International Institute of Social Studies

Mañana será bonito: transit migration, encounters, and relations between migrants and locals in Necoclí

A Research Paper presented by:

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Colombia

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

SPD

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December 2024

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Acknowledgements

This research is hardly mine alone. First and foremost, to the Necocliseñxs that opened their lives to me, that told me about their victimisation and mobility experiences, about their fears and hopes, thank you from the bottom of my heart. To the transit migrants that trusted me enough to tell me their life stories, dreams, and plans, I will be forever in debt to you. Thank you all for the long conversations on the beach, for the shared laughs and the momentaneous but sincere complicity and trust. To everyone I encountered in Necoclí, thank you for trusting in this research and for allowing me to bring your experiences and thoughts into paper. Thanks also to *Sin Pasaporte* festival for sharing their knowledge and hopes with so many.

I came across migration studies by coincidence, and they quickly awoke a curiosity in me that I had only ever felt a handful of times. For Nanneke, I have only words of gratitude and admiration. Thank you for welcoming me into this unknown and many times scary field. Thank you for trusting my hunches, for encouraging me to trust in my intuition, and for guiding me in this challenging but beautiful process. Thank you for having been there every step of the way and for giving structure to my dreaming and ramblings. Thank you for showing me the virtues in remaining human in a ruthless world and the value of my excitement, joy, and tears.

To my parents, Lucho y Ana, my eternal and most deep gratitude for raising me critical, sensitive, and curious. Thanks for holding my hand when I got lost and never letting go, for dreaming with and through me, and for being my number one fans. A Irmita y Germán, gracias por mostrarme cómo el amor vive en las contradicciones y los desencuentros; por ser el cimiento sobre el cual pudimos crecer tantxs, por la curiosidad sincera, la emoción inmedible y el orgullo recíproco. To my sisters, Juanita, Manuela, and Elisa, the loves of my life and my best friends, thank you for the calm, wisdom, and excitement you embody. I would not be the person I am today without you. To Elisa, in particular, thanks for coming to Necoclí, for your excitement; sharing this with you was a dream come true.

To Felipe, my strongest platform, thank you always. Thank you for the endless conversations on anthropology, Marxism, global politics, and love. Thank you for rambling with me and for being the amplifier that I so much needed. Thank you for helping me to coin sensations and intuitions into academic terms and ideas. Thank you for pushing me to places I had never in my wildest dreams thought I would get. Thank you for becoming an expert in urban music when that was my focus, in social reproduction when it seemed I would go down that way, and eventually in migration, when my mind was made. This research would have not come to exist without your unconditional support and your brilliance, and I wouldn't have gotten where I am without you.

Thank you to my crew, without whom this master's, this research, and the life in the Netherlands would have been unbearable. To Luisa, Vanessa, María Gracia, Diego, Ignacio, María Margarita, and Pedro, thank you for the laughs, the advice, and the support in sadness, burnout and overwhelm. You became my home far away from home. I will be forever grateful to ISS' faculty, particularly Arul Chib, Murat Arsel, and Helena López Niño for the long conversations and the wise counsel. Finally, thanks to Sandy and the Butterfly for being an oasis and a constant space for celebration and joy, and to ISS' administrative, security, cleaning, and IT staff, without whom ISS would not stand.

Somos una especie en viaje
No tenemos pertenencias sino equipaje
Vamos con el polen en el viento
Estamos vivos porque estamos en movimiento
Nunca estamos quietos, somos trashumantes
Somos padres, hijos, nietos y bisnietos de inmigrantes
Es más mío le que sueño que lo que toco

Yo no soy de aquí
Pero tú tampoco
Yo no soy de aquí
Pero tú tampoco
De ningún lado del todo
De todos lados un poco

Movimiento
Jorge Drexler

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List of Acronyms

ADCK	Apartadó Dioceses Community Kitchen
AGC	Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia or Clan del Golfo
CEV	Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad (Commission for Truth Clarification)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation(s)
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)
ETE	El Totumo Encantado
FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army)
HO	Humanitarian Organisation(s)
LAC	Latin American and Caribbean
RUV	Registro Único de Víctimas (Single Registry of Victims)

Abstract

Necoclí, a small Colombian town near the Colombia-Panamá border, became a major transit spot for hundreds of thousands of migrants in the past decade. Here, the wounds of an ongoing armed conflict, historic marginalization, and state abandonment remain unhealed, and locals have had to relate and adapt to transit migration quite rapidly. As opposed to what traditional approaches might suggest, relations between vulnerable populations can hardly be classified as purely hostile or solidary. This study challenges simplistic views by asking how solidarity and hostility entangle and relate in the ways that locals from transit places, in this case, Necocliseñxs, perceive and engage to the transit migration phenomenon and population. All of this, while understanding that migration is yet another dynamic added to ancient ones. To explore these questions and deepen understanding on human interaction, I conducted ethnographic research, incorporating both participant and non-participant observations, as well as informal conversations with locals and transit migrants in Necoclí. I found that the presence of multiple actors and overlapping dynamics complexifies the ways in which locals perceive and react to transit migration. In a context where multiple vulnerable populations' needs are unmet, state presence is limited, and criminal organisations exert influence, hostility and solidarity engage in a constant and interdependent relationship shaped by time, space, and specific events. This study underscores the need to historicise and contextualise local responses to better understand the fluid boundaries between hostility and solidarity in migration contexts.

