves in the region, and she was a vocal witness of her four daughters' disappearance. MINGA provided legal representation for her case, and the Alliance offered moral and political support. Marta, in her late thirties, with feathered black hair and an anxious gaze, was a new member of the Alliance, as well as of the Women's Path to Peace (la Ruta Pacífica), one of the country's largest and oldest pacifist feminist organizations, inspired in part by the symbolic protests of transnational groups such as Women in Black (Cockburn 2007). A slim, serious single mother in her late twenties, Emilse spoke for the Peasant Association of Southwest Putumayo, ACSOMAYO, which claimed to represent over 13,000 peasants and 2,300 indigenous people and is a member organization of the Women's Network; she assumed leadership of ACSOMAYO after paramilitary groups killed the previous president. Willington was the only man participating in the delegation and was a representative of the Cofán people, one of Putumayo's 13 indigenous communities. The group was accompanied by MINGA's executive director and the Putumayo coordinator.

U.S. advocacy groups began traveling to Putumayo in 1999. I represented WOLA that year on a research delegation that also included representatives of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, MINGA, and one other Colombian human rights group. MINGA quickly established close relationships with Washington-based NGOs, including the eventual sponsor of the Putumayo activists' 2008 delegation, the Center for International Policy (CIP), which was founded in 1975 by antiwar activists. CIP's research director, Adam Isacson, ran its Colombia program and authored an influential blog, *Plan Colombia and Beyond*. Subsequent delegations to Putumayo included a 2001 WOLA-organized U.S. congressional delegation, including Representatives Jim McGovern (D-MA)—who later sponsored the 2008 Putumayo delegation—and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL). Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch visited the region; the latter dedicated a chapter to the military operations in Putumayo in a 2001 report on paramilitary–military links. Witness for Peace brought delegations of Americans and wrote grassroots policy reports documenting the impact of U.S. policy in the region. MINGA facilitated many of these trips and maintained extensive contacts with advocacy and activist organizations in Europe and the United States, sending staff on speaking tours and participating in advocacy campaigns targeting specific legislative initiatives in the United States and European Union.

These advocacy campaigns emerged from a broader process of professionalization of human rights groups in that they no longer only denounced abuses but attempted to formulate specific policies. In the case of Latin America, much of the military and political agenda was set in Washington, rather than the region's national capitals, allowing Washington-based NGOs a privileged position in this process. Human rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, established Washington advocacy offices during the 1990s, as did a number of humanitarian aid groups. Such efforts required activists to develop new forms of expertise: acquiring knowledge of the U.S. legislative schedule, process, history, and political terrain and developing personal relationships with congressional staffers. Rather than speak in the utopian language of human rights recommendations, these activists now had to function within the Washington universe of possibilities—developing “the ask,” the specific action they wanted policy makers to take, related to past actions and future results.⁷ They were also able to interact with new counterparts: During the 1990s, a bureaucratic infrastructure within the government was growing to address human rights concerns (Mertus 2008; Sikkink 2004). These contradictory imperatives—policy focused and oppositional—resulted in both innovative coalitions working with a variety of tactics and strategies and deep, sometimes bitter, divides over appropriate means and ends. U.S. advocates faced fraught calculations of the political cost of policy-making efforts that alienated grassroots constituencies (Goodale and Merry 2007; Merry 2006). Both U.S. and Colombian activists within grassroots organizations critiqued advocacy as requiring compromises and “insider” strategies by NGOs in Washington; they preferred confrontational and protest-orientated strategies and had little interest in negotiating piecemeal policies in place of their demands for dramatic changes in U.S. policy. They viewed U.S. policy as a source of violence and suffering and were generally dismissive of the possibilities of transformation from within the policy process, claiming that prioritizing such campaigns was wasteful, politically dishonest, and exclusionary.

Despite these concerns, U.S. advocates working on Colombia specifically prioritized bringing their Colombian partners into the U.S. policy process. Lisa Haugaard, director of the Latin America Working Group (LAWG), a coalition of religious, humanitarian, and solidarity organizations, described this new priority as a conscious reaction to the focus on the U.S.

grassroots during the Central America movement. Founded in 1983 as the Central American Working Group, LAWG expanded its efforts, with five paid staff working on increasing humanitarian and development assistance throughout Latin America, opposing the Cuba embargo and promoting human rights in Colombia. According to Haguaard, LAWG hoped to create mechanisms for Colombian human rights groups to participate directly in policy making rather than simply using them to educate the U.S. public. This effort coalesced in the work of the Colombia Steering Committee, established in 1998 as a loose coalition of human rights, humanitarian, and religious organizations, which began working on Colombia policy because of concerns about the impact of Plan Colombia and was cochaired by LAWG and the U.S. Office on Colombia (USOC).⁸ The USOC was created in 1998, with two paid staff and funding from the Ford Foundation, on the initiative of members of the Colombia Human Rights Committee in Washington; its mandate was to increase the participation of broadly defined sectors of Colombian civil society in U.S. policy making.

Enacting proxy citizenship

The November 2008 delegation originated in a proposal for Putumayo activists to testify at a congressional human rights caucus hearing and to conduct a week of meetings with government agencies in Washington. According to Isacson, MINGA's director Gloria Flórez developed the delegation proposal with a two-pronged mission: to raise awareness of the Putumayo activists as a protective strategy and to examine the results of Plan Colombia in its place of origin. CIP had organized a short visit to Colombia by a congressional delegation with Representative McGovern earlier that year; during a night of drinking and analysis of Colombian politics with activists in Bogotá, Flórez and Sanchez presented the proposal for the delegation to him as their "big ask." Having first traveled to the region in 2001, McGovern had a long-standing interest in it, and as a senior member and, later, cochair of the Congressional Human Rights Commission, he was strategically positioned to facilitate a hearing focused on Putumayo.

