The multiple faces of insecurity

An analysis of security from the Chocoano women's perspective

Master Thesis within Political Science

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Abstract

This thesis explores the complexity of the concept "security" in theory and practice. The traditional security concept is replaced by a human-centred security approach in order to analyse women's security,. The stories of Afro-Colombian and indigenous women from the poor and war-torn region Chocó in Colombia demonstrate that the insecurity of the *Chocoano* women is not only created by the armed conflict in Colombia, but that insecurity fundamentally has its roots in societal structures and systems as well. This thesis argues that the category "woman" is insufficient and that an intersectional approach is the only way to fully understand the Chocoano women's security and insecurity. In the case of Chocó, the population's ways of relating to the ancestral territories is one example of how ethnicity and culture play a mayor role for their security. The concept *human security* will be embraced for its recognition of the intimate relation between human rights, development and individual security. Galtung's theory on violence will also be used in order to complete the picture of how the direct and indirect violence that Chocoano women suffer from is reinforced by unequal power relations.

Furthermore, women's possibilities to act for security, mainly through non-governmental organizations and the Church, are investigated. The peripheral positions of the Chocoano women in Colombia as well as within their own cultures are found to be barriers to women's effective participation in security policy. It is also concluded that the relation between security and activism for human rights is rather complex and contradictory in Chocó. Finally, it is argued that there exist several parallel and competing discourses of security. The predominant discourse of security in Colombia ignores many of the dangers that women in Chocó are exposed to. The concept of security must be seriously challenged both in theory and in practice if women's security is to be guaranteed in Colombia.

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

"We are talking about security. I'm thinking that if there would be more resources here, things would be different. If there would be better health, well everything related, it would all be more reliable. Because even though there would still be war, it would not be like it is today. It would be more like moving towards peace."

The opening lines of this thesis were stated by a Colombian woman called Sandra. Sandra is a poor Afro descendant woman living in the war-torn region Chocó in north-eastern Colombia. For years, illegal armed groups have been fighting each other and the state's military forces over the control of the region. The Chocó region is considered the poorest and one of the most remote in the country. Of all the cities in Colombia, Chocó's capital Quibdó is the place hosting the largest proportion of internally displaced persons[1] (IDPs) relative to its size. Quibdó is also the place where I have met Sandra and several other *Chocoano*[2] women whose stories make up the backbone of this thesis. This is in an attempt to explore the concept "security" by letting persons whose voices rarely are heard speak their language of security. By critically examining the predominant security discourses and structures of power, light can be shed over the construction of insecurity for those who find themselves in peripheral and marginalized positions, such as the women of Chocó.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to understand how gender relations and other social and cultural aspects affect how security and insecurity are constructed for women in Chocó. The purpose is also to examine how women perceive their possibilities to influence their security and in what terms security is deliberated in Chocó. In order to reach such understanding this thesis examines how insecurity is perceived in a specific context – the one of Chocó – and how women from local and regional organizations[3] express their opinions and experiences around security and insecurity.

My research questions are:

a) What factors and conditions are perceived as security threats by women in Chocó?

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[1] Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border (IDMC 2009).

[2] Chocoano means being from the province Chocó in Colombia.

[3] When talking about organizations in this thesis the Church (Diocese of Quibdó) is included.

b) How do women perceive their possibilities to act for security and what role do non-governmental organizations and the Church play for their personal security?

c) How is the term "security" used and deliberated by women in Chocó?

d) How do social and cultural factors influence the construction of insecurity for women in Chocó?

1.2 Background

This thesis is the result of a cooperation with the Swedish civil society organization Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (SweFOR). SweFOR is an organization working for peace and reconciliation through nonviolence. Colombia is one of the countries in which SweFOR's peace observers make permanent presence, supporting local peace-building efforts and protecting human rights defenders. In Chocó, SweFOR work together with the organizations Asociación Orewá, COCOMACIA and COCOMOPOCA, which are so called ethnic-territorial organizations. The purpose of having peace observers in Chocó is to increase local organisations' capacity to act and decrease that of the aggressor, to collect and disseminate information nationally and internationally and to offer moral support and hope. Furthermore, SweFOR's International Peace Program is about information and advocacy work to increase knowledge about the situation in Colombia, so that violations of human rights don't go unnoticed. (SweFOR 2009). Even though the SweFOR personnel have great knowledge and experience of the conditions of Chocó, my hope is that this study will contribute to their work of collecting and spreading information about Chocó. Above all, I hope thesis will be useful as a source of information about the security situation of organized women in Chocó.

Security is an issue that has been at the centre of international relations thinking for long. The traditional concept of security refers to the safety of the state from external military attacks. The state's sovereignty and autonomy are central concerns for governments who can go to extraordinary lengths to eliminate possible threats of military harm. The security concerning individuals has clearly not been on the top of the agenda of the traditional concept of security.

Throughout the years much has changed on the international scene. Today, more than 90 percent of wars and conflict take place *within* states, just like in the case of Colombia. As a result warfare has come to target civilians to a much greater extent (Söderberg Jacobson 2005). Whatever the threat to the state might be, the security of individuals and civilians is still frequently treated as a secondary matter in global and intra-state warfare. The state-centred security concept has been increasingly criticized by a number of scholars claiming that the security of the individual has to be treated as equally, or more, important.

During the 1990s the United Nations (UN) introduced a new approach to security. The concept of *human security* is a progressive and inclusive concept that revolves around the security of the individual. Today, there is a lively debate on what security is and what it is not which demonstrate the great impact the questioning of the traditional

security concept has had. By turning the locus of security away from the state, the UN human security doctrine argues for the need of talking about basic necessities, equality and human rights as security issues. The recognition of the intimate connection between the living conditions of the civilian population and sustainable peace has also contributed to realizing the importance of a broadened security concept.

However, a human-centred way of looking upon security does not necessarily mean gender-conscious outlook. Feminist scholars have pointed out that the risk of a human-centred approach is a gender-neutral or male-centred approach (see Söderberg Jacobsen 2005; Stern 2001). Women and men are often exposed to different kinds of threats but too few attempts are made to distinguish those differences.

Research and experiences show overwhelming evidence that equality between women and men and female participation and influence is fundamental for development, poverty eradication and human security. Almost ten years ago the UN Security Council adopted *resolution 1325* in order to promote the participation of women on all levels of conflict resolution and peace building. The tendency to see women merely as victims and to consider security issues a domain that needs to be handled by men marginalizes women and ignores their roles as victims *and* actors. Therefore, women pertaining to organizations dedicated to human rights will be particularly addressed in order to find out how organizing relates to security for those women. As will be argued, activism within non-governmental organizations can have contradictory relations to security.

In order to carry out a profound analysis of the threats to security experienced by women in Chocó, simply adding the category "woman" is not enough. For example factors such as ethnicity and age have shown to be crucial in the construction of insecurity for Chocano women. As will be argued in this thesis, understanding security requires identifying the structures of power (economic, social and political) as well as cultural norms and world views constructing the reality of women in Chocó and their possibilities to be safe.

2 Methodology

This chapter contains information of how this thesis has been carried out, the selection of methods and units of analysis and some of the difficulties that have had to be dealt with along the way.

2.1 A qualitative approach

This thesis is a field study carried out in Colombia during eight weeks February-April 2009. Six weeks were spent in Chocó which is the region in focus of the analysis.

The method is a qualitative approach and a combination of sources and methods have been used. The principal way of data collecting has been through interviews. Furthermore, the time spent in Chocó allowed me to get an insight into the way of living of the population and to participate in meetings and events of relevance for the thesis. Field studies have the advantage of allowing the researcher to get insight into the phenomenon of interest through observations, informal meetings and conversations, and other ways of interacting with people. During my stay in Colombia I also found written material and other sources related to my field of interest.

2.1.1 Selecting the respondents

The criteria used to find the respondents were that the person should be a woman and member of a non-governmental organization. I also wanted to include variations in age and ethnicity. My method of selecting the interviewees can be called a *strategic selection.* That is, the selection is not random but rather based on systematic judgements on what units (in this case persons and organizations) are most rewarding to include on the basis of theoretical and analytical purposes (Grønmo 2006:94).

I ended up interviewing 23 women. Of these six, are so called "informants" and the remaining 17 are called "respondents" (see Appendix A). The interviews with the informants aimed at collecting information around certain themes (such as a social worker of Doctors without Borders giving information about the health situation in Chocó) but did not focus on their personal security situation. The interviews with the respondents were more focused on their own perceptions and experiences related to security.

When using the method of strategic selection there is no way of calculating how many units to include before starting the field study. However, an important criterion is that the process of selection can end when the inclusion of new units does not contribute to new information relevant to the purpose of the investigation and the information collected earlier (Grønmo 2006:95-103). During the process of selection I constantly compared the potential respondents with those already interviewed. New insights of who would be relevant and interesting to interview, and what additional information was needed, came along the way.

I consider the final selection to be both inclusive and varying. Out of the 17 respondents, nine were leaders[4] in large organizations with high recognition and coverage in Chocó, some form part of national and international networks[5]. Of the remaining eight respondents, six were engaged in community organizations or productive projects on a smaller scale and two were members with no specific role in two of the large organizations. In total the 17 respondents represent thirteen different organizations. The women's ages varied between 16 and 59 years old. Three of the women were internally displaced persons originating from rural communities and one was currently residing in a rural community.

Thirteen of them defined themselves as Afro-Colombian and two as *mestizo[6]*. The most difficult task was to include indigenous women. Out of the 17 respondents only two were indigenous. The indigenous women in Quibdó tended to be shy and many of them did not speak Spanish. On two occasions indigenous women came to meet me, but accompanied by their fathers and brothers. On both occasions their family members would not let me interview the women. I also travelled to an indigenous community called Unión Waunaan and spent three days there. Unfortunately, the strict hierarchical roles in the indigenous communities only allowed me to talk to one woman who was the coordinator of the Women's Council. The other indigenous woman came from the indigenous organization Asociación OREWA. Anyway, I consider their stories and the complementary information given by other women on the situation of the indigenous peoples as satisfactory for my purpose.

2.1.2 Conducting the interviews

The process of identifying the respondents and to arrange meetings with them was sometimes a difficult task which required creativity and persistence. However, individuals were generally positively inclined to participate. All women were given the choice to be anonymous and to have their names and other details exchanged. They all stated that they did not mind having their names published.

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[4] Here I define leader as a person with a salient and important position with real influence in their organizations, not necessarily a position of presidency.

[5] Those organizations are ADACHO, COCOMACIA, COCOMOPOCA, La Red Departemantal de Mujeres Chocoanas, La Ruta Pacífica and the Diocese of Quibdó.

[6] Person of mixed "race". Mestizo in Colombia can also refer to southern European descendants. The particular security situation of the mestizo persons in Chocó is not a unit of analysis in the same way as the security of Afro-Chocoanos and indigenous communities. Anyway, it should be noted that it is problematic to divide individuals into mixed and non-mixed. For example, one of the women defined herself as Afro even though one of her parents was Afro and the other a mix between white and indigenous. Therefore I have chosen to let the respondents auto-definitions to guide the denominations of the respondents. However, when discussing the general security situation in Chocó the entire population is included. The two interviewed mestizo women (Elsa and Yaneth) are both nuns working at the Diocese of Quibdó. They originally come from other provinces but have spent almost two decades in Chocó. Those women were included as they are both considered leaders and human right defenders in Chocó, which are important categories in this thesis. They also have a profound knowledge of the realities of the Chocoano communities.

With one exception the interviews with respondents were recorded and later transcribed. The interview that was not recorded was the one carried out in the indigenous community Unión Waunaan. Due to the high presence of the guerrilla in this area of Chocó, I was recommended by a Catholic nun residing in the community not to record the interview as it would intimidate the woman. Therefore I decided not to even consult the indigenous woman about the matter, as I had reasons to believe the question would be uncomfortable. This interview was also different from the others as I was recommended not to use the word "security", since the woman would be likely to believe that I expected her to tell me about the activity of illegal armed groups in her community. To give witness of such matters could put the woman at risk and she would probably not be willing to do so anyway. Therefore I switched the word "security" to words such as "problems" or "difficulties" in this interview and wrote down what was said.

The interviews with the respondents can be called "semi-structured", "half-structured" or "open" interviews (Kvale 1997:17; Kylén 2004:20). This method implies that a number of questions and themes for the interview to focus on are prepared before the interview, an interview guide[7]. The aim of this kind of interviews is to understand the respondent's personal opinions and experiences of the subject in question. Therefore more or less the same questions are posed to all respondents in order for the researcher to compare the answers and find patterns and points of connection However, this method gives the researcher the freedom to ask questions in a different order and to be formulated in different ways between the interviews. It also allows additional questions and themes to be discussed during the interview, depending on how the dialogue proceeds. (Esaiasson et al. 2004:254-255; Kylén 2004:20-21).

2.1.3 Literature

The literature used in this thesis in order to understand Colombia, Chocó and the large fields of security and gender studies has been obtained through searches on library data bases and on the Internet. Different governmental sources, non-governmental organizations and academic publications and articles have been consulted and used to line out a background to the problem investigated. When researching Colombia, however, one has to be aware of the sources of any information. In such a conflictive context with a wide range of competing interest, opinions on Colombia are polarized. Therefore, established sources such as the United Nations, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Colombian state entities (DANE, Observatory on Human Rights in Colombia) and well-known NGOs (i.e. Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group and Amnesty International) have been prioritized. Literature on the history of Chocó and its peoples and traditions is not easy to find, but I managed to receive some in Chocó and also by searching on the Internet.

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[7] The interview guide used in this study can be found in Appendix B.

2.1.4 Observations

Observations are important and necessary for any investigation in which the researcher needs to create an understanding of the society, group or phenomena that is to be examined. Phenomena, problems, social relations and a variety of other informative aspects of social structures can be detected through observations by the researcher. Just spending time on the streets of Quibdó and seeing the ramshackle houses, the poverty and the struggling people, or watching the multinational mining projects along the roads and the rivers leaving giant deserts of destroyed land, these are impressions difficult to retell.

I attended several meetings, workshops and other events. For example I participated in a workshop on violence against women[8] and in a three-day encounter of female politicians and community leaders of Chocó[9]. I also visited the northern suburbs of Quibdó (Zona Norte) twice, women's productive projects, the celebrations of the International Women's Day and the open meetings arranged by the Diocese of Quibdó on every Tuesday. On all those occasions I could spend time and talk to numerous women (and men) and take notes on what was said and discussed. As commented above, I also spent three days in an indigenous community.

Chocoanos are generally friendly, helpful and curious people, which certainly had a positive impact on social interaction. Spending time with staff of international agencies such as Swefor and discussing my thesis with them was also of great help.

2.1.5 Processing the material

When the field study was over and all the interviews transcribed I had plenty of texts to deal with for the analysis. Transcribing all the interviews was a time-consuming and tiring occupation, but rewarding well, as it implied spending several hours dealing with each interview. When going through the collected material it is of vital importance to pay close attention to all sequences of text that relate to the research questions of the investigation. This has to be done in a systematic way. Statements and sequences cannot be chosen simply because they coincide with the investigator's expectations (Starrin & Svensson 1994:81).

During the processing of the information I was careful to stick to the approach described above. In order to take control over the material I chose to use a method of codification which is a way of sorting the data (Kylén 2004:170-175). A list of codes containing fifteen codes was invented. The codes responded to different themes of interest such as participation, health, organizations, armed actors, ethnicity etcetera. Wherever the themes occurred in the text, its code was noted in the margin. The codes were often combined or several codes were put at the margin of the same piece of text.

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[8] Arranged at the Diocese of Quibdó by ADACHO, an organization working for the rights of the internally displaced population, March 3 2009.

[9] Arranged by the women's rights organization La Red Departamental de Mujeres Chocoanas, March 6-8 2009.

For example if health was discussed as a security problem I would put an H in the margin, and so on. I found this an effective way of getting to know the material even better and for systematic scanning of the material.

2.2 Delimitations of the study

The population of interest in this investigation is women in Chocó. Naturally, my selection of 17 respondents cannot reasonably be considered representative of the whole population. Rather, this is an attempt to exemplify how insecurity can be, and often is, constructed for women in Chocó through the intersection of a number of social, cultural and political factors and processes. How security and insecurity are perceived also depends on the place of residence. The study was carried out in the province capital Quibdó with the exception of the visit in indigenous Unión Waunaan. It was not possible for me to travel around Chocó like I would have done, if the security situation had permitted me to do so. However, the fact that three of the interviewed women were internally displaced persons coming from other parts of Chocó, and that several of the women represented organizations working intimately with the rural population and other Chocoano municipalities, makes their experience and knowledge of women's situations outside Quibdó highly relevant.

