Victim, Terrorist or Conflict Transformer?

Internally Displaced Student Activists in Colombia

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Mona Wærnes
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List of abbreviations

AUC *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia.* The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia.

ASPU *Asociación Sindical de Profesores Universitarios.* The University Professors Association.

DAS *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad.* The Administrative Department of Security.

ELN *Ejército de Liberación Nacional.* The National Liberation Army.

FARC-EP *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo.* The Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia – People's Army.

GAULA *Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal.* Unified Action Groups for Personal Freedom.

IDP Internally Displaced Person.

JUCO *Juventud Comunista Colombiana.* The Colombian Communist Youth.

PDA *Polo Democrático Alternativo.* The Alternative Democratic Front.

SIJIN *Seccional de Investigación Criminal.* Section of the Judicial Police.

TLC *Tratado de Libre Comercio.* Free Trade Agreement.

Contents

1 Introduction

The armed conflict in Colombia has lasted for approximately forty-five years, making it one of the most long-lasting ongoing armed conflicts in the world. Even though the most visible part of the conflict is the violence, it involves political, social, economic and cultural dimensions as well. The leftist guerrillas, the right-wing paramilitary groups and the national army are all central actors in the armed conflict.

The conflict consists not only of its armed parties; there is also the Colombian civil society, a sector that has traditionally been more or less excluded from peace negotiations between the armed parties in the conflict. Nevertheless, people and social movements in civil society seek ways of peaceful means to contribute to change in Colombian society. One important group in civil society is the student movement at the universities. The student movement combines working for the aim of improving the academic level in higher education, student welfare, providing free and available education, and working for the freedom of expression and more equal distribution of wealth and power in society in general.

However, it can be complicated and dangerous to become involved in student activism in Colombia. Through the student movement young people organize activities at the universities or in society to influence all dimensions of the conflict. The possible consequences of such activism are death threats, disappearances, torture, internal displacement, random detentions and assassinations. Despite violence and displacement many students choose to continue the activism. On the one hand, students exposed to serious human rights violations like internal displacement become victims of the conflict, but on the other, they can potentially use their experience and skills to contribute to the resolution of the conflict.

This research project focuses on the student activists that are internally displaced as a consequence of participating in activities and protests in the student movement.

Internally displaced and student activists in Colombia

In this thesis I focus on university student activists who are internally displaced as a consequence of threats related to their involvement in political activism. I have chosen to focus on this particular group within the student movement in order to explore the strategies of people in a group of activists that are likely to have a high degree of commitment to activism as well as consciousness of the potential consequences of the political involvement

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in university and in society. In contrast to most internally displaced people (IDPs), the student activists demonstrate greater awareness of the cause of their displacement. Many know that engaging in for example student rights or not following the scientific consensus at their university may result in death threats. Instead of ceasing the activities when they receive this kind of threats, many choose to continue, a choice which in many cases yields only one real result: internal displacement.

The number of student activists that are internally displaced is unknown, and there is little data on student activists and forced displacement. However, UNESCO's report on the human rights situation in the education field shows that Colombia was among the worst-affected countries from 2004-2007 (UNESCO 2010). The number of death threats and assassinations of teachers and university students has risen sharply in this period. In former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez's first presidential period from 2002-2006 there were 592 reported cases of violence against the Colombian student movement, including threats, raids, personal injuries, harassment, legal incrimination, arbitrary detention, displacement, kidnapping, torture and homicide (ACEU & SAIH 2008). Ninety teachers were assassinated from 2006 to 2008 (UNESCO 2010), and twenty-six university students were assassinated in the period 2002 to 2008 (ACEU & SAIH 2008, UNESCO 2010). In the same period, twenty-two students were registered displaced, a number that probably is much higher because many are not registered.

Displacement is one of the most widespread and visible results of human right abuses against the civil population in Colombia. In 2007 there were around 3,8 million internally displaced people, making Colombia the country with the second largest number of IDPs in the world (Flyktninghjelpen 2007). Most of them are poor peasants who have been forced to flee to regional centers because their land was taken or because they received threats from the paramilitaries or guerrillas. Colombia is one of the few countries in the world which have enacted the legislation to protect the internally displaced, although this legislation is not implemented in reality (Skretteberg in Human Rights Watch 2005, Fadnes 2008). The fact that the present government in Colombia describes the IDPs as economic migrants is not likely to improve this situation (Human Rights Watch 2005). Only half of the IDPs receive the humanitarian assistance they are entitled to according to the legislation. In addition, assistance is limited, in most cases only provided for three months. The need for assistance is much higher, considering that these are deprived people that have often lost everything in the displacement. Many IDPs have to continue to flee because they suffer violence in the cities where they arrive. The main force in intra-urban displacement is paramilitary militias. Inter-

urban IDPs, those who flee from one city to another, are not recognized as displaced by the authorities because they are not forced away from their "habitual place of residence", and do not have the rights to humanitarian assistance (IDMC & NRC 2006).

The displaced students usually fall into this category, for the reason that they attend universities which are localized in cities. Not much attention has been given to students who are persecuted and displaced from their universities and cities because of activism in the student movement. Students are in some ways a privileged group, as they often have a higher level of education and are more likely to have a larger network of contacts in the new city. However, their role as agents of change in their communities and as critical and independent thinkers exposes them to human rights abuses and loss of freedom. In addition to a difficult security situation, the newly displaced students often lack basic assets such as food and decent housing. As a consequence they are completely dependent on support from friends, family and organizations. The lack of attention from the authorities and international organizations can be explained by the small size of displaced students as a group and that they are not considered the most marginalized group among IDPs. They are often not registered as displaced, and both qualitative and quantitative data on displaced students is very limited.

Research questions

The following three research questions will be explored in this thesis:

1. *How and why do the internally displaced students organize themselves politically at universities in Colombia before and after the displacement?*
2. *How and why do some Colombian student activists become displaced?*
3. *How can the internally displaced students contribute to conflict resolution in Colombia?*

The first research question touches upon the motivation for the activism, what student activism implies and why the students continue the activities after threats and displacement. Based on this I will discuss how the displaced students are both victims of the conflict and potential agents of change. This research question addresses three levels of analysis. First, the individual condition, choices and motivations for organizing and participating in activism, second, the organizational level and the strategies of the student organizations, and third, how these activists are related to the student movement and civil society in general in Colombia.

The second research question explores the dynamics of the causes of forced displacement, what triggered the displacement and how the displacement affects the participation in the student movement.

The third question is meant to connect the other two, exploring how the students as displaced people and part of the student movement can play a role in transformation of the Colombian conflict and society. I will examine how their activities in the student movement and their perception of the causes of conflict affect their choices of strategies and activities for a transformation of the conflict.

To answer these questions I will focus mainly on internally displaced students in Bogotá who are either individually associated with the student movement or members of organizations that are affiliated with it. I interviewed eighteen such students during a two month fieldwork in Colombia in 2007. During this time I also met with several human rights organizations, peace organizations and student organizations.

The conflict in Colombia

The conflict in Colombia is the oldest armed conflict in America (Rojas 2005), and the country is characterized by violence, poverty and a lack of basic human rights. Colombia is one of the countries in the world with the greatest inequality in terms of the allocation of land, and fifty percent of Colombians live under the poverty line (IDMC & NRC 2006).

The current conflict stems from a period between approximately 1948 and 1957 known as *La Violencia* (The Violence). An old rivalry between liberal and conservative forces exploded into an armed conflict that led to thousands of deaths. This period constitutes the basis for the formation of various guerrilla groups in the 1960s and the 1970s, such as the FARC (Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional), both of which still exist. While the guerrillas claim to fight for social justice and the redistribution of wealth, the paramilitaries' objectives are to eliminate the guerrillas and civilian movements[1] and retain the political and economic status quo (Guáqueta 2003).

The paramilitary groups, later united in The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), were created to assist the army's counter-insurgency strategy in the 1980s (IDMC & NRC 2006). According to Petras, the aim of paramilitary death squads is to "evict peasants, sympathetic to the guerrillas, from the countryside and to assassinate progressive urban slum dwellers, student activists, human rights workers and trade union leaders" (2003:24). He

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[1] http://www.amnesty.no/web.nsf/pages/A0759E8E9B396E94C1256BF20032E9D0, cited May 2007

argues that the aim of the paramilitary violence is to isolate the guerrillas from their "natural mass base" and their source of food and recruits, or as one of the informants puts it, to move the water from the fish. The people here are the water, and the fish are the guerrillas.

There is a discussion concerning to what degree the paramilitaries constitute an independent party in the conflict. Many claim that the Colombian government was responsible not only for the development of the paramilitary groups, but that they also still maintain close ties to them (OAS 1999, Amnesty International[2]). In 2006 there was a far-reaching scandal called *parapolítica* was uncovered where links between paramilitaries and politicians supporting Uribe were revealed. According to the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* sixty-eight members of the Colombian Congress and Senate were investigated or found guilty in maintaining connections with the AUC[3] in 2008, and the ex-director of the Colombian security police DAS is still in prison for cooperation with the paramilitaries.

It is discussed to what extent the original causes of conflict, the ideological differences and deep-seated grievances of the poor, still remain, but they are important factors (Guáqueta 2003). The conflict's strong clash of interests and the violent way the parties try to reach their oppositional goals qualify to Ramsbotham's (et al. 2006) basic definition of conflict: the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups.

There have been a number of attempts at peace negotiations in Colombia. In 2002 the last peace dialogues between the government and the FARC guerrilla broke down. The same year, the independent candidate Álvaro Uribe Vélez was elected as president. In 2006 Uribe was re-elected president, and in August 2010 the Uribe-loyal Juan Manuel Santos Calderón took over his office. Santos is not the first president of the powerful and influential Santos family, which also owns a television channel and the only national newspaper in Colombia, *El Tiempo*. While he was Minister of Defense in Uribe's administration he became known as the leader of the controversial attack on FARC in Ecuadorian territory where central FARC leaders were assassinated, but also for provoking Ecuador's sovereignty. My thesis focuses on the policy and incidents related to Uribe's administration because the research project was conducted during his presidential period.

The Colombian war has developed from being defined as a war on insurgency, through being a war on drugs, to finally becoming a war on terrorism, but all the definitions imply the same goal: to defeat or force by military means the guerrilla to negotiate (Jones

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[2] http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/col-summary-eng, cited May 2007
[3] http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/articulo-parapolitica-abren-investigacion-preliminar-contra-victor-renan-barco, cited August 2010.

2009). Uribe denies the existence of an armed conflict in Colombia (Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo" 2006). He maintains that there is only a "fight against terrorism" and aims to reach a military solution to the conflict, which entails rearmament, an attempt to eliminate the guerrilla and the abandonment of the negotiations between the government and the FARC. The Uribe administration employs a discourse that accuses anyone expressing disagreement with the government's policies of being guerrilla combatants or guerrilla collaborators. Under the right-wing president Uribe it has become even more complicated to work in opposition movements, and many that engage in social movements are exposed to harassment.

However, the government's hard line against guerrillas does not prevent it from launching peace negotiations with the paramilitaries called the *demobilization process*, even if the AUC was never engaged in violent conflict with the state (Jones 2009). According to the Colombian authorities, 30 944 paramilitaries handed in their weapons and were demobilized between 2002 and 2006 (Alto Comisionado para la Paz Alto Comisionado para la Paz & Presidencia de la república 2006). Nevertheless, the social movements have continued to receive death threats signed by a paramilitary group that has called itself *Águilas Negras* (Black Eagles) following the demobilization process. This paramilitary group is suspected of being the new paramilitary umbrella organization subsequent to the intended demobilization of the AUC. It works in a manner very similar to the AUC, and in effect, many human rights organizations claim that the new group actually comprises mostly the same members (Klassekampen 10.08.2007:11 & [4]).

In the political context of Latin America today, where most of the countries in South America have center-left governments, the Uribe administration in Colombia has been an especially important ally to the United States (Bouvier 2009). In 2000 *Plan Colombia* was launched, which aimed to strengthen the Colombian state and fight against the FARC. The implementations of this plan led to Colombia becoming the third largest receiver of aid from the United States. This aid has been directed to the military and prosecution of the war and not for democracy, human rights, peace initiatives or civilian related issues. The United States military presence has increased rapidly since 2000. In 2009 up to 1,400 U.S. troops and military contractors were stationed on Colombian territory, and in spite of loud protests from other Latin American countries the United States military was allowed to use air bases on Colombian soil to track drug traffickers and the insurgency.[5]

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[4] http://www.latin-amerikagruppene.no/Landsider/Colombia/Landprofil/index.html, cited August 2010
[5] http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1915825,00.html#ixzz0wJgG8Vn5, cited August 2010

The civilian population in Colombia is located in the crossfire between armed guerrilla forces, paramilitaries and the national army. Rojas (2005) argues that the state in Colombia is fragile and does not protect its citizens. The Norwegian Refugee Council confirms this and argues that the Uribe government's policy of "democratic security", whose aims are to eliminate the guerrilla groups and involve civilians in counter-insurgency activities, creates peasant soldiers by giving the peasants arms and sets up networks of a million informants among common people in Colombia (IDMC & NRC 2006). These "security measures" have involved more civilians in the armed conflict and contributed to the stigmatization of people, particularly human rights defenders and community leaders who have forcefully been displaced.

In the history of the Colombian conflict there have been many peace initiatives, but none of them have yet succeeded in establishing peace. According to Bouvier (2009), analyzing the role of civil society and NGOs in policymaking has started only recently in Colombia. Traditionally the focus has been on peace negotiation between the government and the insurgency groups, or studies of violence, human rights violations and violation of international law (Bouvier 2009). According to García-Durán (2006) the peace movement had different main focuses, first, in the 1970 and 1980s it mobilized against paramilitary massacres, in the 1990s it changed to protest against the kidnappings by the guerrillas, and in the beginning of the new millennium it focused in rejection of all kind of violence regardless if it is by the paramilitaries or the guerrillas.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapters 1-5 serve to present a background in terms of context, theory and methodology. Chapters 6-8 present the main analytic part, and the conclusions are gathered in chapter 9. This introduction aims to provide a context to the following discussion and includes a review of central issues related to the ongoing conflict in Colombia, with a focus on how it affects actors in civil society, particularly related to forced displacement. It also presents a brief overview of the situation of the student activists and how they are affected by the conflict. In chapters 2-4 I present the theoretical framework applied in this thesis, consisting of three approaches, discussed in one chapter each. The theoretical analysis is focused on a discussion of the main concepts that contribute to understanding the interaction between civil society and social movements on the one hand and the role it can play in a process of conflict transformation on the other. Further issues discussed in these

chapters include how internal conflicts can be transformed to peace, and the different strategies of the social movements to contribute to this. Chapter 2 provides an introduction to theories on civil society as a site of resistance. It also discusses how actors in civil society can interact with political parties, with the aim of giving a background to why the student activists mostly identify with the left-wing parties and their choices of strategies. The aim is to provide a base to understanding the position of these students in the extreme polarization in Colombian society. Chapter 3 provides an introduction to the concept of conflict, the different views of causes of conflict related to approaches to what peace means and how to implement conflict resolution. It explores how conflict is not necessarily negative in all contexts and forms, and concentrates on the theories of how civil society can contribute to transforming conflict. This is provided as an alternative to the more traditional approach in conflict resolution of focusing on ending the conflict. Chapter 4 explores strategies of the social movements to mobilize people and successfully pursue their interests is explored.

Chapter 5 gives a brief introduction to qualitative methodology and the conduct of the fieldwork. I discuss the methodological choices and challenges regarding ethics, accessing informants, uneven power relations in the field and interviewing informants with security problems. The chapter is concluded by presenting the process of analysis.

In chapter 6-8 I present the main observations from the fieldwork and discuss it in relation to different approaches to civil society, conflict resolution and social movements. Chapter 6 constitutes the first part of the analysis and investigates how and why student activists become mobilized. Attention is given to the student activists' grievances, the role of the student organizations and the identity of the displaced activists. The chapter seeks to shed light on why the student activists are seen as a threat and how they cope with this. Chapter 7 focuses on the causes and circumstances of the displacement of the student activists and how this affects their participation in the student movement in relation to political space, motivation and strategies. The chapter explores the discursive framing of repression and how the abuse of the student activist is justified by the labeling of student activists as "rebels" and "terrorists". The chapter closes up with a discussion of the role of the student organizations in the displacement.

Chapter 8 aims to connect the objectives and activities of the displaced students and the student movement with conflict resolution. The chapter continues with an attempt to explore how displaced student activists can contribute to the transformation of the Colombian conflict within their philosophy of a political and not military solution and change in the deep-rooted causes of conflict.

Chapter 9 aims to summarize and tie together the analyses made throughout the second part of the thesis. The main argument in the thesis is that to reach a sustainable peace in Colombia, ending of the violent elements of conflict is not enough to address the reasons and causes of conflict. There ought to be a transformation of the conflict to change or eliminate the deep-rooted reasons for conflict, a process in which the inclusion, participation and contribution of the civil society is required and invaluable. The testimonies of the internally displaced student activists in this thesis illustrate this, seeing themselves as conflict transformers rather than the common representation of them as mere victims of displacement, or the government representation of student activists as "terrorists".

2 Civil society

> Unarmed civilians are not only victims of armed confrontation but actors of peace.
> (REDEPAZ 2001 in Rojas 2005:94)

As the view on civil society's role in conflict resolution varies according to one's definition of the concept, it is natural to start with a discussion of what civil society actually is. After a discussion of the different definitions I will look into the role of civil society in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. I will close the chapter with a review on the discussions on whether political parties are part of civil society and how the social movements can interact with political parties.

What is civil society

Civil society can be defined as relatively autonomous formal or informal organizations or groups, usually non-profit, working voluntary somewhere in spheres between the state, family and market, who want to protect or extend their interests and values (Orjuela 2004, Merkel & Lauth 1998 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). Civil society consists of organizations like community organizations, trade unions, activist associations, faith-based groups and co-operatives (McIlwaine 2007).

The focus in this research project is on activists in student movement and their role as conflict transformers. As further discussed in chapter 6, they define themselves as student activist and political activists, rather than activists in the peace movement, although some of the activities they engage in are related to conflict resolution. These kinds of activities make them correspond to Orjuela's (2004) definition of peace actors as persons, networks and organizations that take part in activities with the aim to contribute to war-ending in a non-violently way, while recognizing the needs and grievances of the different sides in the conflict.

When a conflict situation take place, all actors adapt to the difficult environment and new power relations, but not all reactions are regarded as intentional or fruitful. According to Belloni (2006 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006) uncivil, xenophobic or mafia-like groups are likely to become stronger in a weak state, something that could result in civil society groups developing into more uncivil actors provoked by economic decline, social stress and ever-present existence of violence (Schmidt 2003 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). There is a discussion about which actors belong to civil society. Some claim that only NGOs belong to

this category, while others include a variety of actors, even local business and soldiers (van Tognersen et al. 2005 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). Others put weight on the values of non-violence and mutual tolerance and believe that civil society actors must be civil and groups showing uncivil behavior are excluded from the civil society concept (Merkel & Lauth 1998 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). However, some organizations may act violently only in certain occasions, i.e. when attacked by armed forces during a demonstration. Anderson & Rieff claim that globally, civil society rarely includes groups associated with the political right, international terrorist or criminal groups (2004 in McIlwaine 2007). Civil society is rather understood only to include progressive groups or new social movements that promote issues as environmentalism, feminism and human rights.

Civil society as a site of resistance

In a situation of war, civil society has limited space and suffers a lack of basic rights such as freedom of speech, and the right to organize is restricted (Orjuela 2004). Talking about peace can be dangerous and may be seen as a political act. In order to construct a culture of fear the non-combatant civilian population is often targeted in internal conflicts (Nodstrom 1992 in Uyangoda 2005). In spite of this, della Porta & Diani (2006) point out, social movements have contributed both in democratization of authoritarian regimes and opened for more participatory approaches in representative democracies.

McIlwaine (2007) believes that competing aims within civil society can undermine democratic consolidation, and argues that the existence of civil society organizations does not automatically lead to the emergence of democracy. Gramsci argues that civil society could play the role to challenge or to uphold the existing order and the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes (McIlwaine 2007). Gramsci points out that there is no guarantee that actors in civil society will act as a counter movement and not contribute to a consolidation of existing ideological hegemony or carry forward the authority's hegemony. If the civil society is aware of this protracted war of position, a new societal consensus could be formed within civil society (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). The role of the cultural and ideological support provided by civil society was essential for the survival of capitalism in Europe (Alagappa 2004). The hegemony of capitalism rested not only on material foundations but also on cultural and ideological support. The Gramscian perspective has been particularly relevant in understanding resistance to authoritarian regimes in Latin America (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006, Kumar 1993 in McIlwaine 2007).

What Rajasingham-Senanayake (1999 in Uyangoda 2005) calls "hidden economics of war" that operates through population displacement could be an obstacle to civil movement counter-hegemonic struggle. This implies that civilians become tools of dirty wars, and displacement can be a profitable exercise of armed groups. To avoid this, Rajasingham-Senanayake argues, it is important that internally displaced people are aware of their situation and try to turn the displacement to a sphere of change.

Relationship between civil society and political parties

While some see civil society as an alternative to political parties, others raise critical questions about how and to what extent it provides political representation for people and their interests (Stokke 2010). Since social movements usually focus on a single issue and a political party has a wide range of issues, it is a common belief that they have very different functions (Painter & Jeffrey 2010). However, as they point out, what seems to be a single issue often involve a broad view of society and is relevant in various fields. According to Escobar & Alvarez (1992) scholars of social movements have too often glossed over the external interventions in their analyses of movement dynamics in an effort to portray movements as genuine expressions of the "real" interests of the economically exploited, culturally marginalized, and politically disenfranchised. As many Latin American social movements defend their political, ideological, and organizational autonomy, Escobar & Alvarez (1992) argue that analytical skepticism towards proclamations of absolute autonomy by movement participants is warranted. Social movements seldom emerge spontaneously, nor do they develop in isolation from other social and political actors. Extracommunity actors often intervene in crucial ways to shape the political trajectories and discursive content of social struggles.

Schneider points to the centrality of parties and party militants in fostering political activities among the poor (Escobar & Alvarez 1992). She argues that in the case of Chile in the 1980s there was a strong correlation between previous left-wing activism and the resurgence of protest, especially where the Communist Party had active presence. She stresses that under the dictatorship of Pinochet most literature failed to see the nexus between the political and civil society. According to Schneider there was no connection between the level of economic depression and the intensity and scope of protest action, as many scientists and sociologists focused on. The neighborhoods hit hardest by the crisis were not where the resistance was strongest. The construction of autonomous neighborhood organizations and the

formation of a new social sector do not explain the eruption of protests alone. Schneider argues that the social movement interpretation fails to explain the peculiar configuration of protests in authoritarian Chile, because the protests were concentrated in those neighborhoods that had previously been the center of left-wing political activity.

Schneider argues that residents of communist-influenced neighborhoods believe that individuals can make a difference, that they can take control over their lives in collective organizations with others (Escobar & Alvarez 1992). Those who lived in such communities continued to resist military rule despite the high personal cost because they believed that their particular organizational skills were critical to movement success, that collective solidarity action was capable of defeating even the most powerful military regime, and that their own collective identity was such that passive acceptance of the regime was incompatible with the personal and individual sense of self. Even if Schneider makes her arguments in the specific Chilean context, these points are relevant to other situations where political life is organized alongside violent conflict.

Summary of theory on civil society

Civil society consists of a variety of actors in the space between state and family, and it has gradually become more accepted to include civil society actors in conflict resolution and peace processes. However, not all actors in all conflicts agree on this, and it is still a major challenge to succeed in including the right civil society actors at the right time in the process and apply their inputs for real. The scholars in civil society theory disagree on how civil society and political parties interact, but there are examples in other Latin American countries that illustrate that a close or overlapping contact between the two could be favorable in mobilizing social movements.