U.S. NGOs provided the significant material and political resources required for proxy citizenship. Access to U.S. officials, even within Colombia, often required travel, frequently from distant hamlets, to municipal capitals or to Bogotá. National and international NGO partners paid for transportation costs, hotels, and food. NGO connections also facilitated visa applications, bypassing, among other things, the financial requirements for short-term travel and the wait for the required interview, which at times reached as long as two years. In the case of the Putumayo delegation, Isacson, inspired by Flórez's proposal, wrote a grant request to the Connect U.S. Fund and, to his surprise, received the funding. According to the fund's website, the rapid response grant is "designed to enable organizations to respond and act on unique, time-sensitive and unforeseen opportunities for advancing more responsible U.S. global engagement" (Connect U.S. Fund 2008–10). The website lists a July 2008 \$20,000 grant approved for "Justice, Truth and U.S. Military Assistance: giving Putumayo's victims a hearing." This funding covered the travel expenses of four activists from Putumayo and two from Bogotá, and it paid for some of the U.S. advocates' staff time. Legitimacy was the primary political resource provided. This was, in part, the product of institutional shifts in policy-making practices, including the increasing reliance on private policy expertise from think tanks in the late Cold War and post-Cold War period (Baxstrom et al. 2005). NGO advocates vetted Colombian activists, and MINGA staff vouched for the Putumayo activists. Not just any Putumayo resident could make proxy citizenship claims. Claimants could not be guerrilla supporters or criminals; small coca farmers were acceptable but not owners of large coca plantations. The vetting processes required for proxy citizenship occurred in a nested hierarchy of organizations: International NGOs

developed partnerships with specific national groups that established links with particular regional and small-town activists.

Appropriate advocacy practices were taught through official workshops and informal mentoring. At the beginning of each visit, Washington-based staff would instruct Colombian activists on the mandate and politics of the institutions they were engaging and the best manner in which to present their case. In the case of the Putumayo delegation, this training occurred both in Bogotá and Washington. In addition to the preparation offered by Colombian advocates, Isacson flew to Bogotá two weeks prior to the trip to “explain . . . what to expect, who the people were that that we were going to meet with, the meeting messages, what would work.” In Washington, the training ranged from a multihour discussion of advocacy strategy in the bare CIP conference room to whispered counsel in the marble, high-ceilinged hallways of congressional buildings. Advocates explained the different mandates of government agencies and provided a brief history of the careers of individual officials and explained their roles in policy debates. Before meeting with congressional staff, U.S. advocates shared their analysis of the voting records and interests of particular members of Congress.

Through these informal training sessions, numerous activists were taught the basics of U.S. constituency-based politics and political advocacy and were trained in presenting particular kinds of human rights narratives, even if, in practice, they maintained their agency in the production of particular narratives. Several scholars of the sanctuary movement have analyzed how the production of “good stories” (Lorentzen 1991)—the particular framing of Salvadoran history and conflicts, a charismatic speaking style, and the articulation of authentic but nondamaging victimhood—was fundamental to the ongoing activism of U.S. sanctuary workers. Even while discursively denying their political agency, Central American activists strategically deployed it as part of their political mobilizing strategy (Perla and Coutin 2010). Their stories had to generate “empathy, to spark a sense of urgency, and obligation or responsibility” as well as “be adapted to dominant US norms, values and [self-]perceptions” (Perla and Coutin 2010:12). Colombian activists were instructed to be extremely concise, to present linear narratives focused on specific incidents, and to focus their complicated stories of Colombian violence on a single anecdote that could be understood by and elicit sympathy from young congressional staffers who could spare just 15 minutes for a meeting. Yet the Colombians exercised considerable initiative when articulating their stories. Asked to assess the political performance of the Putumayo activists in the meetings, Isacson concluded that, despite his instruction that they incorporate a broader analysis of the region’s security situation into their testimony, “they didn’t do much of that, they talked about the threat that they are still under, their personal situation. But it was not a good view of security in Putumayo overall.” While adhering to some of the advocacy training, such as producing emotional, abbreviated accounts of specific incidents, the Colombians chose to focus on the incidents that had most affected them personally, even if they had occurred several years prior.

Contesting state claims: Putumayo in Washington

Arriving in Washington, Putumayo activists confronted a narrative of their history that cast them as criminals and guerrilla supporters who were transformed into citizens through U.S. intervention. This view, of both the historical problems in Putumayo and the success of the U.S.-sponsored programs in the region, was widely promoted by U.S. officials and contractors in English-language newsletters, press interviews, and official reports. In their Washington meetings, the Putumayo activists directly challenged these conclusions. Security had not improved, the activists asserted, and multiple armed groups maintained an ongoing presence in

the region. The activists argued that the Colombian military, rather than providing security, was, in fact, contributing to insecurity, increasing the levels of violence experienced by inhabitants and violating their rights. Their critique of U.S. counternarcotics programs in the region was based not on an assessment of the ineffectiveness of these programs in reducing the flow of drugs or the price and availability of illicit drugs in the United States. Instead, they linked the counternarcotics programs to the larger social problems experienced in the region, focusing on the personal cost to the population. Finally, they argued that U.S. policy should be reoriented away from the military and into humanitarian and development projects.

