Making space for peace: international protective accompaniment in Colombia

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This is a chapter about bodies used to make peace in the midst of war, but also about bodies that are more than bodies, and how bodies with chains can build peace.[i] In conflict zones some bodies are more likely to be attacked than others. Certain outsiders, for example, tend to be left alone. International protective accompaniment is a grassroots peacebuilding strategy that uses that privilege by putting internationals who are less at risk literally next to locals who are under threat because of their work for peace and justice. Sometimes they are called 'unarmed bodyguards'.[ii]

This strategy was started in the early 1980s by US solidarity activists in Central America. Since then thousands of human rights workers, grassroots organizations, and communities have been protected by accompaniers. Today there are 24 organizations doing international accompaniment in ten countries (see figure one). Most accompaniers are now from the US, Canada and Western Europe, and continue to serve in Latin America, though there have been smaller teams in other regions, particularly in Palestine (though it has been notably less successful there). Colombia, with 13 groups, is far and away the country with the largest number of accompaniment organizations.
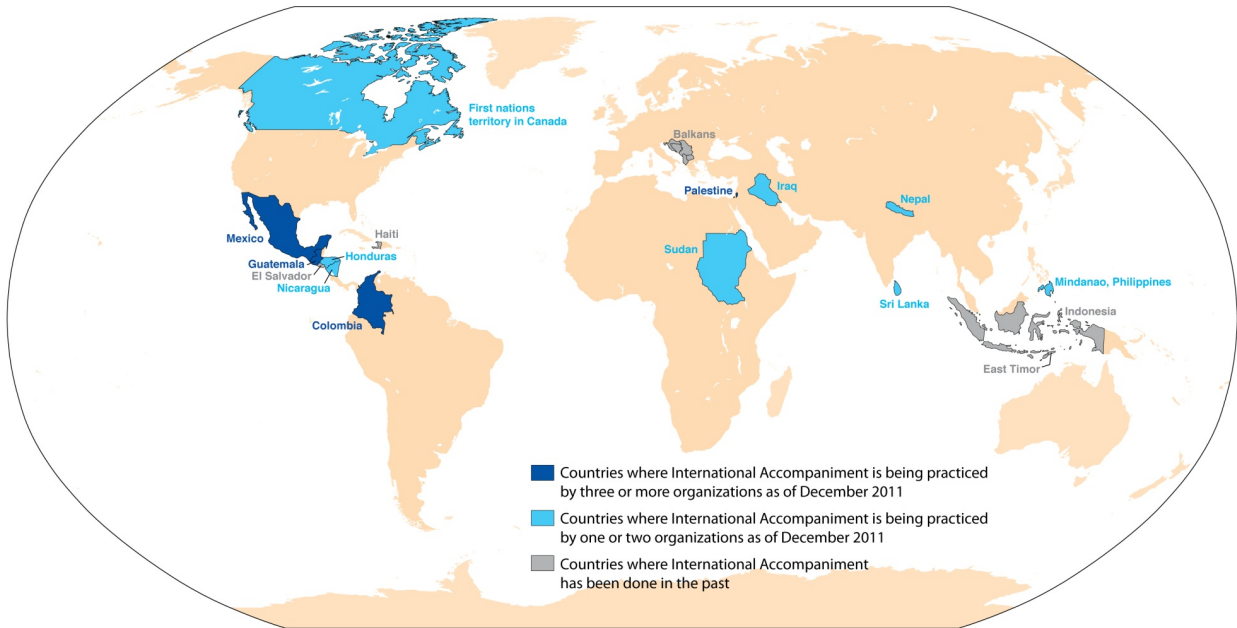
Figure 1: Where international accompaniment is and has been practiced
Map by Eric Leinberger

Ironically accompaniers use the reality that their lives 'count' more in the current geopolitical system, to try to build a world where everyone's life is respected, and everyone 'counts'. International accompaniers are less likely to be attacked because, in a sense, their passports make their lives 'worth more' – particularly in the countries they go to, where the US often plays a key role in the conflict. Accompaniment is generally done to protect human rights activists who are threatened by state and parastate actors who receive support from the US, and sometimes from Europe and Canada.

There is a dramatic case from Colombia of a death squad coming in the night when Peace Brigades International (PBI) was there. It was in Barrancabermeja, on 23 December 1997 and two PBI accompaniers were spending the night in the home of Colombian human rights worker Mario Calixto because he had received serious threats.[iii]   Two armed men came to the door that night, saying they were going to kill Mario. When the accompaniers stepped forward and said

'we are internationals and we are here with him,' the armed men left. Scenarios like this are

extremely rare. The aim of accompaniment is to ensure that armed actors will already know that

the accompaniers are present, and so will not even knock on the door. But as Mahony puts it, we

have no way of knowing how many times they choose not to knock on the door[iv] – and I would

add, we have no way of knowing why they chose not to knock.

So let me clarify that I do not look at *whether* accompaniment works, because there is no way to

fully know if an accompanied Colombian

was not attacked because of the

accompanier's presence or because of a myriad of other factors, ranging from the weather to the

love life of the local paramilitary leader. Given that those accompanied regularly say that they

believe they are alive because of accompaniment, and that more and more Colombian groups

request international accompaniment - far more than currently receive it - I assume that it

generally does work, at least in Colombia. Instead this chapter is about *how* accompaniment

works, how it 'makes space for peace', to use the PBI slogan. First let me offer a bit of context

about Colombia and why it has more accompaniment organizations than any other. There are

two aspects of the Colombian conflict that make accompaniment particularly effective there:

land grabs and US involvement.[v]

Land grabs

What is most fought over in the Colombian conflict is control over land. The numbers of people

violently expelled from their lands (largely by paramilitaries) took off in the 1980s and has

continued to grow.   From the mid 1980s through to 2009 in Colombia around one in 10 people

had to flee their homes, communities, and land - over 4 million in total.[vi] More than 80 per cent

of those were displaced after 2000 (when the Colombian army's Plan Colombia began), and 98 per cent were displaced from rural areas - which is to say it is the rural poor whose land is being taken.[vii]

By the 1980s land distribution in Colombia was already one of the most unequal in the world, and it has continued to get far worse. From the colonial period through to today political conflicts have turned around control over land for economic activities.[viii] Colombia started exporting coffee in 1870 and bananas in 1900, and barbed wire made its first appearance around that time, expanding and enclosing ranch lands. LeGrande argues that these activities pushed more people to the 'frontiers', starting a long running cycle where poor settlers (*colonos*) would clear and cultivate the land, but were followed a decade or so later by men with resources who used various methods to push them off their small plots (which they often had no legal title to) and consolidate them into larger private properties.[ix] This cycle of displacement has been repeated again and again over the years as 'frontier' land has taken on new value when 'new' commercial crops emerge, or other natural resources are found or become more valuable.