3 Conflict theory

To approach the Colombian conflict and what role the displaced student activists have in it, a discussion on what a conflict is may come in hand to be able to tell how actors in civil society can contribute to resolve it. There are different suggestions on what the causes of conflict is and equally many suggestions on what must be done to end it. I will start this chapter with a review on the different views on what conflict is with the aim to formulate the best suited definition for this research. Then I will discuss the different theories on how to deal with and how to end conflict, with a focus on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation. I will specially go into these issues in a civil war context, as there is a civil war in Colombia.

What is conflict

A civil war is an intrastate conflict which consists of different phenomena, such as military coups, attempted coups, short-lived rebellions, actions by militias, armed gangs, freedom movements, terrorist organizations and government actions which could be related to some of the other components mentioned (Wallensteen 2002). The hallmarks are repression, comprehensive police measures, preventive detentions, human rights violations and detentions. A common objective in conflict is to keep or take control over the governmental power. Civil war implies breaking up existing relationships, dividing and destroying families, friendships and local communities. The social and psychological effects are often more devastating than many interstate wars.

Conflict could be defined as the pursuit of incompatible goals between two or more parties (Mitchell 1981 in Uyangoda 2005, Ramsbotham et. al. 2006) Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program has a quantifiable definition on armed conflict: "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year"[6], while Paffenholz & Spurk (2006) emphasize that armed conflicts involve organized, armed groups with the government as party to the conflict in most cases. Colombia is an example of that. According to Paffenholz & Spurk armed conflict usually has three phases: i) prior to the outbreak; ii) armed conflict and; iii) post-

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[6] http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/data_and_publications/definitions_all.htm#i, cited March 2010.

conflict phase, which often evolve in recurring cycles of peace and violence, and different phases can even be present at the same time in the country.

Conflict has negative as well as constructive functions in human and social relations. Paffenholz & Spurk (2006) argue that armed conflict could be a fundamental obstacle to development. Conflict can lead to violence when channeled destructively, but at the same time it is normal in any society and can have positive outcomes when handled in a constructive way. Coser draws this last argument further and argues that conflict can have a stabilizing and integrative function (1956 in Uyangoda 2005). This leads us to the Marxist view, where conflict is necessary, and is seen as the main dynamic for progress in human society and for reaching higher stages of development.

One should distinguish between symmetric and asymmetric conflicts. In a symmetric conflict you find relatively similar parties, such as between two states of comparative strength (Ramsbotham et al. 2006). In an asymmetric conflict the power relation between the parties, for instance majority versus minority or government versus group of rebels, is asymmetrical. In asymmetrical conflicts the root of the conflict does not lie in particular issues, but in the very unequal power structure of the situation.

The causes of conflict, what fuels it and how it develops are widely debated issues and different approaches to conflict resolution are based on different views on what a conflict is. The following part of this chapter seeks to go deeper into this, presenting the different approaches to conflict resolution.

Negative and positive peace

An important discussion when it comes to conflict resolution is the concept of peace. The question is whether peace should be defined only as the absence of war or if peace is something more complex (Wallensteen 2002).

To define peace it can be useful to first discuss the concept of violence. Galtung (1996) divides violence in conflict into three, in what he calls the *violence triangle*. *Direct violence*, like murder, is straight-forward violence between actors. *Structural violence,* like a child dying of poverty, makes it harder to identify the guilty party behind something that is still undeniably violence. *Cultural violence*, mechanisms which make invisible or justify the other kinds of violence, is even tougher to combat. It is possible stop direct violence by negotiating the conflict behavior. Removing the contradictions and injustice is necessary in order to defeat structural violence. Cultural violence can be fought through changing attitudes.

The concept of peace is also subject to different interpretations, depending on which type of violence the situation is a result of. Galtung (1996) distinguishes between *negative peace* and *positive peace*. Negative peace is characterized by absence of violence, for example a ceasefire, while positive peace appears when the structural and cultural violence is absent as well, which implies a positive content such as restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population. The 1992 UN *Agenda for Peace* is based on a negative peace interpretation when it defines peacebuilding as "preventing large scale violence or the recurrence of violence immediately after wars or armed conflicts (1-3, maximum 5 years)" (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006:15). Here, the emphasis is on activities directly connected to this constricted objective and peacebuilding is expected to end when a post-conflict country guarantees a minimum of security to its people and democratic structures based on a government elected in approved elections.

Paffenholz & Spurk (2006) argue that the positive peace approach is too wide to allow a clear definition of the end of peacebuilding. As it is so hard to operationalize, they find it difficult to define when the aim is reached regarding profound issues such as negotiations, peacekeeping, trauma healing, poverty reduction and democratization. They suggest a compromise definition between negative and positive peace understanding: "Peacebuilding aims at preventing and managing armed conflict and sustaining peace after large-scale organized violence has ended" (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006:15). The time perspective is five to ten years and peacebuilding should include, but not equate, development of economic reconstruction, development and democratization.

Causes to conflict and its resolution

The different schools of thought in conflict resolution have different terminology, approaches and actors, and they are closely related to the view on causes to conflict. The analysis of the displaced student activists is mainly based on discussions and empirical findings related to the conflict transformation school, which focus on the transformation of the deep rooted causes of conflict. However, other approaches are also relevant, especially because much of the content in conflict transformation school is based on other approaches, but also because they have been relevant to what has been done of conflict resolution attempts in Colombia. I will shortly mention the schools of conflict management and complementary schools, then go more detailed through the conflict resolution theory, which is the broadest approach on the field and is the approach that the conflict transformation approach is closest related to. Much of conflict

transformation school draw on critics directed at conflict resolution. These latter approaches are based on the explanation of Uyangoda (2005) due to that conflict arises because of incompatibilities in power, resources, wealth and status.

There is not necessarily any connection between ending a violent conflict and conflict resolution (Ramsbotham et al. 2006). The basis of conflict will remain in peace as well as in a war situation if nothing is done to change the reasons for conflict. Moreover, there are many forces that may have interests in a conflict persisting. Some people are accustomed to war and do not know any other reality, others have a career in the military and are afraid of losing status and power if there the war ends, while others have a financial interest in keeping the conflict going. This makes the conflict resolution process complex and may hamper the involvement of different actors working for conflict transformation.

Approaches to *conflict dynamics* understand conflict as a dynamic phenomenon (Wallensteen 2002). Basically one actor is reacting on the acts of another actor, which leads to further action. This way the stakes in the conflict escalate and both actors are responsible. This escalation can lead to dynamics pushing the actors in a conflict into two camps, and there will be a polarization in the conflict. Wallensteen argues that it is difficult to break the dynamics in a conflict. The aim in conflict resolution must be to change the direction of the flow of events, to turn escalation into de-escalation and polarization into positive interaction.

According to Ballentine & Sherman (2003) there is a common assumption that economic factors matter to conflict dynamics, but not on how they matter, how much and in what ways. The disagreement is mainly on the terms "greed" and "grievance". Collier's (2000) greed theory finds no correlation between socioeconomic inequality and conflict risk. He believes that conflicts are more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievances. Ethnic heterogeneity, the level of political rights, economic mismanagement and regime type do not matter on the outbreak of civil war. There is, however, a high risk in countries with dependency on primary commodity exports and surplus of undereducated young men. Ballentine & Sherman (2003) argue that access to lucrative economic resources has figured more prominently in the duration of armed conflicts than in their onset. The longer a conflict has lasted, the more likely it is that the factors that sustain the conflict have changed and provokes new grievances (Ballentine & Sherman 2003).

The conflict management school is short-term management of armed conflicts, and has until the mid-1990s been the dominant approach to peacebuilding or conflict resolution (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). This approach focuses on gathering leaders of the conflicting parties and external diplomats to a negotiation table. Conflict is understood as a permanent

consequence of differences of values and interests in or between communities (Miall 2004). It is considered unrealistic to resolve conflicts completely, therefore is the proposal to manage and contain the conflict. The aim is to reach a compromise of laying down weapons and resume to normal politics. Civil society plays a limited role in the conflict management school, and civil society does not have a seat at the negotiation table because of the assumption that lower numbers of actors involved in negotiations, makes it easier to reach an agreement (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). The conflict management approach is criticized for only including leadership in the country in the peace process, to not be neutral in internal conflicts and that it does not seek change in the deeper causes of why there is a conflict in the first place.

The complementary school combines elements from the conflict management and resolution schools and has three different approaches. First, the *contingency model* which tries to identify the best timing and method for a third party intervention in armed conflicts (Fisher & Keashly 1991 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). This approach is based on Glasl's escalation model (1991 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006) where the idea is to de-escalate the conflict from phase to phase. According to this theory the escalation phase is the best time for resolution-oriented approaches, while power mediation works best when the conflict escalates. The second approach in the complementary school is similar to the contingency model, but focuses on *actors* rather than which approaches to use; the question is who is most effective at different stages (Bercovitch & Rubin 1992 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). The more the conflict escalates the more involved the third party should be. The third direction of this school, the *multi-track diplomacy approach*, adopts a "track"-concept and makes the complementary school to approach the conflict transformation theory (Diamond & McDonald 1996 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). While track-one is linked with the conflict management school and involves diplomatic peacebuilding actors, track-two is tied to the conflict resolution school, and the other tracks group with other relevant actors.

Conflict resolution theory

Ramsbotham *et al.* (2006) see conflict resolution as a generic term which consists of different components. In a restricted sense, conflict resolution refers to the elimination of causes that led to the conflict (Uyangoda 2005), because conflicts in general are anchored in economic, political, social or cultural factors. According to Ramsbotham *et al.* conflict resolution implies "that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and transformed" (2006:29). The

behavior is no longer violent, attitudes are no longer hostile and there has been a change in the structure of the conflict. The term equally refers to the process to make these changes and to the completion of the process. The aim of conflict resolution is not the elimination of conflict, but to transform violent conflict into peaceful processes of social and political change. This could correspond to the idea of Galtung's concept of positive peace, or moreover, Paffenholz & Spurk's definition which also includes managing armed conflict and not necessarily end it before working for peace. Wallensteen defines conflict resolution as a "social situation where the armed conflicting parties in a (voluntary) agreement resolve to peacefully live with – and/or dissolve – their basic incompatibilities and henceforth cease to use arms against one another" (2002:50).

The unpredictable process of escalation and de-escalation can be thought of as a bell shaped normal distribution curve (Ramsbotham et al. 2006). It starts with *differences*, which could be part of any social development, through the emergence of a *contradiction*, up through *polarization,* which indicate that the conflict becomes manifest, and culminating with *violence* and *war*. The decline of conflict starts with *ceasefire*, followed by *agreement*, *normalization* and at last *reconciliation*.

There are two central questions related to conflict resolution in a civil war situation (Wallensteen 2002). The first one explores how to construct a social and political system which gives social and political space to all groups in society in order to distribute power. Participation and influence in a society are keywords. The second one goes into how to remove the security dilemma where no actor wants to be the first to de-escalate. To reach a settlement the parties have to be secure and ending violence is necessary. According to Wallensteen, a general conclusion about civil war is that it is difficult for the parties to solve their incompatibilities themselves, and it is more likely that the conflict becomes protracted than end in victory. Most of the recent intrastate conflicts concerning governmental power take place in countries in the South which are poor, overpopulated or have very unequal distribution of wealth.

A challenge in the reintegration part of conflict resolution in civil war is that the leaders on both sides do not come from the same social class or share a normative system (Wallensteen 2002). Many civil wars have revolutionary origins where the aim is to change the power relation. Not winning might be perceived as a failure.

According to Paffenholz & Spurk (2006), the objective of the conflict resolution school is to solve underlying causes of conflict. Relationships must be built and recovered not only on leadership level, but also in society in general. This approach is inspired by strategies

from socio-psychological conflict resolution on inter-personal level. In practice, conflict resolution could be organized in workshops where ordinary representatives of the conflicting parties such as NGOs, communities or individuals get together to rebuild relationships between them. These representatives do not represent a government or an international organization, but they engage in root causes of conflict.

The objective of conflict resolution is to deal with the causes of conflict and build new relationships which will last between hostile groups (Uyangoda 2005). The idea is to replace incompatible goals with perspectives that can provide win-win compromises. It does not mean termination of conflict through victory for one party. Conflict resolution involves more than just cessation of hostilities or implementation of agreements. Taken into account that only one third of the conflicts in the world after the Second World War have ended through negotiations, a successful peace process needs to involve all parties in the conflict, including civil society, and the roots of the conflict should be addressed (King 1997 in Orjuela 2004).

The approach is criticized by the supporters of the conflict management school for requiring an overly long process to stop wars (Bercovitch 1984 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). Another critique is that improved relationship between participants in one group or between two particular groups in the conflict does not necessarily have any impact on other groups, the leadership of the conflicting parties or the peace process at large (Atieh et al. 2004 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006).

After the Cold War the conflict resolution theory was subjected to three political criticisms which were important in the development of the field and the concept (Ramsbotham et al. 2006). First, it was questioned whether the consensus of conflict resolution strategies based on mediation and negotiation by the international community is the best approach in cases where war is motivated by economic motives and greed, not grievance (Berdal & Malone 2000). Shearer (1997 in Ramsbotham et al. 2006) questions this in his analysis of conflict resolution in Sierra Leone, where the warlord insurgencies based on criminal mafias have a central role in the conflict. Meditated settlements and humanitarian aid could have the unintended effect of prolonging the conflict and feeding the warring factions. A military action, like demonstrated in Bosnia in 1995, is more likely to have the effect of foreshortening the conflict by forcing the acceptance of settlement. The response to this realist criticism of conflict resolution is, according to Ramsbotham *et al.* (2006), that a "quick military fix" is rarely possible. The second criticism has roots in Marxism and sees "liberal" conflict resolution as naïve and theoretically uncritical (Duffield 1997, 2000 in Ramsbotham et al. 2006). Conflict resolution is committed to the continuation of existing power structures

and the norms of "liberal governments" are imposed from the outside. Instead of recognizing conflict as a part of the global system with exploitation and oppression, the most powerful economies and governments treat the wars as local symptoms of local failures and want behavioral and attitudinal changes in those countries with conflict. As an answer to this critique, Ramsbotham *et al.* (2006) argue that what is criticized is a *caricature* of conflict resolution and not conflict resolution itself. Structural change in an asymmetric conflict situation *is* incorporated in the conflict resolution, but not in a classical Marxist manner. The idea that violence is unavoidable and integral to the nature of conflict, like the realist theory and most Marxist theories think, is rejected in conflict resolution. The third criticism argues that the Western view of conflict resolution is not necessarily the right one other places (Salem 1993, 1997 in Ramsbotham et al. 2006). This culturally contingent criticism has been central in conflict resolution discussions resent years. Ramsbotham *et al.* (2006) argue that instead of abandoning conflict resolution because it is Western, it is necessary to find ways to enrich Western and non-Western traditions through their mutual encounter. Conflict resolution is an integral part of development, social justice and social transformation.

The conflict transformation school

The conflict transformation school concentrates on the deep roots and causes of conflict and is the process when a conflict is transformed into peace. As it recognizes the existence of irresolvable conflicts, its objective is to *transform* conflict instead of necessarily end it (Rupesinghe 1995 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). The approach differs from conflict resolution and conflict management in that it recognizes that today's conflicts require more than the reframing of positions and the identification of win-win outcomes (Miall 2004). It seeks a resolution of underlying causes and focus on long-term relationships instead of short-term conflict management is central. While Ramsbotham (et al. 2006) argues that the conflict transformation school is the deepest level of the conflict resolution approach, Lederach (2003) believes that transformation builds from the strengths of conflict resolution approach, but argues that "conflict resolution does not necessarily incorporate the transformative potential of conflict" (Lederach 2003:68). His point is that a narrow definition of conflict resolution does not automatically reach potential of a broader change.

Lederach (2003) that the key advantage of conflict transformation is the use of multiple avenues of response. Miall (2004) argues that it addresses different dimensions from micro- to macro-issues, local to global levels and grassroot to elite actors. The aim is to

support structural change instead of facilitating outcomes or delivering settlements. Further, the idea is to engage with conflict at the pre-violence and post-violence phases as well as with the causes and consequences of violent conflict. Conflict transformation is a process of transforming the relationships, interest, discourses and sometimes the very constitution of society that make up the conflict.

Initiatives in conflict transformation approach address inequality and social injustice with a long-time horizon. Lederach (1997 in Miall 2004) argues for a long-term transformation of a war system into a peace system. There must be changes in the personal, structural, rational and cultural aspects of conflict. Different system levels should be addressed over different time-periods. In the long-term process of peacebuilding there should given an importance to the role of civil society and be an interaction between the role of people within the conflict parties, the society affected and outsiders with relevant expertise (Miall 2004). The groups within the conflicting society play the most important role rather than the mediation of outsiders. This approach is based on the notion of conflict to be transformed gradually through several smaller or larger changes and specific steps by a variety of actors.

Rupesinghe (1995, 1998 in Miall 2004) argue that conflict transformation should embrace multi-track interventions, like some scholars of the contemporary approach argue. Peace building is done on grassroot levels within civil society in alliance with the media, business groups and the military. Rupesinghe argues in favor of incorporating conflict resolution training and track-one interventions that include diplomatic intervention and peacekeeping or using as many tracks as possible. Lederach (1997 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006) believes in rebuilding destroyed relationships, reconciliation within society and the strengthening of society's peacebuilding potential, and that third party intervention should support international actors and coordinate external peace efforts. Top leadership is targeted in track-one by mediation at the level of states. Mid-level leadership is reached in track-two where the approaches like problem-solving, workshops or peace-commissions. On track - three the grassroot, representing the majority of the population is present, and there are activities like peace commissions or dialogue projects.

Most contemporary conflicts are asymmetric characterized by inequalities of power and status (Miall 2004). These conflicts are often protracted and change constantly from violent to less violent periods, which make these conflicts defy the cyclical bell-shaped models of conflict phases described in the conflict resolution approach. The conflict

transformation approach seeks to do something about the complexity of conflict, and take into account that protracted conflicts damage society, economies and regions in which they are situated. Miall argues that this way of approaching contrasts starkly with the "relative simplicity" of the core theories of conflict resolution, especially when it comes to the win-win outcomes and two-party contests.

A central difference between conflict resolution school and conflict transformation schools that is relevant for this research project, is that the conflict transformation school is concerned that conflict operates as an agent or catalyst for change (Miall 2004), which is a relevant issue related to the study of the displaced student activists in Colombia as shown in the analysis chapters.

War is not necessarily bad

Cramer (2006) believes that there is an assumption that liberal interpretation of war and liberal and neoliberal interpretation of development is the most appropriate. In the contemporary understanding of liberal peace and the interpretation of war, there has been a merger of security and development, and it basically states that there is no development without peace and vice versa. Cramer argues that this formula lacks meaning and criticizes the assumption that economic growth brings peace. In many countries, rapid growth over a sustained period of time has not ended violence, like in Brazil where the war stopped, but the country struggled with institutional mess, unresolved extremes of accumulation and poverty and widespread violence. Another example is Colombia, which has combined a stable state with sustained economic growth on the one hand, and persistent civil war and non-war violence on the other. Cramer argues that by some estimates more people are killed in non-war violence in Colombia than in the civil war, and refers to that in the year 2000 Colombia's homicide rate was the highest recorded anywhere in the world with 63 per 100 000 inhabitant.

The liberal interpretation of war, where peace is the natural condition of society and war is unnatural, has been the dominating one (Cramer 2006). In contrast to this, Cramer argues that wars are not exclusively negative in their consequences. Wars combine destruction with change; they provoke social, institutional and sometimes technical adjustments. There is a paradox of violence and war; violence destroys, but is also often associated with social creativity. Cramer believes that to distinguish between good wars and bad wars is "still a tempting notion" (2006:285): "Of course civil war, all war and all violence are stupid. But civil war, or more broadly violence in developing countries, is not irrational or pointless"

(Cramer 2006:283). By this he means that contemporary violent conflicts are not eruptions of meaninglessness or outbursts of savage backwardness. He gives El Salvador as an example, where violence might have escalated in a series of provocative statements but ultimately there have been established limits to the extent of exploitation in Salvadoran society. The communication of violence may almost always tend to produce some kind of peace as understanding.

Cramer (2006) argues that class is more relevant to understand contemporary violent conflicts than usually acknowledged, albeit a slightly more up to date concept of a class than Marx's traditional perception of it. Violence and war have been common experiences of transition since the very early origins and spread of capitalism, but war is not inevitable and the challenge is always to secure social and economic transformations, and minimalize the devastation involved. In a violent conflict the challenge is not just to minimize its damage, but to maximize any potential for positive change that might arise in the course of that conflict.

The role of civil society in conflict transformation

> Just as the costs and benefits of war are borne differently by different participants in war economics, so too are the costs and benefits of peace (Ballentine & Sherman 2003:6).

Civil society and social movements can turn out to be crucial to be able to transform a conflict and reach a peaceful resolution. There is a positive correlation between the degree of civil society involvement in peace negotiations and the sustainability of peace agreements (Wanis-St.John & Kew 2006 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). However, originally civil society was generally not given any role in peacebuilding, and it was considered a complicating factor in international conflicts (Berman & Johnson 1977 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). Not until the 1960s peace research was established as a discipline, but the Cold War became a main focus for a time. In the mid-1990s the focus shifted from the role of external to the role of internal actors of the conflict-affected country (Lederach 1997 in Paffenhlolz & Spurk 2006). Since then, many non-state actors have been involved in peacebuilding activities like dialogue projects, peacebuilding training, peace funds and capacity building programs (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). A new emphasis on peacebuilding has emerged, emphasizing developmental efforts supporting peace (Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse 2005 in Stokke 2010). Such peacebuilding has broadened to mean comprehensive conflict transformation before, during and after violent conflict.

Rupesinghe (1998a in Orjuela 2004) thinks non-state actors, or civil society, can contribute in a limited, but important way to the transformation in internal conflicts, and according to Wallensteen (2002), a participatory civil society is essential for a stable society and for sustaining democratic society. Active, numerous, independent, non-governmental, non-violent civilian-based organizations are important. Orjuela (2004) supports this, and argues that the solutions cannot be imposed from above or from the outside. She thinks the peace processes in South Africa and Northern Ireland show that including civil society in the process gives a better chance for a positive outcome, and Wallensteen (2002) argues that civil society also played an important role in bringing down autocratic regimes like in Thailand in 1992, Indonesia in 1998 and the Philippines in 2000. A strong civil society can be a barrier to military control in a society. In the phase of implementation of peace agreements, civil society has a special role. For example, they bring up cases of human rights violations which the government have overlooked or neglected.

Stokke (2010) cites four overarching dimensions or areas of peacebuilding: public security, economic recovery which implies establishing socio-economic foundations of long-term peace, social healing by establishing the political framework of long-term peace and more democratic institutions which includes reconciliation and justice (Smith 2004, Jeong 2005:12-13 in Stokke 2010). Further, there are some common patterns that can impact or limit civil society activity in a conflict situation (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). One is destroyed physical infrastructure, which limits communication and makes mobility and close contact with civilians more difficult. Also state structures or institutions which are important to civil society's work become weakened or non-responsive. Another factor is lawlessness and lack of security that may endanger civil society actors. In some cases, there is also a suppression of basic human rights which limits most civil society activities. Trust disappears, and social capital outside family or ethnic affiliation deteriorates or is destroyed (Stiefel 2001 in Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). Finally, the media often becomes strongly restricted, something that limits civil society's possibility to communicate their case to the public or the government.

Orjuela (2004) suggests three interrelated functions of civil society in conflict resolution. Firstly, put pressure on key actors in a conflict. Secondly, work with ordinary people to build popular support for peace movements and improve local relations between groups. Thirdly, play a role as an intermediary between ordinary people and key actors. This means that civil society acts on intermediary level between those acting in conflict and those suffering from the consequences. Orjuela considers actors in civil society to have a special

status as relatively independent from the key actors in a conflict, something that makes them suitable spokespersons for the interests of grassroots communities.

