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„Rethinking development: socio-cultural approaches to rural
challenges in a globalized world.
Case study of Norcasia, Colombia.“

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Abstracts

German:

Diese Arbeit beginnt mit einer Analyse des Entwicklungskonzepts und der Art und Weise, inwiefern es die Entwicklungspraxis in den letzten fünfzig Jahren geformt hat. Somit stellen wir fest, dass der massenkompatible Entwicklungsdiskurs in einer westlichen politischen Agenda seine Wurzeln hat, abgekoppelt vom tatsächlichen Wohlbefinden der Menschen, und eher auf den wirtschaftlichen Wachstum fokussiert. Zur gleichen Zeit haben Jahrzehnte von neoliberaler Globalisierung zu einer Verschärfung der Kluft zwischen Reich und Arm beigetragen, das zu einer gesteigerten sozialen Ungleichheit geführt hat. Am stärksten betroffen sind ländliche Gebiete und Kleinbauern, da 75% der ärmeren Bevölkerung in diesen Gegenden leben.

Der vermeintliche Prozess, der durch die Umsetzung der Millenniums-Entwicklungsziele erreicht wurde, wurde hauptsächlich in bevölkerungsreichen Ländern wie China und Indien erzielt, aber wie viel diese Millenniums-Entwicklungsziele tatsächlich zur Verminderung des Ländlichen beigetragen haben, ist fraglich. Auf diesem Weg bietet die Post-Development-Kritik einen enthüllenden und aufschlussreichen Schlüssel zur Erkenntnis in der Entwicklungswelt und vor allen Dingen gibt sie den offensichtlichen Fehlern und Mängel einen Sinn. Entwicklungskritiker befürworten das Eingreifen von Anthropologen in nationale Armutsforschung, die das Zusammenfügen von sozialen, politischen und räumlichen Dimensionen ermöglicht und Armut in einen globalen Kontext von gesellschaftlichen Problemen einbettet.

Durch eine umfangreiche Analyse der Gegebenheiten in Norcasia, einer Anden-Region in Kolumbien, ist das Ziel dieser Arbeit das die Herausforderungen in der sogenannten „ländlichen Entwicklung“ aus einer soziokulturellen Perspektive zu verstehen. Außerdem, werden mittels einer ethnografischen, auf Menschen ausgerichteten Forschungsmethode campesinos zum sprechenden Subjekt, die bei der Errichtung eines demokratischeren Verstehens im ländlichen Raum helfen.

Die dementsprechend entwickelte Feldstudie brachte Einsicht in die Gründe einer landwirtschaftlichen Krise, die sich in ganz Kolumbien ausbreitet, und in die Herausforderungen der *campesinos* vor der globalen Wirtschaft und eines neoliberalen kolumbianischen Staates.

English:

This thesis starts by analysing the concept of development and the way in which it has shaped development practice along the last half a century. We thus find that the mainstream discourse of development is rooted in a western political agenda delinked from people's actual wellbeing, and rather focused on economic growth. At the same time, decades of neoliberal globalization have contributed to exacerbate the breach between the rich and the poor, resulting in increasing social inequalities. Rural areas and small-scale farmers are the most affected, being the 75% of the world's poor living in rural areas.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the reality of Norcasia, in the Andean region of Colombia, the research therefore aims at understanding the challenges of said 'rural development' from a socio-cultural perspective. In addition, by means of an ethnographic, human centred, method of research, *campesinos* become the speaking subjects, helping in the construction of a more democratic knowledge of the rural medium.

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La realización del presente trabajo es fruto de un proceso de aprendizaje, y a su vez, experiencia de vida que empezó en el verano de 2015, cuando fui a Colombia por primera vez.

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List of abbreviations

ACMM – Autodefensas Campesinas del Magdalena Medio (Peasant Self-Defense of Magdalena Medio)

ASOCANORA – Asociación de Cacaoteros de Norcasia

ASOJUNTAS – Asociación de Juntas de Acción Comunal

ASOPINOR – Asociación de Piscicultores de Norcasia

AUC – Autodefensas Unidas Campesinas (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia)

CELAC – Community of Latin American and Caribbean States

CORPOCALDAS - Corporación autónoma regional de Caldas (Caldas Environmental Authority)

DANE – Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (National Administrative Department of Statistics)

DNP – Departamento Nacional de Planeación (National Planning Department)

ELN – Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)

FAO – Food and Agricultural Organization

FARC – Fuerzas Armadas revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

HDI – Human Development Index

ILO – International Labour Organization

IMF – International Monetary Fund

ÍPM – Índice de Pobreza Multidimensional (Multidimensional Poverty Index)

NBI – Necesidades Básicas Insatisfechas (Unmet Basic Needs)

OAS – Organization of American States

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PCN – Proceso de Comunidades Negras (Process of Black Communities)

PDC – Programa de Desarrollo Comunitario (Community Development Program)

SENA – Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (National Service of Learning)

TLC – Tratados de Libre Comercio (Free Trade Agreements)

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees

WB – World Bank

Introduction

The topic of my research came from a personal interest developed in the summer of 2015 during a two-month volunteering period in Norcasia, a rural town of Colombia. I had the chance to work in a rural development project with other volunteers on behalf of an Italian no-profit organization, *Punto Missione Onlus*, that has, for the past two decades, been implementing different charity missions throughout Europe and, lastly, in Colombia.

This experience, though brief, left me with the personal desire to explore deeper into the history and the culture of Colombia, in particular the rural medium and its inhabitants. Moreover, in a context where my position as a volunteer consisted in offering my time and resources in a project which planned to bring help to more disadvantaged people, I started to question precisely those categories that were causing the differentiation between 'me' and 'the others'.

Even though a genuine curiosity was what pushed me through the investigation in the first place, I decided to take this interest to a more academic level, starting with research on the rationale behind the discourse of development and the agency of the objects of development itself. I have thus found in the post-development critique a revealing and eye-opening key to understanding the world of development, and above all, to making sense of its evident failures and shortcomings. Nevertheless, I based the research on a less 'radical' stance, which allowed me to conduct such analysis and position myself as a researcher with a particular scope. The subjects of my study had been therefore the people of this small rural town in central Colombia, where the civil conflict had, in earlier times, counted a considerable number of victims, where *campesinos* had seemed to stop the cultivation of the land and where the rural youth had been more and more attracted to the city in search for better opportunities.

The field research, which was conducted during the months of June and August 2016, had been focused on understanding the causes of an agricultural crisis that spread all over Colombia, and the challenges of *campesinos* in front of the global economy and a neoliberal Colombian state. '*Colombia es un burro cargado*

*de oro que no sabe lo que lleva encima*¹ says don Ernesto¹ (personal communication, August 2016) referring to all the natural resources that Colombia possesses that are instead exploited by foreign companies and have been – with the illicit drug trade - the lifeblood of illegal groups, fuelling a turf war that has forced millions of *campesinos* off their land. The land - its ownership and its productivity – is one of the focal points of this research, being Colombia one of the most unequal countries in terms of land and resources concentration.

Therefore, in the hope to make a small, yet clear contribution to the study of the rural medium in times of globalization, the research focuses on the socio-cultural, as well as historical variables that have come to characterize the context in which rural inhabitants of Norcasia face their everyday challenges. Moreover, an anthropological approach to the field research will help to shape a knowledge that is holistic and oriented to the ways in which culture affects individual experiences, as well as the basis of social life.

¹ All the research participants' names have been changed in order to protect their identities. This applies also to local organizations' names (except the ones I have been personally involved working with). The titles *don* and *doña* – respectively Mr. and Ms. - are widely used to refer to married and/or older persons in a sign of respect, but are omitted in case of close relationships with the interlocutor.

1. Problem statement

The second half of the 20th century opened up to be the 'era of development'. Western countries were said to be committed to the development of the less developed ones, under the concept of a democratic 'fair-dealing'.

Since then western models and practices of development have been implemented widely all over the 'developing' world with an emphasis on economic growth that is, the increase in the per capita production of material goods. In 1990s, the Washington Consensus² evidenced the discourse of development as a political operation delinked from people's actual wellbeing. This was particularly the case of Latin America that despite having witnessed macroeconomic advances through these market-based policies, saw no advances in poverty rates and increasing socioeconomic inequality.

In 1992, some critics of development reviewed the key concepts of the development discourse, assessing that development through GDP growth had miserably failed, and calling development a 'concept of monumental emptiness' (Sachs, 1992).

However, the development industry continued in its direction of achieving 'development goals', establishing in 2000 eight ambitious Millennium Development Goals to be reached in 2015, which turned into 17 'Sustainable Development Goals' for the 2030 Agenda.

Yet, world's poverty figures show that over 2 billion people are still living on less than \$2 a day (World Bank, 2016). A vast majority of the global poor live in rural areas, are poorly educated and mostly employed in the agricultural sector. The alleged progress that is said it has been reached through the implementation of the MDGs - as the target of reducing extreme poverty rates by half was met five years ahead of the 2015 deadline - was achieved mainly in highly populated countries like China and India; but in fact, how much really the MDGs have contributed in reducing poverty globally is questionable³ (UN, 2015)

² The Washington Consensus was a collection of 10 economic policy-prescriptions imposed by the IMF and the WB as a standard reform package to crisis-wracked developing countries.

³ In 2013, 10.7 % of the world's population lived on less than US \$1.90 a day, compared to 12.4% in 2012, a 35% decrease compared to 1990. According to World Bank's revised estimates, extreme poverty rates have fallen significantly in China and India (WB, 2016). However, the reduction in extreme poverty between 2012 and 2013 was mainly driven by East Asia and Pacific (71 million fewer poor) –notably China and Indonesia—and South Asia (37 million fewer poor) –notably India (ibid.).

Moreover, against the predictions of UNDP, inequality worldwide rather than have declined over the past 20 years have increased considerably (Noguera de Echeverri, 2008).

This is particularly true for Colombia, where the urban-rural divide is very marked and the level of inequality is the highest in the region (Gillin, 2015). Despite Colombia's recent acknowledgeable economic performances that opened her the door into the global economy, its countryside is lagging behind. The last decades of orthodox neoliberal approach to economy that have been followed first by president Álvaro Uribe and then by president Juan Manuel Santos, have, in fact, not effectively addressed the root causes of the country's poverty and inequality, but rather tended to benefit private and foreign capital over small workers or *campesinos* communities.

In the attempt to understand the peculiar Colombian rurality in all its facets, the research aims at exploring and analysing the rural context of the municipality of Norcasia, department of Caldas, through a multi-levels study of the rural settings, with a focus on its people. Through an analysis of the empirical reality as experienced by its people, the research aims at understanding both the cultural and the socio-economic features that lay behind the current agricultural crisis that Colombia is suffering. Norcasia and its surroundings can be taken as an example of how the Colombian countryside is facing the present situation and is working for the future, after having witnessed decades of civil conflicts, forced displacements, and lack of state presence.

The area of Norcasia is characterized by a constant migration flow, many *campesinos* moved or were forcibly displaced to Norcasia leaving areas of Colombia that were unstable from the point of view of safety, with high rates of violence, especially related to activities of illegal armed groups, *guerrillas* and *paramilitares*, and organized crime. At the same time, there is a high rate of emigration to the closest urban centers of Manizales, Medellín or the capital Bogotá. In general, the surrounding area presents a high population mobility, and this has been and still remains the general trend. The causes of this constant migration flow in recent times can be various, but most of them are related to the deep agricultural crisis that both the region and Colombia as a whole is suffering.

Compared to other parts of Colombia, the region of Caldas at present enjoys an acceptable level of safety: the presence of armed groups and trafficking linked to illegal crops and drugs in general is marginal. The cultivation of coca crops, which spread across the vast majority of the territory of the region, lasted until 2005/2006, yet having a big impact on the current agricultural developments. Coca crops were fumigated or eradicated by the government and at the same time violence linked to illegal drug trafficking decreased. However, due to the conflictive past of the region and the level of general precariousness, opportunities are rather scarce and young people prefer to migrate to bigger or more central cities, where they can hope to get a higher education and search for more stable job positions. Thus, *campesinos* families, who have always been working the land, faces the lack of generational replacement.

This is the scenario behind rural Colombia, where the *campesino* community is the part of the society that most faces low quality education, lack of public services and scarce job opportunities. The peasantry in Colombia has historically been marginalized both culturally, socially and economically from the processes of the society in general. In this way it has been dominated by elites that have organized the territory - through State reforms - according to their interests, to the detriment of the needs of the peasant majority, exacerbating the conditions of inequality and poverty that converged in the marginalization of communities from all the aspects of society. In addition, the militarization of the rural area heightened the social and armed conflict, that most *campesinos* suffered on their skin. After over half a century of internal conflict, and in the wake of the recent peace agreement between the government and the Farc, a major challenge is set for rural Colombia.

The project being implemented in Norcasia by *Punto Missione* and *Santa Teresa de Ávila* hopes to offer a better future to young *campesinos*, by giving them access to secondary education, practice agricultural techniques and continue with their higher studies. Moreover, a second phase of the project plans the construction of a dairy processing plant

Therefore, on a second level, my interest in analysing this particular rural context, considering people's narrations and experiences as the main source, is to uncover ways for future livelihood improvements. How does the *campesino* community define its wellbeing and what do they identify as possible future

improvements? In which way agricultural development on a subsistence level could improve rural livelihoods? And, lastly, to what extent the empowerment of young *campesinos* – through education and agricultural training – could change the actual scenario facing Colombian rurality?

2. Methodology of Research

2.1 Macro, meso and micro level of analysis

As a whole, the research involved more than one level of analysis.

In the first place, a macro level of analysis was needed in order to outline the macro context of my field research, that is, positioning Colombia at a global level, and in turn, analysing Colombia at a national level. Therefore, I first analysed the broader Colombian context on a socio-historical perspective⁴. Secondary data gathering was focused on the socioeconomic research on 'development' and poverty, taking into account the relevance of history and historical events – i.e. the civil conflict, violence, illicit crops - that have shaped, and continue to influence the present of Colombia.

A meso level of analysis was instead used to analyse the regional level, that is Caldas as a region, and rural Colombia compared to urban Colombia as well. This level of analysis focused mainly on the increasing rural-urban divide that Colombia has witnessed in this last half a century, and which is reflected on many different aspects of society.

Lastly and more importantly, the micro level of analysis involved the ethnographic study of the municipality of Norcasia. This was done through the collection of demographic and livelihood data, direct and participant observation, life stories of local people and interviews, as well as wellbeing-ranking of community members as to generate local criteria for poverty and development assessment.

The theoretical foundations of the research are found in post-colonial and, more specifically, post-development theories.

2.2 The ethnographic fieldwork

The field research I conducted in Norcasia had the shape of an ethnography aimed also at re-defining the semantic contents of 'development' and 'poverty' in the rural area of Norcasia, Caldas.

⁴ Social history looks at the lived experience of the past, focusing on social structures and processes, giving priority to the study of particular kinds of phenomena, such as classes and movements, urbanization and industrialization, family and education, work and leisure, mobility, inequality and conflicts.

I mostly used ethnographic methods of social research, such as participant observation, storytelling and narrative and semi-structured interviews. As Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011) explain:

Ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives. ... First-hand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world by drawing upon such participation [is the core of ethnographic research]’.

Therefore, the types of interviews conducted were mainly narrative or semi-structured, as to detect their personal experiences, their past of violence and insecurity that may have suffered and the real link with what they foresee as their future. What is that they give more importance to? How do they define their situation of precariousness, and do they see ways forward?

Fieldwork research is a particular method of knowledge production inherent to the field of anthropology. It is an experience-based production of knowledge, which focusses on evidence and facts. Anthropology itself is the instrument for the creation of knowledge on a given topic. Anthropological knowledge tries to understand what is happening in the immediate context, it is a way of generating knowledge through someone’s direct and immediate experience. The context is the experience, which is gained through participant observation, and the sources and venues of actions. The fieldwork can be also defined as a socialization, as a process of building personal relations through physical and social involvement in the field. The learning process is facilitated by gate keepers and key informants; people whose positionality is essential to access important information. The description of the information collected should be an inductive one, because what the researcher is describing can be conceptualized as culture, a process or a conflict. At the same time the observer has to be objective and rely on cultural relativism, to avoid personal intervention and preserve the authenticity of the information collected.

One of the most important feature of the anthropological knowledge is holism: every data has to be evaluated and understood in relation to the whole context. Moreover, anthropology, as a holistic science needs both primary and secondary sources, it’s a ‘zig zag process between primary and secondary re-sources’ (Caglar, 15th March 2016, Vienna). Secondary resources are in fact important for the research as they represent a sort of preparation for the field research, as a way to ‘map the land’ of what has been done around your topic (ibid.).

Throughout my research, which comprises different level of analysis, I did not restrict myself to one method, rather I used a triangulation of methods, which allowed me to make use of both quantitative and qualitative data, the latter through an ethnographic approach.

Supported by the theoretical framework and the analysis of the wider Colombian context and the rural-urban divide, the field research I conducted might represent a useful assessment of the current project being implemented in Norcasia and its future development. At the same time, as a cross-cultural and two-way process research that values the knowledge of less privileged people, it may contribute to question the dominant discourse about the concept of 'development' and 'progress' in non-Western world, in the attempt to search for appropriate ways forward.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Research, anthropology and development

The methodology that I chose to use for the main purpose of this research, the ethnographic fieldwork, responds to the necessity of qualitative data - or the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods - when addressing social matters⁵.

As Ludovic Kibora (2012) argues, in order to be effective, poverty reduction programs should be grounded in people's own perception of poverty and wealth. He addresses the issue of poverty reduction policies in Burkina Faso by stressing the importance of qualitative studies, and he advocates the intervention of anthropology in national poverty research, which would allow for the articulation of social, political and spatial dimensions and inscribe poverty in the global context of societal problems.

If quantitative research starts with the formulation of hypothesis based on pre-existing theories, social qualitative research develops its hypothesis from social practice, that is, in an inductive manner, starting from the observation and ending with theory (Bracker, 2002: 95-98). In the latter case, the object, the development of the research and the results are determined by the subject who is being investigated - *el investigado* – and by his/her systems of relevance - *sistemas de relevancia* (Bracker, 2002: 99). This allows for a higher flexibility and adaptation to the object and subject being studied, while not separating the studied phenomena from its social context, considering that they are a totality in themselves (ibid.).

According to Glaser and Strauss (in Bracker, 2002: 38), when embarking on a research of this type the researcher should enter the empirical world without fixed categories or hypothesis, but rather focus on data and impressions while participating in the social life of the subjects studied: *'our purpose is to generate theory, not to establish verifications with the facts'*.

The 'grounded theory' thus shaped may take different forms and may be generated by each form of data, but *'it is likely to be a better theory to the degree that it has been inductively developed from social research'*

⁵ *Las técnicas triangulares en las ciencias sociales intentan explicar más concretamente la riqueza y complejidad del comportamiento humano, estudiándolo desde varios puntos de vista, utilizando datos, tanto cualitativos como cuantitativos* (Serrano in Bracker, 2005: 73)

(ibid., 35).

The main objective of social research is not to explain, but rather to understand (from German: *Verstehen*), that is to understand human beings and their actions framed in their individuality and in the real context (ibid., 94). The historic dimension is also included in social research, as the understanding of a given social fact or phenomena includes the search for historical relations of those behaviours (ibid., 98).

Given those assumptions, the research that I have conducted in Norcasia came to be structured as a social research that identified what was relevant for the society as a whole in terms of development and wellbeing in the context of a post-crisis and post-conflict rurality.

The question that led my research in the first place was that of to what extent a study of a society based on its people and its perceptions could be relevant to the development of the society itself. Anthropologists already gave an answer to this, yet not unitary. As the demand for an increasing social and cultural-based approach to development is rising, there have been discordant opinions among anthropologists about their involvement in development studies and practices. Anthropology and development both stem from western expansion to the 'other' world and have, since their inception, shared the interest for social change (Argilés, 2005: 7). Since the last decade of the last century, when the rise of 'postmodernity' began to put into question the superiority of western epistemology, it followed that the theory and practice of development started to be questioned as well.

Anthropologists got involved in the study and search for alternative development models or alternatives to development, and with this, questioned their involvement into the field of development itself.

The differentiation between a development anthropology (anthropology *for* development) and an anthropology *of* development in turns create a differentiation amongst anthropologists. According to Grillo's classification, anthropologists are divided into the 'reformers' (those anthropologists prepared to become directly involved in development projects and policies), the 'principled rejectionists' (among them the 'post-development' thinkers Escobar, Esteva, Ferguson, Hobart and Sachs, who reject anthropology's practical involvement), and the 'monitorists', who take a more measured approach toward the study of development without becoming directly engaged into its projects (Grillo in: Paiement, 2007).

Development anthropology – which could be labelled as the ‘neo-developmental’ trend - is the recent trend of anthropology appeared during 1970s, when the emergence of the new professional market of the industry of development and cooperation spurred the rise of an applied anthropology. Anthropologists working as cultural mediators on the field agree to compromise with the institutions that foster development, in the attempt to transform the practice of development from the inside, empowering local knowledge, guaranteeing the respect of socio-cultural components and conducting evaluations (Argilés, 2005:78).

On the contrary, the anthropology *of* development criticises the involvement of anthropology on the field of development, as it risks to perpetuate the mainstream model of development, which tends to widen the gap between planners and beneficiaries, and often fails to meet the real interests and needs of the poor.

Particularly of my interest are those theoretical contributions that discuss the hegemony of the growth-led development patterns. Those new tendencies, among other things, propose the use of qualitative methods of research as a way to draw projects and policies hand in hand with locals’ knowledge and needs, and in this way understand not only the impacts of projects and policies on social subjects, but rather, and most importantly, how the latter can positively impact policies (Freidenberg in: Tripin, 2005).

A review of the history of development and its critique are therefore essential to lay a basis for a social research that investigates the rurality in all its features, a reality that is one the first to be included in the development discourse, yet at the same time often excluded by the very forces that drive the so called ‘development’.

3.2 The crisis of development and the post-development critique

As we have been witnessing most notably since the turn of the last century, the results of half a century long ‘development’ brought increasing social inequality, environmental degradation, spread of HIV, leading to the more general impression that all those coordinated efforts to address these and other kind of suffering had failed to meet their explicit objectives:

Because although development can mean jobs, poverty reduction, greater respect for human rights, better access to basic services, and greater land sovereignty, it doesn't necessarily. Believe it or not, it is possible to reduce income poverty (MDG1), and to meet a range of other MDGs regarding provision of basic health and education while simultaneously committing grave human rights abuses, disempowering the poorest, and encouraging the consolidation of power and wealth in the hands of the rich (Glennie, 2011).

As a consequence of the widespread criticism and obsolescence of development models which praised economic growth – along with uncontrolled industrialization and modernization - as the necessary base for social change, new and alternative development trends have emerged. Between others, we have seen the emergence and consolidation of trends such as sustainable development, human development, community-based development, local development, until reaching post-development and de-growth proposals which question the economic growth as the root of development (Villalba, 2013: 1427).

Many social movements around the world are striving to take their lives in their own hands and to affirm themselves on their own path; of example is the international peasant movement of *La Via Campesina* which recently celebrated 20 years of 'standing up for food sovereignty'. Similarly, indigenous groups, who represent an important part of Latin American population, are mobilizing to protect their ancestral lands and to ask for broader social and political participation.

Nevertheless, the dominance of western myths of development and progress are still widely used and recreated especially by big multilateral aid organizations.

Critics of development started to raise their voices already at the end of 1980s, declaring the failure of the development machine and launching a new era of 'post-development'. Gustavo Esteva, a Mexican activist and one of the most known advocates of post-development, provokingly stated that 'development stinks', and only rich or numb people can fail to notice it:

The time has come to recognize development itself as the malignant myth whose pursuit threatens these among whom I live in Mexico City... the 'three decades of development' were a huge, irresponsible experiment that, in the experience of the world majority, failed miserably' (Esteva in Pieterse, 2000: 176).

Drawing from post-colonial and post-modernist theories Esteva and other scholars such as Arturo Escobar, Wolfgang Sachs and Gilbert Rist – to mention the most influential - started to suggest that development efforts were part of a wider western agenda whose theoretical practice and intervention had been

subjecting poor and marginal groups and nations to the interests and ideologies of large western development bureaucracies. Post development theorists were the first to question the conventional aims, measures and achievements of development, questioning their universality and if they were even essentially desirable to the 'poor', objectified as the end of development.

At the end of 1970s thinkers as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha had already spoke out to challenge the underlying myths and assumptions of European colonialism, history and identity, forging what was to be named the post-colonial theory. They agree in identifying that colonialism had a strong epistemological dimension that remained in the post-colonial present, and which was causing relations between the North and the South of the world to be still unequal (De Sousa, 2007).

The hegemonic knowledge production of the west required in fact the presence of an 'other', an inferior other. Thus, the development discourse started to be seen as a way to legitimize western interventions in the south, and reiterate the capitalistic civilizational model.

Along the line of post-colonial critique, De Sousa Santos (2007) acknowledges how the burden of colonial epistemic mono-culture is still accepted nowadays as a symbol of development and modernity, and calls for a democratization of knowledge, towards an emancipatory ecology of knowledge. De Sousa's is a struggle against moral and cultural imperialism and neoliberal globalization – global capitalism and global markets - that have taken over the past decades and increasingly homogenized and assimilated different cultures.

Documenting subaltern narratives and post-colonial experiences (Spivak in Sousa, 2007) post-colonial thinkers aimed at 'decolonizing' knowledge and power, in order to build a more democratic and just society (Sousa, 2007).

The post-colonial discourse thus shaped was strong in criticizing how often the application of foreign – western - concepts and agendas to issues and events that had to be instead understood on their own terms, somehow shaped the destiny of many non-western countries.

Starting from the decade of 1980s-1990s much of the political changes towards neoliberalism that underwent Latin America and other non-western countries, were externally imposed by western economic

institutions. Western neo-classical ideology shaped the field of development since the beginning and continues to influence governments around the world, which are increasingly exposed to the forces of globalization and macroeconomic reforms (Johnson, 2009). Neo-classical theory has infiltrated, up to 'colonize' the field of development (Fine in Johnson 2009:12), and still dominates the theory and practice of development; this is why many theorists are trying to challenge this view and explore alternatives. The critiques and challenges posed to development in turn resulted in an increasing fragmentation of the theories and the methodology that it uses to understand and explain complex and contextually-specific processes of economic development and social change.

Castillo (2007:13), in the introduction of her book 'Development: Progress or illusion?' explains how the fragmentation of the concept of 'development' itself, both in its theories and practices, has led scholars to question its roots:

Esta múltiple fragmentación tanto del concepto como de las prácticas de desarrollo en campos particulares de la teoría y de la acción [...] pueden ser leídos como el fracaso de dicha noción y como la incapacidad de sus prácticas para sostener una idea de bienestar para todos, idea cada vez más lejana. En otras palabras, en la medida en que la noción de desarrollo ha venido a ser parte de prácticamente todas las dimensiones del ser humano, en lo conceptual se ha convertido en un todo que, por lo mismo, y a la hora de alcanzarlo en práctica, se diluye de tal forma que es inalcanzable.

The theory and practice of development, in all its features, have long infiltrated each dimension of the human society. Yet, its promises are still unfulfilled: if it would have been actually possible to accomplish all the objectives that are promoted in the name of 'development' through the international discourse, we would have already achieved happiness for the humanity (Castillo, 2007). However, as Wolfgang Sachs argues, if all the developing countries would have followed step by step the example of the industrial countries, we would have needed five or six planets more to serve as mines and waste dumps. Therefore, it is clear that the 'advanced societies' are definitely no model to follow (Sachs, 1992). In a similar way as post-colonialism, post-development employs elements of discourse analysis to question western narratives of modernization and progress. Influenced by the work of Foucault, post-development scholars carried on an assessment of the way in which the epistemology of modernity -classical social theory- dominates the study of development and thus they raised scepticism about the discourse that legitimized and gave power to the development machine – a seemingly humanitarian motivation of development agencies and projects

(Johnson, 2009: 80).

They criticise neo-classical epistemology from its roots, as it has never engaged in representing cultural difference and diversity. Its theorists claim strong political, cultural and epistemic ties with southern scholars and activists. They question the way in which global problems like poverty, vulnerability and illness are classified in relation to the interests and practices of development projects and, most importantly, in relation to the actual needs of the beneficiaries of development.

Post-development theory also shares with post-modernism a rejection of the modernist faith in positivist science, and the assumption that it may be used to advance goals of universal progress and social change. They thus challenge the way in which the study and the practice of development is committed to the 'universalizing norms and discourses of a positivist social science' (Johnson, 2009: 79). Through the positivist method development practitioners define and classify problems and generate propositions about the conditions under which a society may 'undergo' development; ethnography, on the contrary, rejects the universalism that underlies the scientific frame and give voice to the subaltern.

By so doing, post-development scholars revise the core assumptions of development and urge to respect the agency, identity and individual worldviews and narratives of the objects/subjects of development (Johnson, 2009).

3.2.1 The birth of development and underdevelopment

The 'de-construction' of the development myth at the same time rests on the historical moment when the discourse on development was actually constructed. Post-developmentalists unanimously agree in identify 1949 as the year development was born, that is, when Harry Truman delivered his inaugural address as US president-elect, in which, for the first time, the universalizing concept of 'underdevelopment' was mentioned.⁶ In the aftermath of the WWII, during the historical process of decolonization and the

⁶ Also known as the Four Point Speech it declaims as follows: *'[.]First, we will continue to give unfaltering support to the United Nations and related agencies, and we will continue to search for ways to strengthen their authority and increase their effectiveness. Second, we will continue our programs for world economic recovery. This means, first of all, that we must keep our full weight behind the European recovery program. Third, we will strengthen freedom-loving nations against the dangers of aggression. Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas believe*

emergence of the United States as a global power, the words of Truman and the development discourse thus initiated, echoed as the 'new global strategy' (Escobar, 1995). Development was thus created as a strategic response to the threats of communism, and the general conditions of poverty and overpopulation in the 'third world' that was decolonizing (Johnson, 2009: 89). Ivan Illich, a pioneer of the critique on modernity called it the beginning of a 'destructive war on poverty' in the third world by the US. The development discourse provided the ideological and instrumental means by which first the US and later other western powers could legitimate the consolidation of their hegemony and the hegemony of its capitalistic economies, securing strategic control over natural resources, expanding markets overseas and deploying a system of military tutelage that would help to secure American interests abroad (ibid.). The 'promise' of development was a promise of what life could be under 'a benign US imperium' (Esteva et al., 2014). Since its inception, the emphasis of development has been on economic growth and GDP came to be the key metrics by which development was judged. In 1960, with the publication of 'The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto', W.W. Rostow established the five stages of economic growth that underdeveloped countries had to undertake in order to reach the level of a modern, capitalistic, industrialized and democratic society (ibid.).

In 1970s, then World Bank president McNamara, recognized the non-satisfactory progress that development had reached, and thus insisted on broadening its focus, in order to overcome social aspects or 'obstacles' (ibid.). He also called for the inclusion of qualitative indicators to measure development, yet unsuccessfully, as GDPs never ceased to be the most used indicator for this matter.

In Latin America and other developing countries, the external debt rocketed, together with increasing

that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens. Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies: hunger, misery, and despair. In due time, as our stability becomes manifest, as more and more nations come to know the benefits of democracy and to participate in growing abundance, I believe that those countries which now oppose us will abandon their delusions and join with the free nations of the world in a just settlement of international differences. We will advance toward a world where man's freedom is secure. To that end we will devote our strength, our resources, and our firmness of resolve. With God's help, the future of mankind will be assured in a world of justice, harmony, and peace [...]' (Truman, 1949)

poverty and marginalization due to rural-urban migration; the expectations of a universal, unlimited progress fell miserably. As to question the causes of underdevelopment some Latin American scholars proposed the 'dependency theory', which stated that resources flow from poor and underdeveloped countries to wealthy ones, enriching the latter at the expenses of the former. They thus argued that underdevelopment had been created by development, by a neo-colonialist process of exploitation (Argilés, 2005:40).

Characterized by the economic shock caused by the 1973 oil crisis, the decade of 1980s was remembered as the 'lost decade for development'. Doubts about the ability of states and societies to create the conditions for material progress and social change were raised, and the sociologist Wallerstein proposed the 'world system theory': an approach to world history and social change suggesting that there is a world economic system in which some countries operate as stronger forces and therefore benefit from the system while other are exploited (Argilés, 2005:48). At the end of the Cold War, the West-East confrontation shifted to the dichotomy North-South, in the context of a new-born globalization (ibid., 62). Cultural, economic and political bonds among countries in the world and the intensification of technology and communication resulted in an increasingly complexity of the worlds system. At the same time, models of exchange and consumption get unified, while the system of global communication/interaction tended to exclude less developed countries and subaltern groups.

Against this background, proposals of a more sustainable and people-centred development started to take hold. Earlier in 1976, the ILO (International Labour Organization) had adopted the basic-need orientation to development and the measurement of poverty, yet the approach was soon to be criticized as consumption-oriented and not questioning the social and political structure impeding the achievement of a better quality of life.

Later on, Nobel prize for Economy Amartya Sen's 'capability approach' contributed to bring to the fore a new focus on human development and capabilities rather than consumption. Sen's 'Capability and Entitlement approach' was an effort to develop a more open ended approach to the study of poverty. He also contributed to the discussion on themes like distribution and scarcity. In his 1981 book 'Poverty and Famine'

he claimed that neo-classical theory failed to theorize the conditions under which resources may be distributed within the society – on the basis of supply and demand. At the end of the 20th century, one of the results of neoliberal economy was ‘development by dispossession’, which caused the countries that experienced the most serious famine to be the ones that exported most food (Sen in Esteva, 2014:23). The critique of scarcity as a ‘socially manufactured’ concept is carried on by Esteva (2014:73) who argues that the arrival of capitalism and the enclosure of the commons deprived people of their means of subsistence and this resulted in the creation of the ‘modern needs’, an outside definition of what it means to live well, and thus, a ‘modern fiction’.

Along with Sen’s capability approach, there have been innovations on the field that have aimed to capture an image of development less linked to the mainstream neoclassical theory.

Participatory research methodology – whose key exponent was the British development practitioner Robert Chambers - gives a more accurate insight about local realities, which would in turn inform better policy.

Participatory paradigms were never intended to provide a formal methodology, but rather to develop more effective programs and policy. Its agenda aimed at expanding the political terms of discourse and empowerment. The development community took a very long time to discover the intrinsic knowledge possessed by those people who were in need of help (Chambers, 1994). Too often the outsiders, who are professionals, technicians, etc., had believed that their knowledge was superior to that of the locals. In this way outsiders’ reality blanketed that of local people, who were often treated as poor and incapable people. The developed world had for a long time perpetrated this equation of underdeveloped world as composed of poor and helpless people. In the same way, to speak of people as being vulnerable was to treat them as passive victims, ignoring their capacities, assets and resources that they indeed possess (ibid.).

Similarly, the livelihood approach first adapted by the British Department for International Development (DFID) in the ‘90s provides an analytical framework to put people at the centre of development. It combines the methodological individualism of neo classical theory and the notion that individual household decisions may be constrained by a variety of social, cultural and political factors.

All those new approaches share the assumption that poverty and deprivation are the combined result of different factors, which structure the choices individuals and households can make about the ways in which they employ their assets. More much attention is given to the details of household decision making and life cycle needs and events. Those new approaches are said to provide a powerful means of capturing the complexity and diversity of development process, generating insights about micro level impacts of macroeconomic policies and change (Johnson, 2009: 130).

The 1990s, labelled the era of 'redevelopment' after a decade of crisis, was characterized by a neoliberal turn, as Europe opened its labour market and the US opened its trade flows while crisis-wracked developing countries had to agree to the Washington Consensus resulting in the removal of trade barriers, privatization and deregulation (Esteva et al., 2014). The Washington Consensus, as the economist Stiglitz (2002) suggested, was a 'one size fits all' treatment imposed by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the WB (World Bank), which was lacking of political and social efforts to improve real opportunities for the weakest.

The 21st century opened up with the introduction of the 'right to development' and the creation of the Millennium Development Goals, and the approach of Jeffrey Sachs – special advisor for the UN - on a global strategy to end poverty, became the dominant discourse for the majority of US and European NGOs. In 'The future of development. A radical manifesto' Esteva, Babcicky and Babones (2014) dubbed the Jeffrey Sachs' focus on the alleviation of obvious suffering in the third world as a 'philanthropic capitalism', and insisted that the advances on the field of development by technological and material means, had only modernized poverty, and deepened it. They also argue that too much often too many development projects have supported dictatorship and no 'democratic fair-dealing', as once declared by Truman.

The Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1995), asserting the failure of orthodox theories of development, poses a strong critique on the mainstream development discourse as it has legitimized only the voices of Western experts, while undermining those of locals.

Escobar had long studied and worked with Afro Colombian communities of the Pacific region, analysing their 'politics of difference' in the context of neoliberal globalization, creating what has been called the *Proceso de*

Comunidades Negras (PCN). Popular, indigenous and Afro descendant groups of Colombia reject the mainstream development model because of the rationality hidden behind. The proposal of a different development should be based, according to Escobar, on the idea of *Buen Vivir*, which is not 'development' at all, says. Economy should be subordinated to *Buen Vivir* and not viceversa (Escobar, 2013).

According to Escobar (2013), the history of Latin America since the colonization has been a history of social and ecological devastation and the exploitation of its people and its natural resources were the price Latin America had to pay in name of 'development' and 'progress'. He also suggests that development scholars should recognize the plurality of models that can be used to interpret and evaluate social and economic relations. After decades of development failure, the 'remaking of development' must start by examining local constructions, to the extent that they are the life and the history of a people, that is, the conditions of and for change (Escobar, 1995). Likewise, a more adequate political economy must investigate how external forces – capital and modernity- are processed, expressed and refashioned by local communities (Escobar, 1995:98).