Though this process started early, by the middle of the twentieth century more than half of Colombia was still a 'frontier zone', and the areas most disputed between armed actors since then have been these zones.[x] The trends have varied by region, but LeGrande argues that in general terms in the 1970s the new crop was marijuana, in the 1980s and 1990s it was coca leaf for cocaine, and in the 2000s it was oil palm for biodiesel.[xi] In the late 1980 there were significant new discoveries of oil and coal and new oil discoveries in particular have continued.[xii] In the last few years as the price of gold has taken off, so too have gold mines.[xiii] Small mines are being taken and consolidated into larger holdings.[xiv] There are regional and temporal

variations, but in broad strokes this is an ongoing cycle of accumulation through dispossession.[xv] This development model is made possible by, and relies on, violence.[xvi]

These land grabs have aggravated an already extremely unequal division of wealth in Colombia. In 2009 the UNDP ranked Colombia as the 6th most unequal country in the world.[xvii] Land concentration in Colombia is striking and, again, is one of the worst in the world. [xviii] The top 1 per cent now own 52 per cent of the land. Worse still, they do not use it well. A recent World Bank report talks of the *'ganaderizacion'* (cattleization) of the country. Some 41 million hectares that were before used to grow crops are now used to grow 21 million cows (at an average of about two hectares per cow).[xix] But food crops are also being replaced by oil palm plantations, under a development model promoted by the US.[xx]

This is an ongoing massive counter-land reform. Displacement is not a side effect of the armed conflict - the conflict turns around the theft of land and resources. Oslender argues that displacement is a development strategy and that terror is its tool.[xxi] Over half of all cultivable land is now in the hands of 'former' paramilitaries who have been engaged in one of the largest land grabs in the world.[xxii] Many brave campesinos are resisting displacement, as well as returning to their stolen lands – and both are particularly spatial forms of resistance that can be more easily supported through the physical presence of accompaniers than, say, a hunger strike. It is largely those communities, or the human rights groups that support them, that are protected by international accompaniers. Accompaniers' ability to deter attacks against them is shaped by the 'special role' of the US in Colombia.

US involvement

In the last eleven years the Colombian government has received far more US military aid than any other country in the Americas. US military aid to Colombia was drastically increased in 2000 when Congress approved 'Plan Colombia', and came to more than six billion dollars between 2000 and 2010.[xxiii] The US role in the conflict in Colombia is not only geopolitical but also geoeconomic. The neoliberal program pushed around the world by the US and US-led international financial institutions has aggravated the Colombian conflict. Neoliberal policies were first widely adopted in Colombia in the late 1980s.[xxiv] Tariff barriers went from 83 per cent in 1985 to 6.7 per cent by 1992, which had a huge impact on the agricultural sector and opened the way for drug barons to push their way on to land.[xxv] As unemployment skyrocketed in certain parts of the country,[xxvi] many turned to the drug trade, or the paramilitary or the guerillas - often the only employers in remote areas.

Neoliberalism creates havoc that can only be contained with repression, as exemplified in the first full implementation of neoliberal policies in Chile in the 1970s, under the Pinochet dictatorship. It is no coincidence that the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was put forward along with the military Plan Colombia. The FTA offers special concessions and protections for US corporate investment and opens access to key resources. But as cheap corn and other US products flood the market it will put many more Colombian small farmers out of work. The FTA was signed in late 2006, but only approved by the US Congress in October 2011. But Colombia is not as much a case of neoliberalism creating havoc that is then contained with repression as it is one of violence creating havoc for neoliberal 'development' to take advantage of.

The relationship between natural resources and US military aid is no secret. Bill Richardson, then Secretary of Energy under President Clinton, said in Cartagena in 1999, shortly before Plan Colombia began, that, 'The United States and its allies will invest millions of dollars in two areas of the Colombian economy, in the areas of mining and energy, and to secure these investments we are tripling military aid to Colombia.'[xxvii] Access to and control of resources is tied to control of land. Colombia has a wealth of reserves of untapped oil, natural gas, gold, and coal, as well as emeralds, uranium, hardwoods and ample fresh water, which is used to grow in particular bananas, sugarcane, oil palm,[xxviii] cattle, and roses[xxix] - though these may not be the first exports you think of in relation to Colombia.[xxx] Colombia is a major Latin American exporter of oil to the US,[xxxi] but perhaps more importantly it also has large untapped future oil reserves, many of which are thought to be located in what has traditionally been territory controlled by the FARC guerillas.[xxxii]

Though two organizations were doing international accompaniment in Colombia in the 1990s, it was when US involvement in the Colombian conflict jumped in 2000 that a wave of organizations began accompaniment, led by US based groups, though other European groups then followed. Accompaniers came because of the military aid in several senses. The increased militarization was leading to more violent land grabs, displacement, and human rights abuses generally. Some accompaniment organizations were inspired by a sense of responsibility to work on the ground and support those struggling against the abuses that the military aid paid for by their tax dollars was facilitating. But the increase in US aid is important for understanding the workings of accompaniment because it, ironically, offers accompaniers leverage through the use of a US passport that is now even more powerful in Colombia.

Going on an accompaniment

So how do accompaniers use a passport to 'make space for peace'? Accompaniers talk of going on 'accompaniments'. In the peace community of San José going on an accompaniment can mean a six hours hike up the mountains with three community leaders who are going to speak with members of one of the hamlets of the community, or it can mean sitting next to a community member on the back of a truck on the hour long ride into town and going through several military checkpoints. The paramilitary checkpoints tend to disappear when an accompanier is present. Accompaniers usually go on these trips in a pair of two, wearing uniforms, and if they are hiking in the mountains, with a satellite phone and sometimes carrying a white flag.

I talked with accompaniers about what they did with their bodies and props to shape the space on these trips. They agreed on the importance of walking with confidence and standing straight and looking vigilant rather than slouching or looking distracted (which can be difficult during long meetings in hot weather). They also agreed on the importance of obviously speaking in English (or Swedish, etc). One Latina accompanier from the USA said that if she had no one to speak English to at a checkpoint she would make a phone call in English, even a fake one.