Paffenholz & Spurk (2006) argue that there are seven key functions for civil society in conflict situations. The first is *protecting* citizens' life, freedom and property against attacks by the authorities as well as *monitoring* activities of state and non-state actors in regard to conflicts. Civil society organizations may also contribute to reconciliation by *socializing* citizens into norms of tolerance, mutual trust and peaceful conflict resolution and promote *social cohesion* by bridging social capital across societal cleavages. In the development field, NGOs and self-help groups are expected to engage in *service provisioning*. Finally, civil society organizations may also contribute to political transformations through *advocacy and public communications* of interests by creating channels of communication and raising public debates and *intermediation* between interest groups and the state. Apart from the security-oriented functions which are specific to conflict situations, the others correspond to the roles that are emphasized in the general discourse in civil society, namely (i) to generate social capital and inclusion in society; (ii) to provide political representations for popular interest and demands; and, (iii) to support development through self-help and service provisioning (Edwards 2004 in Stokke 2010).

García-Durán (2006) believes that the peace activists and organizations face a particular challenge in Colombia because the peace negotiations have turn out to be an elitist project, which is to marginalize those who favor non-violent options. García-Durán argues that it is necessary to prevent this peace building model that in practice rewards the violent and punishes the non-violent actors, and to offer concrete alternatives to move toward peace and social justice through nonviolent means. This is only possible with the empowerment of civil society organizations, so they become able to claim their place in the social and political processes, having contact with the political parties or directly participating in the social and political activities. García-Durán argues that the mobilization for peace needs to be linked to a broader social spectrum. In the Guatemalan peace process there was a parallel forum to the ordinary peace negotiations where civil society discussed related issues and gave recommendations in the process (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). It was established to ensure a broad based peace process without including too many actors. In this processes the form of selecting the civil society representatives is central, due to the fact that locally based organizations tend to have more legitimacy and acceptance. Lederach (1997 in Paffenholz & Spurk) supports this, and points out that national actors are to be preferred over outsiders in peacebuilding, and that non-governmental peace initiatives are as necessary as official or

unofficial diplomatic efforts. The importance of viewing civil society as wider than NGOs has become clear. Orjuela (2004) argues that the "NGOization" of social protest have led to a "taming of social movements" (Kaldor 2003 in Orjuela 2004), which implies a shift in focus away from peace movements and grassroots civic engagement, representing a trend of professionalization of the civil society.

Paffenholz & Spurk (2006) warn that the mere existence of and support for civil society does not automatically lead to peacebuilding. They claim that a good understanding of civil society's role and potential for peacebuilding is required. It is also important to recognize that certain roles and functions of civil society vary depending on the phase of conflict and may not all be equally relevant and effective in all conflict phases.

Civil society dwindles during a war because the space for organizing diminishes (Orjuela 2004). The conflict will generally cause insecurity and fear, and prevent people from participating in society. The fact that many civil society actors are forced to go into exile often weakens the organizations even more.

Even if civil society has been more involved in peacebuilding the last decade not much profound research or debate on the relationship between civil society and peacebuilding has been done (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006).

Summary of theories on conflict

When it comes to conflict theory, the most central explanation on why conflict arises are incompatibilities in power, resources, wealth and status. This view on conflict causes is closer to the concept of a positive peace rather than a negative peace. In conflict resolution, negotiation between the top level leaders and the two main actors, usually the state and an insurgency, is emphasized and the approach is most frequently used in many attempts of conflict resolution, also in Colombia. The conflict transformation theory, which draws on some of the elements of the other approaches to resolve a conflict, like the multi-track model, is gaining more and more support. The approach further explores how influence and change the roots and underlying causes of the conflicts. It also differs from the other approaches on the field by emphasizing more on the necessity of including actors in civil society in all the process of conflict resolution and transformation and it recognizes the existence of irresolvable conflicts. The role of civil society in conflict transformation is multiple and balance between being marginalized by the authoritarian authorities or some of the armed

actors in conflict and find strategies to be able to have an integral role in the process of transforming conflict and peacebuilding.

4 Social movements

In the section about social movements I will discuss three different theories within social movement theory. The aim is to explore what makes people mobilize and the dynamics in the political space of action. To do this I will first, after an introduction with an attempt to define social movements, discuss causes to conflict, activism and displacement and look further into theories about structural production of grievances. Then, I will go through structures of mobilization and collective identity to investigate how students are mobilized and organized, based on their background and what happens when entering the universities. Third, I will discuss political structures of possibility, scope of action, frames of contention and the repertoire or strategies of protest. The aim is to explore how to influence various venues, first in the universities, then through political channels and through different forms of public protest, and how their mobilizations suffer control and oppression. Finally, this is related to a discussion of the specific setting of Latin America, since the concept of social movements is contextually important.

Definition of social movements

Civil society is a broad term which encapsulates much of the organized activity outside the state or other public functions and family. Yet some parts of civil society work with more specific political goals in mind. Some of the organizations fall into the category of social movements, a term with its own limitations and problems of definitions.

McAdam (et al. 2001 in Nicholls 2007:607) defines social movements as "collective forms of contentious politics activated for the purposes of achieving political goals through nontraditional means". The social movements are contentious because they are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents when struggling for their claims (della Porta & Diani 2006, Nicholls 2007). Nicholls (2007) argues further that the goals of most social movements are better redistribution of resources and power. According to della Porta & Diani (2006) the success of the mobilization relies on the movement's ability to organize discontent, reduce the costs of an action, create solidarity networks, and achieve external consensus.

Some scholars define social movement both as networks of interaction and specific organizations. However, della Porta & Diani (2006) claim that social movements are not organizations, but networks which include or exclude formal organizations like interest

groups, religious groups or political parties. A single organization is not a movement, but may be part of a social movement process. Della Porta & Diani argue that social movements have participants and not members, and that there is more space for individuals in a movement compared to an organization. Della Porta & Diani (2006) point out that the actors in social movements are linked together by dense informal networks, and they share a distinct collective identity. A movement is only "in place" when collective identities develop to structural connections which are stronger than specific events and initiatives. The participants establish connections between different incidents that happen at different places in different times, which are relevant to their own experiences. These are woven together in broader and extensive narratives.

The term *new social movements* refers to movements that rose in the 1960s and 1970s. Civil society, poverty and wealth gaps were central issues in "old movements", while "new movements" focus more on ethics, values and identity. Originally, there was one American and one European tradition of social movement theory with two different models of collective action. The European model was based on Marxist and structural-functionalist explanations, while the American explained collective actions as actors' attempt to deal with crisis (della Porta & Diani 2006). Western Europe's strong labor movement made the new social movements really look new, but in the United States, where labor movements were less important, the social movements were explained by the ability of outsider groups to mobilize resources, and not by big societal changes (Foweraker 1995). Within European theory the aim was to explain *why* social movements rose, while in the United States the focus was to explain *how* social movements mobilized. Identity is a central question in the new social movement theory developed in Europe, while the resource mobilization theory, which is further discussed later on in this chapter, came from North America and focused on strategy. Later scholars use concepts from both of these approaches (della Porta & Diani 2006). Foweraker (1995) argues that new social movement theory can explain the increasing incidence and broader scope of social mobilization in Latin America, while resource mobilization theory might address the political constraints and opportunities and explain the social movement success. Foweraker (1995) argues that only new social movement theory has been applied to Latin America.

According to della Porta & Diani (2006) analysis of social movements should include the structural changes in social conflict patterns as well as the role of cultural representations in social conflicts. The processes that transform values, interests and ideas to collective action are also important, along with how a specific context influence a movement's possibility to

succeed. In the following section, structural production of grievances will be explored, followed by mobilization structures and collective identity, and rounded off with a review of political structures of possibility and protest strategies. A short analysis on Latin America will also be drawn, as work on civil society should take into account the contextual nature of conflicts and the specific civil arrangements this leads to. A discussion of civil society or social movement activity should include an understanding of the specific and historically contingent situation the conflict and its actors are situated in.

Structural production of grievances

The scholars of structural theory see structural differences like production of grievances as a base for mobilization. The approach to social movements can be divided in three; the understanding of oppression as something based on material conditions, as political exclusion, or as a denial of identity or culture (della Porta & Diani 2006). Structural differences in society constitute a reason for mobilization against oppression. A classical view in structural theory is Marx' analysis of class, that exploitation of the workers leads to organizing of resistance in the working class. Structural interpretation of social movements originates in industrialization of society and the emergency of the markets, where conflict based on the dichotomy between capital and labor first arose (della Porta & Diani 2006). With the construction of the nation-state there were territorial conflicts between the new central state and peripheral, rural areas. The idea is that "structure affects collective action by creating forms of dependence between social groups and thus the potential of conflicting interests" (della Porta & Diani 2006:37).

According to a structural view, shared grievances and beliefs about the cause and possible means of reducing grievances are important preconditions for the emergence of a social movement (McCarthy & Zald 1990). For a social movement to arise, an intensifying of grievances or deprivation must take place, together with development of a common ideology. Discontent based on different structural conditions is a necessary condition for a specific social movement to arise, and there must be a collective and general opinion concerning what are the causes of discontent and how to redress it.

A movement in a country with an internal conflict differs from the movements working for peace in Europe or the United States, according to the system reform view, which is part of García-Durán's (2006) framework for interpretation of peace work. Instead of concentrating only on security related issues, which is common in Europe and the United

States, the focus in countries with an internal conflict is on resolving structural problems that affect people's life, and the organizations have multiple tasks and objectives. War implies deterioration of the social situation which leads to poverty and provokes other problems. Peace does not only consist of ending the war, but also achieving higher levels of justice and development. The denial of identity, religious and cultural rights may be other structural problems that have to be confronted. García-Durán argues that the struggle for democracy is the second central issue on the peace agenda in repressive and excluding regimes. It has not been easy to reach consensus within the movement or find a focus that boost the mobilization for what Galtung (1996) calls positive peace, and not be satisfied with achieving a negative peace. However, the disappointment produced by failures in peace negotiations can lead to broad support for political candidates who advocate strong safety as a mean to defeat the opponents, as was the case of Israel (García-Durán 2006). The election of Uribe points indicates that this is a factor in Colombia as well.

García-Durán (2006) argues that there must be somebody to negotiate with, and in a war situation the hostility could be strong. Therefore there must be a transformation of the culture of looking at each other as enemies and one must move towards a peaceful or nonviolent society (Coronel Ferrer 1997 in García-Durán 2006). However, García-Durán (2006) argues that in countries suffering from armed conflict, there is a particular debate on the use of violence. The presence of guerrilla groups with political demands like liberation, autonomy, equality or democracy makes the political struggle more open, and the legitimacy of the use of violence is contested. Some political sectors favor theories and practices of change that promote radical and violent transformations to challenge the power structures. Such sectors consider the struggle for peace "trivial" or light and as something that does not guarantee the elimination of the roots of the conflict.

Social movements in Latin America

Although there are some similarities between the social movements in Latin America and those in North America or Europe, the nature of the movements, their needs, their cultural makeup, and their significance are very different, and these similarities are rather limited (Escobar & Alvarez 1992, Foweraker 1995). Social movements in Latin America arose in conditions of a stronger material deprivation than in the North. An essential factor for the development of the movements was the struggle against authoritarian regimes or military dictatorship at the end of the 1960s (Foweraker 1995, Paffenholz & Spurk 2006).

Furthermore, movements that arose within weak and deliberately divided civil societies, often suffer from strong authoritarian tendencies (Foweraker 1995). The weak tradition of welfare led Latin American movements to struggle to secure basic social services and public utilities. The authoritarianism made basic civil liberties and the rights of citizenship the central concern of the movements.

For most communities and associations in Latin America the basic issue is how to consume enough to survive, and material demands remain paramount for the great majority of social movements (Foweraker 1995). Thus, it is mainly the lower classes which mobilize for reasons of work, wages, services and housing rather than the educated middle class who have their basic needs covered and the time and income to organize and agitate.

In the 1960s and 1970s the social and political environment changed with a shift from rural to urban population (Foweraker 1995). This had a strong impact on social movements in Latin America, and urban social movements were not merely a natural result of poverty or marginality but a response to state policies. They demanded social services, public utilities and access to land and water, but the military or authoritarian states suppressed such struggles. The labor or agrarian movements continued with the rise of these new urban movements.

Mobilization structures and collective identity

Identity is often a base for mobilization. Identities are multiple and the different identities can be politicized in different ways, at different times and places. A social movement succeeds when it is able to make people feel a certain collective identity related to the issue the movement work with (Painter & Jeffrey 2010). Painter & Jefferey argue that whether they are able to capitalize on that politicization as a social movement depends, among other things, on the mixture of resources which it is able to mobilize. They explain that a happening may be the factor that initiates the discursive construction of a social movement. In Colombia the implantation of rough budget cuts in the university sector or the assassination of a student activist in a demonstration may be examples of such factors. In order to continue the discursive construction after the reaction on such an incident, movements develop narratives about their activities, victories and defeats (Painter & Jeffrey 2010). The songs of the Colombian student organizations to commemorate the assassinated student leaders are examples of this. Further, Painter & Jeffrey (2010) argue that social movements often promote representations of the movement as a struggle against oppression or discrimination.

The success of the movement also depends on the resources that the movement draws to promote its ideas. *The resource mobilization* theory focuses on the resources needed to transform discontent into mobilization (della Porta & Diani 2006). The scholars of resource mobilization theory try to explain how some movements arise and others do not, and how detached individuals make up a social actor (Foweraker 1995). This approach does not accept the assumption that since people generally are more or less equally miserable the reason for social movements to arise seems self-evident (della Porta & Diani 2006). Tension and structural conflict is not enough to make a social movement grow big. Conflicts of interest, opposing ideologies, differences in opinions and feelings of unease are not alone causing development of collective action and social movements. The capacity of the movement depends on material resources like work, money, concrete benefits and services, but also nonmaterial resources like faith, moral engagement, people's time, commitment and friendship. The tactic and choices made by the social movement and consequences of collective action on political and social issues depend on the kind of resources available (McCarthy & Zald 1997, Edwards & McCarthy 2004 in della Porta & Diani 2006). Issues analyzed in this theory school are how collective actions operate, how they acquire resources and mobilize support inside and outside their group.

The approach is based on rational choice theory, which assumes that people act on the basis of rational calculations about the cost, benefits and likely outcomes. Critics of resource theory claim that a person cannot necessarily plan rationally in advance, and that good access to resources alone is not enough to mobilize (Painter & Jeffrey 2010). However, as Painter & Jeffrey argue, the success and impact of action do only partly depend on the resources mobilized in the pursuit of the goals.

Framing contention

Nicholls (2007) argues that social movements could be oppositional or contentious. This implies that they are opposed to one or more element of the existing social and political order. They are in conflict with other groups or institutions in society who wish to preserve the status quo. In this conflict, the social movements can take the use of *framing* to make changes. A frame could be explained as a schema of interpretation that people rely on to understand and respond to events. A framing process occurs on different levels and between different actors. *Mobilizing frames* is the alignment between organizations and people. The other level

is *competitive frames*, or the struggle over meaning, where the counterparts of an organization could be the state and political institutions or other organizations.

The mobilizing framing rekindles the issue of grievances and explores how social movements mobilize support (Crossley 2002). Snow (et al. 1986 in Crossley 2002) argues that social movements should try to link their frames with those of the potential constituents to secure support and resources of those constituents, so-called frame alignment. There are different possibilities for alignment as well as different techniques of doing this. Snow *et al.* argue that *frame bridging* is useful in cases where constituents hold consistent but unconnected frames to social movements, and they can align themselves with those constituents by informing them of a certain issue and drawing out the connections that people can recognize. For example groups that are concerned with student rights might be encouraged to participate in a new student rights campaign simply by having the issues presented to them as student right issues. *Frame amplification* means, according to Snow *et al.*, to draw a population's latent sentiments and schemas, like connecting people's already existing values with a particular cause. *Frame extension* is to extend the social movement's own basic frame and align to popular causes to win the people supporting it to join their organization. It may also involve aspiration of adopting culture or practices of a particular group in effort to draw young people into their frame.

According to Snow *et al.* (1986 in Crossley 2002) the organizations must create a "bridge" between themselves and their potential constituents. Tarrow (1998 in Crossley 2002) adds the importance of a central role of emotion in both collective action and framing. He argues that organizations must engage strategically with the symbols and culture that creates and communicate people's understandings of the world to maximize their support. The grievances interpretation is important, especially when suddenly imposed. Grievances can generate emotions which the organizations need to channel and manage. Frames make sense of and channels emotions. Tarrow points out that emotions play a central role in fueling activism. The activists' feeling of injustice moves them to actions because their feelings are framed as feelings of injustice. The process of frame alignment should attempt to benefit the symbols which are emotionally invested if they are to be effective. Framing takes place in a contest of struggle.

Tarrow (1998 in Crossley 2002) argues that an important area for framing is mass media, but in most cases media will reproduce the framing of the ruling classes. Crossley disagrees on this and believe that there are examples where mass media has contributed to changing the framing of issues concerning social movement organizations. Diani (1996 in

Crossley 2002) argues that anti-system and anti-establishment frames have more resonance and more effectiveness when there is a high degree of conflict in society. However opportunities for working within it are low.

This discussion on the struggle over meaning brings us over to the concept of *competitive frames*; the alignment happening between organizations and the state and political institutions or between one organization and another organization. Central to this is the field of *contentious politics*. Tilly & Tarrow (2007) argue that contention, collective action and politics converge into contentious politics. Their aim is to explore how dynamics of social protest are tied to their political, social and economic context. Social movements often engage in this contentious politics, which can be explained as the use of disruptive techniques to make a political point or change with the use of actions that disturb the normal activities of society, such as demonstrations, riot, civil disobedience or insurrection. Tilly & Tarrow's definition of the concept is: "Interactions in which actors make claims that bear on someone else's interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are as targets, the objects of claims, or third parties" (2007:202).

Instead of defining all forms of social protest as social movements, Tilly & Tarrow (2007) use a narrower definition. They believe that social movements share some elements with other forms of political contention such as coups, electoral campaigns, strikes, revolutions, and interest-group politics, but have their own distinct characteristics. Most forms of contentious politics are not social movements. They define social movement as a combination of a sustained campaign of claim-making, an array of performances based on organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities. These contentious performances are standardized ways in which one set of political actors makes collective claims on some other set of political actors, for example mass demonstrations. Tilly & Tarrow present the concept c*ontentious repertoires* which they define as forms of collective actions or arrays of contentious performances that are currently known and available within some set of political actors. These repertoires of contention are repertoires of claim-making routines that apply to the same claimant-objects. Social movement repertoires are the context-specific, standard operating procedures of social movements, such as public meetings, lobbying, solemn processions, special-purpose associations and coalitions, demonstrations, petition drives, and pamphleteering.

Political structures of possibility and protest strategies

Political opportunities are also central to the growth or decline of social movements. Political process theory shares with the resource mobilization theory a rational view of action, but pays more systematic attention to the political and institutional environment in which social movements operate (della Porta & Diani 2006). The relationship between institutional political actors and protest is central. Social movements interact with actors who enjoy a consolidated position in politics. According to Tarrow, social movements that operate in favorable political environment will grow, because the risks associated with participation in the movement are reduced (Painter & Jeffrey 2010).

According to Nicholls (2007), there are four basic elements that structure the political opportunities of social movements. Firstly, the relative openness or closure of a political system. Secondly, the stability of ruling elite alignments. Thirdly, the availability of elite allies in the system; and lastly the degree of repressiveness. Canel stresses that existing institutional and political structures and traditions often inhibit the effectiveness and continuity of social movements (Craig 1990 in Escobar & Alvarez 1992).

Every social movement develops in a particular geographical context, which provides the resources and opportunities for its development (Painter & Jeffrey 2010). Painter & Jeffrey argue that social movements can "use" geography to further their objectives. The movements can for example scale up their activities from local to national, to spatially extend networks with activists in other contexts, or to root their work in local, place-based concerns.

Scale shift is the movement from a low level scale to a higher scale, and can contribute to the organization's development of social networks across geographical and social boundaries (Tarrow & McAdam 2005 in Nicholls 2007). This extension of a movement through pre-existing relational ties is called "relational diffusion". Nicholls (2007) argues that being at the same *place* and sharing similar experiences creates strong trusting relations between the activists. Tilly (2005 in Nicholls 2007) points out that these networks are important to create trust and certainty when people use their resources in collective mobilization and social movement campaigns. Nicholls (2007) adds that these strong ties make it more possible that people stick to the project even if the risk of involvement increases.

One might be think that place itself is a uniform factor, some background factor to be accounted for. However, geographical proximity and stability are not the only reasons for the feeling of trust (Coleman 1988, Collins 2004 in Nicholls 2007), and might not exert such a direct influence on the movement. Massey (2004 in Nicholls 2007) criticizes the

territorialized conceptions of place and scale and questions the view of place as something with homogenous interests and identities. She would rather highlight the internal multiplicity of places, the pluralistic exchange between the actors within these areas and interactions across different sites. Amin (2004 in Nicholls 2007) argues that spatial configuration and spatial boundaries are no longer only territorial or scalar. In a globalized world, where social movements can draw on modern communications technology and their members can sometimes move around and across borders, socio-spatial relations in and between groups that work with the same aims, but in different places, would in many cases have more in common and trust each other more than people related simply through territorial location.

Nicholls (2007) believes the economic and political powers are articulated in *spatially uneven* ways, and that this produces variations in the grievances and development trajectories of social movements. Since social movements mostly operate at the intersection of a series of overlapping state spaces, such as municipality, regions, nation state, international agencies, it provides a highly complex mix of opportunities and constrains for advancing their causes (Miller 2004, Sikkink 2005 in Nicholls 2007). Nicholls (2007) argues that the uneven nature of capitalism not only differentiates grievance structures across space, but also concentrates and disperses the resources needed to make social movements possible.

Summary of theories on social movements

Social movements are collective forms of contentious politics with the purpose to achieve political goals through nontraditional means. The structural production of shared grievances and beliefs about the cause and possible means of reducing grievances are important preconditions for the emergence of a social movement. Social movements in Latin America arose in conditions of material deprivation, and an essential factor for the development of the movements was the struggle against authoritarian regimes, which in many ways is the case in Colombia. Social movements should seek to find factors that initiate the discursive construction of a social movement, and contentious framing could be central for mobilization. Political opportunities are central to the growth as well as the decline of social movements.

5 Methodology

In this chapter I will present how I have proceeded to study the strategies and political analysis of the displaced student activists in Colombia. The aim of this chapter is to explain the methodological choices made during the course of study. My methodological approach comprises qualitative methods applied during fieldwork in Colombia and the use of secondary sources. I will start with the conduction of the fieldwork and explain the concrete methods used to collect data. Then I will give an overview of what I consider to be the most important reflections on my fieldwork and data collection process. I will discuss the challenges I met in terms of ethics, accessing informants and handling uneven power relations in the field. I will especially focus on security related issues because I did my fieldwork in the context of civil war among a group of people with major security problems. Lastly, I will show how I analyzed the data collected.

Qualitative methods seek profundity in the data material and emphasize meaning. Qualitative approaches concern processes that are interpreted within a context (Neuman 2000 in Thagaard 2003). The methodological choice in a study will always depend on the purpose of the study. In qualitative research the goal is to gain an understanding of a phenomenon in society, which implies a high degree of interpretation (Thagaard 2003). Thagaard argues that a basic feature of qualitative research is the direct contact that often occurs between researcher and informant, and this will affect the material the scientist gathers during the research process. Conducting a research project on a rather unexplored and undocumented field in a setting of armed conflict and insecurity of the people involved, I considered it best to base the research project on a method which could reveal new insight to and perspectives on the issue, as well as generate a high level of confidence. The researchers' ethical responsibilities are linked to three main principles that apply in all phases of the project, namely: i) informed consent, ii) confidentiality and iii) the consequences of participating in the research project (Kvale 1996, Thagaard 2003), are discussed throughout this chapter.

