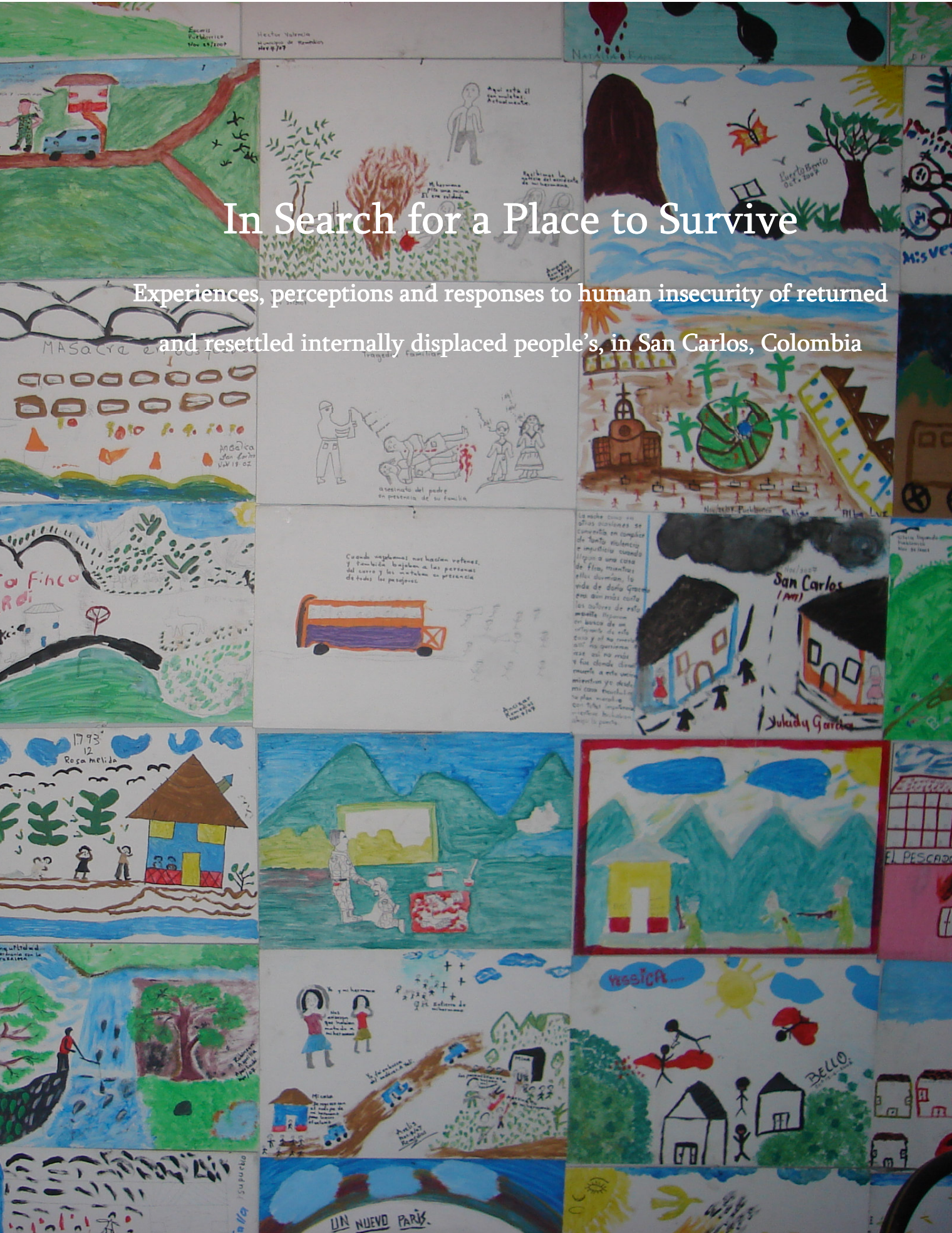


# In Search for a Place to Survive

Experiences, perceptions and responses to human insecurity of returned and resettled internally displaced people's, in San Carlos, Colombia



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displaced people's, in San Carlos, Colombia**

This thesis is submitted in completion of the master Latin American and Caribbean Studies of  
the University of Utrecht

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## Summary

This thesis presents a descriptive analysis of internally displaced people's search for a place to survive. The author makes use of a narrative framework in which she delineates six phases of displacement to catch the experiences, perceptions and responses to human insecurities of this particular population across times and places. Forced displacement is caused by a context of enduring exposure to violence and threats which lead to such extent of fear that leaving the violent scene is perceived to be the only option left to survive. From this moment onwards the search for a place to survive begins and is called the first phase of displacement. Starting from this phase internally displaced people encounter all sorts of 'new' human insecurities in their host communities where they accordingly adapt and respond to. Some manage to build-up a life there and reside and others continue struggling. Nevertheless, many people who have experienced forced displacement long for the place they once called home and choose to return to their community of expulsion. The sixth phase of displacement arrives when internally displaced people 'stop' with identifying as '*desplazados*.' Still, whether returned or resettled, it remains a contested question: where (which place) and when internal displacement ends?



## Acknowledgements

Early in the morning I left with a friend to La Ventanita on a motorcycle, which aside from going by foot is the only way to reach this place. The road was merely a small path with ditches, mud, rocks, plants and water and frankly quite risky terrain where you could easily fall and break something. Till recently now and then members of the FARC Front, 9, had passed through this '*vereda*' and therefore I could not tell my acquaintances in advance that I was about to pay them a visit. Finally there, I called José that I was standing in his '*vereda*.' He was super happy and surprised and told me never to have thought we would meet in his '*tierra*.'

His house was in a bad shape, but livable, with three rooms, of which one designed as a kitchen. He proudly showed me his first harvest of beans and the maize and unions that were growing. He prepared us an '*almuerzo*' and we agreed to go out fishing. It took us 25 minutes walking over hills and going through small rivers and plants were surrounding us everywhere. I thought a lot about the possibility to step on a mine and expressed this to my companions. José assured me in a jovial tone that there was no risk because he had walked this route several times and thus far nothing had happened. He explained me that he had feared the same when he walked here for the first time, while showing me the marks on trees he had left behind to make sure that on his return he would take the same route. Especially, while walking through a meadow-like field caused me anxious feelings, because I could not see where I put my feet.

When, we finally arrived at the river I felt relieved. I took off my boots that were full of water and walked to the farthest rock to relax and put my feet in the water. The view was stunning, the river was shining brightly, the water was crystal clear and the heat was tremendous. While we were walking back we heard an explosion. Apparently the group of emergency demolition of explosives had found a mine or a bomb. Following our return we heard two other explosions. Later I was told that they had destroyed four bombs. Upon our return in central park of San Carlos my friend and I were so tired that we could hardly speak, only because of the heat, the insects and the groovy terrain. The returnees I visited this day live in an extremely abandoned territory and are among the firsts that have returned to La Ventanita since the end of 2008. They have lived without any visit of state institutions and the risks of encountering a mine for over six months. Two weeks ago, a group of soldiers had walked through the '*vereda*' to let them know that the army is nearby and that they are not fully abandoned by the state. Lucinda

told me about the encounter in a hilarious way, but she was extremely happy with the attention of the army.

This was one of my last meetings during the fieldwork I conducted in San Carlos about experiences, perceptions and response strategies of returned and resettled '*desplazados*.' When, still in the phase of orientation of 'choosing' a village I could have never imagined to be welcomed with open arms by the people I wanted to interview about their life histories and future plans. This account is one of many and I want to thank all people who became part of this study deeply for confiding in me and giving me the feeling that it was a 'good' thing to have started this research. Without you the narrative contents would have been different so therefore thank you all very much for having shared your stories with me.

Alongside enjoyment, laughter and special memories, the focus of this study about experiences and perceptions of violence, fear, poverty and forced displacement were not happy subjects and hopefully I have not offended anybody with the words I have put on paper.

I briefly mentioned the process of orientation and in this respect I am grateful to Conciudadanía. I was welcomed with open arms by Benjamín Cardona and moreover given the opportunity to travel with Nelson Duque and John Ochoa to several municipalities in the Oriente. With them I have set my first steps, so to speak in the Oriente. They have introduced me in an excellent manner to their networks and without them the research might not have followed through. Therefore thank you very much.

Furthermore, I am grateful to Pastora Mira who has adopted me with warmth, laughter, joy and kindness within the setting of her home and \*family\* which made my short life away from my home in Holland super nice. Aside from this she has introduced me to her extensive network in San Carlos by taking me on strolls around the park, drinking '*tinto*' on almost every terrace possible, and introducing me to community leaders. Moreover Pastora supported me to get confidence and feel at ease in San Carlos and in retrospect I can say that she has succeeded. In addition I want to thank Ligia and Jesús for taking care of me in their generous home with delicious meals, tranquility and conversing about odd and ordinary daily experiences and sharing thoughts. You two have made my stay very pleasant, calm and secure.

Outside Colombia, I want to thank my parents for supporting me while doing this research. You two have always been there for me on crucial moments in every possible way and without the two of you this journey would have been impossible. Regarding the financing of this study I

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## Map 1: The department Antioquia within Colombia

Scale: 1 centimetre is 100 kilometres



Source: [http://encarta.msn.com/map\\_701510159/antioquia.html](http://encarta.msn.com/map_701510159/antioquia.html)

## Map 2: The Oriente within the department of Antioquia

Scale: 1 centimetre is 10 kilometres



Source: [http://encarta.msn.com/map\\_701510159/antioquia.html](http://encarta.msn.com/map_701510159/antioquia.html)

## 1. Introduction

“Where are you going to in the Oriente?” a taxi driver in Medellín asks me while he drives me to the bus station. “I am going to San Carlos” I answer. His reaction was not what I expected. “Do you know it there?” “It is very dangerous” “You have to be very careful” he warns in a pedantic and astonishing tone.<sup>1</sup>

Several times I found myself conducting small conversations similar to this one, especially in taxi's in Medellín and Bogotá. It, draw my attention to the fact that municipalities of the Oriente in general have a notorious reputation. In retrospect I can say that such comments appeared to be highly influential for my own perception of what atmosphere I would encounter when I got there. After all I had to live there for some time to conduct a research. It made me worry while imagining disturbing sights and insecurities of all kinds that made it unlivable. Gradually, after paying several visits to San Carlos and other municipalities in the Oriente my view adjusted and in retrospect I realized that other peoples perceptions had made me feel insecure about places that I had never observed with my own eyes.

Since a few years internally displaced people and Colombia have caught my attention. I remember that my interest started while searching for information about '*paramilitarism*' which was the theme for a paper I had chosen during a course for Conflict Studies. The paper turned out to be a complete failure because I embraced the theme of displacement more and got entangled reading about it. At the time I discovered that there were approximately 4 million internally displaced people in Colombia and that worldwide internally displaced people outnumber international refugees. Moreover, international legislation for internally displaced people did not even exist and had it, even then these people were subject to national legislation and institutions, due to their displacement within national borders, which in some countries was part of the reasons for their refugee status within their own country which made humanitarian aid difficult to engage. Who were these displaced people and did they have dreams? Or did they just felt miserable?

While I studied Cultural Anthropology I noticed my interest for themes like trauma, reconciliation and identity. How is it possible that people suffer and loose such a lot at the

hands of others and still find ways to give life meaning while living in the same village as their victimizers? This is for example a question that till today keeps my mind occupied. While trying to make sense out of processes of identity construction I always ended up feeling that my eyes were about to pop out so I decided to temper this inquisitiveness. As naïve as this might sound, gradually during the course of my study I discovered that practically everything that moves us, on which we base our choices, take action and what we prefer above other things is based on processes of identity construction. In a nutshell this is how the idea was born to conduct a research about the motivation of internally displaced people to return to the community where they fled from in times when the armed conflict is no longer there.

During the fieldwork that took place from February till June 2009 I have focused on the following central research question: How do returned and resettled internally displaced people from San Carlos of the Oriente, Antioquia, perceive, experience and respond to human insecurities and how does this relate to their choice to return to their community of expulsion?

To make this central question feasible I have concentrated on theories about violence, human security, belonging and home. I have been inspired by the concept 'habitus' and the insights of Ghorashi (2003), Nordstrom (2004) and Sen (2006) to oversee the interconnectedness between these concepts. Furthermore I have delineated the process of displacement in six phases to grasp the experiences with, the perceptions of and responses to human insecurities of internally displaced people through time and place.

Violence is an intended act with a pursued end that causes or threatens to cause physical or psychological harm or death and does not stop with the physical carnage of the battlefield (Concha-Eastman 2002: 44; Moser and McIlwaine 2004: 8-9; Nordstrom 2004: 59). Considering that the intentional damage of violence does not stop in the aftermath of violence and armed conflict it is interesting to pay attention to internally displaced people's experiences and perceptions of violence. This population forms particularly an interesting research population, given their subjection to violence, displacement across time and places in Colombia and after a considerable time have returned to their 'homes' in communities that are recovering from armed conflict and violence. By focusing on their experiences, perceptions and responses to human insecurities through time and place shall give insight in the 'meaning' of the wider

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1 Conversation with a taxi driver in Medellín on March 14, 2009

implications of violence for the 'self' and the social relations within societies in the aftermaths of violence.

Violence is a factor of human insecurity as are poverty, hunger and sickness. Thus, peace, economic stability, satisfaction and health are human securities. Human (in)securities shape part of the context in which people make choices. Choices made in the present are not only based on consciousness and rationale but also on common sense. On the part of common sense in our choice-making we can look at 'habitus' which Bourdieu viewed as an embodied history that gives permanence in change. Habitus can be perceived as a past social framework that gives direction to the ways that people act ('agency') and think (Ghorashi 2003: 28). "Becoming is shaped and reshaped through an interaction between change and continuity in which sets of practices that embrace both past and present experiences and future expectations" (Barth 1994: 13, 14). Nevertheless, decisions are also constructed on the basis of our rationale and our own interests which are also informed by cultural environment and the social position of the 'choice-maker' Wimmer (2002: 27-28). Thus, people look at the past (experiences) through the lens of the present (context), and with an eye to the future (objectives) and moreover individuals also have desires and feelings (Ghorashi 2003: 30).

Thus, decisions and 'agency' are shaped within a certain amount of possibilities which is delineated by the context we find ourselves in. However, we can always make choices but within the limits of our capital (Sen 2006). Thus, choices are multiple and so are the identifications which we 'choose' to belong to. To make one identity dominant over the other also depends on the social, economic and political context in which we 'choose' our identifications. Expressing to belong to a certain territory (like a Colombian rural municipality or *vereda*) might not be done if this would entail a certain danger through the political circumstances one finds him/herself in during an armed conflict. Nevertheless we can always make choices based on past experiences, present reasoning and with objectives in mind to improve our living conditions in the future. Thus identity, choices, agency and contexts are all shaped through processes of becoming which means by phenomena that are beyond mere control, but also on common sense, rationale, desires and emotion.

Internally displaced people experience multiple human (in)securities during a continuum of moments in time and across places. To capture their experiences, response and perceptions about human (in)security I distinguish six phases of displacement. I do not view this six-fold

delineation as a static or linear process of displacement. An approach as such would under-snow the multiple and dynamic character of displacement. Nor are the experiences of the people, interviewed for this study representative for the whole population of displaced people in Colombia, let alone in the world. We can view it as a non-chronological framework in which pros and cons for the choice of a certain form of agency are weighed. Hence, these six phases are delineated by porous boundaries in which internally displaced people can find themselves in an alternate order of times across time and place. However by marking boundaries within a forth going process of displacement that sets in from the moments that people are overarched by a context of violence and fear do make it possible to grasp the multilayered motivating factors of leaving, building-up a live in the host community and a possible return or resettlement to the community of expulsion, amongst others.

Therefore the first phase of displacement that I distinguish is exposure to violence and treats that lead to such extent of fear that leaving the violent scene is perceived to be the only option left to survive. The second phase is hardly realizing what has happened and difficulties with expressing experiences into words. Some have more difficulty to respond to insecurities in this phase than others. The third phase of displacement is when people are out of the void of despair and in search for work and other means of subsistence in the host community. The fourth phase is the dilemma of missing the community of expulsion in combination with either the efforts to build up life in the host community has been 'successful' enough to stay or 'disappointing' enough to think about a resettle or return to the community of expulsion. The fifth phase is after the return or resettlement in the community of expulsion and trying to build-up life there. The sixth phase rests on the question when and where (in what place) does internal displacement end?

### ***Research population and location***

At the time of shaping the fieldwork proposal I wanted to interview returnees and re-settlers in the Oriente of Antioquia, which is a department of Colombia. I had discussed the suitability of this zone with my supervisor and we agreed that especially the recent developments of recovery from decades of armed conflict were ideal to meet this research population. The beginning weeks in Colombia I spend on searching a place where internally displaced people



were returning to. Now that the fieldwork phase has closed and the writing process nearly finished I am proud to have chosen for San Carlos, a municipality which to my opinion has been a perfect location to conduct my Master graduate research.

Before San Carlos became a theatre of operation for armed groups with opposite ideological backgrounds it was a relatively calm and flourishing municipality famous for its rivers situated in gorgeous green mountainous settings, fertile soils, and hydro-electric facilities. Tourism and the production of coffee, cacao, vegetables, fruit, wood and electricity were rather lucrative businesses. Currently only the production of electricity continues on large scale which produces 33 percent of the national energy. In addition to magnificent sceneries with great economic potential the community character observable today also shows a reflection of the violent past. Visual and concealed symbols such as demobilized paramilitaries, the presence of guerrilla, anti-personnel mines, abandoned houses and returnees and re-settlers all found presence which in spurs of moments made me gaze and wonder how people manage to craft out a future while literally living with the past.

The people interviewed for this study had various<sup>2</sup> identities and occupations. For protective reasons I have shielded off practically all identities and adopted pseudonyms. I did so even for informants that explicitly wanted to be named because I could not bear the idea that somebody's safety would be at stake after my thesis would pass 'wrong' eyes. When actual names are used this is due to the (public) profession of the informant which makes an identity difficult to conceal in the first place and furthermore the respondent had not objected for the usage. Despite, the considerable variety of respondents, the shared identification of the main research population were adult returned and resettled internally displaced people that had a high-low to mid-class rural standard of living before they got displaced and represented both sexes.

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<sup>2</sup> I have conducted 45 interviews amongst (returned), (resettled ) internally displaced people with distinctive age and gender as well as demobilized people, ombudsman, the local administration, security institutions, national bodies like ACR, CNRR, DAPARD, Acción Social, Gerencia de desplazados del municipio de Medellín as well as ngo's like Conciudadanía, IPC, ASOVIMAS, CORDESAN, CARE. In addition I have conducted countless informal and semi-formal conversations and been present at several reunions of returned and resettled internally displaced people, with and without the presence of state institutions and organizations. Besides these reunions in San Carlos I have participated in one of UNDP, one of ACR, two of ASOMIVAS, one about a rural production initiative and one about victims of the armed conflict in the Oriente which was held in Marañilla.

## *Methodology*

Through anthropological research and a literature study I have gathered the information which is presented in this thesis. The techniques I used were (informal) conversations, participant observation, (semi)-structured and more open interviews and life histories. I have lived two and a half months with a family in the fieldwork area. This formed part of the method of participant observation which moreover proved a fantastic strategy for developing a profound network of informants via 'snowballing' which entails that via (key)-informants you meet new informants. Besides making *Me* and my objectives visible at meetings and activities where the research population held presence living in the study area and doing 'normal' things also gave me the possibility to 'taste' and observe the atmosphere of San Carlos which I highly enjoyed.

Informal and formal conversations in times provided new insights about (new) relevant topics regarding this study and have led several times to adapting my line of questioning during interviews but also to supplementing and reviewing question-lists for interviews. With the exception of 9 interviews that were either personal histories or more open interviews all were conducted by using prepared question-lists. However, during some interviews there was more space to drift away from the original questions than in others and also personal histories were at times steered by occasionally bringing up a new topic. The shortest interview/personal history took 25 minutes and the longest more than 3 hours. The interviews with returned and resettled internally displaced people, besides several of the 9 just mentioned were all a combination of personal histories and question lists. The advantage of this combined method, in my opinion is that personal histories give a detailed understanding of how local populations construct perceptions and give meaning to certain experiences, places, memories and events. This '*emic*' perspective gives a deeper understanding of community relations and the viewpoints of the research population. Prepared questions made it relatively easy to compare and analyse the information necessary to 'answer' the research questions. These were threefold during the fieldwork: What are the experiences and perceptions of returned and resettled internally displaced people regarding violence, fear and human insecurity? What are their perceptions regarding home, belonging and future? How do (local) state institutions contribute to the human security of this population to rebuild their lives in dignity? In this thesis I will present my findings concerning these research questions.