Accompaniers disagreed on where they should stand (or sit, or walk) in relation to the person or persons they accompanied. For example, some accompaniers sit in the circle of a meeting of those they are accompanying, some just outside, some far outside. Some listen, some make a point of reading or doing other things to show that they are not listening, like playing with kids. Different groups do accompaniment differently and disagree on best or even standard practices. In this case there is no clear equivalent to Butler's example of 'wearing pink' to explain gender

performativity, though most accompaniers would argue for at the minimum 'wearing a uniform' to be read as an accompanier - yet not even all groups do this.[1]

Ideally each time before they head out on an accompaniment most accompaniers do a safety analysis of the current situation in that area. If it is high risk some groups fax a letter to the Colombian General in the area letting them know they will be coming through. They carry a copy of that letter to show at checkpoints, and often they have the cell number of the General to call if there is a problem.

They get that number by meeting with the general - and often they get that meeting by having the US embassy call the General - and if need be they get the US embassy to make that call by having a member of the US Congress call the embassy and ask them to do that - and they get the member of Congress to make that call by getting their constituents to call them - and they get constituents to make those calls by sending letters, action alerts, speaking tours, and generally through grassroots organizing in the US. The more calls and letters accompaniers can generate from the US, the more protection they can provide in Colombia. A lot of the practices and performances of accompaniers on the ground in Colombia - like vest uniforms with multiple languages on them (see figure two) - are aimed at reminding armed actors of the power of that chain of connections behind them.

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[1] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1993).

Figure 2: Accompanier from Peace Brigades (left) and Christian Peacemaker Teams (right) accompanying a march by the Ruta Pacifia de Mujeres (Women's Peaceful Way) to the border with Ecuador to highlight the plight of discplaced women forced to flee across the border. photo by author

Before heading out on an accompaniment ideally accompaniers consider not only where they are

going and what the situation has been like there, and what type of action they are accompanying,

but also how long it has been since they activated a chain like that, and how strong the response

was. But I found that some accompaniers skimp on analysing and strengthening those chains

and get seduced into thinking that their bodies alone provide protection, particularly if their

bodies stick out as different, like the two accompaniers do in figure three.[2]

Diagramming accompaniment

Accompaniers and authors writing about accompaniment rarely talk about the chain of

connections when they write about how accompaniment works. When I asked accompaniers

how it is that accompaniment 'makes space for peace' several referred to the diagrams in figures
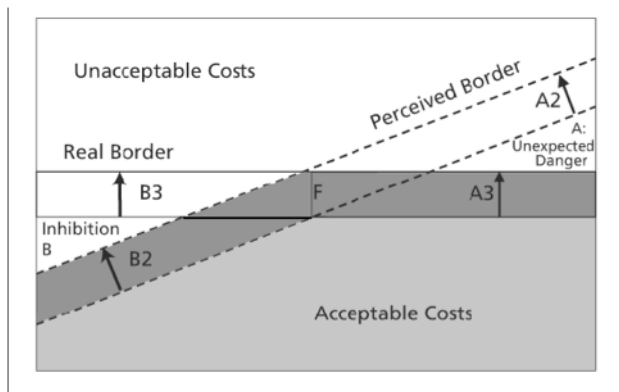
three and four.[xxxiii]

Figure 3: Mahony and Eguren's diagram entitled
'Activist's Political Space & Effect of Accompaniment'
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 As Mahony describes it,

> *Each actor in a complex conflict situation, whether a soldier or a human rights activist,*
> *perceives a broad array of possible political actions and associates a certain cost/benefit*
> *or set of consequences with each action. The actor perceives some consequences as*
> *acceptable, some not acceptable, thereby defining the limits of a distinct political space.*
> *Accompaniment alters this mapping of political space for a threatened human rights*
> *activist … Accompaniment is effective in the gray zone... But no one knows where the*

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[2] Whiteness does indeed play a role in accompaniment, but in complicated ways, and it is not all that is at work. Koopman, "Making Space for Peace: Accompaniment as Alter-geopolitics."

borders are! ...In space A the activist unknowingly walks into danger and suffers the consequences. In space B, fear has been instilled so effectively that the activist is inhibited from taking actions that are in fact relatively safe.... Accompaniment expands this available space by pushing both the "real" and "perceived" borders upwards.[xxxiv]

A similar but opposite logic is shown in figure four.
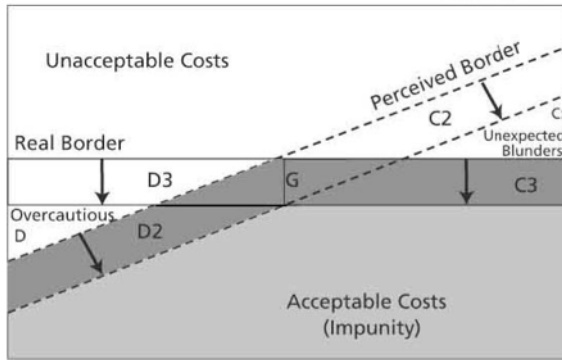

**Figure 4: Mahony and Eguren's diagram entitled
'Aggressor's Repressive Space & Effect of Accompaniment'**
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One of the key areas for accompaniment in this model is area C3. This is where an attack happens and accompaniers have to show that they can exact, as Mahony and Eguren put it, a 'political cost' high enough to give credibility to future accompaniment (like freezing military aid, as happened after Luis Eduardo was killed in the peace community of San José) - but this model does not show how accompaniers use chains of connections to do that.

In describing this model they slip between using the term 'political space' and simply 'space.' As Mahony and Eguren define it, 'political space' refers to the ability to carry out political actions and is determined by the consequences which either the accompanied person or the attacker decide are unacceptable. It seems that even when they use simply the term 'space' this is what they are referring to. Yet in their history of accompaniment they regularly discuss whether the people who were accompanied could as a result enter a particular physical area or not. In the

book they never discuss the relationship between political and physical space, though the two are clearly intertwined in many of the stories they describe (organizers being able to meet, activists occupying buildings, etc).