The fieldwork

I carried out the fieldwork in Colombia from mid-August to mid-October 2007. The aim of the fieldwork was to interview students who had been forced into internal displacement because of political activism at universities. To refine the sample I sought displaced students who had fled to Bogotá since president Uribe entered office in 2002. The fieldwork includes

method triangulation, consisting of interviews, participant observation and the use of documents for background information. According to Fangen (2004) this triangulation improves the validity of the informant's statements.

Before the fieldwork I had been to Colombia five times previously and I spoke fluent Spanish. These previous visits, where I became acquainted with Bogotá and central persons in the student movement, made it possible to begin my research soon after arriving. At the end of the fieldwork I had completed eighteen interviews[7], conducted over a period of five weeks.

The interviews

The aim of the fieldwork was to obtain profound knowledge about the situation of internally displaced student activists. Qualitative interviews were a natural choice of method since interviews, according to Thagaard (2003), are a good way of gathering information about a person's experiences, point of view and self-understanding. The interview method is particularly suited to studying people's understanding of the meanings in their world (Kvale 1996).

I chose to conduct individual semi-structured interviews, where the researcher has an interview schedule[8], but can vary the order of the questions and follow up with further questions according to the informant's answers (Bryman 2004). The advantage of the semi-structured interview versus the structured or unstructured interview to my approach was that a semi-structured interview made it possible to delve into essential information that I may not have taken into account when making the interview guide. In this way it was also possible to compare the answers afterwards, which was necessary with so many informants.

I usually met the informant one time before the actual interview to explain the project. This way I could ensure informed consent, i.e., that the person that is being studied is informed of the basic features and overall purpose of the project he or she participates in (Kvale 1996, Thagaard 2003). Too much information can influence the behavior of the informants and the information gathered by the researcher (Thagaard 2003), so I tried not to discuss details, but rather focus on building up confidence with them to ensure that the informants were participating voluntarily and were aware of the right to withdraw at any time, like Kvale (1996) stresses.

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[7] See appendix 2: Overview of informants
[8] See appendix 1:Interview guide

I let the informants determine the place for the interview to ensure that they felt comfortable and safe in the interview setting. When the interview took place in a park or a café I offered the informants something to eat or drink to be polite and because I knew that some of them, especially those who had recently arrived in Bogotá, did not have any income and depended on others to cover even such basic needs as food. I was aware of the importance of not creating a situation where the respondents who volunteered did so for payment. I was also aware of the danger of insulting respondents by offering them something in return for an interview they considered a natural part of their work or a favor to me or people in their organizations. Most of the respondents politely turned down the offer of food. Later in the fieldwork when I became better acquainted with them I interpreted the rejection as a combination of an expression of politeness and that most of them really considered it natural to participate. They saw the interview as an opportunity to pursue their strategy of denouncing the incidents they had been exposed to, and considered it strange to want anything in return.

Participant observation

In this research project I participated in and observed meetings, seminars, cultural activities related to displacement, political demonstrations, presentations or speeches, and activities related to the ongoing local election campaign. I had meetings with NGOs working on human rights or peace issues, with student organizations, different personalities from political parties and professors, and I visited universities and libraries. The information I gained helped me locale other relevant people, interpret the interview data and find written sources and literature about activism, IDPs and the situation in Colombia in general. Bryman (2004) describes participant observation as taking place when a researcher immerses herself in a group for an extended period, observing behavior, listening to what is said in conversations and asking questions. Fangen (2004) argues that a partly participating observer should not be on the side of interaction, but take the role the other participants give her if she agrees on the particular role. As a main rule the researcher should participate, but avoid actively changing the interaction.

According to Thagaard (2003), observing while participating gives a good qualitative basis to the understanding of the social context, and Fangen (2004) points out that this is a method where the researcher participates not only as a scientist but also as a human being. Skjervheim (1996 in Fangen 2004) emphasizes that the method requires the researcher to engage with the human beings she studies and to act as a subject in a conversation, instead of

standing outside and being a stranger. In informal settings I built confidence with the informants, gathered relevant information about the research topics, about the activities they had participated in and what events they were planning on engaging in next. I could discuss both ideas for the thesis as well as the conflict in the country or the situation for the displaced people. In the Colombian organizational culture many ideas and plans emerge in informal settings. Fangen (2004) points out an advantage of using this method: the researcher obtains first-hand information and he or she comes closer to people's reality beyond situations arranged by the researcher, which strengthens the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data. Spending time with people in the student movement functioned as a corrective to the information obtained in the interviews, and there were cases where I discovered that some informants somewhat modified the truth, especially in relating confidential information concerning their security situation. On the other hand, I had asked the informants about their personal histories and their point of view, and they were free to emphasize other things than I was expecting based on the interview guide.

Thagaard (2003) stresses that the relationship between the researcher and the informant, the closeness and the sensitivity, is important for the material the researcher ends up with. The fact that I was a student, of the same age and similar political background as the informants, made it easier to be present in the places and spaces the student activists were and interact with them and observe. Meeting them in informal settings was crucial to the fieldwork, like going to one of the student bars where the different student organizations gathered. There I was introduced to central people in the student movement and potential informants. The reputation of the person who introduced me to someone was of vital importance, because if he or she was considered trustworthy, I was too.

Fangen (2004) points out that as a researcher you are expected to do the same things as the people you study, but being present as a researcher and human being could change or influence the situation. It was neither possible nor desirable for me to participate at the same level and in the same way as the displaced student activists. I would, for instance, never know exactly how it is to be forcefully displaced or to feel the pressure due to lack of security.

An ethical aspect of participant observation is that the researcher implicitly accepts the common understanding of an issue when she participates in certain activities (Fangen 2004). I was especially concerned with emphasizing the observing aspect of participant observing when I on two occasions went with some activists to the violent student demonstrations called

tropels[9]. This strong form of expression indicates a high degree of conflict between the students and the authorities, and my presence could by an outsider easily be understood as an action of support. It was impossible to avoid this, so I kept a low profile and made sure to always stay in the peaceful sectors of the demonstration.

To avoid cultural biases as a foreigner without profound knowledge of the context I was in, I tried during the fieldwork to follow the news and be where the people were with the aim of knowing the culture, the music, the food and the everyday life better. Living in Bogotá with students and young activists was a conscious choice because it gave me unique access to the Colombian society and the groups I was studying. As Thagaard (2003) stresses, observation provides information about a person's behavior and how the persons relate to each other.

The role of the researcher

Being so close to the informants, spending so much time with them and being present in social settings with them is not without difficulties. The honesty, knowledge and integrity of the researcher are all crucial factors (Kvale 1996). The researcher has a scientific responsibility to her or his profession and subjects; to find, control and verify the data as best as possible.

According to Thagaard (2003), the close relationship between researcher and respondent is based on a fundamental asymmetry because the researcher is writing about the informant afterwards, or as Nielsen (1996 in Thagaard 2003) formulates it: the researcher is a kind of spy. As a researcher interpreting the interviews and observing in a foreign context, I could potentially have more power than the respondents. However, most of the people contributing were students themselves, which meant that they had knowledge about and often high consciousness of what was implied by a research project and fieldwork. Most of the non-students I met were people in different organizations in civil society and social movements. Both the latter and the student activists were highly concerned about the human rights situation in Colombia and welcomed people that were interested in doing a project on that issue. My impression was that the respondents wanted me to have all the information they gave me and that they wanted me to write about it.

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[9] *Tropel* is, in this context, a violent demonstration or confrontation between activists and the authorities, usually the police, at the university.

The researcher may have different types of relations to their subjects: exploiter, reformer, advocate, and friend (Kvale 1996). A challenge related to the researcher–respondent relationship is gender. The literature on the implication of the researcher's gender is concentrated on female researchers and male respondents (Thagaard 2003). Lundgren (1993 in Thagaard 2003) introduces the concept of *gender dichotomization*. According to Lundgren situations may arise where the male respondents underline that researcher and respondent represent different genders and try to take advantage of this dichotomy to strengthen their masculinity. In my fieldwork, I experienced losing the possibility of further contact with a potential informant because of a situation similar to what is described by Lundgren.

Fangen (2004) argues that it is important to find a position between participation and analytic distance, between doing all research from the office desk and being a non-observing participant, or even "going native"; to copy the culture and lose all distance and analytic ability. To avoid adopting the values and standards of the environment studied, reflection over such processes is vital. It is central to find a balance between seeing the world from the informant's point of view given their situation and living condition, which could be an important step to obtaining profound knowledge, and assessing their opinion critically.

As will be discussed further in chapter 7, students fearing for their lives because of political activities at the universities were more likely to be on the left than on the right side in politics. As briefly mentioned, my contacts in the student movement knew me from before the fieldwork as a person sympathizing with their cause and they mentioned this when introducing me to potential informants, because many in civil society Colombia are afraid to speak openly to people they do not know. I am aware that my political background may have prevented some groups and people to fully trust me or maybe even to meet with me, but it also made it more probable that the group I studied would become more likely to trust me. On a general level, Fangen (2004) argues, most sociologists are politically interested in the sense that social studies is often about taking the party of the oppressed or pointing out inequities in society. Social researchers are sometimes put in a position where they "take sides". Becker (1967 in Bryman 2004) argues that it is not possible to do research that is unaffected by our personal sympathies, because it is difficult not to take sides, considering that many research projects are conducted in the context of hierarchical relationships. Gouldner (1968 in Bryman 2004) disagrees, arguing that a researcher does not necessarily sympathize with a group just because he or she takes the point of view of a group in society seriously. Kvale (1996) argues that ideally, the aim of a research project should not only be to develop scientific knowledge, but also to improve the situation of the people studied, while Fangen (2004) emphasizes that

there is no consensus as to whether science should have the objective to promote change or not. She focuses on the effect the study could have on the informants. In any case, it is important to avoid cognitive bias or confirmation bias, i.e., the tendency to apply and interpret the information that supports the researcher's own views or opinions and avoid searching for information and interpretations that contradict the researcher's presumptions and beliefs (Bryman 2004).

The social researcher is never conducting an investigation in a moral vacuum, in an objective, value-neutral way. An ethical challenge proposed by fieldwork is the possibility of the researcher ending up emotionally empathizing with the informants' point of view to a greater extent than what is ideal. Habermas (1984 in Fangen 2004) argues that social science should not be neutral or objective to social phenomena. Rather than strive for neutrality at all costs, the researcher should clarify his or her position and reflect critically on it. Mies (1993 in Bryman 2004) introduces the concept of *conscious partiality*, affirming that value-neutral research is undesired. It would for example be incompatible with the values of feminism to conduct research on women in an objective, value-neutral way.

Fangen (2004) argues that for the politically engaged researcher in the actual field it is difficult to detach herself or himself from pre-assumptions. It is crucial that the researcher reflects on the way these assumptions have influenced what he or she has or has not seen and how to interpret the material. Most people I met were active in an organization and were likely to have a political agenda. The places they took me to and what they told me influenced my impression of the topic studied. Concerned about confirming my biased political opinions or being considered a person to the left I took measures like meeting with a broad spectrum of people and organizations to obtain a more diverse perspective on the issues related to this thesis. Fangen (2004) argues that it is important to avoid taking side in a conflict, and a potential solution to that would be to study all groups and levels to understand the different parties' point of view. I tried to establish contact with the government officials to hear their side of the issue studied, but I did not succeed. Neither did I succeed in getting in touch with displaced student activists from the political right, something that is further discussed in the section about gathering a sample. However, this is not necessarily a crucial loss. Fangen (2004) points out that it is difficult to realize a study of all sides. She argues that in conflicts it is likely that the doors will be closed if one group's informants know that the researcher has been studying a group with conflicting aims. In practice, the best way of avoiding biases is to not under-communicate unflattering findings that do not suit or correspond with the researcher's personal political opinion.

There are diverse political tendencies on the Colombian left, and the guerrilla's role in particular is a much discussed and conflicted topic. Because I had worked with one of the actors on the left before, many assumed that I agreed with that group. I did not realize how "categorized" I was until after some weeks, when I was discussing issues related to the thesis with a professor at a university in Bogotá. In talking to me he emphasized only the role of the FARC guerrilla, focusing on how the guerrilla had changed during the last few years and why the guerrilla was unable to promote peace in Colombia. He persisted in this vein even as I expressed that I was not especially interested in that aspect of the conflict and tried to ask other questions. Not until later did I remember that I had mentioned to him that I had been working closely with a specific organization when I introduced myself, in order to make clear that I was on the left to make him trust me. This professor belonged to another faction on the Colombian left and believed that the organization I had mentioned have an overly favorable opinion of the guerrilla. This made him assume that I needed information that could change my point of view on this matter, even if I was not particularly interested in that aspect in this research project.

I did not quite understand how much being introduced as a "trustworthy person" and being a foreigner that was not a part of the Colombian conflict meant before an incident that occurred after I had been in Colombia for a month. I received an email from a Colombian student writing a paper on the same issue as I. He had heard of my project, and he asked if I knew of any displaced students. He told me that he knew they existed, but had not met a single one yet, after weeks of asking around. At this stage I had twenty-six names of potential informants that were displaced students, which was more than I needed. After meeting with him to form an impression of his credibility, I asked some of the persons on the list of potential informants if they wanted to call him, and since I recommended him, two of them agreed to be his informants and they helped him to find more informants. In this situation I was the responsible person in case this student turned out to be, for instance, a spy. This is why I did not give him their phone numbers, but rather had them contact him.

How was it that I had five informants even before going to Colombia, and met new ones every day, while this Colombian student did not know any displaced students? First of all he was studying at a private university where the students were likely to support president Uribe and his politics. Secondly, he was not a student activist himself and he did not know many people in the student movements. Third, he was actually also an internally displaced person, but because of the FARC and not the paramilitaries or the state. Since he had been threatened by the left-wing guerrilla, he was looked upon as being more likely to have an

agenda against the student movement. The fourth reason, and maybe the most important one, is that this student was Colombian, which made him part of the internal conflict. It was more likely that a Colombian student had a hidden agenda than a person from Norway.

The sample

The intention was to gather a strategic sample, which implies that the researcher chooses informants with qualities or qualifications that are strategic in regards to the research question (Thagaard 2003). I used the snowball method to gather the sample. In snowball sampling the researcher establishes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and uses these people to establish contact with others (Bryman 2004). The snowball method is not a way of achieving a representative or exhaustive sample (Thagaard 2003).

I used the snowball method in two ways to avoid reaching informants from only one contact net, something Thagaard (2003) warns against. One way was by contacting different student organizations that I had indications had IDP members. I asked people from the student organization I already knew and people from civil society to introduce me to the other organizations. Usually they introduced me to central persons and leaders in the other organizations at their university or people that they knew were IDPs. The other technique used was that of asking the informants at the end of every interview if they knew other students that were displaced. In most cases I was given more names. By following these two tracks of searching for new informants I accessed a more diverse group.

Almost all the IDPs that were told about the project, from me or from a friend of theirs, agreed to participate in the research project. I received a negative answer from only two IDPs, who were displaced very recently, and seemed confused and discontented about their situation as displaced. They returned to their hometown after a few weeks in Bogotá, against the wish of their student organization. The fact that these displaced students did not deal very well with their new life in Bogotá may illustrate a potential problem posed by the snowball method. Since it is based on the informants being available to the researcher, there is a danger that the sample could consist only of persons that are positive to the research or do not mind that their life situation is studied (Thagaard 2003).

I closed the standard search for more informants after a month's time and focused on reaching different kinds of informants to obtain what Thagaard (2003) calls a category based sample. This entails defining certain categories that should be represented in the sample and

choosing informants from each of these categories. The plan was to interview male and female internally displaced students, from different regions and universities, from different student organizations, with diverse political views and with different ethnic backgrounds. I almost realized that ambition, but I never had the chance to interview anyone of indigenous background or of very divergent political views. I failed to meet one organization for indigenous people that I planned to meet. In the search for right-wing IDPs I met with a liberal student representative at one of the private universities. He confirmed what people in the student movements and the informants already had told me; displaced students organized in a right-wing organization were rare (Fadiño, meeting 10.17.07). Many right-wing students do suffer from forced displacement, but because many of them come from affluent families they are very seldom displaced because of political activities at the universities since they are less likely to protest against the government. They do not receive death threats from the state or the paramilitary groups, like my informants did, but from guerrillas that threaten to kidnap or hurt them if their family does not pay to avoid it. Many families choose to send their sons or daughters to a safer university in Bogotá or abroad rather than paying or risking new threats or something happening. The liberal student leader explained that many of the wealthy students that find themselves in this situation go to the United States, something the less affluent student activists from the left in the student movements could never afford or maybe not want to do.

More displaced students than I needed were positive to the idea of being interviewed. I had to refuse some of them, because I considered that I had reached a saturation point of the sample. Reaching the saturation point signifies that more informants would not give additional understanding of the phenomenon and that the sample was sufficiently large (Thagaard 2003).

The informants

I conducted all but one interview in Bogotá. I interviewed six women and twelve men. There may be some more male than female students who are displaced, probably because there are more male students with high positions in the student organizations. At the time of the displacement, fifteen of the students were part of a political student organization, one was independent and one was not part of the student movement at all. The informants were from twenty to thirty-one years old. They came from twelve different places and attended eleven different universities, one of which is private. Two of the informants identified themselves as

Afro-Colombian and were part of the Afro-Colombian movement. The duration of the displacement varied from four weeks to over six years. Two of the informants were displaced to Bogotá during my fieldwork there.

The informants were very open and did not mind that the interviews were recorded, except for one who did not want to answer one of the questions while the microphone was on. It is important to be aware of the influence the recorder could have on the informant's answers and well-being. The informants assented to being recorded and I made it clear that we could turn the recorder off at any time. Since I wanted to preserve the informants' point of view, it was important for me to have everything they said on tape to ensure that my quotes were as correct as possible.

I found the informants open and seemingly pleased to share their personal stories and their points of view on the conflict even if a few did not answer all the questions. The informants were clearly affected by what they told me in the interview and on several occasions an informant started crying.

The persons referred to as informants in this research project are the eighteen displaced students I interviewed using the interview guide. Among the people I met in the organizations and at the universities I had several key informants who introduced me to persons and activities, as well as contributing essential information. According to Thagaard (2003) a key informant is a person the researcher develops a personal relationship with, who provides the researcher with good insight on the issues and that could be a partner of discussion or analysis. The key informants were very useful since there was little written data on the material I was working on and the security aspect of the topic sometimes made it difficult to access reliable information. To avoid the danger Bryman (2004) warns about, that of the researcher developing overly strong ties with and copying the interpretations of the key informant, I always tested out hypotheses and interpretations on the informants or other actors in the field.

Gatekeepers are persons who have the authority to open or block access to an environment or an organization (Hammersley & Atkinson 1996 in Thagaard 2003). They are often concerned with the researcher's motives, what they will gain and loose, and may seek to influence how the investigation take place (Bryman 2004). I was in special need of assistance when going to the *tropels*, because of the high degree of conflict and the probability of violent actions. This demonstration form is risky and therefore requires a high degree of security measures by the participants. The activists would not let anyone they did not fully trust participate in the preparation and debriefing. As a foreigner I did not run the same risk as the

Colombian students being at campus while the demonstration went on, but still it was crucial to have guides that could tell me what to do and whom to trust.

I noticed that all of the gatekeepers and key informants had a different interpretation and opinion of the research project, and I decided to discuss issues with them while making it clear that I would not consider all their proposals and input. At the same time they probably influenced the research project more than I could ever be aware of, because they chose whom to introduce me to, which university to take me to and to what meeting they would invite me.

Security

Dealing with people in an extreme and vulnerable situation requires some security measures to ensure the security of the informants. On the fieldwork I did not discuss the thesis with strangers, never talked about the informants or activities I was attending to other people, and I was very careful with all contact information I had of people. To further ensure confidentiality I spent much time building trust before the interviews or meetings and I made it clear that the informants were anonymous, as well as the student organizations they belong to. Thagaard (2003) stresses that information which could contribute to the identification of the informants should be limited. In this thesis the names of the informants are fictional and the information about their background is very restricted. The security situation and the stressed situation in general for the displaced students may also indirectly be sources of error. Some may have kept information from me for security reasons or because they did not trust me completely.

Thagaard (2003) stresses the consequences that participation in the research project may have for the participants. This implies that the informants' integrity should be ensured throughout the process, and that the informant is not hurt by the research project. Since all of the informants had grave security problems I had to ensure the safety of the informants and take security into consideration with every step I took along the course of the fieldwork. At the same time, the informants took risks every day by continuing the political work after the displacement and some of them told me that being interviewed by me was a minor risk compared to their other activities. Some students even said they preferred that I was present because it made them feel more secure. Being seen with a European could give them some "foreigner points" and grant them protection for some time.

Analyzing the data

The structuring of the recorded interview material into text facilitates an overview and is the beginning of the analysis (Kvale 1996). During the last weeks of the fieldwork and for a month following it I transcribed the interviews into written text and compared the transcriptions with the notes taken during the interviews. According to Kvale (1996) transcribing is a way of translating from an oral language to a written language with different sets of rules. The text represents decontextualized conversations and abstractions: interpretative constructions and not copies of an original reality. There is no true, objective transformation from the oral to the written mode (Kvale 1996), so the validity must be achieved by finding a useful transcription for this particular research. I had decided to summarize parts that contained little relevant information, but I quickly discovered that most informants gave relevant information in response to the questions and I considered it necessary to reproduce entire interviews relatively verbatim to avoid the fragmentation of the transcriptions. I noted emotional expressions in parentheses because I considered the topic to be so sensitive and personal that it was important to show the informants' reaction in order to capture the complete narrative.

The interpretation of the material starts during the interview in giving response to the informant with follow-up questions, and continues during the transcription and then the coding. I read through the transcriptions, field notes and other related documents in order to find key remarks and observations, or codes. I made a coding scheme where I grouped the codes into similar concepts. From these concepts, I could form categories which I would use in the analysis of the data material collected. I made various attempts at forming a suitable scheme because it was difficult not to exclude any interconnection relations of issues in the material while at the same time compressing the material in order to obtain a more manageable data material suited for more precise interpretation. There were several features in common in the information's stories, something that made coding easier.

The language presents a challenge pertaining the degree of reliability. The interviews and the transcriptions are in Spanish, much of the planning and discussions about the research project was done in Norwegian and the thesis is written in English, which may result in a loss of nuances in the process from collection data to the interpretation, analysis and dissemination of the findings. All the informant's quotes in this thesis are translated from Spanish to English by me.

6 Why participate in student activism?

> The university reveals many roads, and one learns how to choose which to follow. But it also has to do with luck (Leandro).

In order to explore how and why student activists become mobilized three central elements are discussed. The first element is the student's grievances. These can be divided into two groups: the grievances related to education and the university structures on one hand, and the grievances in society on the other. The students organize activism related to the education and university field and activism related to politics in society, respectively, which are both described in this chapter. The discussion is derived from the review of structural production of grievances in chapter 4. The second element studied in this part is the role of the organizations in mobilization. The university as an arena for commitment, radicalization and activism is explored. Identity is the third element affecting how and why students participate in activism. This part focuses on the economic and political background of the activist, but also on how the university as a site of academic and human formation affect them.

To contextualize the student activism I will start by giving a brief introduction to the student movement in Colombia with a particular focus on the large protests in the months before this fieldwork was conducted in autumn 2007. I will then review the different forms of student activism, and illustrate challenges related to how the student activists participate in activism after the displacement. At last I will discuss the students' backgrounds and motivations for being a student activist.

The student movement in Colombia

The student movement has a long history of defending the public and autonomous universities, expressing meanings about the state's role in higher education and organizing political activities at the universities (Archila et al. 2002). In the 1970s there was a peak of protests in Colombia, and there has been a steady amount of protest actions since then. In the 1980s, mobilizations for freedom of speech and organization became important. Because the students were threatened as criminals, and suffered expulsion from campus and denigrating campaigns undertaken by the media against public universities, the different student organizations vanished gradually or they radicalized and started to work clandestinely. At first the repression created solidarity, but later it created resignation. The protests in the 1990s were dominated by actions against violence and armed conflict, against the violators of

human rights and in support of freedom for prisoners kidnapped by the FARC, and humanitarian aid to the millions of displaced people.