The highest-profile moment of the trip was their testimony before the House of Representatives Human Rights Commission, a two-hour event on a Thursday afternoon. The commission, while officially sanctioned by Congress, does not consider legislation but is voluntarily convened to educate members of Congress and the public about human rights issues. All of the activists who spoke focused on their individual experiences of violence and suffering during their testimony, with Colombian Bogotá-based advocates offering contextual remarks describing the general situation in Putumayo and their research in the region. Among the Putumayo activists, Blanca offered the most sustained testimonial narrative, an account of the disappearance of four of her daughters and her subsequent search for their bodies. Sitting on the raised dais before commission members, Blanca spoke in a loud, deliberate voice of how the girls, 19, 18-year-old twins, and 12, were taken from a family barbeque on January 1, 2001, by paramilitary commanders she listed by nickname (in each meeting, she recounted the same details, using the same phrases). She described how she fled to a neighboring state with her surviving family members, returning to search for the bodies of her daughters in the mass graves that had been discovered throughout the region. After another leader of the women searching for their families' remains was killed, she was forced to flee again, this time to Bogotá. Her delivery was punctuated by brief pauses while she cried, wiped her eyes with tissues, or breathed deeply in an effort to maintain her composure. At times, she directed her words to a large banner, hung along the wall at the back of the room, that displayed pictures of her disappeared daughters—the youngest in her school uniform, her head cocked, an inquisitive smile on her face—and located her account within a tradition of political presentations set in a visual landscape of the dead and disappeared. Her presentation ended with tears as she explained her current economic misery and demanded that the government return her house—now occupied by supporters of the paramilitaries that killed her daughters—and provide aid for her surviving family.

The commission hearing replicated many of the expected elements of a testimonio performance as a public event, in which the activists speak to a sympathetic audience. The activists faced the public on a raised stage, sitting behind a long desk and speaking into arched, wire-necked microphones. The two members of Congress on the stage did not cross-examine or question the activists but allowed them to speak uninterrupted and praised their work and bravery. Held in the Rayburn building, the event was open to the public; anyone could enter, provided they passed the metal detector surveillance at the building entrance. However, the audience, sitting on straight-backed metal chairs arranged in tight rows, with an aisle in the middle, was primarily a sympathetic crowd of Washington human rights advocates and largely liberal Democratic staffers.

An earlier meeting at the State Department provides an alternative example of how testimonial narratives were incorporated into policy making and was more typical of the delegation's meetings. The setting was distinct from that of the hearing in a number of ways. The meeting was closed, and only invited State Department officials and the delegation participated;

no one else was admitted to the building, much less the meeting, without prior individual clearance. Unlike the large, open hearing room, the meeting at State took place in a small conference room. Here the activists did not face their public. Rather, the meeting was presided over by the most senior government official present, an older man in a plain blue suit, who sat at the head of a table flanked by two younger women taking notes. The activists were seated in a long semicircle facing him along the table, and a row of chairs was set against the wall for the lower-ranking staff. There were, however, similarities. As they had at the hearing, during this meeting, the activists made their presentations without interruptions or the give-and-take common to the meeting format. Despite Isacson's statement during the initial introductions that the activists welcomed questions, the State Department officials present did not question them or make any remarks until the conclusion. Rather than the sustained testimony of the hearing, however, the Bogotá advocates did occasionally interject to provide additional information, cite statistics about additional cases, or mention their broader advocacy campaigns. As in the hearing, the activists offered tales of personal tragedy as representations of communal suffering. Blanca repeated the story of her daughters' disappearances. Marta's personal testimony focused on her search for the body of her sister, a two-term local representative taken from her home, hacked to pieces, and thrown into a river along with seven others. She went on to describe how the most basic aspects of daily life had changed, as people could no longer travel outside of town for fear of being accused of participating in an armed group. Ana described having to continue teaching in school buildings taken over by paramilitary groups, her efforts to assist the widows and orphans left after military attacks, and her ongoing concern about the well-being of young students forced to travel from distant hamlets through combat zones. Willington focused on the forced military recruitment of indigenous youth and the abuses by the "security forces [that] do whatever they want ... because they think everybody is supporting the guerrillas."

Much of the debate over such testimonio has focused on the issues of contested authenticity and their ability to represent collective experience (Arias 2001). Here, I instead explore how the testimonial form functions as political practice and expert knowledge. The policy arguments offered by these activists were produced through, and legitimated by, their emotional accounts of lived encounters with the U.S. state through the military and counternarcotics programs the United States developed and funded in their region. These political narratives are deeply gendered, accounts of suffering rather than of political agency or resistance; in their accounts, the delegation's women positioned themselves as maternal figures and caregivers in relationship to their family members as well as the broader community. Assuming this role is particularly important in a region like Putumayo, where inhabitants are doubly suspect as possible guerrilla sympathizers and drug-trafficking criminals, both widely viewed as male identities.⁹ While both testimonio and policy knowledge attempt to inspire the listener to action, in this case the audience was not U.S. citizen activists moved to protest but government officials acting to shift policy. In the arena of policy expertise, the focus was not on the suffering and political mobilization of the narrator but on the provision of hidden knowledge and the production of information about the role of the state that can be deployed in policy making. For policy makers, the region of Putumayo is of central importance as the target of the initial development programs and military operations funded by Plan Colombia. Yet information flow from the region is restricted; because it is physically remote from the developed center of Colombia, sharing a border with Ecuador, travel to and in the region is difficult and dangerous, prohibited or limited to brief official delegations for the vast majority of U.S. officials because of security concerns. Intimate knowledge of "inaccessible or illegible" things is one central element

in the construction of expertise (Carr 2010:21). Thus, the continual mention of the risk involved in the activists' presentation of their experience, the demands for silence in the region, and the bravery required to attempt proxy citizenship demands all valorized the delegation's accounts as precious and important information. At the same time, these accounts of abuses and government malfeasance were presented as common knowledge, widely known and experienced within the region, easily comprehended by anyone who has been there. Marta, for example, emphasized her status as an eyewitness in speaking of the relationship between the military and paramilitary that could be publicly observed in her town: "I saw with my own eyes, how they drank *trago* (alcohol) together, how they talked together, the *paras* (paramilitaries) and the security forces. And we all had to stay quiet."