Imagining space

In conversations with accompaniers they talked about space as much more than just 'political space'. So one of the exercises I did in the workshops I held with different accompaniment groups was to have them draw, in small groups, the relationship between society and space. Given the context of displacement in Colombia it is not surprising that many drew parts of society as struggling for and over space. Many were then confused as to how to include and to diagram the relationship between what they often referred to as physical space and what they described, variously, as emotional space, space to speak, space for democracy, space for development, space for organizing, space for autonomy, economic space, legal space, political space, and moral space. I then asked them to put accompaniers in their diagrams and again, this was difficult for many. They described themselves, in their diagrams, as: opening space, increasing space, widening space, giving space, extending their 'safe space' to another, connecting different spaces, building or sustaining links between space and certain sectors of society, protecting space, joining spaces, bringing in to a larger whole parts of society that were marginalized in space, and a few as creating space. One group showed themselves 'squeezing hegemonic space' but also getting into its cracks and widening them.

Most of their diagrams relied on an imaginary of space as fixed – as something that remains the same but that there is more or less of. So when I asked them how they 'made space' they often talked about making more space rather than changing the space. They tended to imagine space

as a container for society (space as abstract) rather than imagining society and space each shaping each other (space as relational). They had trouble describing how political space and material space were related, though accompaniment clearly affects both.

In Mahoney and Eguren's diagrams of how accompaniment works (figures three and four) space is also portrayed as an 'empty grid within which objects exist and events occur'.[xxxv] Space here does not shape people or events, nor do people shape space other than to make more or less of it for someone else. Even when they write about 'political space' it can appear as a passive backdrop within which political activity either can or cannot happen. This conception of space, which is so dominant that it appears 'natural', is shaped by and props up capitalism and empire.[xxxvi] Seeing space as abstract is not necessarily 'wrong' – it works well to explain certain things, like owning property, but it is not the best frame for understanding how accompaniment works, nor for thinking about how to do it more effectively.

Abstract space can be imagined as dead, and relational as alive. Relational space is both a product of social relations (physical, mental, emotional, political, etc) and at the same time shapes those relations. But to phrase it this way can be misleading, for neither society nor space exist prior to this cocreation, 'space is a doing that does not pre-exist its doing'.[xxxvii] Space is not something static that an accompanier enters and changes. Space is always actively being created and changed, by all of us in and through interaction. For example, space is shaped by accompaniers through their practice of wearing a uniform, the prodution of carrying a white flag on a hike, the performance at a military checkpoint of showing the notification letter that was faxed to the general yesterday. Of course space is shaped not just by the accompaniers but also

by the practices, productions and performances of space by other actors - notably the

Colombians they are accompanying and the armed actors that are threatening them.

Space is not only shaped by things humans do and make. That there is a river running through

San José shapes the space. But a river will not always shape space in the same way – it depends

on how society sees, understands and uses the river. If people are afraid to cross the river, if they

use it for irrigation, if it is used for travel - these interactions shape how the river shapes the

space. Some socio-spatial relations are so naturalized that we no longer see them – of course we

cross the river. Some are so sedimented they seem permanent - but everything changes, even the

river may move or dry up.

Space is shaped by memory, emotion and morality as much as by material things. The space of

the river in the peace community of San José is shaped by it being where community leader Luis

Eduardo Guerra and his family were killed and the pieces of their bodies were found. This is not

some 'nonreal' space in the mind – it absolutely shapes understandings of and thus practices

around and interactions with the material world that may seem more 'real.'[xxxviii] Memories can

shape how people respond to the space (say, avoiding where Luis Eduardo was killed, or making

annual pilgrimages to the site, or building an altar there), and these in turn shape the space again.

Except that, again, it's not a neat process of space shaping society and then society shaping space

in some linear order – both things are happening at once.

Space is not, however, infinitely changeable.[xxxix] Certain aspects of space recur and are more

sedimented (the river will not dry up overnight unless a damn is put in). 'Space is a performance

of power and we are all its performers' writes Rose.[xl] An accompanier changes the configuration

of power in the space – particularly by networking to power in and from other spaces (and times

– both past and future). Space is not simply a reflection of social relations, it produces relations of power. The other way of framing this is that 'social life is both space-forming and *space-contingent*'.[xli] Soja calls this relationship the socio-spatial dialectic.[xlii]

An accompanier can never know all of the ways space will be shaped, say, tomorrow on the trip she has been asked to make to an accompany a leader of the community down to town. But in deciding whether to go she can predict that the space will be shaped not only by rains that have made the river hard to cross, but also by stories that have been running on the local radio station saying that the peace community works with the guerillas, and by there being a new driver on the chiva (the jeep public transit). Her conversation last week with the General will also play a role, and how long it has been since she met with embassy staff, or flooded them with emails. Having a complex understanding of the ways space is relational and constantly being created will help her decide not only *if* but *how* to do the accompaniment, for that analysis includes having some sense of how she will be read by various others, which helps her to decide whether and which uniform to wear, whether to carry a satellite phone openly or not, and whether or not to take photos at the checkpoint. Most accompaniers in Colombia are regularly doing some level of this kind of analysis. But the priority placed on doing such an analysis and accompaniers' ability to analyze the subtleties of these situations would be improved if they understood and talked about all of these components as together creating and shaping space, that is, if they recognized space as a relational rather than see space as simply *either* material or political, or as something they are trying to clear away or make 'more' of.

Chains of connections

Too often accompaniers leave out of their analysis the chain of connections (their ability to pressure a member of Congress to get a meeting at the embassy and have them call the local general). They also had a hard time showing this in their visualizations of how accompaniment works. In calling this a 'chain' I am drawing on Johan Galtung's theory of how 'the chain of nonviolence' works. Galtung argues that nonviolence

> *works better the shorter the social distance. More particularly, when the other party has been totally dehumanized in the mind of the oppressor, civil disobedience may be seen only as one more instance of queer, strange behaviour, uncivilized rather than civil in its disobedience ... It is when one's own people, the Other inside the Self, or the Self in the Other, start reacting the same way, non-violently, sending a forceful signal that "we are not tolerating this any longer," that chords of responsiveness are being touched. Doubts about legitimacy are generated.*[xliii]

He recognizes that

> *The long-term approach would be struggle against the sources of dehumanization, bridging all gaps within and between societies. But the short-term approach would be to mobilize the in-between groups, have them act out their political conscience and consciousness on behalf of those too far down and away to have an effective voice. And then build social and human ties to solidify that political cooperation, in both directions, with the oppressors and with the oppressed.*[xliv]

