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## DIVERSE TERRITORIES: THE FABRICS OF THE CUIR CITY

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**Abstract:** *Diverse Territories* is a journey that seeks to glimpse the manifestation of the images and imaginaries of cuir, which impact the city of Medellín in the new millennium, and how they have been configured through the culture, spaces and transversal relationships of the members of the city's LGBTIQ+ groups. From this premise, the aim is to show the approach carried out to elucidate the representations, relationships and contrasts that exist when inhabiting an urban territory from the diversity and divergence of the performativity of gender and sex. Here, it is important to mention that to translate cuir experiences and corporalities it is necessary to transcend the physical, that is, the material level of the images that are configured and understood from the collective imagination, with a sociocultural perspective, accompanied by symbolic and affective imaginaries that they are detonated and contained. For this reason, we propose some categories that allow us to capture that subjective view, as they are a recount of different individual experiences of the territory; prioritizing the intersectionality offered by cuir theory.

**Keywords:** cuir, images, imaginaries, territory, visual studies, gender studies

## **INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT**

Since 2020, the Audiovisual - Optical Research Seedbed of the Faculty of Social Communication - Journalism of the UPB Medellín has been working on a qualitative and theoretical-practical research process whose topic of interest and central axis is to investigate the images and imaginaries of cuir in the Aburrá Valley (Colombia) in the new millennium.

Throughout the research, some methodological strategies have been applied, such as the construction of a conceptual framework of different types of texts, a series of semi-

structured in-depth interviews aimed at experts in the area such as artists, activists, curators, designers among others and the "Ágora Cuir" symposium that aimed to review the conceptions of cuir in the city from the perspective of some LGBTIQ+ groups in Medellín.

To approach the topic, some questions were raised as a starting point: what is cuir? Are there cuir images? How has cuir been represented? How can these representations be documented? To answer, a bibliographical exploration was carried out with authors such as Judith Butler and her analysis of the discursive displacement in the notion of gender; Hannah Arendt and her approach to the public and the private to understand the importance of the discussion of contemporary identities in the political sphere; Gilles Lipovetsky's liquid society as a way of looking at the fluidity of cuir experiences; Nicolas Bourriaud and the collage image to frame performance around gender as both a sociological and visual problem; the work of Alfredo Expósito around queer visibility in Ibero-America; the story that Guillermo Correa raises about homosexuality in Medellín; and the perspectives of coloniality of María Lugones to give a contextual approach to the research approach.

Likewise, 13 films and two series were debated that compare, reflect on or challenge the concepts of the theoretical framework. The selection of these pieces sought to connect the problems of diverse communities through a more experimental visibility and narrative. Because this visualization took place during pandemic times, the selection criteria for the works were based on their accessibility on online platforms and the students' search based on their own concerns. Consequently, the use of this material within the methodology and the construction of the conceptual framework was with the purpose

of illustrating, debating and understanding the progress of the readings rather than making a critical analysis of the pieces or using them as a sample in themselves. same.

From this academic and audiovisual contrast, it was analyzed how the imaginaries, images and representations that are evident in the cuir theory influence the social, cultural and historical sphere of the urban experience of the Colombian city.

The dialogues resulting from the seedbed meetings allowed us to reflect on how the metropolitan cuir territory has been inhabited during the last decade. There, one of the first results that emerged was to understand that, although cuir is experienced subjectively for each individual, forming a common ground is complex, since there are different positions and experiences regarding the topic. However, the notion of collectivity is essential and transversal to cuir experiences. This involved asking ourselves again about the conceptions of cuir from the diversity of identities. What does it mean for communities to inhabit cuir in the same sense from different expressions? Is this possible?

Starting from the notion that the cuir concept is a fluid term, that changes, is moldable and is subject to the social and conceptual construction that the same people give from their interaction. This is how on this occasion the term allows us to approach it as much as a collective phenomenon, which is born from each of the subjectivities that touch it.

Cuir, from this point of view, cannot be understood from a linear perspective, it changes over time and evaluates different categories, it transforms with the local and cultural context and will never remain static. It may be that what is caring today is not caring tomorrow, because it becomes part of the norm. Cuir is an individual and collective response to a context that seeks the

expression of being in freedom within the social, economic and political framework. It is an action that renews and tensions, at the same time that opposes the generalized dichotomous and binary linguistic system.

This way, cuir theory has been a way of studying the social dynamics around gender identities and sexual orientations, which in this case encompasses what has to do with peripheral sexualities, gender expressions that transgress the heteronormative vision. and patriarchal of society, the disruptiveness and the dismissal of the dichotomy of man/woman language.