Through participant observation and living and sharing in 'normal' activities I have build-up trust and confidence. In addition I told in advance of all interviews and formal conversations that I conducted a research to graduate for my Master and therefore the information would be made public in the form of a thesis. I emphasised that if information could not be publicized than make notice about this during the interview or do not narrate such information to me at all. In addition I mentioned that I was obliged to treat all information with confidentiality as part of my position as a graduate researcher. Regarding this I have also utilized pseudonyms.

I have tried to stay as neutral as possible during the research and allowed myself to speak with people that had different positions during the armed conflict. It was tempting to dig into corruption scandals that I heard of, but have succeeded to stay focused on the research proposal. Upon hearing damaging information from informants about other informants that were part of this study I could make clear in a respectful manner, that as a researcher I could not choose sides and that all opposite narrators and visions were welcome to take part of this study. Nevertheless, all information was valuable and could give an inside vision about the society in which they lived. Though, I have to admit that it did hit me as lightning when this was displayed to me for the first time. It put my mind to think: Who could I trust and who not and should that even matter for the reliability and validity of the study?

A matter of concern though was if the gathered information in fact was reliable aside from my personal trust toward sources. To overcome this dilemma of reliability I have only used information for my analysis which was told by several sources. Therefore my analysis is based on the shared perceptions of the people spoken to during the fieldwork. I made an effort not to let my 'etic' view overshadow the 'emic' value of the research material. I wanted to tell the story I encountered in San Carlos through the visions of them and therefore I have selected quotes I found representative for the view of at least three different sources. Moreover the sense of fear that I noticed while speaking to informants and listening to their narratives at times affected my sense of trust. It was good to take a break, ones in a while, but at the end of the fieldwork I experienced great difficulties with leaving the place and the warm relationships, made there.

### ***Chapter Outline***

My findings in respect of the central research question, introduced above, are represented in the following order. In chapter two I start with a description of the concepts violence and displacement. What is violence and how does this relate to internal displacement in Colombia? Furthermore I pay attention to the national support system for internally displaced people in Colombia. In chapter three follows a description about the regional and local context of the Oriente, Antioquia and San Carlos. I put special focus on developments in this region which contributed to the presence of various armed actors that spread violence, terror and fear which constituted a context wherein the respondents of this study got displaced. In chapter four I present the first three phases of displacement which delineate the experiences, perceptions and response strategies of internally displaced people. What made them decide to leave their home and belongings and what kind of human insecurities were they responding to in the host communities? Chapter five is concentrated on construction processes of identity, belonging and home. Why is belonging experienced as insecure and is this the reason that internally displaced people want to return to their community of expulsion? In chapter six I describe what kind of public order and security situation ‘*desplazados*’ encounter, upon their return and resettlement and their responses to this. What is their perception of public security? The last chapter is focused on a return to a rural vereda which has been abandoned for years and has to be built up from scratch. What kind of human insecurities can ‘*desplazados*’ experience when they want to apply for an accompanied return of state institutions? In the conclusion I will give some end remarks on my findings gathered during the study.

## **2. Displacement and Violence**

Forced displacement can have several origins such as natural disasters, development works such as dams or by violence and armed conflicts. In this thesis I focus on displacement that was caused by armed groups which utilized violent strategies to obtain exclusive domination in communities of strategic and economic importance to them. Their violence instigated terror and fear amongst the inhabitants of these territories. The study orientation has been on the experiences and perceptions about human insecurities of returned and resettled internally displaced people. Nevertheless, by placing their experiences and perceptions within a theoretical debate about violence and armed conflict will shed light on the meaning of violence.

Therefore I begin this chapter with a conceptual discussion about violence followed by an overview of key concepts in regard of internal displacement. I present displacement against a contextual background of the Colombian armed conflict and the state. This will give insight to which types, motivations and manifestations of violence inhabitants of rural zones in Colombia were exposed and made many decide to leave their communities. Nevertheless, the state acknowledges that many internally displaced people are poor and vulnerable and need special attention to survive. What kind of support policy the Colombian state has developed to attend internally displaced people will follow in the last part of this chapter.

### **2.1. Violence**

What do we mean by violence? And, what is it about violence that people leave their community and (almost) all their belongings behind? The quest to define and describe violence has been continuous and interdisciplinary. We can think conceptually about violence and categorize it in different types, motivations (perpetrators) and manifestations (victims) to make it more tangible. Scholars have thought such questions over and accordingly distinguish different types of violence. One of these types is direct violence which implicates an unorganized form of violence committed by an individual or group that causes physical or mental injury to another person. Institutional violence is perpetrated by the police, military, judicial system or other institutions in the form of human rights abuses that cause physical or mental damage. Nevertheless, corruption and impunity are also ranked within this category.

Political violence defines violent acts which are collectively organized and politically motivated. Technological violence (Nordstrom 2004: 63) points out to the injuries that anti-personal mines have on the human body such as blowing of limbs. Other forms of violence are sexual violence and social violence which are often gender-based.

Examples of broader typologies of violence are cultural violence which underscores the symbolic or ideological reasoning behind violent acts in any other type of violence just mentioned. And, structural violence (Galtung 1996; Scheper-Hughes 1992) which is adopted by scholars who assume that poor people and the socially, politically and economically excluded are exposed to violence as well. There are probably more types of violence distinguishable but I leave it to these. The dilemma which arises when we adopt broad concepts such as structural, cultural and in part institutional violence is that indirect effects of violence such as social exclusion, subsistence insecurity, corruption and mismanagement become acts of violence. By defining violence to such extent washes away the essence of what violence is because then all daily experienced insecurities are assumed to be caused by violence. Moreover broad definitions as such to a certain extent become disproportionate when we compare daily experienced insecurities caused by social exclusion with the effects of violence during armed conflicts and wars.

Therefore I prefer to reason from the following definition of violence. Violence is an intended act with the use of force or power that causes physical and/or mental damage with a pursued end (Concha-Eastman 2002: 44; Moser and McIlwaine 2004: 8-9) and to be aware that the effects of violence are broader than the 'mere' physical injury to the body. Taking this in consideration experiences and observations of violent acts are done with a certain intentionality of which the effects last after the violence is no longer there. Nordstrom (2004: 61, 59) draws attention to this intentionality and the broader effects of violence:

“It is the intent, and thus the emotive context of the act that defines violence and its relationship to political will. Violence isn't intended to stop with the crippling of physical bodies. Violence is employed to create political submission; it is intended to create terror, and thus political inertia; it is intended to create hierarchies of domination and submission based on the control of force. (...) “People don't fight or flee war because of the sheer fact of violence, but because of what violence feels like.



(...) Violence feels like existential crisis, like hopelessness, like the loss of future. It feels like impossible contradictions of resistance within oppression, like the struggle of humanity within terror. Violence is about im/possibility, about the human condition and the meaning of survival. This is why wars are fought with blood-letting, why torture takes place and why neither violence nor war is limited to the physical carnage of the battlefield.”

Seen from this perspective we can understand violence and fear in whole by paying attention to the aftermaths of violence. By analysing the experiences of subjects of violence within certain moving contexts, locations and times will make it possible to grasp the effects and meaning of violence and fear which will appear in the shape of social relations. Thus, by analyzing the social relations and perceptions of violence, fear and insecurity within societies where violence and armed conflict are no longer observable we can grapple the broader effects of the intentionality of violent acts. While doing this we need to be aware that the effect of the intentionality of violence is dependent on the context in which these occur and the personality of the subjects. Reguillo (2002: 190-205) argues that the way that specific violent situations are experienced is subject specific, socially constructed, culturally shared and variable over time and place. Therefore it is more accurate to speak of perceptions of violence, fear and (in)security.

Jimeno also recognizes the constructed and subject specific character of violence, but adds that violence changes the critical sense of social life (2001: 222):

“Violence is a disruptive social act that connects levels of personality, interaction and social structure. Not, through the immediate occurrence of acts of violence, but by producing a common critical sense of social life. This critical sense of social life is a historical construct in which individual and collective ‘habitus’ come together in which the keystone is the notion of authority.”

From Jimeno’s insights about the critical sense of social life we can gather that the unwritten normative rules for the notion of authority based on violence in the present and future is based on experiences with violence in the past. Emphasizing this constructivist approach to the

notion of violence would explain why scholars as Kalyvas (2006) and Lubkemann (2008) argue that when people have been exposed to violence many times during their life for them violence becomes a 'normal'/natural element of life, that is always there but not always visible just a sickness or having a fight with your partner. Thus, physical and psychological damage such as injuries, fear, and mistrust can entail a comparable constructive process of change. Peoples mind, body and soul will never forget or heal completely from encounters with violence but shall find ways to respond to such experiences and in view of that map out new routes to live life at moments when confronted with 'real' violence, but also when violence and armed conflict are no longer observable in communities that are recovering from violence. Nordstrom (2004: 65-69) argues in an illuminating way that people need to get confidence and hope for the future again which gives life meaning. She describes this as follows:

“The present has meaning because it is embedded in a matrix of past realities and future possibilities. Our sense of self comes from memories (history) projected onto the (future) horizons of our lives. To choose one action (over another) is to choose a goal (over another); and that is to craft a future. Life takes meaning through these choices- Through the directions chosen and the reasons for the choice; through linking the here and now and the imminent” (Nordstrom 2004: 69).

Therefore it is important to understand how life in the aftermath of violence and armed conflict can be recovered. The emotional and broader implications of violence offer a connection to the experiences of displaced people that seek to build up human securities during and in the aftermath of violence and armed conflict. This means looking at strategies to build-up human capacities that give life meaning in the aftermath of violence and armed conflict will shed light on the broader and emotional implications of violence and armed conflict. In this respect concepts as human security of the UNDP (1994) and coping and response strategies (Koonings 2009; Moser and McIlwaine 2004; Vincent 2001) are useful to categorize subjects responses to experiencing violence and fear and their perceptions and 'agency' in the aftermaths of violence. Displacement is approached as a strategy that is used to avoid the effects of violence. Nevertheless, displacement in itself has to be viewed as a direct effect of violence wherein subjects are exposed to the direct effects of displacement and hence can be viewed as

the wider effects of violence. The wider effects of violence that can not be observed from the outside of the body are traumas, material losses, hunger, sickness and the loss of house and home. These wider implications of violence have to be pointed out as human insecurities instead of just another typology of violence. In sum life can be viewed as a continuum of securities and insecurities wherein people search for opportunities to feel more secure and violence is one category that shapes a context in which people can feel insecure. Responses to experiences with human insecurities are subject specific which are used and re-used across a dynamic continuum of time, place and context. Internally displaced people are an interesting population in this respect because they have literally moved across time to different places and contexts. Concepts as human security and response strategies to human insecurities will be dealt with in more detail in the second half of this thesis.

## **2.2. Internal displacement**

Internally displaced people were in 1998 defined by the United Nations Guiding Principles as follows:

“...persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border” (UNHCR 2006: 13).

Internally displaced people thus differ from international refugees because they don't cross state borders whereas the causes of forced displacement are comparable to those of international refugees. In Colombia displacement is often forced by violence and terror, spread by well armed military groups that participate in the armed conflict.<sup>3</sup> The armed conflict that can be observed today originates from the 1950s when the state and insurgent groups battled for political power. However, since alliances with drug traffickers became more important the ideological rational

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<sup>3</sup> In addition natural disasters and large scale development projects also cause forced displacements, but in light of this thesis I discuss forced displacement caused by armed conflict.

behind the conflict gradually changed and has presently evaporated altogether. From the 1990s the rural battle scene is dominated by three powerful armies of extra-legal self-defence groups (diverse paramilitary blocks of the AUC), left wing guerrillas (diverse FARC and ELN fronts) and the states security forces (diverse battalions). The main goal of all is domination over vast territories that are of strategic and/or of economic importance (UNDP 2003).

These conflicts have literally divided the country in zones of war and peace and all in between stages imaginable. The concept of zones (Koonings and Kruijt 2004: 2) in Colombia has grown to such extent that within a single city some neighbourhoods are in a state of armed conflict while outside these frontiers of violence citizens are not or do not want to be aware of this and follow their 'normal' daily routines. This segregating aspect of the national territory by violence and armed actors is also prevalent in rural areas of Colombia. There, it is possible to distinct between zones where one armed actor dominates, zones where different armed groups habitually pass through, and disputed zones where armed actors fight over the domination of territory (Restrepo 2004: 174-175, 177).

Inhabitants of these rural areas are (forcibly) recruited, killed or 'chased away' by the dirty warfare methods that armed actors use to meet their goals of total domination and/or economic enrichment. Amongst these are selective killings and massacres next to disappearances, torture, extralegal detention and death threats against every individual they perceive a collaborator or rank and file of the opponent. Next to these methods guerrillas and paramilitaries impose strict order based on war taxes (*vacuna*) and a simple security and justice system. Whereas the FARC eliminates common crime and sympathizers of the paramilitary, police or military, the paramilitary assassinate real or suspected guerrillas, teachers, community leaders and drug addicts, prostitutes and thieves (Restrepo 2004: 177).

In addition to the previous threats for personal security, the state and the population also face challenges in respect of anti-personnel mines as a result of the armed conflict. The first explosive artifacts were planted by the ELN, followed by the FARC and the paramilitaries. Every planted mine means a risk of at least 50 to 70 years wherein it is possible to make victims that in most cases survive. Between 1990 and February 2008 nationally 12.166 persons have survived an explosion of anti-personnel mines and in the department of Antioquia 2.406 people were victimized (CNRR 2008: 14-15).

This dynamic where the civilian population become direct and indirect targets of irregular

armed actors who use intimidation and fear by making everybody a potential suspect and collaborator of the conflict, alongside more open methods of violence and coercion instigate(s)d massive forced internal displacements of Colombians next to international refugees. Colombia contains, after Sudan and next to Congo and Angola the most internally displaced people in the world, as a consequence of violent internal conflicts. To indicate, between 1999 and 2006 Acción Social a national agency for the attention to deprived social categories, including internally displaced, registered 1.976.970 people (Vargas w.y.: 3). CODHES (2009) a Colombian consultancy group for human rights and displacement registered 2.165.873 internally displaced between 1999 and 2005. Other sources speak of figures that reach four million people.

Several scholars (Ibañez 2008; Sanford 2004: 257-258) argue that displacement is a key military strategy of the armed actors instead of a by-product. Sanford (2004: 261) argues that the alleged support of the civilian population of the guerrillas was utilized to justify the development of the self-defense groups and paramilitary to retake territory. Subsequently the paramilitary consolidated their control by using displacement as a principal tactic to empty zones of any possible guerrilla support. Moreover, she states that the military and paramilitary worked together. While the army frequently used planes and helicopters to bomb civilian areas paramilitaries carried out ground offenses and spread treats and killed people they suspected of subversion (Aviles 2006).

Seen from this view displacement is a direct military strategy of the armed actors to obtain single domination over vast territories usable for the exploitation of natural resources, as strategic centers and/or corridors of war and for the transportation and production of illegal goods. Thus, displacement overall takes place in zones that have importance because of their roads, electric plants, that are suitable for the cultivation and production of coca(plants), petroleum, rivers and frontiers for the transportation of arms and drugs amongst other things that can take place (almost) undisturbed in the margins of the state (Restrepo 2004: 175-177; Sanford 2004: 260).

The effect of internal displacement on the national economy (Ibañez 2008) is a heavy burden. According to Law 387 (see paragraph 2.3.), internally displaced people have the right to emergency attention and humanitarian aid in the receipt communities where they arrive. In later phases of displacement people that are able to work need employment, not to speak of reparations to which also other victims have the right. Displacement is just one of the many

categories of victimizations that exist in Colombia. That the state is not able to attend all internally displaced people adequately and equally obviously is no surprise. There still is no permanent settlement between the classic oppositional armed groups (state and guerrilla). Moreover 'new' criminal organizations that make use of 'old' structures are prevailing in different localities of Colombia and amongst the consequences of their war strategies are also forced displacements (MAPP-OEA; ICG).

During the fieldwork I heard an employee of a national institution for reparation argue that internal displacement is the problem of why the armed conflict still exists in Colombia because they can be easily recruited. I agree with his reasoning that displacement creates graver forms of poverty amongst large segment of the population. Poor people that suffer from economic deprivation; hunger and even feelings of abandonment and deception by the state form an employment pool for informality, (semi)illegal and criminal activities such as the cultivation and production of coca(plants). Although, occupations on the bottom of this chain I personally can not condemn, given the social economic circumstances where many Colombians have to deal with daily and the scarcity of legal employment, it cannot be denied that narco trafficking is one of the links that armed criminal groups use to sustain and prolong with the production of violence, terror, fear and insecurity. Armed actors and criminal organizations pay considerably more than the national minimum wage.<sup>4</sup> Hence, I agree with Koonings and Kruijt (2004: 14):

“Increasing numbers of Latin Americans live in an informal society geared up for uncertain everyday survival. Here violence finds a fertile breeding ground. Indeed the new violence and many of the armed actors involved in it are clearly connected with poverty, inequality and exclusion. Violence hits the vulnerable in a disproportionate way, while many of the rank and files of the armed actors are recruited from among the poor.”

Nevertheless, to say that internal displacement and its subjects feed the armed conflict in Colombia in my view goes beyond reason and generalizations as such puts a stigma on

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<sup>4</sup> During conversations and interviews with different people I have heard that they were offered 4 million Colombian Pesos monthly for getting involved with criminal activities. A minimum wage, if it is possible to find legal employment pays around 400.000 Colombian Pesos which is approximately 133 Euro.



internally displaced people victimized by the violence of armed groups. I hold this stance because many internally displaced people deliberately choose not to get involved with (semi)-illegality and criminal activities and just want to live a life without daily confrontations with violence and worries about how to make it tomorrow, as I will show in later chapters of this thesis.

### **2.3. National support-structure for attention to internally displaced people**

Internally displaced people form a vulnerable population in many respects. Alongside emotional, physical and psychological damage they have lost (all) their belongings and stay in zones that differ from the places they have fled. In addition they mistrust state institutions as a consequence of fear due to experiences with human rights violations of security institutions or overall feelings of neglect by state institutions which is damaging for the reputation of state sovereignty and the confidentiality as protecting organ. However internal displacement, thus residing within national borders, in short legal terms means bound to national legislation and protection mechanisms. The United Nation developed the guiding principles for attention to internally displaced people in 1998 with the aim to guide state regimes how to respond to disasters as such. However, the guiding principles are not binding these are inspired by refugee law, international humanitarian law and (inter)national human rights law which are binding. In sum, states can develop national policies to search for durable solutions and prevention of forced displacement and utilize humanitarian, refugee and human rights protocols as guidance.

Despite the problems mentioned above in 1997 Colombia had already adopted Law 387 (Rúa, M. et al. w.y.: 5-7) to attend internally displaced people. By adopting this law the state gave recognition to the vulnerable position of internally displaced people and their need for extra legal 'protection' to regain their citizen rights and become 'ordinary' citizens. Thus, internally displaced people have special rights, next to 'ordinary' citizen rights because theirs have been degraded by the violations committed during the armed conflict. After 1997 this law has been accommodated several times to make the implementation process more effective.<sup>5</sup> These state

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview of all adopted decrees see the 'Manual de Atención a la Persona en Situación de Desplazamiento' page 52-53 by Rúa et al.

efforts to offer attentive and preventive solutions to vulnerable social categories to regain a minimal but self sustaining basis of existence are signs to assume that Colombia is not a failed state. The coordination and the distribution of funds between organizations to put Law 387 in effect is centralized under the overall responsibility of Acción Social (Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional) which was created in 2005 under decree 2467 (ibid.: 25-26). This national body is responsible for the canalization of national and international resources between all organizations and projects that are working in the field of displacement. Thus, the president of Colombia carries the ultimate responsibility for this institution.