Martin and Varney argue that although Galtung presents this as a psychological chain, it can also be seen as a communication chain, where intermediaries can communicate more directly be that because of language, meaning systems, or other reasons.[xlv] As they see it, 'The chain gets around power inequalities by utilizing a series of links, each of which is closer to power equality than the direct connection between resisters and their opponents'.[xlvi] As Clark puts it 'when an oppressed community cannot directly influence power-holders in a situation, they begin link-by-link to construct a chain of nonviolence by approaching those people they can reach, planning that each link will in turn connect with others until the chain extends to people closer to the

power structures and even to decision-makers themselves'.[xlvii] Clark cites Summy's argument that this is useful when a power holder is not directly dependent on the cooperation of the subject population, and so the chain connects with those on whom the power-holder does depend.[xlviii] In this case the general depends on US military aid, that aid depends on votes from US Congress, the member of Congress depends on votes from their constituency, and one of those constituents just got an email from, say, someone they go to church with whose niece is in Colombia serving as an accompanier. If this chain happens enough times, the accompanier may eventually be able to call the General directly when a threat happens, and without mentioning the chain the General will know that this kind of pressure can be generated. Indeed accompaniers in San José now not only meet regularly with, but also have the direct personal cell phones of the generals in the area to call in case of emergency.

Accompaniment is not based on one chain of relationships but many such chains. These chains move closer to centres of power, and people on one end of the chain will have more access to resources than those on the other end. These connections do not happen just in moments of crisis. These chains are built up over time. Church basements across North America play a key role, as they are regularly the site of talks by accompaniers and the accompanied that make it more likely that people will understand and care when they receive an action alert. This sort of groundwork has been done for years by the solidarity movement, building a culture of connection to struggles across Latin America, as well as national policies, paradigms and institutions that they can draw on (like Congressional subcommittees). The work of accompaniment may seem dramatic, 'putting bodies on the line', getting ambassadors to call generals - but it relies, through these chains, on more ordinary actions elsewhere – a church dinner, an email, a phone call.

New information and communication technologies have made these chains longer, wider, denser, and easier to access. The solidarity movement in the 1980s relied on faxes – activists were asked to pay a small fee in advance and authorize a fax sent in their name in case of emergency. Now software allows for pretty 'quick click' action widgets to be circulated as a facebook status update. Social media on the internet makes it much easier to take many more steps along the chains in the web – to find, say, someone who goes to church with a staff person from the Congresswoman's office. The dramatically lower cost and smaller size of not only cellular but also satellite phones makes it possible for accompaniers to go into areas with little or no cell phone coverage, like the mountains around San José, and still be able to call out and reach that network. Likewise the lower cost of airfare has made accompaniment more possible, as well as the delegations and speaking tours that create the networks it relies on. Video recording and editing and subtitling are all now dramatically cheaper and more accessible and accompaniers are increasingly using short online videos to build and strengthen links on these chains.[xlix]

Not an actor-network

Proponents of 'actor-network theory' (ANT) would argue that these are 'nonhuman' members of a network (along with documents, money, buildings, etc.). Certainly they shape the connections that are made, but I found no accompanier who considered their satellite phone, or their twitter page, to actually be 'part' of their network. Instead these are considered *tools* for building and maintaining connections with humans. However essential those tools may be for the work, stranger still to accompaniers would be the ANT argument that it is neither subjects (accompaniers) nor objects (satellite phones) in isolation that get things done (i.e. have agency),

but that when they work *together* in an (actor-)network *each* is an 'actant.'[1] Actor-network is written with a hyphen because it understands actor-networks themselves to be what 'acts.'[li]

The types of chains that accompaniers build and use are very different from those described by 'actor-network theory' (ANT) in that they are not only consciously built *as* chains, but they also purposefully cross and make use of hierarchies of power and privilege. ANT networks are flat: all human and nonhuman objects in them are potentially the same. A long-standing critique of ANT is that it does not recognize the impact of differences of power, like race and class.[lii] It is true that some have used ANT in ways that do recognize power differences. Routledge and Featherstone in particular have done so in describing international solidarity work[liii] - yet in doing so they seem to be using ANT only partially. Routledge explicitly writes that ANT is wrong to argue that differences in the distribution of power are solely relational effects within the network.[liv] Routledge writes about how some members of the People's Global Action network, like himself, function as elites in the network – yet he seems to wish that what he calls 'imagineers' did not hold so much power in the network. He repeatedly presents power differentials across the network as an obstacle rather than a resource.[lv]

Unlike Routledge's 'global justice networks', those in the chains of connection that accompaniers call on do not all belong to a formal coalition – these chains include people who may only ever make one phone call, as well as the Congressional staff person who receives it. Unlike the networks Routledge writes about, people in these chains do not necessarily have similar visions, identities, or face similar threats, but their links to each other are built through seeing some connection, however distant, between themselves and the next link on the chain.[lvi]

These chains, however multiple, recurring, and occasionally overlapping they may be, are not the image that seems to be commonly associated with a 'network'. A network often seems to be imagined as somewhat stable, with regular 'members', something the accompaniers could turn to again and again.[lvii] But the chains I described above are constantly *in movement*, with new links growing, some links getting stronger and others breaking. Not all links have equal weight or numbers of connections (as often depicted in diagrams of networks). Some of the chains can be quite fragile and ephemeral, while some links are connections that last for decades. These chains are far from formal and are not fully visible to anyone. There is no magic view to zoom out to and see the whole thing, though certainly some of the key nodes can see their own many connections (and literally, the names on their email lists and if they use 'salsa' software even how often each responds to action alerts – but not necessarily if they pass these on, tweet them, or talk about them at the dinner table). These chains are not a 'natural' or somehow inevitable process.[lviii] Networks are not a quality inherent in space, as some ANT theorists would have it. Mobilizing these chains requires work – imaginative, emotional, political and material labour. With each accompaniment traveled, each story told, each letter written, these chains must be made and made again.