Talking, then, about the spaces of cuir becomes important to understand the construction of intersubjectivities or subjectivized collectivities in public urban settings and to conceive new forms of connection and contact, since space constitutes a fundamental element in the articulation of society, plays a vital role in the mechanisms of social differentiation and in the dynamics of power itself. For this reason, social relations, daily life and identity are anchored in the places and the affects that they generate, a situation that leads to different representations and meanings, in addition, the territories and the city are appropriated in a certain way, consolidating a cartography that It is not explicit or present on the map of Medellín.

With this we infer that representation in the territories goes far beyond the physical space and transcends towards the symbolic. Thus, there are linguistic, emotional, aesthetic and historical traces that make a difference and that can be translated into culture, in the way people relate and the experience with diverse bodies. Lakoff and Johnson, for example, presented a novel conception of the metaphor with which diversity can be represented:

It is a phenomenon of thought that was reflected in language, that was omnipresent

in everyday life and that allowed the structuring of experience (Lakoff and Johnson, 2001: 39 and 40). They further noted that the essence of metaphor was to understand and experience one type of thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 2001: 41).

This relationship of living is configured in customs, circumstantial events and individual and social historicities that, as a result, give an eclectic identity through interaction with others. These spaces cannot be given by themselves and immediately, they have had an evolution and collect many aspects of the movement of cuir in Medellín.

Therefore, the physical body, as a biopolitical device, is essential to redefine the world and understand the context and the traces that are interwoven on the skin and the street as a memory, both material and emotional, and that impact the way of living, relating. and make visible voices that are not included in heteronormative discourse.

For this reason, in-depth interviews were the first step to review how cuir has been understood by the participants of the city's LGTBIQ+ groups. There it was noted that there are multiple meanings on the topic, because cuir turns out to be an unclear, non-homogeneous term and lacks value or generates conflict for all communities because not everyone identifies with it. This was an opportunity to explore it together and contrast it through dialogue. To do so, the "Ágora Cuir" event was created, a virtual symposium on November 18 and 19, 2021 where, through 7 discussion tables, various voices came together on issues of diversity and inclusion. Right here, in this symposium, several positions regarding cuir were evident and discussed at the same time, which led us, from the seedbed, to treat it from emerging categories that arise from the dialogues and discourses of groups and from individuals.

With these three inputs, conceptual framework, interviews and symposium, the students obtained sufficient tools to systematize the results of the ongoing research. The way to do this is through a multimedia documentary project composed of a photobook, an exhibition, an experimental video and a cartography that tracks the symbolic affections of the territory more than the geographical points of cuir experiences. The latter, still under construction, is supported by a reflection on the methodological process that has been carried out during these two and a half years to be able to work with communities and which gives rise to this presentation.

Displaying these experiences on the physical map is showing that intimacy that is superimposed on the social and the territory, which will help to elucidate the unnoticed that is part of the collective imagination. Although Habbeger and Mancila (2006) express it, "social cartography is a process of participatory urban planning in which the actors themselves rethink the territory from the map, putting the knowledge and memory of the people who live in it at the center. and seeking collective solutions through citizen participation and dialogue between different actors." (p.1)

From there arises the idea of thinking about the territory as a fabric, as a thread of meanings, voices, symbols. It is a way of going beyond what we see and entering a more intimate sphere represented or superimposed on the merely physical, giving a deeper and more complete look at the imaginaries and images that are created in the territories and specifically for this research, the city of Medellín.

## **DIVERSE TERRITORIES: THE FABRICS OF THE CUIR CITY**

When mapping experiences about the diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations in a Latin American city like Medellín and its metropolitan area, we face the problem of tracing experiences that, in principle, are located on the discursive margins of institutionality and the norm. Consequently, their very representations cannot be given from traditional, classical or hegemonic strategies.

From there, the biggest question has been how to map the affects of a territory and understand the manifestation of the images and imaginaries of cuir that impact the Aburrá Valley in the new millennium. This tracking aims to know how they have been configured through culture, spaces and transversal, affective and daily relationships of the members of the LGBTIQ+ groups of the city and in addition to those power relations that occur in the experience of citizenship, with government institutions.

To understand it in depth we will use some important categories such as: institutionality/government, understanding from power relations; affective/symbolic, as a way to transcend the physical; and imaginaries/territory, alluding to the dissolution of the border. The intersection of all these will give us a vision of how to understand the territory of Medellín from a symbolic perspective. For this reason, a new process is proposed in the methodology focused on active participation; Since the cuir theme is abstract and subjective, we focused on obtaining information from the experiences and perceptions of the participants that could account for the symbolic and affective relationships of the members of the LGTBIQ+ groups in the city. To account for the interaction, the result is cartography, still in development, in which the space of Medellín is symbolically shown,

which implies transcending the physical and seeking in meaning a way to trace other representations of the territory.