2.3 Reflections on the method

When using interviews as a method to collect information, a number of factors influence the answers. Some women had never been interviewed before and seemed slightly nervous, even though this was only noticed in the initial phase of some interviews. The interview situation is not a meeting of absolute equals since the investigator decides what themes to discuss and is the one asking questions. My intention was always to let the women take their time and space to express their thoughts and opinions. However, sometimes my questions were interpreted very differently from what I expected. I found it hard to interrupt and lead the women back to the track I was following. Sometimes the time at my disposal was not sufficient to go as deep into all the questions as I wished. It is also likely that the women did not completely open up to me, although in some cases a good contact was established. Some experiences are simply too personal and intimate to talk about and might be connected to shame, such as experiences of intra-familiar and sexual violence.

On some occasions linguistic conditions were found to be an obstacle. Even though I manage Spanish fairly well, I had some troubles understanding the Chocoano dialect, especially at the beginning. In order to fully understand the interviews I therefore had to ask the woman to explain and repeat, which might have broken off her train of thought. On the other hand, I believe this could have contributed positively in the sense that I showed that I was keen to understand her and interested in her story.

The meeting of two cultures can also be a crucial factor in an interview situation. My understanding of the meaning of a statement can be rather different from how it is meant in the woman's context. Me coming from a rich country was of course a great

contrast to the extremely poor conditions of some of the women that were interviewed. Before starting the interviews I was careful to point out that the purpose of the interview was academic and that I was in Chocó independently of any international aid organization. Despite this, some women asked whether the investigation would help them in some way and what they would get out of it. However, when I had explained the purpose better they all agreed that it was important to participate.

These are only some examples that possibly have influenced the information collected in the field. Despite this, I believe that the chosen method was by far the most appropriate one in the search for an understanding of the Chocoano women's reality. Interviews are a fruitful and rewarding way to reach (a certain kind of) knowledge, but as Kerstin Vinterhed puts it "Interviews lead to another kind of truth than do statistics, another kind, not the truth!" (Quoted in Davies & Esseveld 1989:37, my translation).

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter is a presentation of the theoretical framework that has served as both an inspiration and a tool in the drafting of this thesis. First, security studies, and particularly the human security approach, will be discussed in section 3.1 and its sub-sections. Section 3.2 deals with security issues from a gender perspective. The importance of adopting an intersectional approach when analyzing women's security is argued for here. Thereafter follows section 3.3, in which the concept of violence is addressed by using Galtung's theoretical framework. Finally, the chapter ends with section 3.4 which contains reflections on how the theoretical the framework is used in this thesis.

3.1 Security studies

Security and insecurity are central and widely disputed concepts within International Relations theory and policy. Even the authorization of talking about an issue in terms of "security" or "insecurity" is disputed (Stern 2001:21). As the purpose of this thesis is to explore women's security in Chocó, it has naturally involved a great deal of reading and thinking on the concept "security", its meaning, construction, definition and usefulness.

Many definitions on "security" can be found in the literature. The definition said to be the most widely used and accepted is Buzan's "the pursuit of freedom from threat" (Stern 2001:21). However, it has been argued that too much disagreement exists on potential conceptions, theories and definitions of security, and that the debaters should spend the same energy directly on the security threats themselves (Alkire 2003:9).

Traditional or mainstream security studies are carried out in order to determine the threat, use and control of military force, and the specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent, or engage in war. Security studies privilege the position of the state and makes it the primary object which is to be secured. Focus is put mainly on external threats to the state, such as other states or international actors such as terrorists. The traditional school also deals with internal threats that can be considered harmful to the state's character, rule, or territorial and demographic integrity. The state's autonomy is seen as a strong objective, both for states, individuals and groups (Morgan 2007: 14-15).

The fact that the state is the *referent object* of security has been a matter of debate, and a series of problems related to the traditional state centric security school has been pointed out. The critique is that thinking of security as the threat, use and control of military force reduces security to *military* security, and renders other forms of security into something else (Mutimer 2007:54-55).

3.1.1 Critical security studies

A critique of the traditional security school emerged during the 1990's and was labelled "critical security studies". The critique that was articulated was broad and did not

denote a coherent set of views. Rather, the common denominator was the fact that various schools were troubled by the ways security studies were carried out, and wanted to move beyond the Cold War era in some forms of critique of the major assumptions of traditional security studies (Mutimer 2007:54-56).

The standard assumption of security studies is that the people are secure if the state is secure – the state as the reference object as mentioned above. Critical Security Studies asked questions about the cases in which the state is secure, but its people is not? Can a country be said to be secure when the state is oppressing its citizens? How can we think about referent objects other than the state within the camp of security studies? By questioning the referent object of security it is necessary to question the whole nature of security studies (Ibid.).

By altering the traditional way of looking upon security, a wide range of questions emerged that required thinking more broadly about the sources of both security and insecurity. This desire of finding new ways of theorizing around security attracted a range of theoretical perspectives, including constructivism, post-structuralism and post-Marxism that have come to form strands within critical security studies. The character of Critical Security Studies is said to be marked by the concern with "the social construction of security" (Ibid. 60-66).

The critique is broad and much space would be required in order to make a fair description of the many approaches that has been established. My intention is not to carry out such an extensive summary. However, what the above mentioned approaches bring to the fore is that traditional security studies are insufficient and biased towards the state. Therefore complimentary approaches are needed in order to reach a full understanding of what security is, for whom it is, how it is constructed and what practical political action is to be taken. The critical security scholars theorizing is to a large extent driven by a vision of the conditions that *ought to pertain* for people to be secure (Kerr 2007:92). Here, I have chosen to focus on the concept of *human security*.

3.1.2 Human Security

In 1990, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) launched the concept of *human development* in its first Human Development Report. In the report it was argued that development needed to be defined more broadly, and contain components such as health, education, equality and political freedom (UNDP 2009, King and Murray 2001:586-587). The single goal of the first Human Development Report was that of "putting people back at the centre of the development process". Human development is about people having choices and being able to live their lives according to their interests and needs (UNDP 2009).

So, what does human development have to do with security? The answer is that the human development paradigm influenced the development of a new security paradigm: that of *human security*. The term human security has its origins from the UNDP policy statements on development, and in particular the 1994 Human Development Report (Kerr 2007:92, King and Murray 2001:585). Human security is about putting people's

security instead of the state's security at the centre. Just like the advocates for human development wanted to remove per capita income from the centre of development policy, the background of the human security concept is the post-Cold War desire to leave the focus on military and state centred security policies behind (CHS 2003).

Although what is actually considered a security issue varies widely according to the approach and perspective taken, it is hard to deny that the concept of security used during the Cold War era is sufficient today (Jacobsen 2000:268). The fact that conflict since the mid-1990s overwhelmingly takes place within the borders of states, not between states, demonstrates the great need of re-conceptualising security. Human security puts focus on the connection between development and conflict. It also highlights the view that threats to humans, as well as state entities, are changing (Kerr 2007:92-93). In traditional security theory, the state is the only actor that seeks to protect itself and defend its own survival. On the contrary, to ensure human security other actors than government can be involved. Regional and international organizations, non-governmental organizations and local communities are examples of actors that can seek to protect individuals for various threats (CHS 2003).

3.1.1 The narrow and the broad schools of human security

Despite its links to development, human rights and other fields, the research and policy agenda for human security remains unclear. All proponents of human security agree that its primary goal is the protection of the individual. However, human security does not have an obvious definition. The human security agenda has received considerable criticism, mainly for its vagueness and the resulting difficulties of clear policy implementation (King & Murray 2001:585). Human security has also been compared to "sustainable development" - everyone is for it, but few people have a clear idea of what it means (Alkire 2003:22).

Two main schools with different approaches to human security have emerged: the "narrow" and the "broad". The matters of tension between the two schools are the meaning of human security and what threats are to be included into the concept (HSC 2005:8).

The *narrow school* focuses on the threat of political violence to individuals. That is, "the threat of political violence to people, by the state or any other organized political actor" as argued by Mack, a proponent of the narrow school of human security and part of the Human Security Centre (HSC) (Kerr 2007:95, King & Murray 2001:585). The Human Security Centre produced the *Human Security Report* (2005) and since then annually produces human security reports that tracks trends in human security issues and aims at providing a summary of the incidence, severity and consequences of political violence around the world (HSC 2009).

The Human Security Centre recognizes that threats of political violence are strongly associated with poverty, lack of state capacity and various forms of socio-economic and political inequality. However, due to pragmatic and analytical reasons, threats like poverty and disease are not included in the Human Security Centre's analysis of human

security. The proponents of the narrow school argue that the analytical costs would be too high and limit the possibilities for conceptual clarity and guidance for research programs. The definition of the narrow school can be simplified as "freedom from fear" of the threat or use of political violence (HSC 2005:viii; Kerr 2007:95).

The *broad school* argue that human security means more than a concern with the threat of political violence. As distinguished from the narrow school's definition "freedom from fear", the broad school adds several kinds of freedoms, for example "freedom from want" and "freedom to take action on one's own behalf" (CHS 2003:10). The proponents of the broad school want to include both direct and structural threats of hunger, disease, natural disasters and other life-threatening dangers, inside and outside of states. The proponents of the broad school argue that these threats kill far more people than war, terrorism and genocide combined, and therefore human security policy should seek to protect people from these threats as well (HSC 2005:8; Kerr 2007:95).

The Commission on Human Security (CHS) argues that creating human security is about protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. This means protecting people from severe and widespread threats and situations by using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. The objective is to create "political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity" (CHS 2003:4).

As demonstrated by the above description, the broad school's definition of human security is extremely inclusive. The Commission on Human Security refuses to make a detailed list of what human security should and should not include - human security is supposed to be a dynamic concept. What is considered to be vital elements of life and what freedom is, varies over cultures and among individuals inside cultures (CHS 2003:4). However, the vital cores do not include all aspects that are important or necessary of life. Rather, these may be described by fundamental human rights, basic capabilities or absolute needs. The rights and freedoms in the vital core pertain to survival, livelihood and dignity (Alkire 2003:3).

As the proponents of the narrow school are connected by the common focus of the threat of political violence, its means are also directed to manage these threats. The policies can for example be found in the vast literature on managing internal conflict and transnational violence. However, the measures of the broad school will depend on whatever the threat is perceived to be and its means are therefore limitless (Kerr 2007:95-96). The broad school also has a more outspoken focus of not merely protecting, but also of empowering, people and societies to create security for themselves. The Commission on Human Security underlines that in almost every situation of human insecurity, both protection and empowerment strategies are required, even though their balance and form will vary considerably (CHS 2003:10).

Threats to human security can be direct (i.e. genocide or discrimination) or indirect (i.e. a raise in military spending affecting health expenditure negatively). A human security perspective helps identifying gaps in the infrastructure of protection, as well as identifying ways of empowering people to react on security problems. Whatever has to

be done, the people whose security is affected should take part in formulating and implementing these strategies. Empowered people can stand up for their rights and mobilize against security threats. This implies that the broad school aims at policy implementation providing education and information to enable people to deliberate and scrutinize the roots of insecurity. It also means creating a public space where opposition and discussion is tolerated and can flourish (CHS 2003:10-11).

Finally, it is important to make clear that the different scholars' conceptions of security, both those of human security and others, do not necessarily compete. The various and diverse understandings of security should therefore not merely be seen as mutually exclusive and contradictory, but also as necessary approaches to broaden our understanding of security. As argued by Brand-Jacobsen and Jacobsen, perhaps the great failure of the traditional security conception is the attempt to conceive the world in terms of "either/or", that is, security or insecurity. A complete understanding of security should therefore go beyond "either/or" and towards an understanding based on "both/and", since the recognition of what is security to oneself and what it means to others can be rather diverse. Security, as argued by Brand-Jacobsen and Jacobsen and the various schools trying to widen the concept of security, must be extended to include economic, political, social and cultural factors. It must be recognized that other threats than war exist and threaten individuals' security on a number of levels (Brand-Jacobsen & Jacobsen 2000:268-269).

3.2 Gender and security - an intersectional approach

As mentioned earlier, security does not have to be discussed exclusively in relation to war and armed conflict. However, just like in this thesis, this is frequently the case. In order to understand the mutual relationship of gender and security it is fruitful to consider the foundations of the nation state and war and the traditional roles of men and women. As some feminists argue, the gendered nature of the state is significant for the unequal treatment of women within society in general. Despite the fact that women increasingly have been integrated into many institutions of states, the provision of national security and the military has been and continues to be a sphere of the male. The work of defining and defending the security of the state has been a men's task, and continues to be so (Kennedy-Pipe 2007:76-81).

War is traditionally associated with masculine values such as strength, honour and courage. It is argued that military training and boot camps are designed to construct and reinforce certain notions of what it is to be a man. Women, on the other hand, have been regarded as carers and nurturers of the homeland and future generations, ignoring the many tasks women have performed during wars, many times on the battlefields (Kennedy-Pipe 2007:80). The perception of women as "spoils of war" is based on the traditional legal status of women as property of the male. Rape was, and can still be, perceived principally as an injury to the male state, group or person who should protect "their" women. This role has made women the object of protection instead of subjects of action (Banda & Chinkin 2004:12; Kennedy-Pipe 2007:78). However, the protected might have had little say in terms of whether they are rendered "safe" by the state and military or not. It has been argued in numerous works on women and conflict that while

women have frequently been targeted by the enemy, they may also suffer in the hands of their so-called protectors (Kennedy-Pipe 2007:76-84).

In reports and studies of the effects of armed conflict, the particular concerns of women are often considered peripheral. Gardam and Charlesworth argue that even though women often bear the major burden of armed conflict, women's experiences of conflict are frequently ignored. When women are addressed, focus is generally put on violence, in particular on sexual violence. According to Gardam and Charlesworth, this tends to obscure other important aspects of women's experience of armed conflict. These experiences also differ widely across cultures depending upon the role of women in particular societies and the characteristics of the conflict (Gardam & Charlesworth 2000:148-150).

Security theory and policy have been criticized by a growing number of feminist theorists. Hierarchical social relations have been hidden behind a depersonalized security concept in Western political theory and policy, and feminist perspectives have explored how nation-state security practice departs in the faith in a sovereign masculine subject. Various feminist theorists have concluded that as long as the language of national security ignores to speak out the multiple experiences of both women and men, security will be highly limited. As Peterson argues:

"Radically rethinking security' (Dalby) is one consequence of taking feminism seriously: This entails asking what security can mean in the context of interlocking systems of hierarchy and domination and how gendered identities and ideologies (re)produce these structural insecurities. Moreover, rendering women's insecurities visible, does not simply provide historical-empirical confirmation on masculinist domination. Illuminating the gender of core constructs and historical processes both shed new light on ways of being and knowing and suggest alternative understandings of 'who we are' that are then available for (re)visioning." (in Stern 2001:25).

If mainstream security thinking disregards women's experiences, what about the alternative security perspectives? The "individual" or "human" has indeed been placed in the centre by many alternative approaches, such as human security. But then one has to ask: what individuals (or humans) and in what contexts? Is the human security paradigm, with its connection to basic human rights, a possible entry into addressing securities and insecurities of those whose experiences are rarely or never outspoken? Stern argues that the category "individual" (or human) becomes unstable when considering identity. She poses the question: "How can one address, for example, the articulations of insecurity of people who are not only poor and indigenous, but are women – people whose struggles are multiple and whose security needs are both contradictory and contingent upon context?" (Stern 2001:24-25).

Armed conflict often exacerbates inequalities that exist in different forms in all societies. Women therefore become particularly vulnerable during conflict, just like other groups such as immigrants and minorities that traditionally are suffering from discrimination. (Gardam & Charlesworth 2000:150). Like a wide range of feminist writings on women in conflict has demonstrated, even during times when conflict is

said to be over and political violence to decrease, women's insecurity can peak (see Meintjes et al. 2001).

A woman belonging to an ethnic minority is likely to be exposed to multi-dimensional discrimination, and less likely to be able to make her security concerns heard. These multiple discriminations do not operate independently but *intersect* and reinforce each other with severe consequences for the enjoyment of human rights. It is therefore crucial to capture how *intersectional discrimination* can be a result of both structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of discrimination or systems of subordination. Such an analysis can lead to insights of how discriminatory systems such as racism, patriarchy and economic disadvantage create disempowerment and marginalization (Banda & Chinkin 2004:11).