Acción Social also carries the overall responsibility (Comite Desplazados Antioquia 2009) over three levels of public administration that systematize, review and regulate every public, private and communitarian initiative in regard of victims of internal displacement. On the national level this coordination is done by SNAIPD (Sistema Nacional por Atención Integral a Población Desplazada). The departmental CDAIP (Comité Departmental para la Atención Integral a la Población Desplazada) and local committees CLAIPD (Comité Local para la Atención Integral a la Población Desplazada) coordinate and intercommunicate between the public, private and communitarian initiatives that give humanitarian attendance, support reestablishment, and work in the prevention of internal displacement (Comité Desplazados Antioquia 2009). Hence, the main objective of these committees is to make policies and initiatives for the accompaniment of displaced people more effective. In respect of this study the responsibility for these last two committees fall under the governor of Antioquia and the mayor of San Carlos.

### ***The national registration procedure in the system of Acción Social***

Next to implementing Law 387 and canalizing national and international budgets Acción Social screens all people that want to register in the RUPD (Registro Único de Población Desplazada) system. A RUPD-code has vital importance for displaced people, because without it the state does not recognize them as such. Meaning that internally displaced people without a RUPD-code have no legal right to special attention that can help them regain their 'ordinary' citizen

rights. To obtain a RUPD-code people have to declare their displacement within a year after their displacement. To start the application procedure for RUPD the applicant needs a CIPOD number. This number signifies that an individual has declared his/her situation to the public prosecutor ('Ministerio Público').

To obtain a CIPOD-number a displaced person has to declare an accurate context of their displacement at the '*personería*,' '*defensoría del pueblo*' or '*procuraduría*'<sup>6</sup> in the host community. In San Carlos the public prosecutor is represented by the '*personería*'<sup>7</sup> and the '*personero/a*' sends the declaration to Acción Social. Acción Social screens if the declaration of the applicant is well founded or not. Officially, the results have to be received in ten days (Rúa et al. w.y.: 34). Ideally the whole process of declaration and registration takes three months at most. However due to understaffed offices and the many applications this process often takes more time.<sup>8</sup> While displaced people wait for their registration and all other displaced people that are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance can receive some basic necessities, like water, food, shelter, blankets and medical assistance. This however depends on aid initiatives in the host community. The Red Cross (Cruz Roja), an international organization was mentioned several times as offering assistance in this respect.

### ***State attention for people with a RUPD-code***

After registration in RUPD displaced people have the right to emergency humanitarian aid for three months. This aid consists out of a rent allowance, a pack of personal care and cooking utilities, groceries, psychological and medical assistance and free education to reach a minimal

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<sup>6</sup> Procuraduría is the independent juridical organ with the power to impose sanctions in the case of unlawful actions by members of any social service body, from ministers down to low ranking civil servants. Defensoría has no sanction power but has to protect the human rights by making denouncements. Personería has the responsibility to register and prosecute human rights violations within municipalities (Kruijt and Koonings 2007: 33-34).

<sup>7</sup> The personera of San Carlos told me in an interview on May 21, 2009 that she helps internally displaced people with understanding their special rights. Amongst other tasks, she helps them with obtaining documents necessary to start-up procedures for registration matters, in the CIPOD and RUPD, but also to start-up the application procedures for reparation, return and re-settlement. In other words the personería has the responsibility to register, systematize and coordinate between the doubts and rights of internally displaced people and other victims of the internal armed conflict and the institutions that need to attend them. In short a legal adviser on (international) human rights and a watching organ to make sure that the institutions perform their tasks in the way they are supposed to.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with a well informed man in Medellín on April 29, 2009.

self sustainable living standard. If, assistance needs to be continued after this period the subject needs to ask this at attending offices for internally displaced people in the location of registration and settlement (Rúa et al.: 35).

After the three months of humanitarian emergency aid people with a RUPD-code can apply for a sum of reparation money from Acción Social which is about one million pesos for each family.<sup>9</sup> Families and single mothers of children between 7 and 18 years old that have to live of less or exactly two minimum wages monthly can apply for a two-monthly child subsidy of Familia en Acción. This subsidy serves for 12 months subsidy for nutrition and 10 months for a school subsidy. In San Carlos education is free of charge, but I do not know if they can still obtain the school subsidy of 10 months and use it for other means.

When registered in the RUPD-system, then displaced also have the right to free social health care and medicines. All Colombians possess a SISBEN card, which is part of the social health system and has different levels of attention. Internally displaced people with a RUPD-code have level zero of SISBEN which signifies that they live in misery or poverty and will not be charged for medical consults and medication. However, this system sounds very social and reasonable I have heard many complaints about the attendance in the hospital of San Carlos for people that have a level zero on their SISBEN card. Even up to several scandals where poor people with level zero that needed acute emergency help were not attended in time send home without attendance or diagnosed improperly which forms a threat for the lives of inhabitants that are in need of medical attention.<sup>10</sup> Other rights that apply to internally displaced people is that their abandoned properties can not be sold while they are absent, they can re-settle in whatever Colombian municipality they want, and they may return to the exact same place and house in their community of expulsion. This last aspect will be dealt with more detailed in chapter 7.

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<sup>9</sup> This information came to my notice during an interview with a well informed man in Medellín on April 29, 2009. I have not been able to find exactly what the conditions for this reparation are, besides that it is for families. I don't know if individuals can apply for such reparation as well. I did spoke an informant during an informal conversation who had received around 1 million pesos and she has not suffered from lost family members within the nuclear family or 'hogar.'

<sup>10</sup> I have not asked the hospital staff about the stories and complaints about medical attendance in San Carlos, but still I think that these remarks are an indication for health service toward people that have level zero on their SISBEN card.

Violence is an intended act with the use of force or power that causes physical and/or mental damage with a pursued end. The effects of the intentionality of violence are however broader than 'mere' physical and mental damage to the body and soul. These broader effects of violence can however not be defined as violence. To define the broader effects of violence and displacement it is more accurate to speak of human insecurities of which experiences are subject specific and dynamic across time and place.

Just as definitions of violence and displacement the web of rights, committees and private and public initiatives remain abstract protocols till the moment these transform into concrete actions that can be experienced by its subjects. By describing the relationship between theory, practice and subject experiences will give meaning and a broader understanding of the institutional attention system for displaced people in Colombia. These experiences will be dealt with in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

In the next chapter I will outline the experiences of internally displaced people against the history of political violence and armed conflict in San Carlos and the Oriente of Antioquia. This historical context is essential for understanding the effects of strategies of opposite (armed) groups that feuded for (political) domination, on the social, economic and demographic character of a community. Moreover this will give insight in what kind of factors of violence the returned and resettled internally displaced people which were interviewed for this study were subjected to and made them decide to leave their house and home.

### **3. History of Political Violence and Armed Conflict in San Carlos, Oriente**

As we saw the history of (political) violence and armed conflict in Colombia is long and complicated and above all characterized by local dynamics. Colombian armed groups, whether legal or illegal tend to follow their own strategic agendas and impose their self-made rules upon populations in the areas where they cross or settle. In this chapter I focus on local developments of political violence and armed conflict that at the verge of the millennium had resulted in a demise of approximately two third of the population of San Carlos. This focus will cover the most important dynamics concerning the presence of armed actors in the Oriente and the types of violent actions they used to meet their goals. These changing cycles of public security and order can be seen as the theatre in which violence, terror, suspicion and retaliation orchestrated feelings of fear and despair upon which many decided to flee their community.

#### **3.1. Modernization and the origins of violent conflict in the Oriente**

The Oriente is a mountainous region situated in the south-east of the department Antioquia<sup>11</sup> and consists out of 7021 square kilometers with 23 municipalities. The economic potential of this region is divers owing to its forests, rivers, lakes and soil suitable for the production of coffee, sugar cane and cacao but also to keep stock. These geographic distinctions divide the Oriente in four sub-zones formally known as Altiplano, Bosques, Embalses and Páramo.

The modernization process of the Oriente geared up in the 1960s with the construction of water reservoirs that are used for the generation of hydro-electric power and a paved road to connect the capital Bogotá to Medellín. This new infrastructure brought along an influx of inhabitants in search for employment (Uribe et al. 2000: 9-12) next to rich investors that started buying large terrains (*fincas*) for recreational and business purposes. Besides an influx of new people, these mega development projects also set off a cycle of economic migration and (forced) displacements of peasants that already inhabited the Oriente. Especially El Peñol, San Carlos and Guatapé were affected by this because the water reservoirs were constructed in these

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<sup>11</sup> See map 1: of Antioquia within Colombia.



municipalities (Uribe et al. 2000: 15).<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the 1960s and 1970s in the Oriente meant economic opportunities and migration for some and forced displacement and poverty for others. Alongside these social economic changes the political dynamic in San Carlos was also changing. Since its foundation in the beginning of the 18th century San Carlos has been influenced by a conglomeration of the church, local elites and the conservative party in social, economic and political respect (Uribe et al. 2000: 12).

In the 1950s several '*veredas*' of San Carlos were invaded by groups of assassins linked to the Conservative Party (*pajaros*) from the Magdalena Medio to wipe out farmers with a liberal background whom were fleeing from Puerto Berrío to the direction of San Luis and San Carlos. Hence, as a result from this political violence farmers that offered an alternative political voice to oppose conservative ruling ran an increased risk to get assassinated, were killed or forced to displace. This period of increased political violence is called 'La Violencia' wherein '*liberal chusma*' meant liberal scum and '*contra chusma*' attacks against people that prefer liberal politics (Uribe et al. 2000: 12; Palacios 2006: 160-169). In San Carlos of the 1960s, threats and selective killings related to political violence between liberals and conservatives was still pervasive as the following memory of Liliana about her first encounter with violence and displacement underscores:

"I have known violence since I was a small child. I remember that one day in 1966 two men entered the house and shot my father in the head and neck. I got so scared that I ran outside with my little brother and was afraid to return to the house." (...) "This was called '*chusma*,' my father was a liberal and the conservatives had murdered him." (...) "Later we had to flee because I had recognized the murderers who were from the village where we lived. You see violence and displacement have been part of almost all our lives. Before this happened I can remember that we ran to several places with my father."<sup>13</sup>

Alongside, the rise of liberals that politically opposed hegemonic domination of conservative

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<sup>12</sup> See map: for a map of the Oriente.

<sup>13</sup> Conversation with Liliana in San Carlos in April, 2009.

ideologies in politics<sup>14</sup> and the Civic Movement (Movimiento Civico<sup>15</sup>) in the 1960s, the phenomenon of leftist armed insurgent's presence became significant in the 1970s. Especially in the rural areas of San Carlos, Guatapé and San Raphael that were most affected in social economic perspective by the hydro-electric developments which had impoverished a large part of the population and enriched others. People that lived in poverty and misery due to unemployment and children between the age from 12 to 17 with little access to education, health and other opportunities risked to become recruited by the FARC. Moreover, the FARC saw potential to extort the rich elites that owned large pieces of land (*fincas*) and cattle businesses and to demand war taxes of the hydro-electric companies.

For years the FARC Front 9 had consolidated their settlement in rural parts of San Carlos and San Raphael. For a decade long between the 1970s and 1980s they had grown in economic and material strength and had managed to duplicate their manpower. As a result, from 1982 onwards the FARC expanded their domination to other municipalities of the Oriente. Amongst these were Alejandría and Concepción in the North-East (Embalses) and to San Luis and Cocorná in the mid-East (Bosques). Another FARC Front, 47, started to operate in the South of the Oriente. Their expansion resulted in frequent road blocks and attacks on the road between Medellín and Bogotá which also became a scene of armed combat with the army that executed countermeasures against the FARC. Despite these army offensives the ELN Front Carlos Alirio Buitrago and Front Bernardo López Arroyave had also consolidated presence in parts of San Luis, San Fransisco, Cocorná, Granada and San Carlos at the beginning of the 1990s and the FARC was still expanding and growing in strength.

For San Carlos the 1990s meant that the urban part was interchangeably invaded by different guerrilla groups alongside self-defense groups of farmers that have been active in the region from the late 1980s onwards. The first group that appeared in the urban center was the ELN Front Carlos Alirio Buitrago and when they left the FARC Front, 9, invaded.<sup>16</sup> When they entered they stayed for a while to execute their businesses and then left off to the rural zones.

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<sup>14</sup> The Anapo had managed to obtain political influence in San Carlos and San Raphael that offered another political choice besides the traditional liberal and conservative ideologies (Uribe et al 2000: 16).

<sup>15</sup> In the 1960s with the construction of the hydro-electric stations started collective action of protests against these developments because it had such an impact on the households of farmers. Also the height of electricity in the region was an element of protest. In the 1970s this collective action culminated in a civic movement in the Oriente (Uribe et al 2000: 15-17).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Pilar on May 18, 2009.

When guerrilla Fronts arrived in the urban center of San Carlos they demanded war taxes (*vacunas*)<sup>17</sup> from merchants<sup>18</sup> as the experience of Pilar also illustrates:

“I used to have a store for children with toys and 'piñatas.' When the FARC started to extort me I gave everything away to the people in the park. All the investments in the store were gone in several minutes.” (...) I did this because I did not want to contribute to financing the war that was destroying our community.”<sup>19</sup>

Besides war taxes they also executed extortions, kidnappings and selective killings of members of the political establishment and merchants alongside others that were related to public security institutions as the loss of Carolina points out:

“My daughter was killed by the guerrilla in the door opening of the house. She was the girlfriend of a military so I think they killed her for that.”<sup>20</sup>

Next to selective killings the guerrilla also attacked public security representatives and they blew up infrastructure, hydro-electric plants, electricity pylons and power lines. The strategy of the military was not effective given the fact that both guerrilla groups expanded till the mid-end of the 1990s.

### **3.2. Guerrilla and paramilitary suspicion and retaliation**

In response to the growing strength of guerrillas and especially the FARC, the governor of Antioquia, Alvaro Uribe Velez denounced a new law in 1994. This law legalized private organized self defense groups of the upper-middle and elite class citizens that had been the main targets of the guerrilla. These groups were called CONVIVIR and by 1997 there were 600

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Pilar on May 18, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> During an interview with Manuela on May 20, 2009 she told me that the FARC was looting stores and giving it away to people especially youth. She said never to have participated in such activities that she thinks is the same as stealing.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Pilar on May 18, 2009 in San Carlos.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Carolina on April 6, 2009 in San Carlos.

CONVIVIR forces active on the national level of which 64 operated in Antioquia to protect merchants and cattlemen (Uribe et al. 2000: 18). These groups were often trained by people with a military background and instructed counter-insurgency tactics to eliminate the rank and file of the guerrilla. After the legalization of such groups in Antioquia the scene of violence turned grimmer as Carlos remembers:

“From the late 1970s and 1980s the guerrilla was already present in (...). They lived for some years in the same part. We lived more or less together, but in peace and in quietness and calm. When only they were here they were not violent and they did not bother us very much. Sometimes they wanted to buy chickens or a pig and then they would pay the double price for it. But they were not really bothering us. That came later when other armed groups came. Then the situation became very harsh and difficult. When the army and the paramilitary came the fights started over the territory and everything changed very violent. I think at the end of the 1980s<sup>21</sup> the army started to fight with the guerrilla and kill them. When the paramilitary arrived after the military it got even worse. Oeff.. that was a very complicated time. It was impossible to talk with the paramilitary because they suspected us always from working together with the guerrilla. The paramilitary was present in this area from 1994 or something like that. You could not talk to anybody and the paramilitary began to kill a lot of farmers.”<sup>22</sup>

These self-defense groups were approaching San Carlos from the Southern and Eastern rural villages and their presence entailed a change in the dynamics of the armed conflict in respect of violence, terror and fear amongst inhabitants living in areas where the guerrilla had settled.

In 1997 many of these self-defense groups began to organize in the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) under the command of Carlos Castaño. In 1997 Block Metro that was one of the AUC paramilitaries settled in San Carlos. Carlos Mauricio Garcia Fernández, later known as Commander Rodrigo Franco or Doble Cero was the commander of Block Metro. This

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<sup>21</sup> From the late 1980s the self- defense forces of Ramón Izasa were also active in some veredas of San Carlos to forcibly displace some inhabitants whom they accused of collaboration with the guerrilla (Uribe et al. 2000: 18).

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Carlos in San Carlos in March, 2009. When I asked ELN or FARC he said both, but overall

Block settled in El J3rdan, a co-regiment ('corregimiento') of San Carlos where Doble Cero in his youth used to come on a regular basis to visit his grandfather that owned a big piece of land ('finca Justo Fern3ndez') there (OPROA 2008: 12-13). Carlos Garcia had studied at army schools in the United States and Colombia where he had learned about counter-insurgency tactics. He left the army in 1988 and started working with Fidel and Carlos Casta3no. Together they founded the Peasant Self-Defenses of C3rdoba and Urab3 (ACCU) where Doble Cero introduced counter insurgency methods to resist the guerrilla.

The ideology behind counter-guerrilla tactics was often referred to in Colombia as: 'to take away the water from the fish.'<sup>23</sup> Put in other words to guarantee that all (possible) rank and file of the guerrilla would disappear from the area by using methods as intimidation, terror, selective killings and massacres. Besides severe damages to the FARC and the ELN the effective war strategies also increasingly exposed the civilian population to cruelties as Hernando explained:

“Here (...) just a few people disappeared that were from here because the guerrilla had captured them and took them away. The '*paracos*' were different. They stopped the cars and made people step out. They came with a register, papers like this '*llenitas*.' He explains while picking up a piece of a4 paper. On both sides with: name, village, numbers of '*cedula*' and everything. Thus what they did, they stopped buses and ordered everybody to step out for a control with our identification card in our hand. They would say: Get out for a control we are '*paramilitares*.' Then they were going by the row like this: ... looking at the '*cedula*' and the list and searching, searching... The ones that appeared on the lists were moved to this site and others to that site. The ones on the lists they took away. The first massacres happened when they took 22 at a place about two kilometers from here. They took them to San Lores a '*vereda*' of San Raphael. All the people that they had taken from the two buses, because there were two were from (...) and (...).<sup>24</sup>

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FARC. Where we lived has almost always been a pure FARC zone.

<sup>23</sup> During different interviews and conversations between February and June 2009 informants phrased the situation of increased violence, threats, selective killings and massacres as the consequence of a certain tactic, called 'to take away the water from the fish.'

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Hernando in San Carlos in March 2009.

With the AUC entering the region the dynamic of the armed conflict again had changed dramatically for inhabitants of the areas where they began their counter insurgency operations. Along the strategies of the paramilitary the guerrilla also turned more violent and began with retaliation offensives against perceived rank and file of paramilitary and military. This atmosphere made it extremely dangerous for people to get associated with one or the other armed group as Ricardo remembers the times when he had to travel:

“If I had to travel to Medellín I was always stressed out, because some of the people with whom I was in the same class of college were now either working with the guerrilla that controlled the road to San Raphael or with the '*paras*' that controlled the road to Granada. I never knew who else would be in the bus and was scared that one of my old classmates would greet me or chat with me. Than I ran the risk that someone else in the bus could inform to one group or the other that I was with one of them, if you understand what I mean.”<sup>25</sup>

The FARC and the ELN both lost control over their strategic corridors and were ousted by Block Metro. In three years time from 1997 till 2002 Block Metro controlled 40 municipalities in the North-East of Antioquia and practically the whole Oriente (OPROA 2008: 15, note 2). In sum, the interference of the paramilitary was successful in respect of their goal to exterminate and uproot the guerrilla from the areas they dominated. The extortion, kidnapping and selective killings from their side stopped. In return however the community in whole experienced an increase in violence, terror and fear as result of the counter insurgency tactics of Block Metro. Everybody was made a potential suspect of collaboration with the guerrilla. In response the guerrilla as well turned more violent towards inhabitants and whole communities who they suspected from informing the paramilitaries and the military about their whereabouts. Alongside disappearances, selective killings, torture, extra-judicial detention and massacres

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Ricardo in San Carlos on May 16, 2009.

technological violence of anti-personal mines had also become a grave problem for inhabitants of the rural areas of San Carlos. The guerrilla had placed these (often) self fabricated bombs and anti-personnel mines to damage their opponents and maintain dominance over strategic corridors. Hence these explosive artifacts not only formed a risk for combatants, but also for the public and personal security of inhabitants of San Carlos.