In these accounts, policy knowledge is also constituted through the focus on the role of the state and its military forces. These institutions were not absent but actively participated in the conflict, through direct action (such as strafing houses in indigenous communities) or collaboration (between the military and paramilitary groups). In her account, Blanca does not locate her family's tragedy within political disputes and claims. She laments her loss as a mother and insists on identification by the public in terms of the universal claims of parents seeking to protect their children. Her story, however, implicates the state in several ways. First, she intentionally names the paramilitaries who were working with local military commanders in the area. Second, she describes the repeated inaction of specific government officials who refused to assist her: during her daughters' abduction, as she yelled for help in the village square; then, as she begged the local police and the mayor's staff to take action; and, later, as she returned to search for the bodies among the multiple mass graves in the region. Here she contests the dominant narrative of the absent state, repeatedly describing state agents as actively colluding in brutal violence or actively refusing to intervene despite their presence and her immediate demands that they do so. She concludes with a reference to the ongoing dispossession generated by paramilitary violence in the region. Her house, in a final insult, remains occupied by paramilitary gunmen.

During these state encounters, the Colombian activists also presented their testimonio as a form of policy knowledge, through the "ask" embedded in the narratives, in which the United States appeared complicit in the abuses of the Colombian state. In her discussion of the humanitarian crisis generated by the destruction of food and coca crops and the killings by state security forces, peasant leader Emilse told the State Department officials, "I know that although you don't have complete responsibility, that some of it is the responsibility of the Colombian state, many of the programs in this region that we are talking about are funded by your government." She requested that more responsive, long-term development projects be funded in the area. Schoolteacher Ana concluded her remarks with specific policy claims: "We have to live daily with the armed groups, so we ask, how can you keep giving money to the military, when you know that they are violating the right to life, to housing, to tranquility. The best way to help a country develop is to provide the help directly to the social part of development, for children and education."

The testimonial double bind

For many of the NGO, congressional, and agency staff who traced their political education to participation in or sympathy with activist movements, the testimonial performance was a legitimate form of actionable policy information. The accounts also gained credibility from the privileging of local information, the notion that "being there" provided particular insights and authentic knowledge unattainable other ways. These emotional accounts of personal loss served

to validate the claims of suffering and abuse; they were fundamental to the legitimacy of the policy critique offered by Colombian activists on the basis of their lived experience in the region (Allen 2009; Fassin 2008). The authenticating power of experience was explicitly stated in some of the meetings. The activists were repeatedly told by some of the officials of the worth and importance of their testimony as political knowledge that could help them in the policy-making process. In the words of one official, “We appreciate your visit, because it is one thing to hear directly from people, and not just read about the situation.” Officials also spoke of being personally affected—moved—by the testimony that they had heard. However, the activists’ testimony, fundamental to their political credibility with their allies for producing proxy citizenship, was also epistemologically risky. Some policy makers dismissed it as inadmissible because of speakers’ reliance on emotional, individual narratives. The emotional personal stories that legitimated the claims of political knowledge through lived experience were in some cases interrogated as inadequate and excluded from consideration as the kind of expert knowledge required for policy making. For advocates espousing this view, testimonial performance should be accompanied by broader analysis, in the shift from activist inspiration to policy knowledge, or it risks dismissal by policy makers. This double bind emerged from the ways in which the practices of advocacy within existing political systems set up unresolvable tensions between requirements of immediate political action, including legibility as legitimate political actors, and broader demands for social transformation (Cattelino 2010; Fortun 2001; Redfield 2012).

This dynamic became very clear in one meeting with a congressional staffer, a senior aide who self-identified as a political ally critical of U.S. policy toward Colombia. Sitting around a long table in an empty hearing room, he repeatedly and aggressively questioned the speakers about their larger analysis of the dynamic in the region, rejecting their stories of lived experience. When Willington spoke of his indigenous community as being on the road to extinction, the staffer demanded, “When you say, it was ‘exterminio,’ do you think it was a policy, or a consequence?” When Willington offered a series of statistics about the indigenous communities in the region, the staffer responded, “That is the kind of information we need: concrete data, demographic data, where you can see the difference from one time to another.” Is this a policy, a trend, simply a single event, or a consequence of other factors, the staffer repeatedly demanded. Blanca’s emotion as she tearfully recounted once again the disappearance of her daughters was a distraction from a concise analysis of the larger histories of violence. In his dismissive body language and comments, the staffer clearly signaled he viewed the accounts of suffering as obscuring the required analysis and as delegitimizing the speakers. Several times, he looked to me to cut off the Colombians, so that he could ask questions that he felt were more critical. This staffer viewed the encounter not as space for witnessing the delegation’s accounts but as an opportunity for further political training for the activists, who could use their Washington meetings not as a platform for their public testimony but as an educational encounter in which they learned about U.S. political culture and how interests are defined and weighed in U.S. policy debates. “Politics is done toward another government, not the people, and you have to balance the interests involved,” he told the activists. He was unwilling to serve as the expected witnessing public to their performance of outrage and grief as they pressed their moral demands on the state.