Regarding the above, we rely on Armando Silva (2006), who highlights that the territory is something physical, but it is also a mental extension:

Territory was and continues to be a space, even if it is imaginary, where we live with our loved ones, where the memory of the ancestor and the evocation of the future allow us to refer to it as a place that was named with certain geographical and symbolic limits. Naming the territory is assuming it in a linguistic and imaginary extension: while traveling over it, stepping on it, marking it in one way or another is giving it a physical entity that is combined, of course, with the naming act. These two exercises, naming and exploring, must evolve towards the meeting of the region called territory, as a fundamental entity of the microcosm and the macro vision. Let me explain, the macro vision of the world passes through the affective microcosm from where we learn to name, to situate, to mark the world that I understand not only from the outside in, but originally the opposite, from within, from my psychological interior or the social interiors of my territory, towards the world as a rest. (p.27)

Thus, the objectives for this cartography are: to observe the representation, relationship and contrast that exists when inhabiting a physical and symbolic territory and to describe the implications of communities inhabiting it in the same sense from different pedagogical expressions, dance, art, activism, etc... Based on Silva's approach, we propose the idea that the territory of Medellín is imagined from affection and as a fabric.

But why imagine Medellín from affection? Affect is the way in which emotions, memory and relationships between all the subjects who live and coexist within the territory intertwine and take on a significant meaning for both daily and historical life. Everything social

builds a fabric of meanings that remains, lays foundations and gives particular characteristics such as functionalities, prohibitions, conflicts or opens the door to new meanings, depending then on social and even individual movements.

On the other hand, the territory understood as a fabric speaks of a more tangible perspective, but at the same time symbolic, tangible, understanding it as a fabric that stretches, breaks, new fabrics are sewn, new threads and from the symbolic, because from the Imagined, a map is created that superimposes the physical map of Medellín, the symbolic map does not respect the barriers, limits that are formally stipulated, likewise “the relationships between people are not far from the meaning of marriage, weaving and spinning. There is a constant fusion of energetic forces from different senses, which have the function of elaborating worlds through threads or subtle sources (of complementary senses)” (Ramos, 2005, p.5) Therefore, we take the threads as a way of understand shared meanings.

## **IMAGINARIES/TERRITORY**

The territory is configured as a network of meanings that are woven through the subjectivities of each person, creating a cultural and imaginary construction that creates characteristic symbols and widespread social patterns. Medellín is a symbolic territory that divides, fragments, unites and relates from shared imaginaries.

The imagined (or the imaginaries) is the “ability to make emerge as an image something that is not, nor was” (Castoriadis:220, cited by Silva p.52) It is a linguistic and aesthetic capacity of the human being that creates metaphors and meanings that are built from sharing and interactions, images about spaces and social relationships, and in this case, in the urban, however, imaginaries such as cuir are unstable and transform over time.

Furthermore, as a result of the imaginaries, symbols appear and each one of them has particular characteristics and its meaning revolves around these.

## **INSTITUTIONALITY/ GOVERNMENT**

In the territories, there are some power relations, which shape, give behavioral patterns, control and supervise social movements and phenomena, for this reason it is taken as a fundamental part of the social and cultural construction of the city, in this case institutions. We can use the government in Medellín as an example, the Mayor’s Office or the Council, and particularly some of the communities within the exercise of semi-structured interviews, commented that although the governance of Medellín is not aggressive towards the communities, it is indifferent.

This also implies that we cannot leave aside an order that directs and intervenes both consciously and unconsciously, because the social is deformed and accommodates the legal and institutional, which generates tensions or agreements between the parties involved.

Medellín and also in Colombia, for example, between 1890 and 1980 sexual relations between men were criminalized. In Colombia in general, religion and especially the Catholic Church had a great impact on power at that time, “in the context of the laws against obscenity and modesty and the institutionalization of silence in the face of carnal passions, it was “They were fabricating a series of literary, legal, medical, popular and journalistic representations about individuals observed and named as strange who carried out a series of misunderstood, illegible and reprehensible sexual practices.” (RARE, p.9, p.13).

This involved discriminating against many groups in the city, making them invisible and fragmenting them in history and territory. Although finally with the Political Constitution of 1991 there was a change in rights issues, thus giving the opportunity for more representation, free association and activism within the city.

## **SYMBOLIC/AFFECTIVE**

Taking this into account the symbolic and the affects, they will give depth and reason as to why they impact so much on behaviors. The symbolic, for its part, we can relate as: “the statements around objects endowed with a life of their own that have an existential status endowed with agency-(which) have become commonplace. Without a doubt, objects (aesthetic/artistic or not) produce shocks in feelings and carry an emotional charge that cannot be ignored.” (Moxey Keith, s.f) This implies that the symbolic appears through important affective experiences and that the body as a biopolitical apparatus is an instrument that naturally creates symbols that also transcend all material things, and that these are interpreted by the collective unconscious. and the individual unconscious.