Carlos Medina Gallego, a researcher at the National University in Bogotá who was a student leader in the 1970s and 1980s, claims that there is no student movement in Colombia.[10] According to Medina Gallego, there is student activism, but the student activism in Colombia has always been developed by the parties and other political forces and movements. To be an authentic student movement, he argues, it is necessary to have a common general basis, a minimum program and a national plan of action that the whole sector works on and identifies with. Medina Gallego indicates by this statement that the student organizations in Colombia depend too much on and maintain relationships that are too close with the different political parties, mainly the left-wing parties and the liberal party. Many of the student leaders and activists disagree with this. The leader of the biggest student organization in Colombia and student representative on the university board of a university in Bogotá, argues that it is certain that the Colombian student organizations have close ties with different political forces, especially with political parties, but that the student movement does exist (meeting 09.21.07). He believes that the masses of student activists organized in the student organizations or participating independently in the student movement feel a strong identity with the student movement as a movement, and organize themselves with a common perception of a shared base. The discussions related to the student movement in this thesis are based on the latter point of view, which seem to be the most dominant one among the student activists.

Archila (et al. 2002) divides the student protests in Colombia into one internal and one external form of protest. The internal protests occur in relation to the educational institutions and deals with defending the autonomy of the university under the headings of free education and public financing over the national budget to avoid market logic, which implies running the universities as if they were private companies. The external protests happen in relationship to society, revolving around issues like political, economic and social problems in the country and in the world.

The informants argue that there is a crisis in Colombian higher education. In the spring semester of 2007 there were intense student demonstrations all over the country where thousands of students expressed their disagreement with the National Development Plan 2006-2010. This plan is a bill passed by the Congress in June 2007, with the purpose of

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[10] http://www.scribd.com/doc/30649801/Sobre-El-Movimiento-Estudiantil-Carlos-Medina-Gallego, cited August 2010.

"improving coordination between the different institutions that make up the public sector and building a unified and integrated vision of the management of the sector, improving its effectiveness and efficiency and ensuring a better allocation of public resources" (my translation).[11] The student movement criticizes this plan and argues that it may lead to privatization of education in Colombia. The plan proposed reducing the resources transferred to the public universities and increasing the participation of the private sector in higher education. The student movement argued that economic cuts would affect the academic quality as well as welfare for the students. In 2007 there was a wide specter of actions all over the country, including peaceful protests, occupations of universities, carnivals and street blockades, which on several occasions ended in police violence, detention and caused a wave of displaced students. For the first time in many years the students finally achieved the attention of the media.

The student protests of 2007 are examples of how emotions played a central role in fuelling activism. As Tarrow (1998 in Crossley 2002) stresses, the student movement succeeded in channeling the reasons for grievances and emotions generated by the unwanted politics and the economic cuts, as well as the violence against students. The leader of one of the student organizations states that the students understood that the protests were about more than just this particular law proposal; they were about the educational system or model as a whole (leader of student organization 1, meeting 09.21.07). He also claims that the protests were a reaction to the national elections the year before, when Uribe was re-elected as president.

The same student leader calls the Colombian universities "islands of democracy" in an undemocratic country, as the freedom of speech and right to organize are principles that are more likely to be followed inside than outside the university gates (leader of student organization 1, meeting 10.19.07). The university as place and political space is central to the student activists. Many of the informants express that attending the university and participating in student activism have helped them to see the situation of the country clearer and amplified their view of the conflict. Lucas explains how the universities can have an enlightening role and contribute to consciousness of the realities in the country:

> When you enter the university everything is different. The university is so beautiful.
> You enter a universe of possibilities and knowledge. All kinds of people are there: the
> intellectual, the athlete, the artist…Political issues are understood there. [The

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university] permitted me to develop other values. The university looks differently at the country.

However, according to some informants not all the universities are arenas of free thinking. Especially some of the smaller private ones often reproduce the discourses and frames of the authorities rather than encourage critical thinking. Sebastián was one of those who felt that the university hindered him to think freely:

At that time I was an instrument of the university. They formed me. I reproduced the university's schema. I defended the authorities, and the paramilitaries as a group in opposition to and as defenders from the guerrilla. I defended the right to education for those who could afford to study. Those who could not, they did not study, and that's it.

Historically, the protests or proposals of the students have rarely been taken into account by the Colombian state or society (Archila et al. 2002). On the contrary, the students have been treated as if they were an enemy of the state, which has radicalized the confrontation between the state and the students. This again intensified to an extreme, leading some of the student leaders to start working clandestinely and others to drop out of the university. With this creation of fears, some governments have been able to periodically reduce student political activity throughout the student movement's history. However, an active movement certainly still exists, as shown by the mobilizations of 2007. It varies in size and intensity of activities according to the actual challenges and political context.

Activities and strategies related to student activism

[The university] had a library in bad condition, [it] did not have internet, the research equipment was weak, the professors did not show up and the quality had sunken. Action was needed and we occupied the university and with the student council we organized negotiation tables. We defended the public universities and fought for materials for the university. We had started the struggle against the standardization processes and the commercialization of education (Anahí).

This quote by Anahí illustrates how the student movement relates to the concept of contentious politics and how the grievances at the university are tied to their political, social and economic context in the country. The student activists make claims on behalf of the students' interests.

All the informants were organized in political activities at their university before becoming IDPs. In some cases it is difficult to say whether the major cause of displacement

was the activism at the universities or involvement in other organizations as well. The student activists describe using a broad contentious repertoire at the universities, which includes the conduction of seminars, academic forums, general assemblies, cultural activities, political activities, debate groups, video forums, student camps, negotiation tables, congresses, student strikes, demonstrations and sometimes *tropels*; all of which are suitable for different situations, places and occasions. A *tropel*, for example, is used rarely and is a strong form of expression that only parts of the student movement use and it requires a high level of grievance and resignation, like after a recent incident of an assassination of a student.

Some kind of activism is more accepted by the government and thus entails a lower security risk, but sometimes it is enough only to be organized to be looked upon as a dangerous element in society. Different kind of student activism at the universities could be divided into three; cultural activism, academic activism and political activism.

The informants combine *cultural activism* with other kinds of activism and consider it as a part of their project to change Colombia. Changing the culture of violence as well as the people's perception of reality and thus the conflict, which is produced and reproduced through cultural expression, is important in the long-term transformation of a war system into peace in the conflict transformation approach. Some informants emphasized that there is a cultural conflict in addition to the social, economic and armed conflict in the country. They claim that there are certain interests behind for example some TV shows or behind a lack of cultural activities for young people. They believe cultural expression is important for young Colombians and can help them to become involved in positive activities that give them the possibility to be a part of something and manage an activity on their own, which can keep them away from the streets.

The students become involved in cultural groups of poetry, literature, dancing, theater, storytelling and film clubs. One informant organized a film club showing movies on big screens to children in marginalized neighborhoods. Cultural and activist-like actions are often included in the daily student activist work like making wall-painting, graffiti and organizing concerts with a political message. Several informants claimed that they did not organize the cultural activity only for the value of culture itself, but to raise the level of consciousness about the conflict and other topics. An example is Valentino, who participated in a group organizing a mix of cultural and political activities like theater groups, poetry, plastic art, women's rights and human rights.

Academic activism refers to activities related to student rights, like working for the need for a democratic election of the rector, or influencing the reading material on university

curriculums. Activism conducted by the informants in the university forums is often central in the cause of displacement. The student representatives are elected by the students and they usually represent a student organization. Their job is to represent the students in decisions made at the university and they often function as spokesmen or negotiators when the students find themselves in conflict with the university administration or the government. Many of the informants were part of the student council at the university before the displacement, which often turned out to be risky in terms of security. In the diversity of the activist environment there are also activities not that political, like philosophy discussion groups and research groups. Agustin, for instance, worked with an archeological research group at the university studying a native tribe that had disappeared.

At Jimena's university one student organization with close ties to the university board bought votes and used methods like giving away free refreshments in support of one candidate in the rector election. As a reaction other student organizations launched a campaign of blank vote and more than 4000 persons voted in blank, but because the votes of the professors were valued more than the students', the candidate who was accused of being bought won and was appointed rector. The student movement considered the election invalid, which drove them to shift strategy, using different repertoires of contention and adopting stronger measures than they initially had:

> They had pretended to elect a rector, and this was when we declared a strike. Two students declared a hunger strike and another eight occupied the office of register and control, and we entered a strike that lasted more than two months. Together with the professors' union we denounced the elections. During the strike we organized demonstrations, mobilizations, communiqués, *choquelatados*[12], cultural acts and more. (Jimena)

One of the organizations I have studied existed only at one university and actually disappeared because of a paramilitary violent campaign against them. The members of the organization that were not forced to displace stopped being activists out of fear, or became refugees in other countries. Some were even assassinated.

Political activism includes activities like intervening in education politics to influence a new law proposal or preventing cuts in the education budget. The informants often link the academic activities inside the university or in the education field to political activities in society in general. The student movement is mainly centered on student related issues. However, what can seem to be an isolated issue often involves a broader view of society,

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[12] Hot chocolate parties; free, hot chocolate for everyone.

which is exactly why the student movement participates in demonstrations together with the peace movement or the trade unions. Many students combine profession studies with civil society work outside of the university. One informant, who studied environmental engineering, worked with a sea turtles reserve. Others engaged in rights based organizations working with women and gender equality or natives and minorities as well as peace organizations and human rights work in NGOs. For Ana the decisive event triggering the death threats resulting in her displacement was her organization's involvement in helping marginalized people after a natural disaster. The student organization assisted in the displacement of people living on the slopes of a volcano after the eruption alarm had gone off. This involvement was, according to Ana, considered to be too political by the university board, and thus lead to the death threats.

Not all of the informants were able continue their studies after having been displaced. Consequently, some of them do not pursue the student activism at the universities, but they do not quit the activism *per se*. Many start working for human rights organizations or do political work in general, activities that they do not necessarily distinguish from the student activism they did before.

Some informants who were not accepted at a university in the new city, and thus were not formally students, wanted to continue the student activism and participated anyhow. Agustin was criticized for leading a student assembly at the National University without being a student there. Other students started asking questions about his involvement and he was accused of being a guerrilla collaborator. This made it difficult for Agustin to participate even though he was a part of the national board of his organization.

Background for activism

The students enter the university from the age of sixteen or seventeen. For many this represents the only "social ladder", as one informant puts it, the only possibility for poor people to advance economically by the means of a university education. My informants became involved in student activism or student organizations in different ways. Some entered through other organizations; others were included in a group when they entered the university.

Dramatic incidents creating anger and fear have contributed to students' recognition of the necessity of organizing collectively. The incentive for Agustin to become an organized activist working more systematically was a violent incident at the university:

> At the university I was a student activist. (…) I wasn't part of any group. I started to organize in a *tropel* that the army started. We were doing a peaceful protest in the streets against the 02 legislative of [the president at that time] Pastrana in February, the first semester of 2000. We blocked the street. The army came and told us to move. The officer of the army takes his automatic weapon, a gun, and fires five times in the air – Pah! Pah! Pah! – to make people go away. A soldier behind him (…), a professional soldier, grabs his rifle, loads it and fires up. He discharges like sixteen shots in the air and hits the university right where it says [the name of the university] at the front of the entrance. The university still has holes from these shots. The army did not kill anybody. But they threw a dispersion bomb. It fell on my foot and I lost consciousness. (…) Well, that is how I started.

However, Agustin's decision to become involved politically was formed earlier in his life. The assassination of his father when he was thirteen years old was an episode he considered to be decisive for his later involvement in political activities. A horrifying and violent incident like that, which several of the student activists have experienced, indicates a high degree of conflict in society. This contributes to creating a frame of anti-system and anti-establishment attitude in society, which may have an effect on the mobilization to a movement. However, such a frame makes it more risky to participate in a protest which may affect the families of the student activists as well. One informant told me about a fellow student activist, who had been in exile in Chile for a year and was visiting Colombia to plan the move to Canada with his family:

> He was crossing the street when a guy came and killed him in front of his son. The bullet passed the son, who was eleven years old, and made a hole in his t-shirt. The bullet also passed through the arm of his cousin. The guy started to shoot at the neighbors so nobody would come close. The child started to run after him, shouting: "I'll kill you! You killed my daddy!" (Romina)

In many cases displacement means split families, sometimes permanently, and one of the informants tells how he had to leave his daughter:

> The situation with my daughter is very difficult. She calls me crying. She does not know why I left. She is only eleven years old. I lived with her mother until she was seven years old. I did not want to tell her why I left (Lucas).

Some of the informants come from families that are politically aware, involved in human rights work or different kind of activism. Leandro's parents have security problems that are as serious as his are: "For me it was normal that people walked around armed and that armed people came to our house. My mother has bodyguards, my dad too." Mostly because doing political work is stigmatized, some parents or families do not even know that their child is a

political activist, and many think that participating in activism involves a risk that is too great. The result is that not all the displaced students tell their parents about the real cause of moving. For Ana it was difficult to tell her mother that she had to move to Bogotá: "In my house they did not know anything. I told my mother three days before leaving that I had to leave, but not why. It was complicated because I am the only child." Claudio, on the other hand, has a family with a high level of political conscience, which can also be complicated, and he had to struggle to create his own political identity.

The students usually live at home before the displacement, relying on economic support from their families. Many of the students have part-time jobs to be able to pay for lunches and books at the university or to contribute to the household. Many IDPs combine the studies with work, and sell homemade food, books, or help other students with papers. When Agustin's mother lost her work he had to sell candy at the university to finance his studies, but still he had a difficult financial situation: "When my pants were old and worn out, I let them tear, and I adopted a hippie style, because I did not have enough to buy pants every year." Being a hippie strengthened his identity and at the university they labeled him as a rebel student from the left.

None of the informants were able to manage economically totally by themselves right after the displacement, even if some have parents that helped. Most of my informants participate in student organizations which include class analysis in their work for better student rights and universal education. Most of them have a strong class identity. Nahuel reflects over this:

> I belong to a class. I have withstood hunger, my family has withstood hunger. You know that there are many things that are not for you. I am not going to keep still with my armed crossed. If somebody gets killed, well, then you know that you have to fight for your rights. I do not have anything to lose.

However, the displaced student activists are usually not among the most marginalized in society in a country where only about 30% have the possibility to study[13]. The students are fortunate enough to have access to higher education which grants them better possibilities on the job market, in addition to increased intellectual and social capacity.

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[13] http://www.universidad.edu.co/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=35&Itemid=11, cited August 2010

The motivation for activism

> I am a grain of sand that could contribute (Agustin).

This quotation by Agustin is quite illustrative of the role many displaced student activists see themselves in. They have had to move away from everything, give up an old life to pursue their political activism. The informants explain why they engage in activism in different ways, but the main motivation is trying the best to be that grain of sand that could make a difference. Martín compares it to a kind of illness: "I think politics is like a virus: once you've caught it, it is difficult to get rid of it" (Martín).

Why the students organize themselves at their university and in a certain organization or group varies, but there is still a fundamental agreement on the importance of doing so. The leader of one of the student organizations argues that the motivation of most student activists to organize or participate is related to three paramount elements: anti-imperialism, anti-neoliberalism, and anti-war (leader of student organization 1, meeting 10.19.07). Juan Pablo points out fighting the injustice as a main factor:

> What motivates me? All the injustice in this country. [I want] a more just country, where all Colombians, men and women, have the same access to fundamental rights, like freedom of speech and education. [I wish] that all of us were accepted and had the same possibility to travel and study. Seeing the injustice, seeing that there is no work, no libraries in the schools or in the universities, no space for recreation… We see that the policy is discriminatory. Because of this, we organize in order to have a more dignified life.

This statement from Juan Pablo fits into the framework of the conflict transformation approach, where inequality and social injustice are addressed, building on a long-time horizon. Leandro states that he chose to continue the activism because he does not want to be just another person reproducing today's system:

> [I continued] because the life of human beings, above all in poor countries, is predetermined. We are born to reproduce the system. It should not be like this. We are struggling for a different country; we believe that it is necessary to implement a new system. (…) To try to avoid the potential risk turning into an actual accident. Because this is what displacement is: a work accident.

Romina sees the activism as a strong commitment to activists that have lost their lives:

> I believe [giving up political work] would be to give in. It would be to stop being. I do not feel that it is a commitment only to me, but also to the dead activists. I do this in memory of those who died and those who were displaced.

The displaced students do not see their role in conflict resolution as something they can quit. Their project is long-term and the stakes are high. This high degree of commitment shows that the student movement also draws on elements like nonmaterial resources such as faith, moral commitment and the investment of time, as described in the resource mobilizing theory.

Agustin points out that being a student activist does not only imply repression and persecution, and explains how the student activists behind a campaign could receive much sympathy from the other students and sometimes become local heroes at their university:

> We closed down a [university] building. "We denounce the rector, ta, ta, ta!" I went up to the second floor and I talked to the people like I was Evita Perón. From upstairs "aaaeeh!" and the people applauded and so on. I had a very good image at the university.

Summary of how and why the students participate in activism

The internally displaced student activists describe a broad repertoire of actions and strategies to mobilize people and win through with their struggle. They combine cultural, academic and political activism within the field of education and the university space with activism on issues related to general social grievances in society. The motivation is changing the causes of grievances in the educational sector as well as grievances related to the unequal distribution of power, resources and wealth in Colombia. Most of the activists were aware of the risk of becoming displaced, but considered it worth it. The displaced student activists are mobilized by their political conviction developed in lectures or through organizations at the universities or by economic, political or family-related factors in their social background.

7 How and why do Colombian student activists become displaced?

> There is a lack of democratic guarantees to exercise freedom of speech, freedom to think, and freedom in general. The student and the displaced represent this (Agustin).

This chapter seeks to explore on three levels how the displacement affects and influences the student activism. First, I discuss how forced displacement affects the political space of the activist. The opportunity of struggle becomes limited or changed, as do the channels for working for peace in the political space. I examine how the repression of the state and the paramilitary can hinder activism directly by making it impossible to physically participate and indirectly by intimidating the activist. I also examine how this repression can in some occasions motivate and create a stronger commitment to the cause the activists struggle for.

On the second level I discuss how this repression is legitimized by the discursive framing of the Colombian government. There are two central competitive frames in Colombia which disagree on whether the state suppresses the opposition and actors in civil society or if the state does its job as defenders of the people against terrorists. As we see in this chapter the accusations of being terrorists is not only an overall discourse or frame, but also put into practice and directly articulated in prison sentences and death threats.

The last level of displacement discussed here is the organization as providing displacement relief and the organizations' role in crisis. The organization the student activists belong to may play different roles; as a provider of money, food and a place to stay in the new city, as re-organizing the internally displaced students responsibilities and position in the organization, and as an actor that interferes in the displaced activist's life and sometimes disagrees with his or her choices.

First, I will explain the dynamics of the displacement and provide an introduction to its possible implications. I discuss why and how the students had to displace and the incidents that generate the displacement. Second, I will discuss who is to be held responsible for the displacements, continued by discussion on the role of the student organization related to the displacement of students. Third, I explore why the student activists are seen as a threat to the Colombian government and the paramilitaries.

The aim of a death threat

After every death there are always a multitude of displaced (Leandro).

Threats and death threats from paramilitaries or state institutions in various forms are the most common cause of displacement among the student activists. The aim of the threats is to intimidate the activist sufficiently for him or her to stop the political work or to leave town. The threats are meant to link the student activists with the guerrillas and in this way label the student activists as terrorists, which, following the logic of war, makes them a legitimate target. The threat can take different forms like phone calls, email, public communiqués, oral threats or direct or indirect threatening actions like persecution, detention or attempted murder. Sometimes the threats are directed at a student organization in general, but the most serious are usually those specifically mentioning someone's names. When an activist is exposed to such a threat, he or she, or the organization the activist is organized in, usually makes an assessment of the threat. In some cases the student has to displace immediately, but in other cases he or she resorts to less dramatic means, like ceasing the activities for a time and changing behavior and routines. This can include changing time schedules, sleeping in different houses every night or moving to another house to shake off the stalkers, in order to be able to stay in their home city for a longer time. Moving to another house and changing habits and environment is displacement *within* their own city, which is also a form of displacement.

The armed conflict is more intense in some regions in Colombia, and the rural parts are usually more affected than the urban ones, which means that some places are safer than others. The paramilitaries and the guerrillas usually work in regional units or groups. Consequently, they may think of an unwanted person that leaves their territory as a problem out of mind. It is more likely that the safety of activists is secured in a bigger city, like the capital Bogotá. Its size, international connections, the diversity of political organizations and the amount of activists makes it easier to blend in and be less visible to the intelligence service and the paramilitaries. However, moving to another city is not a guarantee of safety, and some of the students have been forced to become displace more than once. This was the case of Valentino, who had to run away from town when studying in secondary school at the age of seventeen:

I was a pupil activist in secondary school and I was a rescuer in the Red Cross. In 1999 they killed the president of the school council. He lived in my house, I was vice president. He was seventeen years old. Everyone on the council received death threats. (…) For a while I kept a low profile at the school and worked only with the Red Cross. As soon as I finished secondary school I left the town. It was the 11th of January 1999. I started studying at the university and four or five years later I was forced to displace again.

How and why does forced displacement happen

"Displaced, poor guy…" No, I knew what I was doing. My commitment is ethical and moral. I knew all the time that this could happen, or something worse. A threat does not intimidate me (Valentino).

For displaced students, the incidents that result in their displacement are not unique in time or history. Not every death threat or intimidating incident results in displacement, but usually, especially when the threat is repeated, the activist reaches a limit where he or she leaves life in the home city.

The death threats reach the students in different ways. Written death threats may be spread in the neighborhood or at the university, like one case where somebody threw sheets of paper with threats from the second floor of the university hall without anyone seeing who it was. Victoria also received death threats in the university:

We received personal and direct threats on pamphlets from the paramilitaries. It said that they were going to do a "social clean-up", starting with the communists. It also included gays, people using drugs inside the university and so on.

Another informant actually discovered a paramilitary death threat directed at him tacked on the university wall. This was not done to intimidate only him, but also to remind the other students that the paramilitary groups were present at the university and watching them. Some of the informants even experience receiving new threats when denouncing a threat at the police office:

Nahuel: I went to the DAS[14] to denounce it, and they asked me if I belonged to an organization like the Communist Youth. I denied that, you know that admitting this is dangerous in a small village. If I belonged to the *Polo*[15] then? I said yes, because they might have seen me in some march. They did not have any reason for asking me this.
Interviewer: Do you consider this a threat?

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[14] The Administrative Department of Security in Colombia.
[15] *Polo Democratico Alternativo* – The Alternative Democratic Front, also called PDA or *Polo*.

Nahuel: Of course. I went there to denounce it and ended up being interrogated.

What triggers the displacement

> We began to work with politically persecuted persons when they started to persecute us too (Anahí).

The student activists constantly review their situation, considering when it is becoming too difficult to be able to stay. What triggers for taking the step to actually become displace varies. If anyone in the group the student activist belongs to at university, or any of the professors, receive serious threats, disappear or are assassinated it is more likely that the student will be forced to displace. In cases where the personal security problems have lasted for months without any directly acute incident, many of the students mentioned incidents that made them afraid of what could happen to their close family as constituting the decisive or ultimate reason for having to displace. They do not want their own personal actions to hurt anybody who does not share their political conviction and consequently does not have the possibility to calculate the risk. This is especially a dilemma when the family is not already involved in politics or is unaware that the informant is involved in this kind of activities. Several informants also mention their physical resemblance to their sister or brother as an important factor in the decision of leaving, because there are cases where this constitutes a danger to the sibling. Leandro tells how he was afraid that intelligence agents or an assassin would mix up him and his brother and pick the wrong sibling:

> My brother called me and told me what had happened when he arrived home. He is a little fairer than me. He looks a lot like me. He stepped out of a taxi and another taxi appeared and closed the first taxi in from the front. A stranger came out of the taxi and tried to force him into a car. There was a woman that said: "That is not him. That is his brother." They pushed him and told him to beware. They left him there and went away. From that day I have been in Bogotá.