This staffer’s conduct violated the activists’ expectations of appropriate conduct during these meetings and of the suitable response to their emotional accounts. During the evening following the meeting, the last at the end of a long and intense day, the delegates were full of anger and outrage at what they perceived as the staffer’s disrespectful dismissal of their political

claims and personal tragedies. Worse, they felt, his effort to explain the U.S. political system and the complex landscape of political interests involved in shaping U.S. policy making was an effort to delegitimize their political claims through testimony, invalidating their presence. “Why should we bother coming here if everyone knew everything already and nothing was going to change?” one of the activists angrily demanded over breakfast the next morning. The Bogotá-based national NGO activists admitted to me that they were experienced in providing the kind of quantified analysis viewed as legitimate policy information but that, for the Putumayo activists offering their testimony as a means of staking claims on the basis of their dramatic lived experience, this demand was profoundly alienating.

At the same time, many were concerned about the display of excessive emotion. Collective ritualized displays of emotion are critical sites for the consolidation of activist identities and commitments (Goodwin et al. 2001); the Women’s Alliance employed public marches and symbolic performances in their *trabajo lúdico*, which translates as “playful work” but here glosses a much larger field of sensory, sensuous, emotional, and artistic experience and expression.¹⁰ Many of these events included moments of intense public grieving. During their after-hours discussions of each day’s meetings, the activists returned to the most intense display of emotion in their performance of testimony: public crying. Some activists said they did not want to present their stories following Blanca’s testimony because of the dramatic impression she made and the difficulty of restraining their own tears. Public tears were clearly gendered. Only women activists cried. MINGA’s executive director laughingly recounted being scolded by one of her staff, an experienced international campaigner, for crying in meetings while discussing cases with senior officials. The Bogotá-based activist, who had worked in Putumayo for the past decade and was a close mentor to the women, strongly discouraged public crying in meetings, telling them that it would delegitimize their claims. Yet, during informal advocacy training conversations, she repeatedly urged the activists to make policy makers cry, through their stories of intense suffering, as a means of generating political commitments.

This policy advocacy had unintended consequences. In some cases, the personal testimonies offered by the Colombian activists were reconfigured in the service of state projects. Through the particular power of “state speech” (Butler 1997) to create legal and political realities, the presiding official’s concluding summation at the State Department meeting rearticulated the activists’ testimony into one that exonerated U.S. and Colombian officials. By emanating from institutions, state-sanctioned framing of events and histories circulates as inherently more authoritative and credible, rendering ineffective the activists’ attempt to contest these narratives. The activists provided repeated and clear allegations that U.S.-supported military forces colluded with paramilitary groups and that counternarcotics policies produced humanitarian crisis. Officials rhetorically erased the substance of the Colombians’ political claims, refusing to acknowledge the focus on state complicity with paramilitary violence and the ongoing impunity and threats in the region. Instead, they described the population as “trapped between two forces,” naming only the guerrillas and not acknowledging the paramilitaries and their Colombian military patrons. Rather than acknowledge the ways in which the Colombian state is complicit in political violence, the State Department representative instead described it as absent. “Because they are not in the communities, there is no prosecutor, army, or police forces, there is no presence of the state,” the official offered as the final lesson of the meeting. “If the army is there, they are just passing through for a moment, the government is not there.” Finally, State Department officials rearticulated these claims as a statement of support for the militarized development projects being formulated by the United States.

“We are concerned about not being heard,” a Bogotá-based advocate began before outlining a critique of this program, including the ways in which social development objectives were militarized and made subordinate to military objectives, violated the rights of civilians, and were used for intelligence gathering. The fundamental critique of the military as responsible for ongoing abuses, as well as of a model of governance that places the use of violence at the center of the role of the state, was ignored. While arguing for ongoing U.S. pressure on Colombian military forces to “conduct themselves well,” U.S. policy makers rejected a shift to educational and humanitarian development projects, as advocated by the activists, endorsing the increasing militarization of humanitarian and civilian government programs. The activists’ profound critiques of U.S. policy were thus remade into support for U.S. programs. The content of their claims—emotional personal testimony to demonstrate the ongoing impunity, violence, and complicity of the government in abuses in their region—was not addressed. The fact of the meeting itself—that activists were able to meet with U.S. officials, their presence rather than their speech—was used as evidence of U.S. democratic practice. “Participation” in policy making became simple presence, the encounter itself, rather than the incorporation of people’s views and critiques into policy or the practice of governance.

Citizen subjectivities and the repatriation of proxy citizenship

Participation in proxy citizenship advocacy transformed activists’ sense of political possibilities and participation in Colombia in complex ways. Activists feared their public testimony would lead to violent reprisals in Colombia, even as they widely viewed facing this risk as demonstrating their personal valor and commitment to martyred family members. Testimonial performance itself was a fraught process, exposing activists to the contradictions of their temporary safety in Washington and the ongoing violence in their home region and to the emotional consequences of reliving their traumas. For some activists, travel to Washington provided new political resources and alliances as well as contributing to new citizenship subjectivities within Colombia.