### **3.3. Internal AUC war**

In 2002 the armed conflict complicated again because Doble Cero and Carlos Castaño got entangled in an internal war over the role of narco-trafficking within the AUC and the peace process between Alvaro Uribe and the AUC. Doble Cero had no intention to negotiate and demobilize and Carlos Castaño ordered different AUC Blocks to conquer the areas that were dominated by Block Metro.<sup>26</sup> (OPROA 2008: 15). In San Carlos it was Bloque Cacique Nutibara that eventually took over Block Metro as Pedro underscores:

“At the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003 I came to San Carlos and I was a member of Block Cacique Nutibara. In this time it was extremely violent because there was a conflict with Block Metro and Cacique Nutibara or better said between Block Metro and the rest of the organization AUC. It was very harsh.”<sup>27</sup>

This new dynamic of the conflict also meant that inhabitants that still lived in San Carlos were again exposed to a cycle of open forms of violence. From 2002 onwards the AUC initialized several massacres in rural ‘*veredas*’ which caused massive displacements to Granada, San Luis and the urban part of San Carlos.<sup>28</sup> Also in the urban centre the community was exposed to open violence, terror and fear as the following comment of Marena underscores:

“We lived at the park in San Carlos where they killed many people. We would lock ourselves in during the night in one room with food and barricade the door. One

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<sup>26</sup> Interview in San Carlos in May, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Interview in San Carlos in May, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Information gathered during a UNDP meeting with representatives and leaders of different community sectors in San Carlos on March 20, 2009.

time they overturned the door of the house and we heard shots. The next day we found a neighbor who was shot in a room. It was a frightening time and I was always scared to open the door of the room after the shooting had stopped for some time. You never knew what you would see and find dead in the streets. I have seen a lot of murders when we lived in that house.”<sup>29</sup>

The confrontation between the AUC and Block Metro ended more or less in the Oriente in the area around San Roque that is in the north of Antioquia where the last combats took place and caused many deaths on both sides. Arboleda the second commander of Block Metro was in command during this time because Doble Zero had left the zone. After Arboleda had entered he denounced the end of the armed confrontation and Blocks Cacique Nutibara demobilized and more or less vaporized according to Pedro:

“But Cacique Nutibara also dominated here for a certain time after Block Metro had left, or not? I ask surprised “No, here not, because this zone was not of Cacique Nutibara, it was of Block Metro.” When Cacique Nutibara demobilized and other Blocks left to other parts, some members stayed and other Blocks entered. Then Block Heroés de Granada was formed. Thus, Cacique Nutibara also got fragmented to different parts? ... He laughs bashful and says: “More or less.”<sup>30</sup>

Eventually Block Héroes de Granada demobilized according to the Peace and Justice Law in 2005 and started with their reintegration program (Comisión DDR 2007: 62-63). From this moment onwards every year the public order and security situation has improved bit by bit. The national forces started building military bases in rural ‘*veredas*’ and some displaced started to return and in 2006 the livability improved. The hydro-electric facilities in Calderas were recuperated and public policies, based on voice and votes were developed to recuperate the community character. In 2007 the road between San Carlos and Granada was repaired, the exhumation process to locate and identify cadavers started and the first electoral process after the demobilization of paramilitaries took place. In 2008 the military started with the emergency

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Marena in San Carlos in May 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Pedro in San Carlos in May 2009.



cleaning of mines as the offering of psychosocial help to victims and victimizers and a forum for reconciliation was organized.

### **3.4. Legacies of the armed conflict: Deaths and Displacement**

The armed confrontations, violence and terror have taken the lives of many inhabitants and made others leave their homes out of fear to get killed. After Block Metro had entered the Oriente the level of violence, fear and displacement in San Carlos intensified. Whereas from 2002 and 2003 displacement had become a massive phenomenon in San Carlos most sources I spoke to during the fieldwork had left San Carlos in 1998 and 2001. According to the municipal registers of the last five years (CARE 2007: 2-3) more than 600 people have died when disappeared people are excluded and approximately 9000 people have been displaced. Approximately 2.700 of these forcibly displaced people had fled to the urban part of San Carlos and the rest to other areas in Colombia or had become international refugees (ibid.).

However by looking at population figures documented in 'Mapa Politico en el Oriente Antioqueño, 1988-2008' (OPROA 2008a) it is possible to observe a larger decline of the total population of San Carlos. The fluctuation of the population figures between 1988 and 2008 can serve as an indicator of peaks when many deaths and displacements occurred. For example in 1988 San Carlos had a population of 26.616 people which in 1990 had increased up to 34.029 people. In 1992 this number decreased to 33.336. In 1995 San Carlos had only 24.326 inhabitants and in 1998 there were 23.318 people. In 2001 there were 23.263 people and information about population data during the elections in 2004, won by Nicolás Guzmán are not available. However in 2008 the population of San Carlos counted merely 15.826 people (ibid.). When subtracting the estimated number of 3.500 (CNRR 2008: 15) displaced that have returned and resettled sporadically since 2005 and massively from 2007 onwards it is possible to state that at the verge of demobilization the population of San Carlos had diminished to approximately 12.000 people which means that almost two third of the population had either left the municipality, disappeared or was killed.

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As we saw the history of violence and armed conflict in the Oriente and San Carlos is extremely complex and dynamic. The modernization developments in the 1960s had changed the rural community character in economic, demographic and political respect. San Carlos had become an important municipality because it produced a significant part of the national electricity. The new developments had attracted rich investors to buy land for business and recreational means and caused an increase in economic inequality as well. This community character was misused by the guerrilla who could extort and kidnap rich and prominent figures and recruit the poor to grow in strength and expand to other municipalities in the Oriente. In response to the guerrilla a conglomerate of peasant self defense forces were founded to stop the extortion and kidnapping of their rank and file.

However the initial ideology to protect landowners and peasant families against the guerrilla soon escalated and was exchanged for a counter-insurgency strategy which made everybody that resided in the rural areas a potential rank and file of the guerrilla or vice versa a collaborator of the paramilitary. In short, the presence of armed actors with different ideological backgrounds meant for the inhabitants of the community that they were increasingly exposed to threats, selective killings, massacres and other forms of open violence and methods to create fear. In 18 years time almost two third of the population was either killed, disappeared or had left the municipality. In the next chapter I will describe how inhabitants of San Carlos dealt with the atmosphere that I have just outlined and what this meant for their pace and path in life.

#### 4. Responses to Human Insecurities, Fear and Displacement

Imagine the context that I described in chapter three wherein neighbors and family members disappear or get killed and your life is threatened because you happen to live in an area where rivaling armed groups are patrolling. The experiences described in this chapter are from inhabitants of San Carlos that had to cope with such an atmosphere of terror and abandoned their belongings, property, friends and neighbors out of fear to get killed. They sought refuge at the homes of family members or traveled towards unfamiliar places in Colombia they considered to be more secure.

Before analyzing the recollection of experiences with violence and other insecurities of people who at the time of this study either had returned to or resettled in San Carlos I present a theoretical exploration of the concepts human security and life/coping strategies. These conceptual frameworks are useful to grasp experiences as well as reactions to violence alongside other experiences in life that can be perceived as (in)secure. Whereas personal perceptions and responses regarding insecure situations become more tangible when categorized according to conceptual frameworks I have kept in mind that these every day experiences with security issues are continuous multilayered phenomenon's capable to change. Therefore I find it useful to structure the experiences and responses to human insecurities of the research population within six phases of displacement. In this way I can show the multiple and dynamic nature of the response strategies at different stages of the process of displacement.

In this chapter I will present the first three. The first phase of displacement catches the moments when inhabitants of San Carlos were exposed to violence and treats which led to such extent of fear that they perceived abandoning their property and belongings as the only option left to survive. The second phase describes the periods that internally displaced people have difficulty to grasp with what has happened to them and reside in some sort of state of shock. Some have more difficulty to deal with this phase than others. The third phase of displacement is when people are out of the void of despair and in search for work and other means of subsistence in the host community.

#### 4.1. Conceptualizing human (in)security and life strategies

As we saw in chapter 2 it is more accurate to speak of perceptions of violence, fear and (in)security. To embed these concepts into a broader understanding of human experience I have used the human security concept of the United Nations (UN) that was introduced in 1994. Human (in)security is split up in seven distinctive but interconnected categories (UNDP 1994: 24-34) that people can perceive as (in)secure. Thus, the UNDP pursues to reason from a multilayered and people centred approach which in essence recognizes that insecurities can have dissimilar origins at particular moments in time. As such these categories serve as a useful framework to order how people can experience life in changing contexts of public order and security across place and time. Hence, utilizing this framework supports ordering the experiences of returned and resettled internally displaced people of San Carlos in changing contexts of public order and security across time and place. This means in times and places which reside in armed conflict or peace or in between thus recovering from an armed conflict.

The human security categories the UN distinguishes are economic security, food-, health-, environmental-, personal-, community-, and political security. To avoid over detailed descriptions of all categories it is sufficient to mention that economic security refers to assets like paid work and housing, food security is about the ability to consume enough food to stay healthy and health security refers to all abilities to stay healthy. This entails access to health care, clean drinking water, nutritious food and a clean environment (environmental security) to evade health problems (UNDP 1995: 24-30). Obviously, the intensity of (in)security experiences within these categories are interconnected and deprivations in one category influence the (in)security in others.

The three remaining human (in)security categories show overlap with typologies as direct violence, political violence, cultural violence and institutional violence that result in physical hurt, injury or death, already discussed in chapter 2 (see also UNDP 1994: 30-40) In this respect personal (in)security refers to direct forms of physical hurt, injury or death whether inflicted by the state, other states, groups, 'the self,' other individuals, intra-family, rape or child abuse. Community (in)security points to physical hurt, injury or death caused by violence against – or within a group - members of an organisation, community, nation or family with a certain ethnic, racial or cultural identity. Political (in)security overarches the spectrum of human rights

violations inflicted by state institutions like the police or the military that lead to physical hurt, injury or death (ibid.).

From this short exploration we can assume that at specific moments in time individuals experience multiple human (in)securities. Accordingly so are their strategies to deal with human insecurities. Agency is dependent on the social-economic and political context which demarcates people's options to change their human security situation. Internally displaced people have abandoned the scene of violence and Moser and McIlwaine (2004: 178-182) and Koonings (2009) rank displacement as an avoidance strategy to cope or respond to violence and fear. Moser and McIlwaine (2004: 178-182) distinguish three categories of coping strategies of which one is avoidance. Besides searching refuge in other places, staying silent about witnessing or experiencing a violent act, staying in the house with the doors well locked, don't go out at night, and avoid certain geographical locations that are marked as dangerous are also avoidance strategies of coping. At the other side of the spectrum they position the hiring of informal security personnel, purchasing arms for protection and responding with a form of counter violence as coping with violence and fear as confrontation coping strategies. Other forms of coping as for example reporting a crime to a doctor or the state authorities and the strengthening of social relations within the family or the community they leave open for designation.

Koonings (2009) fills this gap in other coping strategies left open by Moser and McIlwaine which he designates as re-active and short term response strategies. Besides avoidance and confrontation which he calls resistance Koonings delineates accommodation, compliance and recovery as response strategies to everyday violence and fear. The strategy of accommodation implies to learn to live with violence as best as possible and lead a 'normal' life. With compliance he denotes strategies wherein people explicitly abide by the rule of armed actors whereas resistance strategies are the hindering or mediation of violent acts of armed actors by turning to private violence or non violent protests or petitions through grassroots and/or institutional channels. A final response strategy is recovery which points to the broader consequences of living in violent places instead of direct responses to violence and fear of armed actors.

Whereas Moser and McIlwaine (2004) and Koonings (2009) define displacement as an avoidance strategy to cope or respond to violence Vincent and Sorensen (2001: 12) have a

slightly different notion of displacement which they approach as a protection strategy to shield life, personal security and the liberty of movement of individuals and groups. In their view coping strategies give:

“A limited view of who the internally displaced are, because their agency reaches further than merely securing physical survival” (Vincent and Sorensen 2001: 7-8).

With this notion they have classified five subgroups of response strategies (2001: 11-12) that internally displaced people utilize to deal with human insecurities. Thus, their focus is aimed at framing strategies with the *objective* to recover human securities that were affected by violence which they specify as protection-, subsistence-, civic-, property-, and education strategies. Subsistence strategies are internally displaced peoples responses to economic-, food- and health insecurities. As we see these categories are comparable to those mentioned by the UNDP in their human security framework. With civic strategies they underscore different sets of responses to get access to public participation in community-, governmental- and public affairs but also the agency to get access to personal identification documents, birth-, marriage- and death certificates and manners to maintain the family unit, their social identity and culture. Under property strategies they rank all efforts of internally displaced people to protect personal property in the community of expulsion but also the reparation or restitution of lost property due to violent conflict. Under education strategies they delineate the efforts to get access to education for children and adults. Besides reading and writing skills other capacities that can be obtained through workshops and apprenticeships are included as well (ibid.).

I agree with Moser and McIlwaine (2004) and Koonings (2009) that internally displaced people avoid harm or even death by leaving the violent scene. However, avoiding violence at one particular moment in time does not exclude that other responses to violence and fear such as accommodation, compliance or even resistance were used as well before deciding to leave the violent scene. Approached as such displacement is an ultimate response strategy to violence and fear in order to protect personal security and avoid the effects of violence that can harm or lead to death. In this respect I agree with Vincent and Sorensen that displacement is a strategy to shield life, personal security and the liberty of movement and that recovery strategies are also utilized.

Hence, response strategies to human insecurities or in turn strategies to recover human securities can be used multiple times across time and place and are dynamic and subject specific. I prefer response strategies as Koonings and Vincent and Sorensen use to delineate the agency of people instead of coping because this term implies a continuum of decisions and actions that internally displaced people take in changing contexts of human (in)security they encounter from the first phase of displacement and onwards. Internally displaced people do not only respond (take action) when situations created by 'forces' that are beyond their control require this of them (thus choice and action based on fear), they also take actions that are based on the wish to make sense of life again after having pulled through the labyrinth of senselessness, grief, hate and confusion as I will present hereunder and in subsequent chapters.

#### **4.2. Experiencing the first phase of displacement**

From my study in San Carlos it became apparent that especially direct and indirect (violent) threats to personal security alongside widespread fear as effect of mistreatment, killings and disappearance of loved ones, neighbors and family by armed actors were the main motivations for inhabitants of San Carlos to abandon their house, possessions, work and social network. The following memories of Eliana and Marena are illustrative for particular experiences and the reasoning behind decisions to leave home:

“Life was beautiful in San Carlos. We owned a house that was very well organized. The violence began when a few commanders of an armed group arrived in (...) where my parents lived. I was a bachelor student in Medellín and my brother was seventeen and ready to begin a study or work or go to military service. (...) In 1998 my father phoned me and said: Daughter you have to get your things together and come here. I was confused and did not know what to take with me. My father had said take just your clothes and shoes because tomorrow we are going to (...). I asked why and he told me that my little brother was kidnapped. (...) Within a few days I had got my things together, left to my parents and from there we all left to Medellín. I don't know how we got there and in what kind of state, but we did. We had to leave because our name appeared on the lists of different armed groups in San

Carlos.”<sup>31</sup>

Marena did not lose members of her family neither did she received direct threats from armed actors but she was afraid that something could happen because of what she saw around her in the rural community.

“Some neighbors were killed and others were leaving. The place got emptier and I got scared that we could be the next getting killed or that something would happen to my children. Therefore we decided to go. My husband knew somebody from who we could rent a place in San Carlos, so that is where we went to.”<sup>32</sup>

Besides leaving the violent scene to protect their personal security it came to my attention that displacement is also a strategy to respond to food, health and economic insecurity. For example the presence of feuding armed groups also made anti-personnel mines come into play that were planted on agricultural plots, roads, in trees and rivers. People have told me that armed actors had put explosive artifacts around a field full of trees that bore fruit ready to harvest while inhabitants that were already low on food supplies had to watch there actions.<sup>33</sup> These people were told that these bombs would make sure that they would not be able to ‘feed their enemies.’ Thus, in addition to suffering direct threats for the personal security at the hand of armed actors or anti-personnel mines and bombs the mobility of rural inhabitants and the ability to sow and harvest crops were also minimized. In sum, displacement is a strategy to respond to personal, food, health and economic insecurity.

The reasoning behind the choice to seek refuge in a particular host community is related to particular experiences in the community of expulsion and perceptions about host communities. First of all people flee to places they perceive as more secure or safe which can be within a range of a few kilometers but also on the other side of the country. The ones that run off as far as possible often appear on death lists of opposite armed groups and perceive a departure of the region as the only option to protect their personal security.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Eliana in (...) on April 2, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Marena in San Carlos on April 22, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Manuela in San Carlos on May 20, 2009.



People that displace within close range of San Carlos, which means to one of the neighboring municipalities in the Oriente, either had not received personal death threats by armed actors, lacked the means to travel further away, knew in advance that they were not able to adapt to big city life (socially, mentally, economically) nor to the climate of the hot coast or perceived the urban part of San Carlos too dangerous. In this last respect I refer to the stigma that rested on inhabitants of particular rural villages (*veredas*) that were perceived as pure guerrilla zones and therefore ran an increased risk to get caught by the paramilitary that from 2000 onwards gained increased permanent settlement in the urban part of San Carlos.

Besides these reasons to 'choose' one over the other host community also having family or acquaintances in the host communities and/or knowledge about possibilities to find shelter and employment are factors on which the choice for a particular host community rests. Whether displaced in 'far away' places, 'close to' or even within the municipal boundaries of San Carlos to protect their personal security or avoid that death threats could be realized, the deprivations in food, economic and health security endured or even increased due to the abandonment of the little resources they had prior to moving out.

#### **4.3. Second phase of displacement: Everything was strange and insecure**

From conversations and interviews about getting displaced and being displaced arose that all bear horrible memories about the moments that circle around the initial phase of displacement. This episode in time happened to be difficult to put into words for most interviewees and also made evident while I spoke to Fransisco:

“I never speak about these things. It is too painful (...), because it also makes me remember harsh and cruel things that I want to forget.”<sup>34</sup>

Others simply refused to talk explicitly about their experiences because it made them feel like crying and kept repeating that it was very hard and cruel. It would be impossible to make me understand what they had been through during that period in time. Feelings are personal and

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<sup>34</sup> Conversation with Fransisco in San Carlos after an interview on March 18, 2009

for most, during the time this study was conducted, it was yet too difficult to share these with a stranger. For me, even in the role as a master degree researcher these signs said enough and I felt obliged to respect these.

Still, one particular recollected experience of Fransisco reveals a small part of what a first arrival in a receptive community can be like:

“It was especially hard when we first arrived in (...) <sup>35</sup>in the coast in some sort of camp with other people. There were almost exclusively black people and Indians '*Puros negros y indios.*' How shall I say it, they had other manners and talked weird. There were for example naked Indians. They frightened my daughters a lot (...) and really suffered (...). The Red Cross distributed several blankets and some food, but it was almost nothing because this place was full of people.”<sup>36</sup>

We can observe that in addition to food, economic and health insecurities everything around them was strange. This strangeness exhorted deep feelings of home-sickness which were often expressed by people that had displaced to ‘far away’<sup>37</sup> host communities such as cities and the coast. Experiencing home-sickness is related to people’s sense of belonging to which I will come back in the next chapter. However, this home sickness was often also brought into relation with experiencing periods of physical and mental ills which in concurrence were also the effect of big climate changes and a continuum of multiple other losses. Lina for example had experienced a period of weeks that she could not come out of bed and her legs began to swell:

“It was almost as if I had lost the will to live.”<sup>38</sup>

And Leticia describes such periods as not feeling human anymore:

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<sup>35</sup> To protect the identity of the respondents that worked with me in respect of this research I have deleted all the names of places and activities as much as possible in order that identities can not be reduced from places.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Fransisco in San Carlos on March 18, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Thus, with ‘far away’ I do not only refer to far as in physical distance but also ‘far away’ in the sense of temperature, city, geographical conditions and social/cultural differences.