One of the most intimidating ways of receiving the message "go away" is being followed on the street or watched in everyday life. Sometimes the stalkers stay outside the student's house all night and take pictures, making it very clear that this is a warning. One of the informants had to displace because of an attempt of forced disappearing, which is a widespread form of human rights abuse against the student movement. This phenomenon makes many activists fear being surrounded by unknown cars with darkened windows without license plates, or displaying other suspicious elements. Jimena experienced this:

Jimena:	When I left the appointment, I was startled, because the first thing I saw were two people on black motorbikes without license plates, without any marks, wearing black clothes and black helmets. When I saw them I went back into the building, walked around there for a while and went out again. I had to go back to the university. I was on foot.
Interviewer:	You did not call anyone?
Jimena:	No, it is very close anyway. When I went out I crossed the avenue and they set off to close me in even if it was a one-way street. I passed by one street and when I reached the next street I stopped in front of a school because all the students were going out on the streets. They passed me very slowly and very close. When I had walked two more streets I saw them again. I started to walk very fast. They approached, closed me in and shouted: "*Mamerto*[16], you are going to die," and that we should accept that the principal had won the elections. "Death to the leftists!" I started to run and I lost one of my sandals, but I kept on running without it. I arrived at the petroleum trade union USO. I had only to pass the bridge on the left to arrive at the university. When I continued walking they followed me. I crossed the street running and arrived at the university gates. When I came there tears started to run down my face.

An indirect way to force someone into displacement is to convince the rest of society and the people around the victim that he or she is working with the guerrilla, like in the "death to the leftist" quote above. Stigmatizing a student activist is a very common strategy to make him or her displace. The accusations made by right-wing students of being disloyal to the student council and rumors that he had stolen money from it was the cause of Claudio's displacement. Others suffer from rumors claiming that he or she works for the guerrilla. This makes it difficult to keep or make new friends or to find a job. Informants tell that people start to watch out when they are present and many do not want to be seen with them because they are afraid of also being accused of being a collaborator. In one case a group of young students received a death threat with these accusations at their university and the local newspaper published the entire threat. The consequence of this was that the whole city knew of it and the people did not know whether to believe in the students or the accusers. In this case the particular students were frozen out of society on top of having a hard time because of security problems, and they all had to leave the city. Simultaneously, many other students involved in student activism at that university, who were not mentioned in the death threat published in the newspaper, received letters and flowers of condolences probably from the paramilitaries which frightened everyone off from continuing the activities.

Several informants argue that a common strategy used by the authorities to make somebody into subjects to threats or human right abuse is to arrest them. When the local

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[16]*Mamerto* is a Colombian word that identifies a sector in the left side in Colombia. It has its roots in a historical event where the Communist Party was involved.

authorities charge or sentence a student activist with rebellion and terrorism they send a signal to the illegal armed groups to "take care of" this activist in particular. This way the police "marks" certain activists, which makes it dangerous to be arrested. Young students who have been arrested or imprisoned therefore have serious security problems when released from prison and are most likely to be forced to leave the city. Facundo tells what happened to him when after four months in prison convicted of rebellion he was released: "The GAULA[17] followed me, filmed and observed me. Who knows, one day they'll find me when I am alone and they'll raise a false case against me. Because of that I had to go away."

In the most serious cases of forced displacement the informants have been exposed to an assassination attempt. In one case a gun was fired towards the informant, but he pushed the assailant and ran away. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the methods of the police and illegal groups, like in the case of Facundo when he was arrested:

> One morning the home phone rang and I answered it. It was seven-thirty in the morning. A young lady said:
> - Hello, Facundo, how are you? Are you not going to the university today?
> - Who am I speaking to?
> - To Sandra.
> - Which Sandra?
> I do not have any classmate named Sandra. I had class at nine o'clock. I took a bath, put on my clothes and went out. When I came out in the streets I discovered a couple of strange guys with cars and motorbikes without license plates and closed helmets. I thought "whoa! What's happening?" I started my motorbike and I realized that they were also starting their bikes. They tried to stop me. There were two alternatives. One, they were going to rob me. Two, they were going to kill me. They reached me and shouted: "[Expletive] stop!" They had a gun. I did not want to stop because they did not identify themselves or anything. I went on and they followed me. But they had a faster bike than mine and overtook me, and one of them tried to jump onto my motorbike. When he tried this I did a pirouette and the one that tried to ride my bike fell off. As he falls he shoots at me, - pah! Nothing happened to me. I continued and some cars followed me. I went to the bakery where they know me. I hid. The stalkers, that proved to be the police in civil, arrived there, took me outside and told the lady in the bakery that I was a motorbike thief. Then they said that I had been captured for rebellion.

Are there other options than displacement?

> [You have] three possibilities when you become involved in the political struggle, when you oppose the administrative, the economic and the military system that rules the country: (...) They displace you, they imprison you or they kill you if you struggle

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[17] Unified Action Groups for Personal Freedom. A police unit working under the national army, which aim is to fight kidnapping and extortion.

for ideals. You have these three options. It is more likely that these three things happen than that you win your struggle, that Colombia changes. I knew this (Valentino).

Some displaced students continue to have serious security problems also after the displacement. In some of these cases other countries or international NGOs offer them participation in a program or studies abroad. The idea is to leave the country for a limited period of half a year or a year to allow the security situation to calm down. Usually the cases of these students are so complicated that they accept, even if some of them would prefer to stay in Colombia. Nahuel, who was offered a scholarship to study abroad, explains how difficult it was for him to accept it:

Interviewer: If you had not been threatened, would you still have accepted the scholarship?
Nahuel: No, because I had just begun the work I was doing as a student leader and we were doing big things. We were in a process of awaking consciousness. I was contributing to changes in my country. I wanted to use my career to improve the quality of life. I was very motivated.

Nevertheless, Nahuel felt obligated to leave. He usually worked as a busker to finance his studies, but after rumors that he was a "guerrilla collaborator" were spread, it was very difficult for him to sell his goods on the streets. His security problems led to a loss of paid work, and lack of money made him decide to leave the country. If the case of the displaced does not make it strictly necessary to leave, it could be considered a betrayal by the student movement, and as a form of utilizing the displacement as an excuse to take off to the Western world. To avoid this, the organization the student belongs to, if he or she does belong to one, is often involved in decisions like this, to anchor it in the organization. However, the organizations may facilitate or hinder the individual activist when included in these kinds of decisions because its agenda does not always correspond with the displaced activist's interests or needs.

The informants told about cases where student activists who had received death threats, and that should have fled, stayed. They did this because they had a special reason for staying, like small children or a pregnant girlfriend, that provided them with strong ties to their city. Sometimes that worked out, but sometimes it did not and the threat was realized.

Implications of moving across place and space

When the student activists have to displace, they sooner or later have to quit the activities in the student movement at their home university. Most of them organize themselves in the same organizations or similar ones, depending on whether the former organization is present in the new city, the relationship they have with it and if the IDPs are actually students or not in the new city. The displaced do not only move across space, from one city to another, but in many cases they also switch to participating in work on a higher scale in their organization. They often advance from doing mostly local or regional work, to having tasks and responsibilities at the national level. This can further lead to a strengthened work at the national scale, while it simultaneously may become weakened at the local or regional scale. However, this movement, even if it is forced, of student and human rights activists from a low scale to a higher can contribute to the organization's development of social networks across geographical and social boundaries. This development is called "scale shift" by Tarrow & McAdam (2005 in Nicholls 2007), and is often manifested in the form they call "relational diffusion", which refers to the extension of a movement through pre-existing relational ties. The relationship between local, regional and national levels in the student movement or inside an organization may be strengthened when a student activist moves from one region to the capital. Even if it is difficult to travel back and forth, most of the activists keep in touch with their old companions in their home region and promote their region's interest in national meetings, gatherings and activities, and create new relations across geographical and social boundaries. Most of the displaced students see their displacement as something temporary, especially right after the displacement. Victoria actually returned for a few days to prevent her organization from falling apart and to make sure that all the work had not done in vain:

> After one and a half month of displacement I returned to form a team of transition to make sure that other people continued our work. There was a very small group left. (…) It was a very tense environment and we knew that at any time something could happen. It was almost a clandestine work, because there were paramilitary groups forming inside the university. (…) Then I had to leave again.

Some student activists do not displace and hide in the home city, after months or years of receiving death threats, because they are too valuable to their organization in that particular city or region. Several student activists, like Ana, postponed the displacement voluntarily and

worked clandestinely for a while to make sure the remaining activist work would continue after she had left:

> In the beginning we tried to stay, because the four of us were part of the board and it was necessary to work so the organization would not fall apart. We trained new people. We stayed for three weeks more in spite of persecution and threatening phone calls.

Despite means like this, the organization's work falls apart in some cities and regions.

As discussed in chapter 4, people in social movements, like in student organizations, develop close ties and trusting relationships by being in the same place and sharing much of the same experience over time. Tilly (2005 in Nicholls 2007) believes that networks of trusting people are important to avoiding embezzlement by others, and Nicholls (2007) points out that strong ties encourage actors to contribute to social movements even when the risk of involvement increases. This may be one of the reasons the student activists accept the risk posed by organizing and political work, and even that of being displaced. They take risks in solidarity with the students at their university, other student activists and especially with those student activists who have suffered human rights violations such as displacement, attacks or murder.

As Coleman and Collins (1988, 2004 in Nicholls 2007) point out, geographical proximity and stability is not the one and only reason for the feeling of trust. As discussed in the previous chapter, the strongest ties in the student movement are probably caused by the students' common belief in radical changes at their university and in society in general. At the same time, geographical closeness increases the likelihood of repeated contacts and bonding, which in turn favor strong ties. In the displaced students' case, the university is a place they are more likely to feel place-related ties to, and not the local community in general. The student activists are often in opposition to the local government, the university board or people that do not support their aim, such as right-wing parties or illegal paramilitary groups, and all these are groups that are represented in their own city. The activists cannot trust all their fellow students or even fellow members of the same organization because of possible infiltrators from the police or the paramilitaries. Usually the activists do not know who the police or paramilitaries inside the university are. Victoria, however, experienced knowing the identity very well of the ones threatening her:

Victoria:	We even knew who was behind it: groups financed by the paramilitaries. Many times we met them at the university and they could say: "Let's go and drink a coffee." It's a cunning strategy.
Interviewer:	Why?
Victoria:	This is a way to make "problems" disappear. The local government orders poor people to "clean up the streets", but we always know that they work with the paramilitaries. They invite people to have a coffee outside the university, and as soon as the students are outside they force them into a car and take them away.

Despite this, fellow students generally support the student activists and share their frustration to a greater extent than the rest of society. This corresponds to Massey's (2004 in Nicholls 2007) criticism of territorialized conceptions of place and scale, where she questions the view of place as something that shares homogenous interests and identities.

Trusting people becomes more difficult after a displacement, and the displaced students have to start all over again building the same strong relations that encourage trust. They often have a small group of people, for example from their own organization, who they do trust, but the IDPs often become much less likely to trust a new person because of the difficult and dangerous situation they find themselves in just after the displacement. Ana believes this to be one of the main challenges when a person is newly displaced: "This entire social web, what you have constructed all your life… it falls down. You have to work hard to strike roots to again make the life accommodating in the new city."

Who is to blame for the displacements?

As discussed in the introduction, the Colombian Supreme Court and a wide range of human rights organizations have proven that there is an extensive connection between the Colombian government and the paramilitary death squads. When actors in the social movement organize activities that contradict the policy of the authorities, they can expect repression from the state as well as from the paramilitaries. All informants believe paramilitary groups or one of the police units to be the ones behind the threats and violence against them. In some cases it is no doubt that it is them, because they have signed a written death threat, but in other cases it is just a suspicion. Most of the informants also mention state actors like different sectors of the police, the national army or state offices as part of the threats or at least as linked to the paramilitaries. Claudio explains this:

| Interviewer: | Whose fault was your displacement? |

Claudio: The state. They use the paramilitaries to legitimize themselves. They say: "It was not us, but the paramilitaries," when everybody knows about the contact between them. They created the paramilitaries. The *paras*[18] are fulfilling their function to exterminate the opposition.

One informant points out that the paramilitaries often willingly link their connections to the government in several deaths threats:

> The death threats are funny, well, not funny, but they show and uncover a little of what is developing on the national level when it comes to legalizing paramilitarism. The paramilitaries threaten us in the name of The Law of Security and Democracy and in the name of [president] Uribe Vélez (Martín).

As briefly touched upon in the methodology chapter, right-wing students suffering human rights abuse because of participating in student activism are rare. This could be because right-wing students participating in student politics often do not consider themselves to be activists, but more as student politicians or administrators, as one of the informants put it, and they are more likely to run for election to the student council or the university board on an individual basis rather than as representatives of an organization. Usually, this group does not represent any threat to the university administration or the authorities since these students are more likely to agree with the prevailing policy conducted by the right-wing government. However, the right-wing also consists of diverse organizations and opinions, and a liberal student is more likely to oppose the politics conducted by the government and become involved in the activism related to the student movement than a conservative student. Even if death threats targeting right-wing students are rare, they do occur. One informant knows of a case where a girl from a conservative student organization received death threats from one of the leftist guerrillas and became displaced because of that. There are probably more cases where guerrillas are responsible for death threats against student activists, but they usually threaten other groups in society, for example the police, the army, insubordinate peasants, people from the right or wealthy people. Some students experienced that the guerrilla threatened student organizations in which they largely agreed with politically because they disagreed on strategies made in the student movement or were in conflict over which candidate to support for a student election, but nobody had heard of anyone that had been displaced by the guerrilla.

Several informants hold the university, specifically the university administration, responsible for the displacement or at least for playing a central role in its occurrence.

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[18] Slang for the paramilitary groups.

Claudio was elected to the student council and found himself in conflict with the university administration because they wanted to cut all the funding which was used for copies and office expenses to the council. He tells about what happened in the wake of this conflict:

> A couple of days later a communiqué came out where two from [student organization 4] and two from [student organization 1] where threatened. Before that, somebody had commented that the [university] administration had ordered to have the three students in the council followed. The private security guards at the university had to report at what time we entered, went out, with who and that kind of information. A list from the intelligence service of the state also turned up (Claudio).

Whether local or national government are directly to blame for the displacement can be discussed. The informants have experienced assistance on some occasions and on others exposure to threats from the authorities. In the case of Lucas the state took measures when the persecution of the members of the student council at his university became serious. The Ministry of the Interior gave the council communication equipment and bullet-proof vests, and a vehicle from the state. David also received assistance from the state when he had to displace: "The Ministry was watching out for me and they asked what date I wanted to leave. The Ministry paid for the journey by air and gave me three months of financial assistance." However, at the same time David believes that the government also played a central role in the cause of his displacement and tells how he is watched by the police against his will:

David:	Later the police did a risk assessment of me.
Interviewer:	Did it bother you that the police investigated you?
David:	This was the thing I did not want. Before I left I had a police man that called me once a week. He was responsible for me. This made me afraid, I did not want it. I did not even want to do the denouncement or anything.
Interviewer:	Did you feel insecure because of the investigation?
David:	Yes, but most of all because of my family. And I felt insecure because the paramilitaries were in the neighborhood.

The president of the trade union of university professors, ASPU, shares David's skepticism of police protection: "The police gives "protection", but that could be the same as persecution. I do not want to be "protected" anymore" (Hernández, meeting 09.19.07). Lucas believes he was displaced because of a lack of security measures from the state, and argues that the Colombian state has the responsibility for every person that becomes displaced. Valentino reflects on the contradiction of receiving assistance from the state while knowing that they were the ones that displaced you:

Interviewer: Did you receive any assistance from the state?
Valentino: Yes. The state offers a kind of indemnity. They catch you, they assassinate your family, and afterwards they pay you 800 000 pesos[19] because they killed your father. [As an IDP] they help you for three months, 1 200 000 pesos[20] a month. It is an indemnity that the state gives after they damage you. In reality it is not any help. It is utilizing the victim to legitimize all the criminal actions the state is being responsible for. It is hypocritical. It is using the pain of the victim. If they kill my mother in a paramilitary massacre, and the state recognizes that they killed my mother and they pay me, they are using me, not helping. I do not consider this as any help. They do not give you health care, education or anything.

There are also cases where the paramilitary plays a double role, like when a paramilitary collaborator came home to Agustin's house to offer him protection from the paramilitaries and a good salary if he stopped the political work at the university and collaborated with them instead. This could be interpreted as a threat and as an attempt to draw on the popularity of a profiled person to change the field of struggle in order to mobilize people in favor of their cause. However, the paramilitaries are not primarily known for worrying about reputation or for using civil forms to persuade people to agree with their cause.

The role of the organizations related to the displacement

A student activist outside of Bogotá, whom I had a meeting with, told me that in some cases, like his own, the student organization does not bother to help a person to get out of the city. They do not offer to give a displaced student the necessary means to survive in a new city. This may be politically or personally motivated and often originates in internal disputes in the organization. As mentioned, most of the IDPs depend financially on the state, NGOs, friends or his or her student organization to be able to manage at the new location. The conclusion of this student activist was that in some cases, only the most popular student leader or student activist with good contacts on the national board of his or her organization will be able to move to another city if he or she does not have close friends or family there. This observation is supported by another student activist outside of Bogotá who received personal death threats and was not even contacted by the organization at the national level.

The student organizations, political parties or human rights organizations that help a student out with practical issues relating to the displacement sometimes feel a certain "ownership" to the student. This sense of ownership may have existed before the displacement too, when the student was an active member, had responsibilities or paid

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[19] About 2300 Norwegian crowns.
[20] About 3500 Norwegian crowns.

positions, but it often becomes stronger and more unilateral after the student has received financial assistance and help to get out of a region. This may result in three different situations. First, it makes it very difficult for a member to argue or disagree with the leaders of the organization. The best thing to do is to follow any suggestion and order about what to do and not to do. This often includes working a lot for the student organizations and a limited spare time. Second, the displaced member is obligated to follow instructions to go to a certain region or city where they need someone to contribute to the regional or local organization. In some organizations, they do not have the capacity to receive more displaced activists in Bogotá, because everyone goes there, so they send them out to another region which is considered safe. This way some other region has to follow up the displaced and assume the main responsibility. The organization may grow stronger in this new region when a skilled student activist arrives and experiences Tarrow & McAdam's (2005 in Nicholls 2007) scale shift, but a regional board may also come in short when it comes to a lack of capacity and too much responsibility. Third, some organizations cannot actually afford to help the displaced student economically, and reclaim part of the financial help the IDP receives from the government to the organization. Every IDP has the right to receive 3,6 million pesos[21] the first three months (1,2 million a month), and this is more or less the only help the government offers. This help does in most cases reach the displaced student, even if it usually comes very late. The money reclaimed by the organizations could for example be 40% of the total amount, or they offer to "administrate" the money for the member, so she or he will be sure that the money will last longer. In this way an organization may "earn" money on a displaced, but the expenses of receiving him or her is probably higher.

A former student activist who was displaced years ago, and who today is a central person on the Colombian left, explains that there are some cases where student activists do not always become displaced primarily because of serious security problems:

> There are people that are displaced because of other reasons, but they would not say so. I feel solidarity with them. (...) Sometimes an organization receives general threats which do not name anyone in particular, and if you want to go to Bogotá, you go there. This is opportunism. "I want to go to Norway. I denounce it, get my story in the newspaper and, being a friend of the ambassador, I can go there." On the bottom there is something, but the motivation is financial (meeting 10.20.07).

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[21] About 10 500 Norwegian crowns.

Why are the student activists considered a threat?

> We only struggle for real education. We do not feel that what we are doing is wrong (Anahí).

Historically, students and academics have played a decisive role in political change and democracy. When student activists act as agents of change, as critical and independent thinkers and denounce injustice and the violation abuses conducted by the state, they put themselves in a vulnerable position of reactions from the authorities. Benedicte Bull, Associate Professor and expert on Latin America at the University of Oslo, comments that "students are not exposed because they are students, but because they are politically engaged and possess unwanted knowledge. Research can also be seen as a threat" (My translation) (Universitas 03.10.10). Bull believes much of the reason for the attacks on the universities is that student groups and researchers often focus on issues that are not promoted by other groups. She stresses that student groups often have close ties to social movements and find and spread information about issues like human rights violations.

Polarization in Colombian society and politics

The amount of human rights violations against the student movement shows that there are vast challenges related to two of Nicholls' (2007) basic elements that structure the political opportunities of a social movement; the extreme repressiveness present in today's Colombia and the closure of the political system which this represents. This makes it very difficult to show disagreements with a political issue and much less organize protests.

As pointed out in the introduction chapter, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States led to what was called the "security measures policy" that is strengthening the arbitrary powers of the state at the expense of individual freedoms and collective social rights (Petras 2003). Petras argues that society has become more polarized at global level, but this applies to the internal politics of Colombia as well where anti-terror laws have been implemented the last years. The displacement of a student activist is an indication that he or she is considered an enemy of the authorities, because the person is clearly not wanted in that particular place and position he or she were violently driven away from. This way the displacement often leads to a process of empowerment and increased awareness of the political situation. At the same time the grievances increase among the displaced students, and

the death threats and forced displacement play a role in the polarization of the conflict. More people become more deeply involved, which also produces more military targets in the conflict. This can be seen in relationship with Wallensteen's (2002) conflict dynamic theory of polarization and escalation of conflict when the actors in a conflict are forced into two camps. According to the bell shaped normal distribution curve of Ramsbotham (et al. 2006), polarization occurs where the conflict manifests and culminates with violence and war. However, as scholars of the conflict transformation school point out, a protracted armed conflict like the Colombian one varies in intensity and amount of violence, and the conflict cannot be understood as one curve, but as many. Even if the student activists find it most important to change the causes of conflict they also argue that the government should take initiatives to a ceasefire or peace agreement, which is this model's next step in resolving conflict. However, since 2002 the Colombian government has not shown interest in taking such initiatives, and the highest point of the bell curve with violence and polarization is prolonged, and the variation of the intensity in the conflict will continue, which makes the model of the bell shaped conflict curve inadequate.

The public discourse in Colombia has changed during the last years. One informant argues that many people that never supported the guerrilla's existence or the use of arms now claim that the guerilla had legitimate grievances before, but that they in later years have become corrupt and greedy. The informant interprets this as a successful campaign of the Uribe administration towards people who harbor sympathies with the aims but not with the means of the guerrillas. This campaign has succeeded in making people focus on lack of security caused by terrorist attacks by the guerrillas as the main challenge in Colombia, instead of the lack of fundamental rights and the unequal distribution of wealth. The focus on security is often the main focus in a conflict situation, and according to García-Durán (2006), the mobilizations for peace have been truly massive around the world when the focus has been on a single issue, usually related to security conditions. Lucas stresses that the guerrilla is not a mysterious, unexplainable phenomenon that arises without reason:

> The guerrillas do not grow on mango trees. They grow up in the villages; they are part of the Colombian people.

Accusation of terrorism?

> There is a particularity at the public universities: That all of us are guerrillas, according to the authorities (Romina).

As presented in the introduction, the main cause of displacement for a student activist is the accusation of being a guerrilla combatant or guerrilla collaborator, which according to the government is synonymous with being a terrorist. The students continuously try to provide new content to the frames that define meaning in Colombian politics, and participate in a constant struggle to change the acceptance for the assumption that people in civil society and in opposition to the government are the same as guerrilla combatants.

To the question of whether some of the student organizations work with any guerrilla organizations, Lucas responds that there is no armed student activist inside the university:

> I have not seen any person from any student organization with a weapon inside my university. There are no armed combatants inside the universities. The government accuses everybody of being guerrillas. They say that any student could be a terrorist, especially if he or she is from the public universities.

One of the several disputes between the activists in the peace movements in Colombia concerns the tensions related to matters of violence and internal war, especially the problems of legitimacy posed by guerrilla groups and their struggle, or the rise of the governments' repressive policies to deal with the opposition or "rebellion" (García-Durán 2006). García-Durán argues that the context of internal conflict makes the peace movement in Colombia emphasize the defense of life and protection of the people, though there are sectors and organizations which focus on other debates. There is ambiguity in the Colombian peace organizations regarding the validity of using violence as a political means.