The complex calculus of testimonio as political performance, healing exorcism, and personal therapy was a frequent topic of reflection by the delegation. A large and growing literature critiques testimony’s supposed specific psychosocial impact on the speaker as a technology of healing and on larger political structures as legal mechanisms of redress, much of it emerging from studies of truth commissions that rely on public testimony (Feldman 2004; Hinton 2010; Shaw et al. 2010; Theidon 2012; Wilson 2001) and emerging forms of humanitarianism (Fassin 2008; Redfield 2006; Ticktin 2011; Wilson and Brown 2011). During their after-hours dinner and taxicab conversations, activists returned again and again to the emotional work of providing testimony as both a burden and a release. Blanca’s final words in her tragic narrative were repeated ringing calls for financial support for herself and her surviving family. Being a witness had become her life’s work and the highlight of numerous NGO events, yet she continued to live without a regular salary in the poor conditions of Bogotá’s squatter neighborhoods. One of the more experienced Bogotá-based advocates reflected on the emotional stress involved in leaving the crisis-driven daily routine of Colombian human rights activism and spending time in the relative comfort of U.S. and European NGO offices and homes. She described a cycle of resentment, despair, and anger that she had experienced during her first trip abroad and had since witnessed repeatedly while accompanying other activists. “Many things that people have not dealt with emotionally emerge,” she told me, admitting that she experienced a breakdown “of intense emotions” during her first trips out of the country. This traumatized and emotional reaction was also evident in the kinds of relationships that the activists developed with

each other. Blanca's constant angry, scolding harangues of the other activists were widely viewed as the product of the emotional toll of losing her daughters and her subsequent focus on their case. "You have to realize that people are affected by these things in different ways," one told me. "Some people get very grumpy and angry, some people react in different ways, it is a long process."

In part, activists' distinct responses are a result of the contradictory assessments of the physical risks of retaliation generated by their political participation in public testimony. There was a great deal of discussion among the activists about risk: of what kind of talk generated risk and who among them was at the most risk. At the same time, taking on risk was a signifier of political and personal commitment to their dead and disappeared family members and to the suffering collectives and communities that had experienced similar losses but were unable to speak out. These disputes came to a head before the public hearing, when heated discussions of the possible effects of Colombian media coverage led one of the activists to refuse to participate. She explained to me later that she was both fearful of future violence and emotionally exhausted by the expectation that she produce a specific narrative accounting of painful events, "getting everything out of me, *sacando todo*. Remembering everything, all the bodies I saw, that I had to collect, telling the families and figuring out how to bury them."

The activists also described long-term personal, institutional, and political transformations as a result of their trip. Within the complex political terrain of their visit to Washington, they repeatedly described the transformative experience of speaking. In one meeting, one told a staffer simply, "I don't know how we got so brave," as she described their understanding of the work in Washington. They described the experience of daily life in the combat zones of Putumayo as profoundly silencing and of repeatedly having their claims dismissed and ignored by Colombian government officials. The opportunity to speak in a public hearing, and in meetings with powerful officials, some felt, validated their political claims. During interviews nine months later in Colombia, Ana told me how the experience "made me think about a lot of participation, *confianza* (trust), how we had it in Washington, we could have meetings and say things, how we could tell our story, but we couldn't do that in Colombia because we don't have *confianza* in other people. Being there made me realize we have to say the things that are happening, made me less afraid to speak, the things I need to say."

These activists also gained political capital that was useful during their encounters with local politicians, in which they demonstrated their newly acquired transnational political standing and increased status back in Colombia. Ana described a meeting with the mayor of her small town, who admonished her for not telling him about her trip before she had left, claiming, "I am the authority, and you are under my authority." She responded by asserting her autonomy and the right to "speak the truth." She described a later encounter, after local prosecutors had twice come to look for her. After three sleepless nights, she finally decided that demonstrating her political clout by revealing her trip to Washington would be the only way to get them to leave her alone. When they stopped her car and requested her identity card, she claimed to have left it at home, handing over her passport instead, with the full-page U.S. visa. "I am a teacher and a defender of children's rights," she told them, "that is what I was doing there." Despite her intense fear during the trip, when she recalled the experience back in Colombia, she described it as making her feel "protected," giving her both the confidence to speak and allies that she could rhetorically and practically call on in times of stress and confrontation.

Conclusion

The Colombian activists had multiple and distinct ways of evaluating their experiences in Washington. Several attributed changes in U.S. policy to their work. Speaking nine months after the trip, over a small cup of wine on the porch of a friend's house in Putumayo, one told me, "We did a great job, things changed so much, so fast, afterward [in the decrease in funding for Colombia], I like to think we had something to do with it." In describing the hearing, one of the activists excitedly reported that she had seen a member of Congress tearing up during the testimony of family disappearance. She repeated the story more than a year later when describing the achievements of the trip. Although the activists did not get the policy changes they advocated—suspension of military aid and redirection of assistance to humanitarian programs—they claimed that shifts in aid resulted at least in part from their activism (other explanations could include the decline in the U.S. foreign aid budget, the financial crisis in the United States, and a shift in U.S. focus to Mexico with the rise in drug-related violence there). Washington-based NGO advocates argue that the Colombian activists contributed to cumulative changes and were fundamental in creating and sustaining the commitment of their policy-maker allies as well as contributing to educating an activist public through speaking tours and media coverage. Thus, while activists were not singularly or directly responsible for subsequent political actions, NGO advocates saw the cumulative effects of their efforts, resulting in letters of support from members of Congress, public statements of support and political support in specific cases, and, on rare occasions, funding through budget line items (usually dedicated to government partners such as the human rights unit of the inspector general's office). Others saw the trip as a waste of time and resources and a distraction from the ongoing demands of work among their communities.