Moreover, as Rahnema (in Johnson, 2009) argues, the international development bureaucracy and the impact that global capitalism inflicted on the south was detrimental to the real needs and interest of those affected by such processes. The same efforts to achieve modernization and development have undermined the wisdom of the 'vernacular society' (ibid.).

While development practice indeed helped with the circulation of knowledge and the creation of capabilities, yet it also deterred the autonomy and the value of different modes of knowing. Development devalues certain form of knowledge when peasants are seen in purely economic terms and the natural environment is undervalued – and thus exploited. Therefore, as in the case of PCN, Escobar makes a powerful argument in favour of linking scholarship and practice, which is ideally done by incorporating poor and politically marginal voices into the authentic construction of knowledge.

3.2.2 Beyond post-development

As we have seen, too many times aims and directives of development have been strategical and geopolitical, and have thus clashed with the real needs of the beneficiaries. The discourse put in place by dominant

development agencies resulted to be ideological and historical constructions, which treat development problems in an inappropriate way and can be unhelpful – when not damaging - to the real needs and experiences of those objectified by its discourse.

As to give a light to the problem, post-development and postmodernism share the idea that history is biased in favour of western and Eurocentric view about modernisation and progress. Central to this idea was that foreign aid could facilitate the liberation of non-European and non-capitalist societies, and that the US should lead this process (Johnson, 2009:90).

However, as Johnson (2009) suggests, the notion that development is inherently biased from the roots - against the poor and the south - appears to foster a relativism that question not only the dominant discourse and practices of the international development agencies as the IMF and the WB, but also calls into question any effort to improve the human condition - engaging in a 'meta-narrative' of exploitation and salvation. They also tend to simplify the difference that exists among different development agencies.

Post development theorists have been criticized for minimizing the achievements of development and for advancing an agenda that is not sufficiently clear in its purposes (Pieterse, 2000). Moreover, as Pieterse (2000) argues, the western/non-western and local/foreign binary risks to deny the agency of the very societies and movements they are aiming to engage.

Against this backdrop, James Ferguson offers a more modest assessment of the ways in which development discourses may be used to legitimate the application and expansion of bureaucratic power (Johnson, 2009:99). Ferguson argues that development may be used to expand and legitimate bureaucratic power, but its processes are not to be viewed as necessarily detrimental to the poor: development may as well be very effective when it assists and succeeds (Ferguson in Johnson, 2009).

Even though post-development critique has been regarded as often too passionate and sometimes too personal (Paiement, 2007:202), it can be a valuable corrective to mainstream development theory in several important aspects, when it proposes alternatives to development, as the indigenous idea of *Buen Vivir*, as

well as harmony, sustainability and self-subsistence of ethnic communities and a path to an autonomous and liberated education and learning.

Post-development can be used to understand and advance a more critical approach to development. While it fails to articulate with sufficient clarity the ways in which its vision of local self-sufficiency and global solidarity would challenge the dominant paradigm (Pieterse, 2000), it situates development in a wider historical context of globalization modernization and geopolitical change. It also recognizes and give voice to those undervalued and compartmentalized within dominant development discourse, establishing intellectual spaces for the subaltern to speak (Spivak in Sousa, 2007).

At last, according to Fine (in Johnson, 2009) development needs to commit to the ideals of a genuine interdisciplinary research, combining approaches that involve qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The study of development should thus be essentially connected with the practice, since it entails both a moral commitment to human development and a practical commitment to achieving this aim (ibid.). Moreover, it entails the challenge to represent the experience of other cultures and the ways in which we engage in inter-subjective communication (ibid.).

4. Macro and meso level: The Colombian context

4.1 Latin America's turn beyond neoliberalism

Notwithstanding the shortcomings that the theory of post-development leaves behind the critique of the development discourse, I personally found it an inspirational critique and a new and challenging perspective from which to observe Colombian rurality.

The critique that Arturo Escobar poses to the development discourse as a whole originated from questions around hunger and development in his native country, Colombia. Those concerns took him into the social sciences and anthropology, and since 1993 saw him engaged with Afro-Colombians social movements and anti-globalization movements.

His view around Colombia's approach to development helps to shape Colombian reality and to a certain extent, understand the rural crisis Colombia is suffering.

Linked to a growing dissent towards the Washington Consensus and the structural macroeconomic reforms⁷ that were imposed to Latin America in the 90s as a 'cure' to the debt crisis and economic stagnation suffered during the 80s, resistance and construction of alternatives to the neoliberal model have been undertaken in many countries of the continent. The failure of the past three decades imposed neoliberal transformation is evident as since the turn of the 21st century the continent saw a radical overthrow of past regimes that pioneered that system. The radical 'turn to the left' experienced by Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia is exemplary, as well as the progressive and politically heterodox governments that have been established in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and others have questioned the neoliberal consensus and showed evidence of a change in the political language and ways of intervening in the society (Svampa, 2012).

Although very heterogeneous in cultural and political projects, those progressive governments that have been elected by organized political and social mobilization, are struggling to reverse the social and economic desolation of the previous era, that brought all over the continent unemployment, informality, ecological

⁷ 'Neo-liberalism entailed a series of structural reforms intended to reduce the role of the state in the economy, assign a larger role to markets, and create macro-economic stability; among the most important measures were liberalization of trade and capital flows, privatization of state assets, deregulation and free markets, and labor reforms' (Escobar, 2010:8).

impacts and raised inequalities and poverty. As Escobar (2010:8) argues, while many neo-liberal reforms are still in place and the transformations promised by those new progressive governments 'are more rhetoric than reality', some important elements of the neo-liberal past have been reversed, resulting in the increased agency of the State in the management of the economy and the nationalization of private companies. Insights from Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador show much more radical ruptures with the past reflected in radical agendas for societal change and ambitious constitutional transformations, a struggle for 'decolonization' from the dominant Western patterns of production and knowledge, in the name of a 21st Century Socialism (Lander, 2012:78). In particular, the governments of Bolivia and Ecuador, both countries with a high degree of indigenous population, very heterogeneous societies, were the first in Latin America to have put forward the project of 'plurinationality', by establishing legal plurality within a nation state, based on *Buen Vivir*. Yet, the projects of re-foundation of Bolivia and Ecuador are still partly founded by revenues accumulated from extractive activities, that shows the lack of concrete policy proposals of transition from a developmentalist state to post-development and post-extractivism. Nonetheless, as Lander (2012) argues, an alternative society cannot be 'technocratically designed' and Bolivia and Ecuador still represent the most vigorous alternatives to the civilisation pattern in crisis. A nice example comes from ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the people of Our America), an intergovernmental association founded by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004, now comprising of eleven members among which Bolivia, Ecuador and countries of the Caribbean. It has attempted to combat the neoliberal model by creating de-mercantilized spaces and promoting 'fair trade' – without WTO regulations -, and it is said to have contributed to Venezuela to be declared the second country in the region to be illiteracy-free (Sader, 2008).

At the other end of the spectrum, while the majority of countries were undergoing important changes in their government, leaders such as Felipe Calderón in Mexico, Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Alan García in Peru and Álvaro Uribe in Colombia struggle to keep the prescriptions of neoliberalism going, and found themselves in isolation (ibid.). With a conservative political agenda, and aligned with the US, Colombia, Peru and Mexico are still following an orthodox economic route. Differently from the progressivism and reformism in most parts of the continent, their regimes have been labelled as 'conservative modernization'

(Calderón in Escobar, 2010:45).

Through the imposition of a 'brutal form of neoliberal modernity', as Escobar (2010:41) posits, they have been repressing the mobilization of new 'relational ontologies' or worldviews—a politics of the difference - by indigenous, peasants and Afro descendants groups struggling to defend their own territory against extractive projects. Those strongly militarized governments of Colombia, Peru and Mexico and the actions taken confirm the tendency to a classical approach of 'order and investments' associated with the neoliberal project (Svampa, 2012:51). However, struggles for autonomy in Chiapas and Oaxaca in Mexico, indigenous and afro struggles and some peasant struggles in Colombia and Peru occupy a prominent role in the resistance movement in Latin America.

The process of changes that has begun at the outset of the 21st century, resulted in a massive geopolitical realignment in the region, and a declining US influence – though not total (Miroff, 2014). The foundation, in 2011, of CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean states), a regional bloc for Latin America as an alternative to the Washington-based OAS (Organization of American States), is exemplary of this changing trend.

On the other hand, however significant this realignment was, the overall development model is such that it continues to be dependent on the accumulation fuelled by the exploitation of natural resources – hydrocarbons, soy, sugarcane and African palm oil above all (Escobar, 2010:47).

As Maristella Svampa (2012:43) puts it, the transition from the Washington Consensus brought to a new economic and socio-political incorporation into the global order through the 'Commodity Consensus', based on the large-scale export of primary products, sustained by the boom in international prices for raw materials. In turn, the expansion of mega-projects of natural resource extraction has notably intensified, generating socio-environmental conflicts all over the continent.

A new cycle of struggles, centred on the defence of the territory and the environment, unveil all the challenges and tensions facing post-development thinking, which therefore leave open the discussion about development models and the boundaries of democracy itself (Svampa, 2013:59).

4.2 Neoliberalism in Colombia

Against this very polarized regional scenario, Colombia, as we have seen, represents some kind of outlier. Being a traditional ally to the US and has long symbolized the epicentre of US influence in Latin America. To counteract the armed conflict that it has been suffering internally, Colombia found in the US a strategic ally, that, for the purpose of fighting the 'War on drugs', has been heavily involved in the conflict since its beginning⁸.

The tie with the US and the conservative political agenda that it has undergone in the last decade, contributed to a sort of isolation of Colombia from the rest of Latin America. Therefore, at the moment when the region witnessed a radical reversal towards left or centre-left governments, Uribe's conservative presidency was highly supported at home, thanks to the implementation of his tough 'democratic security policy'.

During his first mandate, the then President Juan Manuel Santos has moved toward the centre, engaging from 2012 in peace talks with the Farc guerrillas, thus disputing with former president Uribe, leader of Colombia's right (Miroff, 2014). Uribe, while sharing similar view on economy, fervently opposed the peace negotiation with the leftist rebel, and accused Santos of supporting a 'Castro-Chavista' tyranny – a claim that eventually would have contributed to win the referendum against the peace deal in October 2016.

Since the rupture with Uribe, Santos' U Party - Coalition of National Unity - underwent an ideological shift of leadership away from the conservative and belligerent politics of Uribe, towards a more 'progressive' and 'third way' brand of politics and won the 2014 re-elections by making them a choice between war and peace (Wojciak, 2014).

Santos has been a proponent of the 'third way', the idea, most identified with the Blair administration, that calls for a policy of free markets as far as possible, but with state intervention as far as it may be necessary.

He declared the third way to be the way for peace with social prosperity, greater social inclusion and a

⁸ In the early 1960s the US government encouraged the Colombian military to attack leftist militias in rural Colombia, as part of the US fight against communism. As of August 2004, the US had spent \$3 billion in Colombia, more than 75% of it in military aid; before the Iraqi war, Colombia was the third largest recipient of US aid, after Egypt and Israel (Stokes, 2005).

friendly development of the environment (Presidencia Colombia, 2014). Moreover, Santos is engaged in educational reforms to follow the WB recommendation and to impress the OECD, to which Colombia has applied for membership. Up to now, Colombia has signed twelve free trade agreements (FTA) worldwide, and six preferential trade agreements (PFTA); it has signed FTA with many of its biggest trading partners, such as the United States in 2006 and with the European Union in 2008 (OAS, 2016).

However, critics from the left labelled it as 'neoliberalism with better packaging', as Santos's bet that the steadily growing economy based on foreign investments and free trade agreements will translate into work and well-being for many Colombians is ignoring serious problems in the domestic industry and agriculture (Morgan, 2014).

The National Development Plan put in place by Santos is a sign of how neoliberalism is still at the base of the national structure. Like his predecessor Uribe, Santos firmly believes that mining and petroleum are the locomotive of Colombia's development. Therefore, since his first mandate, he has themed the NDP with the setup of five 'locomotives of development' that would bring prosperity to Colombia. The said locomotives: mining, agriculture, housing plus technology (innovation) and infrastructure are sought to achieve an 'intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth'. What is evident, is the overarching idea that natural resources are the key for development, reflected in the promotion of a conventional model of agriculture, based on technology and capital investments, when the majority of Colombian countryside is sparked by high land tenure inequality and restricted access to capital. Colombia's political leadership is still committed to an economic model that views the agrarian economy as an impediment to development rather than as its catalyst (Richani, 2011). This vision has, for several decades, fomented a lopsided strategy that favours agribusinesses and cash crops - of flowers, African palm oil, sugar, and bananas - cattle ranching, and concessions to multinational mining corporations rather than small-scale producers (ibid.).

Interestingly, as Escobar (2013) suggests, putting it on the discourse level, the metaphor of the 'locomotives of development' is such an anachronistic one, since it dates back to the 19th century, at the time of the industrial revolution. It is as to go back to the times of industrialization, which were 'deeply destructive' for the working society as a whole. Yet, Colombian government represents it as the future, the progress. The

mining and the agricultural (and agro fuel) sectors are – according to this model - entirely based on capital investments and technological development. In an interview for *Palabras al Margen* (2013) Escobar asks himself a rhetoric question about the agency of communities and environment within this model: it is a destructive strategy. Colombia's powerful elites are the one who can every time reinvent their own model of exploitation and destruction. And this is the history of Colombia since colonization, argues Escobar (2013): however, nowadays this devastation took the name of 'locomotive of development'. Popular and indigenous groups, as well as *campesinos* communities all around Latin America are increasingly coming together and rejecting this dominant model.

The neoliberalist model of free trade has put in disadvantage Colombian industry, but the most damaged is the agricultural sector. It is in fact difficult to compete with goods coming from countries that receive subsidies for the agricultural food production; in this way, they will be always offering lower prices products, creating more poverty in the country and enriching the importers. The neoliberalised global political economy, as Harvey (in Esteva et al, 2014:95) argues, it is a system that benefits few at the expense of many, and through the 'accumulation by dispossession' model has resulted in the creation of class distinction.

Neoliberalism, although perceived as an economic strategy, it acts in all the fronts, social and political. Both Uribe and Santos, as well as their predecessors, had believed in the economic growth of the free-market and commodities exportation neoliberal model, through government decentralization and privatizations. The first huge privatization was undergone by Pastrana back in 2002, when the mining complex el Cerrejon in the department of La Guajira – one of the poorest region of Colombia, now suffering a serious draught – was privatized.

The discourse against the mainstream model of development resonates when one sees the obvious flaws of neoliberalism adapted to a country like Colombia, where poverty, the armed conflict, the drug trafficking, the criminality and corruption, the levels of inequality were not taken into account.

While FTA are meant to abolish trade barriers, and thus, favour export prices, the weakness and vulnerability of the Colombian economy makes it dependent to the dominant economies, who have the power to

influence both economic and political issue inside the country (Pazos y Vega, 2009).

Throughout its history Colombia had been dependent on many external political and economic factors, which have caused the country to be victim of a sort of 'global clientelism' (ibid.), which in turn, spread internally.

The circumstances and the real needs of Colombia are therefore not comprised in this model, which along the years has caused the concentration of power in a very small elite, who dominates common interests in favour of their own, hindering social change and increasing the polarization within the society.

Before taking on reflections about the extent to which globalization and neoliberalism have affected the rural area and the *campesino* community, I would like to insist on the processes of formation of the rural-urban divide, caused by the same forces of neoliberal globalization that spurred urbanization and industrialization, which is a constant in many non-western countries.

4.2.2 The Colombian rural-urban divide

Colombia has been historically an agrarian economy with most of its population living in rural areas.

The rapid urbanization started in the second half of the 20th century, causing rural population to shrink in respect to total population: while 94% of the territory of Colombia can be considered rural, in 2015 rural population comprised only 23% of the total population (World Bank, 2016).

Despite the downward trend in the share of total population, rural population was seen to maintain a slow but steady growth in absolute numbers, in accordance with the growth rate of the country. According to DANE, between 1939 and 1993, rural population doubled reaching more than 11 million, and continued to grow steadily. However, it is worth to notice that in the last years this trend has reversed, as rural population started a descent, while in the last two decades the cities increased their population by more than 10 million (ibid.).

The massive urban migration that Colombia experienced since 1960s turned what was mostly an agrarian society to one of the most industrialized country in Latin America (del Ama, 2013).

As del Alma (2013) explains the phenomena of increasing urbanization was spurred by drastic policies that

government instituted after the formation of the National Front⁹ in 1958. One of these policies, the Accelerated Economic Development, favoured the expansion of industrial agribusiness and thus hundreds of thousands of *campesinos* had to migrate and abandon their farms.

The civil conflict broke down, and the rampant violence that the Colombian countryside was suffering, causing, in the first place, displacements and land dispossession, accelerated the exodus to the cities in search for security and employment. During the 1970s-1980s urban jobs grew, especially in the extractive and processing industries; coffee production, oil and exports doubled, favouring the rise of private companies and increasing domestic consumption (ibid.). Cities like Bogota, Medellín and Cali offered, besides increasing economic opportunities, access to a better education, health-care system and technology. However, the excessive and unorganized urbanization brought to increasing social divides within the cities and to a new form of urban poverty.

By the end of the 20th century Colombia's market economy grew steadily, as industry and service sectors expanded largely, and its GDP went growing at an average rate of 4%. At the same time the GDP share of the agricultural sector was seen to drop to a 15%, from a 30% back in 1965 (World Bank, 2016).

When, at the beginning of the 21st century, Colombia suffered a serious economic recession, the agricultural sector seemed to have a slight recovery on its shares, but this was only due to the economic crisis affecting the urban sectors. In fact, the agricultural sector lost the 25% of its revenue capacity in the last five years of the century, exacerbated by lack of land productivity, underutilized farmland and a weak transportation infrastructure (Perfetti in: Serrano Ordóñez, 2007).

In recent years GDP growth in Colombia has reached a record peak of 6,9%, one of the highest growth rate in Latin America (World Bank, 2015). However, the agricultural sector continued to lose its share of the economy, dropping from 8% in 2000 to 6% in 2014.

Despite having dramatically reduced its percentage of GDP, Colombia's agricultural sector has nevertheless

⁹ the National Front (1959-1974) was a bipartisan coalition that consolidated the power of Conservatives and Liberals that agreed to rotate the power for a set period of four presidential terms.

remained an important source of employment, representing a strategic employment generator in rural areas (Steiner and Vallejo, 2010). The fact that agriculture lost relevant income capacity while still representing a major source of labour says a lot about the extent to which the products of agriculture are undervalued in the market-based economy of Colombia.

4.2.3 Campesino communities and globalization: The 'New Rurality'

Globalization, which can be defined as the process of expansion of capitalism worldwide at the outset of the 80s, brought significant changes to both urban and rural areas. While cities and urban spaces were the cradle of globalization, as the constant urbanization and the creation of urban jobs brought more and more people to the cities, also rural areas underwent a process of change. Rural spaces had long been associated with 'backwardness', opposite to the 'progress' represented by urban areas, which were seen to be modern, dynamic and the centres of civilization.

The changes brought about by globalization in Latin America differs for instance, from Europe, where the loss of importance of agriculture as the motor of the countryside found a new dynamism with tourism and residential alternatives, as well as the production of quality food by small farmers (Trpin, 2005:3). Moreover, the presence of the State as a guarantor of those traditional and non-competitive activities helped in the rediscovery of the countryside as a medium that goes beyond the provision of food.

On the other hand, the landscape in Latin America was quite different: small and medium *campesinos* lost ground in front of big landowners and agro industries integrated with the international demand, expanding agribusiness and cash crops. The increasing land concentration related to financial capital and transnational corporations led to the impoverishment of small landowners, who are forced to search other rentable activities outside the agriculture sector. Neoliberal policies largely impacted rural Colombia, resulting in the loss of food sovereignty, the globalization of agribusinesses, and the increasing rural-urban migration as a consequence of peasant agricultural weakening. As Edelmira Pérez posits (in Trpin, 2005:4), with the new economic model rural poverty and marginalization in Colombia increased, particularly for indigenous communities, elderly people and women head of the household.

Over the past decades since the post-war period, the imposition of the capitalistic model of development had gradually forced rural inhabitants into the market economy, endangering their subsistence and causing the destruction of the surrounding environment (Kautsky in Misleh, 2011:25). This was caused by the monetarization of rural economy that obliged peasants to turn the products of agriculture into commodities, selling them on the market in order to acquire money:

And so the peasant was forced to become what we now customarily think of as a peasant - a mere farmer. And the more the peasant assumed this role, the wider the gulf between agriculture and industry, the quicker the independence, security and comfort of peasant life vanished (ibid.).

The capitalistic system destroyed the productive and manufacturing capacity of rural inhabitants, who, once self-sufficient, are now increasingly dependent on the manufactures produced in the urban centres, because cheaper. This, in turn, led to the *capitalization of agriculture* (Kay in Misleh, 2011), as the necessity to produce in order to sell on the market and gain profit. The subsistence method, and its incentive, were thus left behind in favour of profit making. Rural livelihoods are more and more dependent on the market, as the sale of products is essential in order to survive. The logic of accumulation and intensification of production - through expansion, innovation and scale economies - penetrates the agrarian sector and facilitates the fusion between agriculture and industry. Consequently, those small-scale *campesinos* who are not able to compete in this system - when their land does not give enough fruit or not rentable ones - have to start selling their work, becoming part of the agrarian working class (Misleh, 2011). In many rural areas of Colombia, the precariousness of formal and informal jobs offered in the countryside is such that people are often contracted as *jornaleros* - day labourers.

Living on agricultural subsistence turned out to be very unfeasible, as the land became less rentable - due to climate and past exploitation - and thus the products of the land too. In addition, the value of the products of the land is squeezed by the intermediaries, who channel them to the market. Neoliberal globalization has caused a restructuring of the agricultural sector and the system of food production, impacting the rural life, the *campesino* community, and transforming its relationship with other parts of the country. The role of the State in supporting small-scale, non-competitive agricultural production has totally failed (UNDP, 2011).

Moreover, the international opening of trade barriers led to an increase of food import from abroad, in an

unfair competition with local production. Local production has also been affected by big scale or extensive agriculture and livestock from other parts of the country.

This changing landscape resulted in a new definition of the rural spaces which has been advanced, mostly by Latin American scholars, in the 'New Rurality' approach.

The new rurality approach attempts to characterize the new transformations experimented by rural sector as a consequence of globalization and the implementation of neoliberal policies (Kay in Pérez, 2007). On a second level, it identifies the changes in the appreciation of rural spaces, due to the raise of environmentalism, rural tourism and recreation, as well as cultural and lifestyle changes as a consequence of the increased rural-urban interaction and of mass medias.

Cristobal Kay, rural and social development researcher, listed four main transformations in Latin America's new rurality that have been identified by scholars: the shift to rural non-farm activities, the increasing flexibilization and feminization of rural work, the growing urban interactions and the rising importance of international migration and remittances (Kay, 2008).

Both men and women are increasingly engaging in 'pluriactivity', as they combine traditional agricultural activities with non-agricultural ones, as artisanal activities, transportation, rural tourism and agro industry (Farah and Pérez, 2004:139, Amtmann, 2005). Remittances from migration, together with non-agricultural rents, assume increasing relevance as fundamental assets in a rural household's livelihood.

In this always changing environment, as interdependence between rural spaces and urban world is increasing, a non-traditional vision of rurality already started to take hold (Amtmann, 2005). Moreover, the homogenization of the models of consumption coming from the west – consumerism and accumulation of goods – gradually involves rural areas as well (LLambi in Pérez, 2007). Technology, and in particular telecommunication stir up rural society and cause the limits between city and countryside to get blurred.

Gramont (in Pérez and Farah, 2008) speaks of an 'urbanization of the countryside', as non-agricultural occupations grow, mass medias reach out to the most remote areas and rural-urban migration allows for the creation of social nets and reconstruction of *campesino* communities in urban settings.

At the same time, we can talk about a 'ruralisation of the city' (ibid.), as the uncontrolled urbanization is not supported by an adequate urban development.

The whole model of rural society is found in the middle of a crisis, because it does not understand its actual role and new functions (Pérez, 2001).

The new rurality approach thus aims to develop new proposals in terms of public policies and actions, in order to overcome the negative consequences that neoliberalism inflicted to rural inhabitants (Kay in Pérez, 2007). Those strategies are centred around peasant agriculture, rural jobs - especially for young people -, empowerment and environmental sustainability. The agency of the *campesino* community is emphasized in a bottom-up approach; however, the role of the State is not specified and it lacks of definite measures to implement those objectives.

Colombia, amongst other Latin American countries, built its efforts in creating a new institutional structure based on local governments – municipalities – in order to push development policies directly from the territory (Gramont in Pérez, 2008). However, the challenges imposed by globalization, the lack of social equality, the inefficient infrastructure, the loss of institutional credibility and the cruelty of the armed conflict are all factors that shape the complexity of Colombian rurality, which therefore demands a greater effort of understanding and analysis (Pérez, 2002).

4.2.4 The land distribution inequality

As we have seen, one of the causes of the agricultural crisis that Colombia has been suffering over the past decades is land ownership inequality.

Latin America figures the highest rate of land distribution inequality, a problem that goes back to colonization, when indigenous people were dispossessed from their resource rich lands. At the time of the independence from European colonial powers, the ownership of land was simply transferred to local elites and since then, very little had changed. Past agrarian reforms resulted in the formalization of land property to benefit the elite, who initiated labour intensive activities, such as cattle-raising.

Land ownership inequality created low and insecure income for rural poor, that in turn had retarded human capital accumulation, creating a vicious cycle that hindered economic growth and social change. All over the

region, the agricultural growth had been an 'exclusionary' one (Carter, 2000), as it has displaced *campesinos* from their lands and prematurely mechanized the agricultural production and thus deepened rural inequalities. In the case of Colombia, because of the weak presence of the State in remote and mountainous areas, displacement was the method often used to resolve disputes over land.

The high landownership concentration was at the same time the cause and consequence of the civil conflict. The internal conflict exacerbated the concentration of land, since it was mainly characterized by disputes over territories and resources between the guerrillas and the military and paramilitary forces. This turf war displaced millions of peasants from their land. Moreover, only during the 80s and 90s, armed groups involved in the drug trade had grabbed around 4 million hectares in order to launder profit coming from illegal activities (the Economist, 2010).

The expansion of paramilitarism took the form of an armed *counter-agrarian reform*, to which the then president Uribe, after the demobilization of the AUC, was not able – or rather willing – to address, as just only 17.000 hectares were returned to landless *campesinos* (Castañeda, 2009 and the Economist, 2010). In 2009 the land stolen by armed groups was of 5.5 million hectares, once owned by about 3.5 million *campesinos* (ibid). At the end of 2014, only 1% of those landless peasants was able to reacquire the land title, while the majority of *desplazados* were unable to return to their expropriated land or refused for fear of violence (Amnesty International, 2015).

In 1960, Colombia's Gini index for land inequality (a number between 0 and 1 which measures inequality, being 1 most unequal) was 0.841, rising to 0.885 in 2009 (Gillin, 2015). Colombia actually scores as the eighth most unequal country in the world in terms of land ownership (ibid.). 80% of land is in the hands of just 14% of owners and this concentration has increased over the last fifty years (Oxfam, 2015). Reforms to address land inequality are often incomplete, as people would lack the tools to be competitive and thus those reforms do not have a positive impact on poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2006). As a result, in term of food security, just 0.4% of the population owns 62% of the country's cultivable land, while only about one fifth of the arable land is cultivated – from a total of 21.5 million hectares suitable for food production only 4.9 million hectares are cultivated - with most lying fallow or used for livestock breeding (ibid.). At the same

time, the titled land which is used for mining exploitation – mostly mega mining projects - has surpassed the total cultivated land, reaching 5 million hectares. It is with no wonder, that Colombia still imports 28% of the food it consumes (WFP, 2015).

Land ownership concentration in Colombia has taken the shape of a real ‘resource curse’, exacerbated by past government policies and corruption – as when Uribe subsidized rich landowners, including two convicted drug lords, through the national agricultural policy AIS (*Agro Ingreso Seguro*), supposedly in order to sponsor his re-election campaign (Pachico, 2007). Even though the resource curse is a concept generally used to explain phenomena that involve the exploitation of non-renewable resources, it definitely applies to the large-scale exploitation of gold and other minerals happening in other parts of Caldas and all across Colombia, a topic that we will be discussing in the next chapter. ‘Natural resource curse’ is the name given to the chronic underdevelopment that most countries with abundant natural resources are characterized by. The term is mainly directed to countries with non-renewable natural resources such as oil and minerals. Nevertheless, the term can encompass other important resources such as land, which can potentially generate riches for all the population if properly managed (Gillin, 2015).

In the wake of the recent peace deal signed with the FARC, Santo’s government is said to be committed to implementing a more efficient land reform, after the Victims and Land Restitution reform signed in 2011 was not successful in advancing land restitution or relevant agrarian improvements. The peace agreement with the FARC contains, as the first point on the agenda, the *Reforma Rural Integral* (Comprehensive rural development), which was signed in 2013 and is going to be facilitated by the demobilization of guerrillas. Yet, a successful democratization of land ownership depends in large part on the landed oligarchy of Colombia that for long has been an obstacle to past agrarian reforms (SIPRI, 2013).

Even though landownership inequality refers to rurality, it is a reflection of the general inequality that most Colombians suffer in regards to income, education and health. If we look for instance at the HDI (Human Development Index), which measures life expectancy, education and per capita incomes, the figure for Colombia is 0.72, the 97th on a global scale (UNDP, 2015). However, the inequality adjusted figure for the

same index falls down to 0.542 (ibid.). Similarly, the Gini coefficient for incomes inequality which is as high as 53.5 - the highest in the region and, opposite to other countries', on a raising trend from 1990s - depicts the sparking inequality across Colombia, both in urban and rural spaces, and as the emergence of the 'new rurality' shows, cannot be reduced to the urban-rural divide anymore.

Colombia actually ranks 14th on the worldwide scale of inequality, and as long as its social structural will not change, only little will be better off (UNPD, 2015). As Noguera de Echeverry (in Lasso: 2008) suggests:

[Esto significa que] el Desarrollo nunca será equitativo, ni elevará la calidad de vida de todos, ni acabará con la desnutrición, ni con el analfabetismo. El Desarrollo como crecimiento económico, aún el sostenible, sólo es posible, gracias al empobrecimiento de otros; la riqueza de unos cada vez más pocos, es la pobreza de otros, cada vez muchos más.

4.2.5 Some data on poverty: the poverty perception gap

As we have seen, for the sake of modernization, Colombia has rapidly undergone a transformation from a rural to a quasi-urban society, reaching the 75% of urban population.

However, the exceptional economic growth that recently underwent Colombia was everything but pro-poor, as inequality gave no signs of lowering: while in the last two decades income inequality has slowly decreased in the rest of the region, Colombia grows as a more unequal country. In urban centres, it grew by 15%, and Medellin – the country's second largest city, and the most modern one in term of infrastructures and public services – has the highest rich-poor gap in Latin America. In Medellin, as in other Colombian cities, the economy is still controlled by an oligarchy that makes money from protected sectors shielded by the government, leaving the middle class and the poor out of the game (Robinson, 2013 and Lopez, 2013).

While the national poverty headcount ratio fell down from 47% in 2004 to 28,5% recently, rural poverty persists (ABColombia, 2014). The figures for rural areas are much higher, yet from a 73,7% in 2005, the national average decreased to a 44.7% in 2015, corresponding to 4,9 million rural poor, plus 2 million living in extreme poverty (IFAD, 2014 and DANE, 2015). Most of them are found in remote areas and conflictive zones, in the Pacific and Caribbean regions of Cordoba, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Sucre, inhabited by indigenous and afro-descendant population, as well as in Tolima, Boyacá and Huila (ibid.).

Since Colombia showed interest in a membership of the OECD, and saw its bid approved in 2012, the past and current Colombian governments have been making efforts to reach some important prerequisites that would allow the entrance to the OECD. This explains the eagerness to improve socioeconomic indicators, while not directly intervening in changing Colombia's unjust and unequal structure (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2013). In 2014 Santos proudly announced that – according to the last DANE's poverty figures – since his mandate, nearly 4 million Colombian had been lifted out of poverty. However, this apparently surprising achievement has to do a lot with methodological change in measurement, as well as social redistributive programs like *Familias en Acción* which – despite being a relevant source of monetary help - generates artificial and non-sustainable incomes amongst the poor (Galindo y Peña, 2015). The poverty perception gap between statistics and reality is thus pretty wide and does not allow to picture the situation in an adequate way.

The reason why I chose Norcasia as the place to conduct the fieldwork also symbolizes an attempt to give more significance to those figures and, at the same time distance from them, as a way to go beyond prefixed schemes and frameworks that categorize – and too often generalize - the concepts of *poverty* and *development*.

I believe the fieldwork I conducted is relevant as it analyses a rural context in a country long afflicted by territorial disputes, in a crucial historical moment of peace negotiation that could eventually change its fate.

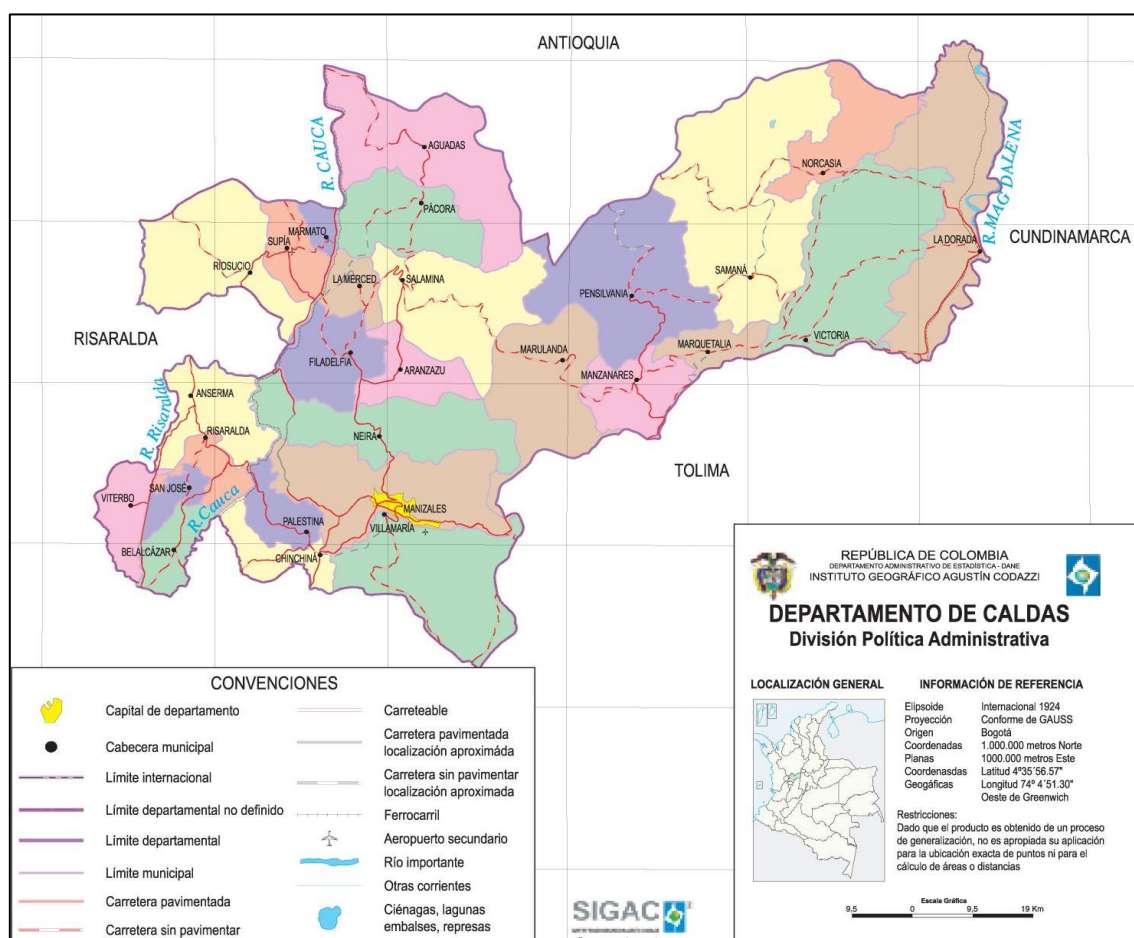
5. Micro level: The Case Study: Rural Development in Norcasia Caldas

5.1 Characterization of the municipality of Norcasia

5.1.1 Territory and demography

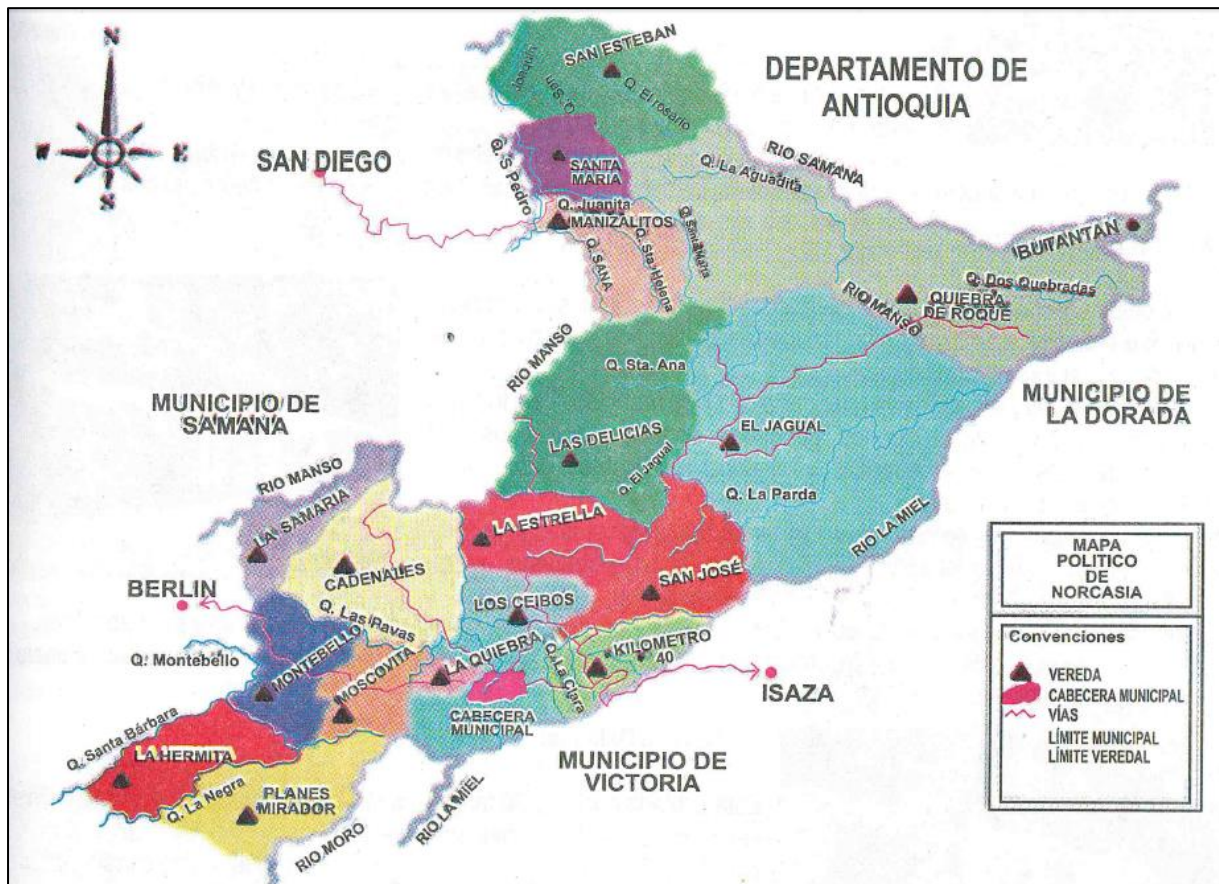
The case study was conducted in the central, coffee-growing region of Caldas, a relatively small region with capital Manizales. Situated in the eastern part of Caldas - the Magdalena Caldense – Norcasia (see fig.1), which only recently in 1999, became an independent municipality, was for long a *corregimiento* (county) belonging to Samaná, with San Diego and Berlin. As in other parts of rural Colombia, the town is divided into *cabecera municipal*, that is, the centre of the village, and its *veredas*, isolated settlements in the countryside. Norcasia is composed by 17 *veredas*, which extend across the entire territory that has a total extension of 211 km² (see fig.2).