What Stern, as well as so-called post-structuralist and post-modern feminist scholars, draws attention to is the *context* of security and an emphasis on the inter-relations or intersections between (political) identity and the possibilities of security. Feminist theories have drawn attention to how "discourses of danger" work together with different identity discourses (such as those of national identity, ethnic identity and gender identity). These discourses create hybrid securities and insecurities, as well as hybrid identities. Even though important work has been done to challenge and expand the concept of security, security generally continues to be treated as a fixed, gender-neutral and universal concept, Stern argues. Therefore, those at the top of national, class, race and gender hierarchies are still dominating the articulations of security (Stern 2001:26-48).

3.3 Violence

Security is intimately linked to violence and it is therefore appropriate to explain how the term "violence" will be used in this thesis. Just like "security", "violence" is not easy to define. I consider Johan Galtung's theory on violence to be an interesting point of departure in order to understand the many dimensions of violence that for example women, poor people and ethnic minorities are exposed to.

I will not outline all of Galtung's extensive theory on violence here. However, I will present some of the aspects of his work on violence that are important to consider for the theme of this thesis. Galtung argues that a wide conception of violence is necessary. That means, for example, that violence should not be perceived simply as physical violence performed by an actor with the intention of causing damage to another person's body or health (Galtung 1975:57).

Galtung has argued that perhaps the definition (or a typology) of violence is not the most important thing to sort out when discussing violence. Rather, Galtung argues, is it important to recall the theoretically meaningful dimensions of violence which can guide thinking, research, and finally action, towards the problems of violence. The concept of violence has to be wide enough to include the most important types of violence, at the same time as it is specific enough to serve as a base for concrete action (Galtung 1975:56).

"Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations." Violence can be defined as the difference between the *potential* realization and the *actual* realization – between what could have been and what is. For example, if a person died from tuberculosis in the sixteenth century it would have been hard to perceive it as violence, since it would have been impossible to avoid. But if a person would die from tuberculosis today, despite all the medical resources available in the world, this is a result of violence according to the above definition. Likewise, the life expectancy of 40 years in a society many centuries ago could hardly be defined as an expression of violence, but the same life expectancy in any society today would (Galtung 1975:57-58).

Galtung distinguishes between several types of violence. However, the distinction between personal (direct), structural (indirect) and cultural violence[10] is fundamental. Direct violence exists when people are exposed to physical violence. Structural violence is described as "social injustice" and forms part of societal structures and systems. Unequal distribution of power can be said to constitute the basis for structural violence. Structural violence deprives people of fundamental values (physical or psychological) that are necessary to live a meaningful life. In order to understand structural violence, knowledge of social structures is crucial (1975:57-60).

Cultural violence is symbolic and refers to those aspects of our cultures that are used to legitimize direct or structural violence. One example of structural violence is media glorification of violence. Symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into the structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both. (Galtung 1997: Confortini 2004:4).

The above distinction between structural, personal and cultural violence is in reality not easy to make. Rather, they intersect and elements of one can exist in the other. Galtung points to the fact that structural inequalities can be demonstrated through the study of health and death statistics among individuals and regions (both national and international). The lack of power usually means the lack of access to health. The unequal structure will deprive the most powerless of their equal possibilities to organize, claim their rights and act for change. Structural violence thereby causes physical damage (ill-health and death), that can be just as harmful as that damage caused by direct violence. Another example is when a person decides to act violently due to the social roles and expectations that persist in society. When one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence, as Galtung has argued. According to Galtungs theory, there is no reason to believe that structural violence causes less suffering than direct violence. However, it is easy to think so, since direct violence can be seen and has an identifiable perpetrator. Structural violence is often silent, anonymous and intangible. Similarly, cultural violence is contained in all areas of social life (religion, law, ideology, science etc.) and can motivate actors to commit

[10] Galtung introduced the concept of cultural violence in 1990, fifteen years after the introduction of his first two dimensions of violence.

direct violence or not to counteract structural violence (Galtung 1975:59-73; Karlsson 2004:29-31; Confortini 2004:12).

3.4 Reflections on the theory

The conceptual understanding of security that will be used in my analysis is that of the broad school of human security. To the broad school, security relates to survival, livelihood and dignity, fundamental human rights and absolute needs. As has been outlined above, the broad school departs in the interconnection between development, empowerment and security. According to this understanding, security is a dynamic concept and what is perceived to be security threats depends on cultures, context and individuals.

The broad school also allows analysing the possibilities of participation of those whose security is affected as a security matter. Empowerment is fundamental to security for all to be guaranteed, and consequently, marginalization and discrimination of some societal groups can be a security threat for those groups.

I find such a holistic way of looking upon security as key. In order to carry out a study on women's security, the women themselves have to be able to define the threats that render them insecure. I would not find it fruitful to ask women what threats they are exposed to, and then only take seriously those that fit into a narrow understanding and reject those that do not. For example, death resulting from the lack of treatment of a curable disease is no less a security threat than death caused by an attack by an illegal armed group, according to the broad human security school.

I do see the benefits of narrow human security approach where security threats are limited to political violence. Certainly, it would be difficult to quantify all the threats included in the broad school, and the narrow school's statistics and research on human security are important to achieve a certain knowledge of how individuals are affected in war and conflict. However, this information has to be complemented with the knowledge of how women living in conflict areas such as Chocó perceive their security in a wider sense.

The choice of area of investigation, the identification and definition of a problem, the methods to be used and in the case of interviews, the questions to be posed, can all be traced back to the investigator's perceptions and values. As Weber pointed out, all investigation is value-laden to the extent that values define what are conceived of as problems and areas of interest (Wade 1993:xi) I depart in a feminist understanding of social relations. I see gender as made up not only of social constructs of women and men, but also of markers such as ethnicity, class and religion. I believe gender has to bee seen as a layered or multi-dimensional concept in order to do justice to differences and diversity among women. Furthermore, the particular struggles for emancipation of Third World women have to be seen in relation to capitalism and imperialism (see Davids & van Driel 2001; Johnson-Odim 1991).

In the context of this thesis this means that I believe women have experiences and needs related to security much different from those of men. The tendency to undervalue or

simply not see the point in asking for women's specific experiences results in women being frequently ignored in security investigations and policy-making. Similarly, women are often seen as passive and mere objects of protection, not as subjects acting for security. This is why I have chosen not only to ask women about how they perceive their security situations, but also how they perceive their room to maneuver in order to influence their personal security.

Power relations are biased not only towards the favoring of men. As mentioned above, aspects such as ethnicity and class are also of vital importance and have to be taken into consideration in order to reach any profound understanding of how security and insecurity are constructed socially. Therefore I will use an *intersectional approach* when analyzing what factors underlie women's security and insecurity in Chocó.

The concept of "violence" is also questioned in this thesis. Violence, in its most common sense, refers to physical violence. Here, violence will be used in a much wider sense in accordance with Galtung's conceptual framework. I argue that women's security is not only a matter of physical violence, but intimately connected to structural and cultural violence. Therefore I believe that by understanding security as a social construct that embodies relations of power, it opens up for a much more comprehensive understanding of women's security.

4 The Colombian context

The history of Colombia is one of conflict. The dynamics and composition of the conflict are complex and have in one way or another involved all spheres of society. I will not try to make an exhaustive analysis of the armed conflict in Colombia here, but a short summary of the conflict and some of its implications on the areas of women, minorities, indigenous communities and social and human rights activism, as those are the themes of this thesis.

4.1 Colombia's history of conflict

Since the middle of the nineteenth century and about one century ahead, Colombian politics were dominated by the conflict between the Partido Liberal (PL) and the Partido Conservador (PC). A long period of civil wars and notable violence finally ended up in a power-sharing agreement between the parties in 1958. This agreement was exclusivist and elitist, and the other parties, such as the communist one, protested heavily. 1964 saw the surge of left-wing guerrilla movements – including Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) – in which peasant self-defence groups, grassroots and popular movements, as well as some communist militants, converged. Further guerrilla movements emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, including left-wing M-19 movement, drawing government into protracted military campaign. The origins of these leftist movements were the restricted possibilities of political participation and the unequal distribution of resources in Colombia (ICG 2009, Strömberg 2009:2).

The 1980s saw attempts of peace agreements that were not upheld for long. Instead, the conflict deepened and was complicated by the organized drug trafficking. The narcotics industry has played a central role in the conflict. Right-wing paramilitary groups emerged in the 1980s and just like the left-wing guerrilla movements they got involved in narcotics trade.

Leftist groups led by the FARC tried to get involved in formal politics with the formation of Patriotic Union Party (UP) in 1985, but the party was effectively held back by paramilitary groups killing thousands of UP members (ICG 2009, Strömberg 2009:2-3). The murder of the UP presidential candidate in 1990 caused the FARC to withdraw from formal politics.

In 1997 paramilitary groups together formed the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). In attempts to eradicate the coca cultivations and to defeat the guerrillas, the United States got increasingly involved in the conflict through the backing of "Plan Colombia". Peace talks with the FARC failed, and the 1.3 billion dollars the U.S. gave to Colombia were mainly used for funding military fights (ICG 2009).

The current president Alvaro Uribe was elected for the first time in 2002, and re-elected in landslide vote (62.2 percent). Uribe's main objective has been to bring security to the Colombian citizens, and when elected the implementation of his Democratic Security

Policy started. The president's security policy had visible effects (at high cost as argued by his critiques). Since first coming to power in 2002, Uribe's Democratic Security Policy has intensified a military campaign against the FARC that resulted in the group going on the defensive, along with bringing about a fall in the number of towns seized by the guerrillas and a significant decrease in crime and kidnapping rates. The popularity of Uribe is still high and according to polls 70 percent of the Colombians support the president (Moloney 2009; ICG 2009a, 2009b).

The Justice and Peace Law (JPL) that was introduced in July 2005 creates a legal framework for demobilization and transitional justice but with questions about victims' access to justice, truth and reparations. The paramilitary organization AUC and the government signed an agreement of demobilization of AUC in 2003 and the government now considers the demobilization to be complete. Both the demobilization process and the implementation of the JPL have been widely criticized for being ineffective and lacking security. Paramilitary structures are still highly present and continue to be important actors in the Colombian conflict. Some paramilitary groups were never demobilized and new illegal armed groups of paramilitary successors have mobilized. Threats against and killings of victims testifying in the process continued, while many paramilitaries failed to collaborate fully with the Justice and Peace tribunals, in particular failing to return land misappropriated by them. This continued to undermine the right of victims to truth, justice and reparation. (Amnesty International 2009; ICG 2009b).

The Uribe administration has been flawed with scandals. Starting in 2005, the revealing of relations and cooperation between key state institutions and the paramilitary resulted in the "para-politics" scandal. Seventy-five members of parliament have been accused of collaboration with the paramilitary, but only a few have been sentenced to imprisonment. Links between the Secret Police (DAS) and the paramilitary were also revealed. The scandal not only exposed the political powers of the paramilitary, but also the organization's extensive economical power in Colombia. In 2008, another scandal hit the government as the phenomenon of "falsos positivos" was uncovered. The Colombian military in cooperation with paramilitaries have killed civilians and reported them as guerrilla member defeated in combat in order to improve statistics (ICG 2009a, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009). The Uribe administration continues to be criticized for crimes committed by its military. For example, Amnesty International state that at least 296 people were extrajudicially executed by the security forces in the 12-month period ending in June 2008 (Amnesty 2009).

4.2 The humanitarian crisis

The armed conflict of Colombia is strongly marked by the fight of control over territories and over the population. Territorial control is needed for the cultivations of coca, for transportation of weapons and drugs and other resources. When the illegal armed actors come to take over land, the inhabitants of the territories often face the unpleasant choice of either supporting the illegal groups' projects or to be exposed to violence, threats and expulsion. The Colombian state's lack of control over the territory results in constant combats between the illegal armed groups and between those groups

and the Colombian military. In the many different military strategies that have been tried over decades, the civil society continues to suffer from the illegal armed groups' war strategies of threats, persecution, assassinations, rapes, kidnappings and massacres, just to mention a few. (Villareal & Ríos 2006:28).

The result of the conflict is Colombia having what is said to be the world's largest internally displaced population. The estimated number of internally displaced persons varies heavily between sources. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) some 3 million are on the national registry for internally displaced person in Colombia, with an average of 300,000 new cases registered yearly in the past two years (UNHCR 2009). The displaced population faces severe difficulties and often lives in crowded and poor suburbs of urban centers. A UNHCR assessment in 2006 revealed that security and the difficulties of claiming their social and economical rights were the main concerns of the internally displaced persons in Colombia. It is estimated that the average income of a displaced person is only 61 percent of the minimum wage and the displaced persons suffer an unemployment rate three times higher than for the urban poor in general. Displaced women and girls are hit particularly hard by violence and sexual and gendered-based abuse. Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities have also been disproportionately affected (UNHCR 2009:324-325).

The Colombian government is the main provider of assistance to the internally displaced persons and Colombia has a sophisticated legal framework to support the humanitarian situation. However, a legal framework is not enough. As has been indicated by a wide range of organizations and entities, including Colombia's Constitutional Court, severe gaps persist in the state's protection of victims and vulnerable civilians (UNHCR 2009:324).

4.3 Women, minorities and the conflict

The UN High Commission on Human Rights states that the rights of women, especially women heads of household, rural, indigenous, Afro-Colombian and displaced women continue to be affected by sexual discrimination as well as by diverse forms of gender violence. The security of women and girls has deteriorated as a result of the armed conflict and the use of sexual violence and social control by the illegal armed groups (UNHCHR 2005 paras. 100,124).

Women in Colombia suffer from discrimination on the basis of their gender and on their ethnic and cultural origin. The situation for indigenous and Afro-Colombian women is particularly critical. They face two layers of discrimination: firstly, as members of their racial and ethnic group, and secondly, their sex. The armed conflict reproduces and deepens discrimination, and the armed groups exploit and manipulate social disadvantages in specific groups as a strategy of war in order to control territories and resources (IARCH 2006 paras. 102,103,107; Corporación Siempreviva 2006).

The indigenous population constitutes only slightly more than three percent of the Colombian population. This group is particularly affected by the armed conflict. The assassination of an indigenous person is not just the loss of a life but also an attack

against the stability and survival of the indigenous culture. During the ten-year period 1998-2008 the Colombian state's Observatory on Human Rights registered 1075 assassinations of indigenous persons in Colombia (Observatory on Human Rights 2008:20).

Just like the indigenous population, Afro-Colombians are severely affected by the conflict. The Colombian state has estimated that 72% of the Afro-Colombian population is in the country's two lowest socio-economic strata. The Afro-Colombians is one of the population groups with the highest rate of forced displacement, which is said to reach up to 30%, while the total Afro-Colombian population is estimated to constitute around 10% of the total population (IARCH 2008 para. 110).

4.4 Chocó

The province Chocó, located in the north-western Colombia by the Pacific Ocean, is the region in which the field study of this thesis has been carried out. The province capital of Chocó is Quibdó. Colombia is a country of obvious and extreme regional differences, and Chocó truly demonstrates this (Wade 1993:x).

Chocó has a population of about 441 000 inhabitants, Quibdó roughly 110 000 persons (DANEb 2006, DANEc 2006). However, its demographic characteristics are very different from the average in Colombia. The Afro-Colombians constitute about 10.5% of the total population in Colombia whereas they make up 80-90% of the population in Chocó (DANE 2006a; Wade 1993:4).

Chocó is also inhabited by indigenous communities, who make up 3.4% of the total population and 11.9% in Chocó according to official numbers. Out of the 87 indigenous ethnic groups present in Colombia, five are populating Chocó: Embera, Embera Chamí, Embera Katio, Tule and Waunan (DANE 2006a:16-17, 35).

This large majority of African descendants in the province has its historical explications in the times of slavery. New Granada, as the colonial region roughly corresponding to Colombia was called, gained independence with a highly mixed society (Wade 1993:4). Colonization had devastating consequences for the indigenous communities. It is estimated that in Latin America 90% of the indigenous peoples disappeared as a result of colonization. It is thought that it was this loss of workforce that caused the mass importation of black slaves (DANEa 2006:9, Observatory of Human Rights 2008:4). Slaves from Africa were brought to Colombia from the beginning of the 1500s and many of them were taken to Chocó. At the top of the political and economic hierarchy were the colonial elites, proud of their "clean blood" supposedly free from black and Indian blood. "Race" was of the highest importance (Wade 1993:4). Given the nature of the Chocoano society at the time, race mixture was unusual, an evident fact to visitors of Chocó today.