<sup>38</sup> Conversation with Lina in San Carlos in April 2009. She had to cope with several deaths in the family, the loss of several business initiatives and several displacements due to direct violence and threats from illegal armed actors in the host and expulsion communities.

“One of the hardest moments was when my daughter came with my grandchildren to visit us and I could not offer her even salt to eat. I felt terrible. (...) It took me two years to feel and function again, normal, like a human being.”<sup>39</sup>

Next to experiencing physical and mental insecurities some people were overshadowed by feelings of fear to such extent that it affected their mobility and social life within the host community as a result of staying inside and not wanting to talk with other people.

Whether displaced to unfamiliar places in Colombia or in areas closer to their community of expulsion, for all the first days, weeks, months and even years have been a struggle. First in search for shelter, food, and work to survive and after realizing what had happened, dealing with the memories and pain they had endured. The last two comments of Lina and Leticia catch the void of despair where displaced people can find themselves in when they have to grasp with multiple situations that are beyond their control. These periods where feelings of despair and illness overshadow the spirit to overcome other human insecurities are typical for the second phase of displacement. These feelings that overshadow mobility and agency are highly subject-specific as is the path to move away from this phase. It might be accurate to say that some hardly experience this phase while at the other spectrum people stay in it for years, or re-experience comparable voids alternate times while in the meantime residing on the verge of mere survival and trying to build-up life again.

#### **4.4. Third phase of displacement: building-up life in host communities**

When people manage to overcome voids of hopelessness or just instinctively know that the only way to survive is to work are signs of (regained) mental and physical strength to set in creative strategies to survive and/or build-up something new. This path or focus of wanting to build-up a new life in the host community I refer to as the third phase of displacement. In this phase internally displaced people are searching for work in the host communities or create small businesses to make money by selling gas, eggs, self-prepared food and drinks, ‘*minutos de celular*’ and hand-made products in the streets alongside working in bars, restaurants,

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Leticia in San Carlos in April, 2009.

construction and surveillance. Their continuous search for creative strategies to respond to economic and food insecurity (poverty) often entails displacing multiple times to other host communities in Colombia and within cities. Amongst internally displaced people unemployment is high which is often related to the requirements of educational or labor skills in the job market they do not cover. Fransisco told me:

“After (...) we went to (...) because I needed work. (...) I had a beautiful house (...) the finca was very beautiful (...) I owned animals and had a relaxed life. I had lost everything and missed all this when I lived in other parts of Colombia. (...) Finally, when all the money was spent and I could not find work we went to Medellín. We arrived there without food and money and I had to live under a bridge with my two daughters without even a lemon to eat. I suffered a lot then”<sup>40</sup>

From this account we see that continuous periods of unemployment meant for some complete impoverishment. Alongside searching and creating labor people with knowledge about the existence of the national support system appeal for social aid at offices such as Acción Social to improve their living conditions (see also chapter 2). However strategies to recover subsistence security as appeals for social aids as well as finding work are not always successful as Leticia’s life story in a nutshell illustrates:

“After Medellín we went to the coast (...) where my husband sold food and drinks. (...) With the money he earned we supported ourselves because we didn't receive any help from the government, in not one of the places where we lived. Till today we do not have a code of displacement. (...) I once went to an office of Acción Social or something like that to ask for a ‘*mejoramiento para vivienda*,’ but the man who worked there couldn’t help me because we were not displaced according to him. I did not understand this, because we had lived everywhere and lost our things. Our son disappeared and my brother-in-law was killed. (...) After this job my husband went to work as (...). Things went a little better for us because this new job was

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Fransisco in San Carlos on March 18, 2009.

steady for several years. When his contract stopped and he could not find work we had to start all over again. We went back to Medellín for a few months and from there we moved directly to (...) where we started growing coca. We became coca farmers.”<sup>41</sup>

Thus, besides appeals for state support displaced people try to improve their living conditions by working in whatever mix of legal, informal and illegal sectors. As we saw continuous disappointments to obtain a legal job supports the decision to start with (semi)-illegal work. I already mentioned the growing of coca in the previous account, but another type of coca related employment entails more risks in respect of personal and health security which came to my hearing while talking to Hernando:

“I got very sick when I was working (...) with coca. My skin had turned very dry and white with wounds. So I stopped (...). Besides I did not like the ambiance of the people that worked there. (...) After this period I went back to (...) to work in (...). (...), somebody offered me a lot of money to work with coca again, but I refused. (...) It is like this. You can obtain a lot of money but also end up dead. (...) That’s the problem of the mafia. Therefore I don’t choose for such a life anymore. It is trouble. I want a stable life, sleep calmly, work and take care of my family.”<sup>42</sup>

Thus, moving multiple times to other host communities in Colombia or within cities is a way to respond to food and economic insecurities but also to deal with environmental insecurity. With environmental insecurity I refer to the inability to adapt to climate changes (temperature and humidity), but also to the social-economic environment of for example the city or a host community where they produce coca. Internally displaced that live in a large city are for example unable to afford a living space in a quiet and prosperous neighborhood and end up in popular areas with its particular conglomerate of difficulties. People with children for instance had experienced difficulties with raising their children in a situation where daily vulgar words were cast out in every corner of the neighborhood. In some cases (youth) gangs had offered

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Leticia in San Carlos in April 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Hernando in San Carlos in March 2009.

drugs to their children.<sup>43</sup> Besides, city-life costs a lot of time, energy, money and worries due to long distances to get from a to b, dependency on public transportation and the rent of a living space.

In addition to these environmental insecurities people that had managed to set up small businesses and lived a relatively descent life were sometimes exposed to extortion or personal threats by local gangs. Other threats for personal security were related to escalating violent conflict between armed actors in popular neighborhoods of the cities. These experiences with increased risks for personal securities again led to fear at moments when the children went out to go to school or when they had to go out to go to work. The responses to these experiences with personal insecurities in the host community was to stay in the house as much as possible, don't go out at night or displace to another host community within Colombia or the city as did people that were again exposed to a full scale armed conflict.

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We saw that the choice to abandon home is made within a context where multiple factors of human insecurities are experienced. When the perception arises that no other response strategies rest to protect life people displace to other places they perceive as safer. Displacement is an avoidance strategy with the objective to protect the life of 'self' and loved ones against the 'real' or 'perceived' threat that armed actors will harm them physically which could lead to death. Besides avoidance displacement is also a recovery strategy as response to subsistence insecurities as health, food and economic insecurities that besides violence can develop to such extent that it becomes a 'real' threat for personal security as well. In short the decision to abandon home, house and belongings and to seek refuge in a host community is taken when a combination of personal, political, food, economic and health insecurity is experienced.

When people find themselves in the second phase of displacement they especially utilize avoidance and accommodation strategies as response to the context wherein they suddenly are situated. They avoid conversations with other people and stay inside their place of living because their agency is overshadowed by feelings of despair and signs of physical and mental

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Eliana in San Carlos in April, 2009

trauma. In short 'being' in the 'void of despair' is accommodation to the mental and physical health insecurities and by barely responding neither 'live' nor 'feel human.'

In the third phase of displacement in the host community I have shown that generally speaking a mix of avoidance and recovery strategies were set in as response to their experiences with human (in)securities. Avoidance strategies were just as in the previous phases of displacement employed as response to 'real' and 'perceived' threats to personal security which led to second, or multiple times of forced displacement to another host community in Colombia or in the city. In addition displacement to other host communities was also set in as response to experiencing economic and food insecurities. If, not 'direct' threats to personal security but food and economic insecurity were the main motivations to displace to other areas we have to perceive this response as a recovery strategy for subsistence security.

I briefly mentioned that home-sickness and the missing of familiar-ness were experienced in all phases of displacement discussed so far. Feelings of home-sickness are related to a sense of belonging and accordingly can be experienced as a dimension of insecurity alongside food, economic, personal, environment and health insecurity in host communities. In the next chapter I will analyze how and why belonging insecurity becomes a motivation factor that leads to the decision to return to the community of expulsion.

## **5. Home Again, When the Violence is no Longer There?**

People who have experienced internal displacement respond in different ways to human insecurity which is context dependent and subject specific as we saw in the previous chapter. Next to material losses such as a 'house,' the immaterial losses are immense as well. Internally displaced people do not only lose property and other possessions, but also family members, loved ones, neighbours, confidence in the state and other human beings due to exposure to violence and fear for long periods of time. What do such severe past experiences in the place once called 'home' do to their sense of 'belonging' and can a place, which bears pains, losses and beautiful memories, be called home again when the armed conflict is no longer there?

In order to make sense of concepts such as belonging insecurity and home I start this chapter with a theoretical debate about identity, belonging and home. I will put special focus on the interconnectedness between these concepts and what past experiences implicate for decisions in the present and objectives for the future. An analysis of the experiences and perceptions of internally displaced people against the background of this theoretical framework and the context of human (in)security wherein displaced people decide to return to their community of expulsion will shed light on the question when and why belonging insecurity can become a stimulus to return to their rural community of expulsion for some and not for other internally displaced people.

### **5.1. Identity, belonging and home**

Identity formation is a socially constructed process and exists by and large out of three interconnected processes of becoming. Personal identity (Larrain 2000: 24-30) is shaped in a particular cultural context ('habitus'), in relation with shared social categories as certain symbols such as clothes, language, food, religion, territory, a flag or other symbols that give people a sense of belonging. We also define ourselves in terms of how others see us. In the words of Ghorashi (2003: 33): "Individuals' identity formation is very much influenced by 'others.' (...) It is about identifying oneself with others in relation to others." This is the third component of identity construction and refers to the socially constructed process of personal identity.



'Habitus' was introduced by Elias in 1987 as 'incorporated learning' (Elias 1997: 30, cited in Jimeno 2001: 239) who gave insight in the trend that experiences remain embedded in the individual 'habitus' of people, but was bound to change due to changing experiences through time. Bourdieu (1990: 56) refined this concept and described it as an 'embodied history' or social learning system. He argued that cultural, economic and political resources are distributed unequally which together form a context of meaning in which an individual is socially positioned. He perceives this 'embodied history' as a 'forgotten history' on which we base our choices and gives permanence in change. Decisions are not purely based on common sense, but also on consciousness.

Wimmer (2002: 27-28) adds to this insight that decisions are constructed on the basis of our rationale and our own interests that are informed by cultural environment and the social position of the 'choice-maker.' Thus, people look at the past through the lens of the present, and with an eye to the future, but individuals also have desires and feelings (Ghorashi 2003: 30). When we take these insights in consideration perceptions take shape when "people try to make sense of their lives by constructing an imaginative wholeness which could include contradictions" (ibid.: 31). "In this sense the choices that people make are not without conditions, but are formed through situated agency, one that is shaped and practiced through converged past and present discourses" (Ghorashi 2003: 32).

Thus past and present experiences and discourses shape our perceptions on which we base our choices to change or not change the context where we find ourselves in, in future moments in time. We make decisions and perform 'agency' because we want to improve the situation where we find ourselves in. Thus, making choices and taking action (agency) is a process of becoming. This process of becoming occurs through a junction of various past and present discourses and experiences that involve both elements of change and continuity. Choices are made within multiplicity but are bounded (Ghorashi 2003; Sen 2006).

The multiple dimension of the process in which choices, motivations and 'agency' take shape is important and related to the process of identity formation. "Within this relational process, identities are constructed, challenged and that results in the changing configuration of identities" (Ghorashi 2003: 35). The perception and sense of belonging to a group, geographical location, political ideology or partner is also shaped according to this process of becoming which is multiple. Belonging to one particular identity does not exclude that we also belong to

other identities. “Identities are multiple we belong to all of them” (Sen 2006: 4-5). A person can feel that he or she belongs to different identity groups because identification can take place at various levels, in different situations or moments in time.

For example a person that feels to belong to the community of San Carlos can be a Buddhist, a woman, rich, like to work on the land while listening to salsa music and live in the city.<sup>44</sup> As we see identities of belonging are multiple and the importance of belonging to one identity group in opposition to another becomes apparent in the specific context in which identity ‘choices’ are made. This is context dependency of identity because “choices are always made within the limits of what is seen as feasible. (...) one still has to decide what exact importance to attach (...) to that identity over the relevance of other categories to which one belongs” (Sen 2006: 5). The sense of belonging to a community is important because it could be seen as a resource – like capital (ibid.: 2).

The sense of belonging and ‘homeness’ are related identity producing processes (Hedetoft 2004: 24-25). He argues that belonging is rooted in place, familiarity, sensual experiences, human interaction and local knowledge. Phenomena as such constitute feelings of ‘homeness.’ These phenomena are however not the same for everyone and nor do they automatically produce feelings of belonging. However home is where we think we belong “territorially, existentially, and culturally, where our own community is, where our family and loved ones reside, where we can identify our roots, and where we long to return to when we are elsewhere in the world” Hedetoft and Hjort (2002: 8)

Home is both imagined as an actual geographic place, but also connected to and disconnected from the physical space in which one lives. Home is defined both as a private domestic space and as a larger geographic place where one belongs, such as one’s community, village, city, and country (Espiritu 2003: 2). “Home is anyplace; it is temporary and it is moveable; it can be build, rebuild, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination” (Espiritu 2003: 11). People, who relocate, carry with them not only physical belongings but also their memories.

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<sup>44</sup> I have not met this particular woman I use to make my point. However I have based the examples of identification on conversation held in San Carlos. I have to say there was one particular person who almost matches with this woman.

## 5.2. Belonging and identity of '*desplazados*'

People that identify as '*desplazado*' live in poverty and perceive that they will be '*desplazado*' for as long as they live. Their identification is clearly shaped by the social and economic position in which they reside. Reasoning within this particular context in time overshadows their hope of ever overcoming their status as '*desplazado*' even after they have returned or resettled to their community of expulsion to where they think and want to belong. In their perception their experiences with personal, food and economic insecurities as result of the violence and fear they encountered by armed actors that forcibly displaced them from the place where they felt at home will be carved insight their brain forever. Therefore they will also be a '*desplazado*' forever.

If we understand identity and belonging as a resource, like capital, we can assume that violence and fear, followed by displacement, which lead to experiencing different sort of human insecurities would also undermine the sense of belonging, leading to 'socio-cultural' or belonging insecurity.

Place, however, thus residing in the host community or returned or resettled in the community of expulsion appeared to be of less importance considering that people who have suffered forced displacement, but have the feeling that they have dealt with the past, lead relatively stable livelihoods due their acquirement of a steady job no longer, or do not want to be identified as a '*desplazado*' despite their residence in the host community. In other words they have succeeded with building up a satisfactory life in the third phase of displacement. Therefore we can say that they jump from the third phase of displacement directly into the sixth phase which entails that they either have succeeded with regaining their citizen rights that had been violated by the violence by the armed actors or have managed to recover the experienced (im)material losses in the past to such extend that they feel satisfied enough to feel at home in the host community. Nevertheless, these 'successful' internally displaced people continue to feel that they belong to their community of expulsion, San Carlos and whenever they have the opportunity to do so they return temporarily.

Thus, identifying as a '*desplazado*' is overall dominant over other identifications for people that are still seeking for strategies to respond to economic, food and health insecurities. As we see, identifying as a '*desplazado*' indeed is more based on situational choice-making than on

whether or not people have 'just' experienced forced displacement and whether or not they reside in the community of expulsion or the host community. That identifying as a '*desplazado*' is related to poverty also became apparent when Victor told me:

“The rich have suffered less than us, the people that had a good but modest way of life. Violence and displacement have turned us into poor people and they, the rich have not experienced the struggles we are going through (...).<sup>45</sup>

In addition to rich people, '*desplazados*' from San Carlos also dissociate themselves from the 'native' inhabitants of the host communities. In most situations these 'natives' are Indians and Blacks from the coast or inhabitants and criminals of popular neighborhoods in cities. They perceive the people in the cities of Colombia as less close and caring than they are in San Carlos. They even speak of rude, crazy and dangerous people in the popular neighborhoods where they are more or less obliged to live because the better parts of the cities are unaffordable. In the coast you have naked Indians and black people who have different cultural habits, like language usage, food customs, treatment of women and other habits that disturbed or even frightened them. Even if a geographical location had similar characteristics as San Carlos, still it was not the same as the atmosphere to which they belong as Leticia recalls:

“The zone where we lived was a pure coca zone. Everything stood in the meaning of producing coca, there. (...) These three years in the countryside were very calm, but still not the same as in the Oriente of Antioquia were we are from. We are farmers from Antioquia and we missed the countryside and the landscape of the Oriente, the calmness, nature, caring people, everything.”<sup>46</sup>

Taking this account of Leticia in consideration the sense of belonging is not only shaped by a rural way of living, or leading a comparable life as you were used to before they became '*desplazados*.' The sense of belonging is also connected with the people that reside in the place where we want to belong to. Thus people feel they belong to the place they know best.

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Victor in San Carlos on April 3, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Leticia in San Carlos on April 3, 2009.

### 5.3. Home and house

“Places are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific and local and multiple constructions (...) Places are socially constructed by the agency of the people who live in them and by forces that are beyond individual control” (Rodman 1992: 641, 644). Thus ‘place’ and ‘home’ come into practice through habits, costumes and narratives that are socially constructed in the memories of individuals and their agency that is informed by lived experiences in a certain context and time. Important in this respect are the physical, emotional and experiential realities that places hold for their inhabitants at particular times. For all, the places they forcibly abandoned bear horrible memories of loss and pain, next to the good memories of a life without experiencing violence, fear, abrupt human insecurities that were instigated by armed actors. The longing to return to a certain moment in time when life was good and without worries seemed to be an important aspect of the sense of belonging amongst returned and resettled ‘*desplazados*.’

However this does not imply that all people that have experienced forced displacement decide to resettle or return, or even have the intention to return to the communities of expulsion where they once lived satisfied. The reason for this is that they perceive it as impossible to feel at home again, there. As we saw above home as Espiritu (2003: 2) defines it is an imagined ‘place’ and an actual geographic location at the same time. Some prefer to stay in the city due to work, study and the new life they have build-up there. This is also true for resettled internally displaced who choose to live in the urban part of San Carlos instead of returning to their old houses in their communities of expulsion. There they have to start all over again because nature has overtaken their properties and former means of subsistence and is not the same anymore as the place where they once felt at home. Most neighbors are dead or live in other places or people choose not to return to their communities of expulsion out of fear that history will repeat itself or that the threats against them will be honored after all. It seems that the urban part of San Carlos and other host communities have more to offer for some people that have suffered internal displacement than others. The main reason is that they are satisfied enough with the life they have build-up so far after their resettlement in San Carlos. In their opinion a complete return is unnecessary as Fransisco also recalls:

“We might as well build up our lives in the urban part of San Carlos, where I have my work and where my children can go to school.”<sup>47</sup>

The ones who are tired of searching for places where they can feel at home, and haven't found their rest yet, want to return to their community of expulsion and start with building up a new home. As Carlos and Umberto recall:

“We might as well return to the land and house we have abandoned (...) and try to rebuild our lives there. There at least we have a house and land that is ours, where we can live permanently and cultivate food.”<sup>48</sup>

Returnees and re-settlers in San Carlos imagine a perfect home as the place where they have their own house and a stable form of income and food security so that they can organize a life without worries. The house needs to be spacious enough to receive friends, family and comfortable with access to running water, electricity and a television. Inhabitants of rural zones add to these elements that they imagine a perfect home as a place where they have enough space to keep animals and cultivate different sorts of crops. For Leticia to feel at home means:

“I come home from work or from a visit and that the chickens are fully grown and ready to get killed, to turn them with fresh vegetables into a nice Sancocho soup. That I don't have worries about how to make it tomorrow and that I am satisfied.”<sup>49</sup>

What is the meaning of a house? I asked Carlos:

“A house is just a place to live in, it gives shelter against the rain and it is a place to sleep and cook”, he says while making a belittling laugh after I asked him if a house also provides security. “A house doesn't provide safety because an armed group can

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<sup>47</sup> Conversation with Fransisco in San Carlos on March 15, 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Conversations with Carlos and Umberto in San Carlos in March 2009

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Leticia in San Carlos on April 3, 2009.

enter very easily at whatever moment they feel to.”<sup>50</sup>

Therefore a house, as a private domestic space does not provide protection against personal insecurity, like violence. A house however does mean everything for internally displaced people whether resettled in a host community or residing in their community of expulsion when taking in consideration what Eliana told me:

“Without a house you have nothing and you can't feel at home without a house.”<sup>51</sup>

A house owned as property contributes to economic security which enlarges their choices. To own a house where you can live in is one economic insecurity less because then they don't experience the stress of displacing and searching for new living spaces when an owner decides to sell it, live there, or raise the rent. The only threat to the security of owning a house are armed groups that lack moral, disrespect privacy, or instigate violence and threats.