Fig. 1 Political Map of Caldas



Source: Instituto Geografico Augustin Codazzi, 2010

Fig. 2 Political map of Norcasia



Source: Luengas Quiroga, 2011

According to the municipality's database (Alcaldía de Norcasia, 2016), there are 637 families living outside the urban centre, for a total of 2029 persons. Some of the households are located along the sides of the main road and in most of the cases they only own a small plot of land. A relevant number of smaller or larger *fincas* (farms) are found in quite remote areas, a few of which can only be reached by foot or on horseback. It is estimated that there are a total of 400 *fincas* in the countryside; most of which are small-scale farms (Guillermo, personal communication, July 2016). A considerable part of the territory is thus concentrated in few extended properties, some of which are administrated or rented by landless *campesinos* families, as big land-owners usually live in urban centres.

The topography is another factor that does not help with the development of infrastructure, as Norcasia is

situated at 700 m above sea level, between the two main Andes Mountain chains, or cordilleras, and the whole territory is uneven and the land/terrain is in many parts steep.

Of its approximately 6322 inhabitants (DANE, 2016), 68% is settled in the village, while the remaining 32%, the *campesinos* (farmers), are scattered in the countryside. Among the population there are no relevant numbers of people belonging to ethnic minorities.

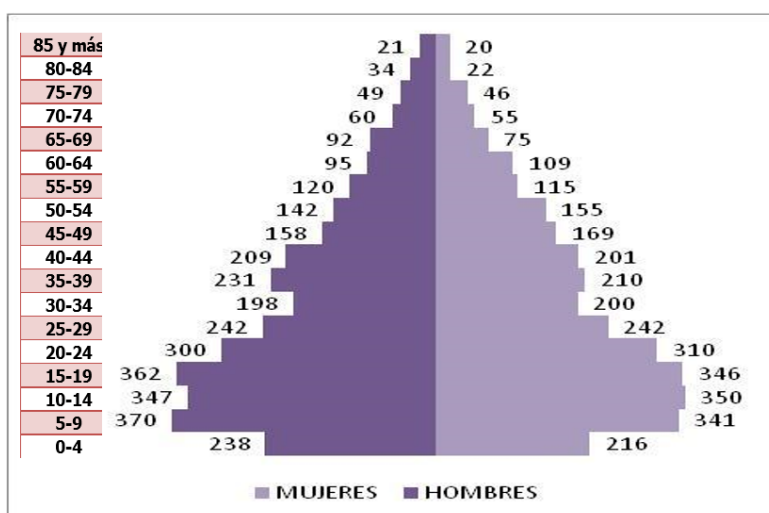
If we take a look at the last DANE census (2005) and its projections for Norcasia, we see that the demographic trend of the last decade is that of a decrease in population. More evident is the decline in the rural area, as the tendency is to move to the urban area of the municipality, for an easier access to public services. The general demographic decline of Norcasia is instead due to a decline in the fertility rate and to the larger phenomena of rural-urban migration that involves migrating to the nearest cities or metropolitan areas. Generally speaking, the area presents a high population mobility, as this has been the tendency for many years. Manizales, Medellín and Bogotá - located at a 200-300 km range corresponding to at least 5-6 hours ride – are the closest destinations.

The population dynamics of the municipality of Norcasia are in line with the processes of urbanization of the country, since its urban population, compared to the previous years, increased by two percentage points. However, when crossing this information with the economic activity undergone by the working population, we find that it corresponds to work in the rural sector, as there are no other economic activities in the town. This phenomenon also has to do with the proximity of most of the *veredas* that involve commuting to work in the fields (Plan de Desarrollo 2014-2015).

If we look at the characterization of the population (see fig. 3), we see that Norcasia has a relatively young one: around the 25% of the inhabitants are between 14 and 26 years old (Plan Municipal de Juventud, 2012-2015), while the majority stands between 15 and 44 years old, thus active and able to work. However, lack of job opportunities and low education, as well as poor cultural and social engagement, affect mostly young population who tend to emigrate to urban centers in order to search for a better future. Against this

backdrop, and as in many other parts of rural Colombia, the generational renewal in the agricultural sector is at a standstill.

Fig. 3 Population pyramid of Norcasia



Source: *Plan de Desarrollo Municipal 2014-2015*, Alcaldia de Norcasia

5.1.2 Physical and social infrastructures

Before the construction of Bogota-Medellin highway, the only road connecting the two biggest cities of Colombia was the Dorada-Sonson-Medellin route, which passed through Norcasia. For decades this route had been crossed by trucks and buses carrying passengers, cattle, and huge quantities of agricultural products to supply interior cities and towns, until the construction of the highway that left the region isolated from the rest. There is only one means of transport left that goes over the Dorada-Sonson route, a *chiva* bus (artisan rustic bus used in rural Colombia) that everyday leaves from Sonson and goes down till La Dorada, carrying people and any type of goods from the fields (Luengas Quiroga, 2011)

The government as well lost its interests in the region and in those towns, that soon were seized by both guerrillas and paramilitaries. At the end of 1990s, in between these two bloodthirsty powers, on the outskirts of Norcasia, the hydroelectric project La Miel I started to take shape, with the construction of la Miel I power plant - completed in 2002. At that time Norcasia was not even a municipality, but with the boom of the hydroelectric project, the route Dorada-Berlín was restructured and paved. At present,

however, due to the activities of the project itself, the road between Dorada and Norcasia is very deteriorated and the planned restructuration of 2010, promised by ISAGEN, has still not started.

Veredas of La Quebra, Moscovita, Montebello and Cadenales are easily reachable by the paved road heading to Samaná, as well as Kilómetro 40, on the way to the bigger town of La Dorada. The rest of the *veredas*, are connected with the centre and between each other by 100km of tertiary roads.

Although not paved and in some parts very damaged, especially after heavy rains, a main road give access to the farmland and most of its *veredas*. Quebra de Roque, the biggest and most populated *vereda*, counting more than one hundred families, is a two hours' bike ride away from the town. Vans and for-wheels drive vehicles, which are usually overloaded, can take up to four hours. Other *veredas* or smaller settlements scattered in the countryside are badly connected with the main road and thus isolated from the town and its facilities.

As we will see later, the construction works of the plant brought many workers from outside to arrive to Norcasia, and thus projects for an improvement of the health service promised the construction of a modern health center. However, what was built at the end was a level 1 health centre – Hospital Sagrado Corazón- that could not sufficiently look after the needs of the population. Another health center was closed down as soon as the construction works ended (Luengas Quirogas, 2011). Health care is subsidized through SISBEN (System for the Selection of Beneficiaries for Social Programs)¹⁰, for which low-income household receive public healthcare services, while only a few households turn to private healthcare.

Periodically, some of the medical staff organize rounds to the *veredas*, in order to provide a minimum of medical assistance to those who are not able to reach the centre, like elderly people or families with children. Most of the households in the countryside now own a motorbike, however, when emergencies happen the ride to the hospital can be risky. In this case, the group of volunteer firefighters of Norcasia can provide emergency transportation, as long as it through an accessible road.

¹⁰ SISBEN is the national system of identification of beneficiaries for social subsidy, and classifies the people according to their socio-economic level into 6 strata. Most of the social subsidies and public health programs are focused in strata 1 and 2 (IDB, 2016).

Besides the recent renovation of the sports hall next to the school - which has now the function of a cultural and sport centre – Norcasia counts a modern sports centre comprised of two football and basketball pitches, a swimming pool and a gym, where fitness classes take place during the week.

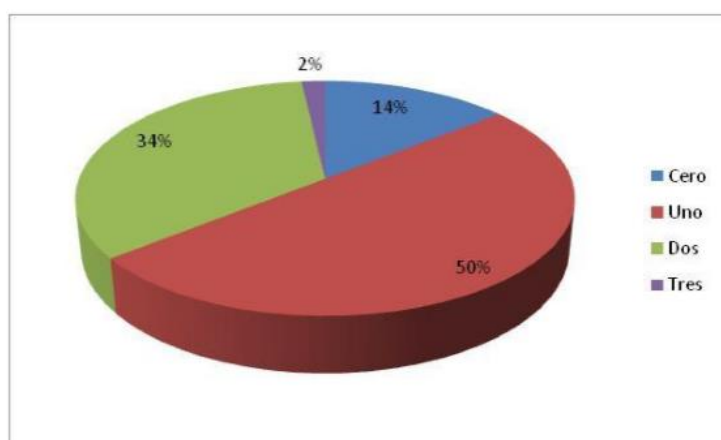
5.1.3 Social stratification and socio-economic condition

Colombia has - by law - since the 80s a system of social stratification used to classify socio-economic differences between households, based on the *inmuebles* – property. It was first implemented to classify urban sectors into different strata with similar socio-economic characteristics on a scale from 1 to 6 (1 as the lowest income area)¹¹. According to the stratification, poorest households are granted subsidies for public services, while the wealthier are contributing more. This system is said to have caused strong divisions between poor and wealthy areas in urban centres, worsening the stigmatization of the poor (IFHP, 2012). Moreover, it is said not to be an effective means to measure the real socio-economic condition of a household, since it does not take into account neither the incomes nor the consumption patterns of a given household: there is a high percentage of low stratum households that present, however, a level of consumption more similar to those of households of the highest stratum, and therefore benefit of social subsidies (ibid.). Due to the shortcomings of this socio-economic stratification, other proposals have been made, for a more accurate identification of households in need of social subsidies. For instance, SISBEN, though being a costlier method, is a much more precise one in the identification of households lacking basic needs.

Even though in rural areas the gap is not so evident, people often refer to each other by their '*estrato*'. As the figures for Norcasia show (see fig. 4) the 50% of Norcaseños are of a low-low stratum, while only a small 2% qualify as medium-low stratus (the 14% which classifies as a 0 stratum, refers to the households which have not been classified, most probably those located in remote rural areas).

¹¹ There is no precise characterization of the six strata, which take into consideration the building (physical status and materials) and the surroundings, and they are classified as: 1 bajo-bajo, 2-bajo, 3-medio-bajo, 4-medio, 5-medio-alto and 6-alto (DANE, n.d.)

Fig. 4 Socio-economic stratum



Source: *Plan de Desarrollo 2012-2015*

The lack of adequate housing both in the urban and rural areas of Norcasia is one of the problems the municipality has tried to address. In 2015 the Ministry of Housing (Minvivienda) handed over 80 apartments to families in need and *desplazados*. Another project is under way and it said it will benefit another 120 families.

Especially in rural areas, most of the housing are found in very poor condition, with wooden walls and packed dirt floors. Moreover, the 34% do not have access to clean waters, and the 39% do not have basic sanitation. Only in recent times electricity was installed in the most isolated *veredas*, yet leaving Manizalitos and other smaller *veredas* still without power (Plan Municipal 2012-2015).

In 2005, the NBI (*Necesidades Basicas Insatisfechas*) indicator¹² for Caldas showed that the region was one with the lowest rate of unmet basic needs, after Valle del Cauca, Bogotá, Quindío and Risaralda. At the regional level, however, Norcasia presented the 36,6% of population lacking of basic needs – one of the highest in the region - being 24% in urban areas, while 59% in rural areas. The unmet basic needs for Norcasia were mostly related to adequate housing and access to basic sanitation (ACNUR, 2007). The last

¹² Intended as the inability to provide for one's own food, clothing, housing and health care because of insufficient income and/or resources

measurement of NBI dates back to 2005, since the index was then regarded as inadequate to measure social development in an epoch of recovery and expanded investments in the social sector (DNP, 2010). The newly introduced IPM (*Índice de Pobreza Multidimensional*)¹³ showed a considerable decrease of poverty rate at the national level from a 49.2% in 2003 to a 27% in 2012. Though there are no municipality data, the average regional IPM which was calculated to be as high as 51.1% in 2005, fell down to 22.1% in ten years' time (DANE, 2015).

5.1.4 Formal basic Education

In the urban area, the *Institución Educativa Gerardo Maria Mayela* offers pre, primary and secondary schooling. In Colombian educational system, basic education (*Educación básica*) is divided into basic primary and basic secondary school. Basic primary goes from 1st to 5th grade, while basic secondary from 6th to 9th. Grades from 10th to 11th are instead classified as vocational (*Escuela media o vocacional*), at the end of which students obtain a high school diploma (*bachillerato*), with which they can access higher education or university. However, school years from 6th till 11th are usually referred to as *bachillerato* or *escuela secundaria*, and are continuous. Therefore, for a matter of clarity, I will from now on refer only to primary and secondary school, without distinguishing middle school.

In the rural area each *vereda* has its own primary school, although the least populated one (e.g. La Samaria) have closed down due to the small number of students in that area or the lack of professors.

For what regards secondary schools, *veredas* of Montebello, Moscovita, la Quiebra and Cadenales, situated on the western part of Norcasia and reachable by paved road, are served with a scholar route to the urban school. For all the other *veredas* on the eastern side, there are instead only two secondary schools, one located in Quiebra de Roque and another one opened only recently in La Estrella

Both primary and secondary schools, belonging to the *Institución Educativa La Estrella*, are rural schools, and for that, they follow the *Escuela Nueva* schooling model, which differs largely from the standard one. In

¹³ The index identifies deprivations across the dimensions of health, education and standard of living, and shows the number of people who are multi-dimensionally poor (suffering deprivations in 33% or more of weighted indicators) and the number of deprivations with which poor households typically contend with (UNDP, 2015).

a rural school, say it a primary school, students are not divided into grades, since there would be only few students for each level, and thus they are all gathered in one class, supervised by one professor alone.

Normally rural schools, as for Norcasia, have just one room and host from a minimum of 5, to a maximum of 26 students (*Secretaria de Educacion de Norcasia*, 2016). For bigger schools, as the ones that offer secondary education as well, there are subgroups. Every student, from 1st till 11th grade works by him/herself on a book following the guides provided, and completes modules in a series.

As for the different method, rural schools are known to be less demanding, and there are some students from the town who prefer to study there. However, a student graduating from a rural school will not get the equivalent diploma of *bachiller academico*. He/she will get a *bachiller agropecuario* (agricultural), which of course is not on the same level as the standard one, and it does not prepare enough to gain access to university.

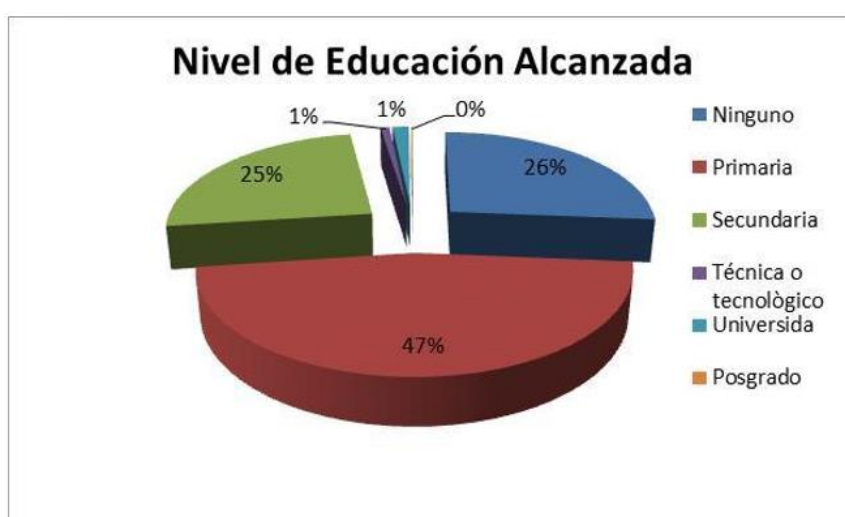
Another problem linked to rural schools is the difficult transportation within and between *veredas*. Even though they are supplied with school routes that go over the main road, some students have to walk long distances to be able to catch the transport and reach the school. Educational coverage, especially at the secondary level, is not exhaustive and despite the fact that many students decide not to continue with secondary education, some other have to give up as they are unable to get either to La Estrella or Quiebra de Roque's secondary school. To date there is neither transportation for students coming from rural areas who would like to study in the town's secondary school, in order to get a *bachiller academico*.

Data from 2012 (Plan de desarrollo municipal 2012-2015) shows that 47% of the current population of Norcasia attended primary school, 25% possess a *bachiller* while 26% have no academic title (see fig. 5). Only a small 2% have obtained a higher education, professional or technical diploma (Plan de Desarrollo municipal 2012-2015). The secondary and higher education coverage could have slightly changed in those last years, as the trend is on the rise. A first agreement with SENA (*Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje*) in 2013 brought to Norcasia technical courses for early childhood care and electric installation. Later that year, a group of

women obtained the opening of a course on beauty care¹⁴. In 2015 two courses were offered on environmental management and road construction and last year basic IT and *mayordomía* – agricultural business administration. Only recently have technical courses by SENA been introduced in the school at the 10th and 11th grade, in order to train future school graduates and strengthen their competencies. Moreover, the proximity with the city of La Dorada, where the offer of distance or blended learning from public universities is advancing year by year, opened the possibility for some Norcaseños to study during the weekends.

Nevertheless, the very low rate of higher education is explained by the fact that the majority of the students that undertake a university career in bigger urban centres, are unlikely to come back to Norcasia.

Fig. 5 Level of education in the municipality



Source: *Plan de Desarrollo municipal 2012-2015*

The gap between gross and net educational coverage from 1st to 11th grade, which in 2010 were at an average of 109,8% and 70% respectively, indicates that a large quantity of students is studying at extra age, and a relevant share is not studying at all (Plan municipal 2012-2015). Even though the coverage figures for secondary school have considerably grown in the last decade from 43% to 67%, the majority of students are

¹⁴ SENA is a public institution focused in development of programs of professional (technical and technological) formation, and offering what has been labeled as ‘education for employment and human development’. It is a public institution and thus, its courses are free of charge and focus on areas such as Administration, Agriculture, Architecture, Construction, Design, Electricity, Electronics, Mechanics and Technology.

at an extra age and drop off rates are high. Moreover, if we isolate the 10th and 11th grade (vocational school), the net coverage is at only 17% (ibid.).

The drop off rates are higher than the regional average – excluding Manizales – being at 12,5% and 6% for rural and urban areas respectively.

5.1.5 *Hogar Juvenil Campesino and Granja Monte Carmelo*

A small community of nuns from the Carmelite Missionaries order arrived in Norcasia in the 1980s, and since then, they have been actively engaged in supporting the most vulnerable groups of the community, mostly elderly people and families in need.

As part of their social support for the community one of the Carmelites identified the possibility of opening a *Hogar Juvenil Campesino* to help young people coming from rural areas to continue their studies. Along with some professors and other Norcaseños who shared the desire to help young *campesinos*, and following the example of many other *Hogares Campesino* working all around rural Colombia – one in the neighbouring San Diego hosts 40 young campesinos - they founded the first non-profit organization of Norcasia with the name of *Fundación Renacer Comunitario* (FURECOM), which is the only community-led organization of Norcasia. Founded in 2007, *Furecom* began its activities in 2008, accommodating nine boys belonging to low-income campesinos families, and who, due to lack of means of transport or infrastructure, would not have been able to continue with secondary education in the place where they lived. Four years ago spots opened for girls as well, and during the years there have been a maximum of twenty teenagers being hosted annually. Some of the students come from complex familiar situations or have suffered a difficult past of abuses - a problem unfortunately common in Norcasia, and something that we will dwell on further in the chapter dedicated to rural youth.

The students are given board and lodging from Monday to Friday, and they are then allowed to visit their families during the weekend. The *Fundación* not only bets on formal education as the basis for social change, but provides technical education as well, through entities such as SENA and Corpocaldas (Caldas Environmental Authority) which offer trainings on environmental management, water conservation, bird watching and agricultural techniques.

Isagen, the company owner of La Miel I hydroelectric power plant located on La Miel river, south of Norcasia, has been supporting *Furecom* financially since the foundation. However, in the last years its promised funds were delayed and at the end never delivered, until the company stopped the financing all together.

In 2014 *Punto Missione*, an Italian no-profit association founded to support and develop charity and missionary activities implemented by the Carmelite Ecclesial Movement, established a collaboration with the *Fundación Santa Teresa de Avila*, a Colombian entity founded in 2003 by a Carmelite Priest Father Arcesio Escobar, managing the charity called *Ciudades de Dios*¹⁵. As part of a deeper collaboration with the *Fundación Santa Teresa*, *Punto Missione* decided to contribute to the already existing project, with the desire to offer additional agricultural formation to the students and their families.

After having obtained approval and funds from the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) for a two-years agricultural development project – ‘*From theory to practice: agro-livestock farming training project for young farmers of Norcasia, Colombia*’ - dedicated to this group of teenagers and their families.

The project was launched with the purchase of a plot of land and the start-up of a farm, named *Granja Monte Carmelo*, where Italian volunteers with two workers and with the participation of the students, started the cultivations of cacho, plantains, fruit trees and vegetables, as well as dairy cattle and small-scale poultry breeding both for self-consumption and for the sale of milk, eggs and chickens. Through the Sena, theoretical and practical trainings have been organized to prepare students on the maintenance of such cultivations. Volunteers from Italy are a stable presence in Norcasia, coordinating the project and assisting the daily work in the *Granja Monte Carmelo* as well as in after-school activities with the students of the *Fundación*.

The ambitious objectives of the *Fundación* have however found many obstacles in the implementation

¹⁵ There are in total 21 *Ciudades de Dios* located in various region of Colombia consisting of different reception facilities, through which, depending on the needs of the community, they assist abandoned children, young people and single mothers with children, who face particularly difficult situations, in the attempt to offer them, other than the satisfaction of their basic needs, the opportunity for educational growth – which can effectively lead them towards an independent and dignified life.

during the first years of activities. The main guidelines of the project are in fact defined in Italy – at the headquarters of *Punto Missione* – and then transmitted to the Italian volunteers in Norcasia, who often have difficulties in complying with those. After the two initial years of the project that saw Tommaso as the coordinator, volunteers from Italy are now, in fact, rotating each year or two, depending on their availability, and therefore the *Fundación* lacks of a main reference person. One of the major obstacles has thus been the absence of a local – someone who knows the territory and its peculiarity - in the coordination of the works and in the supervision of the cultivations and the animals of the *Granja Monte Carmelo*, which has caused delays and excessive costs in the implementation process. This has been solved at the beginning of 2016 with the hiring of Luis Felipe, an agricultural engineer who had previously worked in the implementation of programs dedicated to *campesinos* and, most importantly, knows well the territory and has many contacts among the inhabitants of Norcasia, and other nearby towns, which indeed has helped in getting things done easily. Nevertheless, the ‘example’ of self-sustainability that the *Granja Monte Carmelo* meant to give to Norcaseños had dubious results, as the investment made at the beginning was conspicuous, and the maintenance of the farm comes at a high cost, both in terms of work and resources deployed.

On a positive note, the activities with the students of the *Fundación*, who get to be involved in the works at the farm two days per week, and the help of the Carmelite nuns in the educational and personal support of the students, all contributed to create a solid group. Visits to the families by the volunteers have also favoured the birth of trustful and friendly relationships between them. However, given the limited span of the project, and due to the dispersion of the households in the rural areas, the families themselves have never been truly involved in any productive activity nor agricultural training promoted by the volunteers. The establishment of any kind of cooperation between the families – which was the first real objective of the project - has in fact revealed to be unfeasible, for reasons that will be made clear in the following chapters. A second phase of the project – which has had major delays in the implementation - sees the purchase of a plant for the transformation of milk into dairy products - yoghurt, cheese, ice cream - and the proccession of fruit into fruit preserves. Besides what is being produced in the *Granja Monte Carmelo*, milk and fruit will be collected from other producers close by. The production and sale of milk in the territory of Norcasia and

beyond is almost entirely 'monopolized' by a cheese factory located on the way to la Dorada. *Lacteos la Fortuna* transforms around 6000 liters of milk a day (Luis Felipe, personal communication, August 2016), collecting milk from every *veredas* of Norcasia, Berlin and Florencia, and paying it at a very low price. The dairy processing plant in project would buy milk from *campesinos* of Norcasia at a slightly higher price, in order to value their production, and later sell the products on the local market (*De la teoría a la práctica: proyecto agrícola formativo agro-zootécnico por los jóvenes agricultores de Norcasia*, Colombia 2015). This is indeed a very ambitious plan, since Norcasia, as we will see, lacks of a center for the transformation of agricultural products, that otherwise do not find market.

Moreover, in collaboration with *Fundación Costruimos* – a no profit organization based in Bogotá, starting from 2017, high school graduates from the *Ciudad de Dios* of Norcasia will have the possibility to receive a scholarship in order to continue with higher education in the nearest city. The scholarships have been granted to three students, two of which will be going to Bogotá (Andrés will start engineering, while Liseth will study social work), and the third one, Juan Camilo, will be staying in Norcasia and will be enrolled in the University of Agronomy in La Dorada, through distance learning.

Regardless the ambitious plans brought about the *Fundación Ciudad de Dios*, its limited span of activities implemented and the obstacles encountered, make it difficult to value the positive impacts that have generated for the community of Norcasia. This demonstrates that, even when in good faith, projects aimed at bringing development and lift people out of their situation of 'poverty' and 'backwardness' (ibid.), do not manage to meet the real needs of those who are the objects of such 'development'. Too often, non-governmental organizations carrying out development projects are – because of the limited potential or due to obstacles in channeling resources effectively – too marginalized in their interventions. Therefore, what they do is to shape the marginalized communities where they intervene by 'disciplining them through a series of participatory exercises, trainings, and interactions in order to imbue them with entrepreneurial attitude and values' (Ferguson in Johnson: 2009).

Nevertheless, this is by no means intended to devalue the job that the *Fundación* and the Italian volunteers

have succeeded in doing at a more social and relational level, creating a solid network of trust among those students, with their families and with other community members. The volunteers are also engaged in the promotion of other recreational activities opened to the community – which I personally have helped organizing during my stay in Colombia - such as the Italian language course and the summer camp for kids, and which have made the *Granja Monte Carmelo* a meeting point and have contributed to build trust around an association which is entirely at the service of the community.

5.1.6 Economic activities

The territory of Norcasia is characterized by different land use activities, livestock farming and agriculture in the first place. Norcasia is known for its vast cultivation of avocados, both *criollos* and *injertos* – local or grafted species. Other crops that follow are cocoa, *plátano* (plantains) and *caucho* (natural rubber), as well as a wide variety of *cultivos de pancoger* (staple food crops), *caña* (sugarcane) and other fruit trees.

Despite being inscribed in the *Eje Cafetero* (Colombian coffee region), together with the entire territory of Caldas, coffee growing in Norcasia stopped decades ago, after a plague, *la roja*, put an end to the existing cultivations of coffee (see Annex 1). After this, coffee growing has been reattempted only at a small scale, but it is unlikely to increase, as the average temperature in Norcasia has always been slightly too high for the extended cultivation of coffee. The consequences that the construction of La Miel I dam had on the microclimate of Norcasia and the neighboring area, is said to have contributed to the disappearance of coffee crops (Luengas Quiroga, 2011). Moreover, the incursion of guerrillas in the region just at the time of the coffee crisis, and the consequent spread of coca crops, can also be taken as a cause of coffee crops halt in Norcasia (Acero, 2016).

The superficial soils, generally well drained, but of low fertility, are prone to erosion. For this reason, those lands are cut out for semi-intensive livestock farming and permanent or semi-permanent crops. The natural vegetation has been thus replaced by different type of pastures, and sown field like maize, yucca, beans, plantain and some fruit trees are disappearing. *Veredas* of Montebello and Moscovita were once producing and commercializing yucca, but they abandoned this activity due to the low market prices of this product, and they are now only producing it for internal subsistence.

Industrial activity is almost null, and is generally constituted by artisanal carpentry and auto mechanics. Transformation of agricultural products is done at a small-scale family level, with the production of diaries mostly for the household consumption, chocolate and fruit preserves. The only exception in the municipality is, as we have seen, the *Lacteos La Fortuna*, detaining the control of milk demand, and has at its disposal the *lechera*, which every morning collects milk till the furthest *veredas*, and it is also one of the few means of transport connecting Norcasia with its *veredas*.

As we can see from the table below, The main economical activities developed in the region are livestock, agriculture and forestry, which make up the 98.87% of the municipality's incomes (UMATA, 2007).

Table 1. Distribution of Norcasia's economic activities per hectares

CATEGORÍAS	HECTÁREAS	%	PRODUCTO(S)
Agrícola	3953	18	Aguacate, cacao, Plátano y cultivos de pancoger.
Pecuario	30	0,14	Porcinos, Avicultura y Caprinos.
Forestal	10.900	51,6	Bosques y Rastrojos.
Improductivo	0	0	
Ganadería	6.184	29,27	Bovinos de cría, leche y engorde.
Piscicultura	10	0,047	Tilapia, Mojarra roja y cachama.
Minería	0	0	
Industria	0	0	
Comercio	0	0	
Servicios	0	0	
Otros	47	0,22	
TOTAL	21.124	100	

Source: *Unidad de Asistencia Técnica Agropecuaria* (UMATA), 2007

Mining activities – due to the high illegality - are not included in the economic activities, and thus we cannot infer to what extent they contribute towards the economy of Norcasia. However, a more recent report on the employment in the municipality says that 9.85% of the population is involved in mining (Secretaría de Planeación y Desarrollo Sostenible, 2016). Mining still represents an important subsistence activity for many households, and it therefore will be given attention in the next chapters.

Likewise, the high level of informality in the commercial and service sector disguises the growth and the increasing importance that it has gained in the municipality, reflecting the changes and diversification that the rurality has undergone in these recent years. The municipality also employs a relevant number of young people in its administrative and secretary positions, as well as the cultural center and in the hospital.

According to the report, 2.16% of the population is involved in the service sector, corresponding to around

150 persons (ibid.). Other than normal commercial activities as shops, restaurants and bars, many are coming up with street selling, homemade products, repair services, moto taxi and other makeshift jobs.

Isagen's hydroelectric plant, as we will see in the next chapter, is another source of employment, yet for a limited number of people. Despite the enormous amount of workforce needed for the construction that took several years, it created a few hundreds of stable jobs (SLE, 2014). On the other hand, it is said that while Norcasia and its inhabitants were informed of the working opportunities that the hydroelectric plant would have opened, only a few undertook a professional path in view of it. Sena also offered *técnicos* in engineering and tourism, *'pero nadie se preparó (profe Cecilia, personal communication, July 2016)*. Despite the creation of jobs, the development of La Miel I plant brought about several socio-environmental conflicts that will be discussed later. It contributed to the displacement of campesinos, as farms situated on the river coast that had been affected from the dam had to be evacuated. In fact, Isagen bought those lands at a quite good price, however, a resettlement of the affected ones has never been on the agenda. For its part Isagen has been engaged in financing and developing community's projects in the territory and therefore is deemed a relevant agent of development in the region, as it will be discussed later on, with contributions from locals.

The touristic sector is a promising one, since the territory of Norcasia has considerable areas identified as environmental heritage and projects of eco-tourism – through the school and SENA courses - are starting to be taken into consideration. Even if Norcasia is not a coffee growing territory, it has been included in the 2011 declaration of *'Paisaje Cultural Cafetero'* as UNESCO World Heritage, and therefore can benefit from the conditions of negotiations and implications that the declaration brings (SLE, 2014). The Amaní reservoir, the rivers Miel, Manso y Moro, countryside resorts and other place of interests have been attracting tourists of the region to Norcasia, being the area safe, as armed confrontations and illegal drug trafficking are long gone in the region.

5.1.7 La Miel I hydroelectric power plant

The present characterization cannot end without dwelling a little more on Norcasia's hydroelectric giant, La Miel I power plant, as it has played an important part in the recent history of the region and still has a wide

influence on the municipality; yet far from being '*la verdadera joya de la corona*'¹⁶ for Norcaseños and their neighbours.

The confluence of the rivers La Miel, Moro, and Santa Barbara stream, and the topography of the site, together with its technical and environmental conditions, opened the possibility for the construction of a gravity dam, and a combined hydroelectric power plant that with an installed capacity of 396MW would have been, at that time, the biggest one in Colombia in term of energy produced. The project had been studied since the 1960s, but the construction, undergone by a Brazilian committee of engineers, started only at the end of 1990s¹⁷. The Hydroelectric La Miel I began commercial operation at the end of 2002, making up, at that time, the 8% of the energy produced in the whole country.

For its innovation and its magnitude, the energy produced by the plant was expected to foster development and bring industrial growth to the central region of the country, traditionally dependent on agriculture.

During the construction of the plant Norcasia attracted huge amounts of people from outside, as thousands of workers came to work on the construction site. The population grew from 6 to 10 thousand from one day to another, and this created indeed a huge growth in goods' trade and services, which was in part good for the town, but at the same time brought problems of security, alcoholism and prostitution (Abad Faciolince, 2014). A new health centre was built, just to be closed down as soon as the construction of the dam was over and the majority of the workers went back to their homes.

At the same time, the quality of life and the prices of the land increased as well. The road to La Dorada was paved, until later being deteriorated by the heavy traffic that crossed the way.

A security area around the dam was established and those lands were all bought from campesinos that once lived there¹⁸. There was no forced displacement of people, however many campesinos lost their homes, crops and animals. Terrestrial communication was interrupted in some points, as bridges or paths were

¹⁶ 'The state crown jewel', as it has been appointed by many Isagen, the company owner of La Miel and other seven hydroelectric plants in Colombia.

¹⁷ The construction of the plant was hastened by the energetic crisis that Colombia suffered in 1992 (*el apagón*), triggered by El Niño, a weather phenomenon that caused drought across the country and consequently lowered reservoir level at many of the hydroelectric power plants.

¹⁸ Those territories were set aside for ecological restoration (reforestation) to support the preservation of biodiversity in the region (Isagen, 2013).

made unavailable for the construction of the dam. Boats are now circulating through the waters, from dawn till dusk, carrying campesinos with their *mulas* loaded with goods to sell in the town; yet there are still a few *fincas* that have been isolated, without a way out to the town at any time of the day (ibid.).