The rich natural resources and biodiversity of Chocó, especially in gold mining and agriculture, attracted investors and caused slave trade to flourish. In 1778, slaves were 39% of the total registered population in Chocó, a number twice as high as in any other region in New Granada. Around that time the indigenous population constituted about

37% in Chocó. This population was also exploited for economical purposes, but not to such extent as the African slaves. Slavery existed as a legal category and as a real status for the African descendants until 1851 (Wade 1993:8, 98-99).

When slaves became free in Chocó they were rejected by the discriminatory white society and retreated to remote areas and disperse settlements in the forest along the riverbanks (Wade 1993:101-102). The small communities along the rivers are still there, just like the striking poverty and abandonment. Similarly, the indigenous communities in Chocó have been and still are moving deep into the jungle as a way of resistance and survival of their culture (Diocese of Quibdó 2005:55).

The armed conflict in Colombia has had severe impacts in Chocó. Illegal armed groups are fighting for the control over land and of the rivers. Chocó is tropical and covered with a dense jungle. Its infrastructure is extremely poor. The rivers are strategically important to control, in particular the large Atrato River, being north-western Colombia's most important route for the trafficking of arms, drugs and contraband (UNHCR 2003). The intense conflict and high presence of illegal armed groups and state military have increasingly involved the population and their ancestral territories in the conflict (Peña Trujillo 2002:261).

The violence in Chocó has caused a great part of the population to be displaced. The Afro-Colombians of Chocó today are involved in an accelerating process of migration towards the urban centres of Colombia (DANE 2006a:20). The care of the internally displaced persons is insufficient, and in many cases the internally displaced persons don't receive any help at all, which even has caused people to die from hunger in Chocó (Colombian Constitutional Court 2009:50).

4.4.1 Cultural and territorial rights

In the nineteenth century indigenous peoples, slaves and women were completely excluded from political participation. In the early twentieth century all men obtained the right of political participation, whereas Colombian women had to wait until 1957 for the same right (Observatory on Human Rights 2008:9). In the 1970s Afro-Colombian and indigenous movements started an organized fight in the defence of their cultures, ancestral territories and traditional knowledge and customs. Their fight led to the incorporation of a wide range of rights in the Colombian Constitution of 1991. In 1993, Law 60 regulating the territorial rights of the indigenous population was adopted, and the same year Law 70 of the Afro population's right to collective property was implemented (DANE 2006a:13-15). Today, Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities are well protected by Colombian law, and the Colombian state is obliged to recognize and protect the cultural and social integrity of those communities (Colombian Constitutional Court 2009:5).

The Afro-Colombian population is recognized in Colombian law as a population with a proper culture and a common history, having their own traditions and customs that reveal and conserve an identity that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups (Law 70 art. 2). This same law recognizes, among many other things, the collective property

rights of the Afro-Colombian communities (Law 70 art. 2-18). The law stipulates guarantees and rights to the protection and use of ancestral territories and to the administration and conservation of natural resources. The right of the Afro-Colombian population to participate in decision-making directly affecting their collective property is also regulated by Law 70 (art 26-31) (Colombian Constitutional Court 2009:5-7, 29, DANE 2006a:19-20).

According to official statistics, 4.13% of the Colombian territory was recognized as collectively owned by Afro-Colombians in 2005. Out of the total 132 collectively owned territories, 52 are situated in Chocó (DANE 2006a:20).

The indigenous communities are peoples strongly attached to their territories as well. Most of them live in rural areas in so-called *resguardos* on territory that is not legally limited. Resguardos are rural areas with legally established limits, with their proper social and juridical organization and titled as collective property of the indigenous peoples. In Chocó the indigenous population has 115 resguardos out of the total 710 existing in Colombia. Of the total Colombian territory 29.8% are indigenous resguardos (DANE 2006a:18-19). According to the Colombian Constitution of 1991 the indigenous communities are autonomous in their decision-making and social, political and juridical control inside their territories, as long as it is not contradictory to the fundamental rights outlined in the Constitution (Observatory on Human Rights 2008:16-17).

The indigenous communities speak their traditional pre-hispanic languages (totally 65 existing in Colombia) and not all master Spanish. Spanish is the official language of Colombia, but the Colombian Constitution states that the indigenous languages and dialects are official in the territories where they are spoken, and that the indigenous peoples have the right to bilingual education (Observatory on Human Rights 2008:12).

The increasing presence of industrial projects and multinational companies in Chocó has caused problems for the Chocoano population and conflicts over territorial rights. Exploitation of natural resources is carried out on ancestral territories without the obligatory consultation of the inhabitants. Voices have been raised over the occurrence of cooperation between the mining and agricultural industries and the paramilitary. The paramilitary squads enter the territories and force the population to move in order to clear the land for industrial exploitation, especially for the cultivation of African palm tree. Another reason for the illegal armed groups to clear the land is to create illicit cultivation of coca, or else the inhabitants are forced to cultivate the coca under threats. Those organizations and individuals defending their ethnical rights and rights to collective ownership of ancestral territories are converted into enemies of both the illegal armed groups and the industry (Flórez López 2007:525-532; UNHCR 2006: Note 12, Annex IV, para. 14).

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights and a number of organizations have pointed to crimes of human rights committed by the Colombian army in Chocó. The Colombian army, sometimes in collaboration with the paramilitary, has been responsible for a wide range of violent acts such as assassinations and forced disappearances threatening the lives and dignity of the Chocoano population. For example, populations in guerrilla-controlled areas are stigmatized and accused of

collaboration with the guerrillas by the Colombian military and paramilitaries. The accusations lead to torture, detentions and threats of civilians for the mere reason of living in a certain area (IACHR 2004:7-17). The Colombian army is also accused of protecting private companies cultivating African palm trees in collectively owned territories, intimidating the population in order for them to get involved in the production or to leave their territory (IACHR 2003 para. 2e).

5 The security threats perceived by Chocoano women

In this chapter it will be lined out what factors and conditions were described as security threats by the interviewed women. The chapter is organized into sub-sections corresponding to frequently recurring themes in the women's stories. Those themes are inter-related and sometimes difficult to separate, which makes this division one alternative among many others possible. As will be noticed, the presence of some factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, poverty and the unfavourable conditions of internally displaced persons are present throughout the whole text as I found it problematic to deal with them separately.

This is the most extensive of the four chapters dedicated to outline the results of the field study. I consider the magnitude of this chapter necessary in order to provide a solid base for the discussions in the following chapters. The chapter starts with a description of the Chocoano population's relation to their territory, and how this relation causes insecurity to multiply when the territory is invaded by armed actors and industrial projects. The presence of armed actors and its potential consequences for women, will thereafter be dealt with more in detail. After that follows a section dealing with violence in the urban areas, particularly in the suburbs of Quibdó. The three following sections deal with economy, health and education as matters of insecurity in Chocó.

5.1 The exploitation of ancestral territories

> *"If we* (Afro-Chocoanos) *don't have our territory guaranteed, we don't have anything. And the most important thing to us as an ethnic group, the base, the very base for us, is the territory. /.../ Equally, the indigenous people, just like them, without the territory we are nobody."* Nicolasa

The evergreen Chocó is covered with a dense and humid jungle. The jungle is cut through by numerous rivers crossing each other. For the Chocoano inhabitant, and especially those of the countryside, nature is fundamental. The rivers are used, among other things, for fishing, washing, bathing and mining and as a means of communication and transport for the many communities that cannot be reached by road. Many Chocoano houses are constructed on the water with tall legs so that the river can grow and retire. The jungle is used for hunting, agriculture and getting important materials for medicine, wood for building houses and many other things.

For generations, the Afro and indigenous populations have had their own, traditional ways of caring for the land and passing it on. The relationship that the Afro and indigenous communities in Chocó have with nature is so fundamental in their lives that the presence of any strange element, such as armed actors or industrial projects, can be experienced as a threat to security.

For both Afro-Chocoanos and the indigenous populations in Chocó, the territory is intimately related to their spiritual life. Nicolasa, the leader of the ethno-territorial

organization COCOMOPOCA, explained that for the Afro-Chocoano population, the "infinite life[11]" is in the territory:

> *"There* (in the territory) *is everything. Because when we are talking about territory we don't talk about the possession of territory. We talk about what's in the territory. We talk about the air, we think we have a right to it. We are talking about natural resources, about the water, about life and how life is related to nature, to this cosmic view of the world, of nature, and our ways to communicate with nature. What one does inside it has aims, everything is in this structure. We are from a people that cannot live far from the water, not far from the mountains. Because there we have everything. And to see it strained is to see a threat against our lives. And the fact that we* (COCOMOPOCA) *don't have our right to collective ownership is a threat against our lives, and with all the politics and the projects that the government has for this zone it is an attack against the lives of the black communities living there."*

Just like the Afro population in Chocó, the indigenous communities experience life itself as threatened when their territory is invaded. Indigenous Dora explained that the spirituality of the indigenous is inherited from their ancestors and that the nature has certain energies that is passed on from the earth to the community. Dora said women have a special relation to the territory:

> *"They say that the indigenous women are related to Mother Earth because Mother Earth is the one producing, who gives food and gives life to nature. The woman comes from this, the woman produces, the woman gives life, the woman is the one who knows how her children will be, she is the one who suffers when something happens to them, and in this same way Mother Earth suffers when her wood is exploited, the mines, when they are exploiting all of nature."*

Yaneth told me that when the land of the indigenous is invaded, it is an invasion of their cultural space. The territorial equilibrium is altered, which implies a stress in their spiritual lives:

> *"For example when there have been combats on their territory, bombardments, for them the conclusion is that it creates an imbalance of the spirits controlling and giving equilibrium to nature. Therefore, the concept of security is also related to the territorial and spiritual relations they have with their territory."*

Multinational and national companies exploiting the natural resources of Chocó were described as a security threat by various women. There was consensus among the women that it is the Colombian government that is responsible. "No multinational project passes the Colombian border without permission and support from the government" said Elsa at the Diocese of Quibdó. The Colombian and multinational companies come to Chocó, exploit nature and then leave Chocó with the gains from the exploitation. "And to the people, what is left? In the territory what's left is more poverty and deteriorated nature", Elsa continued. According to Elsa it takes at least thirty years

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[11] "La vida inmensa" in the original statement.

for a natural environment to recuperate after it has been damaged by the industrial projects.

The damage in nature affects the daily life of the Chocoanos and disturbs the balance of their way of living with nature. The women told me how the rivers dry up because of the great amounts of sand that falls into them around the mining projects. A dried- up river can be life-threatening to the communities living along it, as communications are cut off and fishing is no longer possible. This means that one of the basics for everyday sustenance disappears at the same time as the possibilities of transporting food to the communities are destroyed. If people can't bathe or wash in the river, it leads to hygiene problems and risks of disease.

The state is also perceived as a generator of insecurity because of constantly delaying the juridical process to decide upon the right to collective ownership of the territory. On a structural and less direct level, capitalism and globalization can be considered threats, as those can be seen as the driving forces behind the presence of multinational companies in Chocó. Firstly, these threats imply that basic human necessities such as food and minimum hygiene standards are restricted, which means a threat to life and a threat of forced displacement. Secondly, these threats imply dangers to whole cultures and ways of living for the ethnic groups traditionally inhabiting the territory.

The freedom to enjoy ancestral territories can doubtlessly be considered essential or even vital to life in Chocó. The protection of those vital values is one of the core objectives of human security. What people consider being "vital" and "the essence of life" is recognized by the broad human security school as varying among individuals, cultures and societies. In the context of Chocó, ethnicities and their values, norms, customs and world views, have a crucial influence on how insecurity is constructed.

5.2 The presence of armed actors

"Women have been victims of sexual violence by the armed groups, they have turned into widows, they have had to witness torture, to witness assassinations. The majority of the displaced are women and children. Because of the conflict, there are organizations demanding that the women's bodies no more should be used as spoils of war, that women's bodies have to be respected in this war, that the women here don't want to give birth to more children of the war. The cry out of these organizations gives a hint of the very preoccupying reality of women in Chocó." Adriana, Unicef

When discussing security in Colombia, the presence of illegal armed groups and criminal bands is what first comes to the mind of most people. All Colombians are affected by the conflict that has been transforming the Colombian society for over forty years, but some more directly than others.

The presence of armed actors in the countryside obviously has consequences in the security situation for all, woman and man, old and young. Some of the respondents had been living in the countryside but had been forced to displace. Others had been working intimately with the rural population for years. Women's insecurity was frequently

related to sexual violence in the interviews. The risk of sexual violence is a security problem affecting all women and girls, even if they are not being abused themselves. Living in a society where acts of sexual violence is as common as they seem to be in Chocó, the fear of being abused infects women's minds and autonomy. In the culture of the indigenous communities, it is a severe violation if any other man than the woman's husband sees her naked. Therefore, when armed actors are in the area, indigenous women sometimes don't dare go bathing, according to Yaneth.

According to Adriana, young girls are especially vulnerable when armed groups arrive:

> *"In the communities with a presence of armed groups, both legal and illegal, women are converted into spoils of war. Generally where there are a lot of militaries there are very high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution, abuse, sexual exploitation of children and of involvement of girls with the armed groups. Therefore, this is another factor of insecurity because the legal and illegal armed groups, and especially the legal ones, wherever they are, the amount of sexually transmitted disease rise, the number of girls getting involved increases.*

Just like in so many other conflicts, women in Chocó are used as instruments of war. Mothers, sisters, daughters and wives of members of illegal armed groups and the police and military are attacked in order to insult the man they are related to, Nubia stated. For example Maria, an internally displaced woman, said that one of the reasons for her constant fear is related to one of her sons. Illegal armed groups killed her husband and two of her sons, one of them was murdered in Quibdó after the displacement. Another of Maria's sons joined an illegal group and ended up in prison. She is now terrified because of a rumour she heard about him:

> *"I feel insecure because... the same people that killed my son, I have a lot of fear, at night I don't go out. I don't go out at night because there is someone, a man that I don't even know, who said that my son in prison, I don't know what problems they had, but he says he will do to my son what hurts more than anything. And what would hurt him most is to hurt his mother, right? That is why I feel insecure."*

Women and girls are also recruited by armed groups, but not to such a large extent as men and boys. Some women choose to leave their communities to go along with the armed groups. They might fall in love with a member of a group or simply choose to join the group because it appears to be their best option in life. Others are obliged to join against their will, so called forced recruitment.

Alba, also an internally displaced woman, said that since men are more likely to be victims of forced recruitment, they often go hiding in the jungle when armed groups arrive to their communities. This results in women being left alone in the village:

> *"At night, the moment one saw a light everybody had to run. The men ran to the jungle, the women stayed alone with the smallest children, because the older children also ran to the jungle so that they would not be taken away."*

The presence of both legal and illegal soldiers restrict the free movement of the communities in nature and along the rivers. People are forced to move within certain limits, or are simply too scared to move far in order to take care of their cultivations, go hunting or fishing, etcetera. The state military sometimes cut off food transports to the communities in order to secure that the food won't be passed on to the guerrilla, or they let only a minimum of the food supply pass.

Both Damaris and Alba established how the presence of armed actors affects food security in the countryside. Alba said:

> *"The river turned into a disaster when they* (the armed group) *came to our village. They threw the dead corpses in the canoes and you could see those little animals that eat the dead swimming around. We lived terrified, we could no longer go fishing, go get wood, go get bananas, because the armed groups were around."*

Some women also argued that the presence of the state's army attracts the illegal armed groups in attempts to confront and combat the army. In this case, the civilians are trapped in the middle of violent confrontations and rendered even more insecure.

5.3 Violence and conflict in the urban areas

Armed groups are also present in the urban areas of Chocó. In Quibdó, criminal bands and gangs, often with connections to the guerrilla or paramilitary, constitute another factor of fear to the city's inhabitants. For the internally displaced persons coming to Quibdó for protection, the violence continues.

Alba's community was invaded by both paramilitaries and the guerrilla on various occasions. Her husband was kidnapped and Alba had to flee leaving her nine-year-old daughter behind, but after some time the family could all gather in Quibdó. The fear of the illegal armed groups, however, continued in her new town because of the presence of the guerrilla and paramilitaries there as well:

> *"And one comes here* (to Quibdó), *and one sees the same people that made you flee to the city. Look, I came here, here was the guerrilla, here were the paramilitaries, the same ones that I saw there. I saw them. And I had to hide once again."*

People running away from violence often lose all their belongings and economic sustainment, not to mention the loss of family members. While living this trauma, the displaced persons have to find their ways of survival in a new place and deal with the stigmatization of the displaced persons that exists in Quibdó, as argued by some of the respondents.