According to some of the displaced student's revolutionary ideology, the use of violence by the guerrilla is justifiable, but they support the use of violence on a *theoretical* level. One informant points out that if they really were into using arms and believed that this was the optimal way to achieve their goals and requirements, they would have joined one of the guerrillas already. Living under the conditions of political repression as the informants describe, a timely question is why not more actors in civil society resort to arms. Orjuela (2004) points out that only groups that have taken up arms are included in peace negotiation, while other groups with grievances are excluded. Potentially, this exclusion of civil society could be an argument in favor of crossing the line over to the armed groups, and this is one of the reasons that marginalized groups should be given a voice in the peace process. Agustin explains how joining an insurrection group can be the easiest or the only solution for an individual under certain conditions:

> It is impossible for me to engage in dialogue with the state. There is no space for dialogue, there is no respect for differences, and there are no guarantees for democracy. Therefore, the only possible road might turn out to be the armed one. It is the road where I could defend my ideals, because there are no other roads anymore.

Romina tells how some of her friends from the student movement gave up and joined guerrilla groups:

> I heard many people saying that the peaceful struggle did not have any meaning anymore, that it is more meaningful in the mountains[22]. I said: "no!" [People went because] they were very upset because of what had happened, after the massacre.

However, if some student activists feel the necessity of "giving up" the legal, non-armed road, why do people like my informants, who have just as heavy security problems as many of those who devote their lives to a lifelong service in the guerrillas, stay in the non-armed student movement when they know the risk? Lucas's strategy is to win over the arms with arguments:

> With arguments we win over the arms. It has never been permitted to have a space for thinking differently or where we can express our ideas. But we have to confront it with argumentation.

The student activists are consistent in their argumentation for a political and not a military solution of the conflict, and the use of peaceful means in spite of the accusations of being guerrilla collaborators and the exposure to state violence. Conversely, some of the student protests do end up throwing stones at the police, especially in a memorial protest after a student has been assassinated in a previous demonstration, something they consider to be fundamentally different from joining armed forces or using violence systematically to obtain something.

Summary of how and why the activists become displaced

The student activists' detailed testimonies of the process of the displacement show that their political space has been limited and their political rights violated in various ways. The death threats, the displacement and other human rights abuse against the students have an intimidating impact on the activists, but the activists that actually become displaced usually

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[22] *Mountains* refers to being part of the guerrilla because it mostly operates in the mountains.

continue the activism at the new location and with a high degree of commitment. The reason for this is probably that the activist-part of their life has been strengthened when displaced, for the reasons discussed above: leaving many of the other elements in their life like family and friends behind, the strong dependence on an organization after displacement and the realization that their displacement means they were making a difference in their previous activism.

Civil society in general, and maybe the student activists in particular, have so far not won through with their view in the struggle of framing of the conflict. The accusation against the student activists of being guerrilla collaborators, and thus also terrorists, is consolidated in the conflict discourse. For the activists, this implies that they are undermined as political and reliable actors. They are consequently seen as a threat to peace in Colombia and are persecuted by the state and armed paramilitaries because of this.

The organizations the activists relate to may play a crucial role before and after the displacement, and usually they assist the students in time of crisis, but some of them are not able to contribute or do not agree on the choices made by the activists.

8 The displaced student activists' role in conflict resolution

This chapter examines the role of the student activists in conflict resolution and begins with the students' understanding of conflict. As further explored in this chapter, the students argue that there is a need for conflict transformation, not just negative peace. With regard to how the student activists can contribute to transforming the conflict, this thesis argues that they may have three roles: Firstly, the students work for a political rather than a military solution to conflict. Secondly, they underline that there ought to be a comprehensive conflict transformation, and not only formal negotiations. This is visible by the discontent the students show towards the result so far and the government's politics of ending conflict by military means. Thirdly, the student activists emphasize the necessity of civil society actors in conflict resolution and reflect on what role civil society could play. The activists' perception of the causes of conflict is explored as this constitutes the basis for what kind of role civil society can have. It also explores identity related to the student movement and other peace actors.

I will first discuss the activists' understanding of the conflict, continued by how they can contribute to transforming the conflict. I will close by presenting some reflections on this group's suitability for contributing to conflict resolution.

Understanding of the Colombian conflict

> Privatization of the universities, closing down schools, cuts in the hospital budget; all this is part of the conflict (Nahuel).

This statement by Nahuel illustrates the connection the displaced students make between the activism located at the university related to the content and politics of higher education and the activism of the conflict in the country. Agustin states that "with hunger there are no morals at all, there is no ethics either", which illustrates the perception of the conflict as caused by grievances. It also indicates that it could be understandable that people who find themselves in an extreme situation use drastic means to force changes.

The informants express that the Colombian government has to a large extent succeeded in consolidating its view on the causes of the conflict. "The president has sold us the story that there are terrorists here, and because of this there is a conflict" (Lucas). Martín follows up: "The spell they have cast on Colombia is the conviction that the principal problem

in Colombia is security and terrorism." The prevailing opinion in Colombian society and internationally is that the conflict is mainly caused by the guerrilla terrorists, and war on terrorism is the best remedy to resolve it. Lucas does not agree on this and stresses that:

> We do not live in a wonderful country where the only problem is the guerrilla. It is not like that. Tomorrow the guerrilla can disappear, but we will still live under bad conditions, because of the unequal distribution of wealth.

Martín reflects over why so many people in economically marginalized groups accept the idea of the guerrilla as the main cause of the problem:

> The problem is that we [Colombians] do not have memory. The everyday life is killing the collective memory. And this is one of the most complicated aspects. Some call this social amnesia, to not want to know anything of politics, nothing of the conflict, nothing, nothing.

The displaced student activists emphasize that they comprehend the conflict not only, or mainly, as an armed conflict, but as a general conflict in society with deep economic, social, political and cultural roots. The rather unanimous view among them of why there is a conflict in their country underscores Guáqueta's (2003) opinion that the causes of the conflict are ideological differences between the armed parties and deep-seated grievances of economically marginalized rural populations[23]. This corresponds to Wallensteen's (2002) argument that civil war is more likely to occur in countries with a high degree of unequal distribution of wealth. Several informants express that the conflict is due to the significant social differences and the struggle over whom is to have power. As Martín stresses: "As long as the inequality and the current economic and political conditions exist, there will not be peace." Nahuel does not believe that the armed conflict will cease as long as the causes of conflict remain:

> There are constantly more and more poor people than rich people. Until something is done, the armed conflict will not come to an end. They can give you a loaf of bread today, but you will be hungry the rest of your life.

Romina asks how it is possible for there not to be a conflict when ten percent of the people own eighty percent of the land. These statements indicate that conflict in a situation like this is somehow inevitable. Accepting Cramer's (2006) argumentation that conflict and civil war is not necessarily only negative, confronting an excruciating situation like this would be

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[23] The FARC-guerrilla, which is the largest and most important guerrilla today, was founded among poor peasants trying to defend their land, and it claims to represent the rural poor in a struggle against Colombia's wealthier classes. The distribution of land is still a central issue in the conflict, especially when it comes to the enormous amount of IDPs.

understandable. As Cramer argues, civil war in developing countries is not always irrational or pointless. The informants thus contradict Collier's (2000) greed perspective, as they do not believe that the conflict is caused by economic opportunities of the armed groups. However, some students mention the government's motivation of war to be driven by economic opportunities, carried out by the national army, though this is not included in Collier's analysis. The students' focus is on deep-seated grievances as the root of conflict, which the conflict transformation and conflict resolution schools are based on. This view receives support from Guáqueta (2003) and Cramer (2006), who argue that the cocaine commodity chain, from leaf to refined powder, does sustain conflict in Colombia, but that it do not cause civil war, like many believe. This argumentation on the Colombian conflict is consistent with what Ballentine & Sherman (2003) argue, namely that lucrative economic resources become more important in the continuation of armed conflict than in the cause. Guáqueta (2003) argues that the objective of most Colombian guerrillas is not self-enrichment, but that their growing economic strength has made it less likely that they would demobilize. Gutierrez Sanin (2003 in Cramer 2006) argues that economic motives cannot explain the membership and sustainability of organizations like the FARC, and stresses that most recruitment to the guerrilla is voluntary, the soldiers do not get paid and there is little defection to the paramilitary groups that do pay their troops. The time horizon of the FARC's program for social change is extremely long and life for the guerrilla recruits is harsh. Financing war by producing or trading illegal commodities or abusing monopoly control over other high value commodities is not restricted to rebels or warlords. Cramer (2006) points out that governments also indulge in this activity to fund wars. United States government officials have found evidence of cocaine in Colombian government planes, suggesting individuals in a government meant to be aiding the United States' "war on drugs" were at the same time profiting from the drugs trade.

As well as inequality and injustice, repression is also mentioned as the main reason for the Colombian conflict by many of the informants. Other factors causing conflict mentioned by some informants go back in time: the civil war *La violencia* and the European colonizing of America. A more contemporary factor mentioned is the exploitation and imperialism by the United States and Europe. According to Cramer (2006), the IMF or the World Bank's structural adjustments are factors that stir up the situation in Colombia, but there is no evidence that it has caused war.

Who are the conflicting parties?

There is a discursive struggle regarding who is to have the hegemony to define the conflicting parties and their characteristics, which is related to the different perceptions of the conflict causes. The Colombian government would on the one hand claim that there is just one party; the guerrilla, since the government considers there to be no conflict in Colombia, only a war against rebels and terrorists. On the other, by conducting a demobilization process with the head paramilitary group AUC, as the government did in 2006, the paramilitaries are in practice treated as a separate party distinguished from the government. The informants have a different view, and claim that the state and the paramilitaries in reality make up the same party:

Interviewer: Who are the conflicting parties?
Leandro: The state and the insurgency. Of the armed parties, there are those two. (…) The paramilitaries are not a party in the conflict. They are party of one of the parties; of the elite and the state.

Most human rights organizations would agree on Leandro's statement about the paramilitaries; it is not possible for a state to have a peace negotiation with itself. This view is gaining more and more support, and people doubt that the government and paramilitaries constitute two separate institutions because of the comprehensive paramilitary scandal, where close connections were revealed between the paramilitaries on the one side and top leaders and many of the congress members on the other, all of them supporting Uribe. Because of these connections the informants believe the demobilization process to be illegitimate. Victoria explains:

They [the paramilitaries] were demobilized by the Law of Justice and Peace, but they did not hand in the weapons. What happened is the opposite: a legitimizing [of the paramilitaries]. The process of "negotiation" was a monologue; it was not demobilization, but a maneuver to distract the international organizations.

The students underscore that the conflict does not only include the *armed* parties, and emphasizes groups in civil society as the party that is most affected. Nahuel has a broad perspective on the conflicting parties that includes both national and international armed and unarmed actors:

There are three parties. Or four. First, the government of the United States. Second, the Colombian government with the paramilitaries, the right hand of the state. Third

comes the guerrilla or the insurgent groups. Fourth, there is us, the civil society, that ultimately suffers all the consequences of the conflict. We are the ones who make up (…) the displaced, the dead, the orphans, the single mothers, and even the paramilitary soldiers and other soldiers. The ones that suffer most are us, the people (Nahuel).

At first sight it may seem surprising that Nahuel mentions the United State as a party, but as mentioned in the introduction in chapter 1, the country is heavily involved in the conflict through for instance *Plan Colombia* and the extensive cooperation between the U.S. army and the Colombian national army. A couple of informants also mention the international society in general, and believe that they should be much more involved than they are today.

Some of the informants emphasize that the unequal power distribution between the main parties, that is the state and the guerrillas, makes the Colombian conflict an asymmetric one. Some point out that the conflict between the state and the social movements or civil society is also asymmetric, because the state has much more power, means and resources compared with the activists. The state uses violent means to suppress expressions of disagreement and protests, which the actors in social movements cannot match, or as Leandro puts it: "We only have our hands, our discourses and our actions."

How to resolve the Colombian conflict?

> It is easier to answer how not to solve [the conflict], than answer how it can be solved (Agustin).

As discussed, the students see the conflict as something that touches upon many more issues than just the armed war, which implies that the informant's proposal for conflict resolution includes a transforming process where all aspects of the social, economic, political, cultural and armed conflict are taken into account. When answering the question of how to resolve the conflict the students describe an all-embracing, integral peace, similar to the concept of positive peace, where the reasons for conflict ought to be resolved. The informants reject the idea of only making use of the conflict management approach and do not mention a cessation of the armed conflict or negotiation between the two main conflicting actors as a solution to obtain sustainable and long-lasting peace, even if all of them emphasize the necessity of a political, and not an armed, solution. Many mention peace dialogues and political negotiation between the state and the guerrillas as an important first step, but emphasize the importance of participation and inclusion of society in general, or as Juan Pablo answers when he is asked

how to obtain peace in Colombia: "With a real [peace] agreement which benefits all the sectors, especially the most excluded. [I want] an agreement where all of us are included." According to the conflict transformation approach, groups within the conflicting society should be given greater influence in the conflict resolving process, like Juan Pablo points out, and it should have a long-term perspective. Or as Leandro says: "A process of negotiation should be a process of profound changes that the whole of society needs; a social reform." Some informants are stricter than others in their definitions of good enough conditions and political environment for negotiation and see it as almost impossible that real, fair negotiations will happen soon. Martín is one of them: "We will agree to a negotiation when, and only when, it affects the people's interests."

As discussed here, many of the student activists largely equate peacebuilding with democratization and development, which makes their point of view some closer to Galtung's concept of positive peace, than Paffenholz and Spurk's (2006) attempt to settle on a compromising definition between positive and negative peace. Many of the informants' understanding of conflict corresponds to a great extent with the Marxist critique of conflict resolution, namely, that it is an approach that contributes to a continuation of existing power structures. As discussed in chapter 7, some of the students mention that they do not necessarily see an armed reaction from the people on the social, economic, political and cultural conflict as only negative, but on the contrary, understandable and inevitable, even if they work towards a political and not an armed solution of the conflict. This view is reminiscent of Cramer's (2006) statements that wars combine destruction with change and provoke social, institutional and sometimes technical adjustments. None of the student activists see the conflict as something that will disappear if only the guerrillas or the paramilitary cease to be or if the state stops violating human rights, because the conflict stems from deep social inequality and the people have to react to that, one way or another. There will still be conflict in Colombia even though the armed violence ceases, if the social conditions in the country do not change, as Nahuel says: "[We have to] put an end to the social inequalities. I say this is the magic formula, I am not Merlin, but I believe in making an end of this." Nahuel believes that to end the armed conflict, the reasons for arming have to go away and says that "The armed struggle does not stop with armed struggle, the conflict has showed that." But still, many people do participate in the armed conflict, and Nahuel tries to explain why:

> It is a social conflict. Many people get tired of it. They take their rifle and go to the mountains. They think that it is a way out. Because of this we are still in a soon to be fifty years old conflict that every day becomes more cruel.

In 2007 the Humanitarian Agreement, which was a proposal for an agreement of prisoner exchange between the FARC guerrilla and the government, was believed to be an important first step to peace dialogues and open up for a ceasefire and further peace process. The student movement and many organizations in civil society launched campaigns hoping that this could be an opening to a political solution of the conflict. However, the government later denied any conversations about prisoner exchange. In this case civil society tried to contribute to a change of behavior in the conflicting parties, but was not given a real space to participate. In emphasizing the importance of an agreement between the armed parties in combination with more profound changes and more participation of civil society, the student activists are arguing for a multi-track approach, as argued by scholars of the transformation school and some from the contemporary school. In the process of the Humanitarian Agreement, track-one was used and the top leaders of the FARC, the government and other central people were involved, while track-two and track-three involve other actors that could contribute and work with broader issues not directly related to the agreement. The idea with an initiative like a prisoner exchange draws a parallel to what Orjuela (2004) points out in chapter 3, that peace work does not necessarily aim to end conflicts, but to make non-violent conflict possible.

The student activists as conflict transformers

> Without romanticizing displacement, displacement may also involve innovation (Brun 2003:26).

Brun (2003) argues that displacement may involve innovation and that it is a process of creating change and new possibilities. Displacement can result in the remaking of the self and is not simply related to victimization, because the struggle of recovery occupies a central place in the lives of many displaced persons (Torres 1999 in Shanmugaratnam et al. 2003). Sebastián's displacement is an example of this. He was unaware of the risk of his activities at the university before the displacement and went through a process of increasing awareness after being displaced to be able to understand what had happened to him and what to do:

> I was getting to know [the political youth party]. I was questioning everything. Until a person said to me: "You are in the condition you find yourself in because of [president] Uribe's politics. You cannot defend a person who has displaced you. You cannot defend a government that has killed your friend. You cannot defend a state that has displaced you." Little by little I started to open my eyes.

Sebastián joined the youth party and was later presented to a student organization through them. This is not an uncommon way of entering a student organization, because of the close relationship between political parties and the student organizations. As discussed in chapter 2 in connection with civil society, parties, especially left parties, may play a significant role in organizing people in civil society and social movements. Sebastián's story shows how his frustration and fury against something diffuse was transformed into purposeful activity that helped him to process what had happened. Even if Sebastián was displaced because he had assisted his professor in a research project precisely about displaced peasants in the shantytown outside his home city, he was not able to fully comprehend why these people had been displaced before he obtained the political consciousness which the youth party provided him with. Sebastián's new understanding is similar to what Schneider describes happened in the communist-influenced neighborhoods in Chile where the residents started to believe that they could make a difference as individuals in collective organizations with others (Escobar & Alvarez 1992).

Sebastián's ignorance of the human rights situation in the country before he became displaced is not uncommon. Many IDPs do not know which kind of activities involve risk. Lucas explains how he too was ignorant of this when he was younger:

> In a country like Colombia there are many Colombians who do not understand. (…) We are such victims of the conflict that we do not notice what happens in the country. (...) I was victim of the social conflict, but I did not understand that. I only understood that I did not have money for the bus, period. People know that they do not have any money to pay for something, but not why.

However, after the displaced all the student activists are well aware of their situation and have many thoughts about how to play the role of agents of change or conflict transformers. Orjuela (2004) maintains that victims of war must be included in peace processes, as well as perpetrators in war and civil groups encouraging war. In the phase of working out a peace agreement for a long-term solution to the conflict, civil society actors can provide good analysis and research, come up with ideas, organize discussions, and help to shape the policy formulation. The informants reflect on how they as displaced persons are in a special position. Agustin believes that they as displaced are like a reflection of a conflict: "What happens is

that displaced students are itinerant witnesses". He continues by recognizing that "I am a part [of the conflict], but as a social and political actor." Martín emphasizes that "Our role is to show reality."

One informant sums up the role of a student activist in conflict resolution: "To question, criticize and propose is our role" (Martín). This includes revealing and not accepting the existing frames and hegemony, in addition to presenting an alternative. Displaced students can challenge pro-war discourses and promote the use of non-violent methods, or as Orjuela (2004) points out, education is a keyword for counteracting prejudice, war propaganda and enemy images. A fundamental issue for many of the informants is to raise the level of awareness in the Colombian society, and to form what Gramsci describes as a new societal consensus in society by acting as a counter-hegemonic movement. As students and trained activists, the main form of contributing is to spread knowledge and show that issues can be seen from different angles and that there can be different truths. It is difficult to improve the level of political conscience in today's Colombia, and Valentino thinks that this can be explained by a lack of an active civil society:

> In Colombia civil society does not exist, because the freedom of speech is not respected. The media sells me the idea that I have to watch soap operas, vote for a certain party, eat chips, et cetera. There is no freedom of thought, and because of this there is no civil society.

What Valentino describes is a reality where the media contributes to what Gramsci calls a consolidation of existing ideological hegemony and that there is no movement in civil society which is strong enough to challenge that. The informants do not think that freedom is limited only by the power or the censure of the media, but it is one of the central factors.

Orjuela's (2004) study of civil society in Sri Lanka around the turn of the millennium, showed that civil society can contribute to a change of attitude, and be a channel for people to express their views and assist people with practical needs at the local level. This may be transferable to the situation with the displaced in Colombia because the Sri Lankan conflict has many similarities to the Colombian one.

Opening political space

According to Ramsbotham (et al. 2006) a civil society that addresses conflict can prevent violence at an early stage. Wallensteen (2002) stresses the importance of removing the security dilemma in a conflict, which could make more space for the

organizations in civil society. To provide safety, de-escalation has to be assured at state level. To be able to function, civil society needs a certain level of security and protection against violations, but this also works the other way around: a stronger civil society leads to a higher level of security. This is an everyday dilemma for many Colombian student activists who are potentially IDPs because of their work in civil society.

The informants point out the extreme human rights abuse as something that is and could be an obstacle to setting the agenda in conflict resolution.

> There is a stigmatization and repression in every demonstration, with assassination, torture, beating and psychological pressure. This is also part of the conflict (Victoria).

Victoria is one of those who had to displace from a situation in her city that was so extreme that it could be a hinder to mobilizing resistance:

> Two-three dead emerged every day in the city. In one week you could find 100-200 dead. This was in 2003, in April. In the newspapers they called it "The Black April" because of the quantity of homicides, displaced and human rights violations.

As mentioned in chapter 4, social movements have contributed to democratization even when the situation of war limits the space for organizing. According to the student activists there are episodes where work has been limited and they have experienced that talking about peace could be dangerous. They have to continually calculate the risk and make choices based on it, but also concentrate on trying to make the student movement and the activism into something that could really contribute to resolving the conflict. When it comes to conflict in a civil war like Colombia, one of the central questions is how to provide political space to all groups in society (Wallensteen 2002). The student activists have experience working with this as an aim. Working for the right to participation and to be given room in public and political space are some of the main struggles in the student movement and are often contributory causes of displacement.

The legitimacy of the state is questioned by a large sector of the population in Colombia, especially in the rural areas where people have suffered forced displacement, human rights violations and loss of property because of the state (Guáqueta 2003). The government's network of informants and armed peasants make the displaced people and civil society military targets because they are perceived to play a military role in the conflict. This is similar to what Rajasingham-Senanayake (1999 in Uyangoda 2005) warns about; the

hidden economics of war, and implies that civilians have become tools of dirty wars. The internally displaced students are aware of their situation, which makes it easier to turn the displacement to a sphere of change.

Agents of change in the university sphere

Many informants consider the university to be a special place where they can develop ideas of how to change Colombia. Leandro believes the university can reflect society in general: "In the public universities you find a small version of society contained within four walls: The rich, the poor, the revolutionary, the *paraco*[24]*,* the homosexual…" As discussed in chapter 6 about student activism, the displaced student's prime identity is that of a university student activist rather than a displaced person. Their thoughts on how they can contribute to conflict resolution in Colombia are not considerably distinct from how they believe student activism should be conducted. The student activists have a profound commitment to their role as activists and conflict transformers, which is founded on the view of conflict as something compound and complex and conflict resolution as something that must be complete and integral.

As described in chapter 6 the use of negotiating tables between the conflicting parties on a student- or university-related issue is among the activities the students organize at the universities. Negotiating tables have been used in different situations to establish a dialogue between the students and the student administration over issues like university fees or rector elections, or with the rector or local government to communicate and negotiate the demands in a student strike. Conducting negotiation tables and conflict management on university-related issues are examples of experience the student movement gains which could be transferred to the national scale, in order to contribute to negotiations on the conflict in Colombia. Orjuela (2004) argues that activists in civil society can engage in dialogue with the armed actors in the area, which may improve the everyday life of civilians, and can facilitate the change of public attitude towards the conflict.

Parts of the peace movement?