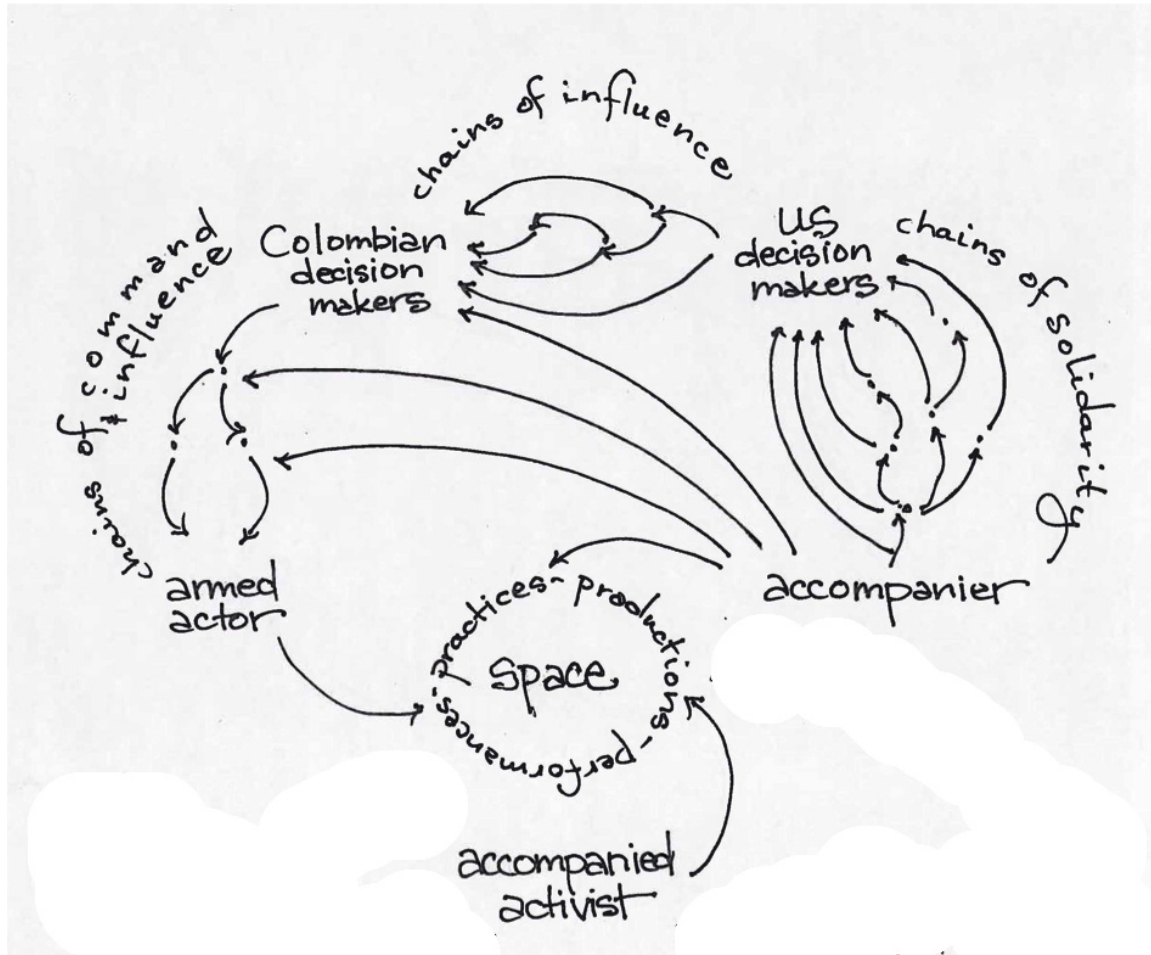**Diagramming accompaniment with chains**

Figure 5: how accompaniment works spatially
by author

I attempt to diagram how accompaniment uses these chains in figure five, though there is a good

deal of complexity that is not captured in it. Inside 'US decision makers' for example there can

be a big difference, most notably between Congress, the State Department, and the Embassy –

and there are of course different offices within each of those. A key part of strategizing by

accompaniers is figuring out who inside which of these entities to pressure, and who can then

pressure whom. Likewise there are many Colombian decision makers and chains between them.

The category of 'armed actor' is also very broad. I did not want to use 'perpetrator', as Mahony

did, because armed actors are shaping the space whether or not they are actively threatening the

activist. This category includes, notably, the army, national police, and neo-paramilitaries – but for this diagram at least, not guerrilla groups. The guerrillas are indeed shaping the space, but international accompaniment does not work as a deterrent against guerrillas. Colombian activists may have other ways of trying to deter attacks on guerrillas, which may even involve other international chains of influence, but accompaniment is not part of these. Not portrayed on this diagram are the chains of connection that the accompanied activist has to other Colombian activists and to other actors more broadly.

Again, if accompaniers have a clearer understanding of space as relational and how chains of connection can shape it, this can improve their conjunctural analyses and strategizing. For example, many accompaniers choose not to take photos or video of armed actors because they do not want to anger the actor in that moment. Yet recognizing the importance of mobilizing those chains and the power of images to do so, in some cases the short term anger may be outweighed by the pressure that could be brought to bear on that actor with the use of such a photo. Accompaniers can also be more conscious of reminding others of their chains of connection through their daily practices, productions and performances of space. Arguments that space is relational may seem like obscure geographical theory, but imagining space this way can actually make accompaniment more effective and keep both accompaniers and those accompanied safer.

Geography of and for peace

That the USA is so heavily involved in the Colombian conflict means that when accompaniers generate a call to a Colombian general from the US embassy it has for more impact than a call from the Bolivian embassy. In doing so accompaniers leverage and even influence dominant geopolitics. But what may have more impact in the long term is how accompaniment is itself

engaging in an alternative form of geopolitics. It is the ongoing work of building new and different connections between people in the USA and Colombia, and North and South more generally, that will most change the political, economic and social systems that make some lives worth more than others, and ultimately wear away at the very privileges accompaniers use to do this work. One way to understand this work is as an alternative way of doing geopolitics, or alter-geopolitics.[lix] It is the ongoing daily work of building new ties between people across places that will wear away at the systems that make some lives worth more than others.

Accompaniers may protect a relatively small number of activists, but this shift they are a part of is far from small. It is my hope that accompaniment can have a bigger impact if I as an academic learn from, contribute to, and share the work they are doing. Much as Gibson-Graham's focus on alternative economic practices has been a way to re-imagine what economic geography can be and do,[lx] studying peacemaking efforts like accompaniment is one way of re-imagining political geography and how it can contribute to peace.

Geographers have long offered advice to 'the prince', and justification to the 'Great Powers' for their colonial exploits.[lxi] Given that the discipline of geography has long been used for and tied to war, it might seem odd to turn it for peacebuilding.[lxii] But the discipline of geography is not, as O Tuathail puts it, 'beholden to battlefields' - even though it has been shaped by them.[lxiii] I run the risks of using the 'master's tool' of geography to think about accompaniment because peace is inherently spatial.[lxiv] Peace is shaped by the space in which it is made, as it too shapes that space. Peace is always situated – it is made in some *way* but also some *where* for some *people*.[lxv] Peace is not the same everywhere anymore than war is. Peace is not a static thing, nor an endpoint, but a socio-spatial relation that is always made and made again.[lxvi]

Let me end by coming back to my title. 'Making space for peace' is the slogan of Peace

Brigades. It can be understood as an explanation of what accompaniment does and how it works.