Internally displaced women coming to Quibdó often find themselves discriminated on by the rest of the community and by state institutions. The indigenous peoples constitute a small minority group in Quibdó and are especially marginalized and stigmatized. For example, indigenous peoples are often accused of collaboration with the guerrilla by the

Colombian army and paramilitaries present in the city. This prejudice of indigenous persons as informants or collaborators of the guerrilla leads to threats, violence and arbitrary detentions. The fact that indigenous people, and especially women, often don't speak Spanish puts them in a situation where they can't defend themselves against the threats. As indigenous women are often forced to displace alone when their husbands are killed in their communities, they become victims of sexual violence. The number of houses of prostitution where you find only indigenous women and girls is increasing in Quibdó, according to Yaneth.

The internally displaced population in Quibdó is large, and in *Zona Norte,* the northern suburbs of Quibdó, the displaced are in great majority. The poverty in the northern suburbs and the experiences of violence and trauma in the population's recent history make the area vulnerable. This vulnerability is taken advantage of by illegal armed groups and local criminal bands, that here find a base for recruitment and abuse of a torn population. As will be argued below, the Colombian state is also spreading insecurity in the suburbs, involving the population in the conflict.

Jenfa is a nun living and working in Zona Norte since many years. According to Jenfa, about 80 percent of the population there are internally displaced persons. The fact that this population comes from different places with different habits and little social ties to each other, generate much conflict in the suburbs. Many children and teenagers who have lost one or two parents in the conflict are forced to fend for themselves in these violent surroundings.

Women, in particular girls and teenagers, are exposed to several threats in Zona Norte. One is the recruitment of girls and teenagers by the armed actors. Jenfa argued that the population of Zona Norte is forced to be part of the conflict:

> *"The strategy of the government is to wipe out the illegal armed groups, especially the guerrilla, and one of the strategies they are using is to infiltrate the community in search for informants. Therefore, on the one side you have the guerrilla trying to construct their ideology, their project or whatever they call it, and they are utilizing the people. On the other side are the paramilitaries that are also trying to wipe out the guerrilla in an alliance with the state, and they are taking advantage of the people as well. On another side is the state itself, the armed forces, the police, the Security department, right? And they also come here, eager to destroy the guerrilla and supposedly the paramilitaries, and they utilize the people as well! Therefore, the people are trapped in a situation with no way out, a dead end. We know that the armed groups are here, and the worst of all is that they are taking advantage of the necessities of the youth here. They make them part of the conflict, use them as informants and make the young people reproduce the disorder in our society."*

Women transiting the streets of Zona Norte at night are more exposed to risks of abuse and violence than in the centre of Quibdó and some other neighbourhoods. The inhabitants of Zona Norte are sometimes restricted to transit certain areas of the suburbs due to the fight of control of juvenile gangs and the armed groups fighting for control

over the areas. A young girl falling in love with someone from another zone can get into trouble for that, according to Jenfa.

Prostitution is a too common option for women and girls in the suburbs. Jenfa told me about the night club that also works as a brothel one block from the nuns' home. "The more night clubs, discos and bars, the more prostitution we have" she said. In Zona Norte anyone can have sex with a girl about ten years old for less than a dollar, according to Jenfa. Small children of prostitutes can also be seen outside the bars at night, left alone exposed to any abuse, while their mothers are forced to prostitution. Jenfa said:

> *"The girls that I tend to see here and that I know are into prostitution, they say 'Sister, if I don't do this... I don't want to, but I will die of hunger, I have to!' And others say 'It's not poverty that makes me do this, it is the armed actors that come here and say that if I don't go to bed with them, I will be in trouble.' Therefore it is a series of situations impossible to solve. There is no way."*

Jenfa argued that in Zona Norte men and boys run a greater risk of being killed in the streets that women and girls. According to her experience, the reasons for girls being killed are often questions of love and jealousy. "If a man likes you and you don't pay attention to him, that can be a motive for him to kill you", she said. Women and girls can be forced into prostitution by gangs, and when they want to quit against the will of the boss they can end up murdered.

As made clear by the findings outlined above, there seem to be several elements of a woman's identity that can influence her exposure to insecurity. As a victim of forced displacement, she is more likely to have problems with housing and her personal economic situation, and therefore more inclined to search for a home in a poorer and more violent area. Girls and young women seem to be particularly vulnerable to sexual violence such as rape and forced prostitution.

In Zona Norte one interview was carried out with a sixteen-year-old girl called Siri. She was active in juvenile group of the Church and an organization for young people in her area. Siri's greatest fear was the violence generated by the illegal armed groups, and she told me various examples of this violence and how young people got killed in her surroundings. After school, Siri does not go out at night due to the dangers in the street. "And especially now because of what just started with the leaflet (see below). That threat is directed towards all of us."

The leaflet that Siri referred to started to circulate in Quibdó some weeks after my arrival, after having passed through other Colombian cities as well. There seem to be various versions the leaflet, of which I got to read two. The headline of one leaflet was "The time of social cleansing has arrived". The message is directed particularly towards prostitutes (accused of infecting society with Aids), drug addicts, dealers, thieves and youngsters in general. It is a death threat to anyone frequenting bars or the streets after ten at night and an admonishment to fathers to keep their sons and daughters inside. One leaflet is signed "The Organization" and the other Aguilas Negras, a paramilitary group.

Gloria, a woman living in central Quibdó, told me that she is more scared in the streets now than before. She said:

> *"People have been scared because of the leaflets that are circulating. As you see the streets are empty now, at eight, nine o'clock they are completely empty. I believe that those are the precautions that one takes. Because honestly, I don't have much faith in the authorities. I don't think that the police or the army can protect me. Or I think they could protect me, but it's just not in their interest to do so."*

The threats of the leaflets were brought up during several of my interviews and on meetings I went to. The threat was taken seriously, no wonder in a violent society such as that of Quibdó. The killings and other acts of violence constantly happening in Quibdó were, after the spreading of the leaflets, frequently ascribed to this "social cleansing" by people I talked to. I cannot possibly judge if the actors behind the leaflets did start a wave of social cleansing or not. Anyway, it was obvious that it created a wave of fear and insecurity in the Quibdó society.

Visiting the northern suburbs and talking to Jenfa and Siri was an effective way of understanding the potential of the leaflet. The abandonment of the population caused the insecurity resulting from a threat of social cleansing to multiply. This demonstrates how the effects of a potential threat cannot be analysed separately from its context. In a society where people are not surrounded by armed actors and violence, where girls are not forced to sell their bodies in order to survive and where people can take the protection of the state for granted, such a threat would not be as powerful as it was in Quibdó.

5.4 Economic insecurity – a fight for survival

In the interviews, Chocó was frequently referred to as an abandoned and marginalized region of Colombia. It was argued that the lack of resources in Chocó is a result of regional and local corruption and the government's policy of redistribution of resources. Some of the women pointed out that the state's budget for the war eats the resources that should be spent on welfare and social security. The poor infrastructure was a theme high on the agenda during my stay in the region, after a tragic bus accident on the inferior road between Quibdó and Medellin killing about 30 persons. People who cannot afford travelling by air have to risk their lives in order to enter or exit Chocó, and the bus accident became a symbol of Chocó's marginalization from the rest of Colombia. Another equally symbolic factor is the poor water supply in Chocó being one of the worst in Colombia (IARCH 2008 para. 110). Justa, among others, argued that racism and ethnic discrimination are the prime reasons for the unequal access to the country's resources:

> *"We* (COCOMACIA) *have always said that the indigenous and black communities have always suffered from this marginalization by the state. Because... the state doesn't offer us the same possibilities as it does to the*

mestizos, to other persons. The other races, the other ethnicities have better opportunities than us blacks and indigenous."

Several of the women that I interviewed, displaced or not, had severe financial problems. The women often spoke in terms of *survive,* not just live, which gives a hint of their living conditions. The lack of money resulted in a great deal of insecurity since the women could not satisfy their own and their children's basic needs.

Gender relations in Chocó imply a clearly defined role for the women as caretakers, both among the Afro and the indigenous communities. The result of this is that women often are forced to take the complete responsibility for the children, if she is not in a relationship with the father. In a society like that of Quibdó, where it is not unusual for women to have over ten children, the burden becomes severe. This does not only make her economic needs greater, but taking care of the children also leaves her with less time to earn her living and to participate in community decision-making processes (a security problem that will be dealt with below). It is also important to recognize that in families where the husband is controlling the economy, the woman may be poor and insecure, even if the man is not.

Women's poverty, in many cases extreme poverty, is a trap that appears all too hard to get out of. In many cases women are separated from the men who traditionally may be their source of income. The lack of education and training and general attitudes towards women can make it extremely hard for women to support themselves financially. Adriana argued:

"I think that the armed conflict is a great threat to women because in this conflict a lot of men have been killed. This has forced women to be heads of households, to take the full responsibility of sustaining their family, to create a future for their children."

A great part of the women in Chocó make their living in the informal economy. Leonilde for example, sold minutes from cell phones in the streets to earn her living. Leonilde worked every day, sometimes until late night, but the income from selling minutes did not give her enough. In order to earn some extra pesos, Leonilde sometimes stayed out late and walked home in the dark instead of paying for the bus, to save some money. In the streets she was scared that people might understand she had the earnings of the day in her pockets and rob her, or do something else to her. What worried her most, however, was to leave her children alone all day.

"I have to leave them alone and it keeps me very preoccupied because actually, the girl is already a woman, she is already thirteen years old and needs a lot of care and attention from her mother because she is pretty restless. She goes out in the streets a lot because I'm not there, therefore this is not good for us. /.../ They can get her involved in things that she is still not capable of defend herself from."

Leonilde's situation is not unusual in Chocó. Due to their parents' poverty, many children and teenagers are left to take care of themselves day and night. At *Doctors without borders'* centre in Quibdó, a social worker told me that most of the cases of

sexual violence and abuse that are presented at the centre are children and teenagers. "Most of the population make their living in the informal economy and the mothers often have to leave their children at home alone while working. There are people taking advantage of that." she said. Another reason for sexual abuse of women and girls are the poor living conditions women have to deal with when being displaced. Displaced persons usually come empty-handed to Quibdó, they have to live in crowded places and often with strangers. This leads to women and girls being exposed to sexual abuse.

One of the women, Damaris, also put her financial situation and her children in focus when talking about insecurity. After many years of struggle Damaris managed to borrow money to get a house for her and her six children. Even though the house is poor, lacks bathroom and is situated in the suburbs, it is better than before when they all shared a room with one bed and had to sleep on the earth floor. Damaris had a partner, the father of three of her children, who lived in Bogotá. He was murdered by the paramilitaries in Bogotá less than a year before the interview, and Damaris's situation had become even more complicated:

"Since he died my situation has been terrible. It was only ten months ago and it seems like these ten months I have been living by the grace of God, because it has been so hard for me. With six children, the oldest already had a baby. And the other five studying. It has been very hard, now I have to deal with the health costs, the food, their studies... And I have had a lot of problems, I have gotten myself into debt, I have had to borrow money from people, sometimes I get depressed. Really, it has been so, so hard, and it's just sad to remember everything I have been through in my life. Because when he was alive I called him and I said that I needed this and that and he had a job so he could get money and send it to me. Now it's very hard.

Damaris feared that her desperate financial situation made her so vulnerable that she would be an easy victim to abuse if she was "offered good things that later turned out to be really ugly". When talking about insecurity she said:

"Well insecurity for me... as far as I understand, insecurity is like not having anything to lean on. Like not having anything to fall back on, for example, I'm a single woman and I feel insecure because I'm not backed up by a man and anyone could come and mess me up because he sees that I'm a lonely woman and that I don't have... like that I'm fighting for my life, and therefore he takes advantage."

Poverty can also imply a trap for women as economic dependence on their partners may force them to stay in violent and abusive relationships. Women often consider having a partner as security, according to Nubia. It can be a question of survival for a woman to stay with a man, since women in Chocó often are extremely poor. In an abusive relationship the woman will have her possibilities of controlling her own life and decisions destroyed. Nubia said:

"The only way for a woman to leave this vicious circle of violence is to be conscious enough to leave and be independent. Independence has generated much consciousness for women. But in a world like this, where there are no

possibilities, no employment, there is no way you can tell a woman to be independent."

Yaneth, among others, argued that the indigenous women are the poorest women in Chocó. Their economic dependence on their husbands in combination with the strictly defined gender roles in the indigenous cultures makes indigenous women extremely vulnerable:

"And if the husband abandons her, she will be completely abandoned because there are no other persons in the community that will take responsibility for her. And as the majority of the indigenous communities suffer from extreme poverty, women's insecurity and vulnerability are multiplied. On the other hand, the state doesn't have any programs directed to the protection of indigenous women specifically. Therefore she is oppressed both by her own culture and the state."

The indigenous women Lorena was 28 years old, head of household and mother of three children. "A woman without husband never rests" Lorena said, and told me that despite her hard work she and her children sometimes only get to eat once a day. Despite the daily fight for survival, Lorena said she thinks she is better off alone, because she can study and make her own decisions. She said that as the husband controls the family economy in her community it means that for example, if the woman gets sick and wants to go and see a doctor, she cannot leave without her husband's permission.

5.5 Women's health and reproductive rights

Several of the interviewed women described the health standards of Chocó a as major security threat. It is obvious that economic insecurity leads to restrictions in the access to health for women in Chocó. But it's not all about money. The Colombian public health system is ill-functioning and the access to health in Chocó is restricted, particularly in the rural areas. The hospital in Quibdó lacks capacity to perform many treatments and operations, and the sick in need of more specialized care therefore have to be sent to the larger city of Medellin.

Sandra had a problem with her ankle since she was a baby, as a result of a mistake at the hospital. She limped and had an open wound that she always had to cover up. Sandra said that the insufficient health care she received has been a worry and obstacle to her entire life. "If you don't have health, you have nothing", she said, and told me that due to her difficult financial situation she is often forced to skip the medicines in order to be able to buy food.

The area of sexual and reproductive health care is especially important for women's health. In Chocó, the access to maternal health care often is a question of life and death. The maternal mortality in Chocó is the highest level not only in Colombia, but in Latin America, according to Adriana at Unicef. Regional differences in maternal mortality are huge in Colombia, which confirms the connection between place of residence, poverty and health insecurity. For example, in the neighbouring province of Risaralda 52 women die out of every hundred thousand live births, whereas in Chocó the corresponding number is 400 women (UN Colombia 2009). Women's access to health is

precarious, and even in the cases where there is a health centre available, the attention of sexual and reproductive health is often insufficient, Adriana said.

Teenage pregnancies are common in Chocó. The access to information on contraceptive methods is particularly scarce in the rural areas. Many young girls lack knowledge of contraceptive methods or simply lack the economic conditions to buy contraceptives. The risk of maternal death is twice as high for teenage girls than for adult women (UN Colombia 2009).

Sexual violence is widely perceived as taboo in Chocó. There are myths in society about what "types" of women are raped, and being abused sexually is intimately connected to shame, according to Nubia. Women who confess to being victims of sexual violence can be stigmatized. According to Yaneth, indigenous women are especially vulnerable when exposed to sexual violence, as revealing sexual abuse in indigenous communities is a taboo that can cause her to be rejected by her husband, family and community. Indigenous girls in some *Embera* communities also run the risk of female genital mutilation.

Mari Mosquera at Doctors without Borders said that women and girls in Chocó are often unaware of their rights to health. Her organization therefore accompanies women and girls to hospitals and state institutions so that they will be attended to properly and respectfully. At the time of the interview, Doctors without Borders were soon going to close their program on sexual and reproductive health in Chocó. Mari was worried and said that after its closing, women and girls victims of sexual abuse or in need of maternal health care would not have anyone to guarantee them help and support.

The very heart of human security is protecting lives. Consequently, good health is therefore at the "vital core" of human security. According to the Commission on Human Security, war and poverty are the gravest threats to health and to human security in general (CHS 2003:96). As outlined above, women in Chocó are exposed to much higher risks of dying as a result of childbirth than women in other regions of Colombia. This structural violence is a direct threat to women's lives and dignity and is a revealing example of the discrimination and structural violence that women in Chocó are exposed to.