The natural flow of Moro river and Santa Barbara stream has been diverted, and thus the two rivers that once flowed through the territory of Norcasia, and the respective natural sites that were once beautiful touristic spot are now lost (Lenguas Quiroga, 2011). The major ecological damage caused by the dam was the total suspension, on a stretch of several kilometers, of the channel forming the river La Miel, today referred to as 'lecho seco'- dry riverbed. Fishing had been affected too and due to the changing levels of the river flow fishes often get trapped, and thus, have to be put back in the river. People work at 'rescate' during the night, as that is the time when the river flow goes down. As doña Isabel told me once:

[...] yo trabajaba al rescate. Los que van en el rio la miel a coger los pescados que se quedan cuando baja el rio y echarlos otra vez al rio. Porque por la noche descarga. Yo trabaje casi 4 años en eso. Pero lo maluco es que no teníamos un sueldo fijo. Porque era por turnos. A veces uno iba hasta las 7 de la noche y el día después le tocaba bajar al rio a las 4 o 5 de la mañana. Y nos tocaba bajar muy lejos, cruzar el rio. Y caminar mucho. Y nos tocaba días por medio. Estuvimos así cinco años trabajando de noche. Y los sábados y los domingos a las 2 después de la discoteca ponerme el uniforme para irme a trabajar hasta las 8 de la mañana [...] Y otra vez cuando el embalse se botó por encima, hace como 7 años¹⁹. Yo trabajé en la parte abajo del muro sacando pescado podrido de ahí. Y los enterrábamos, si porque era contaminación. Entonces nos tocaba doble turno (doña Isabel, personal communication, August 2016).

Following the construction of the dam, the tropical microclimate of Norcasia, once dry and clearly divided into a summer and a winter season, has changed visibly. The air is much more humid, and fog and lower temperatures are some of the climatic changes that the area witnessed, and which directly or indirectly affected agricultural cycles especially those of annual or semi-annual crops (Lenguas Quiroga, 2011). This is said to have also influenced the spread of tropical mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever and chikungunya: *'la aparición de enfermedades como el dengue causado por la perdida en los niveles del cauce que dejás aguas estancadas y eleva su temperatura es el hábitat de los sancudos y otros insectos que han afectado la salud de las comunidades'* (ibid.).

¹⁹ *'Cuando la represa, desbordada su capacidad, abrió sus compuertas y cultivos alternativos, cultivos de pancoger y maíz, aparte de cerca de 40 mil papayos se perdieron'* (Doña Isabel, personal communication, August 2016)

A recent development of the plant saw an additional two diversions – one from Guarinó river and the other one from Manso river – flowing into La Miel through tunnels, that have been made in order to increase the average energy generation, a 7% increase on the plant's annual production (Isagen, 2013). Guarinó diversion has been in operation since 2010 and is located along the border with Tolima (municipality of Victoria)²⁰; while Manso diversion, located on the outskirts of Samaná and Norcasia, became operative in 2013.

Unfortunately, as in the case of Guarinó diversion, Manso river diversion was also problematic. After the construction of the tunnel in 2013, infiltrations caused some smaller streams and water sources (at least 22, in numbers) that previously irrigated agricultural fields, to disappear from the lands along the tunnel's path and nearby. As a compensation measure Isagen had to buy those lots that were most affected by the diversion, and negotiate a compensation to other affected families of Norcasia and Berlin. However, it is certain that the ecological damage transcends the families whose farms were bought, since their agricultural and livestock products were feeding the regional economy (Correa, 2012).

Environmentalists as Teresita Lasso - researcher at Universidad Nacional in Manizales - agree that those described above are not solely environmental and social consequences of bad calculations, but rather, of the entire hydroelectric model itself: *'Esto no solo es un asunto de cálculo y de estudios. El verdadero problema es el modelo de generación hidroeléctrica. La ley, el procedimiento administrativo y la técnica se equivocan'* (Lasso in: Cuervo, 2012)

Despite the serious environmental and social consequences that the construction of the dam and the Manso river diversion had on the territory and on part of the population of Norcasia, Isagen has showed social

²⁰ The Guarinó diversion project, which was part of the initial project of the dam, found opposition on many fronts, and despite irrefutable technical and environmental evidences offered, showing the inappropriateness of the project, the Ministry of the Environment decided to grant the environmental permit to Isagen. The diversion caused the flow of Guarinó river to decreased drastically, the flora and the fauna were affected, as well as the quality of the water that supplies La Dorada's rural and municipal aqueducts. Minor water streams and wetlands disappeared, as well as the livelihoods of families and farmers whose lives depended on those. However, Isagen has always tried to discredit opponents to this project to be misinformed and go against progress and development (CENSAT, 2014). CENSAT (Asociación Centro Nacional Salud, Ambiente y Trabajo) argues that, in fact, the communities are the ones most affected, in the name of public or private profit: *'Las condiciones y afectaciones que dieron origen al conflicto socio ambiental han puesto siempre en desventaja a las comunidades que se ven afectadas, perdiendo sus medios de subsistencia y sus lazos comunitarios, mientras se ha beneficiado la apropiación de los bienes hídricos para la ganancia económica del sector público-privado'* (ibid.).

responsibility and commitment for compensation to those who were affected.

And yet, there is no real census of the damages to compensate. As in other parts of the countries, the weakest communities, especially afro Colombians and indigenous, have been forgotten and the laws protecting those affected by hydroelectric plants have been ignored (Reyes, 2006).

The biggest privatization in a decade

Since 1995, year of its creation, Isagen, owner of seven power generator plants in the country, has been annually transferring 200,000 million COP to the nation; has had influence in four departments and owns more than 23,000 hectares of natural forests and water reservoirs. Moreover, it has been advancing on all the fronts, from energy to environment and from labor to social responsibility.

However, following the privatization of the company at the beginning of this year, the future of the third most powerful energy generator of Colombia is dubious. Brookfield Asset Manager, the new major shareholder of Isagen, said to be committed in maintaining in its body the 700 employees, and to continue with social and environmental complementary programs directed to the communities in the area of influence (Rojas Trujillo, 2016).

President Santos described the sale of Isagen as a '*buen negocio*' – a good deal –, as the 6,49 billion made out of the sale would serve for the development of road infrastructure, in particular for the construction of 4G (fourth generation) highways, as a key to improve economic competitiveness and to reach up to the level of other Latin American countries. The highly unpopular decision took by Santos²¹, who despite the ongoing negotiations with the Farc at that time was certainly not a very popular president, could be only explained with the fact that, according to Mackenna (2015), he genuinely believes in privatization and, another possible explanation is that Santos wants to keep Colombian debt down as part of the Colombian bid for membership in the OECD.

This justification however does not convince the majority of Colombians, who say Isagen was undemocratically sold on the cheap to get much-needed cash that could have been raised without the sale of a

²¹ The privatization was opposed by the 80% of the Senate too, and the legality of the auction process, with BAM as the only bidder, was also questioned (Dube and Ramirez, 2016).

company considered to be *'la verdadera joya de la corona'*: the state crown jewel (Dube and Ramirez, 2016). Despite the promises that BAM has made on all fronts, the majority of Colombian are very sceptical and were strongly opposing the sale of the company. Many opponents to the sale regarded it as one of the biggest privatization in a decade, which put into question the electrical sovereignty of Colombia, 'and leave Colombians exposed to the voracity of multinationals', which will have a greater control over Colombia's electricity generation and tariffs (Dube, 2013).

For their parts the majority of Norcaseños were against the sale of Isagen, as it would have meant a foreign giant presence in their own territory. However, the feeling of dissent against the sale of Isagen, was most likely due to the unpopularity of president Santos – and his negotiations with the Farc - and to the fear that Isagen's financial support to the community would have been taken away:

[...] Imagínese que supuestamente nos privaron [van a privar] de las ayudas que daba Isagen para todos los sectores. La vendieron para lo del postconflicto, para la guerrilla. Es para pagarle el sueldo a los guerrilleros. Suena como ridículo. Esa gente todo lo que hizo... ¡Y ahora hay que pagarles! (Don Ernesto, personal communication, August 2016)

The commodification of water resources

Caldas, especially the eastern part of Magdalena Medio, has a huge environmental potential, as it is the region with the highest concentration of biodiversity and water sources. And it's exactly this richness that makes it vulnerable to national and international interests, as it was for the construction of the hydroelectric plant that implied the diversions of important sources of water for the region.

As Don Carlos, an agricultural engineer from La Dorada, explains it shortly:

En este momento se empezó a no permitir las extracciones de oro [por la contaminación]. Pero siempre prima hay [viene] interés económico. En el páramo están prohibiendo el cultivo de papas, pero no la minería, por ejemplo. Siempre todo sigue el suceso económico. Además, no hay reglas estrictas para las empresas extranjeras que vienen a Colombia (don Carlos, personal communication, August 2016).

Similarly as to what has been done with minerals, plants, and animals, water have been industrialized and offered for sale as a commodity for the economic development of a given region.

Today, the problems regarding water, its exhaustion, contamination or its use as a source of electricity is framed in the *developmentalist* discourse. The diversions of river flows for hydropower production are said to be a very important business, in the light of improving the standard of living of the inhabitants of those

regions. However, for more than a century, on behalf of these ideals Colombia has been exploited with huge mining projects (such as gold mining in Marmato, Caldas), oil wells, coal mines and intensive farming. And yet today, as Noguera de Echeverri (in Lasso, 2008) argues, the exploited regions, rather than having improved, they have impoverished, and its inhabitants too.

As we have seen, if we are to ponder the environmental and social impacts that La Miel I had on the territory of Norcasia and its inhabitants, especially after the contested Guarinó and Manso rivers diversions, it is difficult to say that the plant itself brought tangible benefits to the region as a whole. Prior to its implementation, the project was said to be the salvation of the region and too high expectations were given to the inhabitants of the region toward the project. At a later time, as the plant was operating and various environmental and social conflicts broke out, and in an effort to lower back the expectations of the communities in the area of influence of the dam, various projects were implemented in Norcasia, Berlin and Isaza, some of which included in the Environmental Management Plan (Observatorio de Conflictos Ambientales, 2010).

The region has been developing for years following what Lasso (2011) calls '*estructuralismo hidráulico*', a proposal of economic development and progress that is based on the paradigm '*naturaleza-objeto*' which equals nature to an object, a commodity. The myth of the 'hydraulic structuralism' sees regional economic growth in major infrastructures and projects, which are politically legitimated for its high visibility and business mobility. The model, continues Lasso, causes distortions in the region where it is installed, since the process of regional development and watershed management end up enhancing investments in those types of infrastructures, which comes to be seen as a unifying element of an endogenous development (ibid.). On the contrary, those projects are in fact foreign and imposed, and thus, exogenous (ibid.). They create imbalance, as they exclude a great part of the territory and its inhabitants from their dynamics, since the share of the workforce that can be employed in such plants is, in fact, minimal. The flooded lands lose their agricultural productivity. In a nutshell:

Comprender los límites éticos y paradigmáticos del “estructuralismo hidráulico”, muestra la precariedad del concepto de desarrollo económico promovido por los grandes intereses del capital, que sacrifica la vida de las comunidades, ignorándolas y marginándolas, impidiendo la realización

efectiva de sus derechos sociales, económicos, ecológicos, culturales y políticos (Observatorio de Conflictos Ambientales, 2010).

Isagen's *asistencialismo*

As a power generation company, Isagen has been transferring to each municipality included in the area of influence an amount of *regalías* – legal transfers – to be invested in works of the municipality's development plan (Isagen, 2013). However, when the plant started to be operative, the first administrations of the newly born municipality were not able to take advantage of this benefit, as corruption, mismanagement and suspected allegations with illegal groups led to confrontations and excessive demands to Isagen. As soon as Marisol Manrique was elected mayor of Norcasia in 2011, a new relationship of mutual coexistence and convenience with Isagen was established.

Since then Isagen has seen to represent, at least in terms of resources transferred, a good ally to Norcasia, concerning sanitation of water streams in the rural area and water conduits in the town, as well as the financing of several projects for social improvements (Abad Faciolince, 2014)

During my time in Norcasia I had the chance to participate in several workshops organized by Comunidad Unida, a Manizales based no-profit association founded in 2007, dedicated to promote sustainable development by supporting planning processes and promoting entrepreneurship and a solidarity-based economy. I first met the staff of Comunidad Unida while they were conducting a workshop on leadership (*'Líderes en pro del desarrollo'*) in the settlement of Moscovita, as part of the participatory development plan they had been outlining together with the community's members, financed by Isagen. The same was being done in Montebello and La Quiebra, the three settlements on the outskirts of Norcasia that have been majorly affected by the construction of the dam.

I asked some participant of the workshop what they thought about the program being developed, and how those *capacitaciones* were only given to those three *veredas*:

Es obligación de Isagen porque les quitaron la tierra a muchos. Y porque cambiaron el clima. El clima lo cambiaron con esa represa, y afectaron mucho los cultivos nativos que se tenían en esa área. De toda esta área. Lo que pasa es que Isagen para ser una multinacional le toca dar unas regalías...le toca...entonces que hace Isagen, no se las da todas a una alcaldía o a una gobernación porque se pueden quedar con ellas, entonces Isagen apoya proyecto en las veredas, de la gente de la zona de

influencia de ellos, solamente...Isagen siempre ha aportado una parte, la alcaldía otra parte y la comunidad también, en trabajo (doña Sandra, personal communication, August 2016).

However, as a part of those *regalías* are transferred directly to the municipality, many Norcaseños complain of not seeing those funds 'at work' because of mismanagement and corruption.

As Doña Isabel states, those *regalías* have been feeding already corrupt politicians, that are still influencing the political scene of Norcasia:

El problema más horrible es que los alcaldes están manipulados por un señor que fue mucho tiempo alcalde acá. El sacó mucha plata de allí porque Isagen da mucha regalía, era para que el pueblo estuviera más...avanzado. Porque esas regalías llegan a la alcaldía para hacer inversiones...pasa uno los proyectos y los archivan o que no hay presupuestos... (doña Isabel, personal communication, August 2016).

The presence and the support that Isagen gives to Norcasia and its inhabitants is therefore commonly welcomed, supporting peace and development programs, building water conduits and donating school kits to students. The company's average investments in social and environmental management was of 21 million COP, representing the 18% of the plant's total cost (Isagen, 2013). And still some *veredas* in the area of influence of one of the biggest power plants of the country do not have neither electricity, nor safe access to water nor decent road infrastructure. '*Podría hacer más sin duda*' argues Faciolincie (2014), '*siempre y cuando no se perciba la Central como una vaca lechera a la que simplemente se le ordeñan recursos, en una especie de asistencialismo malsano*'.

5.2 Into a deeper analysis of Norcasia's rurality

5.2.1 More on interviews' methodology

A first characterization of the municipality of Norcasia shows how many aspects have to be taken into account in order to carry out a first analysis of the rural context being studied. This first outline - yet very broad - was intended to point out the most relevant characteristics of the territory, that can be common to other parts of Colombia. With this first characterization of the municipality we already understand the complexity of the context and how the reality of Norcasia is far from being simple, despite the relative economic prosperity of the region in which is inscribed – the coffee belt region –, its richness in natural resources and natural - eco-touristic - sites, the favorable climate, its centrality and the closeness to bigger

urban centers, the marginality of the civil conflict and drug trafficking and the presence of the hydroelectric plant as a 'locomotive' of development in the region – in Santos' words. What is then behind this seemingly positive characterization? This was exactly what pushed me further into the investigation, when I first visited Norcasia during summer 2015. The causes of this alleged rural stagnation were not clear to me and the interest I had developed in the people and the present and future of Norcasia was what brought me to build up this research in the first place.

As mentioned, both the focus and the main source of information of this research are the community's members, how they perceive their present situation and how they construct their future on the basis of livelihood strategies. The interviews I conducted were therefore mostly narratives, or only semi-structured. Depending on the interlocutor, the interviews took the shape of a 'story telling' or 'life histories', in order to make him/her more comfortable in telling their stories, but also for the sake of an unbiased and not-intrusive production of knowledge.

In order to make interviews more similar to a convivial communication than to formal interviews, they were often open with the interlocutor talking about his/her history and family. The dialogues therefore covered various topics and highlighted matters relevant to the subject in discussing the rural context, their culture and their present and future means of livelihood. Questions about the concept of 'development' itself were never – except in some cases - directly asked, to avoid basing the interview on a preconceived idea of 'development' as the need for advancement and progress in comparison to other realities – i.e. other regions and urban areas. Rather, the conversations were guided – only when necessary - by inquiries on wellbeing, livelihood strategies, agricultural subsistence and the campesino community, the agrarian crisis, migration to cities, education, cultural and social behavior to cite the most recurring ones.

From now onward, we will therefore be analyzing various themes that are all related to and help in the construction of a well-rounded analysis of Norcasia's rurality/reality, in the attempt to give an answer to the matters that are the focal points of this research. A voice is given to Norcaseños and Norcaseñas, from the youth to the elderly, from campesinos to professors and municipal employees.

5.2.2 The armed conflict

Dialogues and encounters with elderly people often resulted in personal narrations of past events and anecdotes, and were very interesting on an historical level, underlining how much the countryside had changed and what the forces that drove these changes were. The difficult past that Colombians have been through, and the ways in which it has shaped the present reality, was one of the most current variables in the dialogues, and should be thus used as a basis from which to look at reality how we see it now.

Colombia has been fighting an internal war between the leftist guerrilla groups, namely the FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces), the ELN (National Liberation Army) and right-wing paramilitary groups, since their formation in late 1950s and beginning of 1960s, after a long period of civil war known as *La Violencia*²².

Some of the eldest persons that I have interviewed remember and suffered the period of violence that shook Colombia mainly in the countryside, back in the 1950s, and which set forth the still current armed civil conflict:

A mí la violencia fue la que [...] porque perdí todo el trabajo hecho. Por aquí todo, dese el 1948 hasta [...] yo perdí toda mi juventud. Vendí la finca de 180 hectáreas y entonces me tocó perderla, dejar la cafetera tan hermosa, potreros, plátano, yuca...para venirme por acá con ellos a sufrir. Teníamos 5 niños eso fue en el '62. Teníamos 8 años de casados. Pero toda mi juventud se me perdió. Me vine por acá y empecé a jornalear a 5 pesos para mantener a mi familia... (don Armando, personal communication, August 2016).

Doña Elvira, an almost 90 years old lady also suffered that rage of political violence that killed one of her sons. She came to Norcasia with her family in 1964, feeling the violence. And compared, the violence that Caldas witnessed during the first decade of 2000 was nothing, she said:

La política está siempre en el medio de todos los conflictos. Ay no que miedo, ay no....A mí no me toco si no esto. Estaba yo recién casada, esperando a la primera niña. Ay me daba pesar de mi hermana que, llegando por la tarde, no sabía si estaban vivos, [marido y cuñado] los mataran a todos. Por la noche todos a dormir por allá al monte. Virgen Santísima. Yo no sé. No por aquí [en Norcasia] no, no hubo mucha violencia. Lo máximo fue antes. Muchos liberales se voltearon conservadores porque si no lo mataban. Entonces presentaban estos papeles diciendo que ya eran conservadores. Eso lo hacían por allá estos mandones. Los liberales todos se voltearon conservadores. Si hubo una violencia muy horrible (doña Elvira, personal communication, August 2016)

²² *La Violencia* (from Spanish: the Violence) was the ten-year (1948–58) period of low-grade civil war in Colombia, between the Colombian Conservative Party and the Colombian Liberal Party whose respective supporters fought most battles in the rural countryside, that brought more than 200,000 deaths.

After the creation of the 'National Front', as an agreement between the Conservative and Liberal parties, any political activity outside those two was often banned and attacks on Communist enclaves led to the transformation of peasant communities into mobile guerrilla groups. The activities of those guerrilla groups triggered in turn the formation of right-wing paramilitary groups.

Since their inception, guerrillas have become increasingly involved in criminal activity against the government, including kidnapping, extortion, bombings, murder and hijacking. The FARC later became involved in the illicit drug trafficking— which became their lifeblood, from which they earned billions of dollars a year - and have given a new dimension to the problem of drug-trafficking, playing a supporting role to cocaine producers and smugglers.

Even though the formation of paramilitary groups started as local self-defense against leftist insurgents, they always sought to protect their own interests or protect elite landowners, ranchers and also political leaders' interests. Since their inception right-wing paramilitaries were said to be involved in colluding with Colombian security forces, military commanders and top politicians to eradicate left-wing militias (Hanson, 2008). They were financed in large part by drug lords, or through extorted payments from multinational corporations, and were responsible for the most atrocious human rights violations, forcing the displacement of entire indigenous or black communities from their lands, and massacring defenseless civilians and kidnapping political figures (The Telegraph, 2013).

In 1997 an umbrella organization was formed to consolidate local paramilitary group, with the name of AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*).²³

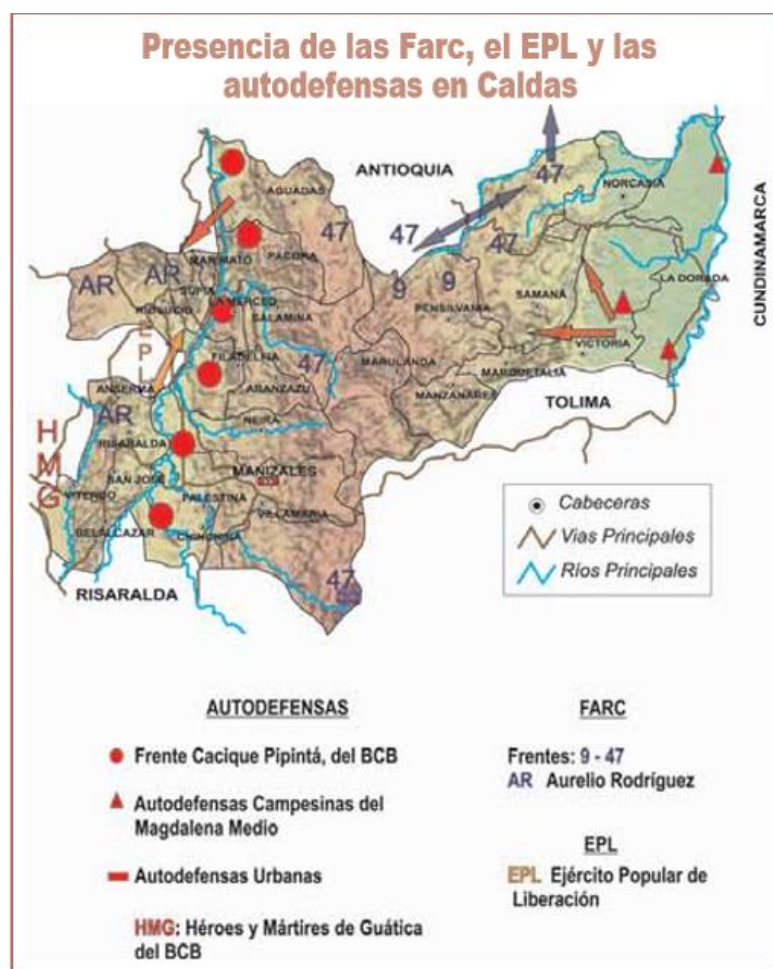
Because of the country's three Andean mountain ranges – which act as natural barriers to integration – and the division of society by class interests, Colombia has historically suffered from a weak state with large areas of territory in which the government is unable to exercise effective control, leaving guerrilla groups to act unrestrained (Paterson, 2014). During more than 50-years of protracted armed conflict, the war has

²³ Infiltrations of paramilitaries at the highest levels of Colombian politics and security forces were only to be discovered at the time of the controversial process of demobilization of the AUC in 2007-2008, when the 'parapolitics scandal' broke out and 50 politicians were implicated (Hanson, 2008).

killed around 250,000 lives – most of them civilians – 50,000 of which are still *desaparecidos*, and displaced nearly seven million people from conflictive zones. At the end of 2014, Colombia had the largest internally displaced population in the world, only after Syria (UNHCR, 2015). The 6,9 million of IDPs are the real victims of the hidden crisis that Colombia has suffered throughout all these years (ibid.).

The eastern part of Caldas (Magdalena Caldense) and the territory and population of Norcasia itself, have not been immune from the violence that the Colombian civil conflict brought in major part to rural areas (see below).

Fig. 6 Farc, EPL and AUC presence in Caldas



Source: IGAC. Procesado y georreferenciado por el Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de DH y DIH Vicepresidencia de la República (Observatorio del programa presidencial de derechos humanos)

The first incursion by the FARC during the 80s, came with a ransack of the bank and a fire that destroyed the archives and part of the town council. Concurrent to the coffee crisis caused by the rupture of the international coffee agreement, the *Frente 9* and 47 of Farc entered Samaná and parts of Victoria and Norcasia (at that time township of Samaná). Guerrillas started to associate with campesinos and coffee growers and introduced the cultivation of coca. For its high profitability and faced with the coffee crisis many coffee growers turned to coca crops.

Later on, during the first decade of 2000, the expansion of coca crops reinforced the power of the Farc, and at the same time attracted paramilitary forces of the Magdalena Medio. The incursion of paramilitaries resulted in open confrontation with the guerrillas, bringing violence, forced displacement, kidnapping and killings, as well as attacks and destruction of infrastructures. From Berlín up to Sonsón, in the heights of the cordillera range, guerrillas kidnapped, recruited and killed, while paramilitaries displaced, killed and seized the region from Berlín, through Norcasia, down to the Magdalena river. Berlín, neighbouring Norcasia, has long been the border between the two armed groups (Abad Faciolince, 2014).

‘Norcasia era una tierra cocalera, hasta el 2005-2006. Se veían paracos²⁴ armado en el pueblo’ tells Guillermo (personal communication, July 2016). Coca crops spread all over the territory of Norcasia, as the majority of *campesinos* gave up with other cultivations and started to grow coca, enriching themselves and fuelling the already dominant drug trade. By then, paramilitaries had made incursions in almost 80% of the territory of Caldas as its two powerful fronts of the AUC (*Autodefensas Armadas de Colombia*) and used to be home to several influential paramilitary leaders, like Ernesto Baez of the Cacique Pipintá front and Ramón Izasa Arango²⁵ of the Magdalena Medio front (*Autodefensas Campesinas del Magdalena Medio*).

Norcaseños remember the son of Ramón Izasa very well, as he entered from la Danta (Antioquia), opening a route towards Guadalito (township of Argelia, Antioquia), just on the border with Norcasia, forcing hundreds of campesinos, who were displaced to San Diego or Medellín, away from their lands. The route was

²⁴ The word *paraco* is presumably a compound of *paramilitar* and *politico*, implicitly referring to paramilitary infiltrations in politics under Uribe’s presidency – Uribe himself is often labelled as *‘paraco’*. The term, however, is generally used as a short form for paramilitaries – *los paracos* or *los paras*.

²⁵ After whom was named a town between Norcasia and La Dorada, Izasa or km 40 (Correa, 2011).

constructed as a way to smuggle drug and weapons towards the region of Caldas.

The decade of paramilitary control that underwent Norcasia and its inhabitants was tough, especially when the cultivation of coca crops intensified and the majority of campesinos became involved in it.

‘Por acá...todo eso...mataban gente. Tuve muchos amigos victimas’ told me don Alberto, a 46 years old tirelessly worker, who came to live in this region at the beginning of the 1980s and developed ties with paramilitaries: *‘Yo fui entrenado con los paramilitares. [¿Y uno después puede salir?] En parte sí. Hubo tiempos en que sí. Pero la mayoría no se salen. Porque cada vez les gusta más. Uno no es libre de salir por ejemplo si trabaja más de dos años. Porque ya sabe y ve mucho. Tienen el dicho de quien entre meno sepa, más vive’* (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016).

The state’s presence in the region was almost none and the absence of security forces to contrast illegal actions brought to the expansion of illicit crops and the increasing intensity of the confrontations between guerrillas and paramilitaries, which caused the major number of victims. As the territories of Norcasia were at that time controlled by paramilitaries, while Samaná was controlled by guerrillas, Norcasia was found almost on the border between the two illegal armed groups. *‘Todas las veredas estaban controladas por los paracos. Ellos regalaban cosas, hacían bazares. Iban a la escuela y traían regalos a los niños para encariñárselos [...] dejaban las armas y los ácidos para procesar la coca en mi casa cuando había redadas militares en el pueblo [...] El ejército mató a un primo mío, él era paraco’* tells Juan Camilo, who lives in los Ceibos, the first vereda out of the populated area. Campesinos were easy preys of one or the other illegal group, many young people joined paramilitaries because they were forced to. Juan Camilo continues: *‘También un hermano mío se fue con ellos. Me acuerdo una noche mis papas discutir con él, y mi mamá llorando...pero se fue con ellos, 5 años, y siempre llegaba la plata entonces...’* (Juan Camilo, personal communication, July 2016).

Even though guerrilla groups were first founded by campesinos and in defence of them, and paramilitaries were for the defence of landowners, soon the thirst for power and territory replaced their ideals:

Los paracos en algunas partes son queridos de la población. Hay gente que les odia porque les han matado familia y amigos. Y yo tengo amigos que han matado a otros amigos míos, por matarlos. Pero siempre acá en Norcasia han sido más paramilitares. Cuando llegaba la guerrilla venían a robar

el banco y robaron por ahí tres veces. La guerrilla no mataba gente. Los paras si mataron mucha gente. Eran más violentos. Lo que pasa es que si mucha gente que mataron es porque estaban con ambos. O se pusieron de ladrones aprovechando que tenían las provisiones y las armas. Entonces los mataban por eso. Es que eso es una cosa que pues, tiene que haber orden (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016).

As president Uribe was elected, security forces and the military finally started to take part more decidedly in the confrontations with the illegal groups, resulting in a spike of violence. As a strategy to stop the advance and recovery of the national territory by the security forces, paramilitaries and guerrillas started using antipersonnel landmines, as to protect coca crops under their control (Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y DIH, 2006).

Forced internal displacement and other victims of the conflict

When, in 2002, guerrillas penetrated into the neighbouring San Diego - township of Samaná - under paramilitary control, '*...empezaron a guerrear el territorio entre paracos y guerrilla para la coca*' and this resulted in two massive forced displacements of campesinos (*profe Cecilia*, personal communication, August 2016).

Doña Elvira, who at that time was living on a street entering the countryside of Norcasia, from which those masses of *campesinos* came running, remembers:

Yo me acuerdo en un diciembre desplazaron tantísima gente de San Diego. De las fincas subían por aquí a pie. Ay, era un invierno, empantanados, muertos del hambre y de la sed. Y los vi llegar con ganados con perros con niños. Ay Virgen Santísima, eso fue horrible. Era como hace 15 años. Es que en San Diego había mucha guerrilla...por allá por las fincas. Ya todo está tranquilo. Estuvieron mucho tiempo por acá y después les avisaron que ya podían volver a entrar a las fincas. Pero habían perdido todo. Todos sus animalitos. Todos a volver a comenzar. Pero se aburrían tanto a estar acá, sin propiedad. A unos les daban posadas, a otros en arriendo, otros conseguían casita. De más que sufrían mucho (doña Elvira, personal communication, August 2016).

Norcasia has not experienced forced displacement of its inhabitants, while it has been classified as a 'receptor' of victims from other neighboring regions. Norcasia counts an approximate number of 700 victims of internal displacement, the great majority coming from Florencia, Berlin and San Diego, townships of Samaná, relocated mostly in the town center (Secretaría de Planeación y Desarrollo Sostenible de Norcasia, 2016).

At present, in the municipality of Norcasia there are a total number of 2406 persons who are registered as victims of the conflict, corresponding to 702 families (ibid.).²⁶

As doña María Isabel explains, in the *vereda* where she has lived for long time now – in the middle between San Diego and Norcasia – many had to flee in order not to fall prey to guerrillas or paramilitaries:

Antes de las fincas todo el mundo salía porque les tocaba...estaban en su finca y le decían 'váyase'...tenían que irse sino no amanecían, tenían que volarse por la noche...y se fueron para el pueblo para coger el carro y salirse para la Dorada, Bogotá o Medellín...y después ya cuando se calmó el conflicto la mayoría si regresó, o venía un familiar y vendía la tierra...el problema era [más] como entre ellos mismos [paramilitares y guerrillas] aquí se metían, se escondían...al estar aquí a uno también le iba a ir mal porque ni modo...uno sabía que tenía que volarse...por ejemplo los que tenían finca por allá para donde uno camina, guerrillas o paracos entraban por ahí y le decían regálame limonadita o regálame almuercito...y entonces si la guerrilla llegaba y se enteraba que los paracos habían estado allí...entonces tenía uno problemas...y si no les hacían almuerzo...peor...y entonces uno para evitar el problema más bien se iba...eso no es vida cierto, y le afectó mucho a unos... (doña María Isabel, personal communication, August 2016).

In other *veredas*, such as San José, the community has not witnessed displacement, and its members have not varied much throughout the years:

Si porque por la vereda donde yo vivía [San José] uno veía pasar esa gente...los veían bajar en carro o a pie...Pero no, las veredas desde muchos años son los mismos...en la comunidad hay la misma gente [...] Que desplazados así casi no porque por aquí no hubo un conflicto muy bravo...Pero sí estuvimos tan cerca...lo más pasaba por allá del 30 o en Berlín, donde se manejaban las dos cosas [paramilitares y guerrillas] pero acá no tuvimos el conflicto...nunca ha sido violento (doña Patricia, personal communication July, 2016).

Even if the violence of the armed conflict was not comparable to other parts of Colombia, each *vereda* has its own history. Don Ignacio, member of the JAC (Junta de Acción Comunal) of Quiebra de Roque explains:

Ah si no y en partes en las veredas también [bajó el conflicto] porque usted por ejemplo no se podía pasar así fácilmente [de un lado para otro]...siempre por ahí lo paraban... ¿Y usted dónde va? E investigar...primero para salir por allá tenía que estar como comunicado porque todo estaba controlado de los paracos...así no lo dejaban ir tampoco...como siempre en esa época habían cultivos de coca usted sabe que eso resultaba difícil...y eso es algo que se manejó mucho...la misma gente cultivaba pero no hubo pues mucha violencia como hubo para San Diego que es muy cerquita a Quiebra de Roque...y sí se escuchaba...y uno se acostumbraba a eso [...] pero que miedo...y si el día que baje esta gente pues no queda ninguno...eso era lo que era el conflicto... (don Ignacio, personal communication, August 2016).

²⁶ Victims of the civil conflict can refer to: internally displaced persons, people whose familiars have been killed, disappeared or kidnapped.

Norcaseños had lived for years just on the edge of a bloody conflict between illegal groups, having their territory besieged by paramilitaries, and exposed to the violence that could have broken out from one day to the next. In other parts of the region, *frente 47* leader Elda Mosquera, alias Karina, *la sanguinaria* – the only woman to held such position in the Farc – was said to perpetrate horrendous crimes and was even accused of have beheaded the family members of some policias in Arboleda (Caldas), and to be playing soccer with their heads. Whether this is a myth or not – I have repeatedly heard of this story from different Norcaseños, even if Mosquera, after she demobilized in 2008, denied it – it was indeed sparking fear in the region and had become a symbol of the violence perpetrated by both guerrillas and paramilitaries. *El miedo* - the fear - was something that kept emerging when talking about the past of Norcasia: *‘si por allá por las veredas se metieron muchos...y con qué miedo nos acostábamos...estuvimos para ir, pero no al final no...porque [los paracos] vieron que por aquí no había mucha gente, [solo había] gente muy pobre’* (mamà Sandra, personal communication, August 2016).

The same fear was expressed by Don Francisco, who could not stand the risk of being alone with his two daughters in his *finca*, while outside paramilitaries were ruling; a fear that did not let him denounce his state of *desplazado*:

La verdad es que me tocó vender la finca por eso. Uno por la deuda en el banco y lo otro pues, uno por allá en el campo con dos mujeres hijas, allá mantenían siempre personas que no le convenían...Entonces siempre le da uno miedo y vende y busca en el pueblo. Si uno fuera capaz de pronto a quejarse, si uno estuviera anotado en esta cosa de los desplazados...Es que yo no fui capaz de denunciar eso...no hay que decir nada nada de esa gente. Gracias a Dios no nos pasó nada...Uno le da miedo para la familia, uno se va a trabajar y le da miedo y nervios a dejar dos mujeres...claro las cosas deben decirlas como son... (don Francisco, personal communication, July 2016)

Despite the low-intensity, the conflictive past and the violence that has spread all over has left its deep traces. As we will explore later, parapolítica, corruption and allegation to illegal armed groups are still a fact and do not seem to cease. Even if Norcasia seems to be a quite peaceful environment, the web of paramilitaries and *guerrillas* organizations spread to a point that it is difficult to know where it actually ends. As the words of Doña María Isabel *‘pueblo pequeño, infierno grande’* clearly explain, personal conflicts and rivalries push people to resort to violence. Threats and crimes motivated by money, accusations, abuses or any other conflict are rather frequent.

No y es que ahorita también hay[violencia]...también a mi papa lo mataron como hace 2 o 3 años...allí en la casa y nunca supimos por qué...por la tardecita a la 7 de la noche estaba viendo la televisión allí y se iba pa' la pieza y le dispararon por la ventana...y hasta ahorita no sabemos ni porque ni quien fue...es que él era muy conocido en la vereda...pero no se era metido con ninguno...le colaboraba a la gente, tenía su tierra...Y es que uno...él era presidente de la junta y salía mucho para el pueblo...Y también para el lado donde yo vivo para Antioquia, en San Miguel también por allá sigue así...mejor dicho [si uno] llegaba allá y no era conocido a los tres días aparecía muerto... (don Ignacio, personal Communication, July 2016).

Moreover, during the entire period of illegal groups presence in the Magdalena Caldense, and due to the lack of security, regular inhabitants of Norcasia were unable to go out of the town: *'fue un tiempo muy duro. Yo estudiaba bachiller, uno no podía salir de Norcasia'* tells Julio Andrés, who, as soon as the rage of violence in the region diminished, left for Bogotá to take on the university path, and completed a degree in zootechics (personal communication, 30 August). Along the way to La Dorada, one could easily be prey of what was called *'la pesca milagrosa'*: operations performed frequently by rebel groups at checkpoints along roads where surveillance by army or police was low. Robs and kidnappings for ransom were frequent, and thus one would rather not venture outside of Norcasia.