And this leads us to think that the appearance and revision of the symbolic problematizes and brings to light perspectives that were hidden and unconscious because “in human consciousness nothing is simply presented, but represented.” This way things exist, without doubt, but depending on the figures that thought gives them, what makes them symbols, since they will have “the coherence of perception, of the conceptualization of the judgment of reasoning, through the meaning that permeates them” (Durand cited by Silva, 2006, p.50)

And that, on the other hand, is complemented by the emotional component. When talking about the affective, it is thought

“as a constitutive aspect of human activity expressed in the innumerable acts of daily life, it constitutes a set of socially shared scripts that adapt and adjust to the immediate sociocultural and semiotic environment” (Markus and Kitayama, 1994).

And that it also has a very important emotional component and that precisely gives relevance to the different experiences from an intimate point of view, understanding that “Affects are psychosocially constructed and include emotions: momentary reactions of great intensity, with neurovegetative manifestations. such as sweat, trembling, blushing, etc, with socially coded expressions” (Rodríguez & Juárez, p.1, 2011)

Likewise, the experiences, historicities and futures of each person are pillars for the construction of the cultural and subjective in the space. Sonia Castillo, for example, tells us about the lived experience and how it is marked in our body and in our memory, thus constructing one’s own experience of reality from individuality. The individual is then an important key to understanding care, because each one contains emotional ties with the environment, with the culture and the people with whom they interact every day. She rescues a definition from Denise Jodelet: “Things are not defined for the subject (man-woman) by their physical properties, but by their lived aspects, with their predicates of value and action. These are only for him or her as long as they perceive them with the meaning that they have for her or his concrete life.” (p.97)

And here the performative and the gender begin to take an important role, because the performative is the form of expression of those lived experiences and that is constructed individually, socially, but also in the context and the territory. Judith Butler considers gender as a way of doing, “an incessant activity performed, in part, without knowing it and without one’s own will, it does not imply

that it is an automatic or mechanical activity. Rather, it is an improvisational practice in a constrictive setting.

Furthermore, one's own gender is not "done" alone. It is always "doing" with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary." p.12 (Butler, 2004)

Therefore, the physical body is essential to redefine the world and understand the context and the traces that are interwoven on the skin and the street as a memory, both material and emotional, and that impact the way of living, relating and making visible voices that from the heteronormative discourse they are not included.

Having explained this, these categories are directly related, since they cover the meaning systems that interact with the physical world and with the experiences of each individual that create something collective. The territory as a fabric allows us to unite various constitutive aspects of cuir in the urban and gives a broader and deeper look at aspects that surpass what is constituted, the real, if we can call it that which is formed through linguistic phenomena, affects and memories that are built in the territories.

## CONCLUSIONS

After the careful journey that we have carried out from the Audiovisual - Optical Research Seedbed, we reached some temporary conclusions, so called because they are willing to govern the temporary situation of the project, but which are a first approach to hypotheses and ideas that in the future with the materialization of cartography they can be maintained, changed or transcended in view of the different collective and individual experiences that arise.

Among the first results that are revealed we will talk about the territory. In the same territory there may be different perspectives from different spaces or specific places in

the city, even if they are part of the whole of Medellín. Therefore, the work of cartography cannot only be within the geographical framework, but also with a symbolic element, which brings us closer to the imaginaries that can be created about the spaces, as well as the affective experiences that can be both positive and negative.

Spaces and territory are important and even determinants of the experience of cuir. The contexts and subjectivities found form something unique that shapes the future of history and everyday life. On the other hand, networks of meanings create images and imaginaries that will ultimately give forms of behavior in different situations or places (some friendly and accessible and others dangerous or prohibited), which show ways of connecting with others, overcoming limits, edges and borders given from the institutional, the physical and the norm.

Cuir is an experience that is both individual and collective, it is that position of being, using the performative as a tool, which shows to others the expression that each individual has and that he also shares with others. In conclusion, we want to leave some questions that remain as a result of these reflections and we believe that they are open to many interpretations. Is everything cuir or no one is cuir? It is such a fluctuating concept that there are multiple visions about it and they are found in the territories.

And finally, we want to leave this question that somewhat summarizes the idea of making a symbolic map or cartography for the city. Is it the space itself that determines how performative acts must be carried out or does it simply play the role that contextualizes the body? We at Semillero think so, however, is space something only physical, or does it also have an intangible and non-material element?



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