5.6 Women, girls and education

Education has a powerful connection to human security, since it enables people to express their needs. As illiteracy largely is a women's problem, it is women who primarily have to bear its consequences. Lacking education means less possibility to participate in social and public life and to occupy a professional or political position. It means an obstacle to taking part in written information and to making deliberate choices in life. It also means greater difficulties in getting to know one's rights and to reclaim those rights. Women in Chocó, and especially indigenous women, internally displaced women and women living in rural areas, therefore have fewer possibilities than men to advance in society and to influence decisions that are crucial for their security.

All Colombian children have the right to free compulsory school (UD 2008:15). In Chocó, thousands of children are denied this right every day. The majority of the children not going to school are girls, and the lack of access to education for women was brought up as a security problem by various women. In some communities there are no teachers available for years and years. Some communities have had teachers sent to them, but when the teachers don't receive any payment they are forced to leave.

In the cases when education is available, some girls are deprived of their right to go because of their parents wanting them to help out in the household. "There are parents that don't want to invest in their girls' education because it will not benefit them", said Gloria. As the girl in a near future will belong to another man and another household, the parents prefer having her working at home and don't see the point in sending her to school.

According to Adriana, the situation for indigenous girls is particularly serious. A diagnosis of the education among indigenous populations that the Unicef recently completed, showed that for every ten indigenous men that go to school, only one woman has the same possibility.

"In indigenous communities they generally privilege men's education because the role of the women is a role much related to the household. The girls, once they get their menstruation, they will have their matrimony arranged. Therefore here girls marry at the age of thirteen, fourteen years. The women start having children very early and they abandon school. Sometimes the girls leave school already in elementary school, for example in the cases where their mother has many children, the girls are in charge of taking care of their siblings so that the mother can go out to cultivate."

The fact that a substantial part of the indigenous female populations never learn to speak or read Spanish has consequences for the women's possibilities to express themselves and participate in public life. For a displaced indigenous woman the inability to speak Spanish will automatically marginalize her when she is forced to start all over again in for example Quibdó, and might leave her dependent on men in her surroundings to speak for her. Illiteracy is unfortunately not unusual among the Afro-Chocoano population either.

5.7 Summary and discussion

In this chapter I have touched upon some of the elements of life in Chocó that render women insecure and threaten their life, freedom and dignity.

The dependence on the territory for livelihood makes the indigenous and Afro populations of Chocó vulnerable when their free movement and use of land is restricted by armed actors and industrial projects. The presence of strange elements on their land not only affects the Chocoanos' basic needs but also causes stress, as the territory is a sphere of spirituality and emotions. So when nature is being exploited the Afro and indigenous populations experience multiple threats to life. Thus, forced displacements not only imply the loss of livelihood in Chocó, but also the loss of culture and identity.

It has been argued that women are often exposed to certain threats because they are women. Such threats are for example the risk of sexual violence and of being forced to prostitute themselves due to poverty or pressure by armed groups and gangs. It has been shown how the armed conflict is a trigger and creator of those kinds of risks and that the Colombian army is taking advantage of their power by abusing and getting involved in prostitution in the communities they are supposed to protect. The armed conflict in Colombia and the gendered perception of women as "belonging to men" convert them into instruments of war and targets of violent acts of revenge directed towards their male family members. Furthermore, the perception of victims of sexual violence as "a certain kind of women" silences and stigmatizes the victims, especially in the case of indigenous women. It has also been argued that young women are particularly exposed to forced prostitution and other manifestations of sexual violence, implying that age is a factor influencing insecurity.

Women's poverty has turned out to be a crucial factor generating insecurity. Male chauvinism in the family sphere tends to result in men being in control of the household economy, which puts the woman in a position of dependence that can be taken advantage of. The responsibility of a woman to care for children not only limits her opportunity to work outside the home, but also leaves her in a critical situation if she is forced to support her children by herself. The security situation of a single woman can be ambiguous and contradictory; it may give a woman more autonomy but also harsh economic consequences.

The access to health and education are other mayor insecurities for women in Chocó. Poor access to health affects women's sexual and reproductive rights and the risk of dying from childbirth is much greater for Chocoano women that the average in Colombia. The tendency to keep girls at home in order for their male siblings to go to school is an obvious result of gendered logic favouring men. Not letting girls educate puts them in a marginalized position compared to men since she is a child and severely limits her possibilities to influence her own security. This marginalization is especially true for indigenous women and the rural population and internally displaced children.

It has also been put to the fore that the failure of the Colombian state to address the poor and the internally displaced population adequately leaves them exposed to a wide range of dangers. The violent suburbs of Quibdó are extremely insecure places to live in, and the vast majority of the population there are internally displaced. Without family or networks in Quibdó, the suburbs are often the only option for the displaced women. Difficulties to obtain dignified housing forces women to live in crowded places with strangers, which can lead to her and her children being abused. Displaced indigenous women often find themselves completely defenceless due to their common inability to communicate in Spanish and the prejudices based on both their sex and ethnicity they meet in Quibdó and other urban areas.

The results of the field study outlined in this chapter demonstrate that women are exposed to threats and violence in conflicts and wars that men are not. The insecurity experienced by women can be rather different from that experienced by men. When looking at society without awareness of gender differences, and more importantly,

without asking women about what specific threats they are exposed to, a gender-neutral and incomplete picture will be the result. In fact, the lack of data disaggregated by sex is one obstacle in improving security for men and women (Söderberg Jacobsen 2005:10). This chapter has highlighted that women experience violence that is institutionalized and present both in the public and private spheres.

Behind all the interviewed women's testimonies looms the fact that the Colombian state's poor efforts to fulfil the Chocoano women's economic, social and cultural rights lay the foundation of women's insecurity in Chocó. The structural violence of unequal opportunities and resource allocation is a direct threat to women's dignity and physical and psychological integrity, as well as a threat to their lives. The supposed security gains from the military presence are far from evident. Furthermore, this thesis has pointed to the vicious circle of poverty and violence. Ironically, it seems to be the same foundation of insecurity that feeds and strengthens the illegal armed groups which the Colombian government claims it wants to eliminate. A poor and desperate population with minimal prospects of a better future makes up a much better base for recruitment for the illegal armed groups that does a resistant and enlightened population. A clear case is the violent suburbs of Quibdó that serves as a refuge for thousands of internally displaced persons. This vulnerability attracts all kinds of illegal groups and criminal gangs utilizing the population to enhance their domination.

With the broad definitions of security and violence used here, light can be shed on security threats that would have passed unnoticed otherwise. Core matters for women's security such as domestic violence, the neglect of women's reproductive rights and other kinds of gender based violence is not regarded as violence of concern for national and international security. Here, the women's stories have shown that even in war-times, threats other than those directly related to the conflict can be just as frightening. It is true that these broad definitions can be ungainly when aiming for concrete and straightforward security policies. To narrow security in Colombia down into a military question is of course much easier. However, the question of who is going to protect women from the structural injustices violently targeting them remains unanswered with such approach.

6 Acting for security: What can a woman do?

In this section the women's room to manoeuvre in order to influence their security will be addressed. Women's security will be viewed in relation to non-governmental organizations and the Church, and the women's ideas of how those affect their security will be stated. Furthermore, obstacles to women's participation in organizational life will be discussed.

How women in Chocó perceive their own and other women's possibilities to influence their security situation was an important theme of discussion during the interviews. However, the question seemed hard to answer and sort of abstract for some. I soon realized that answers might be hard to formulate, since most of the women were engaged in a constant struggle to improve their vulnerable security situations through hard work and much creativity. Sadly, another likely explanation of the small number of suggestions is probably that women in Chocó often feel impotent when it comes to improving their security situations.

The suggestion that a woman should find herself a decent job so she can fulfil the basic needs, as suggested by Alba and Damaris, was therefore a pretty obvious answer (to what might have appeared a pretty ignorant question). Unfortunately this is a possibility that seems far out of reach for most. Another quite predictable answer was that women should be careful when they are out after dark, avoid empty streets and be accompanied. It became clear among the women I interviewed that they are extremely suspicious to strangers. "You never know who is who" said several women.

Dora argued that when indigenous communities are exposed to threats of violence by armed actors on their territories, sometimes the role of the women changes into a more powerful one. During hard times the women keep the community conscious and alert:

> *"Sometimes the women... turn out to be the stronger ones, because the women are the ones who feel the pain around them. Therefore the woman says: We will be strong and we will resist, like our Mother Earth has resisted in the middle of all problems."*

Dora said that women of indigenous communities have formulated strategies to protect their friends and family if anything should happen to them. "They say that if someone from their community is kidnapped, they will go save her wherever they have taken her, dead or alive. I think that during this epoch the indigenous woman has had a revival. And if there is no security, we go search security.", Dora said. If strangers come to the community, the women form part of the guard to defend their community.

Except for those answers, the suggestions on how women can act for security were much related to the gains from joining an organization. Obviously, this result is dependent upon my selection of respondents and the questions posed, since the women's perceptions of the relation between their membership/activism in non-governmental organizations and their security situation have been of special interest to me. I find it crucial to pay attention to civil society organizations and women's roles in

those. If women are described merely as victims, their important role as actors for their own security and for the security of others is obscured.

6.1 Security gains from joining an organization

All of the interviewed women had some connection to one organization or more. Some of the women were passive members, others were leading their organizations. The women considered that the membership of an organization do matter for security. *Awareness* and *formation* might be the lead words of the majority of the respondents. However, as will be demonstrated below, activism in an organization can also be related to security threats.

According to the interviewees, an organization is sometimes the only space where women have the opportunity of discussing their security situations with others, to learn about their rights and possibilities and to receive important information. In a diagnostic carried out by the organization *Corporación Siempreviva,* 183 women's groups and organizations are identified in Chocó. These range from groups of women gathering in the streets of their communities to do handicraft, to regional women's rights organizations. One of the conclusions of the diagnostic is that the affiliation to a group offers women an opportunity to know, interpret and to critically examine their reality together with others. This in its turn serves as a point of departure for the transformation of behaviour, habits and attitudes which can create better living conditions and women's empowerment (Corporación Siempreviva, 2006).

Nubia is a leader in the women's organization *Ruta Pacifica*. When I met her the first time she was giving a workshop on sexual violence for internally displaced persons. Nubia said that there is no public debate on women's security in Chocó:

> *"We live in a torn society. Here in Chocó we are trying to survive. There is no room in the public sphere to talk about women's problems."*

The fact that Chocó is lacking space where women can be empowered and heard was pointed out in various interviews. Therefore it is fundamental that organizations address women and their special security needs.

Organizations in Chocó, regional, national and international, have an important role in helping the population reclaiming their rights, according to several of the interviewed women. Indigenous Lorena's women's group is one example of that. Lorena initiated a cooperation between her organization, UNHCR and the Unicef. The UN organizations will support women in leader skills and how to argue for their causes before local authorities and state's entities. The workshops that organizations arrange seem to provide women with important information they would not obtain otherwise.

The Diocese of Quibdó appears to have played an important role in security construction. The most apparent method is probably the accompaniment the Church does in the communities all over Chocó. Several women stated that the Church has been an indispensable aid in the formation of organizations. ADACHO, OREWA, COCOMACIA and COMOCOPOCA are all examples of this. The Diocese is

functioning as a connecting point for organizations of Chocó, coordinating reunions and lending their locals to be used by organizations. "Without the Church it would all be a chaos", Gregoria said.

All respondents agreed that being part of an organization can make a difference for security. The formation and awareness obtained when going to workshops and spending time with the representatives and other members of an organization was repeatedly pointed out in the interviews. For example when I asked Justa what ways there are for a woman to improve her security situation, she said:

> *"One way is to appropriate the existing laws, get to know your rights in order to be able to reclaim them. To know how to get to the institutions offices, how to talk to the director, how to tell him that one is a human being with rights just like him. This is done through an organization. And when joining an organization you step up as a woman. You don't wait for a man to go reclaim for you, instead you have courage to go by yourself and claim your rights."*

Justa said that when looking upon security from a rights perspective, she is better off than most women in Chocó because she knows her rights, how to reclaim them and where. Justa also argued that women are discriminated upon because of their sex. For example when they go to Acción Social[12] to get help, they are asked to bring their husbands. "If the woman doesn't have a husband, she is questioned because of that. It's hard for a single woman."

Maria first said that her membership of ADACHO, an organization for displaced persons, has not met her expectations since she still has not received any help from the state. However, she later told me that ADACHO do have a positive influence on her security. "Going to Acción Social alone is a waste of time", she said, "Because they don't even pay the slightest attention to you!" When she went there with some of the leaders from ADACHO, at least she was attended to and treated more respectfully. Similar stories were told about the health system in Chocó.

Gloria told me the story about the kidnapping of two of the leaders of her organization *La Red Departamental de Mujeres Chocoanas*. This occurred when the two women were transiting the river in a boat with several passengers, and had nothing to do with the women's activism. La Red Departamental de Mujeres Chocoanas sent out an alarm to all their organizations of cooperation, and the response was huge both nationally and internationally. "Therefore, if one is part of an organization one has more support when asking for help from the authorities. It's like a guarantee." Gloria said.

Female membership of organizations appears to have other values as well. Maria goes to all the workshops that ADACHO arranges. "I sit there and listen but I forget most of the things they said when I go back home" she said, "But the time I spend there is like a moment of relief". Maria has got to know many women in the same situation as her through the organization, and with them she finds support and comprehension. The fact

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[12]   La Agencia Presicencial para Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional is a Colombian state entity that carries out social programs attending vulnerable populations.

that an organization has come to serve as something much more than a way of fighting for rights and survival is apparent in many of the women's stories. Gregoria and Sandra from the women's cooperative *Mujeres por una vida digna y solidaria* are running a restaurant in Quibdó, and they both told me that together they feel more secure. Even though they sometimes barely can make their restaurant break even, the support from the other women is an important factor for their well-being. The women are also depending on each other for their economic security. Therefore, when I asked Sandra how she herself can influence her security situation she said: "From my point of view it is the way that I behave with my companions. If I behave badly, it will have consequences for them too."

6.2 Defending human rights: The female leaders

Defending human rights in Colombia is an activity associated with severe threats. According to a great number of organizations, including the European Union and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), human rights defenders are frequently the targets of threats and violence in Colombia (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008:21). There are tensions between the Colombian government and human rights organizations. The work of human rights defenders is continuously stigmatized by state representatives and the president Alvaro Uribe, several international organizations argue (HRW 2009, ICG 2009).

Several of the women I interviewed in Chocó said that their social and political activism do create insecurity. All of those women have a high activist profile and outspoken commitment to human rights and some were working particularly with territorial rights, women's rights and the rights of the internally displaced population. Their fight for security for all seems to imply certain costs for their personal security. The confidence that the state would protect them was generally low, and a couple of the women argued that the state's actors are potential perpetrators. One woman said:

> *"The army and the police are here to defend and protect our lives, but I ask myself: Who will protect us from them?"*

The nuns Elsa and Yaneth from the Diocese of Quibdó continuously visit communities with high levels of violence and insecurity. This means travelling to and spending time in the places with the highest presence of armed actors. Elsa said that God is the only protection she and her companions from the Church have when they go visit the communities in danger:

> *"Until now God has been great. And well, they say insecurity because we don't travel with any bodyguard. Our bodyguard is God that lives with us by our side."*

Yaneth told me that the Diocese of Quibdó is exposed to direct threats and persecution and its leaders have been assassinated. However, in order to maintain a confident relation with the communities, arriving in company of NGOs or other entities unknown to the community and the illegal armed groups would not be possible.

Nicolasa has been fighting for the collective territorial rights of the population of Alto Atrato[13] since 1986. Nicolasa's activism has brought her many enemies. Just like Elsa, Nicolasa said that her religiosity and faith that God will protect her gave her comfort in an insecure environment.

> *"I live with dreads of what could happen to me, I don't know... It's like a labyrinth, because for security I don't have anyone. The only security I have is God."*

COCOMACIA is an organization working with territorial rights for the Afro-Chocoano population. Justa said that COCOMACIA as an organization has always been threatened and Justa herself has also been targeted by direct threats because of her activism. Just like in the cases above, anyone representing COCOMACIA cannot possibly walk around with police protection. The Colombian state has given the leaders of her organization cell phones with special numbers to call in case anything happens. Justa said that support by international organizations such as Swefor makes it possible for COCOMACIA to achieve things.