The informants in my study mainly identify with and relate to being a student and political activist and not directly to issues like conflict resolution or movements like the peace movement. Probably, most would not relate to conflict resolution, because they do not

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[24] *Paraco* is Colombian slang for paramilitary, usually used in a derogatory sense.

consider conflict to be negative *per se*. This contrasts to the discourse of conflict resolution that has prevailed in Colombia, which mainly focuses on conflict management and negotiation between the armed parties. The student activists do not primarily define themselves as a part of the peace movement, because the perception of peace varies depending on the conception of the different actors in the conflict. One conception of peace is that it could be obtained with a political rather than an armed solution to the conflict, which is the point of view of for example the main organization for victims of the conflict. A distinct view is promoted by the government, who focuses on reacting to the violence perpetrated by the guerrilla groups rather than by the state army or the paramilitaries. Consequently, there are also different views on whether the student movement is a part of the peace movement or not. The student activists construct much of the narrative about why they organize and participate in student activism on the perception of peace as something to be approached politically, and in some occasions interact with the peace movement. In this sense they can be considered to operate as peace actors in civil society.

Are the student activists suitable conflict transformers?

> Caution: Reality on the other side (Unknown).

These words are tagged on the exit gates of the National University in Bogotá. Some of the informants emphasize the necessity of reflection on the position they have in society and the importance of not falling into the trap of believing that everything important happens inside the university gates. Colombia is a country where professionals with a university title are usually referred to with their title. There is a big gap between people with higher education, who are part of society's intellectual elite, and the marginalized people without access to the university. Agustin reflects on the work student activists do inside the university compared to the reality outside the university walls:

> It is difficult to gauge the problems of the rest of the country when you are shut up in the university. You are worrying about the school desks, the computers, the books, the research budget… Outside there are other processes in development (Agustin).

The five student organizations the informants belonged to were on the whole quite similar ideologically. They resembled each other not only in political means, but also in the way of organizing activities. More important, their main objectives were also similar. Sometimes

they cooperated, especially in elections at the university, at large mobilizations and in the center-left election front PDA, but they also spent much time quarreling over certain issues. At the same time, many students emphasized the importance of more cooperation between the different student organizations and a stronger coordination. Many share the vision of one united, national student organization which would include not only the five organizations, but all Colombian student organizations. Juan Pablo, from a student organization that was founded just a couple of years ago following an internal division in another organization, made it seem very easy to unite:

> We believe in unity. The other student organizations should only say three words: where, how and when. The things that make us different are very few.

Some years ago an initiative was taken to create one united student organization on the left. However, according to the different student organizations there were several factors that prevented it from being realized: small but important political differences, strong connections to different political parties that are just as divided as the student movement, lack of trust, together with organizational and personal fights over who was to be part of the new national board. At the same time, there is no doubt that all the student activists in opposition to the government have a feeling of being a part of the same project and the same struggle in the student movement.

How can a victim contribute?

> I am a victim with luck (Martín).

Displaced persons are both victims and agents of change (Shanmugaratnam et al. 2003). Violence, persecution and flight have an impact on displaced persons, but they represent agency and creativity rather than passivity and resignation. Shanmugaratnam argues that most IDPs do not act as passive victims of circumstances.

A displaced person is often considered a victim of the armed conflict in Colombia, though not all the displaced students agree that they are to be considered victims. One informant, Anahí, believes that the victims are individuals who do not do anything about their situation, that accept the role of victim without trying to change the reasons that they are victims. She evaluates this thoroughly when she is asked if she considers herself a victim:

No, that phrase would mean that I recognize myself as beaten. But I am fighting. If there were to be attempt against my life I would not consider myself to be a victim, because at least I would be living by my rules, living out what I believed in, what I found just. If I died, it would not be as a victim. (…) If I have taken sides, I cannot be a victim. The state would consider me an enemy. If the state had been democratic I would at least have been a political subject. But they do not consider people that think differently than them to be political subjects, but enemies. I consider myself to be an opponent more than a victim.

Other informants may describe themselves as victims, and some even consider all the Colombian people to be victims. As Valentino puts it: "I am a victim of the state violence. There are different kinds of victims." Lucas reflects over when he became a victim: "I am a part of the conflict. I have been a victim of the armed conflict since the moment the Black Eagles threatened me." David thinks that even the soldiers in the national army, the paramilitaries and the guerrillas are victims, because many of them do not have other options than joining one or the other armed group. He criticizes the way the young soldiers are used in the army: "They put them in the army and fill them with hatred. They are victims of manipulation." Or, as a member of one of the student organizations who was displaced years ago, puts it: "The victims and the victimizers are often the same" (Martinez, meeting 09.12.07).

Another aspect of the victim – victimizer situation is pointed about by the leader of the national student organization: "The victim is very aware of the location of the victimizer. That is what's special about the displaced student [compared to other IDPs]" (leader of student organization 1, meeting 09.21.07). The student knows very well why he or she became displaced. For an IDP able to analyze this and the identity of the victimizer, it is easier to have a full comprehension of his or her situation and to form a strategy for the future.

As mentioned, a couple of the informants were imprisoned, which was the direct cause of their displacement. One might easily conclude that being incarcerated in today's Colombia certainly means being a victim. Facundo, accused of rebellion, tells about the torture he suffered in custody before a four month stay in jail:

They said that the gun was mine and I had to sign a paper that confirmed this. When I did not sign it, they started to hit me on the cheeks… hit me in the face… After that they took me to the police station. There they beat me again, they threatened me. First they had me in the GAULA's office, then they passed me to the custody of SIJIN[25] with other prisoners. We were held eight days in custody cells under inhuman conditions. They wouldn't let us go to the bathroom and they treated us very badly.

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[25] *Seccional de Investigación Criminal*. Section of the Judicial Police.

Despite the bad conditions, the time spent in prison is not necessarily merely a negative experience for everyone. Guillermina tells how going to prison for a year, accused of rebellion and terrorism, was a mixed experience:

> On a Friday they transported me to a prison for women. It was very difficult, nothing like that had ever happened to me. It was very complicated to be there. People think you are a criminal. (…) But the truth is that on the whole the experience was enriching, because in prison we did a lot of political and educational work. I have a certain level of education so I gave classes of physics and mathematics. I also like music a lot, and encouraged people with music.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the discussion about victims. First, that being a kind of a victim in Colombia is not very rare even using a narrow definition of a victim. Second, if the victim is aware of why he or she became displaced and tries to do something about it, a victim can be just as much an agent of change as a non-victim participating in the conflict resolution, or in some settings even better, because of the relevant experience.

The displaced students' visions of the future

> We [Colombians] do not think of the future, only about lunch today (Claudio).

Claudio believes that young Colombians do not have a long-term perspective on the future. Lucas also touches on this issue, stressed by several informants:

> Youngsters today think about what will happen in a month. But my mother thought about the future, about what she wanted to be as an adult and so on. Our future is very short; it is not a long-term project.

Lucas thinks the war is to blame for young people's lack of thoughts about the future:

> It is very difficult to picture a country without war, because we are a generation of war. Before this conflict there was another. What we know is the war. A bomb, ten killed; [this] is part of everyday life. Most of the people do not know peace. But people are tired of the war. Even the guerrilla says that.

In spite of living under conditions of civil war and extensive human rights violations, most of the students believe in the possibility of changing the future and by this begin to believe in the long-term future. To the question about the dreams about their future, the most common answer is to "finish my career". Even if only a few of the displaced student activists study to

be teachers, many of them want to be teachers, professors or people who in some way can communicate with, enlighten and raise awareness in the next generation. The motivation for this is to help children and young people to comprehend the situation and the conflict and give the young people tools to change Colombia, resolve the conflicts and prevent new conflicts from arising. It is interesting to see how most of the informants automatically start speaking about the future for Colombia or the Colombian people when asked about the dreams for their personal future. Valentino is an example of this:

> I would like to live, give classes, play something, go horseback riding, have a small farm with animals... I would like for there to be no children living in the streets, that no girls should have to prostitute themselves, that there were no exclusive clinics and that people would not have to go into the war where we all lose.

One of the informants emphasizes that she does not agree with the wording of the question (Anahí). She does not have any dreams for the future, but rather a life project. A concrete project implies the possibility of changing the future and influencing what would happen or not. Even if these displaced students are ambitious concerning what they want to do and how they want to be a part of a conflict resolution and a peaceful future for Colombia, their personal future dreams are quite modest: "When I am old, with my chocolate colored Labrador and a house with a chimney, I wish for Colombia to be a democratic country. That is the only thing I wish for" (Lucas). The personal dreams usually fall in the shadow of the dreams or the project for Colombia: "My dream is not to buy a car or a television. My project is a dignified life, welfare and prosperity for everyone" (Valentino).

Summary of the displaced student activists' role in conflict resolution

The displaced student activists do not primarily work for ending conflict in particular. However, they consider the work for democracy and participation in the universities and in society, as well as equally distribution of wealth, as conflict preventing. Much of the strategies and objectives in the student movement do relate to conflict resolution, as linking the activism to the political contexts also outside the university sphere is an expression of.

When it comes to the view on what causes conflict in Colombia the students emphasize the inequitable distribution of the political and economic power. They believe that this is the underlying cause of conflict and that it is necessary to change it in order to find a resolution to the conflict. The student activists reject the notion that it would be sufficient to achieve a military victory over the illegal armed groups while refusing to work for a political

solution to the conflict, which is the strategy of the Colombian government. The students see the state as one side of the armed conflict and the guerrilla groups as the other, but underline that in order to successfully transform the conflict, civil society must be much more included in the process, and the grievances of the people ought to be eliminated or decreased. They mainly argue in favor of a transformation of conflict, which includes a combination of a long-time process of profound change of society with the objective of achieving positive peace, with the use of conflict resolution tools like negotiation and conflict management.

The displaced student activists make up a small but active, educated and committed part of civil society that is willing to contribute more to conflict transformation and conflict resolution if they are given the opportunity, more political space without repression and are allowed to believe that conflict could play a positive role in society.

5 Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to analyze the role of internally displaced student activists in the transformation of the Colombian conflict. I have examined the strategies of displaced activists of the Colombian student movement related to mobilization, displacement and contribution to conflict transformation. The theoretical framework in this thesis consists of approaches to civil society as a site of resistance, how to transform conflict to achieve a sustainable conflict resolution, and the mobilization strategies of social movements.

The displaced student activists are basically motivated to mobilize grievances related to an unequal distribution of power, resources and wealth. They explain their strong commitment to the student movement with the desire to make changes. This commitment may grow stronger both through organization and the experience of being displaced. The activists do not agree on the government's perception of the conflict as a war against terror or the insurgency. They rather believe that the causes of conflict lie deeper than the war between the state and the insurgency groups, and that the conflict goes beyond merely the armed part of the conflict.

The general point of this thesis is to show how social movements in conflict can contribute to conflict resolution and how the displaced activists can turn their displacement into a sphere of change. In all armed conflicts the space of civil society is limited. To be able to obtain a sustainable, integral and positive peace, more than just the armed actors or the elite in society ought to be included. The social movements in conflicts like those in Sri Lanka and the Philippines, which bear some similarities to the Colombian one, with an authoritarian state, insurgency groups and a high degree of political conflict, could study the choices made by the Colombian student movement and vice versa. Also in the other conflicts attempts of violent solution have been dominating, which, in these cases as well, cannot be considered as having been successful according to the criteria of reaching a deep-rooted transformation of society and a positive peace.

The mobilization of student activists

The displaced student activists use different kinds of strategies to mobilize, and make use of tools from different theoretical approaches. First, as we have seen, they mobilize around grievances in the education sector and in society in general, which triggers activism at the universities and in the streets. The academic, cultural and political arenas at the university are

central to facilitating, mobilizing and encouraging activism. The student organizations and the people the students meet there play an important role in empowerment and organizing protest. Along with being mobilized by their political conviction obtained in lectures or in organizations at the universities, the economic, political or familial factors in the social background of the displaced student activists play an important role.

The identity as a student, the identity as an activist and sometimes the identity as a victim, or rather a student activist who has experienced the violence directly by being exposed to threats, persecution and displacement, are central mobilization factors for the student movement. The activists' constant security threat and fear influences the dynamic of the student organizations and gives a particularity to the identity and forms of organizing the protests. On an individual level the displacement often makes these student activists more committed to the student movement or human rights movements, and to the movements' causes. Another aspect of identity is the students' background as coming from middle income and lower-middle income families, with access to resources like higher education and the advantage of coming from politically conscious families.

There have been many important mobilizations, campaigns and demonstrations in Colombia, but so far this has not resulted in deeper change or conflict resolution. Nevertheless, the social movements in Colombia continue to mobilize and organize protests, and new kinds of grievances and new kinds of organizations and forms of protest appear.

The grievances alone are not necessarily enough to trigger a mobilization or start a movement. There must be some factor that gathers and unites an organization. In the student activists' case it is a common identity, life situation, commitment, location and conviction about an issue or ideological view that unite the students in organizations. It must be taken into consideration that the informants in this research project may be some of the most committed of all student activists, both because they were visible and central enough to receive death threats in the first place, but also after the displacement when the student often becomes an even more "professionalized" activist.

Most student activists are aware of the risk that student activism at the universities and in society implies. The motivation for mobilizing is strong, taking into consideration the risk they are exposed to. The student movement does not always succeed in mobilizing a broader spectrum of the students or society or in gaining the influence they seek, possibly because of failed strategies or the lack of political space and opportunities related to state repression.

Why does displacement occur and what does it imply?

There is a polarization in today's Colombia between the government on the one hand, and those who question aspects of the government's policy or try to change the perception of the state of affairs on the other. Colombian student activists become displaced because they are considered to be a threat to the authorities in the country. There is a continuing struggle of framing of the conflict between the Colombian government and the activists or civil society. The government has succeeded in labeling the actors in civil society in general and the student activists in particular as "terrorists" or "rebels", which opens up for legitimizing the abuses against the movement. The activists seek recognition for their work as legal and legitimate based on the perception that there is serious human rights abuse and discrimination in today's Colombia. The threats, human rights violations and displacement of the student movement and other social movements show that the authorities recognize the movements' ability to change the peoples' opinion and conception of the conflict in Colombia.

The student organizations, as well as other organizations like human rights organizations, play an important role in the process of displacement. The students receive support and advice, at the same time that they find themselves in a position of dependency on their organizations.

The political structures and context the student movement works in are not optimal. A political system which excludes many actors, along with the concentration of power within the political and economical elites and the high degree of repressiveness by the state, could potentially both encourage and limit the movements at the same time. The fear resulting from a death threat and the stress related to forced displacement may limit the student activist's possibilities to finish his or her studies or to pursue his or her political project. It is traumatic to be forced to move to another city, to quit one's studies and political work and leave friends and family, and it certainly has an impact on the lives of the young activists. At the same time, some informants say that in the beginning the limitation of political space and feeling of being unsafe is hard, but after some time, they would not wish to change the fact that they were displaced because it has given them other opportunities. The university administration and government's ignorance of the student movement's suggestions and demands and the students' need of protection fuels the movement and increases the grievances and reasons for protesting. The government has signed numerous conventions where they promise to protect, assist and ensure basic human rights for the citizens, but they repeatedly violate those commitments.

Internally displaced students as conflict transformers

A student who is displaced because of political activism at the university sees herself or himself as a participant in a project with the objective of effecting changes in the Colombian society and contributing to a transformation of the armed conflict. According to the student activists the work for student democracy and a better welfare system for the students at the university is transferable to life outside the university sphere as well, that is the work for democracy and better welfare systems in society. The objective is to change the unequal distribution of wealth and power so the grievances of the people are eliminated or lessened.

The student activists in this thesis believe in a political rather than an armed solution of the conflict. Their underlining of the need for a profound transformation of the conflict with integral, positive peace as their goal aligns them with the conflict transformation school. To be able to transform society and the conflict, state violence against civil society must cease. The activists do not refuse conflict *per se*, because conflict may be inevitable when the tensions in society are too important, but they do not believe that there will be any solution within the ongoing armed conflict.

Because most of the displaced activists knew the risk of their political activities, they are particularly aware of the conflict dynamics and the implications of the conflict and constitute one of the most conscious groups of actors in civil society and among the IDPs. If the displaced students activists are offered a certain space and level of security to act in, they can be a resource for transforming the conflict instead of being a product and consequence of the conflict as a displaced.

The displaced student activists want to contribute more to conflict transformation and conflict resolution, if they are given the opportunity. They will not be able to play the role as conflict transformers under just any kind of condition. To be able to continue the activism over time the students need their basic human needs to be covered, and the extensive human rights abuse must cease. They also need to be accepted as legitimate, legal political actors, and to be heard.

Victim, terrorist or conflict transformer?

Are the displaced student activists victims, terrorists or conflict transformers? The student activist is directly affected by the violent conflict when being forced to displace, which makes him or her a victim of the armed conflict. However, most Colombians are affected more or less by some aspects of the conflict, like being marginalized economically or having to

constantly live in fear. As the student activists themselves point out, victims are usually perceived as a passive group. As activists they try to turn the displacement and the repression against the student movement into a possibility of influencing the conflict. Thus, the activists do not perceive themselves as victims.

The activist is considered to be and treated as a terrorist by the Colombian government. After the last attempt of dialogues with the FARC guerrilla in 2002, the consolidation of the definition of the FARC as terrorists has been strengthened. Parallel to a more aggressive policy against the guerrillas, the opposition has also been more exposed to human rights abuse with the accusations of cooperating with the guerrillas, which is the same as being a guerrilla combatant, and thus being military targets. The Colombian government has to a high degree won through with this discourse and framing of the student movement.

The displaced student activists try to turn the displacement and the position as victims of war into a sphere of change. They aim to change the labeling of them as terrorists and they argue for a profound change in Colombian society in order to achieve transformation of the conflict. This finds them aiming for the role as conflict transformers, trying to get rid of the terrorist label and rejecting the role of passive victims waiting to be rescued. One can only hope that one day they will be able to play a constructive role in transforming a conflict that has caused so much pain and suffering for so many years.

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Appendix

1. Interview guide

Name:
Place:
Date:
Time:
Informant number:
Comments:

Background information

1. How old are you?
2. Where do you come from?
3. Where do you live and who do you live with?

A. What do you study?
4. At what university(ies)?
5. How far have you come in your studies?
6. Are you studying what you wanted to study?

If you still study:
7. How much time do you spend on your studies?
8. How do you finance your studies?

If you quit the studies:
9. Why did you have to quit your studies?
10. What do you do now when you cannot study? (Work, voluntary work, nothing)

(B. Tell me about your family.)
11. What do your parents do for a living?
12. Is your family displaced?
13. Is any member of your family involved in political work?

Political activities

C. What kind of political activities are you involved in?
14. What kind of political work did you do at your university in your home city?
    a. Why did you do political work?
15. Do you still do political work in your new city?
    a. How has your political work changed after being displaced?
    b. Why do you still do political work?
    c. How do you do/organize your political work?
16. Are/were you organized in any organization(s)?

    a. Briefly, what is the aim of the organization(s)?
    b. What role do you have in that organization(s)?

D. Why do you organize politically?
17. What kind of difficulties have you been confronted with because of your political work?
18. Were you aware that your political work could result in displacement?
    a. If yes, why did you still continue the political work?
    b. If yes, and you still do similar political work in your new city, why do you continue when you know the risk it implies?
19. Is there anything that could stop you from doing political work?

The displacement

E. How did you become displaced?
20. Can you tell me about your displacement? (Tell me your story)
    a. When did it happen?
    b. Why did you become displaced?
    c. Did you receive threats? From whom?
21. How did you flee from your home city?
    a. Who helped you?
22. What do you think led to your displacement?
    a. What other factors could have been involved? (Your family, friends, membership in an organization etc.)
23. Whose fault was your displacement? (The Colombian government, paramilitaries, guerilla, the international society, your own, other people)
24. Whose responsibility is your displacement? (Who should help you when you are displaced?)
25. Could you have chosen differently/done anything to not be displaced?
    a. How?
    b. What other options did you have?

(F. How is it to be displaced?)
26. How do you like it in this new city?
    a. What do you like?
    b. What do you dislike?
27. Do you miss home?
    a. What do you miss?
    b. Is there anything you do not miss?
28. Can you visit home?
29. Do you think you will move back to your home city one day?
    a. Why/why not?
30. If you knew what you know today, would you still have fled after the death threats?
31. If you knew what you know today, would you still have done the political work in your home city?
32. Tell me about your rights as a displaced person.
    a. Are your rights respected?
    b. Why/why not?
33. Are there different kinds of displaced persons? How? (Farmers, students etc.)

Understanding of the conflict

G. Why is there a conflict in Colombia? (How do you understand the conflict?)
 34. What kind of conflict is it?
 35. Who are the conflicting parts?
 36. What do you think is the solution to the conflict?
  a. What does solution imply and include?
  b. How would you be able to tell that the conflict is over?
  c. What is peace to you? / What does peace mean?

H. In what way do you believe that your and other displaced students' political activities can lead to conflict resolution?
 37. In what way are you a part of conflict resolution in Colombia?
 38. What can you do to be a part of conflict resolution in Colombia?
 39. How important is it for you to reach a solution of the conflict?
 40. Who suffers the most in this conflict?
 41. Do you consider yourself a victim of the conflict?
  a. If yes, in what way?
  b. If no, why not?
 42. Do you consider yourself a resource for achieving peace in Colombia?
  a. If yes, what makes you a resource?
  b. Is there anything that prevents you from being a resource?

Closing

I. What dreams do you have for your future?
 43. Do you think your dreams will come true?
 44. What is necessary for your dreams to come true?

J. What dreams do you have for the future of Colombia?

K. Is there anything else you would like to mention that I have not asked you about?

L. Do you know other displaced students or experts on the field that I should talk to?

2. Overview of informants

Date of interview	Name
Date of interview	**Name**
09.12.07	Nahuel
09.14.07	Francisco
09.15.07	Leandro
09.20.07	Guillermina
09.20.07	Agustin
09.21.07	Martín
09.22.07	Victoria
09.25.07	Romina
09.26.07	Facundo
09.26.07	Ana
09.27.07	Anahí
10.01.07	Jimena
10.04.07	Valentino
10.08.07	Davíd
10.03./10.09.07	Sebastián
10.12.07	Juan Pablo
10.12.07	Claudio
10.18.07	Lucas

3. Meeting log

Date	Organization	Person
09.12.2007	A student organization	Diego Martínez
09.14.2007	CPDH – Permanent Committee of Human Rights. *Comité Permanente de Derechos Humanos*	Jairo Ramírez, director
09.14.2007	Pontifica Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá	Pedro Valenzuelo, professor
09.17.2007	ANDES – National Association of Students in Secondary School. *Asociación Nacional De Estudiantes de Secundaria*	Andrés Álvarez
09.19.2007	ASPU – The University Professors Association. *Asociación Sindical de Profesores Universitarios*	Pedro Hernández, profesor at La Universidad Nacional
09.20.2007	Universidad Distrital, Bogotá	The general secretary and employee Sabrina Perez
09.21.2007	Student organization 1	The leader
09.21.2007	Student organization 2	A member of the board
09.25.2007	Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá	A Colombian student also doing a thesis on internally displaced students
09.26.2007	Student organization 3	The leader and two from the board
10.01.2007	A political youth party	Member
10.03.2007	Norwegian Refugee Council	Nina Meza
10.03.2007	Norwegian Refugee Council	Jakob Roting
10.04.2007	CSPP – Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners. *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos*	Members of the board
10.15.2007	Student organization 4	Members of the board
10.16.2007	Peace Observatory. *Observatorio de Paz*	Vera Grave, responsible of the issues peace and pedagogic in the NGO

10.17.2007	A liberal student organization.	Andrés Fandiño, student representative at Universidad Libre
10.18.2007	CPDH – Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights. *Comité Permanente por los Derechos Humano*	Jairo Ramírez
10.19.2007	JUCO – The Communist Youth of Colombia. *La Juventud Comunista de Colombia*	Claudia Florez, the leader, former leader of a student organization and displaced student
10.19.2007	Student organization 1	Leader. The same as I had met earlier
10.20.2007	PDA – The Alternative Democratic Front. *Polo Democrático Alternativo*	Politician who had been displaced as a student fifteen years ago
10.21.2007	Student organization 1	The board