In sum, feeling at home means to own a house, to have stable economic opportunities, to have neither worries nor feelings of fear for armed groups or people you don't know and where family and loved ones reside. In short, to feel at home depends on what a person perceives as important and enables him or her to live a satisfied life. Thus, home is a place that contains the most characteristics to make the personal lives of returned and resettled internally displaced people complete.

These observations correspond with the concept of 'home-making' of Espiritu (2003: 2-3) wherein she captures the process by which diverse subjects imagine and make themselves at home in various geographic locations. Home-making strategies, she explains, are unique to each individual and have a great deal to do with the histories of individuals and the context and time of the places they inhabit. For returnees, the place they called home before the violence was not the same anymore when the violence hit in. At that time home had become an unliveable place. They fled in search for safety and tried to build-up a home in other Colombian places.

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Carlos in San Carlos in April 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Eliana in April 2009.

Now that the violence is no longer there, they want to feel home again in the place they ones abandoned and make it liveable again and are thinking to return.

#### **5.4. Fourth phase of displacement: weighing the pros and cons of return and resettlement**

In the fourth phase of displacement people are weighing the pros and cons of a return to their community of expulsion. We saw in the previous chapter that feelings of home-sickness or belonging insecurity were to a certain extent experienced by all people that resided in a 'far away' host community. The dilemma of weighing rests on the verge of experiencing belonging insecurity in the host community and if the efforts to build up life have been 'successful' or satisfying enough to stay or 'unsuccessful' or disappointing enough to think about a return or resettlement to the community of expulsion. This weighing of pros and cons depends on three main factors which are belonging, economic and personal (in)security.

People that have success in developing a satisfying enough life stay resettled in the host community when they perceive the community of expulsion in this particular moment in time not as sufficiently attractive compared to the advantages they experience in the host community. Thus, people that experience food, economic, health and personal security of a better quality than they can experience in their community of expulsion leads them to decide to stay resettled in the host community. This group tries to accommodate to belonging insecurity while they reside in their 'far away' host community and return to visit occasionally and whenever they can to their community of expulsion to relax in their familiar ambiance where they can communicate with the people they know best and give them a feeling of belonging.

Belonging insecurity combined with continuous disappointments in finding stable jobs, which kept throwing people back into a life in poverty and misery, combined with renewed exposure to violence in the host community, food and health insecurity form a context that the choice of return to the community of expulsion becomes a serious option.

The ultimate factor of this weighing that eventually leads to the cutting of the Gordian knot is related to the perception of public safety in their community of expulsion. Without sufficient security that they have a chance to rebuild their lives in their community of expulsion withholds them from crossing that bridge of making the actual return and stay in a reluctant zone of weighing the pros and cons in the forth phase of displacement.



While away in the fourth phase of displacement internally displaced people stay informed about their community of expulsion through news broadcasts on the television and radio and via acquaintances, friends and family that reside there. '*Desplazados*' from the urban part of San Carlos who are motivated to return to their community of expulsion also receive reports about the public security situation from state institutions and the '*personería*.' Some perceive the information they hear about the rural areas and/or the urban part to be threatening for their personal safety and remain in the fourth phase of displacement. They fear that threats will be honored, even after this many years.<sup>52</sup> These threats are directly related with past experiences during the armed conflict, but also to 'stories' about the presence of guerrilla and anti-personal mines in the rural parts, as I will present in the following chapters. Nevertheless, despite certain anxieties and fears people also return or resettle in the urban part of San Carlos because they perceive it as better than life in the host communities where everything is insecure. As Manuela recalls:

"I rather live in a place where I at least know the evil than to live in a place where everything is strange and everybody can be your enemy."<sup>53</sup>

Next to perceiving the community of expulsion as too dangerous for their personal security other reasons to decide to stay in the urban part of San Carlos are: a combination of economic and health insecurity to repair their abandoned property and the perception that life can not be built up there yet because at the moment there are not sufficient people. Despite the fact that these re-settlers refuse to return to the properties they initially fled, it cannot be denied that a lack of economic opportunities to live a decent life and the experience of belonging insecurity shaped their choice to resettle in San Carlos to where they feel they belong. In short, the 'far away' host communities offered them too little opportunities to build-up what they searched for, a calm life where they could feel at home.

Whereas most returnees and re-settlers had not found what they searched for, other people resettled and returned to San Carlos because they were again confronted with personal

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<sup>52</sup> Conversation in the form of a focus-group with five people whom resided re-settled and returned in San Carlos in April 2009.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Manuela in San Carlos on May 18, 2009.

insecurities and perceived their community of expulsion as more secure. In short a return as a strategy to respond to belonging insecurity is shaped by combined factors of experiences with human insecurities and San Carlos being perceived as more secure in the sense that they would have more chances of rebuilding their lives there than in their host communities.

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As we saw people identify themselves as '*desplazado*' when they still perceive their lives to be incomplete due to their experiences with food and economic insecurities. By comparing two groups that have experienced similar human insecurities that led to displacement and analyzing why one group identifies as '*desplazado*' and the other group not anymore we can see that not only past experiences influence our choice in identifications to which we want to belong, but also the current context of human (in)security in which we reside and make choices.

I have shown that the sense of belonging and experiencing belonging insecurity is an important factor on which the choices of temporary (visit) and permanent return or re-settlement in the community of expulsion are based. The main reason not to return is either based on fear or the lives they build up thus far in the urban part of San Carlos or another host community is satisfying enough to stay, which they now call home.

In addition an important factor that supplements the motivation to return or resettle in the community of expulsion is related to the perception of improved security. People need to have the idea that a return can improve their quality of living in contrast to what they have experienced thus far in the host communities. They need to have the idea, hope and will that it is possible to build-up life in their community of expulsion.

In the next chapter I will describe the 'real' context of public order and security where they returned to and what kind of experiences of human(in)securities they are responding to after a return and resettlement in the community of expulsion.

## 6. Shimmering between Security and Fear

We saw that an additional factor that shapes the motivation of '*desplazados*' to return or resettle in the community of expulsion is their perception of improved public security. People need to have the idea that a return shall improve their quality of living. From 2005 onwards a trend of sporadic returns and resettlements in urban and rural zones of San Carlos developed. This trend turned massive from 2007 onwards due to significant improvement in the public order and security situation. The phase wherein '*desplazados*' actually return or resettle to their community of expulsion and start with building-up their lives there is the fifth phase of displacement. Whereas in the first three phases I consistently referred to San Carlos as the community of expulsion in this fifth phase the focus has moved one level lower.

From a local viewpoint we can delineate San Carlos in rural parts and an urban part which has consequences for the terminology of communities of expulsion and host communities. The urban part of San Carlos is a community of expulsion for the people that fled in the first phase of displacement, from there to other parts of Colombia. This urban centre is a host community for two groups. One group consists out of people that fled in the first phase of displacement to the urban zone of San Carlos and resettled there. The second group displaced from a rural part and resettled in the first till the fourth phase in other parts of Colombia. Still they perceive the municipality of San Carlos (for them a host community) as their 'area of belonging' and sometimes first resettle there before they return to their 'place of belonging' which for them is their community of expulsion.

What sort of context of public order and security they encountered upon their return and resettlement in the urban part is presented in this chapter. I will demonstrate what kind of human (in)securities returned and resettled '*desplazados*' experience in San Carlos in the aftermath of the armed conflict and what kind of responses they utilize to change their living conditions. This analysis reveals their current perceptions of violence and fear which is explicatory for what kind of security situation they distinguish as secure enough to live in. Prior to this analysis I will give a general overview of the national security policy reforms implemented under the presidency of Álvaro Uribe.

## 6.1. National democratic defense and security policy

Since the presidency of Uribe in 2002 and who started a second period in 2006, national public security has become a priority issue on the political agenda. In June 2003 Uribe and the Ministry of defense presented the democratic defense policy which since has been criticized from different viewpoints. Most criticism was related to impunity for armed actors that have committed war crimes, increased levels of public insecurity and little juridical control over members of military and other security institutions (ICG 2003). Nevertheless, Uribe saw the implementation of (violent) military tactics alongside peace talks as the only possibility to tackle the armed conflict and to achieve peace and security. For this the zones which were under control of criminals, insurgents and paramilitary groups had to be retaken by state institutions. For that the production of coca, the trafficking in narcotics and arms needed to be eradicated and the presence of armed groups had to be dealt with through a combined approach of peace talks, demobilization and annihilation strategies.

In 2003 the policy resulted in a cease fire between the government and AUC leaders which eventually led to the demobilization of AUC blocks in 2004. The manpower of the police and the military were able to expand by estimating a larger share of the national budget on public security institutions. Between 2002 and 2007 the army had expanded from 120.000 officers and troops to 240.000. At present the police force can be considered as a civilian extension of the national armed forces with 400.000 members (Kruijt and Koonings 2007: 34-35). These increases in officers and combatants made the representation of police and military in neglected areas possible alongside increased road controls and vigilance of facilities with natural resources to glance of extortions which had become lucrative revenues for illegal armed actors. Moreover armed attacks against FARC and ELN Fronts or paramilitaries that were not willing to demobilize could intensify by killing them or force them to surrender and demobilize. Besides expansion of these forces also the intelligence body was enlarged to enhance efforts to track down insurgents and capture them (ICG 2003).

Despite many critiques against Uribe's reforms the public order and security situation has 7 years later improved significant in some zones. Especially diminishes at the side of the FARC and the ELN and the demobilization and reintegration of paramilitaries has contributed in this respect. In 1998 the FARC existed out of an estimated 11.300 well equipped fighters and the

ELN 3.600. In 2007 the FARC had diminished till approximately 7.500 fighters (ibid.: 38-39; ICG 2003) and the ELN hardly exists any longer. Nevertheless improved security in one zone in Colombia does not entail it to be a national phenomenon. However from a local or even regional perspective the zones where violence and armed conflict has calmed down are localities where internally displaced people can resettle and return to.

## **6.2. Military and police presence in San Carlos**

The police and military perceive San Carlos as a place resting in a state of relative calmness. In 2005 Héroes de Granada demobilized and the military started with the construction of bases in rural '*veredas*' such as El Chocó, Arenozas, Vergel and Palmichel. This amplification of military presence contributed to an increase of controls, patrols and vigilance activities at roads, bridges and hydro-electric sites.<sup>54</sup> At the time of this study colonel Prieto assured me that there were no armed combats taking place.<sup>55</sup> Moreover since 16 months nothing had been burned or bombed and in the first half of 2009 no murder neither a kidnap or disappearance had occurred. The security institutions ascribed this decrease in murder rates and terrorist attacks to the captivity and deaths of delinquents and ex-paramilitaries responsible for such acts.

Despite these improvements the overall situation of public security remained difficult to evaluate as colonel Prieto of the fourth brigade explained to me:

“Our mission to create security is working. (...) Activities of Front 9 of the FARC have diminished a lot, because they are divided at the moral, structural, equipment and logistic levels. This is a result of the big pressure the national army continuously puts on them. (...) About the urban zone it is not known if there are illegal groups because we have not received reports about this. About the rural zones there are informs that members of illegal armed groups live among the population, but

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<sup>54</sup> This information was told to me during an interview with a well informed man in May 2009 and also by colonel Prieto of the fourth brigade of the national defense forces in an interview on May 24, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Back in Holland I discovered on the website of inforiente that on July 21, 2009 there had been a skirmish between members of the FARC and the fourth brigade of the national security forces in La Mirandita a vereda of San Carlos.

disguised. These criminals (BACRIM<sup>56</sup>) and terrorists walk around in different zones of the country. Our responsibility is to track them down and capture them. The other part is to make sure that they don't have room to operate and take power. And make sure that they demobilize.”<sup>57</sup>

Information about guerrilla presence remained however difficult to confirm due to the trend wherein informants tend to denounce their preoccupations several days after the actual observation. These problems with denunciations are related to levels of trust and fear of reprisals to which I will come back later. Moreover alleged FARC members hide their identity by not wearing camouflaged clothes and mixing with the population.<sup>58</sup> We see, from the account of the colonel that the mandate of the national security force has the objective to increase the public security and mobility of the population in the rural and urban zones by capturing members of the guerrilla and criminal bands (BACRIM) that are involved in narco trafficking.

In order to enhance public security the military perform patrols in inhabited rural areas and maintain permanent presence at strategic infrastructural points. Nevertheless, they cannot be present in all parts constantly due to their personnel capacity and choose to leave the uninhabited rural '*veredas*' (almost) free of military vigilance. From the moment that '*veredas*' become inhabited the military has the obligation to expand their activity and start with occasional patrols. The plight of the military to provide safety for 'normal' inhabitants also applies for '*desplazados*' which intend to return or resettle in their community of expulsion. In short this entails that the military has to provide for zones which are free from risks and threats for the personal safety these '*desplazados*.' These risks are associated with members of illegal armed groups and explosive artifacts such as anti-personal mines and bombs. In respect of this last personal security threat the military has EXDE (emergency demolition of explosive artifacts) and 'Desminado Humanitario' (humanitarian clearing of mines) that work in San Carlos. In the next chapter I will elaborate in more detail about this.

Whereas the military is responsible to intervene in threatening situations for the public

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<sup>56</sup> BACRIM (bandas criminales) are criminal bands involved in narco trafficking.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with colonel Prieto in San Raphael on May 24, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Interview in San Carlos with a well informed man in May, 2009 and an interview in San Raphael with colonel

security the police is responsible to prevent such threats. Both forces exchange information and when a situation threatens to become ominous the police requests intervention from the military. The police force is 14 members strong and they operate from a base which is located in the urban center. Whereas the military covers the rural zones alongside the urban part, police activity is primarily focused on the urban zone. They lack the financial means and the manpower to create and operate more bases in the municipality. However, occasionally they travel between rural 'veredas' when a situation requests this. They can also request reinforcement from the police headquarter in Marinilla to provide public insecurity for example at a large events such as the Games for Peace ('Juegos por la Paz') or the Water Festival ('Fiesta del Agua').

The preventive character of the police mandate is the result of recent national reforms that started in 2008 as I was informed by Lorenzo:

“Now that the society is changing the police also needs to change.”<sup>59</sup>

This change entails that they especially work in the prevention of crime, pacific society and citizen security. Which means to prevent that murders take place, prevent drug use and that the community can work and live without violence. In practice this preventive strategy consists out of supervision, controls in regard of weapon possession, prevention of alcohol use by children and the spread of information on how to respect fellow citizens.

### ***Efforts to establish a good image and gain confidence***

The reserved stance of villagers towards making denouncements of suspicious acts to the police or military is related to mistrust and fear which are legacies of the armed conflict and the misuse or neglect of power in the past. It is without doubt that the security institutions could execute their responsibilities with more precision if the population confided them completely and perceived them as the bearers and guards of public security. Nevertheless, owing to a bad reputation which was built up during the armed conflict this is not yet the case. I was for

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Prieto on May 24, 2009.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Lorenzo in San Carlos in May 2009.

instance told about the lack of intervention at times when members of the paramilitary committed human rights violations against the population. From 2000 onwards the police as well as the military were based in San Carlos during the period of permanent presence of paramilitaries in several buildings in the urban part as Ricardo told me:

“The military and police both had a base here in the urban part while paramilitaries were doing horrible things to people. I don’t know if you have heard of that street over there?” While he signs in a particular direction. “The paramilitary had a base there which was practically next to the police station. They used to play football with the heads of people in that street. (...) Yes, such situations remain questionable. There are also many ‘*falsos positivos*’ in San Carlos (...) and many girls were murdered because they were the ‘girlfriends’ of guerrillas.”<sup>60</sup>

Another experience was narrated by Carolina:

“I have always lived in the urban part of San Carlos and left for almost one year with my son to (...) after my daughter was killed. (...) My son wanted to go back because he missed his home. (...) He disappeared after two militaries had picked him up. His body was found two days later in (...).” She started crying.... “You can read the report from the hospital (...) and say what you think of it, she told me while handing over the bulk of paperwork.” I read the most horrific wounds at practically all his body parts from head to foot. He was obviously brutally tortured... She was crying and asked me: “How can they do such a thing to a child?” I could not spill out one meaningful word and just said how sorry I felt about her situation.”<sup>61</sup>

If this example of physical torture inflicted to the body of an adolescent was not shocking enough than certainly was the next thing I read in the bundle of documents. Despite the autopsy report of the physician another document (from a later date) showed that her murdered son had been declared as disappeared (NN) by the authorities.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Ricardo in San Carlos in May 2009.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Carolina in San Carlos in April 2009.



While taking such experiences in consideration I found the reticent attitude of most inhabitants to make denunciations at the police or the army no surprise at all. Mirabel explained her reasons for avoiding denunciations as follows:

“If something happens and you go to the police... ahh..., nothing will happen. Neither if you go to the military. (...) When you declare something there will always be people that will revenge on you. Security does not exist and this is why. (...) Those, against whom you make a denouncement will know that you have said something about them. Therefore I rather live with pain and say nothing or leave. (...) Even if they are in jail they will have people that will do something to you if you have made a declaration. I will not loose my life because I have made a denouncement. If you make a denouncement they note your name and the number of your identity card (*‘cedula’*) and the ones you have accused will always know how to find you. This is how the system works and therefore I do not denounce anything.”<sup>62</sup>

These stories give insight in the reluctant stance towards the police and the military as the guards and bearers of public safety. The emphasis on implementing human rights protocols as the most considerable need of the police and military to regain confidence from the population indicates that these institutions are aware of the misuse of power by their personnel in the past, but that confidence of the population is essential to be able to provide public security. For example colonel Prieto assured me, human rights were the most important issues which had to be implemented:

“(...) human right and international humanitarian rights have to be implemented more profound within the army, and we need to create transparent results. We have to work in manners (...) like clean operations to make sure that nobody has doubts about the way the army operates and that the army has the function to protect the citizens of Colombia. These are the principal demands of the army at the national

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Mirabel in San Carlos in April 2009.

level at this moment. Gain credibility.”<sup>63</sup>

Next to reforms and stricter implementation of human rights protocols both security institutions invest in confidence building projects. For example they organize social and entertaining activities for children in the municipality. There is for instance a special social division of the army, of five soldiers that organize music, theatre and sports events and every Friday evening they show a movie in the park on a big screen. During a conversation in the central park with the commander of this division I was told:

“They need to know that the army is their friend and not their enemy.”<sup>64</sup>

The police invest in comparable activities to gain confidence amongst the population. Once I observed that they were serving drinks for the public during ‘Dia de la Mujer’ but they also pay visits to schools and events in ‘*veredas*’ to speak about the role of the police to prevent insecurity.

### **6.3. Rumors, pamphlets and other links to the paramilitary past**

Despite significant improvements in matters of security and public order, rumors about ‘new’ armed actors and pamphlets with warnings and allegations disturb the sense of San Carlos being completely calmed down yet. During a conversation with Maria about insecurity the following occurred:

“There are moments when I feel insecure when I can not find work. When I have a little work I feel better.” Thus insecurity is financial? “Yes, because there is a lot of security here.” She walks away to another room and comes back with two different printed flyers. “These are of ‘Aguilas Negras.’” She explains with an unsure grimace that shows in her face. “This one I found in front of the house about a month ago.”