Proxy citizenship begins with the reconceptualization of the scale of citizenship. Not bounded by the nation-state, proxy citizenship becomes one of many forms of contemporary political belonging and claims making before the state, in which the physical limits of territory and the legal definitions of membership or exclusion are no longer central in the process of authorizing citizenship claims. The practices and individual articulation of future political selves are critical, beyond legal regimes or past participation (Cowan 2008:250). This analysis builds on the established literature that examines how governance projects and political categories must be understood in hemispheric rather than national terms in the Americas. Proxy citizenship acknowledges the ways in which Latin American citizens are subject to governance by U.S.-designed, funded, and, in some cases, operated programs within their nations, and it enables the articulation of claims before state power. This process privileges relationships among activists that are channeled through specific institutions and authorized by particular political practices. These relationships and encounters rely on shifting notions of solidarity and political possibility, which have emerged from a history of activist practices first consolidated during Central American peace movements. These dynamics are central not only to trips by delegations of activists to Washington but also to accompaniment, in which activists travel to physically escort activists under threat in other countries and employ advocacy strategies as part of their protection efforts. A number of such programs operate throughout the world; in Colombia, Peace Brigades International, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and Christian Peacemaker teams mobilize a logic of citizenship in which the privileges of some—Western, usually white—are transferred to others through physical proximity to ensure bodily integrity. The institutional channels, and the specific disaggregated privileges of citizenship that flow through them, are critical to many forms of contemporary activism.

For the Colombian and U.S. activists and policy makers, the friction in these encounters (Tsing 2004) produces unintended consequences rather than the stated policy goals. Much of the impact consists of ephemeral and unmeasurable accruing of political capital and credibility for activists, like the rural Colombian teacher who displayed her U.S. visa before the local officials attempting to intimidate her into silence. Several activists I interviewed, whose visits to Washington I do not discuss above, described the new political alliances and commitments created when Colombians from different regions and organizations spent days and weeks together in meetings and hotels. In one memorable case, activists from an organization representing family members kidnapped by guerrillas and one from a group supporting relatives of those targeted by state security forces formed an unexpected affinity. Within the Colombian political landscape, their political alliances were understood to be oppositional. Families of kidnap victims were generally vocal supporters of increased military and security aid, whereas those targeted by state security forces were critical of it. In this case, the vetting process conducted by gatekeeper NGOs ensured that the organization representing kidnap victims focused on lower-class police and soldier draftees, held in some cases for more than a decade as political prisoners. Through their encounters in Washington, they found a shared political agenda, and, in their meetings, they decided to switch testimonies, each describing the others' cases and tragedies, as a means of demonstrating their alliance.

This analysis has emerged from my vantage point within activist and advocacy processes as a former advocate and supporter. My ethnographic work remains located within this sphere and examines the shifting political subjectivities and the institutional channels of these practices. I have been tracing the “landscape of circulation as well as the flow” (Tsing 2000:329). Other work has examined more fully the larger social worlds of these networks, revealing clearly the multiple ways that such activism is contesting and critiqued (Fitz-Henry 2011) as that of “tourist commissions” or “jet-set campesinos” (Edelman 2005), rather than worthy activist advocacy. As such activism is a central form of post-Cold War solidarity, however, understanding the activist intentions and the subjectivities within it is critical for tracing the contemporary political landscape of transnational advocacy.

Proxy citizenship depends on a notion of citizenship rights as partible: that some rights are accrued through the experience of governance—in this case, the right to make a claim before the state—whereas others are not. The process of proxy citizenship and the institutional channels through which these political resources flow reveal that proxy citizenship is partible in another way as well: in terms of a partible population, some of whose members are worthy of these limited rights and some of whom are not. Proxy citizenship is a profoundly exclusionary form of political participation, in which alliances and affinities in relationship with U.S. advocates, rather than simply the experience of governance itself, are a fundamental requirement for access. NGOs play multiple gatekeeping and vetting roles, through which proxy citizenship can be understood as part of a process of professionalization with specific ideological agendas. Multiple political views are excluded, including insurrectionary political projects as well as significant segments (in some cases, the majority) of the population who may welcome U.S. interventions.

As claims embodied in particular forms of policy expertise, communicated through life histories and personal stories, the testimonies articulating proxy citizenship enter into a complex political field. This advocacy practice demonstrates an important use of testimony as policy-making knowledge rather than as humanitarian practice or mechanism for justice. In this social and political realm, testimony as policy knowledge is contested and debated by activists—as an epistemologically and physically risky strategy—and by policy makers, who may dismiss such

efforts as insufficiently objective or analytical for the policy process. Activists debate the calibration of emotion, which must be sufficient to produce politically useful narratives from the complex landscapes of suffering but not so excessive that these accounts are delegitimized. Are tears an authenticating expression of the profoundness of a political claim, or are they proof of personal instability? These debates are ongoing.