Negotiations with paramilitaries and the *parapolítica* scandal

The wave of violence and atrocious crimes perpetrated by paramilitary groups in the region lasted until 2006, when the negotiations between the AUC and the government of the then president Álvaro Uribe brought the paramilitaries to lay down arms and give themselves up to the law of *Justicia, Paz y Reparacion a las victimas* (Justice, Peace and Victims' Reparation), by which paramilitaries would receive reduced sentences in exchange for the testimony of the crimes they had committed. The demobilization of Autodefensas Campesinas del Magdalena Medio (ACMM) took place in Puerto Triunfo, Antioquia, at the beginning of 2006, when 990 paramilitaries laid down their arms and submitted to justice (Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y DIH, 2006).

At the end of 2008, more than thirty thousand professed AUC fighters were said to be demobilized²⁷.

However, after the disarm, former AUC members soon reconstituted themselves into smaller and more

²⁷ There is no agreement on the figures of the demobilization, since members of the AUC were supposed to be around 15-16 thousand, while the number of demobilized counted up to 31 thousand. The demobilization process presented in fact many irregularities, as there had been reports of people being paid to falsely present themselves as AUC members.

autonomous terrorist units – such as Aguila Nera or Baccrim - maintaining control over drug trafficking and illegal assets.

Uribe had been implementing the Democratic Security Policy since 2003, as a mean to regain state control over the territories seized by illegal armed groups, eradicate coca crops and fight the illegal drug trafficking. The key point of the new security plan was the establishment of police or military presence in all parts of the country where they had previously been expelled by rebels. Kidnappings, killings and terrorist attacks seemed to have reduced in numbers and Farc guerrillas had also lost ground, but were not yet open to dialogue with the government (Wells, 2004). A dialogue that would have started in 2012 with the actual president Santos, and would have ended with the historic peace deal between the government and the Farc, signed this last September, yet its implementation pending, after it failed to win Colombians approval through a referendum²⁸.

During its two-terms presidency (2002-2010), Uribe oversaw a massive military assault on guerrillas, that decreased the number of rebels almost by half and forced them into less central and more isolated regions (Volckhausen, 2013). However, Uribe's tough policy has been widely criticized as there have been numerous allegations of human rights violations, while forced displacement and forced disappearances continued to be a major risk for civilians (Wells, 2014).

Against this backdrop, the wide popularity that Uribe gained in its first term was again put into question with alleged infiltrations of paramilitary in regional politics (the 'parapolitics' scandal), as allegation of paramilitary ties with the military and high-ranking public officials broke out.

In 2008 Colombians were to be shaken by the scandal of *Falsos Positivos* (False positives): the government and army were accused of colluding in the murder of up to 1,177 civilians who were then presented as guerrillas killed in combat, in an effort to inflate body counts and receive promotions or other benefits

²⁸ In August 2012, Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos embarked on a historical peace process with the FARC aimed at ending the prolonged internal armed conflict that has plagued Colombia for more than 50-years. The talks were initiated as part of Colombia's efforts to continue moving the nation forward on the path for lasting peace and prosperity, and at a time when the FARC and other rebel groups were at their weakest point. However, Santos' actions have been criticized to be giving too much space to the FARC.

(Verdad Abierta, 2013).

Thus, given the extended paramilitary influence on the territory, those prosecuted as parts of the regional 'parapolitics' represent only the tip of the iceberg of the political influence exerted by the AUC. For this reason, the investigations for allegation to the AUC have always been difficult, as to establish how far the paramilitary group weaved its networks.

As a result, even though the territory and the population of Norcasia had lived in tranquillity since the disestablishment of the AUC, former members or persons affiliated to the paramilitary continue to be a presence:

Acá en Norcasia si hay paramilitares, pero están ahí quietos. Sus trabajos son otros...la mayoría de los paracos vienen acá como turistas. Por ejemplo, tengo amigos paras que viven y trabajan en Cali y vienen acá de paseo. Ellos lo que hacen es escoltas. No cargan armas acá. Ellos se consiguen la plata ellos mismos. Son como unos comerciantes. A mí me parecen bien...Como conozco también unos paramilitares que dejaron las armas y están dedicados al campo y están muy juiciosos...unos poquitos, pero muy juiciosos (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016).

Between 1993 and 2008 the territory of Caldas lived the nightmare of murders, massacres, kidnappings, extortion, assaults and displacements perpetrated by the FARC and the paramilitaries. With the Democratic Security policy carried out by Uribe's government, the illegal groups gradually left the region. This helped the eradication of coca crops and the battle against narcotrafficking, the lifeblood of both guerrillas and paramilitaries. Caldas was, together with La Guajira and Cundinamarca, one of the three regions to register the total eradication of coca across its soil (Giraldo y Mejia, 2016).

However, other types of crimes such as micro trafficking and illegal mining still represent very serious issues. The drug trafficking corridor between northern Valle and Risaralda, poses a major security threat on Caldas and the neighboring regions. There again, the borders Caldas faces, especially in the east, were once the passage through which guerrillas, paramilitaries, coca and all its evils entered (ibid.).

Substitution of coca crops

The destruction of coca crops, financed in large part by the US through the drug eradication program *Plan*

Patriota (as a continuation of Pastrana's *Plan Colombia*²⁹) has also been criticised for destroying other crops cultivated by peasants, as it used aerial spraying (fumigation) of coca-leaves plantations.

In San Diego, a second massive forced displacement was caused by coca crops fumigation. Eduardo, who was living in Norcasia at that time, explained to me:

Cuando después vino la erradicación [de la coca], también pasaban por acá avionetas fumigando con glifosato, y el glifosato la avioneta lo puede echar sobre el cultivo de coca, pero con el viento también daña a los cultivos cercanos, mata el cultivo de plátano y el cultivo de maíz...es un veneno y altera las personas y más que todo las madres gestantes (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

At least for the past 15 years Colombia has used aerial fumigation to spray glyphosate - a Monsanto product - over around 130,000 hectares a year, claiming to have reduced coca cultivation in Colombia to a third of its peak of the late 1990s, and with it, yet only on a minor scale, the output of cocaine produced and smuggled (Reid, 2015).

Despite the fact that fumigation was proven not to be an effective counter to coca expansion - given also the fact that at least a surface of 30 hectares has to be sprayed in order to effectively kill a one-hectare coca crop - it has been used widely just until last year, when the use of glyphosate was banned, as deemed 'probably carcinogenic in humans' by the WHO. This year, president Santos reiterated to not be willing to return to aerial fumigation, against the proposal of some attorneys (Levesque, 2016). However, the peace deal with the Farc, signed this last September, does not include an agreement over fumigation of coca crops, and thus does not exclude the possibility that this technique would be used again in the near future.

On the other hand, manual eradication, which is for instance promoted by the government in Peru - the second largest producer of cocaine in Latin America - is a much more difficult/laborious option, as the coca plants have to be pulled out one by one, and indeed more dangerous, because of landmines disseminated throughout Colombia's territory. Eradication, in fact, rather than destroy the coca crop, pushes it into other, more isolated areas, where state control is weaker because of the ongoing presence of guerrillas.

The problem is with coca eradication policies that have not worked so far, mostly because there has not

²⁹ In 2000, then president Andres Pastrana launched the controversial and unpopular Plan Colombia, with the aid of the US, to put to a halt the flow of cocaine entering the US over the Mexican border and to fight drug trafficking and rebel groups that largely benefited from it. The United States had been a powerful Colombian ally in fighting Colombian illegal drug trafficking for its own purpose of the so called 'War on Drugs'.

been a proper crop substitution program that would have helped former coca growers in shifting back to alternative cultivations:

El gobierno si dio ayuda para arrancar los cultivos de coca y al mismo tiempo asustaron a los campesinos si encontraban un lote de coca le quitaban la finca. Yo invertí 6 años de trabajo en un cultivo de coca. Compre 2 hectáreas y media. Realicé 38 millones de pesos. En 5 meses me daban 210 millones de pesos. Al final me lo erradicaron. Vino la policía y lo arrancó (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016).

Most of the times, as don Alberto explained, what the government was giving in replacement of coca crops, was a mere amount of seeds, usually coffee, worth nothing in comparison to what the profit made out from the cultivation of coca leaves was: *‘pero yo que iba a recibir 3 kilos de semilla de cacao, son 3 kilos que valen 10mil pesos. Eso era lo que daban y me tocaba a mí mismo poner a arrancar todas las matas. No había como y a saber qué hace 15 días me estaba dando 210 millones de pesos...’*(ibid.).

The profit made with the cultivation of coca was often lost from one day to the next, as the security forces were uncovering coca crops and ordering to destroy them. And the coca grower, contracted by either one of the illegal groups reclaiming the harvest of the coca leaves on one side, and chased by military or security forces on the other side, could do nothing but leave its land and run away:

Si eso deja mucha plata. Y nada. Se perdió toda. Ahí se pierde todo. A mí me tocó salir corriendo de ahí porque estaban buscándome para capturarme para meterme a la cárcel, la policía. Y después que uno cae a la cárcel le quitan todo. Hasta que uno quede sin nada no lo sueltan. Así se demore un año o 2 o 3...y como mínimo le dan uno 3 años de cárcel (ibid.).

When asked if he would rather go back to the times when the land was highly rentable thanks to coca cultivation, he answers:

Pues ahora por lo menos estoy tranquilo, pero sin plata. No porque si hubiera seguido con el cultivo lo más seguro es que me había hecho matar. Porque yo soy atrevido y si un tipo me decía por ejemplo cómpreme esa hoja pa’ que la raspe yo se la compraba. Yo pasaba por el pueblo camionadas de coca...compraba una camionada de tomates y llenaba el camión de cajas de tomate y por adentro estaba lleno de hojas de coca. Para pasarlo por el pueblo, por el centro del pueblo. Yo lo pasaba, yo mismo... (ibid.).

On a positive note, the second most important point of the peace deal with the Farc regards land distribution and agrees that the government should focus on a structural crop substitution programs for those farmers who are still involved in the growth of coca leaves, *‘un gran programa nacional de sustitución*

de cultivos y desarrollo alternativo' and should focus law enforcement efforts on producers and traffickers (Levesque, 2016). However, as Eduardo claims:

Cuando hubo la erradicación pues ya todo el mundo dijo que no más, que iban a cambiar, a remplazar cultivos...pero no...aquí que remplacen cultivos es muy difícil. Por aquí que tengan otro cultivo así de rentable como la coca es imposible. La coca era un trabajo riesgoso, pero mucho más rentable, mucho más rentable. Por eso lo que pasa es que...el problema es que no hay otro cultivo que la supere. El café en algún tiempo fue muy bueno, pero no, no hay otro cultivo que la supere (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

To replace coca crops with something as rentable as coca was indeed something utopian, and even the efforts that the government and the regions have made for a restructuration of the countryside have proven to be rather weak. For their parts, campesinos, abandoned by the state for too long, have found in coca harvesting the first rentable activity that could be made out of the exploitation of the land – probably only comparable to coffee³⁰, yet not quite the same -, but were not able to take advantage of it. *'Lo que pasa es que cuando uno tiene coca uno queda mal enseñado. Yo iba y trabajaba 3 días y me iba para el pueblo a tomarme, a gastarme lo que me había ganado'*, admits don Alberto. This was exactly what had happened earlier with the gold-rush, in a territory extremely rich in natural resources as Norcasia and the whole region of Caldas. As we will see later, *la cultura del minero*, was, and still is, something peculiar to the region, and the engagement of campesinos in coca cultivation had only taken this to another level.

5.2.3 (Illegal) mining activity

The gold fever had, in the last decades, been fueling the turf war between the illegal armed groups, who fought over territories to take control of the wealth, in this case, mineral-rich areas. As paramilitaries demobilized and guerrillas lost territory and moved to more peripheral regions, they increasingly lost control over mineral rich territories. In 2010, president Santos, declared the mining sector one of the five *'locomotoras del desarrollo'*. Six years later, the mining sector has indeed grown, however, what have been blooming are megaprojects, and the felling Colombians have is that the government has been protecting big

³⁰ Coffee has indeed been – within the *Eje Cafetero* – the most rentable crop; however, even if the economy is still widely based on coffee, the period of *bonanza* was interrupted by the international coffee crisis and since then its value was never properly restored.

business interests, while it hasn't been wholly committed to the wellbeing of rural and more vulnerable inhabitants, nor has it defended environmental and communities' rights.

At the time being the region of Caldas has 421 mining titles registered, spanning a total area of 97.449 ha, approximately the 13,1% of the departmental territory. In addition to that, there are about 205 pending requests for legalization of other small or big-scale mining sites (Velásquez, 2016). Of those titles, seven companies own the 59% of the titled area, and the ones that control the most extended areas are South Africans³¹, Americans or Canadians (La Patria, 2013). The long resistance that the community of gold-rich Marmato opposed to a Canadian mining company³² unveils Colombia's pro-business mentality that in many cases led to arbitrary concessions to multinational companies at the expense of the communities (Al Jazeera, 2011).

The territory of Norcasia has a great mineral potential, in precious minerals and metals, especially gold. During the 1990s, gold was a source of major incomes for peasants of the whole area, and for many coming from the Caribbean coast to take advantage of the bonanza (Luengas Quiroga, 2011). In Norcasia, 5 mining titles have been registered, mostly regarding extraction of construction materials. Recent municipality data on employment shows that 9.85% of the population of Norcasia is involved in mining, for a total of 700 Norcaseños (Secretaria de Planeación y Desarrollo Sostenible, Octubre 2016).

At present there are no big-scale gold mining exploitations underway, as gold is only extracted through artisanal or illegal small-scale mining, especially in Quiebra de Roque, Santa Maria, San Esteban and El Jagual:

Por allá [Quiebra de Roque] eso es lo que más hace la gente porque en la finca es muy poco lo que hay que hacer porque la mayoría son ganaderas [...] y no es que los trabajadores sean muchos...y listo...la demás gente se queda allí sin nada que hacer...Si usted tiene una tierrita, unos palitos de aguacate tampoco uno se puede sentar y esperar...coge y va a buscar el oro, lo mismo que hace toda la gente (don Ignacio, personal communication, August 2016)

³¹ Anglo Gold Ashanti Mines, a South African mining company that owns the highest number of titles for mining exploitation in Colombia, is also the second major gold extractor worldwide.

³² Marmato, a small town in Upper Western Caldas, sits on one of the biggest untapped gold reserves in the world. Its ca 10.000 inhabitants have been mining for subsistence in the same traditional manner they had for centuries. Until when in 2007 a Canadian mining company arrived and started buying up the mines, and proposed to dig a massive open-pit mine on the site of the town which would require the relocation of all its inhabitants.

Nevertheless, the National Agency of Mining, responsible, among others, for granting exploration and mining concessions, listed the Canadian multinational U3O8 corporation to an entitled area of 9,949 has (in 4 mining titles) in the Magdalena Caldense³³. The multinational, which appear on behalf of Energentia, now called Gaia Energy, owns a 7,303 ha mining title between the towns of Samaná and Norcasia, a concession that contemplates only the exploitation of gold (Corpocaldas and Agencia Nacional de Minería, 2013). At date, however, the multinational is not operating, and most of Norcaseños do not seem to be aware of the concession given to the company. Only through a conversation with don Ernesto, a small-scale gold miner, did I find out:

Ahora esto se lo vendieron a una empresa canadiense así que hacen sacar a todo el mundo. Nos quieren ver afuera para meter maquinaria. Por acá todo esto es un sector minero. Los ríos también. Por allá arriba hicieron un hueco como 800 metros de profundidad, perforaron una placa de oro de 70cm. Así por ese estilo [de Marmato] hay muchos pueblos que están sobre minas (don Ernesto, personal communication, August 2016).

In order to be granted a mining title at a small-scale level, miners have to comply with all the security and environmental norms, and thus in the majority of cases the exploitation is undergone without or awaiting the permission. *‘Nosotros manejamos una minería rudimentaria. O sea, trabajamos con las uñas. Pero hay muchísimas empresas extranjeras que si aprovechan del oro de Colombia. Vienen por acá, compran las montañas y explotan todo’* (don Ernesto, personal communication, August 2016). Even though for many rural inhabitants this represents a small-scale subsistence activity conducted at an individual or family level, the increasing development of the sector and its requests of formalization have led to perceive it increasingly as an illegal or informal practice³⁴.

Don Ernesto’s family live almost exclusively out of gold mining conducted with suction dredges on the riverbed of La Miel river, illegally:

Él [Ernesto] tiene unas dragas pequeñas, en el río. Están para el fondo del río no están ni tumbando barranco ni nada. Pero el gobierno a todos los tildas que todos son ilegales, son criminales...Igual allí no están haciendo daño porque el río con una crecida que haga vuelve y empareja en el fondo. En cambio, todas estas retroexcavadoras y todas estas grandes maquinarias, montañas que se les

³³ U3O8 Corporation is also carrying out exploration in the neighbouring Berlin for the exploitation of a uranium deposit of 2500 ha, as it is the only company to hold a title for the extraction of uranium in Colombia.

³⁴ In Colombia, at least 1500 families are living out of illegal mining activities, distributed across 3600 mining sites that are not granted an extracting title. In the 44% of Colombian municipalities *minería de hecho* is a fact, and it sums up to a 30% of the entire extracting activities of the country (Valera, 2012).

ponga al frente la destruyen, desvían ríos o hacen desaparecer ríos. Ya el gobierno dice que todo es ilegal. Solo con las bateítas es legal (doña Luz María, personal communication, August 2016).

Nowadays all the (gold-extracting) mining activities undergone in the territory of Norcasia are illegal, except the artisanal form practiced along riverbanks, using special washing pans or *bateas*, to trap gold nuggets - the traditional method of *barequeo*. According to the Mining Development Plan of Caldas, (Corpocaldas, 2013) the small-scale mining, or *minería de hecho* is considered illegal, as they usually lack adequate technology, which makes it unsafe for the miners and environmentally unsustainable – since the use of contaminating substances like mercury represents a hazard to the environment. On this regards doña Luz María, don Ernesto's wife, admits: *'Ay sí. Es un trabajo muy peligroso. Muy duro [...] Si hay riesgos. El lleva hartos años en eso. Si entonces es un trabajo muy peligroso y no siempre da, porque todas las veces no. Ojalá dice el, ojalá tuviera otra cosa para dejar eso ya. Y se siente muy enfermo ya, le duelen mucho los huesos'* (doña Luz María, personal communication, August 2016).

Moreover, since illegal groups were once controlling most of the resources of rich regions, mafias are to a certain extent still involved in illegal mining - government tends to generalize and criminalize almost all types of small-scale mining (Valera, 2012).

In the words of senator Felix Valera: *'Se debe diagnosticar el fenómeno, combatiendo las mafias sin acabar la minería en pequeña escala o de hecho, esto reproduciría más la ilegalidad'* (ibid.). Since most of these activities are carried out in rural areas, artisanal mining should be regarded as an opportunity against rural poverty and migration from rural to urban areas and as such, should be given technical assistance and should be duly supported (ibid.).

Local governments and the state said to be interested in a responsible, secure and legal development of the practice. However - as analyst Mario Valencia argues - there is no governmental will to formalize *minería de hecho* but rather to criminalize it, and adds that government persecutes small-scale miners in order to smooth the path for multinational companies (Fundación Universitaria Area Andina, 2012).

'El gobierno si beneficia a las empresas extranjeras y le dan el titulo minero sin ningún problema y pueden venir aquí a Colombia a hacer daños ambientales, a tumbar montañas, a contaminar ríos...eso es un

desequilibrio que hay en Colombia...' argues Julio Andrés, as I ask him how the government is regulating legal and illegal mining. And he adds: *'donde un colombiano que quiera tener un título minero para hacer algún tipo de explotación se demora 5-7 años para haber el permiso, llega una empresa e inmediatamente le dan el permiso y pueden trabajar'* (Julio Andrés, personal communication, July 2016).

The landscape of mining in Norcasia reflects the national trend. A notice dating to this summer, on the web page of Norcasia's Municipality, shows that an illegal gold mine was closed down in El Jagual, as the request for legalization was rejected by the National Agency of Mining (Alcaldía de Norcasia, 2016). Artisanal and small-scale illegal mining still represent an alternative source of income for many. Often out of necessity, many campesinos go in search for gold or work in illegal mines:

Sí es muy precario como trabajo, uno tendría que tener otras alternativas de trabajo, pero es que no hay más... ¿qué más hacer? [...] Por ejemplo, hoy es sábado, al mediodía usted ya comienza ver a la gente que va y le compran por ahí el oro...y entonces uno sabe si sacó para la comida o para la compra de este fin de semana...'que bueno que yo saqué tanto, que saqué 100 o 200 [mil pesos]'. Eso varía mucho...hay semanas que sacan bueno, hay semanas que no... (don Ignacio, personal communication, August 2016).

La cultura del minero, coca and gold bonanza

'Donde hay oro, hay pobreza' told me once a delegate of Corpocaldas from Manizales, underlying that the same pattern applies to almost any resource-rich region of Colombia. If this is true - and it is indeed true when we look at the wealth of Marmato and the precariousness of most of its inhabitants -, it has to do with a lot of factors. As we already saw, individuals or small-scale miners are often crushed by large scale exploitations and have no say in the matter. However, the culture and habits that are inherent to miners have to be taken into account.

La cultura de minero is generally used to describe deeply-rooted habits of people from resource-rich regions, who rely on mining for subsistence. It has for generations permeated the society and the way in which people work and behave. The natural wealth that Norcasia possesses has therefore shaped the culture of its inhabitants. The fact that gold mining is a very precarious yet rather profitable activity - if we are to compare it with agriculture as the only other activity that can be carried out in the countryside at a small scale level - explains the extent to which it has become a 'culture':

Lo que pasa es que hace mucho tiempo hubo una bonanza, la bonanza del oro. Y esta es una zona por aquí aurífera, hay muchos minerales, uno de eso es el oro. Y el oro tiene muy buen precio porque todas las monedas del mundo se manejan por base del oro [...] Por la misma razón, porque llegaba el minero y encontraba gramos de oro, y llegaba y lo vendía, [y sacaba] mucho mucho dinero, y [después] meta trago, y meta trago, y una muchacha y otra muchacha. Y esto nunca ha cambiado, esta es la cultura del minero. Y muy poquitos lograron ahorrar e invertir en algo. Y todavía sigue siendo esta zona acá lo que es Norcasia y San Diego todavía con mucho oro (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

Whether at a small or at a larger scale, earnings that miners can get out of a few days of work are enough to pay off for many more days. This indeed has constantly brought many rural inhabitants to approach the mining sector, and it explains the increasing number of young Norcaseños who invest in courses on *maquinaria pesada* – heavy machinery for mining or oil drilling. Being able to handle that kind of machinery can be very rentable:

Yo tuve tiempos donde me ganaba 300mil pesos al día, trabajaba con la retroexcavadora. Y después dejé ese trabajo donde ganaba bien y me fui a buscar otro donde ganaba mucho más. De lo mismo [minería], pero entonces no era tan estable, pero ganaba más plata. No era legal, solo en parte...Y es que no sé, uno no se puede pegar a eso [a la plata]...Pero si lo miramos con la realidad que tenemos... (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016).

The same happens in many other regions of Colombia: ‘[...] y la cosa es que no es solo de Norcasia no solo de La Dorada. Es en toda Colombia. Yo he estado en muchos lugares. Estuve en la Guajira y por allá es peor. Uno trabaja todo el día y por la noche se toma y se gasta todo lo que ganó. Acá por lo menos uno trabaja por ahí 3 días...’ (ibid.).

In fact, *la cultura del minero* does not pertain to miners only. Instead, it is significantly entrenched in the history of Colombia and in the deeds that marked Colombia’s conflictive past. Colombia is indeed a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, where *criollos*, indigenous and afro all share the same land and the various traditions and habits that they maintain constitute the very essence of Colombian people. The same people that suffered or are still suffering violence, expropriation and displacements as the plague of coca cultivation spread all over the territory.

The plague of coca and the quest for gold have a lot of things in common, as they transferred huge amounts of wealth to many campesinos who were not able to take advantage of them: ‘*Lo mismo que pasó con el oro pasó con la coca...no ayudaron al desarrollo...ah no la plata, y esto era cada 8 día lleno de gente tomando y bebiendo y eso...muy poquita gente aprovechó esa bonanza*’ (Eduardo, personal communication, August

2016).

If we called coca cultivation a 'plague', it is not quite appropriate a term for minerals and gold. However, it is when we address the phenomenon as a 'curse', a resource curse, as we anticipated in the previous chapter. The resource curse that the presence of precious minerals has triggered throughout Colombian territory has benefited only a few and made the state dependent on these revenues mostly through foreign investments in the field. Likewise, the gold bonanza that the region has experienced has left the *campesinos* with nothing else than the continuous quest for gold.

The coca bonanza only made that worse, as it enriched *campesinos* from one day to the next, just to leave them with nothing when the eradication set in:

De 2000 hasta 2007 fue el periodo con abundancia de cultivos de coca. Un niño de 10 o 12 años llevaba hasta 400 mil pesos en el bolsillo. Las empleadas de casa ganaban 800 mil pesos a la semana. Todo era muy caro. Ese tiempo uno salía al pueblo y había gente como si fuera un domingo. Todos los días. Porque había plata. Unos venían a vender y otros a comprar. Se movía mucho la plata (profe Cecilia, personal communication, August 2016).

This digression on the mining sector – apart for mining being one major source of livelihood in Norcasia - was meant to be an initial characterization of the latter and means through which we could understand the actions and behaviours of the individuals that compose the society.

In light of the history and hardships that have characterized the *pueblo* Norcaseño, it will now be easier to comprehend the agrarian issue.

5.2.4 The agrarian issue

Agriculture vs livestock farming

The cultural and thus agricultural practices put in place by *campesinos* can differ from the ones that achieved an education in the town, or from who is specifically trained to be a professional in the field. For that matter, the diversity of my interlocutors helped considerably in the understanding of Norcasia's rurality, from the point of view of both *campesinos* and who, born *campesino*, furthered their studies and practice. One of my informants was an agricultural engineer working as project coordinator for the *Ciudad de Dios* of Norcasia; another informant was a young *campesino* who had been living in the *Hogar Juvenil* for the time of his secondary education and he has been working at the Granja Monte Carmelo for the past two years. The

participant observations and informal conversations with the most different interlocutors that I have been continuously conducting during my stay in Norcasia helped me in the understanding of its agrarian issue from multiple point of views.

As we saw, land concentration is one of the major unresolved issues of the Colombian countryside, and Norcasia is no exception. As a municipality employee explains: *‘en Norcasia hay unos terratenientes muy grandes, que tienen mucha tierra pero que no la cultivan 100%. Hay tierras que han sido expropiadas de grupos ilegales, y deberían ser entregadas a personas que no tienen tierra o que han sido desplazados³⁵, pero todavía hay muchas desigualdades’* (Julio Andrés, personal communication, August 2016).

Despite the agricultural potential that Norcasia has – even if the land is not as fertile as it used to be -, it is mostly used for cattle grazing and many, as we have seen, are involved in artisanal or illegal mining:

‘Norcasia tiene sí potencial agrícola, pero está básicamente enfocada a la minería artesanal o pirata y a la ganadería extensiva con poca técnica. Pero sí tiene mucho potencial en el área del caucho, aguacate, y cacao, por sus condiciones agroclimática y por su posición geográfica tiene un potencial muy grande’ (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

‘Es que por acá la tierra no da’³⁶ is the most heard explanation for the rural standstill. The cultivation of the already degraded land does not yield the sufficient for familiar subsistence and thus the land is exploited even more in its uses, impeding its natural regeneration (Lenguas Quirogas, 2011). The lack of technification has therefore affected the soil, the biodiversity and the yield of the farmer itself. As Eduardo explains: *‘La cuestión es que sí las tierras por acá no son tan productivas entonces lo mejor que hace la gente es sembrar pasto para el ganado...y como los cultivos tampoco son tan rentables...Porque son tierras acidas, no son de origen volcánica. Hay que abonarla y fertilizarla mucho la tierra...uno tiene que invertir más [en insumos y abonos]’* (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

³⁵ There are several governmental programs for IDPs, one is *Familias En su Tierra*, that provides assistance to victims of the internal displacement about to return to their land or to be relocated somewhere else, and support productive activities for their self-subsistence.

³⁶ ‘the problem is that here land is not productive’

As I mentioned, campesinos' practices can lack of the necessary skills or new technologies to be adapted to the changing environment, and the new plagues, which can destroy entire cultivation if not managed properly. This is especially the case of elderly campesinos who have been living all of their life in the countryside and most importantly, have been dedicating all of their time to the cultivation of the land, and are reluctant to change their traditional practices. As don Francisco (67 años) told me once: *'La tecnología quita trabajo a uno...En principio todo el mundo voleaba rula, una cosa y otra. Hoy en día ya se acabó eso. Porque mira que ahora un finquero ya utiliza la guadaña, utiliza la fumigadora...ya no. antes en fincas ocupaban 10 trabajadores, ahora se ocupan si no dos'* (don Francisco, personal communication, July 2016).

Likewise, doña Elvira (89 años), who witnessed the quite radical change that the countryside underwent, blames education that caused people to leave the cultivation of their land behind: *'La gente ya sale para estudiar. Y no vuelven a trabajar la tierra. Antes era diferente porque la gente no era estudiada. Esa era la vida, solo trabajo. Ahora la educación se convirtió en vicios y muy feos'* (doña Elvira, personal communication, August 2016).

Norcasia has been rapidly expanding in livestock farming, at the expense of other cultivations that were once part of Norcasia's landscape:

Uno viviendo acá toda la vida está acostumbrado a ver monte. Eso que ahora no. Anteriormente habían solo cosechas de arroz, de maíz, yuca frijol. Ahora es solo aguacate, y guanábana. Ahora se acabaron tantas cosechas, las montañas son solo potreros [...] Los ricos se pusieron a hacer solo potreros. Anteriormente lo que se hacía era trabajar la tierra. Sembrar y rozar. Ahora no. yo no sé. Por eso el trabajo es tan difícil (doña Elvira, personal communication, August 2016).

The only crops that resisted the expansion of livestock were some permanent ones, such as avocado, cocoa, sugarcane – to produce the unrefined whole cane sugar *panela*, a food staple in the region -, citrus (orange and lemon-tangerine) and fruit (mango and soursop among others). As well as the semi-permanent plantain and bananas, and semi-annual yuca (cassava), beans and corn³⁷. However, both maize and yuca's cultivation have multiple consequences for the yield and the environment, as ancient cultural practices as *slash and burn* have caused irreparable damage to the ecosystem. *'El campesino que hace: mocha, seca, y lo*

³⁷ Permanent crops are produced from plants that last for many seasons, while semi-permanent crops have instead to be replanted after each harvest. Plantain and bananas are semi-permanent, while yuca (cassava), beans and corn are annual or semi-annual.

quema con un fogón, y quema todo eso, quema toda la vida de la tierra. Y las prácticas de manejo de los agricultores son esas' explains Eduardo; and the reason is: *'Porque esta región es muy húmeda. Y al ser húmeda crece muy rápido la maleza, entonces hacen eso para acabar la maleza'* (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

The environmental effects of the *'tala y quema'* practices are highly detrimental for the conservation of and for a sustainable use of the land, causing the rarefaction of the atmosphere as well. This practice, linked to the *campesino* tradition, was extensively used and still is, yet on a minor scale, before the rainy season to prepare soil for cultivation (Luengas Quiroga, 2011). The land is in this way exposed to the erosion caused by the rain, with the consequent loss of its vegetal stratum and microorganisms, that should maintain the levels of natural fertility.

Maize, rice and beans crops also tend to disappear, since the difference between dry and winter season has become blurred, and thus not appropriate to seasonal crops. Fruit trees have vast extension and production, however, except for guanábana, they are not commercialized, since the methods of cultivation are not technically advanced, and are consumed at the family level and the rest go lost.

To this regard, the aim of the municipal secretary of rural development is to meet *campesinos'* needs in this changing environment, through the implementation of several programs. Sometimes however, *campesinos* are not always open to new techniques:

Muchos campesinos todavía utilizan técnicas que son rudimentales o muy antiguas. En algunos sectores del país ya vienen implementando nuevas tecnologías. Y Norcasia no es la excepción. Ya se están implementando nuevas técnicas. Pero el campesino muchas veces no está dispuesto a cambiar. Hay que hablar con el campesino en otra manera... Hay que complementar el trabajo que hacen, de a poquito, así el campesino se va involucrando con las nuevas técnicas (Julio Andrés, personal communication, June 2016).

On the other hand, cocoa crops, though vulnerable to phytosanitary problems and with high production costs, have grown. The production of avocados instead does not require particular practices. It is harvested in the months of April-May and October-November, and is the fruit that most represents the territory of Norcasia, for what Norcasia is known as *la tierra del aguacate* - the land of avocados.

Despite the fact that Norcasia is a territory extremely rich in water, framed by four rivers (La Miel, Moro, Samaná and Santa Barbara) and crossed by a fifth (río Manso), and its soil is very well irrigated, given the constant rains, water sources have been overexploited without controlled and correct procedures, and the vegetation along springs has been cut, causing its extinction. The natural forests are in fact, very tapped and fragmented; mining activities contribute to the deterioration of the soil and the indiscriminate logging of forests to let space to meadow, stubble fields and pasture lands led to serious erosion problems (Luengas Quiroga, 2011).

While cattle grazing is still not a consolidated process for its low technological level, it has grown in terms of areas and quantity of cattle, and it represents the major economic activity for the municipality. The extended *veredas* of El Jagual, Quiebra de Roque and also San Esteban are almost exclusively dedicated to it. Yet, extensive grazing is a capital and land-intensive activity that requires less labor force and thus its development is not as favorable for the majority of small-scale *campesinos* of Norcasia, *‘es el trabajo de los ricos’* (don Francisco, personal communication, July 2016).

To the detriment of agriculture, livestock farming has gained prominence through the years, given also the proximity of Magdalena Medio, a region supplying meat to a large part of western Colombia. Recent data on the extension of livestock farming shows that it has surpassed the 10.000 ha (Plan de Desarrollo Municipal 2014-2015), and its production supplies the demand of the population in terms of meat and milk.

The general tendency is that the cultivable lands tend to disappear for the excessive increase in livestock farming. For this reason, and because of the growing profitability that can be made out of livestock farming, the countryside is carved up into large estates for grazing, property of big landowners: *‘La mayoría no son personas de Norcasia, son de afueras. Vienen una vez al mes hacen su recorrido y ya. Son de muchos recursos. La ganadería si es rentable pero solo a grande escala. Una finca con ganadería requiere el 20% de mano de obra que una finca con actividades agrícolas. Esto hace que la gente opte más por la ganadería. Es de más fácil manejo. El ganado es casi plata en efectivo’* (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

Most of the time those extended properties are left to be administrated, since the majority of landowners do not live in Norcasia but elsewhere. Some *administradores de finca* earn as little as 600.000 COP – the

minimum monthly wage – and the work of the other family members, especially the spouse, in taking care of the house and the food, is not always rewarded: *‘a mi no me dan nada y yo tengo que atender a toda la gente que èl [el propietario] trae cada vez...a veces vienen en 15 y yo tengo que atenderlos a todos’* (doña Isabel, personal communication, August 2016).

Obstacles for the commercialization of agricultural products

As don Carlos – *ingeniero agronomo* from La Dorada - once pointed out to me, in the main square in Norcasia there always is a coming and going of people, meaning that the ongoing business activities are many: *‘Norcasia ha prosperado mucho gracias al cultivo de aguacate. Hay una cantidad de gente, y significa que hay muchos negocios. Norcasia tiene mucho movimiento porque todo era ganadería. Luego subió la vocación agrícola también con cacao y caucho’*. In his words it seems that Norcasia is flourishing again, however what I have heard from Norcaseños reflects quite the opposite. There is indeed a vast production and commercialization of avocados, yet the majority comes from three *fincas aguacateras* in San José. The narratives for small-scale producers is of course, different. The low development of infrastructure is one of a great obstacle to the commercialization, and a greater disadvantage for the most isolated *veredas*. Transportation of heavy loads can be difficult or sometimes not feasible, and the costs can be very high: *‘En Quiebra de Roque uno hecha la cosecha de aguacate y mucho se pierde. Porque si usted lo coge, y tiene que transportarlo hasta aquí, ya solo con el transporte te cobran 10 mil pesos’* In addition to that, explains don Ignacio, the intermediaries who buy the products are the ones who decide the price, and it is often at their advantage: *‘[...]Y usted viene acá y cuando están los comerciantes - los comedones, como los llamamos nosotros - y les dicen, se lo pago a tanto. Y todos pagan el mismo precio...entonces en las veredas lejanas es muy difícil la comercialización por eso...’* (don Ignacio, personal communication, August 2016). In addition to that, the prices are always established by the intermediaries who buy the products to sell in the cities, and most of the time campesinos are found at a disadvantage. *‘En las veredas lejanas dejan que ellos lo traigan hasta el pueblo y como ya lo tienen cogido, le dan lo que quieran. En cambio, en san José donde yo vivo sí, allá a mí me compran el aguacate, lo vendo en la finca’* tells doña Patricia, representative of the JAC. In her *vereda* they have been struggling to support small-scale farmers by gathering their products together, in

order to not find themselves at a disadvantage due to the very low prices established by intermediaries. They have also been trying to commercialize the products directly in Bogotá by themselves, avoiding middlemen. However, this is not always easy, as other inconveniences arise when the municipality itself does not cooperate:

Si no es que a veces aquí uno queda muy mal [...] porque cuando uno ya empieza a sacar los productos afuera, que la administración que los comedones le empiezan a poner muchos inconvenientes, y le van a echar la policía, como hay muchos amigos adentro...y eso es algo que va a pasar porque ya ha pasado...una persona que quiera comenzar a colaborarle a la comunidad de una vez llegan los comedones. Y por eso la gente las comunidades no progresan por la misma alcaldía (don Ignacio, personal communication, August 2016).