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with colonel Prieto in San Raphael on May 24, 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Conversation in San Carlos with the commander of the military social division in April 2009.

She gives me one of the papers and I start reading. “There are a lot of ugly words” I tell her while reading killing thieves, drug users and *‘limpieza social’* after ten o'clock, amongst other sentences. Meanwhile I realize that I have seen this pamphlet before, about a month ago. (...) “I always go to bed at eight so I don't have this problem.” We both have no idea if we have to take these pamphlets serious or not. “Nobody knows.” She tells me.<sup>65</sup>

During this earlier occasion I observed distinctive reactions to the pamphlets. Some expressed to feel frightened because they perceived them as a direct threat against their personal security. Others expressed that if you are no thief nor prostitute or drug-user than nothing will happen. There were also people that in advance could not take these warnings serious because it was just an act to scare people. I even heard the local ombudsman (*‘personera’*) say that it was not necessary to take these warnings serious because they had appeared in the whole country.<sup>66</sup> These warnings were either signed with AUC or unsigned. The unsigned were sometimes perceived to be spread by ‘new’ criminal groups<sup>67</sup> of which one (which at least had a name) was called ‘Aguilas Negras.’ I have asked at interviews with members of (inter)national organizations<sup>68</sup> if they knew if this group really operated in San Carlos. They slightly confirmed that they had heard of such ‘rumors’ but had no knowledge of public confirmations whatsoever. Others just claimed that these were ‘myths’ and that people like to think that they are real.

Another informant that spread feelings of insecurity, but as well remains a ‘rumor’ because publicly these announcements were not confirmed relates to an alleged conflict between two split off groups of ex paramilitaries. These groups could be threatening for the public security situation if they would rearm. Moreover there are also ‘rumors’ that some demobilized still receive offers to re-arm with which they could make millions of pesos, monthly. Demobilized paramilitaries that refuse these offers and want to build up a future without violence feel insecure because they can be assassinated. I was told during an interview about this topic:

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Maria in San Carlos in April 2009.

<sup>66</sup> All these comments were made during different conversations and public meetings in San Carlos between March and May 2009.

<sup>67</sup> This information came to my hearing during a reunion in San Carlos in March 2009 alongside other occasional informal conversations in San Carlos in April and May 2009.

“At this moment there is no indication that ex-paramilitaries and demobilized paramilitaries are rearming. (...) The demobilized paramilitaries are safe in San Carlos. (...) They and their families are sometimes threatened if they refuse to cooperate in criminal deletes.”<sup>69</sup>

However these reports remain rumors because they are not publicly confirmed. Altogether these do create a community atmosphere wherein people don't know what to believe and for some cause preoccupations. These rumors make people remember the time of the armed conflict when denunciations or even a wrong look could be punished with violence. Other links with the violent past of San Carlos outlive as well because symbols that represent this past walk around in freedom as ex paramilitaries. For some people this means that feelings of fear and anxiety steal them over when they encounter people with a paramilitary history and it makes them remember the time when they were dressed in civilian clothes, but carried arms and did whatever they wanted with people. Others are not afraid for the people that used to scare them. Still, encounters remind them of the past, but don't really know how to put the situation into words it is just how it is. They just try to live with it and carry on with doing normal things, daily.

There are 29 demobilized paramilitaries<sup>70</sup> in San Carlos of which most participate in the national social and economic reintegration program for armed persons and armed groups of Colombia of the ACR. The program in short entails that local government need to invest in programs that can help demobilized to reintegrate socially and economically in the receiving communities. This entails that they have to be able to work or study and they receive a monthly allowance to make rearmament, which pays, less attractive. During a meeting with ACR and demobilized that participate in the reintegration program it became obvious that they were not satisfied with their situation. It was difficult to find suitable employment and/or education and accordingly experienced difficulties with supporting their families. From the perspectives of some people that had observed and/or experienced physical violence from

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<sup>68</sup> I asked this at the MAPP-OEA, CNRR, ACR as well as to military and police personnel.

<sup>69</sup> Interview in San Carlos with Hernesto in May 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Other sources made me believe that there are more than forty and others speak of more than sixty people that live in San Carlos and have a paramilitary background. The ones not in the reintegration program of ACR are thus not demobilized.

paramilitaries during the armed conflict it was incomprehensible that they still resided in San Carlos, obtained a monthly allowance from the government and that some even worked for the local administration while they could not find employment and received nothing from the state while being a '*desplazado*' who had returned or resettled in San Carlos.

### *Politics in San Carlos*

Politics are another factor of mistrust within the community of San Carlos which is recovering from an armed conflict and since has experienced one mayor election in 2008. During the armed conflict elections have never stopped, but selective killings of candidates and elected mayors took place as for example Ricardo Jiménez in 1997 (OPROA 2008: 13). In respect of politics the links with the paramilitary past had not been erased yet at the time this study took place. There hung an atmosphere of political polarization which was related to the previous mayor Nicolás Guzmán (2004-2008) and Juan Alberto Garcia Duque who was chosen for a second period in 2008 and had been mayor previously from 2001-2004. These two prominent people were in dispute and discredited each other publicly by the spread of pamphlets that contained back and forth accusations towards each other which spread mistrust and confusion amongst the population.

The public dispute had started after Guzmán had reported his suspicions about corruption practices of Garcia Duque to a newspaper. Duque was ultimately charged which led to a sanction of 12 years non-activity and candidacy suspension for mayor elections. Thus, the mayor of San Carlos was in jail and his deputy Miriam Odila Sepúlveda Zapata had been appointed to replace him as long as advanced elections stayed out (Inforiente 2008; 2008a; 2008b; 2009). Garcia Duque received this punishment because he was found guilty of confiscating 800 million Colombian pesos of public money which was estimated for public health care services in San Carlos. Besides this judgment another investigation was running against him for suspicion of constructing a sport-center on a terrain in El Jordan<sup>71</sup> which had been abandoned by internally displaced people during his previous mayor period. According to Colombian legislation, territories can only be sold with the consignment of the legal owners,

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<sup>71</sup> Interview in Medellín with a well informed person in April 2009.

thus buying and selling property without approval of the legal owners is a crime. Moreover another investigation was running due to the 40 million Colombian pesos that were spend on the construction of this sport center that had actually cost 5 million pesos (ibid.).

As we see reports as these do not contribute to a portrait of a stable public order situation. I describe this political context because politics means the local administration and the local administration has the power to develop projects to attend returned and resettled '*desplazados*.' To state my point more palpable the local administration is responsible for all projects related to development and attention to vulnerable populations in San Carlos. Projects started during one mayor period can abruptly be halted during another one. Moreover, against this background I was told about 'rumors'<sup>72</sup> that funds which supposed to be spend on the attention of '*desplazados*' just disappeared and nobody knew what had happened to it. Some people were sure that these funds were used during election times as a method to convince people to vote for a certain candidate. One notifying account that came to my hearing was that there existed a building in San Carlos which was full of goods which were meant to give humanitarian attention to '*desplazados*,' but did not reach this population because they remained stored in this building and were said to be taken out during election time.

Finally on April 23, 2009 governor Luis Alfredo Ramos Botero had denounced that advanced mayor elections could take place on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2009 (Inforiente 2009). The two candidates that took up the dual were Fransisco Javier Álvarez Sánchez of the Conservative Party of Colombia (Partido Conservador Colombiano) and Hugo Armando Urrea of the Wing-Group Colombia (Alas Equipo Colombia). After weeks of political campaigns with a lot of music and activities Fransisco Álvarez had won with 3441 votes over Hugo Armando who received 2549 votes (Inforiente 2009). Upon my return in Holland I read about the policy that the new mayor Álvarez had in mind for San Carlos when he was quoted in the newspaper El Mundo (Inforiente 2009a):

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<sup>72</sup> In this chapter I make use of the word rumor because I have never asked around about these subjects to the persons or institutions that were accused. Some people who read this thesis might think, what the value is of such information and maybe even if it is reliable or not. As I mentioned previously under methodology, I have only used information that was told to me by at least 4 different sources. This does not always entail cross-checking, and therefore many quotes are left out in this part, which in other chapters support the argumentation line. However I do perceive the information that I have put down in this chapter relevant for understanding in what kind of local society returned and resettled '*desplazados*' reside to show in what kind of present context they make choices and perform 'agency.' Also by describing such contexts gives insight to what kind of human (in)securities they respond and why they respond as they do.

“Here we had a political hegemony of 30 years with administrations that had very similar characteristics. We represent a new development policy: inclusive, full of opportunities that can not only be profited by friends of the mayor but these are for the whole population. (...) I don’t arrive at the administration while looking back and saying that they have done nothing and profited from all the money. What I want is to work and search how we can move this municipality forward.”

#### **6.4. “Keeping quiet is the best defense you have in San Carlos”<sup>73</sup>**

The dynamic presented above lifts a small part of the veil why people feel reluctant to denounce situations that at least can be perceived as peculiar and at the most out of control. The public security and order situation where ‘*desplazados*’ return to has many faces, but one part is their perception of what might happen if they denounce an act which makes them reluctant to do so. Their memories about experiencing and/or observing violent acts had evolved into what in the previous chapter was called an ‘embodied history’ on which we base our choices and gives permanence in change. We also base our choices on conscious made choices, but past and present experiences and discourses shape our perceptions on which we base our choices to change or not change the context where we find ourselves in, in future moments in time. We make decisions and perform ‘agency’ because we want to improve the situation where we find ourselves in. Thus, making choices and taking action (‘agency’) is a process of becoming.

Considering this process of becoming, the context of public security just described and recollecting accounts of people as Mirabel and Carolina who say that San Carlos is a very calm and relax place to live, but within the same conversation mention that nobody has permanent personal security in Colombia:

“I live day by day because now we are living, but who knows if we will all be dead

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<sup>73</sup> This quotation comes from one of my well-informed key informants, raised during an informal conversation in San Carlos in April 2009. About fifty percent of the people I have spoken to in this municipality rose that this was the best strategy to deal with witnessing or experiencing a violent act or crime.

by tomorrow.”<sup>74</sup>

And Carolina who mentioned that:

“Security has nobody in Colombia. Only people with a lot of money who are in a position to pay bodyguards for their security have security.”<sup>75</sup>

Remarks comparable to these two were made by many people I spoke to. Especially the remarks that it is very secure and safe in San Carlos put my mind to think what returned and resettled ‘*desplazados*’ perceive as public security. It appeared to me that the people I spoke to in regard for this study made a distinction between being in a ‘secure geographical space to live,’ ‘having personal security’ and ‘feeling secure.’ In respect of a secure geographical space they perceived an atmosphere that was calm on the visual sight because they did not encounter daily observations of violent acts. Despite the fears that some people experienced as I presented earlier in this chapter for them the level of personal security was sufficient to feel secure and content to live here. These moments of feeling secure however did not mean that they had personal security.

When I asked Hernando what is security he told me the following:

“Marcia, there is only one that knows about security.” he tells me while he signs with his eyes towards the ceiling. (...) “If a person can work he is healthy and that is very important. Security only gives god; nobody else can guarantee your security. The only thing I need is work and the love of god. These are the only things you can trust. Work to gain money and food and stay healthy so that I can take care of my family (...) the love of god for safety (...) and staying in the middle. (...) We live in a world where nobody takes care of nobody.”<sup>76</sup>

Taking this account into consideration to feel secure, you need to have faith in god and the

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Mirabel in San Carlos in April 2009

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Carolina in San Carlos in April 2009

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Hernando in San Carlos in March 2009.



virgin Mary, economic independence and stay in the middle in response to encounters with people who might use violence as act of retaliation such as members of the security institutions, guerrilla, or paramilitary had done in the past. These entities remember them of the time when they observed that violence was used against people that were identified as either belonging to one of these entities by the 'other.' Hence staying in the middle and avoiding that identification by others with either one of these entities, is possible, is the best defense to stay out of trouble because personal security has nobody in Colombia. Another strategy to respond to the perception that nobody in Colombia has personal security and that you are in fact in advance suspected and can be subjected to retaliation was mentioned by Mirabel:

“If you want to live here you do not open your mouth. I do not use my tongue because then something can happen. So I never say what I have seen and who. (...) And here we are now. I am still alive because I have not used my tongue.” You do not have a problem with this that you can not talk? I ask. “No, because if I will I will get problems, so I just do not.”<sup>77</sup>

Other strategies to respond to feelings of fear that you could get into trouble if you would meet certain people was to avoid the places where they could encounter these people and therefore they spend most time in and around their house with their family. They avoid talking about their opinions in public and avoid talking about topics that can cause them harm. As Marena explained:

“It is like making an elephant of a mosquito; therefore it is better to keep quiet when you have observed certain things. Before you know it they have made you suspicious without you having anything to do with it.”<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless while many people adopted such avoidance strategies most assured me that they were not afraid to die because they perceived dying as a gift, what is worse is living with a disease, an amputated body part, the loss of loved ones or putting your live in the hands of

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Mirabel in San Carlos in April 2009.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Marena in San Carlos in April 2009.

others, when you have no idea what will happen. These examples were told to me to explain why they perceive that dying is a gift. Not death in itself is feared, but the previous suffering before death is feared. Another factor for feelings of insecurity was that history would repeat itself. Most explained me that the best strategies to keep away from daily worries and anxiety about what will happen tomorrow is to stay occupied with work, an education and watch soap series instead of the news. Mirabel told me about her preoccupations and why she wanted to stay occupied:

“Yes I am always thinking about that it can happen that the armed conflict will begin again. Many people here are talking about the concentration of members of armed groups here. People talk a lot about this and they also say this in the news. In the news they say that it is dangerous here in San Carlos and that makes me think about what will I do if the violence will come here again and that it is possible that I will get displaced a second time or will I stay this time. Therefore I am scared that the armed conflict again will evolve here. I try not to think about it. (...) “I go to a friend (...) to chat and I go to school to learn to read and write and in the evening I go out to talk with my neighbors and that all works for me as a treatment. If I will sit in the house I will think only about what will happen next. When I am occupied I can live relaxed and sleep relaxed because if I am not occupied a million things are going on in my head. I need to stay occupied. Before I go to sleep I watch the 'novelas.' 'Novelas' are very important because while I am watching I think about what is happening in the 'novela' and not what is happening in the world. Therefore I do not like to watch the news.”<sup>79</sup>

As we see feelings of fear for retaliation which returned and resettled '*desplazados*' want to avoid by not talking, staying away from certain places, not talking with strangers or people that could bring them into trouble are directly related with past experiences with violence. Thus, by staying mute about what you see, hear and experience and try to stay in the middle will keep you out of trouble.

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Mirabel in San Carlos in April 2009

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San Carlos is a community which is recovering from an armed conflict. The public security situation has improved a lot since the demobilization of Héroes de Granada in 2005 and the expansion of military vigilance and controls. However, while violence cannot be observed for the bare eye it is apparent that under this layer returned and resettled '*desplazados*' still choose to keep silent about certain subjects which might bring them into trouble. The illustrations used in this chapter have shown that experiences with armed actors and their exposure to violence and fear have the effect that in the present context they still sense that in advance they can be made suspected and that retaliation with the use of violence is a possibility. Might, this happen there will be no living soul who can help you, because nobody has personal security. Nevertheless despite these avoidance strategies San Carlos as a geographical place is perceived as a secure place to live in where you can feel content.

In the next chapter I will present dilemmas concerning an accompanied return of the state, and the cleaning-up of mines which can also be experienced in the fifth phase of displacement. Especially when resettled '*desplazados*' in San Carlos want to return to a rural '*vereda*' which for state institutions and still is perceived as a no go area because of guerrilla presence and anti-personal mines.

## 7. When Theory Meets Practice: a Return is not easy

We saw in chapter 4 that during the first three phases of displacement a significant share of '*desplazados*' impoverished more and more. We also saw that if this situation endured in the fourth phase of displacement and the public security situation in the community of expulsion had improved that '*desplazados*' eventually cut the Gordian knot and return to or resettle in their community of expulsion. In chapter 2, I briefly introduced that '*desplazados*' may choose the moment of a return freely. In this chapter I present that returnees have the right to special attention of the state which entails the accompaniment of state institutions and other entities of attention to make a return dignified and secure. As we will see is that rural '*veredas*' which have been empty for years are deteriorated to such extend that they literally have to be rebuild from scratch and that the road to physically get there is challenging.

I will start with a description of the protocol for a return process, followed by the problem of anti-personal mines for the process of return and public security in San Carlos. Special focus is paid to the efforts of the state to clean-up these explosive artifacts. Then I will describe a case study of a return process to La Ventanita, which is a rural '*vereda*' with several characteristics in terms of public security and accessibility which cause difficulties for the implementation of the return protocol. At the example of a case study of '*desplazados*' who had returned unaccompanied to this '*vereda*' I will illustrate that state institutions can also be 'forced' from below to make a special effort to accompany '*desplazados*' who have put their personal security at risk to be taken seriously in their objective that a return to their abandoned properties is their only hope to build-up a community where they can feel at home.

### 7.1. Protocol for an accompanied return process

The protocol of return has the objective to attend and accompany '*desplazados*' in organizing their return process. The accompaniment of public and private institutions needs to be done in accord with a legally bound protocol for a return and re-settlement process which was adopted under T-023 in 2004 by the constitutional court and the legal sentences 177 and 178 on August 8, 2005 (Acción Social 2006: 3). The protocol is based on the six pre-conditions of voluntarism,

security, dignity, protection, participation and approval of '*desplazados*' who want to return and the accompaniment of public and private institutions to make the return sustainable (Acción Social 2006: 7).

A return process is set in motion by '*desplazados*' themselves. They have to take the initiative to declare their objectives for a return at the '*personería*' or another representative body of the public prosecutor. This declaration contains what kind of accompaniment from the state institutions is necessary to make their return dignified and sustainable. Only, '*desplazados*' who are registered in the RUPD-system can apply for an accompanied return process. If their declaration proves of voluntarism this is fixed within a document of voluntarism which is the first requirement of application for an accompanied return process.

Secondly the return location needs a security certificate which declares the area to be 100 percent secure which entails free from armed groups and anti-personal mines. This 100 percent safety is debatable as Colonel Prieto of the Fourth Brigade agreed:

“A guarantee of 100 percent safety is very difficult to give in Colombia. A location that is safe or calm today can be unsafe tomorrow.”<sup>80</sup>

As we see from this account, the previous chapter and what I will present here under, the second pre-condition of 100 percent security is debatable. However without a security certificate Acción Social and other state bodies which attend and accompany '*desplazados*' with financial and material assistance to make a return dignified cannot start when seen in the light of sustainability of a return.

Thus, the second pre-condition security and the third which combines dignity and sustainability are interdependent. This interrelatedness and given the fact that local dynamics of security are relatively flexible phenomena in Colombia is the crux of what makes an accompanied return process complex.

Security can only be assured by the military and the police in Colombia. This entails that the military executes patrols through the return community and has semi-continued presence in surrounding areas and roads. As I described in chapter 6 the military is present in inhabited

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<sup>80</sup> Interview in San Raphael on May 24, 2009.

areas which is their plight according to their mandate to enhance public security and mobility for the population of Colombia. In short this means that abandoned areas which are perceived as unsafe, but nevertheless become inhabited through unaccompanied returns of '*desplazados*' put 'pressure' on military personnel to expand their patrolling activities and make the 'unaccompanied return area' secure as well.

## **7.2. Anti-Personnel Mines in San Carlos**

Anti-personnel mines constitute a real threat for the public security of community members in San Carlos. More than half of the 78 villages (*veredas*) are polluted with anti-personnel mines and self made explosive artifacts which not distinguish between 'enemies' and 'non-enemies.' Hence, every living object which encounters these explosives can get injured. So far these explosive artifacts have victimized 73 civilians, seven non-identified victims, two demobilized paramilitaries and 53 members of the military in San Carlos.<sup>81</sup>

The presidential program for integral action against anti-personnel mines exists out of 160 people, nationwide. Half of this group is dedicated to the demarcation and de-activation of explosive artifacts in inhabited areas. How many artifacts there are in the whole country is difficult to indicate when considering that the military does not receive informs about locations from the people that have put them there, but from inhabitants that by coincidence encounter these. Besides it takes more time to demarcate and clean-up explosive artifacts than the fabrication and spread of these. Nevertheless, a group of eighty experts for the whole country is very small when considering that Colombia exists out of more than 1000 municipalities which mean less than 0.08 experts per municipality.