Alba from ADACHO also received a cell phone from the state with the help of a lawyer. Alba is one of the founders of ADACHO and has been fighting for the rights of the displaced since she came to Quibdó in the late 1990s. She and her colleagues at the office don't feel safe and there have been rumours about actors from illegal armed groups circulating outside the office. Several of her companions have been killed and three have had to leave Chocó due to insecurity. In case anything should happen, Alba says her security would be the Diocese of Quibdó, the UNHCR and the CNRR[14]. "They have always been with us so we are not alone in this", she said. Alba added her faith in God gives her security and makes her confident nothing will happen to her.

Gloria considered women working for human rights in Chocó to be exposed to security threats, and she was worried on both her own behalf and that of her female colleagues. She thought that she and her colleagues should receive some training in what security measures they should take in their everyday life and when travelling. Gloria said that the primal measures she takes for security is to be aware of who surrounds her, especially in the streets. If she has to go out late, she never goes alone after nine o'clock.

Gloria said that the only protection for the human right defenders in Chocó to count on is the presence of the international organizations accompanying the local organizations, their leaders, members and the human rights movement as such.

6.3 Obstacles to female participation in organizations

In accordance with several respondents, Adriana argued that in Chocó, the relations between men and women are constructed by an overwhelmingly male chauvinist tradition strongly marked by depreciation of women's thinking and opinions. Adriana

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[13] Chocó is divided into five sub-regions: Alto Atrato, Bajo Atrato, Medio Atrato. El Litoral Pacífico Chocoano and San Juan.

[14] CNRR is the shortening of the state entity National Commission on Reparation and Reconciliation in Colombia.

said that important attempts to change this inequality are made by hard-working, intelligent women through women's organizations:

> *"But anyway, the reality of coexistence and the ways of living here in Chocó is a reality far away from that. Among the indigenous communities more than in the Afro population. The indigenous women due to their culture, their world view, their ways of relating to each other, are in great disadvantage. In much, much disadvantage."*

Gender relations are central to women's activism in organizations. Women from organizations with both male and female members told me that they have had to fight the male domination within their organizations, and that being a woman implies that one has to fight many battles, be scrutinized and perform considerably better than men in order to achieve a position and respect in an organization. Justa, Alba and Dora all told me their stories about the difficulties they have met as women in their organizations.

However, not all women have the possibility even to *join* an organization. Women in Chocó have to deal with various hindrances in order to be able to go to meetings, participate in social and public life, and stay informed. One obstacle is Chocoano women's common fear of walking in the streets, according to the interviewees. Kelly, president of a youth organization, told me that sometimes when her organization has a meeting at seven at night, female members say they don't dare to go because they will have to go home in the darkness.

Patriarchal family relations are another obstacle for women to organize. Women's responsibility to look after their children is one hindrance, so organizations allowing women to bring children can be of crucial importance. I noted that at some of the meetings and work-shops that I attended there were plenty of children, which is a positive sign.

Women are sometimes restricted to go to meetings by their husbands and partners. Nubia said:

> *"And I say to the women "Why didn't you return to our reunions?" and they say "Ah no because my husband won't let me, because my husband said that if I go back to those workshops he would beat me up". And they see it as something normal! Because if she goes to the workshop, he will leave her. And if he leaves her, she will have no possibilities. Therefore it's a circle. And as long as this is happening security for women will not exist. Security for women means health, education, decent housing, it means that women are able to project themselves."*

When Nicolasa told me about her history in COCOMOPOCA and how she became a community leader, she related to her female friend, who had to leave the organization because of her husband's disagreement. "Men here are very jealous, very sexist. And since I have not had a husband, I have been more free", Nicolasa said.

Indigenous Lorena, said that the married women participating in the Women's Council have had to ask their husbands for permission to enter the group. This is because when

an indigenous woman gets married, which is usually around the age of thirteen, she cannot make her own decisions and needs permission from her husband for whatever she wants to do. For a woman to organize and advance as a leader seems to be particularly difficult among the indigenous populations. For those managing to become leaders in their communities, this frequently leads to break-ups within the family, according to Yaneth.

6.4 Summary and discussion

Despite the positive picture of the importance of women's participation in local organizations that I have transmitted here, these are obviously not a panacea capable of solving the security threats of all Chocoano women. The women's stories have convinced me that joining an organization certainly can make a difference for the security of oneself and others. Learning about what some organizations actually have achieved in Chocó, convinced me even more. Many Chocoano organizations form part of great networks capable of raising their voices in the Colombian debate on issues such as the rights of the displaced, of the Afro-Colombians and the indigenous communities. Still, the women I interviewed have little influence over their personal security situations. Nothing ever seems reliable in Chocó, and a woman can possess all the knowledge and will in the world while still not having even her basic rights guaranteed. The processes and structures constructing insecurity are simply too powerful to overcome in any near future.

In this chapter women's possibilities to act for security have been in focus. It has been concluded that what women can do in order to be more secure is somewhat hard to discern, as women are already dedicated to a constant struggle to attain a safer life. Women in Chocó have created survival strategies that guide their ways of living. Therefore, defining women's actions to create security becomes complicated. Still, women's everyday work does contribute to the security of themselves, their children and their communities. Several of the women I met dedicate their lives to the fight for all Chocoanos to have their rights guaranteed and their freedom and lives respected. Others had much less defined roles within their organizations, and while radiating a strong will to contribute, the powerlessness and exposure they experience leaves little space for action. However, it has emerged clearly that women are important actors in NGOs and the Church and that the commitment of those women brings about security gains for themselves and others.

Since Chocó is a province with a large internally displaced population, societal structures and social ties have been weakened. For women that have been forced to split up and start over in new places, organizations can be crucial for them to understand their new reality better, enter networks and step out of isolation and marginalization by getting to know other women and fight for their rights together with them. The movement of populations, the scattering of families and the expansion of female headed households have also created situations where women have to take more decisions themselves, within the family and outside the household. Paradoxically, women's independence and their roles as actors can be strengthened during conflict (see Bop 2002:19ff).

In a place like Chocó where there are hardly any public spaces for women to articulate their needs and stay informed, organizations can, and do, empower women by creating such spaces. Women will then be able to take more deliberate and informed actions which, hopefully, will render them more secure. It was argued by some women that it is important for women's security that women know about their rights and how to reclaim them. The workshops and meetings I attended surely demonstrate that in Quibdó, there are options for women to stay informed and act for security in an organized way. Group affinity and political consciousness can of course be attained without the membership of any organization. However, it seems obvious to me that organizations in Chocó do constitute the most accessible and adequate channel for these matters, as state institutions not appear to be too willing or capable to neither inform the population of their rights, nor to fulfil them.

For women to be represented in any decision-making there have to be prerequisites for them to participate. The findings of this thesis indicate that here are several factors that have a negative influence on women's participation in Chocó which directly and indirectly threaten their security. Many of the hindrances women meet are intimately connected to social and cultural constructs of women's roles and abilities, as well as to obstacles such as poverty and the particularly unfavourable conditions of the internally displaced women. For a person in constant search for livelihood, every working hour counts. It can therefore undoubtedly be seen as a high cost to spend time on meetings where such "abstract" matters as human rights and gender are discussed. Food was handed out at some of the events I attended in Quibdó, which I must be an efficient way to enable the poorest women skip some working hours in order to join. As commented upon earlier it is also crucial that women are allowed to bring children to meetings. Furthermore, to render women's participation possible in the first place there have to exist reunions to go to. Chocó is a region with a large rural population living in small communities with little access to the human rights and feminist movement advancing in Quibdó.

Women have to be able to possess important positions and to exercise their leadership without fear of being attacked. The situation of the women in leading positions that openly defend human rights is extremely worrying. Those women argued that they have few measures to take to protect themselves. It was put to the fore that the female leaders find the support of other organizations, particularly the Church and international organizations are important actors. However, the Colombian state did not emerge as important for the security of the interviewed women. It appeared clearly that faith in the protection of God is an important factor in the construction of security for some of these women.

The female leaders frequently expressed both hope and despair when discussing women's possibilities to emerge as leaders within their communities and organizations. Women's organizations, and women's groups within larger entities, possess "satellite" status in Chocó. Still, my impression is that women in Chocó, and particularly the Afro-Chocoano women, are experiencing a positive development moving slowly but surely towards enhanced equality between the sexes. The interviews revealed that the women have learned much about how to act for their causes in face of the insecurity they are

exposed to. They have learned to unite, to organize for collective solutions and solidarity, to use internet to make their problems known, to make demands and how to work in national and international networks. As argued by Söderberg Jacobson, women many times have the solution to their own security and solutions on security for the rest of society as well (Söderberg Jacobson 2005:49). This knowledge and contribution of the Chocoano women to enhance security and peace deserve careful attention and the creations of spaces where those experiences can be expressed.

Any attempt to obtain stability, peace and security has to include the voices of local and regional civil society organizations. The peripheral position of Chocoano women has long-term consequences for their security. The possibilities for women to make their voices heard and for the real participation of women have been increasingly addressed on the international agenda for quite some time. The objective of the UN Security Council's *resolution 1325* is to ensure female participation at all levels in a peace process. As long as women are excluded from influencing decisions, security for all cannot be guaranteed. Similarly, women from different ethnic groups and other groups such as displaced women have to be enabled to participate. This means that grass roots movements and women's organizations have to be addressed. It also means the rejection of the idea that cease fire and basic necessities have to be dealt with first and after that "women's problems" can be addressed.

Experiences from wars all over the world show that armed conflict can bring about both gains and losses for women. Women can emerge as important actors during conflict, while their contributions are virtually ignored at the time of peace negotiations. During the war, at its end and at the time of peace negotiations, authorities mainly emphasize issues relating to the conflict itself and women risk the backlash of losing their right to exercise leadership on political and social levels. Authorities rarely give expression to any hope of changing the relations of power in favour of the socially subordinate (Bop 2005:30-34). These experiences imply that if a serious peace process would be initiated in Colombia, the Chocoano women risk exclusion both due to their sex and ethnicity. The main conclusion to draw from this chapter is that women in Chocó do not lack the will to contribute, but need support to build a strong women's movement that can stay firm both during and at the end of the conflict.

7 Women deliberating security

One of the purposes of my research was to explore how the term "security" is used in Chocó. As has been outlined in the theoretical discussion (chapter 3) security is interpreted and used in a number of ways in different contexts and discourses. Departing in this discussion on what should be included in the security concept, the ways in which security was deliberated during the interviews will be analysed in this section.

7.1 Security defined?

One of the questions I have been trying to answer in this study was "How is the term "security" used and deliberated by women in Chocó?" During my stay in Chocó I realized that there is no one evident way of how to use the term "security". "What kind of security?" I was asked when I told people about my project. "Do you mean security like the conflict or food security or what?" It was especially hard in some interview occasions, as I was eager to find out about the interviewees' way of interpreting "security" and therefore I did not want to specify my conception of the word. In these occasions I responded by saying that the respondent was free to make her own interpretation of the concept.

It was noted that several women used the term "security" when referring to fear of direct violence, conflict and criminality, and when talking about other areas of security they said for example "health security" or "economic security". Overall, the interviewed women had a very inclusive way of interpreting their security. Some of them brought up problems such as health access and poverty in the first place and then eventually expressed the fear of direct violence. It was also noted that the concept of security is far from clear-cut and can bring about confusion when used.

When starting to carry out the interviews I had hoped that the women would define what security means to them. But, when asked what "security" is, several women found it somewhat hard to answer and therefore described their own problems instead of trying to define what security is. I soon realized that asking for a definition is not always fruitful, nor enough to get a complete picture of how a person interprets the concept. When going through the material, I saw that the definitions given left out a lot of what the women expressed about security in the rest of the interviews. This finding strengthened my perception that defining a concept is difficult and does not necessarily express the complete or actual thoughts of the woman. I also realized that when the women told me about their problems and the situation of women in Chocó, I could not always discern whether this was expressed in terms of security problems or just problems. "Security" seems to be a floating concept that was used in several parallel discourses.

Maria will serve as an example here to demonstrate the inconsistency in the use of the term security. Maria told me that she had several problems; she was poor, unemployed, had health problems and was cared for by her children because the Colombian state had

not given her any help since she became a victim of forced displacement. Despite those factors, when I asked Maria about what made her insecure, she only referred to her fear of being attacked or hurt by illegal armed groups or criminals. I therefore asked her if she also saw her poor economic situation as a security issue. She answered that she did, but that she did not bring it up as a security issue since people usually refer to violence when they talk about security. This implies that Maria did not discuss certain matters as security issues even though she considered them to be just that, because she thought that I expected her to stick to another interpretation of security. This interpretative confusion, I believe, is pretty common. People experience insecurity for various reasons, but might choose to categorize some of those problems as security problems and others not.

On the other hand, contrary to the troubles of definition it was apparent that some of the women already had a clear idea about the concept of security. Those women not only told me how they define "security" and how they use the term, but also how they think the term *should* be defined and used more generally in society. That is, several of the women had given "security" as a concept a lot of thinking and actively promoted a certain definition of "security".

There was a clear relation between the women's organizational positions and activism and how they tended to discuss security. Women who had been active in their respective organizations for a long time and had important positions, could easier define security and argue in favour of a certain definition. Many of them expressed their view of security as "we define security as..." referring to their organization. Many pointed out that security is directly related to the people's possibility to enjoy their rights and to have their basic necessities fulfilled. The rights to education, health, land, housing and food were especially pointed out.

Justa, a leader in COCOMACIA and in the organization's women's section, told me that to her, security is the non-violation of people's rights:

> *Therefore, here we* (COCOMACIA) *understand security as wherever I am I have guarantees, like education, health, non-violation of my rights, that's what we understand by security. I don't know in what way it is in your thesis..."*

Justa explained that her way of interpreting "security" is very different from that of the majority in Chocó. Unfortunately, she said, people in general do not think about security as the access to justice like she does. I asked her why people tend to make this interpretation. Justa argued that it could be explained by the general unawareness of rights due to the historic marginalization of Chocó:

> *"But the people in the communities, if you talk to them about security they directly start talking about violence. It's like... I already know that because I work with them. As soon you say security, they think about armed groups. /.../It is because of our culture, our roots, people don't understand that it is insecurity that I don't have education, that I don't have good health, people don't understand it as insecurity. Rather, they understand it as a necessity I have, which the government doesn't provide for. Anyway they stay here because they don't have any other*

option. Therefore people don't realize that it is a violation of the rights that we have."

These women also carefully pointed out that with this definition of security, the insecurity that the majority of the Chocoano population are exposed to cannot be cured just by the presence of state military or police. Elsa, a nun at the Diocese of Quibdó and one of the founders of the Church's *Commission of Life, Justice and Peace,* said:

> *"The security that we* (The Commission of Life, Justice and Peace) *are talking about is that we all have the same opportunities. Because security does not consist of having an armed actor from the army by my side, no! Security is people having employment, having health, that's the security people are asking for. Because security, you see all this full of army and police, but the people are hungry. So, what kind of security are we talking about? Because the problem remains the same. Everyday there are violent deaths, it happens next to the controlling entities. To me, security is about peoples' needs. The displacements lately have also happened because there is no food security, no health security, no economic security, there is none. And this is the kind of security the Colombian people are asking for, in majority. Because there is a lot of poverty in many places, a large gap between rich and poor."*

When Nicolasa was asked what security is, she started by saying what security is *not:*

> *"Security to me does not mean to be armed or that the national army is present. Our (COCOMOPOCA's) analysis is that it is on the contrary. When the military is here, we are less secure because we get caught in the middle of combats. /.../ They* (the legal and illegal armed groups) *infuse fear and terror and generate a panorama of insecurity, of distrust. /.../ We would like to be left alone without the presence of any armed actor. Therefore we should say that there will be security the day when the Colombian government and state allow the community to have their basic necessities satisfied and start investing in the social sector."*

7.2 The official discourse: Security by arms

This critique of the Colombian government's conceptual understanding of security as exclusively relating to the military sphere was brought up several times by the female leaders. It was argued that the security discourse or debate should not be restricted to merely dealing with direct violence, crime or the illegal armed groups. Nubia, leader of Ruta Pacífica Chocó, said that her organization interprets security as being "something beyond arms and weapons". Her definition was very similar to those of other female leaders outlined above. Nubia said that the grand majority of the Chocoanos doesn't understand security the way she does. "I understand it that way because I'm part of a movement that thinks like that", Nubia said.