Even though avocado is the product *par excellence* of Norcasia because of its productivity and profitability, the prices are often swinging, and in any case, controlled by middlemen:

Recientemente el aguacate estuvo tan caro, casi 300mil pesos la carga, pero eso fue solo un contenticito de unas semanas y después ya. El que se lleva la plata son los intermediarios. Ellos ponen un precio, quieran o no quieran hay que venderle. Si es la compra de aguacate, cacao también. Siempre ha sido así. Ellos se amanguan [confabulan], se acuerdan sobre los precios con otros intermediarios (don Pedro, personal communication, July 2016).

The increasing costs of supplies, fertilizers, transportation, in addition to the low evaluation of the few products that are extensively cultivated in Norcasia, makes it difficult for *campesinos* to invest in the cultivation of the land. Moreover, fruit trees and other not extensive crops are used for personal consumption, and the rest goes lost:

El problema del campo es que por ejemplo nosotros vivimos muy retirados del pueblo y para uno sacar algo es más la perdida que la ganancia. Prácticamente para todos los cultivos. Lo único de que se saque algo de productivo de la finca es lo de la caña porque se saca la panela, porque es lo único que se puede vender. Porque de aquí no se saca nada, nada. Todo lo que usted ve se pierde. Lo que usted siembre es para usted mismo comer o para sus animales y el resto...la leche si se vende o se hace queso. Nosotros no sacamos mucho, porque tenemos sino una vaca, la leche que se saca es como solo para el gasto...porque del resto no... (doña María Isabel, personal communication, August 2016).

On the other hand, those lands which are instead put into production and that do not have the obstacle of transportation, do not find any market for their products. A Colombian saying '*Se saca un bulto de yuca a vender y le sacan dos a la casa*' tells don Camilo, and adds: '*Un pobre dueño de una finca siembra maíz y no se puede vender, casi se regala. Si hubiera una posibilidad que la gente del campo pudiera sacar lo que produce su finca y poderlo vender en otro lado...*' (don Camilo, personal communication, August 2016).

Norcasia also lacks a collection centre, for *campesinos* to sell their products in the community; instead, most of the goods sold in the shops come from Bogotá. *‘Vender solo materias primas no trae resultados.*

Vendemos para comprar cosas que se traen de Bogotá. Hay que pensar a como transportarlos, como transformarlos, para darle un valor agregado’ says Andrés (personal communication, June 2016), a young Norcaseño who is convinced that the countryside cannot survive with agriculture alone; more technology has to be applied and agroindustry should be considered as a way to give an added value to the products of the land. For instance, cacao, that was once processed at a family level, is now sold on the cheap to the markets in Norcasia, and this is a proof that people have also lost the will: *‘Mis papas hacen de todo con los frutos del campo: compostas, conservas, sardinas, vinos, licores...procesan también el cacao en chocolate...de todo. También con la leche, hacen quesos...casi tenemos una agroindustria’* says Eduardo, and he adds: *‘Lo que pasa es que los conocimientos se pierden, las manualidades y todo eso. No se les enseña a los hijos. Norcasia podría procesar muchas cosas. Pero no lo hacen’* (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

Yet, as don Ramiro explains, if some products can still be transformed at a family level, other products such as avocado and fruits would need skills and machines that *campesinos* do not possess:

Los productos de la tierra se venden a un precio muy barato. Es culpa de los intermediarios. Son los únicos que ganan. Hace mucha falta una cooperativa o algo para que se saquen los productos no tan baratos. Hay mucha gente que tiene café, chocolate, maíz. Pero se necesitaría una planta de transformación de granos. Acá en Norcasia hace falta un lugar donde se pueda transformar todo lo que se saca del campo y venderlo directamente. La fruta se pierde. Que no se la compran a uno porque quieren que se la regalen. Entonces se pierde. Que se inventen la vaina del aguacate para transformarlo en otros productos, sería una belleza. ¡Cómo le parece usted que en Europa los aguacates cuesten tanto! (don Ramiro, personal communication, July 2016).

The problem of the intermediaries is one of the biggest obstacles for rural development and it occurs everywhere in Colombia, says Luis Felipe - *ingeniero agronomo* - who has been working in different productive projects in Caldas:

[...] el factor más limitante en todo desarrollo rural, en todo el país, son los intermediarios. Un productor trabajaba todo un año para llegar a sacar unos kilos y se gana una rentabilidad de un 5% y a veces pierde. Es muy triste que la plata de la agricultura se quede en el intermediario. Es un círculo vicioso. El que tiene que arriesgar todo el recurso, el tiempo de sus terrenos, es el agricultor, el que meno recibe (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

The only solution, argues Luis Felipe, is to encourage small-scale *campesinos* to unite in cooperatives, but people are not yet ready: *‘Por eso se tendrían que formar asociaciones, pero la gente no está muy...hay una desconfianza. Es que, si yo me asocio con fulano, él me va a robar. Si trabajamos los 3 o los 4 juntos para vender en Bogotá, resulta que usted, y la cultura colombiana muchas veces ...ellos mismos se están como tumbando y robando el uno a otro’* (ibid.).

5.2.5 Governmental role in rural development

The lack of state presence due to the civil conflict had left rural Colombia in an oblivion for a long time. In addition to that, the inherent unequal structure of land ownership has led past agricultural and land reforms to fail miserably³⁸ and only the recently signed agreement with the Farc that includes a new land redistribution reform gives some hopes.

Regarding the government’s role for rural development, Julio Andrés, responsible of the UMATA (Unidad Municipal de Asistencia Técnica Agropecuaria) of Norcasia, argues:

El gobierno tiene políticas para el sector rural de mucha importancia donde hay que saber aprovecharlas y saber invertirlas, pero infortunadamente muchas personas no les ven la importancia a los proyectos lanzados por el gobierno y es por eso que fracasan y el campo se vuelve improductivo. Más personas que son disciplinadas con este tipo de proyectos logran una mejor calidad de vida [...] el sector agropecuario en Colombia tiene muchas oportunidades, pero no se aprovechan de la mejor manera, [además que la población del campo se está movilizandando a las ciudades] (Julio Andrés, personal communication, August 2016).

At present, Minagricultura (Ministry of Agriculture) is implementing the agricultural policy for 2015-2018 under the program named *Colombia Siembra* aiming at the ‘rebirth of the Colombian countryside’ through the development of the agricultural sector (Minvivienda, 2015). The program is focused on increasing agricultural production for internal food security and on fostering value added exports through an increasing of the cultivated land and production (ibid.).

Through *Colombia Siembra* and other governmental and regional programs the municipality of Norcasia has been implementing different productive projects destined to rural households for the cultivation of cacao,

³⁸ The 2015 agrarian census (the first since 1970) revealed that the rural poverty rate is as high as 45% and farmers get little government support — 83% lack agricultural machinery and 90% do not receive any agricultural credits or technical assistance (Albertus, 2016).

plantain and cacho, as well as fish and cattle farming. There are several associations and productive alliances that have been established among producers of cacao (ASOCANORA, *Asociación de Cacaoteros de Norcasia*), fish farmers (ASOPINOR, *Asociación de Piscicultores de Norcasia*) and cattle ranchers (*Comité de Ganaderos*), yet their influence is in general scarce. Doña Lisa, secretary of the *Comité de Ganaderos*, explains that the association lacks of young and active people to promote the association of its members and to implement productive activities, as well as ties between producers and merchants (personal communication, July 2016). She says that the government does bring forward rural development programs, however: '[...] *la mayoría de las veces son solo los grandes campesinos que ganan. Los pequeños productores están en desventaja. Igual no quieren aprender nuevas técnicas, capacitarse, y desarrollar sus cultivos. A veces los campesinos no se adaptan a nuevas técnicas o practicas - de higiene por ej.*' (ibid.).

On the other hand, *campesinos* are often blaming the government for the abandonment of the countryside. '*El campo está sin valor*' says don Armando, who has worked all of his life with the land, and never received help from the government, even when the violence had caused him to leave the land he had spent all his youth working on. And his accusations are strong: '*el gobierno no se interesa para nada del campo. Nada. Solo para otras cosas. No se ve acá el gobierno. Nada nada*' (don Armando, personal communication, August 2016). The same is argued by don Camilo, who calls for the government to cooperate with *campesinos*, as well as *campesinos* to cooperate with each other:

El gobierno tendría que dar posibilidades a la gente de sembrar cultivos y que les presten plata con bajos intereses. Pero el gobierno lo que hace es tirar más duro al campesino. Como es un empresario bajitico [el campesino] entonces no lo ayudan, porque somos chiquitos. La gente del campo necesitaría que el gobierno colaborara. Debería de estar colaboración entre campesinos [también] (don Camilo, personal communication, August 2016).

Credits are difficult to access, mostly given to the fact that often *campesinos* do not possess a formal land title that guarantees it is their property. The interests are also high, and many *campesinos* had lost their land because they could not pay the interests, '*los préstamos que no se pueden pagar le quitan a uno la tierra*', as happened to don Francisco: '*El problema es que cuando uno se deja convencer de los demás...pedí un préstamo al banco y no fui capaz con los intereses y me toco vender ligerito. Vendimos, nos comimos la plata y nos quedamos [sin nada]. La plata se va en nada*' (don Francisco, personal communication, July 2016).

Only recently, credits for agriculture could have become slightly more accessible with programs such as *garantía Forap*, with which the region assumes some responsibility, in case the person cannot pay back the credit. However, as Julio Andrés argues: *‘Hay también que educar a la gente para que sepa administrar un crédito. A veces se gasta la plata por otras cosas’* (Julio Andrés, personal communication, June 2016).

To this regard, don Armando claims that it is only a matter of willpower and faith:

Y no eso fue solamente el poder de Dios, los brazitos y el trabajo de ella [su esposa] y las ayudas de mis amigos con los créditos...oiga, necesito un crédito aquí a seis meses. [Oiga, pero una cosa, ¡los macheticos también para con eso, con lo que se haga con los macheticos pagarle a usted! A los seis meses ya le traía cargas de maíz, y seguíamos, y a las otra les traje 100. Y se formaron créditos hasta que ya eran por camionadas de maíz. Y entonces ya]...y yo compré tierra a crédito. Oiga, a crédito [...] y oiga muchos dicen que no trabajan [la tierra] porque no tienen plata...Nooo lo que se necesita es valor y Dios no lo deja uno vencer desde que uno busque y trabaje con fe, lo ayuda. Porque uno trabajando no está haciendo nada malo sino bueno para el pueblo (don Armando, personal communication, August 2016).

The truth is that there is a general sense of distrust in the government and its programs, since often they do not address the specific needs of campesinos or the not accurate organization and implementation causes them to fail: *‘Norcasia si tiene un potencial y tiene los recursos naturales adecuados, pero no hay políticas gubernamentales muy clara o cuando si hay el dinero se dispersa muy fácil o se gasta en la parte administrativa y no llega realmente a los productores’* (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

Corruption and clientelism in Colombia are one of the evils that are most felt to be the obstacle for the development of the rurality: *‘El problema no son las políticas de desarrollo rural. Porque hay políticas buenas. El problema es la corrupción que hay en **todo**’* explains Luis Felipe: *‘Cualquier proceso de eso lo manejan políticamente. Estas empresas son casi todas estatales [...] y hay mucha burocracia y contratación...Si del ministerio de agricultura salen 400 millones a los productores le llega realmente solo 60 millones’* (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016). The municipality receives 800 thousand COP for education annually, 150 for culture and 1,200 for healthcare, *‘y este hospital se mantiene una miseria...Yo pregunto. ¿Qué se hace con esa plata? Es la corrupción’* (Guillermo, personal communication, August 2016).

Likewise, argues Eduardo: *‘El problema acá en Colombia es la corrupción. Es muy corrupto todo’* and he adds: *‘Al gobierno interesa que uno sea más bruto cada día, para votar pues los mismos corrupto de siempre. Y la*

corrupción es una plaga, plaga plaga. Los niños de la Guajira están muriendo de hambre por falta de agua. ¿Y por qué? Porque esas aguas la represaron para el Cerrejón, la mina de carbón más grande en toda América Latina' (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

In the past three years three mayors have succeeded, one after the other, following the murder of mayor Marisol Manrique, who died at the hands of her ex-husband in April 2014. Elected in 2011, Marisol brought a wind of change both politically – being elected with the U party after decades of liberal hegemony – and in terms of social engagement for the benefit of the community. She was the first to hold a memorial day as a symbolic reparation for the victims of the conflict, in December 2012, named '*La gruta de la reparación*' and to hand over free apartments for low-income households and victims of the conflict (SLE, 2014). Other projects that had been approved under Marisol's mandate were unfortunately cancelled or could not be resumed by the following administrations:

Mire que hicimos un proyecto para el agua. Y ya estaba aprobado para la alcaldía Marisol [...] Que pasó, cuando cambiaron de alcalde ya salieron con el cuento que botaron todos los papeles, sino que la culpa fue también de la representante porque no guardo las copias del contrato que habían firmado y todo. Los estudiantes a los que se habían dados préstamos para la universidad, al cambio de alcalde tuvieron que devolver toda la plata que le habían prestado (doña Isabel, personal communication, August 2016).

There is a general disbelief in the municipal authorities, which are said to not be committed to the development of the community itself, and to not foster additional qualification and training among campesinos: '*Es que al alcaldía es como si no le sirviera que la gente se capacitara, que la gente saliera adelante*' claims doña Patricia, who even before being elected as representative of the JAC of her *vereda* had always been pushing local authorities for *capacitaciones*, improvements in the infrastructure and for the implementation of productive projects, with scarce results. At the same time, she continues, people are relying too much on the municipality to help them: '*La gente está muy mal enseñada que el alcaldía y el alcaldía...pero el alcaldía no da nada. No sirve para nada*' (doña Patricia, personal communication, August 2016). Most of the time the municipality sets up *proyectos productivos* only if there are a minimum of 30 people participating, when even in Quiebra de Roque, which is the most populated *vereda*, there are hardly this many people that could gather together in the same place, as the territory is so vast: '*Como tienen que cumplir unas cosas anuales y tienen que poner tantos programas, y trabajar con tantas veredas, entonces se*

inventan un proyecto bobo y ya...simplemente dicen que no hubo la gente' (ibid.).

If in her *vereda* there have been some improvements it's because people have started to come together – as in the case of avocado producers - and organize themselves in various activities, often financially supported by Isagen, which has also been implementing the PDC (*Programa de Desarrollo Comunitario*) as a way to strengthen the community's knowledge and abilities and put them into practice (ibid.). Likewise, as don Ignacio claims: *'a veces ellos llegan y no hacen nada. Hay gente que se mata para la comunidad haciendo cosas. Y dicen <<si en tal vereda hicimos tal cosa>>... ¡Como que hicimos si ni siquiera se metieron! ¡Y ni ayudaron ni con lo mínimo que hicimos!'* and continues: *'La administración y la Umata no ayudan. Muy poco ayudan [...] mira había que ir a vacunar para la fiebre porcina que ya traían las dosis. Me dijeron voy tal día, no voy mañana, que no...y me paró como 15 días!'* (don Ignacio, personal communication, August 2016).

Other entities such as Comunidad Unida, which are working to improve rural livelihoods and productivity are not so efficient. If they give away material it is often not the best quality: *'Son tramposos. Lo hacen para propaganda, no más...lo obligan a recibir a uno lo que haya. Los que ganan son siempre esas empresas'* says don Alberto (personal communication, August 2016). This summer around 20 households were to receive plantain bulbs and were told to prepare the ground making holes for them; however, the delivery was postponed twice and delayed for more than three months, causing the holes to plug up. When told for the third time that the bulbs were to be delivered in a short time, many of the beneficiaries reasonably said that they would not accept them anymore. Projects also fail because instead of promoting the work and endeavour of campesinos, people are just given things for free: *'Una vez vinieron y repartieron aguacates y abonos y no les cobraron ni el aguacate ni el abono, nada. ¿Qué es que hizo la gente? Vendieron el abono y el aguacate lo metieron para abajo para un palo hasta que se dañó...y nada'* (Guillermo, personal communication, August 2016). The same happened when *campesinos* asked for tools: *'Pidieron guadañas, se le dieron guadañas y la mayoría las vendió, o las cambió por comprar mulas'* tells *profe* Cecilia, coordinator of the program (personal communication, August 2016). Raquel's family was one of the beneficiaries of this program. Her mum says that, in fact, the majority of the beneficiaries sold the materials, while others did not know how to use it and put it away: *'Llegaron, regalaron eso y ya. Todo el mundo quedó por la misma'*. But

she adds: *‘Nosotros los recibimos [los implementos], echamos allá arriba a la caña lo que es la cal...y con la fumigadora...bueno...digamos que un poquito sirvió...pero digamos que para un programa de esto se tiene que hacer algo diferente, enseñar por ejemplo a sembrar cosas...como una capacitación’* (doña María Isabel, personal communication, August 2016). She personally thinks – and she is not the only one – that assistance programs to *campesinos* could do better with trainings:

‘La ayuda no [la queremos] de plata, pero por lo menos en capacitaciones...Acá no se ve nada de eso. Entonces si sería bueno porque imagínese todo el mundo por ejemplo siembra porque los papas les enseñaron así, y no porque otro le había dicho haga esto porque tiene más rentabilidad, para que tenga como una sostenibilidad. Sí, porque imagínese...tener la voluntad, pero no saber cómo hacerlo...ahí está [el problema]. Lo que no hay es plata...porque pues...uno necesita invertir...pero si el gobierno le pusiera un poquito más de cuidado al campo sería bueno. No con plata, sino con técnicos, ayudando, enseñando como se tiene que trabajar (ibid.).’

If the words of doña María Isabel do not reflect the totality of *campesinos* they indeed express the general feeling of powerlessness towards the reality they are trapped in: possessing land and not having neither the material nor technical means to put it into production. She is also convinced that the majority of *campesinos* would be interested in agricultural trainings, yet the dispersion of the households and the overlapping with the working hours make it really difficult for people to meet in one time and place, and therefore programs often do not start.

To this regard, don Carlos, *ingeniero agrónomo* from La Dorada, admits that often experts that give advice to *campesinos* are not real experts: *‘Triste realidad de la agricultura colombiana: muchos no tienen bastante capacitación y hacen las cosas malas, o [los mismos expertos] dan malos consejos. En el trabajo del campo uno tiene que saber de todo’* (don Carlos, personal communication, August 2016).

The question that raises spontaneously is, who is then to blame? Luis Felipe argues:

Culpables todos. Porque todos los recursos se manejan por interés político. En la parte agropecuaria especialmente: quien monta proyectos normalmente no conoce las zonas. No conocen la cultura del consumo, las condiciones, si esta la gente disponible, la mayoría son proyectos que se montan en la oficina [...] Muchas veces copian a proyectos que fueron exitosos [...] Igual muchos de los productores llegan los recursos y tampoco los aprovechan (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

In addition to that, governmental programs to foster rural development through the empowerment of small-scale *campesinos* seem to clash with the strong neoliberal foundation of the state that favors a free-market economy. The neoliberal turn set in place by Gaviria was taken further by Uribe’s government that saw an

opening of the market to the outside, as he started the negotiations for TLC (*Tratados de Libre Comercio*).

‘Colombia ya tuvo un problema con el señor Álvaro Uribe Vélez que se puso a ponerse a hacer tratado de libre comercio con todo el mundo y ahorita estamos abrochados’ says Guillermo, explaining that people at first cheered Uribe’s controversial policies: *‘Y todo el mundo feliz porque Uribe había hecho TLC...y ahí están con sus TLC todo el mundo...es que no calcularon que Colombia no estaba preparada ni con carreteras ni con industrias’* (Guillermo, personal communication, August 2016).

During Uribe’s presidency Colombia gradually became a safer territory in the eye of the international community, and multinationals started to flood in. In 2011 Colombia Santos signed a TLC with Canada and the USA; in 2013 Colombia-EU TLC was signed:

La economía se abrió...Gaviria amplió las fronteras, y con Uribe y con Santos ya la abertura económica y los TLC [...] pero el problema es que entran muchas cosas. Entra mucho. Por ejemplo, de donde está entrando el maíz. Aquí era zona de maíz. Todo esto se cultivaba a maíz y arroz. Yo fui cultivador de maíz. Es muy trabajadoso pero lo cultivé. Para que de los Estados Unidos me llegue maíz más barato de lo que produzco. ¿Por qué razón? (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

Again, the *Junta de Acción Comunal* should be an important channel toward the empowerment of community members, even though it happens that representatives are elected and resources are managed by political interests. Through the Governorship of Caldas representatives of the JAC request a number of *mejoramientos de vivienda* each year, but often they don’t reach the households most in need. A few *veredas*, because of the dry season, lack safe access to water, and had been waiting for a hydraulic ram to be installed; however, as *campesinos* from San Esteban tells me: *‘[...] Si íbamos a esperar el alcaldía todos hubiéramos ya muerto de sed’* (San Esteban, July 2016)

The same happens with all those governmental programs dedicated to the victims of the conflict. Being Norcasia a receptor of *desplazados*, there are a considerable number of individuals and families that are attended – through governmental programs such as *Familias en su tierra*, *Unidad de Víctimas* - and the project for a new set of apartments is on the way. Other programs such as *Familias en Acción*, SISBEN³⁹ and

³⁹ SISBEN (System for the Selection of Beneficiaries for Social Programs) is the national system of identification of beneficiaries for social subsidy, and classifies the people according to their socio-economic level into 6 strata. Most of the social subsidies and public health programs are focused in strata 1 and 2 (IDB, 2016).

Red Unidos are addressed to low-income households. However, the bureaucracy is often an obstacle, and the system for the reparation of victims does not work efficiently enough to attend everyone.

Don Camilo, who was displaced from Florencia and arrived in Norcasia 18 years ago, only got his status of *desplazados* four years ago, and since then he had received only two *ayudas* of less than 2 million COP altogether.

Many victims do not appear in the system and the process of getting the status of IDP is often troublesome and frustrating. ‘Yo soy víctima del conflicto armado’ tells Alexander’s mum, ‘*tengo una hija desaparecida, me la mataron, pero no me la han encontrado. Y yo pasé papeles acá en Norcasia dos veces para Justicia y Paz y que no aparezco de ninguna parte. Y papeles y papeles, pero nada...no me han vuelto a llamar. Y yo voy y pregunto, pero nada. No aparezco en este sistema*’ (mamá Alexander, personal communication, August 2016). The same claims don Manuél, disabled, who was displaced twice by the violence:

¡El gobierno no nos quiere! No nos quieren oír. Nosotros llevamos más de un año en esta fundación [Retorno a mi tierra] y mire que no hemos logrado a sacar nada. No nos quieren escuchar. ¿Y saben lo que me dijeron? ¡que yo no era desplazado! Es que somos muchas personas. ¡Y además hay muchos que se hicieron pasar por desplazados...cantidades! ¡Y usted quiere que llegara la plata a estas personas que no la necesitan! (don Manuél, personal communication, July 2016).

5.2.6 Younger generations and the countryside

Rural education and training

The last chapter showed on one hand the powerlessness (or indolence?) of *campesinos* faced with the rural crisis, and on the other hand, the seemingly indolence of governmental and regional authorities in their efforts to help this change.

Against this backdrop, the role of younger generations is essential in tracing the future that the countryside faces. Since the lack of training and knowledge is said to be one of the deterrents for a renewed appreciation of the land, it is important to understand how the system of formal and non-formal education works and to what extent the new generations are engaged in shaping the future of rurality.

As we previously observed, education coverage in Norcasia has been advancing at both a formal and non-formal level, however, it is still far from being an instrument for a more inclusive and empowered society. Historically, and as a consequence of industrialization, the government had been pushing for the

modernization of education in line with the developments at the urban-industrial level, whereby excluding rural areas from the process (Parra in Ardila, 1991). The result was a highly homogeneous education model, that did not take into account the cultural, economic and social characteristics of the rurality. The expansion of the sector to cover for the education deficit led to the employment of teachers without any pedagogic preparation (Ardila, 1991). During the 80s, primary basic education arrived in rural areas, followed by secondary education ten years later. However, the difference in coverage and quality between city and countryside soon became evident and revealed the failure of the politics tackling the education problem. Later, the PER (*Proyecto de Educación Rural* – Rural Education Project) implemented in 2000s, aimed at improving the model of *Escuela Nueva* – already active in the countryside - a flexible pedagogic method where each student works in modules following a guidebook, and teachers become mere facilitators of the learning process.

Yet, all those proposals resulted to only guarantee coverage – quantity – rather than quality, and for the majority of cases did not serve the needs of rural inhabitants in terms of education and empowerment. According to Ardila (ibid.): *‘la educación no responde a la realidad social, económica y política que vive el país. Pues la educación como sistema y la escuela como institución permanecen fuera del contexto socio económico y cultural de las zonas rurales. Esto demuestra la inconformidad que vive el pueblo porque la educación no satisface las necesidades que [el pueblo] padece’*.

After all, the neoliberal model counts on education as one of the elements to achieve a better level of development, meaning the wellbeing of the ones that have the capacity to achieve it: *‘como temas de la equidad y la inclusión de los pobres no son temas que interesan a los neoliberales. No es tarea de un gobierno neoliberal procurar la inclusión la igualdad y el acceso de todos a los beneficios. Lo que hace es arbitrar el libre juego de las capacidades de modo que la riqueza crezca aceleradamente’* (ibid.). Since rural areas are not competitive in the global market, the government does not seem to be engaged in the education of rural inhabitants. As Serrano (2007) argues, education has always been, and still is, at the service of the most powerful. evidence is given by the very high costs of accessing higher education: while public universities are free of charge but nevertheless very selective, private ones are enormously expensive.

Rural education in Caldas and other coffee growing regions has actually experienced positive results, since the production of coffee always requires agricultural labour and the government is interested in training young generations in the coffee business (Serrano Ordóñez, 2007). The success of Caldas however does not apply to Norcasia and other departments that do not produce coffee, even though being inscribed in the *Eje Cafetero* has its advantages. The issue of education has received increasing attention and in the last years some improvements have been achieved, such as the implementation of the school route and restaurant at the basic formal level, and the arrival of the *Universidad del Campo* in rural Norcasia. Yet, both in the countryside and in the town centre, the challenges ahead are many.

In general, the level of education is poor since teachers are often not trained in all of the subjects they teach, and their contracts are subjected to political swinging. To this regard, the director of the rural school herself admits that rural education is clearly not meant to empower young *campesinos*:

La educación rural en Colombia es como una alfabetización. Como si estuviéramos alfabetizando a los muchachos para que sigan en el campo. Y que no tengan opciones si no que quedarse en el campo. Por eso no se puede hablar de un grande desarrollo. Estamos a la espera que en verdad con la nueva ministra que quiere apuntar a la calidad de la educación, se mire con un ojo diferente. Pero realmente cuando un docente se mira en relación con la cantidad de estudiantes solamente se pretende apuntar a lo que es economía y si hay tantos estudiantes no se puede tener un docente para estudiante. Aquí tampoco se respetan las áreas. Un docente de español puede dar 5 o 6 áreas y no tiene la disciplina. ¿Entonces qué educación pueden recibir los estudiantes? Realmente es una alfabetización en el campo (doña Claudia, personal communication, July 2016).

When I visited San Esteban I also stopped in the rural school of the *vereda* where around twenty pupils from pre-school to 5th grade are supervised by one teacher alone. The teacher had been recently moved from Bogotá to this remote *vereda* two hours away from the first populated settlement. As transportation has developed along the years, most of the teachers who work in rural school – except for the most isolated ones – lives in the town centre and are everyday commuting to and from work. ‘*A los profesores no le queda tiempo para otras actividades. No se interesa que se desarrollen programas u otras cosas*’ argues don Ignacio from Quiebra de Roque. Teachers eventually lost the role they had as a figure of reference for the community: ‘*Como llegan del pueblo todos los días, ellos llegan siempre a tiempo, y se vuelan al final de las clases. En cambio, en pasado se quedaban en las veredas. Pero eso no es bueno porque el profesor tendría que ser el promotor...ya no se interesa por la comunidad. A ellos no le interesa la comunidad, vienen hasta*

acá solo por el trabajo' (don Ignacio, personal communication, August 2016).

As we have seen, the majority of rural students now have the possibility to pursue a *bachiller rural* without having to move to the town centre. However, as doña Patricia argues: *'Si es baja la calidad del colegio en el pueblo entonces imagínese en la rural. No capacitan nada. Física nada, química nada, contabilidad nada, matemática nada, ingles nada. Todo es muy básico. Solamente los que quieren estudiar salen bien'* (doña Patricia, personal communication, August 2016). If the *bachiller rural* is meant to be more practical and focused on rurality, the only extra activity it offers is food security – working in the vegetable garden of the school.

A new project promoted by the University of Caldas and the Comité de Cafeteros – *La Universidad del Campo* - has recently arrived in rural Norcasia, offering higher education to rural students. It basically offers an additional year of education to college graduates of rural schools, at the end of which they receive a title of professional technologist. However, it is still something small and new and it is exclusively focused on the implementation of agricultural projects. This year, the course *'Formulación y implementación de proyectos agropecuarios'* started with 20 students, and after a couple of months there were only 12 left: *'Unos se salieron porque habían perdido materias, otros por pereza'* says Karol (personal communication, August 2016). Karol, 19 years old, lives with her family in La Estrella, with a 16 hectares cultivated land, and usually the most difficult thing for those who wants to project a future in the countryside is precisely to own a plot of land. However, she says she hasn't thought about her future yet: *'Uno acá, digamos en Norcasia, no hay oportunidades de trabajo...Y lo de la finca no me convence mucho'* (ibid.).

As Doña Claudia argues, not everyone considers this option: *'La universidad del campo es para los campesinos. Eso golpea muchos. Todos los que son campesinos decimos bueno ¿y cuál es la diferencia pues? ¿Entonces nosotros nunca vamos a tener una buena educación?'* (doña Claudia, personal communication, July 2016).

The situation is not much better in the urban school (*Colegio Maria Mayela*) as the classrooms are overcrowded and substance abuse amongst adolescents has become a problem that teachers alone cannot counter. Even if it is not easy to quantify the problem, former students and teachers claim that among

youngster both soft and hard drugs are in use in the school premises.

Even though it's a rural area, the local school does not teach agricultural-related subjects. Only since the construction of the hydroelectric plant, it has taken an eco-touristic focus, however what is actually taught does not differ from a standard urban school.

What is missing both in the local and rural schools is also the interest and responsibility of the parents in the education of their children. Parents themselves are not educated, or are not committed to push their children through it: *'[los padres] son más despreocupados. Y los niños se sienten así...y cuando van a la escuela sin tarea sin nada. Y la escuela se vuelve peor, de más baja calidad'* (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016). To this regard, the work of the *Fundación* in offering support for continuing the education in the town is valuable. Students there are supported both on an educational and personal level, and the role of the Carmelite nuns and of the Italian volunteers is essential: *'Hay muchos que les cambió la vida a estar en la Fundación porque ahí tienen alguien que está pendiente de ellos'* says doña Patricia (personal communication, August 2016). The majority comes from low-income *campesino* families of rural Norcasia, but along the years students from other municipalities have been received.

Liseth, who has been living in the *Fundación* since the 6th grade says to be very grateful, because being there has helped her get through her difficult childhood: *'La Fundación se convirtió en mi hogar, y me siento muy orgullosa de haber logrado hasta ahora, porque ya no me siento una persona mediocre'* (Liseth, personal communication, June 2016).

Many of them come from a very rough personal and familiar context, yet unfortunately this is quite common in Norcasia. *'La composición familiar es muy brava acá'* tells profe Cecilia: *'Porque no hay cultura familiar, no hay unión familiar entonces el muchacho hace lo que quiera se va para donde se quiera llega a la hora que quiera...o si no hay muchos padres estrictos que no le dejan hacer nada, entonces apenas llega la oportunidad se vuelan de la casa... se van muy jóvenes por eso...'* (profe Cecilia, personal communication, August 2016).

Moreover, in a country where gender based discrimination and violence is widespread but for the majority goes unreported (Colombia Report, 2014), the consequences are likely to fall back upon children. Violence,

early pregnancies and promiscuity all contribute to family breakups. Women are often abandoned and left to take care of the children alone⁴⁰. Data from Dane (2015) shows that more than 3 million women in Colombia have taken the role of head of the family – *madres cabeza de hogar*. In rural areas the situation is exacerbated by the consequence of the conflict and displacements, that left women and children even more exposed to violence. For this reason, children are often raised without a paternal figure, and they can be left behind if and when the mother finds another partner: *‘Hay muchos niños o muchachos que están sin papas...y a veces a la mamá le toca hacer el rol del papá al mismo tiempo...es muy complicado’* states doña Patricia, who sees this problem in her *vereda* (personal communication, August 2016). Constant dislocation to and from rural areas, or to the city also cause families to split up. This is a situation that contributes negatively to the wellbeing of Norcasia and its inhabitants. Adults to which I have spoken to often condemn teenagers to be full of *vicios muy feos* such as alcohol and drug abuse, promiscuity in relationships etc. As Mariana (24 años) argues: *‘Hay mucha pobreza en el pueblo también. El embarazo de menores de edad...como por cosecha. Ahora ya no hay familias tan grandes. Antes se vivía muy humildemente, pero había muchos valores. Pero hoy en día como la madre es soltera, el niño crece solo y hace lo que quiere. Es un círculo de pobreza. [Si es niño] se vuelve un vago o un drogadicto...Si es niña hace como la mamá’* (Mariana, personal communication, august 2016).

However, much of these so called bad habits come directly from a culture that is for tradition *machista* and prone to violence, which produces hundreds of thousands of cases of child abuse every year. In particular, the plague of sexual abuse of minors does not seem to decrease: the ICBF (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar) stated that in 2014, every hour two cases of alleged child abuse were reported to *Medicina Legal*. That year there were over 10 thousand reported cases, 40% of which were committed inside households mostly by familiar members or acquainted persons (ICBF, 2014). If in the region of Caldas, the city of Manizales presents the highest number of cases, the general trend in the region is alarming⁴¹. What is

⁴⁰ In 2014 a study of Mapa Mundial de la Familia cast that the 84% of babies were born from single mums (El Heraldo, 2015).

⁴¹ For Caldas, in 2011, for 100 thousands of inhabitants, there were 103 cases of reported sexual abuse, 49 of which registered in Manizales (La Patria, 2013).

even more alarming, however, is that the majority of abuse goes unreported, for fear of reprisal and for a sense of shame and guilt that leads to a tacit consent with the abuser (Pareja M., 2016). That is the situation of Norcasia as well, even though, being a very sensitive problem, no one dares to talk about it. Mostly for fear of backlashes if brought up to justice – and for what is known as *la Ley del Monte*⁴², for which victims should better remain in silence - or because the abuse occurred inside the household, it often remains unpunished. And this, in turn, sadly contributes to a cultural legitimization of the abuse: '*ignorancia ciudadana y legitimación cultural de una sociedad fundamentada en el machismo*' (ibid.).

The ageing of the countryside and challenges for the new generations

Y ahora que la juventud, todo el mundo que corre para la ciudad a buscar trabajo. En el campo ya no lo buscan. Los jóvenes le tienen un miedo al trabajo en el campo. En cambio, se van en una empresa y bueno pues, la vida se les cambia (don Francisco, personal communication, July 2016).

As we have seen, even if Norcasia has a rather young population, only a small part of young Norcaseños is engaged in agriculture. Young people especially are moving from their veredas to the town in order to enter the municipality's secondary school, to get a job that won't involve working in the fields, or in order to migrate to bigger cities. Norcasia, has been witnessing an *envejecimiento del campo* - ageing of the countryside - as younger people tend to abandon the fields: '*Los viejos que están cultivando, los agricultores tienen más de 50 años, y de ahí para abajo son muy pocos los que tienen una tierra y que quieren cultivar. La mayoría de la gente no quiere cultivar*' explains Luis Felipe.

On the other hand, a sector that is not suffering the generational replacement is livestock farming, since behind that are often wealthier families, for the activity being profitable when done at medium or large scale. '*Lo más críticos, más que el tema de las infraestructuras y la economía es el relevo generacional. Y es así en toda parte de Colombia. Al muchacho no le gusta la finca. Casi la mayoría se van a la ciudad. Son*

⁴² "...se encontrará, en fin, con la otra cara de Colombia, con esa Colombia desgarrada y desconocida que apenas vislumbramos en los titulares de prensa y donde la Ley Del Monte rige, con toda su crudeza..." (La Ley del Monte: Crónica, Alirio Busto Valencia, 1999)

situaciones críticas' says Liseth, who has been witnessing the same trend in other parts of Colombia (personal communication, August 2016).

There is a general disillusion and demotivation towards work in the field, and the fear is that the countryside will soon be lacking of agricultural labour. In San Esteban, for instance, there are around 20 families, only a few young ones, while most of them have their sons and daughters living in Bogotá. Most of the young people had left the vereda years back for the city. Yet, as Rafael argues: *'Yo diría que, quien es del campo es del campo. Si uno se va dura dos tres años, pero después vuelve. Un futuro en Bogotá no. No es que es duro. Uno vivir toda una vida esclavizado ahí...veinte, treinta años pagándole a un banco, y pague, y pague...'*

(Rafael, personal communication, July 2016). Someone expressed the faith that, young people should be free to experience the city and then they will inevitably come back to their land. However, if it has been the case for Rafael (*'yo me fui de por aquí supuestamente para no volver. Me fui para la ciudad, para Bogotá. Y decía, no yo por aquí no vuelvo, para Norcasia no vuelvo [...] Me aguanté tres años. Y volví y de aquí no me voy'*) it is definitely not the rule.