The political conditions required for proxy citizenship are profoundly particular: proxy governance programs operated by the United States in Latin America, mobilized U.S. advocates ready to channel material and political resources, and activists on the ground willing to submit to this taxing process. Yet, as the forms of transnational solidarity between U.S. and Latin Americans have waned in the past two decades, proxy citizenship has become an important mechanism for attempting to articulate political transformation within policy-making processes. For the Colombian activists, and, in some cases, their allies, the experience of producing testimonial policy knowledge through encounter with U.S. policy makers reconstitutes a transformed sense of themselves as victims of political violence, citizens. However, their testimonies are not accepted as revelations of truth but assimilated and absorbed into existing institutional agendas. State agents can co-opt these testimonies for particular political projects, producing the encounter with activists as evidence of democracy in action without acknowledging the content of the critique. Given the absence of a mass protest movement, shrinking political space for dissent, and expanding government bureaucracy dedicated to encompassing human rights, advocacy strategies have emerged as a way to enact solidarity, producing new forms of political subjectivities but only limited policy change, if any.

Notes

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1. Proxy citizenship via NGOs is not the only way in which Colombians have attempted to influence U.S. policy outcomes. The U.S. Colombia Business Partnership, founded in 1997 to bring the perspective of the business community to the debates, actively supported the aid package for Colombia. The Colombian embassy pays approximately \$100,000 a month to public relations firms to lobby U.S. legislators (Davis 2007: A6).
2. Throughout this analysis, I distinguish between advocates and activists; these are slippery categories with considerable overlap. I use “human rights defenders” as a metacategory to include both activists and advocates.
3. This article draws on fieldwork funded by the Wenner Gren Foundation, the United States Institute for Peace, and Colby Faculty Development Funds; on my work at the Washington Office on Latin America; and on my research as a fellow at the National Security Archives.

4. I have chosen to focus on one delegation to more completely discuss the particular dynamics in ethnographic detail; I chose this delegation because I have been conducting ongoing fieldwork in Putumayo and because I was able to participate in the group's entire agenda while in Washington, including staying at the same hotel.
5. Another significant difference was the lack of a large Colombian diaspora population within the United States, as there had been in the case of Central America. The millions of Central American refugees in the United States had brought compelling stories of persecution by U.S.-funded military forces directly to U.S. audiences and galvanized the Sanctuary movement (Cunningham 1995; García 2006; Lorentzen 1991). No such population arrived from Colombia. There is no land route from Colombia to the United States, and rather than gather in large refugee camps, most Colombians fleeing violence and instability left their homes as individual family units, resettling informally in shantytowns within Colombia and creating one of the world's largest—but largely invisible—internally displaced populations. The number of Colombians emigrating to other countries did increase (including to Spain, Ecuador, and the United States), but the migrants were largely educated and middle class, often identified with the government and supportive of increased military aid, and were not natural allies of U.S.-based activists protesting U.S. policy. Within the United States, Colombian immigrants' primary political agenda was securing favorable immigration status, such as temporary protective status, for themselves.
6. The prize is awarded annually to Latin American activists promoting human rights in the name of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffit, employees of the Institute for Policy Studies killed in a car bomb orchestrated by the Chilean government in 1976. Colombians won the award in 1991, 1998, 2001, and 2007.
7. In advocacy training, a specific request for action from a legislator or policy maker is frequently referred to as “the ask.” While I am not sure of the precise etymology of the term, I believe it originated in sales and business training.
8. The complete list of member organizations can be found at the USOC website (see USOC 2008).
9. The importance of innocence as an ontological category for victims of human rights abuses has been explored by scholars in a number of Latin American contexts. In urban Brazil, critics of police brutality have been dismissed by accusations that they care only for the “rights for bandits” (Caldeira 2001) and criminals (Holston 2008). In Peru, the human rights community and local communities in conflictive zones have engaged in extensive and controversial debates over the importance of innocence for defending victims of abuse (Theidon 2012). Following the imposition of sweeping antiterrorist legislation, NGOs adopted a “campaign for the innocents,” defending individuals wrongly imprisoned but refusing to take the cases of members of the Shining Path, even if they suffered torture while incarcerated. During the debate over the reach of the truth and reparations committee, legal advisors discussed what is known as the Clean Hands Doctrine, a legal principle that establishes eligibility for reparations depending on degree of criminal involvement. In the Peruvian case, debate focused on whether to provide reparations to families whose Shining Path relatives had been killed while in government custody (LaPlante 2009). Similarly, there is an extensive literature documenting the importance of the production of specific forms of political identities, including innocence, in political asylum claims (Coutin 2007). For U.S. activists, the presumed

criminality of Colombian communities, because of the illicit drug trade, made the human rights issues less salient and these communities less sympathetic.

10. The importance of “*lo lúdico*” and its role in women’s political demands and collective organizing have emerged from a range of ecofeminist and so-called difference feminist writing in Latin America and is employed here to create space for gendered enactment of commemoration and memory. In its own documents, the Colombian women’s group la Ruta Pacífica (Sanchez Gomez 2006) describes the use of symbolism as one of five strategies to counter violence, aiming for “the deconstruction of the pervasive symbolism of violence and war and the substitution of a new visual and textual language and creative rituals and other practices that recover what women have brought to the world.” La Ruta is inspired in part by groups like Argentina’s Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and by the vigils of the international Women in Black movement: women who deploy themselves as iconic figures in public spaces, maintaining ritual silence and wearing black. The women of la Ruta also draw on workshops with street theater groups from Bogotá that train them in an established repertoire of symbolic commemorative practices, including ambulatory displays of photos of the dead and disappeared; installations in public plazas of religious funeral objects such as crosses, flowers, and candles; and public invitations to funeral masses for specific individuals (often printed on newspaper-sized posters and plastered on the streets, identifying the deceased and family members by name). During marches, they cover their mouths with small crosses made of sticks as a sign of being silenced; their uniform at these events is all black, or they wear T-shirts with the slogan “No Más” (No More).

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