Nubia argued that a person, and especially in the Colombian context, can have all the arms in the world and still be insecure. But because of the government's war-centred view of security, investments in social welfare are cut down in order to invest heavily in

warfare. Nubia argued that this is part of a national *and* international war-culture, i.e. to think that security lies in the possession and use of arms:

> *"Therefore security is a very broad theme, it is a very profound theme and it has very strong foundations, so one sometimes says: How will this end? How will this transform, if we have a culture with such a deep-rooted thinking that security is a revolver, that security is a weapon? /.../ The culture of war is embraced not only in Colombia, it's in the whole world. Look at the United States giving security to everyone, thinking that security is bombs and army. Therefore it's a generalized culture, it's a culture in which security is thought of as the possession of arms. And it's the contrary, this creates insecurity."*

Just like Nubia, Adriana from the Unicef argued that the predominant interpretation of security is commonly related to the presence of the Colombian military or police. Adriana pointed out that the actual government of president Alvaro Uribe has contributed to a narrow and restricted use of the concept of security in Colombia, based on the idea of the good guys bringing security to the people by fighting the bad guys. When I asked Adriana how she thought security was interpreted in Colombia, she said:

> *"Horrible. I mean, I think it's a very narrow concept that doesn't involve all the spheres that it actually has. I think that the concept of security that we are using in Colombia is highly influenced by the security policies of the current government of Alvaro Uribe, that security is equal to militarization, to the presence of the army. To attack the illegal armed groups. To us* (the Unicef) *security is something much more inclusive. That is, the possibility that I feel secure is a possibility that also has legal and political aspects. It has social, cultural and intellectual aspects. I see security from a very inclusive point of view, but the concept of security that we have in this country is very restricted."*

According to Adriana and other women, the Colombian population has absorbed the government's conception of security. She warned me that if I should ask Chocoano women if they experience insecurity, they might answer "no, here are the police and the military" even though their children are dying from malnutrition.

7.3 Summary and discussion

As can be seen from the findings presented in this chapter, the security discourse in Colombia is just as complex as the debate outlined in the theoretical section above. The concept of security can lead to confusion on how to use it and what it refers to in a certain context. This confusion seems to derive from the predominant security discourse in the Colombian society that the women had to relate to. From the interviews I can draw the conclusion that roughly there seem to exist two parallel discourses on security. On the one hand, those interpreting security problems as armed conflict and criminality, and on the other hand, those interpreting a security problems as not only crime and war, but also the violation of economic, social and cultural rights.

Apparently, and not surprisingly, everyday, "people-centred" ways of understanding security can be very different from the state-centred discourses articulated by

governments and in international relations. This division is problematic in the case of Colombia, as security discourse is often the language expressing other defining principles of political life as well.

As has been argued earlier, states contain power structures inclined to favour certain groups and ideologies. To let a discourse based on these power relations set the standards of what should be treated as security issues in policy is therefore highly problematic. Those whose voices are not represented in the state will therefore be silenced and powerless in security policy at the same time as their lives can depend on those very issues. The security discourse addressing the needs of protection of Chocoano women will remain marginal, while the dominant discourses of the state thus become and remain dominant because of the power relations sustaining them (see Stern 2001:29).

If we care for people to be secure, the predominant discourses of security must be seriously challenged both in theory and in practice. What is officially to be considered a security problem depends on the definition of what security is, and for whom or what security is to be created. As argued by Marcus, meanings and discourses are not given, static or final. Rather, they are always in process of reproducing themselves (in Stern 2001:25-26). Re-defining and widening the official and dominant understanding of "security" in Colombia as something that can be centred on *both* people (that is, all peoples) and the state, implies transforming discourses and contesting power relations sustaining them. Therefore, the official security definitions do matter.

8 The social construction of insecurity

This chapter contains a discussion about how social and cultural factors influence the construction of insecurity for the Chocoano women. In the previous chapters, various threats, dangers and conditions creating insecurity for women in Chocó have been described. It has also been concluded that what is considered as "security" and "insecurity" can vary greatly depending on conceptual understandings of security and the perspective taken. The intersection of factors such as gender, ethnicity, economic conditions and age can be decisive for how insecurity is constructed for a woman. The construction of insecurity involves numerous building-blocks. In Chocó, those blocks are resting on a firm foundation of inequality.

The women's stories that make up the foundation of this thesis imply that, in order to be free and safe, Chocoano women want for example access to justice, health and education, employment with a decent salary, sovereignty over their own bodies, the possibility to use and enjoy their territory in traditional ways, a political system that does not permit the exploitation of their ancestral territories, a life free from armed conflict, the possibility of transiting public spaces without fear, the possibility of defending their rights without risks of violence and stigmatization, inclusion in decision-making processes in their families and society, equality between women and men and the non-discrimination of them for belonging to a certain ethnic group.

The fulfilment of those needs is threatened by interlocking power systems of oppression and domination. That is, the power of the Colombian government, illegal armed groups, the Colombian Army, U.S. foreign policy, multinational companies involved in exploitation of nature (capitalism), structures of male chauvinism and the domination of some social and ethical groups over others, are all directly or indirectly tied to Chocoano women's insecurity. With this panorama in mind the complexity of the construction of Chocoano women's insecurity evolves clearly.

The marginalization of Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples has historical explanations. The colonial ideas and values of civilization and the superiority of some "races" over others were those ruling when the Colombian nation state was founded. The historical marginalization of Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples is built into the structure of power and social and cultural relations of the Colombian state and society. The fact that Chocó has a population that is over ninety percent constituted by those two groups and that Chocó is the poorest province of Colombia is not a coincidence, I believe. The profound poverty of the Afro and indigenous populations next to the multinational companies and industrial projects exploiting the nature of Chocó, certainly shows similarities to the colonial history of the province. It is argued that the Chocoanos are now experiencing a capitalist colonization instead (Flórez López 2007:525). Capitalist interests stand in fierce contrast to the freedom, livelihood and dignity of the Chocoano communities. The exploitation is a direct threat to the lives of the Chocoano population and is made possible by structural inequalities of power.

Gendered perceptions and stereotypes of women have showed crucial for the construction women's insecurity in Chocó. The women experience certain fears that are directly related to the socially constructed roles ascribed to them as women. When women who are exposed to structural discrimination due to their sex inside their communities simultaneously belong to discriminated groups like the indigenous and Afro-Colombian women, insecurity multiplies. Afro and indigenous women in Chocó are not just occupying the position of "Others" (ethnic minorities) but of *subordinate* Others (ethnic minority women) (see Stern 2001:24).

The subordinate position of Chocoano women in Colombia deprives them of the power to influence the official or predominant security discourses. The predominant national security discourses are those which set agenda for the security policy. Elites define the parameters of discussion for what is a security issue, as well as what measures are to be taken to deal with those issues. The priority of militarization and the vast military expenditure[15] in Colombia is the result of the interests and the security threats defined by those in power. In the Colombian case it seems like the government policy - that challenges to security are to be eliminated by force – may give birth to dynamics consuming the society they are meant to protect.

The armed conflict forces women in Chocó to be constantly surrounded by armed actors. Despite having some female integrants, the military is a sphere of men involved in a "war culture" that has been vital in Colombia for over fifty years. This culture of war is intimately related to traditional "masculine" values such as force and aggression, and to a culture of violence which legitimize and reinforce the role of violence as an acceptable means of responding to conflict. The relation between the protector and the protected is unequal per se (i.e. military/community, armed/unarmed, authority/civil, etc.). In the context of Chocó, the relation between the "protector" and the "protected" must be seriously questioned.

Even though it was not expressed by the women I interviewed, the presence of the military may of course have positive impacts on security as well. This demonstrates how the security needs of women can be contradictory. What renders a woman safer might equally render her unsafe. Being secure in the sense security is discussed in this thesis, however, cannot merely be obtained by military presence. The presence of the army guarantees at the most the absence of full-scale war but cannot in any way guarantee peace (Söderberg Jacobson 2005:9). Constructing security for the Chocoano women means re-constructing profound societal structures and re-defining what is to be considered threats to security. With new definitions of security threats, measures could be taken to change the until now virtually ignored underlying structures and causes which give rise to insecurity. Moving in this direction, a base for constructing sustainable peace upon could be created.

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[15] Military expenditure in Colombia rose from 2.6 billion U.S. dollars in 2001 to 5.6 billion in 2007 (U.S. Department of State 2008).

9 Concluding discussion

The writing of this thesis has been a long, sometimes difficult, but highly rewarding process on a personal level. The six weeks that I spent in Chocó is an unforgettable experience, and even though the stay was short I have been struggling to put all my impressions and learning down to words in this thesis. The study has come to an end, and it is time to ask the question: What is the contribution of this thesis?

Even though the results of this study confirm much of the reasoning of women's security that was outlined in the theoretical framework of chapter three, it has also been shown that every context requires its own analysis of security. Research has shown countless evidence that one can speak in general terms of women's security worldwide, since the structural conditions influencing women's security are present in all societies. Insecurity for women is therefore often shaped in similar ways but to highly varying degrees in different contexts. Discrimination due to sex, ethnicity or group pertinence is a global phenomenon with far-reaching consequences for security. However, if the objective is to attain information on security in a specific place, there is no method exceeding that of asking the group of interest personally, as in this study.

It has turned out indispensable for this analysis of security in Chocó to include factors such as ethnicity and cultural understandings and values. Even though the violent and miserable conditions of Chocó have been described by entities such as the UN and the IARCH, I have despite much searching not been able to find any examples of analysis of women's security in Chocó departing in the human security approach which I have adopted here. Neither have I found any analysis of how the concept of security actually is used in Chocó, nor of the relationship between women's activism in organizations and their security situations.

I believe that both the strength and weakness of this thesis lie in the broad conceptions of security and violence which I have adopted. This choice has resulted in a thesis that is, precisely, broad. Numerous themes and factors have been dealt with, and the reader has (I hope) been offered a brief but firm demonstration of the fact that security for the individual implies so much more than what the mainstream security policy offers today. Yet, the cost of this approach is that the analysis tends to be general and may appear somewhat superficial and predictable.

As pointed out in the criticism of the broad human security doctrine and Galtung's concept of violence, those broad concepts are difficult to delimit and risk pretending to include almost anything directly or indirectly threatening human life, freedom and fundamental rights. During the drafting of this thesis, I soon realized that my approach was complicated from a research perspective, since the problems that potentially could be included in such an analysis may appear nearly endless. Naturally, from a research perspective it would have been easier to delimit security and violence to dealing with political violence. However, such an approach would require me to leave out much of the women's experiences of insecurity.

I find the contemporary debate driven by the human security doctrine and the critical security schools to be highly relevant. The question of what the definitions of security actually mean in practice has loomed as a constant doubt in the back of my mind during the whole process of this study. Is it just a theoretical discourse, occupying a small group of intellectuals, irrelevant to the reality of millions of individuals struggling against insecurity? The critique that the international community should spend less time arguing on the definitions of security, and more time on actually trying to improve security, is it just? (see Alkire 2003:9). The conviction I met among the female leaders of Chocó that the predominant use of the security concept in Colombia needs to be altered was striking. This served as a strong motivation for me, as it confirmed that my chosen approach had support among the ones whose security I cared for.

The notion that social development and sustainable peace, as well as national and individual security go hand in hand may appear obvious to most people. Still, in the light of the current security policy of Colombia, this is worth being repeated. The international community has an important mission to listen to and carry on the experiences and opinions of security of the Colombian women, and to actively work in favour of incorporating them into Colombian security policy. To make the Chocoano women's voices heard, in Colombia and internationally, contributes to re-formulating the security concept so that it does not just occasionally, but generally, include the individual's security. In order for a new conception of security to be useful, it is required that not only the security problems of women are identified, but also that the structural causes of the problems are addressed.

To alter the structural causes of women's insecurity – oppression not only based on sex but also on ethnicity, imperialism and so on – is a task that some Chocoano women demonstrably are devoted to through their daring activism for human rights, equality and freedom for all. The resistance of those women, and the evidence that the civil society's organizations actually can make a difference for their members' security, constituted something for me to hold on to in the rough and hopeless context that I found myself in. For understandable reasons, some of the women appeared to have little hope that their security situations would improve in any near future. But, I also saw a strong will to change their situations and to contribute to the development of their society.

If I should get the chance to realize further research in Chocó, I believe that the most relevant questions to ask would deal with the empowerment of the Chocoano women. What are the most accurate ways of supporting the civil society's organizations in Chocó, and particularly, the gender-related work of these organizations? How can greater possibilities for women to participate socially and politically be created? What can the women do to empower themselves, and what role could or should the international community take on in Chocó? The findings of this thesis imply that the presence of the international community is highly appreciated in Chocó. Still, several of the interviewed women suggested that the international aid could do more good if directed differently.

My belief is that if a broad research program guided by these types of questions was carried out, this could lead to results highly relevant to the Chocoano women's security situation. And if this thesis could in any way contribute to such a development, it certainly would make my engagement and efforts feel truly worthwhile.

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Appendix A: List of respondents and informants

Respondents

Alba (Quibdó)	Asociación de Desplazados Afrodescendientes del Chocó (ADACHO)	2009-03-24
Damaris	Asociación Dos de Mayo (ADOM)	
Dora (Quibdó)	Asociación Orewá	2009-03-31
Elsa (Quibdó)	Comisión de Vida, Justicia y Paz Diócesis de Quibdó	2009-03-26
Gloria (Quibdó)	La Red Departamental de Mujeres Chocanas	2009-03-30
Gregoria (Quibdó)	Mujeres por una Vida Digna y Solidaria	2009-02-27
Jenfa (Quibdó)	Diócesis de Quibdó	2009-04-01
Justa (Quibdó)	Consejo Comunitario Mayor de la Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato (COCOMACIA)	2009-03-04
Kelly (Quibdó)	Consejo Municipal de la Joventud & Fundación Maria Luisa de Moreno	2009-04-14
Leonilde (Quibdó)	Fundación Maria Luisa de Moreno	2009-03-14
Lorena (Unión Wounaan)	Club Mujeres: Mujeres Trabajemos Juntos Nuestro Pensamiento	2009-03-19
Maria (Quibdó)	Asociación de Desplazados Afrodescendientes del Chocó (ADACHO)	2009-03-27
Nicolasa (Quibdó)	Consejo Comunitario Mayor de la Organización Popular Campesina del Alto Atrato (COCOMOPOCA)	2009-04-31
Nubia (Quibdó)	Ruta Pacífica Chocó	2009-03-20
Sandra (Quibdó)	Mujeres por una Vida Digna y Solidaria	2009-02-21

Siri (Quibdó)	Grupo Juvenil de Sanper	2009-04-01
Yaneth Moreno (Quibdó)	Vicaría del Pastoral Indígena, Diócesis de Quibdó	2009-03-04

Informants

Adriana Guerra (Quibdó)	United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef)	2009-03-31
Angela Ceron (Bogota)	Iniciativa Mujeres por la Paz (IMP)	2009-02-16
Dajam Caicedo Malfitano (Quibdó)	Fundación Maria Luisa de Moreno	2009-03-10
Mari Morquera (Quibdó)	Doctors without Borders	2009-03-12
Yuley Yuliza Cuesta (Quibdó)	Fundación Maria Luisa de Moreno	2009-03-10
Yuly Palacio (Quibdó)	Fundación Universitaria de Luis Amigó (FUCLA)	2009-03-16

Appendix B: Interview guide

Basic information

Give information about me, the objectives of the thesis, my relation to SWEFOR and the right of the interviewee to be anonymous.

The woman is asked to tell me about herself, where she is from, what she does during the days, how she would describe her economic situation etc.

Complementary questions about age, occupation, organization, household/family, religion, auto-definition of ethnicity.

Section 1: Organizational activism

Tell me about your organization.

Why did you choose to engage in this organization?

What is your role in the organization?.

What are the benefits of being active in your organization – what do you get out of it?

Section 2: The security situation

What is security to you? What comes to your mind when I say "security"?

How would you describe your personal security situation?

When do you feel insecure?

What makes/would make you feel secure?

How would you describe the general security situation for women in Chocó? What do you perceive as being the major problems concerning security for women in your community?

Do you think that there are differences between women's and men's security? In what ways? Why?

Section 3: Creating security

What factors influence your security?

Who can affect your security situation? What can they do?

In what way can you act to improve your own security situation?

Does the fact that you are active in an organization influence your personal security?

In your organization, do you speak about (security) problems that are especially concerning women? Can you give an example?

What about in the local context, is "women's security" or other problems especially concerning women being mentioned? If yes, where?

Summing up

Does she have anything to add or change?

Ask if I can contact any of the persons that the interviewee stated as being able to affect her security.

Ask her if she would be interested in the result of the thesis?

Give her my contact info.

Appendix 3: Map of Chocó