Yet it can be interpreted in very different ways. It means something quite different if one

imagines space as abstract and peace as a (neo)liberal peace than if you see space as relational

and peace as multiple, positive, and always in the making. Even the 'making' in the slogan can

be interpreted as clearing away death threats (space as abstract) or as using different practices,

productions and performances of space to reference chains of connection and 'make' relational

space, which the accompanied are also part of making – in a shared struggle to shape space again

and again such that it allows for ever more full and dignified lives, that is, for more positive

peace(s).

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[i] This chapter comes out of a collaborative theorizing process with international accompaniers in Colombia (2007 – 2009) so I want to start by thanking all of those accompaniers who thought this through with me.

[iiii] Liam Mahony and Enrique Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards: International Accompaniment for the Protection of Human Rights* (West Hartford, CN: Kumarian Press, 1997) Most protective accompaniers reject the term "human shield." The media use of this term for accompaniers is a conflation and confusion because the term is also and more commonly used to refer to those who have not chosen this role, i.e. civilians used by armed actors as a buffer. Aside from the question of choice, the term "shields" also implies accompaniers are standing in front of the accompanied rather than walking beside them, as companions.

[iii] Velcrow Ripper, In the Company of Fear (video), 1999.

[iv] "Peaceful Strategies for Protecting Human Rights Defenders," Peace Talks (radio program), June 25, 2010.

[v] The third aspect is racialization dynamics. Campesinos tend to be displaced from racialized regions where accompaniers are more 'out of place'. I write elsewhere about how accompaniers 'wear whiteness'. Sara Koopman, "Making Space for Peace: Accompaniment as Alter-geopolitics" (dissertation, Vancouver, BC, Canada: University of British Columbia).

[vi] "CODHES: Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento", n.d., http://www.codhes.org/ (accessed February 8, 2011).

[vii] Most are internally displaced, which is to say that they flee to another part of Colombia, though some with more resources flee to other countries, primarily across the border to Ecuador, and next to formal asylum in Canada. Diana Arango and Annalise Romoser, *Closer to Home: A Critical Analysis of Colombia's Proposed Land Law*

(Baltimore, MD and Bogotá, Colombia: U.S. Office on Colombia, Lutheran World Relief and IndePaz, February 25, 2011), http://www.usofficeoncolombia.org/ (accessed February 26, 2011).

viii Ulrich Oslender, "Violence in development: the logic of forced displacement on Colombia's Pacific coast," *Development in Practice* 17, no. 6 (2007): 757.

ix Catherine LeGrand, "The Colombian crisis in historical perspective," *Canadian journal of Latin American and Caribbean studies* 28, no. 55–56 (2003): 3.

x Fernán E. González, Ingrid Johanna Bolívar, and Teófilo Vázquez, *Violencia política en Colombia: de la nación fragmentada a la construcción del estado* (Bogotá, Colombia: CINEP, Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, 2003), 260–265, 315–318.

xi Given the difficulty of getting crops to market across the mountains on the few roads, which frequently wash out under heavy rains, crops that are light and of high value have often been the only profitable option in remote areas.

xii Catherine LeGrand, "The Roots and Evolution of Conflict in Colombia" (presented at the Colombia, the Conflicts and Beyond, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada, April 19, 2009) US citizens are the major consumers of all of these commodities.

xiii Heather Walsh, "Gold Eclipses Cocaine as Rebels Tap Colombian Mining Wealth," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 14, 2011, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2011/10/14/bloomberg_articlesLSYNAC6KLVS5.DTL (accessed October 18, 2011).

xiv This is facilitated by the new mining code passed in the mid 1990s, which also drastically reduced royalties to the state down to 0.4 per cent on subsoil resources, and was designed with the help of CIDA, the Canadian Institute for Development Assistance. Michael O Tuathail, "The Converging Paths of Social movements" (presented at the Colombia: The Conflicts and Beyond, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada, April 19, 2009).

xv Harvey argues for using this term rather than Marx's "primitive" or "original" accumulation since it is ongoing. See his chapter explaining this concept in David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005). In that book however Harvey does not emphasize the role of violence in carrying out acts of dispossession. Instead he writes of how the dispossession will create resistance that will then be met with repression, p. 208.

xvi Oslender, "Violence in development"; Ulrich Oslender, "Another History of Violence: The Production of 'Geographies of Terror' in Colombia's Pacific Coast Region," *Latin American Perspectives* 35, no. 5 (September 1, 2008): 77–102.

xvii after Angola, Haiti, Botswana, Comoros and Namibia. Sebastian Castaneda, "Land, Colombia's natural resource curse," *Colombia Reports*, October 28, 2009, http://colombiareports.com/opinion/117-cantonese-arepas/6609-land-colombias-natural-resource-curse.html (accessed December 20, 2011).

xviii Colombia's GINI coefficient for land is 0.85. The GINI coefficient for land is a measure of land concentration that ranges between 0 and 1, where 0 is total equality *Informe Nacional de Desarrollo Humano 2011: Colombia rural, razones por la esperanza* (UNDP Colombia, 2011), http://pnudcolombia.org/indh2011/ (accessed December 20, 2011).

xix Nazih Richani, "The World Bank Development Report and the Colombian Conflict," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, November 21, 2011, https://nacla.org/blog/2011/11/21/world-bank-development-report-and-colombian-conflict (accessed December 20, 2011).

xx Teo Ballvé, "The Dark Side of Plan Colombia," *The Nation*, June 15, 2009, http://www.thenation.com/article/dark-side-plan-colombia (accessed November 1, 2010).

xxi Oslender, "Violence in development," 759.

xxii Forrest Hylton, *Evil Hour in Colombia* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 116.

xxiii Obama has reduced military aid only slightly. CIP, the Center for International Policy, LAWG - EF, the Latin America Working Group Education Fund, and WOLA, the Washington Office on Latin America, "Just the Facts: a civilian's guide to U.S. defense and security assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean", n.d., http://justf.org/ (accessed October 11, 2010).