Seen from this perspective and the fact that de-mining has to be done with great precision makes it a time consuming process wherein people have to be patient (CNRR 2008: 14-15). But, patience is something many '*desplazados*' who live in poverty and long to return to their property once called home, don't have. This means that despite the risks of anti-personnel mines '*desplazados*' began returning sporadically to San Carlos in 2005 and from November 2007 this phenomenon has become massive. Since 2007 till March 2008 1.043 families have

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Fernando Pamplona who works for UCAD together with EXDE and is president of the organization for victims of anti-personal mines (ASOMOVIDINQ).

returned to rural '*veredas*' of San Carlos and to the urban part 267 families (CNRR 2008: 15).

Since unaccompanied returns have become massive two special military groups started cleaning-up anti-personnel mines and other explosive artifacts in San Carlos, EXDE (Explosivos y Demoliciones) and 'Desminado Humanitario.' EXDE started working in San Carlos in January 2008. This group of specialists consists out of four combatant engineers of battalion no.4 Pedro Nel Ospina and a dog. Since the initial month of their work they have destroyed 64 explosive artifacts and at the end of May 2009 this number had increased to 132.<sup>82</sup> An emergency cleaning of mines starts after EXDE has received denouncements of inhabitants who have encountered artifact(s) in his/her '*vereda*'<sup>83</sup> which can be in all sorts of places such as trees, under water, within or in front of schools, roads, plots for cultivation of farmers, within televisions and refrigerators and whatever other public or private place imaginable.

If the location of artifacts is relatively secure<sup>84</sup> to start with a clean-up, EXDE travels to the location for demarcation, and dismantles by blowing them up with stronger explosives. After the emergency cleaning, another military group starts with the humanitarian cleaning of the terrain. A humanitarian cleaning consists out of a profound meter for meter scanning of the territory within one hectare (diameter) surrounding the artifact destroyed by EXDE.<sup>85</sup>

'Desminado Humanitario' started working in January 2009 in San Carlos and exists out of 15 experts who scan the area with metal detectors which is a very time consuming process as commander Juan Ruiz recalls:

“This process takes a lot of time. Not, only because it has to be done with efficiency and entails risks, but also because of the area. San Carlos has mountains and rivers and a lot of plants and trees. That is what makes it a time consuming process because these explosive artifacts can be everywhere, even in houses, rivers, trees, televisions,

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<sup>82</sup> Informative conversation with Fernando Pamplona at UCAD in San Carlos on May 21, 2009

<sup>83</sup> This was explained by commandant (from January 2008 till may 2009 ) of EXDE and the president of Sobrevivienda de Minas Antipersonal (ASOVIMAS) on March 22, 2009. Fernando Pamplona works for UCAD as a medium between community members, local administration and EXDE. He gathers denouncements about localizations of explosive artifacts and communicates with EXDE about the possibilities to start with a clean-up.

<sup>84</sup> Before an emergency or humanitarian clean-up starts the area needs to be relatively secure. EXDE and 'Desminado Humanitario' cannot work when they run the risk of an attack by the guerrilla. Thus, to guarantee the security of EXDE and 'Desminado Humanitario' a group of battalion 4 accompanies them on their missions.

<sup>85</sup> Conversation with commandant of EXDE at UCAD in San Carlos on March 22, 2009 and commander Juan Ruiz

refrigerators.”<sup>86</sup>

After ‘Desminado Humanitario’ has located an anti-personal mine, or self fabricated bomb they blow it up, just like EXDE as Commander Juan Ruiz explains:

“Often when we locate an artifact we blow it up, just like EXDE because this contains little risks and is effective. But if we locate a bomb or mine in a house or school, we have to dismantle it.”<sup>87</sup>

After the hectare is completely scanned by 'Desminado Humanitario' the government baptizes it (hectare) with a safety certificate which is necessary for an accompanied return process. From January till the beginning of June 2009 'Desminado Humanitario' had destroyed 16 explosive artifacts.

### **7.3. Local dilemmas: an experience of return without accompaniment of the state**

As we saw in chapter 4, during the first three phases of displacement a significant share of ‘*desplazados*’ impoverished more and more. We also saw that if this situation endured in the fourth phase of displacement and the public security situation in the community of expulsion was perceived as secure enough, ‘*desplazados*’ choose to return to their ‘place of belonging’ or resettled in their ‘area of belonging.’ However due to their impoverished living condition they need financial and material support from state institutions to enable them to rebuild their communities of expulsion and feel home again. Despite, the phenomenon that returns have become massive since 2007 these were not all accompanied by the state. As I briefly mentioned only ‘*desplazados*’ with a RUPD-code can apply for an accompanied return of the state.

In San Carlos there are rural ‘*veredas*’ which have been empty for years and have deteriorated to such extend that they literally have to be rebuild from scratch. Power lines have been blown up by the guerrilla, the houses have been overgrown with plants and the roads are impenetrable

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of ‘Desminado Humanitario’ in San Carlos on May 24, 2009.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with the commandant of 'Desminado Humanitario' on May 24, 2009

<sup>87</sup> Interview with the commandant of 'Desminado Humanitario' on May 24, 2009



due to mud, landslides, rocks and plants. In addition, these '*veredas*' contain anti-personal mines and some are perceived to have guerrilla presence. In such '*veredas*' the military hardly, if at all patrol regularly, because of their inaccessibility. In short, accompanied return processes to these '*veredas*' are difficult to gain. Nevertheless, this does not stop '*desplazados*' from returning and take more risks and efforts to make an (accompanied) return possible.

La Ventanita is one of the '*veredas*' as I have just described. Due to these characteristics it was called a red zone (*zona roja*). This term 'red zone' was used by a commander of the fourth brigade that worked in the field of intelligence during two public and one closed meeting(s) in San Carlos regarding an organized group of '*desplazados*.' This group wanted accompaniment of the state to return to this '*vereda*' in dignity. However they were unsatisfied with the way the local administration and other state institutions handled their case. The '*desplazados*' who had returned unaccompanied found the term 'red zone' exaggerated because they had encountered some explosive artifact, but were now living there and needed financial support from the local government and other institutions to repair the road, the electric lines, their houses and the school and a recreation field.

It appeared that why some '*desplazados*' of this group had entered the '*vereda*' unaccompanied was because they were tired of hearing that it was too dangerous to return, while they could not work in the urban part of San Carlos and were prone to live with enduring food, economic and belonging insecurity. Besides they had waited from November 2008 till February 2009 for accompaniment of the state for their return, which had been agreed upon in a document by the local administration, and in April 2009 not one state institution had visited the '*vereda*.' They had the idea that their case was not taken seriously and stood alone in this. What sort of developments had taken place before the first meeting of this organized group took place I will illustrate at the example the motivation and experiences of Gonzalo's unaccompanied return to this '*vereda*.'

"I wanted to enter my '*tierra*' but everybody told me not to go because they were going to murder me. I always want to see things with my own eyes, because sometimes things are not as people say. I want that more people go looking by themselves and to see that things are not as they say they are. (...) The problem is that when people have seen one member of the guerrilla they say that it is full of

guerrilla. (...) When I approached La Ventanita with workers who were opening up the road in that direction they did not want to go further and stopped working. (...) It is we are waiting till the administration sends the army to clean the area of mines what they call security. I entered further alone because the workers were scared for the mines. (...) who works for the military told me watch out man, because something can happen to you. (...) It took me three years fighting to enter my '*tierra*' and ultimately with great difficulty I have entered my '*vereda*' in 2008 and de-activated mines and bombs by myself. (...) I entered the path with only my backpack and my machete, a bottle of water and food and walked very careful. On my way I encountered a mine, I took it away and did not say anything about it to nobody. The next thing I encountered on my way was a bomb. I took it out and de-activated it and I entered further. (...) But, I went without the army because if the guerrilla sees me with the military they will kill me. So I entered in the night, so that they could not see me. (...) One day I encountered the guerrilla and when they saw me they were very angry. They pointed arms at me and they said things to me. (...) They asked me why I was walking around, here and I explained that I wanted to return to my little land (*tierrita*). (...) After a while we also talked normal, as we are doing right now, calmly. Now they understand because I explained that I was here because of the economic situation. (...) Later, they told me in this part and that part you cannot enter because it is mined. They said very exactly from this point till that point there are mines so you cannot enter the area from this and that point. (...) My first encounter with others that were returning was in November 2008 when three families had entered. (...) We started cleaning the paths and the surroundings of the houses, and then the houses. Now, we are with 7 families and this week 7 other families will return from (...), but we are trying to arrange the transportation and things like that because we don't have money to buy fuel to put in the cars and here in the municipality this is difficult to arrange because (...) is another department. Now that I have told everything that I have seen there and what has happened people have more confidence and sometimes people come to go fishing. (...) The plan was to first clean the road, then the houses, then the school so that the children can learn something if it is possible to find a teacher that wants to come.

And so little by little we want to go forward and make it better. (...) We are going to clean and repair the school and I have arranged that we can organize some '*convites*' and that the administration will pay fourteen workers, which means us to do this work."<sup>88</sup>

As we can see from this account, for some the feeling of belonging to their community of expulsion and the objective to rebuild their home outweighs the risks for personal security in the fifth phase of displacement. Especially if waiting for the 'agency' of state institutions is perceived as a 'prayer without an end' and they have hardly if anything to lose except their lives. But, as we saw in the previous chapter nobody has personal security in Colombia and waiting to impoverish more was not an option either. By taking risks for their personal security and clearing mines and bombs by themselves, because the other three families had also encountered explosive artifacts when they entered the first time and talking about their experiences to other families has led to the return of more people.

#### **7.4. Protocol for return in reverse**

By denouncing their case towards Conciudadanía a Colombian non profit organization the organized group of '*desplazados*' and their case began to be taken more seriously from that moment onwards by the state institutions that accompany '*desplazados*' according the protocol for return and resettlement which was mentioned previously. Several reunions followed where they first discussed their objectives with each other in the presence of the '*personera*' and a representative of Conciudadanía. The second meeting was also attended by EXDE, the local administration (UCAD) and a representative of the intelligence division of the military. Still the issue of mines, the perceived presence of the guerrilla and the inaccessibility were issues that delayed the de-mining process. The third meeting was however attended by CNRR, Acción Social, Gobernación (DAPARD), AIGMA-OEA, 'Desminado Humanitario, EXDE, Colonel Prieto, intelligence department of the military, the local administration (UCAD), '*personera*' and the '*procuraduría*.' Every representative body spoke, but I think the most important

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Gonzalo in San Carlos in March and April 2009.

comment was from the '*procuradora*' who declared publicly that this group had shown there voluntarism in great deal and therefore the administration and all institutions that needed to ensure their safety and dignity had to start with developments in regard of attending these people.

Hence, the '*vereda*' had become inhabited which meant that the military had the obligation to start patrolling in the area and that de-mining activities had to be started.

The reason given by the military of why the de-mining had not started sooner was related to the inaccessibility of the '*vereda*.' If something would happen to a member of EXDE, while working they would not have the possibility to leave the area quickly to a hospitable, because of the three hour walk from the point to where it was possible to reach by car. Thus, first the road needed to be repaired and that had to be arranged by the local administration. The explanation of why it was difficult to repair the road quickly was related to the lack of money to do so and therefore the local administration had to ask financial support from the '*gobernacion*.'

Besides these difficulties which had slowed down the process of an accompanied return many of the by now more than 15 families that wanted to return to this particular '*vereda*' missed a RUPD-code. The '*personera*' declared during a meeting to have send the declarations, which are necessary for an application to Acción Social, but had ever since not responded. Eventually an agreement was made that Acción Social would make a special effort in speeding up the registration process of these families and that after the road had been repaired and the cleaning-up of mines had taken place that the legal process according to the protocol could start.

Thus, a protocol of return can also be executed in reverse when '*desplazados*' by returning unaccompanied start inhabiting an area which practically obliges state institutions to undertake action in terms of safety and dignity because as '*desplazados*' this is one of their special rights. Thus, the case of this unaccompanied return to La Ventanita can serve as an example of a reversed protocol of return due the character of the return process wherein the 'agency' from below of '*desplazados*' and by public awareness raising have set in motion the institutions that need to provide security and dignity.

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As we saw '*desplazados*' have the responsibility to show their voluntarism to return. Safety and

dignity are the responsibility of the state and these last two conditions to set an accompanied return process in motion are critical as I have shown at the example of a return process to La Ventanita. We saw that a return process is highly dependent on infrastructure, accessibility, public safety, motivation of '*desplazados*' who want to return and the institutions which have to practice according the protocol. We also saw from this example that taking risks for the personal security by returning and inhabiting their communities of expulsion (places of belonging) unaccompanied can be used as a strategy to put pressure on the institutions which have the obligation to implement the return and resettlement protocol. However we also saw that this unaccompanied return strategy became more effective after a Colombian non-profit organization and the '*procuraduría*' were informed about their case. In addition unaccompanied returns form a big pressure for the military apparatus of which the human capacity is not without limits as we also saw in the previous chapter. In the following part I will give some end remarks on my findings that I have presented in this thesis.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have focused on returned and resettled internally displaced people's in San Carlos, a municipality in the Oriente, Antioquia. I analyzed their perceptions, experiences and responses to human insecurities and their motivation to return to their community of expulsion. I described that human (in)securities shape the context in which we think, make choices and base our actions. Choices made in the present are not only based on consciousness and rationale but also on common sense which gives permanence in change. This permanence in change relates to basing our choices on past experiences and perceptions which combined form a past social framework which gives direction to the ways we act and think. Nevertheless, decisions are also constructed on the basis of rationale and own interests which are informed by cultural environment and the social position of the 'choice-maker' and desires and feelings. Thus, people look at the past (experiences) through the lens of the present (context), and with an eye to the future (objectives) (Ghorashi 2003: 30). Thus, decisions and 'agency' are shaped within a certain amount of possibilities which is delineated by the context of human (in)securities we find ourselves in. Thus, we can always make choices but within the limits of our capital (Sen 2006).

To capture the perceptions experiences and responses of returned and resettled internally displaced people I have made use of a framework which delineated six phases of displacement. These six phases provided the narrative structure of the thesis and assisted in catching the human insecurities '*desplazados*' were experiencing as well as their perceptions and responses to these.

I have shown that returned and resettled '*desplazados*' are direct victims of the violence spread by armed actors with opposite ideological backgrounds. These armed groups orchestrated a scene of violence, fear, and other threats to human security in which the daily context of the pool of options to meet future objectives had diminished to such extent that saving the lives of 'self' and loved ones became the most important goal. Their response to avoid death, fear and other human insecurities, such as hunger, restricted movement and the deterioration of economic opportunities made them ultimately decide to leave the place called home.

Forced displacement to other places in Colombia, whether 'far away' or 'close' host

communities, avoided the direct risk for personal security (for some to a larger extent than others), but aggravated experiencing belonging, food, economic and health insecurity in the first two phases of displacement. Not only were they experiencing hardships in dealing with feelings of pain, grief and generalized shock but they also had to find ways to respond to the path that was leading them to a live in poverty and misery which continued in the third phase of displacement wherein they wanted to build up a (temporary) home in their host communities. Experiencing endless efforts to find work whether (semi)-legal and at time and time again not succeeding to construe a stable and satisfying home in the host communities made some choose to get involved in illegal work sectors as the growing and producing of coca(plants). The people that got tired of their endless search for stability, continuously experiencing belonging insecurity culminated in a period thinking wherein the pros and cons of a possible return to their community of expulsion were weighed.

This hanging in the balance of outweighing the pros and cons of a return is the fourth phase of displacement. People that ultimately decide to make the actual return perceive their community of expulsion secure enough for their personal security and have hope and rationale that in their community of expulsion, once called home, they can give more meaning to life, than when residing in their host community.

However upon return the symbols/authorities and discourses which remind them of the violence and fear of the past are not erased yet. Therefore returned and resettled '*desplazados*' continue utilizing avoidance strategies upon encounters with these symbols, discourses and authorities. These strategies are shaped by the sheer thought and perception that can be 'suspects' of or in 'trouble' with these authority symbols of the past in advance which can use violence as a form of punishment or retaliation. Therefore the best defense for threats against personal security is to keep quiet about phenomena observed or heard which can bring them into trouble with symbols of authority which can use violence as retaliation and avoid 'strong' identifications with these authorities by 'other' authorities. In practice this means that experiences with violence and fear in the past still shape their thoughts, choices and actions within a community recovering in the aftermaths of violence and armed conflict.

However for some the feeling of belonging to their community of expulsion and the hope and objective to rebuild their home in their community of expulsion outweighs the risks for personal security in the fifth phase of displacement. Human (in)securities experiences in the

third and fourth phase of displacement necessary to live a dignified life have not changed significantly despite their endless creative agency to do so. Hence, on the one hand their search for a place to survive has not given them more than 'mere' experience and creative 'agency' which have made them think that they have nothing to loose anymore except their lives. Alongside the thought of having nothing to loose, is related to the perception that nobody in Colombia has personal security and nobody does anything for nobody, meaning we are on our own. On the other hand, the future objective to rebuild their home in the place they know best and to live a life in peace and quiet is worth to take this risk for personal security as I have showed at the example of the case study of an unaccompanied return to La Ventanita in San Carlos, in chapter 7.

This example has shown the power of bottom up strategies which lay practically at the other end of the spectrum of avoidance strategies of response. Namely: confronting the context wherein choice-making takes place with a high risk for personal security and seeking for other options outside their own possibilities of agency as well. This means, seeking support of 'other authorities' that have not adopted violence to meet their goals and the ones which have disappointed them thus far by hardly acting at all, which have the power to confront the state authorities that have in the past, but with whom they need to work together to meet the objective of wanting to live a life in peace and quiet in the place they once called home, to reconstruct home. However, while utilizing confrontational strategies by stimulating/spurring up the state authorities and organizations they need, through other authorities which have the power to do so they maintain utilizing avoidance strategies to stay out of trouble which could entail a risk for the personal security at the hands of 'others.' Thus, taking a risk for the personal security in the present is chosen when this risk lays in their own hands and rational choice-making and the context wherein hardly anything can be lost and the objective to rebuild a home and live a life in peace and quiet.

Phase six rests on the question, when and where does displacement end? I have presented that the state defines the ending of displacement as the moment when a person that has suffered displacement has succeeded to recuperate all 'normal' citizen rights which were violated by the actors of the armed conflict. In practice this means when the victims of violence and fear, which led to displacement have recovered their human securities to an extent comparative to or better than before their displacement. This recuperation is done with or without the help of the



state. I have showed in chapter 5 that people with such history and indeed sense that their current life is satisfying enough and that they wouldn't exchange it for the life before displacement and/or neither want to return to their community of expulsion in the fourth phase of displacement do not want to be identified as '*desplazados*.' Nevertheless these people will never forget their roots are of the '*campo*' and some still own a piece of land in the countryside of San Carlos which they use to recreate and even might return to in the future. Their response to belonging insecurity is to visit (temporary return) San Carlos whenever possible because they love the people and the atmosphere of the place to which they feel they belong.

People from San Carlos that have suffered displacement, due to violence and threats but live in poverty and are still struggling to build-up a life that in their view is dignified say that they will be an internally displaced person for the rest of their life. Their argumentation for this is based on their view that their psychological suffering and their losses as loved ones, property and other materials can and will never be repaired. Even a more decent life than they have now will not free them of the experiences of fear and suffering which they will always remember. Therefore they will always be '*desplazados*.'

These remarks about identifying as a '*desplazado*' show that being returned or resettled in the community of expulsion is a mere phase of displacement and has nothing to do with ending experiencing human insecurities on which people base their identification as '*desplazado*.' Thus, identifying as '*desplazado*' means foremost living in poverty in the present combined with having suffered forced displacement in the past. For an accompanied return of the state '*desplazados*' want to be recognized as such by the state because it can bring them more options to rebuild a satisfied life and feel at home in the community of expulsion and end their search for a place to survive.

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