Results of a survey (see Annex no.2) addressed to students of the 11th grade (last grade) of the local high school show that the general feeling among youngsters is that Norcasia lacks both higher (university) education and employment opportunities, and that therefore, the only way out is to migrate to the city⁴³.

The courses that Sena offers do not always answer the needs or the preferences of the high school graduates and are said to not be professional enough. There are in fact two types of courses, *técnicos* or *tecnólogos*: the first one lasts one year and the second one is one year of theory and one year of practice. Sena offers one annually, maximum two of either *técnicos* or *tecnólogos*, while the rest are only short courses or seminars. In any case, teenagers – of both sexes - do not seem interested in getting agricultural

⁴³ The survey was carried out in July, 2016 with two classes – 11.1 and 11.2 - of *Colegio Maria Mayela* of Norcasia, for a total of 75 - anonymous - surveys. The respondents were 47 girls and 28 boys between the ages of 15 and 20. The 11.1 is composed by students who live in the town centre, while in 11.2 the majority are from nearby *veredas*. I decided to target this group of people because, being their last year of high school, I thought they would have had a much clearer idea of their future in respect to younger students. The survey was introduced with an explanation of the questions and a brainstorming on the concepts of *wellbeing* and *development*. Yet, since the questions addressed personal and thus very subjective topics, personal interviews would have been a better method of inquiry. For this reason, the results of the survey were not systematized and only served to gain a general impression around the issue.

formation and training. For instance, last year Sena offered a course for *mayordomo de finca* (agricultural administrator), but amongst the 30 participants, almost the totality were adults.

The majority of respondents express the will to migrate to the city, while only a few consider the option of staying in the countryside. *‘Ser profesional’* or *‘realizar una carrera para salir adelante’* that are the wishes of basically the totality, even though they do not often express what they would actually like to do in the future, and when they do, it is a rather wide field of study (*‘A mi me gustaría estudiar en una universidad de Bogotá...una que dicen que es muy buena y que te dan el trabajo enseguida...’* Female student, 15). There are a few that express the wish to specialize in disciplines such as environmental engineering or administration, biology, veterinary and at last, agronomy, yet most of them are convinced that it will be easier – or rather, the only possible way – to get a job in the city. Only a very few included the countryside in their future plans and acknowledge that, in fact, there are resources to benefit from, if managed in a proper way (*‘No solo en las ciudades hay oportunidades, también las hay en el campo si las sabemos aprovechar, pero primero preparandonos para ejercer todas las actividades que este [el campo] posea’* Male student, 18). Many are asking for higher education in the town, but to this regard, Guillermo argues that a wider educational offer won’t do Norcasia any good:

Todo el mundo pide educación. Está bien. Pero yo le pregunto: si la educación no viene acompañada de la industria de la empresa, tampoco es que se haga mucho, porque siempre nos va a tocar así...estudiamos aquí, a otro lado vamos a trabajar. Y siempre se desarrolla otro lado y acá se queda estancado. Porque estamos estancados acá. O sea, parados, no se evoluciona (Guillermo, personal communication, August 2016).

In terms of youth migration, Norcasia is witnessing what the FAO (2016) calls *youth distress migration*, when migrating is perceived as the only viable option for moving out of poverty, and it is caused by distress or lack of alternatives. This type of migration can be internal or international, temporary or permanent, yet for the case of Norcasia it’s almost entirely internal. Remittances sent back to rural areas of origin are important for the livelihoods of family members who stay in Norcasia, but at the same time it creates dependency (ibid.). A brief parenthesis has to be opened regarding conscription, which obliges young men from 18 years old onward, to join the military forces for a period of 18-24 months. Those who have a high school diploma are only obliged to serve one year, while those who continue studying at a higher university level are exempt,

yet upon payment of a compensation fee, and receive the *libreta military* - military card (Refworld, 2013)⁴⁴. It is common, among Colombia's upper-middle class to buy the *libreta*, and thus to be exempt from service. Meanwhile, the army would organize *redadas*, recruitment practices – made illegal only in 2011 – mostly in rural or poor neighbourhoods, where young men were demanded to see the *libreta*, and in case they could not produce it, they were taken to be signed up for the military (NACLA, 2014). This system penalizes low-income young males who had for decades been putting their lives on the line. Nevertheless, a considerable number of Norcaseños – regardless if they served in the military or not - express the desire for a career in the military or police forces, since it is considered easy to access, and with a stable remuneration.

The second part of the survey addressed the concepts of wellbeing and development. For many, *bienestar* was intended as the more personal feeling of being well with themselves and with their family and friends (*'Mi bienestar es bueno aunque no tenga muchas comodidades pero si tengo familia y vida'* Male student, 17); while future wellbeing was linked to a stable job and economic revenues to be able to afford a better quality of life and help the family. Regarding the development of Norcasia, most of the students regard it as *'regular'*, yet they stress the scarce economic activity of the municipality (*'Uno se acostumbra a vivir así y no piensa en un futuro. Los abuelos y los papas siempre han vivido de la misma manera, si no peor'* Jaime, personal communication, August 2016). Moreover, many students expressed the will to overcome the personal situation in which they live (*'quiero superarme como persona, no ser tan mediocre'* Female student, 19).

Yet, if the projections of the youth may seem ambitious, the general opinion among Norcaseños is that the younger generations are not committed to the development of the countryside: *'Los jóvenes son muy relajados y no se preocupan mucho por...por salir adelante...si ellos dicen salir adelante ser profesionales...pero ni siquiera saben en qué...y qué carrera van a hacer...'* (doña Patricia, personal communication, August 2016). At the same time, moving to a city requires more resources than one would

⁴⁴ Without *libreta* they cannot own property, graduate from university, enter into a professional contract, or stand for office (NACLA, 2014). There are other cases for exemption – yet upon payment of the compensation fee - and the right to *conscientious objection* (cf. IRBC, 2013 [online] <http://www.refworld.org/docid/52a72d584.html>)

think, and for this reason many have to come back to where they came from. Speaking with Andrés, he tells me that he had been studying one semester of electric engineering in Manizales, but had to come back to Norcasia because he could not sustain the living expenses in the city. The same happened to Mariana who was studying in Bogotá but had to give back the loan the municipality offered, when the new mayor was elected. Or Sandra, who went to Bogotá with the idea of studying but found herself doing shift work in a grocery store. At the same time, as Luis Felipe points out, living in a city can be very challenging, and it doesn't always pay back: *'La mayoría quiere irse a Bogotá y trabajar en una empresa porque, mal que bien, se ganan 800 mil pesos. Pero no ha hecho la cuenta que allá el arriendo es más costoso. Si vas a ir al trabajo tiene que coger uno o dos buses. Si se va a comer un plátano o una guayaba tiene que comprarlos, en cambio acá le regalan para donde pasan'* (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

Regardless of the opportunities or the difficulties that the city may serve for young migrants, the migration trend does not seem to slow down: for decades, internal migration has been solely considered as the solution to employment, however, it should be regarded as a human condition, for which individuals are moving to seek their wellbeing and better living conditions.

'Hay gente que trabaja en el campo porque le gusta o porque es el único medio para ganarse de vivir' tells Jaime (personal communication, August 2016) who has never liked the idea of working in the fields and whose dream job is to become a truck driver, like his father. The work of a *campesino* is always despised because it's too hard, and because of the lack of technification the working conditions are extremely demanding. At the same time, if young people do not like to work in the field, neither are they able to, because they haven't learnt: *'Yo le garantizo lo que quiera. Se pueden traer seis jóvenes de lo que hay en el pueblo y no van a trabajar como un viejito como don Francisco'* argues don Alberto (personal communication, July 2016), and don Francisco, in turn: *'Yo he trabajado con mucha juventud también, hay unos que son buenos, pero el que no sirve para el campo no sirve. Quien lo va a obligar a trabajar en el campo'* (don Francisco, personal communication, July 2016).

Once again, people I have spoken to usually blame the parents for the lack of motivation given to their children. *'Es un dilema'* argues don Camilo: *'La mayoría de la gente del campo les inculca a los niños que sean*

profesionales y que sigan adelante, y los que son bueno por el estudio salen adelante pero el problema es que a todo el mundo no le pueden dar empleo. Y si no tienen con que darle estudio en el pueblo [ciudad], van a ser delincuentes. Se van a gaminar a robar ¿porque cómo se van a mantener ellos?’ (don Camilo, personal communication, August 2016). It is indeed a dilemma, since one of the reasons why the countryside is ‘*estancado*’ is because the majority of young people do not want to invest – meaning time and labour, rather than money – in it, and they are the first to admit it.

On the other hand, in *veredas* where the access to secondary school is more restricted because of the distances, school dropout rates are high, since young males start to work at an early age, helping out in their family’s *finca*, while girls help in the house, waiting for someone to come to start a family: ‘*Si lo mas es problemática cultural...los jóvenes tendrían que aprender y ver cómo mejorar las cosas ¿y las muchachas? Madres de familia. Hay muchachas que son unas niñas ya embarazadas, o en la casa esperando a ver quién llegue y se le lleven...eso si es un problema*’ tells doña Patricia (personal communication, August 2016). The same experiences doña Lisa, who is convinced that women are the key to development in the countryside: ‘*Otro problema que obstaculiza el desarrollo son las mujeres que piensan solo en tener hijos y criarlos. Se quedan embarazada a los 18, si no más temprano, y se quedan en casa todo el tiempo. El desarrollo tiene que empezar de las mujeres. Si ellas no se educan y no aprenden algún tipo de actividad, nunca habrá desarrollo verdadero*’ (doña Lisa, personal communication, July 2016).

Raquel, one of the girls in the *Fundación*, lives with her family of six in a very remote *vereda* between Norcasia and San Diego, two hours’ distance either way. Thanks to the *Fundación* she has been able to continue with secondary school, and her younger stepsister Jimena will also join it next year. Her mum, Doña María Isabel, still regrets that she was not able to complete her studies while she was growing up her younger sister all by herself. She believes that education is the only thing she can offer to her children, and she has always been pushing for that. She gives me the example of their neighbours who produce *panela* – a food staple in the region - by processing sugarcane: ‘*Ellos por ejemplo no saben cuánto ganan ni cuanto gastan, le falta también técnica...y como allá trabajan todos, toda la familia hasta los más pequeños tallando y cargando caña toda la semana...solo saben que con eso se ganan la comida y ya. Estas familias y*

muchachos que viven por acá son muy montañeros, no siguieron estudiando y se quedan siempre en la casa. Ellos no tienen curiosidad y no sé qué futuro quieran... (doña María Isabel, personal communication, August 2016). When I visited their neighbours' *trapiche* – the sugar mill which since a few years back was powdered by animals – it was on a Friday, the day the sugarcane, which has been cut and piled up, is finally pressed and the juice thus extracted goes through a three-phases evaporation process, at the end of which the final product is moulded into *panela* loaves. The process is very lengthy and, when asked what the processing time was their only answer was '*un rato*', which literary means 'a little while', but if stressed, the meaning can change into an indefinite amount of time.

Apart from understanding that the countryside needs more technique and that children should be educated, I felt that *campesinos* do not seem to consider the possibility of their sons and daughters specializing in something that could bring benefits to rural areas. Doña María Isabel, for instance, believes it is just not worth it:

Sí, pero vuelvo y le digo que para usted estudiar y volver al campo a perder tiempo no sirve...o sea si usted estudia es para trabajar obviamente...y usted estudia para recibir un salario...El problema de uno de irse a estudiar y volver al campo es: ¿[para] hacer qué? Por eso no estudia. Que ganan con estudiar y si no hay la forma de trabajar acá. Por ejemplo, un técnico, llegaría aquí un técnico ¿y cómo hace uno para pagarlo? (ibid.).

The truth is, the reality of the countryside has always been very demanding, and if *campesinos* are no longer engaged in the cultivation of land as in the past, it is because they may have found ways out. For this reason, most of the parents feel helpless in front of their children's future: '*[...] póngase usted en el lugar de un muchacho que ha visto a sus papas trabajando tan duro en el campo, siempre luchando, adelantando un paso y devolviendo dos...es muy complicado. Los papas tampoco quieren que sus hijos sigan trabajando en el campo*' (Liseth, personal communication, August 2016). At the same time, the feeling is that parents do not want to deceive them: '*El trabajo duro en el campo para ellos [los jóvenes] es casi humillante. Ellos perciben la tristeza que el trabajo de campo a veces da, cuando los cultivos que se sacan ni se pueden vender. ¿Quién tiene ánimo de cultivar así?*' (doña Claudia, personal communication, July 2016).

5.2.7 Poverty and Wellbeing

Acá no hay pobreza, tenemos todo lo necesario. Tenemos tierra, tenemos árboles frutales, tenemos ganado, crece de todo. Pero no lo apreciamos y no lo cuidamos. Y el Estado se olvida de nuestra tierra (doña Carmela, personal communication, July 2016).

This last section is meant to be a closing of the case study in its descriptive, yet holistic form, in order to leave space for a more general reflection on the rural medium.

The discourse around the concepts of *poverty* and *wellbeing* was at the basis of this research, driven by a personal desire for a more comprehensive and profound understanding of this particular Colombian rurality. What impressed me in the first place was to acknowledge how biased our – Western – conception of *poverty* can be and how much it is misused in different contexts that are not where the formulation of the concept came from. Therefore, the investigation turned out to be an investigation of the empirical reality in order to get the *whole picture*, rather than being a research on given concepts.

Nevertheless, throughout participant observation and talks with Norcaseños, the topic emerged quite frequently with interesting results, of which the statement of doña Carmela at the top of the page is an example. Norcasia is a very nomad community, and a receptor of *desplazados* from other regions, yet a part of those, many have never travelled further than their region, and except the three closest cities, they do not have an idea of other cities or countries. They do know that *por allá donde Ustedes* – in Italy - life is very expensive, but this cultural distance creates in them diffidence, rather than curiosity. Instead, they are very sensitive towards the poorest and more conflictive Colombian regions: *‘Y mire que por ejemplo uno aquí, nosotros aquí no estamos tan mal...Hay gente que no ha llegado a salir...Pero en la Guajira es una región difícil para uno vivir. Nunca ha tenido agua, es desierto...’* (don Alberto, personal communication, July).

Likewise, Luis Felipe (personal communication, June 2016) argues: *‘Bienestar en una manera si lo tenemos. Comparados a otras regiones, nadie se muere de hambre. La oferta alimenticia es buena. Si hay necesidades como en todos lugares, pero de alguna manera se suple’*.

Colombian tradition is deeply rooted in the Catholic religion, and faith and providence often shine through their narratives, enriching them of meaningfulness:

Aunque con poco acá uno vive bien...aquí a veces la situación se pone tan difícil que hay que sacar una merca fiada o combustible para poder arrancar...yo no, corro para aquí, rebusque por un lado y por el otro...y eso pues gracias a Dios tiene su forma de medio organizarse...si uno mira el escalón que estamos de para bajo uno dice Dios mío uno no se imagina como hacen para sobrevivir. Es muy triste, uno quisiera ayudar a todo el mundo y escasitamente es capaz de ayudar a su familia. No, hay que agradecerle a Dios para lo que uno tiene...Sí... (don Ernesto y doña Luz María, personal communication, July 2016).

Far from being a universal concept, I did not find *poverty* in this talk with don Manuel, disabled and twice displaced from the violence, who feels thankful because he has a roof under which he and his family can sleep:

[el apartamento] sí fue una bendición de Dios. Nosotros no teníamos donde vivir. Cuando me vine por allá de la finca, yo he perdido mucho dinero... yo soy desplazado y en realidad yo fui desplazado en dos partes. Yo no tenía ni con que comprar la panela, yo [estuve] 15 días sin trabajar...no hay donde trabajar...vamos a ver para mañana, tengo muchas amistades y si Dios quiere mañana cuadro con algo...hay gente que me colabora a veces con mercadito...y cuando haya me llaman...tengo muchos amigos y vea, llega la luz y llega el agua de pagar...Porque yo he sido agricultor toda la vida. Yo estoy sufriendo porque en realidad me tocó de salirme de una parte dejando toda la tierra y todo, pero bendito sea Dios...gracias a Dios no me mataron [...] yo a veces me pongo por ahí de aburrido [...] pero no, hay que seguir adelante...lloran más harto las personas que tienen forma que mi persona. yo no, yo no, mejor dicho, bendito sea mi Dios... ¡Ahí es donde yo cojo ventaja! (don Manuel, personal communication, July 2016).

The peaceful times that Norcasia has enjoyed in the last ten years or so, have indeed contributed to the general sense of wellbeing of the community, as doña Rosa argues: '*Sí, hoy en día vivimos muy bien en la vereda porque tenemos la paz, que un tiempo se estaba muy maluco por esa guerra que había. Hay gente que se ha capacitado y tiene su trabajito. Hay gente que trabaja en Norcasia o en Isagen. Gracias a Dios siempre se trabaja y si se ha visto progreso*' (doña Rosa, personal communication, August 2016).

Nevertheless, the life of a campesino family living in an isolated *vereda*, with little access to services and other eases, can highly differ from a family living in the town, where services, facilities and the supply of products are, in comparison, quite fair: '*Sé que para San Esteban y por allá es muy...todo es muy lejos... ¿Y allá como están las viviendas? Si porque eso mejor dicho...acá uno gracias a Dios vive uno como cierto, uno vive como bueno porque ya tiene su casita...*' (ibid.). However, some weeks later, a conversation with *campesinos* of San Esteban left me positively surprised, as they expressed how much they value the countryside – compared to the city – and despite the hard work the love they have for their land is enormous:

Uno vive tan bueno acá, como dicen todos. Aquí a uno le toca levantarse a las 3 o 4 de la mañana a ayudar a ordeñar si uno le toca ordeñar. A trabajar en el día, pero sabe que uno listo, a las 4 de la tarde uno ya está desocupado, y se pone a ver televisión, salió la novelita [y al ratico uno se la ve y si no tiene lugar de sentarse desde la cocina le está poniendo cuidado]. Uno está tranquilo sin carros sin ladrones que le van a robar [...] Entonces es algo que uno no lo cambia por nada. Es un tesoro. Uno tiene todo. ¡Y no, pille! Uno se mete a pensar que por ejemplo hoy en día vivimos muy bueno. Bendito sea Dios. Y más que todo los hijos de uno. La verdad hemos avanzado y hemos mejorado mucho. Si claro. Mucho porque anteriormente no había carretera, no había energía. Para ir a estudiar las escuelas quedaban muy lejos. A estudiar nosotros hasta una hora o más caminando. Ahora ha mejorado mucho pero todavía falta más (doña Leidy, personal communication, July 2016).

Nevertheless, even in the countryside the situation can vary widely, and depending on means, as well as motivation, one can feel helpless instead: *‘Uno por acá no tiene nada’* tells Raquel’s mum, *‘porque por aquí la mayoría no tiene nada. Tienen los cultivos, y del resto nada...en cambio en el pueblo uno está más relajado...tiene los hijos estudiando, la comida prácticamente uno trabaja y se la consigue...está el hospital más cerca...Hay veces que...yo no voy a decir que uno aguanta hambre porque sería demasiado...pero si, no da para uno pagarlo...’* (mamá Raquel, personal communication, August 2016).

On the other hand, *profe Cecilia*, who has worked for various projects in the countryside, says that what she has always witnessed is mostly a poverty that is in the first place mental, and which stems from the culture: *‘Es una pobreza mental. Sí hay pobreza, pero más que todo ellos no quieren cambiar’* (*profe Cecilia*, personal communication, August 2016). Similarly, Don Francisco argues: *‘Hay mucha pobreza por eso, porque la gente la verdad no quiere trabajar...porque trabajo hay mucho y la tierra todavía produce...claro’* (don Francisco, personal communication, July 2016).

There are, in fact, always two sides to the same coins; yet the cultural variable is always there:

Fiesta y alcohol es cultura. Uno puede ser pobre pero siempre hay plata para fiesta. Si uno aguanta hambre es porque es perezoso. A uno le regalan cosas, la fruta se pierde...Pero uno tampoco puede vivir solo de eso. Falta emprendimiento. Uno hace proyectos, pero sin recursos no se puede hacer nada. A la gente le da pereza. La gente no quiere o no tiene educación (Mariana, personal communication August 2016).

The culture has changed considerably, and the tales of don Alberto who in the past enriched himself with the cultivation of coca may have shed a light on the extent to which it has affected the present: *‘No, en ese entonces no era porque había pobreza. Es porque había plata y uno si se arriesga es por la plata. No es por la pobreza. Los que se arriesgan era solo por gana de tener más y más. Y después de eso queda uno sufriendo porque queda mal enseñado...’* (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016).

6. Reflections on rurality: *La crisis del campo y campesinado*

6.1 Changings in the rural setting and (new) livelihood strategies

Up until now we have been trying to characterize the agricultural crisis that Norcasia is suffering, while contributing to the understanding of the complex Colombian rural *milieu*. It has become clear by now that the crisis is not only *agricultural*, rather a more encompassing one, involving not only one sector, dragging together different spaces (rural and urban) and affecting more generations.

For this reason, I have named the chapter '*la crisis del campo*' as I believe there is no equal in the English language. *Campo* is, at the same time, *campesino* and *campesinado* (the *campesino*'s community), it is an encompassing term, as there cannot be *campo* without a *campesino/a* and his/her community. *La crisis del campo* therefore refers to the causes and the consequences that gradually led *campesinos* to abandon their only traditional source of labour and life – *el campo*. This abandonment was only in part physical – as many have been forced to leave because of the violence or because of the low profitability of the land – yet above all mental.

This vicious cycle in which small-scale agricultural producers are trapped in stems from the highly unequal distribution of wealth and it has been fuelled by the recent history of violence and by the lack of state presence in rural and remoted areas. Moreover, the inability to invest in productive activities and the reluctance of *campesinos* to associate with each other contributed to the growing distrust of the land as a generator of wealth. In addition to that, we have seen that Norcasia witnessed an increasing abandonment of the countryside, as the construction of La Miel interfered with the existing agricultural system and the distribution of the workforce:

Es que sí aquí oportunidades habían de trabajo antes que llegó la empresa de Isagen. En el campo había mucho trabajo. Acá en Moscovita. Porque por ejemplo Don E. necesitaba trabajadores Don P. utilizaba trabajadores [...] en esa época todo el mundo requería trabajadores. Luego cuando llegó Isagen todo el mundo se desplazó del campo a trabajar a Isagen...entonces abandonaron mucho el campo. Las fincas, todos se abandonó. Entonces ya la gente vivía en la pobreza a lo último...cuando construyeron el embalse necesitaron a muchísima mano de obra, pero ya no. Ya no quedaron trabajos (Guillermo, personal communication, July 2016).

Some years later, illegal groups were to draw *campesinos* into the cultivation of coca crops, as Guillermo adds: '*También mucha gente se metió en la coca. También fue en esa época. Era el periodo de la coca. Toda*

gente aficionada con la coca y la coca...Mucha gente se salía de estudiar para irse a raspar la coca. Los chinos [muchachos] se salían por eso. Y las muchachas detrás de los paracos, detrás de los que tenían plata, claro no todas, pero algunas sí' (ibid.).

At the same time, the violence caused many to flee their lands and those who remained did not have the possibility to work either: *'Teníamos una [finca] grandecita de 150 ha, allá pasteaban 350 reses. Pero nos aburrimos, porque no había con quien trabajar, en ese tiempo de la coca mejor dicho... [el trabajo] no daba...entonces la vendimos como hace 14 años'* (don Armando, personal communication, August 2016).

Many *fincas* were sold or given away, and this led to a major concentration of land in the hands of a few. As Diane - a psychologist working for Comunidad Unida - added, all those happenings caused not only the system of labour to be affected, but the idea itself of working in the fields:

Isagen cambió la forma de ver el trabajo. Uno ya no quiere trabajar duro en el campo cuando hay posibilidad de trabajar en una empresa. También como los cultivos de coca y el conflicto afectaron mucho la zona. Antes todos tenían su finca con sus cultivos que eran muy rentables, nunca faltaba la comida, hoy en día uno no puede sustentarse con la agricultura. Los productos del campo no son rentables (Diane, personal communication, July 2016).

Because of the inherent characteristics of Norcasia's rurality, a family cannot sustain itself anymore with the fruits of agriculture. *'En Norcasia había granjas autosuficientes, [cultivaban] frijoles, maíz, [tenían] gallinas...Por la violencia todo se fracasó. Venían y quitaban todo a uno'* tells doña Claudia, director of the rural schools (personal communication, July 2016).

There are only a few households, especially in the most isolated settlements, striving to sustain themselves with what they cultivate and a few animals for milk or breeding, yet, this is more an exception than a rule. Subsistence agriculture – meaning self-sufficiency farming focused on growing enough food for household – or community - consumption, with little or no surplus for trade – is not feasible anymore.

The *capitalization of agriculture* for agrarian accumulation led to the increasing monetarization of the countryside (Kay in Misleh, 2011), and marked a 'point of no-return'. This meaning that, once the *campesinado*, with its products, entered the market economy, they are unlikely to go back to the subsistence model.

Therefore, in the last decades, livelihood strategies have increasingly shifted their focus from a subsistence agriculture to earnings, and thus they have come to control costs, rather than risks – the risk of losing their capacity or tools for subsistence and food security.

However, if once the territory of Norcasia was very favourable for agricultural production, free of coca cultivations, and the region enjoyed a peaceful time, the setting has considerably changed. The region was prosperous, as the population was almost exclusively engaged in agriculture:

*Cuando nosotros llegamos aquí en Norcasia [hace 35 años] esto por aquí no había ganado. Esto era mero aguacate y cacao, y monte. **Todo** mundo trabajaba y en la plaza nunca faltaban los productos...hoy día todo es caro porque viene de lejos...todo es muy caro...porque por aquí se da de todo. Todas allí son tierras buenas para todo tipo de cultivos. Pero entonces la gente se mantiene sicosiada [inquieta] como eso ha sido tan violento toda la vida... (don Francisco, personal communication, July 2016).*

Food was once abundant since the agricultural production was enough to sustain the population, as the products were produced for internal consumption – households' and community's.

The landscape has largely changed now, due to the conflictive past, the increasingly unequal distribution of land ownership, and being the land less productive than earlier. Nowadays, most of the households have to rely on market's products in order to reach food security. Most of the food which is sold in the town's markets comes from Bogotá and it is more expensive. Only the production of meat and milk satisfy the demand of the population. Agricultural production on a subsistence level has long gone, and at the same time, a sustainable agriculture lacks the basis and struggle to take hold – or it was hardly ever attempted at a small-scale level.

6.1.2 Changes in economy and consumption patterns

The gold bonanza and the plague of coca cultivation had enriched *campesinos* from one day to another, and the change was quite fast. *Campesinos* started to purchase goods that had never been able to afford earlier, such as motorbike, television, mobile phones and other equipment:

Vea lo que pasaba con la coca, que era un negocio muy rentable. Antes de la coca el campesino no tenía ni televisor, ni una maquina fumigadora, ni conocía abonos. Ya cuando llegó la coca el campesino, el que andaba a rastrar allá ya tenía zapatos, ya tenía ropa, ya tenía televisor. El cambio fue muy rápido y fue muy bueno. Entonces el cambio fue muy rápido y uno no puede retroceder. Sí, hay gente que metía televisores...cuando llegó la coca eso pasó. Ya la gente compró la motico,

porque era muy rentable. Lo que pasa es que el gobierno no ve eso... (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

Once the conflict diminished in the region, the coca bonanza was over. The change that coca bonanza had caused in the lives of *campesinos* was good in a sense that it gave them – yet not to everyone - the monetary power to access new goods and comforts and it brought some improvements in the technification of the countryside. Throughout the years, the mining tradition had already contributed to establish a cash-based economy, which was strengthened by the revenues made with coca cultivation.

However, just as the coca bonanza had rapidly enriched *campesinos*, the eradication of coca had impoverished them. A great part of land had been abandoned, or had been expropriated by illegal groups and many *campesinos* had fled to the city. The land started to be carved up in large estates, occupied by pastures. Agricultural production had thus since then been prevailed by livestock farming. Yet, most importantly, also because of detrimental agricultural practices the land had never come back to an optimal productivity, meaning that the products of the land had become less rentable.

At the same time, globalization, consumerisms and the new consumption patterns reached the countryside and took hold amongst *campesinos*, from the wealthier to the poorest.

To this matter, Luis Felipe acknowledges how much globalization has impacted the rurality:

El cambio más grande ha sido el costo de vida que ha subido [...] [llegó] la cultura del consumo. El consumismo masivo ya no es solamente en las ciudades. Hace 15 años no había tecnología. Ya ahora uno tiene que tener ropa de marca, televisión, internet. Si no tienen internet o un teléfono de alta gama están desesperado. Se creó la cultura que si uno no tiene todas estas cosas en su casa uno es pobre (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

The problem here is that small-scale agricultural production, because of the low profitability, does not (always) give *campesinos* a surplus that is needed to purchase those goods, and when it does, people start to get trapped into this '*circulo vicioso*':

[...] hay una cultura de consumo que hace que si yo tengo una finca que genera mi plata mis recursos para vivir bien, me quedan unos ingresos, pero no mucho, uno tiene que empezar a pagar facturas de internet, que a comprar el teléfono, el televisor LCD... Familias que hay en Norcasia por humilde o pobres que sean, siempre quieren tecnología, una moto más grande. Y no para, es un círculo vicioso. Conforme si usted gana, quiere aparentar con otros. Si quieres tener un estado social tiene que comprar tal televisor o tal vehículo [...] Se genera esta demanda de cosas que no son vitales para la subsistencia, pero si no la tienes no se va a sentir bien en la sociedad (ibid.).

As the distance between rural and urban spaces has shrunk, new consumption patterns have spread, driving rural inhabitants to seek surplus, in order to be able to access certain products; remittances received from family members working in the city has also made this possible, and at the same time attracted more people to the city. However, it must be said that those new consumption trends and the changing environment did not necessarily implicate a turn to an economy of capital and goods accumulation, since the majority of the households still relies on a subsistence type of economy – that sometimes does and sometimes does not allow to include *‘cosas que no son vitales para la subsistencia’* (ibid.).

At the same time, those new consumption habits have not reached the totality of the population, yet they have their influence, above all on youth. There is, in fact, a high degree of heterogeneity in the social composition of Norcasia, probably because the community is not stable, as the population is quite nomad. The town centre hosts a few big landowners, tradesmen and Isagen employees as well as many *desplazados* who strives to meet their daily livelihood needs. *‘La cabecera municipal es muy diferente del campo. Hay familias que están muy bien económicamente. Muchos empezaron a trabajar en Isagen y le fue bien. Norcasia es un municipio transitorio. Tienen trabajo por épocas por temporadas. No hay una comunidad muy estable, es muy nómada’* tells *profe* Cecilia, from San Diego but actually working in Norcasia’s secondary school. *‘En cambio en el campo hay mucha pobreza [...] Hay familias que subsisten con lo que tienen en la finca, ganado, cerdos, yuca...salen al pueblo solo para manteca y sal’* (*profe* Cecilia, personal communication, August 2016). Likewise, as *doña* María Isabel argues:

Las únicas fincas que producen bien son la del alemán, la de la austriaca y quien más, otras dos, y ya...la de Orduy, que fue el alcalde más corrupto que han pasado y que se arrebató la alcaldía. Pero es que...uno que sea colombiano exactamente y que no tenga nada que ver con política, usted no le ve nada. Nada. Para aquí no lo hay. Cualquiera de la finca usted vaya, lo más que tenga es moto. Y hay gente que tampoco tiene moto (*doña* María Isabel, personal communication, August 2016).

Moreover, as *campesinos* who had migrated to the city and made their fortunes came back to Norcasia, one cannot help noticing the wealthier they have become: *‘Hay compañeros míos que fueron criados conmigo, que estudiaron, que gaminearon⁴⁵[conmigo]...Y ellos se fueron y ahora uno los ve llegar con el carro nuevo.*

⁴⁵ From the French word *gamine*, it refers to street kids, street urchins – *gamines* or *vagos* – from which the verbs *gaminear* or *hacer los vagos*.

Entonces bueno uno dice es que en otras partes hay más plata que aquí' tells don Alberto. On the contrary, he continues: *'Si uno lo ve en la realidad el campo no produce'*, and gives a quite fair explanation: *'Vea este señor don Pedro Rodríguez. Este señor se volvió viejito trabajando, sembrando plátano. Si alguno ha trabajado aquí, ha bregado es ese señor. Yo lo conocí a él joven. Verraco. Y ese señor era que tuviera la mejor casa la mejor finca, y no la tiene. Entonces esa es la prueba de que el trabajo en el campo no da plata'* (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016). The increasing confrontation *campo-ciudad* has therefore contributed to the devaluation of the countryside. *Campesinos* feel they have been working hard all of their life only to see that there are easier ways to earn a living, and therefore they have been moving forward – in some cases out of necessity – to seek new livelihood strategies.

6.1.3 New livelihood strategies

Even though most of the working-age population is involved in agriculture, it is evident that Norcaseños have stopped to cultivate, and this is also reflected in the data about the *productores agrícolas* of the municipality: given that the 37% of Norcaseños live in the countryside, and considering that Norcasia has a rather young population – which imply that the majority are in their working age – the data for agricultural producers is as low as 19% (Secretaria de Planeación y Desarrollo Sostenible, Norcasia Caldas, 2016). Because of the highly unequal distribution of land and wealth, many Norcaseños do not even have the primary source for subsistence – the land: *'Hay gente en el campo que tampoco tienen tierra y no tienen nada y le toca jornalear de otro lado'* tells Don Camilo (personal communication, August 2016), who was displaced by the violence in Florencia around twenty years ago and could never return to his land, and since then he has been earning his living *jornaleando* - by daily labouring in somebody else's *fincas*. In most of the cases the *jornaleo* is the only source of income, and due to the very low wages campesino hardly earn their subsistence: *'Con el trabajo que nosotros tenemos o que yo tengo no me da para comprar una cerveza. Si compro una cerveza me hace falta para una libra de arroz. No puedo tomar. Pero si me las da me las tomo [...]'* (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016). Don Alberto is one of many Norcaseños that have been through the *gold bonanza* and the *coca bonanza* as well, and as he lost his land, he has been without a regular job – not because he did not find one: *'No me gustan los trabajos fijos'* admits don Alberto, and adds:

‘Me gustaría, pero solo si me pagaran más. Si me gano 700mil pesos no me sirve eso porque tendría que estar solo ahí todo el tiempo cumpliendo un horario. Y no a mí me gusta ser libre. Por ejemplo, el miércoles hice un arreglito a una motosierra en 2 horas y me dieron 15mil pesos. Mejor que trabajar todo el día en la granja y ganar 25mil’ (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016).

Norcaseños have come to adopt strategies to gain their livelihoods that do not pertain to the cultivation of land or the breeding of animals. A part from (illegal) gold mining, jobs in line with the changing environment have started to take hold – construction, vehicle maintenance, repair services, moto taxi, commerce, beauty and entertainment, telecommunications etc. Therefore, if the scarcity of employment is a fact, it also happens that the countryside can lack of labour, as daily labouring is replaced by more profitable activities, especially by the youth:

Ayer hablaba con un señor de una finca que no pudo conseguir trabajadores y él paga 35mil, muy bien. ¿Pero qué es lo que pasa? Trabajar todo un día en el campo es muy pesado. En cambio, la gente se va a las 7 de la mañana por una cañada, se lleva sus bateas y si le va bien sacan en un día de 80 a 100mil pesos, trabajando al ritmo de ellos a la sombra en una cañada. Eso ha hecho que haya tampoco la mano de obra para cultivar. El hecho que haya minería desplaza la agricultura porque es un dinero temporalmente muy fácil. O muy fácil no, es duro pero la gente prefiere trabajar un poquito duro y siendo ellos mismos jefes, que si se cansó puede pararse. Pero en una finca no, uno no puede salirse. Eso hace que la gente le guste más la minería en esta zona (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

Likewise, if unequal land ownership is one of a great obstacle for campesinos to produce and sustain themselves with agriculture, many *fincas* are being sold. Boards along the road say ‘*Se vende finca, tel. [...]*’ and announcements are also made through social networks.

Muy triste que de todas partes se vendan fincas...Es muy triste sí. Porque la tierra da comida [...] Hoy en día la gente vende las fincas o las dejan y se vienen por acá a jornalear, o en empresas. Porque no le gusta trabajar ya...nacidos y criados en el campo y ya no quieren trabajar la tierra [¿O porque piensan que en la ciudad se pueda ganar más?] ¡Mentira! porque se amontonan allá en la ciudad, donde hay multitudes de gente [...] En el campo tenemos muchas cositas desde que trabajemos (don Armando, personal communication, August 2016).

The thruth is, while there are landless campesinos whose only wish is to be able to get a piece of land, ‘*Hay gente que en cambio tiene tierra, pero no aprovecha de la misma*’ says don Manuel, who was displaced twice by the violence and now lives in the apartments handed over by Minvivienda in 2015: ‘*Que a mí me hubieran dado la plata en lugar de la casa, yo estuviera en una finquita...claro...que pueda uno trabajar, sembrar*

plátano, aguacate, cacao y yuca...de todo. También unos animalitos para los huevitos...aquí en cambio uno para comerse un huevito tiene que sacar la platica...' (don Manuel, personal communication, July 2016).