xxiv Mario Murillo, *Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest, and Destabilization* (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 132.

xxv Teo Ballvé, "Everyday State Formation: Territory, Decentralization, and the Narco Land-Grab in Colombia," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space.* 7.

xxvi Not well captured in national statistics, but these did register a nearly 20 per cent official unemployment rate in 2000. "DANE - Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica", n.d., http://www.dane.gov.co/daneweb_V09/#twoj_fragment1-4 (accessed July 3, 2011).

xxvii Francisco Ramirez Cuellar, *The Profits of Extermination: Big Mining in Colombia* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2005), 32.

xxviii Palm oil is used for commercial cooking and soaps, but its recent surge in growth is due to its increasing use for biofuel. Colombia has become the largest producer of oil palm in the Americas and one of the largest in the world.

xxix Colombia is the second largest exporter of fresh flowers in the world after Holland and almost all of the roses sold in the US are from Colombia.

xxx "About Colombia," *Justice for Colombia*, n.d., http://www.justiceforcolombia.org/about-colombia/ (accessed October 21, 2010). Cuellar, *The Profits of Extermination*.

xxxi Behind Mexico and Venezuela, but exports from those two countries are dropping whereas Colombia's have been rising. "Overview of Latin American oil exports to the USA," *Alexander's Gas and Oil Connections*, April 27, 2008, http://www.gasandoil.com/news/n_america/3cd816c5a3d1696189ffb00a4a4b10f7 (accessed October 17, 2011).

xxxii Hylton, *Evil Hour in Colombia*, 102; Michael Walker, "Oil and US Policy Toward Colombia," *Colombia Journal*, January 7, 2008, http://colombiajournal.org/oil-and-us-policy-toward-colombia.htm (accessed October 17, 2011).

xxxiii from Mahony and Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards*.

xxxiv Liam Mahony, *Side by Side. Protecting and Encouraging Threatened Activists with Unarmed International Accompaniment* (Minneapolis, MN: New Tactics Project of the Center for Victims of Torture, 2004).

xxxv Derek Gregory, "Space," ed. Derek Gregory et al., (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 708.

xxxvi Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992); Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993); David Harvey, "Space as a Keyword," in *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*, ed. Derek Gregory and Noel Castree (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 270–298.

xxxvii Gillian Rose, "Performing space," in *Human geography today*, ed. Massey, Doreen, John Allen, and Philip Sarre (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999), 248.

xxxviii Rose, "Performing space."

xxxix Ibid., 248.

xl Ibid., 249.

xli emphasis in original Edward Soja, "The spatiality of social life: towards a transformative retheorisation," in *Social relations and spatial structures*, ed. Derek Gregory and Urry (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 98.

xlii E. W Soja, "The socio-spatial dialectic," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 70, no. 2 (1980): 207–225.

xliii Johan Galtung, "Principles of Nonviolent Action: The Great Chain of Nonviolence Hypothesis," in *Nonviolence and Israel/Palestine* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Institute for Peace, 1989), 19–20.

xliv Ibid., 32.

xlv Brian Martin and Wendy Varney, "Nonviolence and Communication," *Journal of Peace Research* 40, no. 2 (March 1, 2003): 220.

xlvi Ibid., 229.

xlvii Howard Clark, *People Power: Unarmed Resistance and Global Solidarity* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 215.

xlviii Ibid., 216.

xlix Many of these are posted on my blog. "decolonizing solidarity", n.d., http://decolonizingsolidarity.blogspot.ca/ (accessed April 9, 2012).

l F.J. Bosco, "Actor-network theory, networks, and relational approaches in human geography," in *Approaches to human geography*, ed. Stuart Aitken and Gill Valentine (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 136–46.

li Nick Bingham, "actor-network theory," ed. Derek Gregory et al., *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

lii Bosco, "Actor-network theory, networks, and relational approaches in human geography"; Bingham, "actor-network theory"; Kirsten Simonsen, "Networks, flows, and fluids—reimagining spatial analysis?," *Environment and Planning A* 36, no. 8, Environment and Planning A (2004): 1333–1337.

liii Paul Routledge, "Transnational Resistance: Global Justice Networks and Spaces of Convergence," *Geography Compass* 3, no. 9999 (2009): 1881–1901; Paul Routledge, "Acting in the network: ANT and the politics of generating associations," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, no. 2 (2008): 199 – 217; David Featherstone, *Resistance, space and political identities: the making of counter-global networks* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); David Featherstone, "Spatialities of transnational resistance to globalization: the maps of grievance of the Inter-Continental Caravan," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28, no. 4 (2003): 404–421.

[liv] Routledge, "Acting in the network," 209 and 214.

[lv] Ibid., 212; Routledge, "Transnational Resistance," 1895.

[lvi] Featherstone does recognize that those in solidarity networks do not necessarily have, as he puts it, common interests or understandings. Featherstone, *Resistance, space and political identities*, 157.

[lvii] This is the impression Routledge gives when talking of international solidarity networks. Featherstone portrays them as more precarious. Paul Routledge, "Convergence space: process geographies of grassroots globalization networks," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28, no. 3 (2003): 333–349; Featherstone, *Resistance, space and political identities*, 91.

[lviii] Kirsten Simonsen, "Networks, flows, and fluids—reimagining spatial analysis?".

[lix] Sara Koopman, "Alter-geopolitics: Other securities are happening," *Geoforum* 42, no. 3 (June 2011): 274–284.

[lx] J.K. Gibson-Graham, "Diverse economies: performative practices for `other worlds'," *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 5 (October 1, 2008): 613–632.

[lxi] Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith, *Geography and Empire* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994); see Felix Driver, *Geography militant: cultures of exploration and empire* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2001).

[lxii] Nick Megoran, "Militarism, Realism, Just War, or Nonviolence? Critical Geopolitics and the Problem of Normativity," *Geopolitics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 473–497.

[lxiii] Gearóid Ó Tuathail, "Battlefield," in *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Human Geography*, ed. John Agnew and David Livingstone (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 478.

[lxiv] Audre Lorde argues that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." I disagree. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Darlinghurst, New South Wales, Australia: Crossing Press, 2007).

[lxv] Philippa Williams and Fiona McConnell, "Critical Geographies of Peace," *Antipode* 43, no. 4 (September 1, 2011): 927–931.

[lxvi] John Agnew, "Killing for Cause? Geographies of War and Peace," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99, no. 5 (2009): 1054 – 1059.