Nevertheless, the situation is not always that easy for who owns a piece of land and has a family to sustain. For Raquel's family, for instance, the land is the only thing they possess, however, they do not have the means to take advantage of it: *'Todo este territorio es muy grande pero no hay como sostenerlo...y por tanto que trabaje uno no es como muy suficiente...hay fincas que son muy productivas porque tienen recursos...Pero no, uno por acá no tiene nada [...]'*. They have also inherited another plot of land from the father in law, however, it is *puro rastrojo* – stubble field – and it would need a lot of labour to be put it into production: *'todo es rastrojo, completa, el 100% está en monte...muchas hectáreas, demasiadas...y no para ponerla a producir [...] no pues...para uno sacar algo de eso...'*. The only cultivations that they have are for family expense and for animal fodder, the rest goes lost. Also the sugarcane, which is processed at a family level in the area to produce *panela* not harvested: *'Necesitaríamos por lo menos 3-5 millones para poder montar el trapiche para procesar la caña. Ya hay suficiente caña...hasta perdida...hay terreno para sembrar más. Es que no se le mete mano porque no hay la forma'* (ibid.). The family in part subsists with the work of Alexander, Raquel's step-father, who does maintenance work in others' *fincas* with the electric scythe: *'uno dice para que le meto trabajo si prefiero irme por ejemplo a guadañar que me gano 60mil pesos al día...y a trabajar un día solo son 30mil pesos...eso es lo que uno mira...'* (ibid.).

Likewise, don Alberto and don Francisco, two daily labourers working for the *Granja Monte Carmelo*, point out the fact that, the most difficult part of owning a *finca* is to be able, and to have the resources, to put it into production:

Don Francisco me dijo esta semana: ¿Usted qué haría si le regalaran esta finca? Yo me asustaría. Yo no tengo con que sostener esta finca. Esto hay que meterle plata y hay que trabajar mucho. Y usted va a ver lo que va a sacar y esto no le da. A pesar de que está aquí en el pueblo y vale mucha plata. Y esto que esta tan pequeñito [...] Tendría que tener mínimo 2 o 3 de trabajadores que se me están comiendo un poco de plata, así como por encima hay que meterle como 600mil pesos semanales que es muy poco, pero la finca no los produce. Si uno se pone a hacerle cuenta de esta poquita leche que saca, la plata se va ya toda en gasolina. [...] Eso es lo que pasa con una finca (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016).

As those example clearly shows, rural livelihood strategies tend to move away from the land, even when it is in their own hands: *'El campo da recursos, pero muy pocos. A veces le quita más...'* says don Camilo (personal communication, August 2016).

6.2 The agricultural crisis: a cultural problem

6.2.1 The decline of the campesino culture

As we have seen, the construction of the hydroelectric plant brought many to abandon the countryside, while gold *bonanza* first and the spread of coca cultivation later contributed to the detachment of the *campesino* from the land; a detachment that was not only physical but rather mental.

Traditionally, the life of a *campesino* revolved around the land and its fruits; his life could not be entirely detached from nature and nature set the time of his daily life.

Even though there are still a few *campesino* families that live in very remoted areas, with no electricity and restricted access to the town centre, most of the rural households have in recent times embraced the use of mobile phones and were able to purchase a motorbike: *'Hace 8 anos había gente que no tenía nada como transporte privado. Ya la gente empieza a comprar su moto. Las vías se han mejorado y ya hay puentes para que unos sectores estén más cerca del pueblo'* (Julio Andrés, personal communication, June 2016).

In San Esteban electricity arrived just three years ago, *'No había luz anteriormente, pero hace 3 años la metieron [...] Un cambio extremo. Hoy en día vivimos muy bueno, bendito sea Dios'* says doña Leidy, leader of the JAC, *'Vaya a ver cuándo nosotros nos levantamos, si había bestiecita para uno para irse para San Diego, ¡si no, arranca a caminar! Mientras que ahora si la carretera está malita por ahí pasa una moto. Ya es un lujo. Y casi todo el mundo tiene su moto bendito Dios. La mayoría. Entonces esa es una bendición'* (doña Leidy, personal communication, July 2016).

Despite the positive advancements that this changing environment – meaning globalization, consumerism and the development of new livelihood strategies - have brought to the most isolated rural setting, something has inevitably changed in the relationship between *campesino* and *campo*, based on agriculture for self-subsistence. The traditional *campesino* culture has changed, as the land is being abandoned,

cultivations have been replaced by grazing lands, and this has had direct consequences on the rural setting, as far as for someone to say that *campesino* culture is fading away:

La cultura ha cambiado mucho. Es que lastimosamente, y nos duele decirlo, nos acabamos los campesinos, para mí, los campesinos se acabaron. Ser campesino no es vivir en el campo, es un estilo de vida [...] Campesino es quien madruga a trabajar, a quien le gusta manejar la tierra...ya uno le dice a todo 'no que pereza'. Y lo que no es un teléfono, o la tecnología hoy en día la quieren todos (Luis Felipe, personal communication, August 2016).

On the contrary, don Ignacio argues that everyone in Norcasia is *campesino*, even if the times have changed and *campesinos* also have conformed:

No el campesino nunca se acaba, porque es que todo por aquí es campo...y es que el pueblo aquí en Norcasia es solo campo...usted sale por allí y hay solo ganadería y todo hay, cultivos...hasta acá hay palos frutales, aguacate, lo mismo que en el campo. Claro no es el campesino de antes que está metido bien lejos allá siempre con su tierra...pero, de todas maneras, todos en Norcasia somos todos campesinos (don Ignacio, personal communication, August 2016).

The truth is, according to don Armando, who has worked his entire life with the land and defines himself '*un compañero para la tierra*' that if once food was never scarce, is because people were working hard to produce it. Nowadays *campesinos* have lost their ties with the land, preferring to escape to the comforts of the city, while losing their primary source of subsistence:

[...] No faltaba carne, no faltaba la yuca, el plátano, [la leche], la cebolla. Todo eso porque hacían huertas. Ya no. Y sí, no había luz. ¡Pero uno ha nacido y se levantó uno así! Pero ya no, que no pueden vivir sin luz sin nada. Todo se volvió así. Y dejan la finca y se vienen para el pueblo. ¡Y se van para la ciudad a amontonarse, a aguantar hambre! ¡Oiga porque...en el campo uno no aguanta hambre! (don Armando, personal communication, August 2016).

The thoughts expressed by don Armando are the exact reflection of the situation that Norcasia is witnessing. If the agricultural crisis which has spread across Colombian countryside depends on many factors, each area has its peculiarities. In the case of Norcasia, what matters is also the culture that it has been shaping along the years, and what it has inherited from past generations. Culture reflects the way in which *campesinos* have resorted from the violence and isolation of earlier times and strive to get back to normality. His reflection, that of a man who has an unbreakable tie with the land, differ from those expressed by the youth, who acknowledges that the countryside may not be offering them the means for a better living. Even so, the majority of interlocutors confessed to experience the same, and they justify it as being a cultural problem. After the eradication of illicit crops, Norcasia barely went back on track, and thus lost the culture of cultivating and of producing – and consequently, of enhancing the value of the land: '*el problema es que en*

Norcasia no existe la cultura de un agro tecnificado. Por ejemplo, yo voy a decir, yo siembro esta tomatara y voy a vender tomate. Es solo yuca y plátano [...] no tenemos esta cultura [...] De sembrar por ejemplo maíz. Porque primero sembraban mucho frijol, ya no se ve' (Guillermo, personal communication, August 2016). Similarly, on a family level: *'La gente no piensa que puede sembrar lo [necesario] para comer ellos mismos. [Cultivan solo para vender]. No tienen la concepción de la seguridad alimentaria. Pudiéndolos sembrar la gente compra cebolla, tomate...Es un problema más cultural que de recursos'* (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

Likewise, doña Patricia argues: *'Mucho viene de la cultura...por lo que desde jóvenes no les enseñan...y padres que son muy perezosos entonces no les enseñaron a los hijos...y el cuento de que en cualquier pedacito uno puede hacer muchas cosas'* (doña Patricia, personal communication, August 2016).

While generally *campesinos* tend to blame the government or the municipality to not be committed to rural development, and this is in part true, they are themselves abandoning the cultivation of the land. argues Luis Felipe: *'Los que tienen un terreno o tienen donde sembrar, que sea prestado o alquilado pueden producir. Pero no tiene la cultura de sembrar. Si usted se desplaza hacia Marquetalia [allá] hay más cultura de autoproducción de alimentos. Son culturas diferentes. El sector de Norcasia es muy encaminado en la minería, que es un negocio rentable de alguna manera [...]* (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016).

In this particular context, culture should not be equated with tradition, as traditionally, the territory of Norcasia was very productive. I assume it has more to do with the mining culture, which is both a tradition of the past and a widespread activity at present. As we have already observed, mining, just like livestock, is almost *'plata en efectivo'* and both activities require less labour, and here is where you will find more people engaged, as Luis Felipe underlines. On the contrary, the attitude towards cultivation is not quite the same:

Acá hay pobreza, pero también hay recursos que se pueden aprovechar. Pero no hay políticas muy claras [para] que la gente se interese a cultivar. Mucha gente está en el campo sentados, esperando que el gobierno les de algo. Es más la actitud. Hay diez personas sentadas ahí jugando cartas todo el tiempo. Si ellos se reúnen y montan una huertica comunitaria por ejemplo...Eso no requiere mucho...pero estaría comprometido con su progreso. No estamos acostumbrado a trabajar mucho. Hay sí gente que tiene un espacio mínimo y se ponen a sembrar yuca. Uno se puede ayudar un poquito (ibid.).

As Guillermo made me notice once, even if also San Diego has extended pasture lands, their inhabitants have never stopped cultivating, at least for their internal subsistence:

Es que en Norcasia somos muy facilista, o sea que acá es muy fácil conseguir las cosas. En cambio, en San Diego quedan escondidos por allá donde todo es difícil [de conseguir] entonces ellos mismos tienen que cultivar las cosas. Es que en San Diego hay muy poco comercio, muy pocos almacenes. Entonces los muchachos de allá hay muchos [que son] de fincas, se quedan también en el hogar...son más trabajadores, más aficionados...Las casas en San Diego tienen solares, están en el pueblo, pero es como si estuvieran en el campo. En cambio, acá en Norcasia no hay...y si no tiene cebolla en la casa te vas para la tienda a comprar cebolla... ¡es más fácil! (Guillermo, personal communication, August 2016).

Guillermo, who lives in Moscovita with his family, and, despite his disability – being born blind – he has always been active part in the community, through the JAC and projects implemented by the municipality and Isagen, feels this detached attitude that Norcaseños have towards their land. His father, don Ramiro, has been a *campesino* for all his life – even when they had to go from city to city for Guillermo's treatments: '*En la ciudad pero se aburre uno. Es el campo que uno quiere. Como uno del campo...un montañero para pegar al pueblo es duro...*' (don Ramiro, personal communication, July 2016). They have a small plot of land, which they have inherited, and where they cultivate plantain, cacao, yucca and fruit trees. He laughs at me when I ask him if they can sustain themselves with what they produce: his sister and one of his two brother work for Isagen, and he works too, in the cultural centre of the municipality – until when they terminated his contract because of lack of funds. Yet, with three salaries, they barely meet basic household needs.

Nonetheless, he is the first to admit that, a part from the cultural variable, Norcaseños are not taking advantage of the resources that Norcasia has to offer, and neither they are truly engaged to change:

Yo he pensado que no es tanto como del gobierno si no de la misma gente que no se ha apropiado de las mismas cosas, de los recursos que ya tenemos. Nos falta más espíritu emprendedor. Porque la gente se ha enseñado o siempre ha querido que aquí lleguen subsidios, que tanta plata...Pero yo pregunto ¿Nosotros que hacemos pues para cultivar, para vender, para generar una empresa o una idea de negocio? Yo creo que tampoco uno haga mucho...entonces uno quiere que el gobierno le esté dando todo cuando uno tampoco ha hecho nada (Guillermo, personal communication, July 2016).

He also claims that, since people are complaining for the government to be corrupted – which is, nevertheless, a fact – they should, instead, take actions: '*Hay una figura en la constitución que se llama veeduría, y porque no nos ponemos a ser veedores y que los recursos lleguen donde tienen que llegar y que se haga lo que se tenga que hacer ¡Porque a la gente le da pereza! La gente dice no, es que eso no es para*

mí...Pero como no...Y lleve uno el verraco...entonces yo pienso que esto también es falta de interés de la gente...' (ibid.).

Governmental programs dedicated to rural development are often inefficient because the beneficiaries are unwilling to associate with each other, thing that would facilitate the operations. Don Camilo argues that collaboration between small-scale *campesinos* is lacking in Norcasia, and remembers of how communal work was beneficial for the community in his native town: *'Debería de estar colaboración entre campesinos. En Florencia acostumbraron mucho en combites'⁴⁶. Para mantener las fincas limpias y bien organizadas. Los combites son muy servidores para la comunidad. Servían para sembrar un área grande de yuca por ejemplo que uno solito no puede'* (don Camilo, personal communication, August 2016).

The attitude of Colombian is for tradition very open and sensitive on a human and social level, yet decades of civil conflict could have changed their disposition to associate and work with others: *'La gente se confía [de su vecino] hasta que se confía demasiado y ve lo que pasa'* tells don Alberto. *'[El estado] Lo ayuda muy poco [al campesino] porque también uno no sabe pedir los recursos. Los campesinos no se unen. El otro detalle es que cuando hay un campesino así avispadito entonces resulta que él se agarra a pedir y utiliza a los otros para coger el solo. Los utiliza los pones a firmar a hacer charlas, pero eso no es para todos juntos es para él solo'* (don Alberto, personal communication, July 2016).

On the other hand, Luis Felipe regards it as a national feature: *'Los colombianos dicen que trabajar en sociedad no es bueno. El colombiano es muy tramposo. [El latino] se considera avispadito y un poco deshonesto. Es muy duro, no hay confianza entre los mismos socios. Uno podría asociarse para que les dejen productos más baratos. Conseguir asistencia más fácil. Pero hay mucho interés personal. Mucho prefieren trabajar solo [...]'* (Luis Felipe, personal communication, June 2016). Likewise, Eduardo claims that it is difficult for one to associate with another because you will never know if you can trust the person, and this is what parents have always taught to children, there is no way to change that:

La gente es muy envidiosa. No se quiere asociar, el concepto de socio es muy muy difícil. 'No usted me está robando. Sí usted me está dando en la cabeza. Me está quitando plata a mí. Esto no me sirve.' Y es muy verraco. Aquí yo he visto muchas asociaciones que se han conformado en muchas

⁴⁶ *Combites* are a form of solidarity where a group of people decide to get together and carry out work that one person could not do alone, usually in exchange of food.

zonas y no, y es que [todas] han ido para bajo. Y hablan muy bonito. Pero es que no...Es que uno para asociarse con otras personas es muy verraco. Es un factor cultural...Desde pequeños nos enseñan a eso (Eduardo, personal communication, August 2016).

A recent study on smallholders' agricultural cooperatives in Colombia shows that in most of the cases *campesinos* lack of both the endogenous and the exogenous conditions to associate (Gutiérrez, 2011). If the access to land, credit, technology and markets are external conditions and as such, do not depend on *campesinos'* will, the endogenous conditions – organizational and collective-actions capabilities – largely depend on individuals (ibid.). The accumulation of human and social capital⁴⁷ is what facilitate collective actions, and the engagement of members of the community in *juntas* should already favour the association. However, as we have seen, Norcasia lacks of the basis for social trust and collective initiative, and the failure of ASOJUNTAS, the grouping of the 17 *juntas* of Norcasia for the sake of promoting social and productive activities, is an example. It failed due to lack of funds, bad management and weak propositions (Julio Andrés, personal communication, August 2016).

On a positive note, doña Sandra tells me how she and some other women from Moscovita organized themselves together in a group to collect savings by selling food, proving that associations work when they are born out of necessity and from personal initiative:

Nosotras ahora hicimos un grupo de mujeres ahorradoras [...] nos ponemos a hacer actividades para recoger fondos para nosotras mismas. Porque siempre hacemos actividades que para la comunidad que para la Junta. ¡Entonces esta vez hagamos algo para nosotras también! Entonces hicimos este grupo y somos 10. Y estamos haciendo ventas cada 15 días vendiendo tamales, envueltos, una rifa...pero entonces ahí vamos a recoger fondos...si ve...Si es que se motivan solo unos pocos... ¡pero a nosotras nos pareció bien meternos juntas! (doña Sandra, personal communication, August 2016).

It has thus become clear why previous attempts of association into a cooperative, such as the one proposed by the Italian *Punto Missione* and brought about within the second phase of the project of the *Ciudad de Dios de Norcasia* failed to take hold. On the other hand, the start-up of the transformation plant is seen as a means to give an added value to products such as milk, that is sold at a very low price, and fruits, which otherwise do not have market.

⁴⁷ Social capital is intended as social organization in the features of trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions (Putnam in Gutiérrez, 2011:2).

6.2.2 Understanding one's own culture and thinking beyond

Colombia ha padecido lo que muchos han llamado el síndrome latinoamericano que es como una crisis de identidad, deterioro de la personalidad disociación de la realidad, idolatría de lo ajeno, sumisión de lo extranjero, carencia de autoestima, de fuerza de unidad interna para combatir sus males y ello no se remedia con inyecciones económicas; es preciso que transforme sus estructuras sociales y económicas, que se libere de los sectores dominantes y que fundamentalmente construya su identidad cultural. Para ello requiere un proceso de dinamización que se geste en el propio pasado para superarlo en el presente y transformarlo (in: Ardila, 1991)

This meaningful quotation – of a former Ministry of Education of Colombia – unveils the rationale which is beyond the narrations that have been collected and analysed throughout this research. *Campesinos* themselves are acknowledging this *síndrome*, and yet they lack of internal unity and strength to fight against it. They lack of power and self-esteem in front of the institutions, yet they also admit to lack the will, or more often, the capacity, to take the destiny of the countryside in their hands:

Nosotros estamos en el atraso en el que nos encontramos. Yo soy consciente que estamos atrasados por la corrupción, las carreteras muy malas e inadaptadas. [pero también] nosotros los colombianos no fuimos educados por hacer empresas, para conformar una asociación. No, nosotros no. La educación de nosotros por cultura es: si uno tiene una finca, produce para la subsistencia, el sustento, tiene plata para el trago y por un medio mercado, y ya (Guillermo, personal communication, July 2016).

Despite the lack of governmental support, despite the corruption that is rampant and intermediaries who will always take advantage of smallholders: *'en parte si es falta de uno de estar más, de tener uno más experiencia...No acá como estamos muy mal organizados...la gente no está como muy acostumbrada, muy enseñada...'* admits doña María Isabel (personal communication, August 2016).

Structural obstacles to the development of countryside are not easy to overcome, however, people have become used to wait for external support, and if the help does not arrive, they will keep on waiting, and complaining: *'Hay que quitarle a la gente que todo tiene que ser pedido. ¡Tan mal enseñados! Cada vez piden y piden...Dejemos el cuento de estar siempre pidiendo, y si no hay recursos miremos a ver que hay que hacer'* say doña Patricia y don Ignacio, who, both representatives of the *vereda* in which they live, have anyway seen progress, when the community gets together and works for the benefit of everyone. The first *casetas* – gathering places where to develop activities, are being built and this is definitely a good start for some

veredas. Doña Patricia: *‘Y a la gente uno le cambia fácil los pensamientos que tienen tan...como el cuento de que si llega algo bien si no, nada...el ser tan mediocre...uno se los cambia muy fácil...en la vereda mía sí... todos dicen hagámoslo, hacemos tal cosa y tal otra...es fácil’* (doña Patricia, personal communication, August 2016).

Against this backdrop, doña Claudia (the rural school rector) is convinced that the target group should be young *campesinos*, because the youth is the future of the countryside. In this sense, education - when managed properly - has a pivotal role in shaping the future of the countryside: *‘La educación es el factor número uno para que los jóvenes entiendan que la tierra es de ellos, y que se puede volver a confiar en el campo’* (personal communicationn, July 2016). However, seen the shortcomings of the educational system, this may be not enough. Due to the changes that the rural medium has been through, especially new consumption patterns and economic surplus are for the youth a new priority.

In this sense, Liseth - from the team of Comunidad Unida - argues that young *campesinos* should be given the proof that working in the countryside can have its benefits: *‘Hay que darle la idea que el trabajo en el campo es duro, pero sí genera recursos. Voy a estar bien, a tener una estabilidad económica. Aquí hay acceso a muchas cosas, si no que el tema económico es el más importante. Lo que voy a hacer en la finca y lo que voy a ganar es para conseguir el estilo de vida que quiero, para comprarme un nuevo celular, por ejemplo’* (Liseth, personal communication, August 2016).

Along this line, the *Fundación Ciudad de Dios* is working hard to give the means and the motivation to young *campesinos* to be engaged with the future of the countryside. *‘La fundación trata de volverles el amor y el interés por la agricultura. Trasmitirle que la agricultura no sea un castigo’* says Luis Felipe (personal communication, June 2016). And at the same time opens new ways to overcome the rural standstill, which, of course, do not restrict to agriculture: *‘Se van a llenar las expectativas de esos niños que quieren ser profesionales. A demostrar que si podemos ser profetas en nuestra propia tierra. La idea es que uno salga para cumplir una carrera de profesional y que pero luego vuelva para conservarla y ayudarla [la tierra]’* (doña Claudia, personal communication, July 2016).

The bond between the campesino and the land has probably loosened, but it is something that will never fade away, because the land will always bear its fruits:

Yo si soy de raíces de acá y nunca me he ido por otro lado. Yo mientras pueda caminar bendito mi Dios, ahí me van a tener. Los hijos de Bogotá dicen ¿porque no venden ahí y se vienen para la ciudad? Pero no [...] Porque con el tiempo el campo, la finca la vamos a necesitar. Esta finca no se vende. Va a llegar el tiempo de que la gente de la ciudad, todos van a querer correr por el campo. Bendito mi Dios, si alcanzamos a ver lo que dice la escritura por acá es lo último que de pronto uno siembre algo y no se dé. Va a ser por aquí (doña Leidy, personal communication, July 2016).

Conclusion

Throughout this research I have been trying to characterize a reality which is so distant from mine, yet at the same time, when broken down into smaller parts, easier to grasp, in its multitude of aspects and contradictions that simply constitute the human condition, being it in rural Colombia or anywhere else. The condition in which we were born shapes, yet only in part, what will be of our future. Being born *campesino* does not make you a hard-worker, nor a more humble person, even though a *campesino* will always proudly tell you: '*nosotros somos campesinos y campesinos vamos a morir*'.

What is striking is how, on one hand, the context I have analyzed is still deeply rooted in the farmer's work in the field and how *campesinos* and the *campesinado* are a reality that cannot be considered abstracted from its roots, despite decades of conflicts and displacements that left million of *campesinos* landless, that is, without their primary source of subsistence. The countryside – *el campo* – is a very complex and yet unitary reality, where the rhythm is still set by nature and all its units are functional to each other. The production, the land, the environment, the exploitation of resources, the conflictive past, have to all be taken into consideration and cannot be excluded from the analysis.

On the other hand, the forces of globalization have in a way drawn rural and urban spaces closer, while at the same time opened a wide breach of inequality that it is hardly going to reverse in the near future. The opening to international markets, the capitalization of agriculture and of its products have further weakened the *campesino* in the eye of the world. They were therefore forced to adapt to this changing environment that started to directly affect their environment; subsistence agriculture gradually lost its feasibility and thus they had to adjust their livelihood strategies into new ones.

The changes that have taken place with the modernization of rurality into a 'New Rurality' reflect, in turn, the responses formulated by each *campesino*. Similarly, migration to urban areas is an ongoing phenomenon, and it represents one of the new livelihood strategies that young *campesinos* in particular have brought forth, and it can be temporary or indefinite in time.

The mainstream discourse around *development* and *underdevelopment* clashes with this reality, in the way in which it defines and categorizes certain groups of people into limiting concepts that transforms the perception of the majority of people on earth into *underdeveloped* (Esteva et al., 2014). By now it is clear how the discourse around *development* and *progress* loses meaning in front of such a complex reality, and how those labels are underestimating the latter. The practice of development has, on the contrary, often caused harm to the people and the environment, objects of development itself, especially in Colombia, where entire communities are displaced from their territories in the name of development. In Norcasia, the hydroelectric La Miel I, which was said to bring development in the region, has forced *campesinos* off their lands, isolated entire *veredas*, and impacted the microclimate – only to later compensate the damages through community projects.

At the same time, because of their inefficiency, rural development programs brought about by the municipality have become empty promises in the eye of *campesinos*, who, because of the civil conflict, have always felt abandoned by the state. Government supported programs intended to help small-scale *campesinos* and enhance the socio-economic development of the countryside in fact often clash with neoliberal agricultural policies implemented by the government, curtailing the efforts of the first. On the other hand, non-governmental projects, even when built on good intentions, fail to take hold, as their actions are too marginalized and focused on training and transferring knowledge rather than addressing structural problems. In Norcasia, the *Fundación Ciudad de Dios* appoints itself to be completely at the service of the community, yet it's still a quite new reality that struggles to make an impact. A more or less genuine philanthropy may, in fact, not be sufficient, when not coupled with concerted efforts by its proponents towards a solid contribution to the community. A contribution which should count on locals as the engine, rather than objects of the development that is hoped to create. Earlier attempts to form associations in order to unite small-scale *campesinos* have failed because they did not take into account important socio-cultural variables. Associations have proven to function only when they are born out of necessity, and not when they are planned from the outside. At the same time, structural obstacles deep rooted in Colombian society, such as the unequal distribution of resources as well as the turbulent past that rural inhabitants

have for most suffered, have led them to adapt their lives and their livelihood strategies to such environment, rather than seek cooperation with their neighbors.

Therefore, if we take the example of Norcasia, that was already free from conflict years ago, but where the culture of cultivation for subsistence or for sustainability has long been abandoned, the normality is that other strategies to gain a living have been found.

Analysing the history, the cultural and social determinants of Colombia's rurality, has allowed me to take a critical stance on it. And it brought me to understand why, for instance, a *campesino* would go in search of gold – because he knows that, sooner or later, he will find a *pepita* to pay for the week – rather than grow a cultivation and wait for its scarce fruits - unless it won't be destroyed by a plague that he does not know how to cure. Moreover, it has shown the extent to which all those behaviours simply represent the human condition, which is naturally inclined to search for better ways, when in suffering or when not satisfied with the actual condition. Without falling into a radical cultural relativism, we need to acknowledge that every view of reality is to a certain extent relative to the context, and no one can hold a complete and absolute view of reality itself (ibid.). To this regard, the apparent passivity of Norcaseños in front of proposals for 'development' could be deemed as a refusal of the latter, and a stance against it, because there is no real necessity. On the contrary, I am convinced that, when there are necessities to fulfil, *campesinos* will resort and employ all the strengths in power to fix such situation. Likewise, I am confident that, given the right means and the right support they lack, *campesinos* can and will engage in constructing something they themselves feel can improve their future and that of their families.

On a positive note, on the third week of my stay in Colombia, the peace agreement between government and the leftist guerrillas, the Farc, was signed, and this marked a real turning point in the history of Colombia. On the 23rd of June 2016 the Colombian government, represented by president Santos, and the Farc, represented by their chief leader, alias 'Timochkenko', ratified the end of the civil conflict, after four years of negotiations in La Habana (Cuba). As we have seen, the implementation of the peace deal was delayed, as it failed to win Colombians' approval in the referendum of October the 2nd. Six weeks after the rejection in popular vote, and through renewed negotiations with the opposition represented by former

president Álvaro Uribe – who fervently opposed the negotiations as leaving too much space to the Farc – a new deal has been approved. The implementation is taking place at the moment, as the estimated 7000 *guerrilleros* and *guerrilleras* of the Farc are being transferred to the 23 ‘concentration zones’, where they will lay down their arms and prepare for civil and political life; one of the points of the agreement allows in fact for the political participation of the Farc. The first point on the agenda is, however, the agrarian reform, which among other things, will create an 8 hectares Land Fund - *Reservas Campesinas* - to be granted to landless *campesinos*. Additionally, it provides the establishment of special development programs, poverty reduction and eradication of extreme poverty, and food security.

The other points of the agreement referred to the eradication and substitution of illicit crops – which has been the lifeblood of guerrillas – and the establishment of a Special Jurisdiction for Peace and a Truth Commission for the reparation of the victims of the conflict.

Despite its historical achievement to end the worlds longest civil conflict, the peace agreement with the Farc has been widely criticized because it seems to leave impunity to guerrillas, and for not addressing the revival of other illegal groups, which will inevitably fill up the gap left by the Farc. On the other hand, the communities most afflicted by the conflict were the first to welcome the deal as a liberation after half a century of bloodshed.

Nevertheless, the peace process should not be considered as the *panacea*, and Colombians will have to wait long until some changes will actually take place. The premises, however, leave a space for hope, as they envisage new and brighter challenges for *campesinos* and rural inhabitants, who could finally have the means and the power to decide for their wellbeing and their future.

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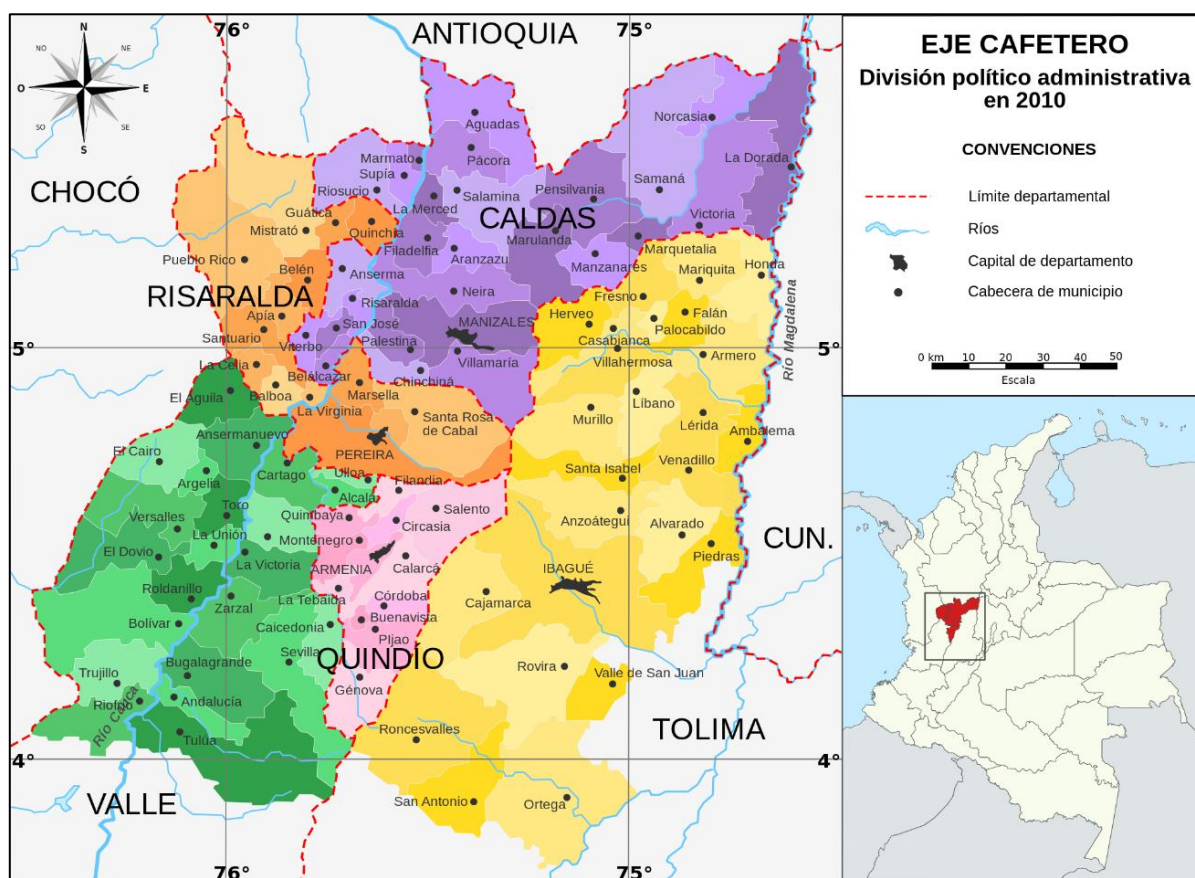
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Annexes

Annex no.1: Colombian coffee growing axis



Source: Wikimedia, 2015

Annex no.2: Survey

ENCUESTA SOBRE EL CONCEPTO DE DESARROLLO RURAL EN NORCASIA, CALDAS

- 1) Eres: H o M
- 2) Edad:
- 3) Describe tu lugar de nacimiento: Vereda Municipio
- 4) Describe tu lugar de residencia: Vereda Municipio
- 5) ¿Tu familia posee alguna propiedad en el campo? SI NO
 - ◆ ¿Qué cultivos tienen?
 - ◆ ¿Tienen ganado, cuáles?
 - ◆ ¿Tu familia se sustenta de las actividades agropecuarias un 100%? ¿O en que porcentaje?
- 6) ¿Con que (otras) actividades laborales se sustenta tu familia?
- 7) ¿Cuántos años de tus estudios perdiste o interrumpiste? ¿Cuál fue el motivo?
- 8) ¿Cuándo termines tu bachillerato que te gustaría hacer?
- 9) ¿Te imaginas un futuro en el campo o la ciudad? ¿Por qué?
- 10) ¿Crees que con terminar tu colegio encontrarás fácilmente empleo?
- 11) ¿Crees que adquirir conocimientos agropecuarios te ayudaría a construir un futuro laboral? ¿Por qué?
- 12) ¿Cómo defines tu **bienestar** social? ¿Y cómo proyectas tu bienestar laboral y social en futuro?
- 13) ¿Crees que Norcasia tiene la necesidad de un **desarrollo** económico y social?
- 14) ¿Crees que tú puedas, en futuro, contribuir con el **desarrollo** de tu municipio?

Gracias por tu colaboración 😊

Annex no.3: Photos from the field



A street of Norcasia on the Colombian Independence Day (20th July)



Día del campesino in the central park of Norcasia (24th June)



Granja Monte Carmelo



View above the river basin of La Miel I



The Amani dam of La Miel I hydroelectric power plant



Vereda Planes Mirador, reachable only by waterway



Vereda San José



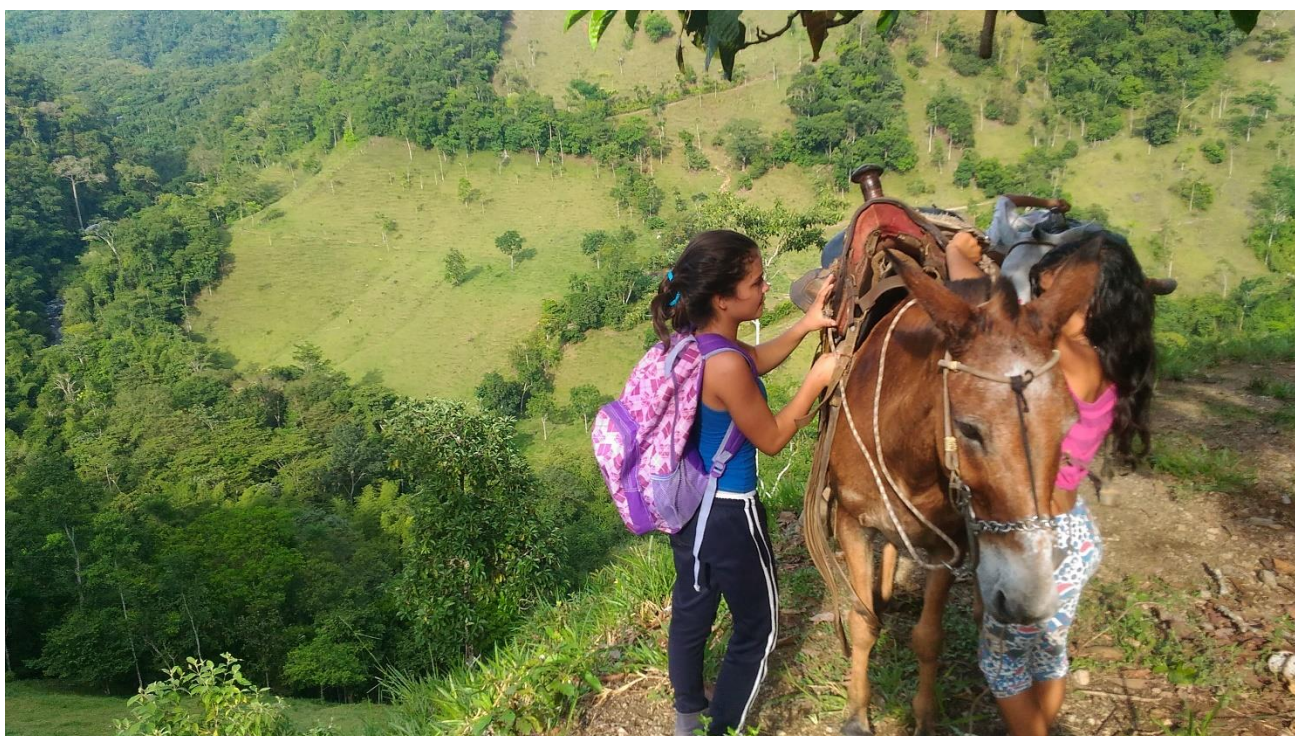
On the way to Quiebra de Roque



Visit to San Esteban



'Se vende esta finca...' vereda Moscovita



On the way home for the weekend



Processing sugarcane to produce panela



A wood cooking stove of a finca



Aguacate criollo, symbol of Norcasia