Relevance to Development Studies

There is a growing body of research on migration, its motivations, characteristics, and consequences. Traditional migration-development studies have portrayed the migration-development nexus as linear and essentially positive or negative when, in fact, it is rarely the case (De Haas, 2019: 26; Kothari, 2023: 80). The reduction of this as a cause-and-effect unidirectional link fails to understand –and explain– how countless phenomena intertwine around migration and development. This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the migration-development nexus as a localised relation highly determined by global, regional, and local governance dynamics, amongst others. This research attempts to bring to the forefront the harm that linear understandings of broad phenomena (migration and development) and of more localised ones (the one-to-one relations of people) can do to vulnerable populations. Comprehensive and localised understandings are essential to promote a field of development studies that is relevant and useful for different populations.

Keywords

Transit migration, local population, solidarity, hostility, migration industries.

Chapter 1. An Introduction to Necoclí: Unknown and Unattended

1.1. What is this Research About?

The jungle of el Darién, located on the border between Colombia and Panamá, is an unavoidable step for most migrants wanting to reach Central America from South America by land. Most of this journey is made in buses or by foot along the Pan-American highway, which goes all the way from Alaska to Ushuaia, except in one spot: the gap of El Darién (Pappier and Yates, 2023). Unable to cross by bus, transit migrants must find alternative ways to get to Panamá. Necoclí, a Colombian town near El Darién became a major transit spot in "the massive migration chain" (VOA, 2021). Once a city dedicated to tourism quite successfully, migration increasingly became a part of day-to-day life (Sarrut et al., 2023: 20). The so-called tragedy of the migrants has become a work and survival opportunity for a large portion of Necocliseñxs[1] (AFP, 2023). Logistical organisation is usually community-based while armed groups set the pace for migrants' transportation (Sarrut et al., 2023: 25).

In migration trajectory research, it is now well established that people do not necessarily go directly from their places of origin to their destinations and migrants may not even have a place of destination in mind when leaving their homes, especially when it comes to irregular mobility (Collyer, 2007; 2010; LØnning, 2020). Many of them do not even plan to leave until they must, and experience their journeys marked by uncertainty, back and forth routes, negotiating with a wide range of actors, hope, and fear. There is a growing body of research to understand and respond to the needs of people on the move and the places and populations through which they pass (Bhabha, 2022; Brković et al, 2021; Díaz de León, 2020; Filippi et al, 2021; Svensson et al, 2016; Valenzuela-Amaya, 2019; Vandevoordt and Verschraegen; 2019, Vogt, 2018).

In Necoclí, solidarity has played an important role in the interactions between the local population and transit migrants. For example, in 2016, the Panamanian authorities closed the border, and thousands of Cuban migrants were left stranded in the nearby city of Turbo (Valenzuela-Amaya, 2019: 26). By facing pressure from the Colombian government to voluntarily leave the country or risk being deported, they found themselves between a rock and a hard place (Valenzuela-Amaya, 2019: 29). The community offered them shelter, and inmates from the local prison even donated goods (Valenzuela-Amaya, 2019: 26, 143-144). Similar cases have been identified, such as locals hosting transit migrants in their own homes either for a fee or for free (Sarrut et al., 2023) and even undertaking roles as guides through the jungle (Valenzuela-Amaya, 2019: 157; 175-177).

However, Necoclí remains a vulnerable and marginalised town within Colombia. In fact, in 2018, 47% of Necoclí's population was made of ethnic minorities[2], 62.70% lived under the poverty line, and 18.7% of the urban population and 70.95% of the rural population lived with UBN (terridata, n.d.). By 2018, 63% of Necocliseñxs lived under conditions of multidimensional

[1] The binary gentilic of Necoclí would be Necocliseña/o. I use *Necocliseñx* to include women, men, and other gender identities.
[2] Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquera, Indigenous or Rrom.

poverty (DANE, 2020). Necoclí's population was also highly victimised during the armed conflict. Antioquia is the department with the greatest number of victims[3], with 1,480,596 victims, 19% of the national total (CEV, 2022b). Of these, around one third (504,933) were in the Urabá region (JEP, 2018), and 54,406 in Necoclí, of which at least 37,868 are registered as victims of forced displacement, the most widespread form of victimisation in the country (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2023; RUV, 2024).

According to some research, difficult local circumstances and high exposure to migration increase the incidence of rejecting and xenophobic feelings amongst locals of transit places (Hangartner et al, 2019). Locals have a high potential to impact and transform migrants' journeys and the way that their local dynamics are addressed and made sense of (Bhabha, 2022: 50). Based on the above, this study focuses on the ways that locals from Necoclí perceive and relate to the migratory phenomenon that came knocking at their door. This study zooms in on solidarity and hostility –as broad concepts that will be defined below– as relating vectors between Necocliseñxs and transit migration.

The crossing of el Darién involves many actors that have engaged in very different types of activities, such as facilitation, extortion, control, and solidarity. Amongst these are indigenous and local communities, the Colombian, Panamanian, and US governments, NGOs, and, mainly in the Colombian side of the border, organised armed groups, particularly the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia or Clan del Golfo (AGC), as will be detailed in Chapter 4. This paper does not analyse the changes in Necoclí from 2020 to 2021 given the drastic increase in migration, but rather explores how, over time, the city and its locals have adapted to it.

1.2. Justification and Relevance

In a globalised world marked by neoliberal capitalism, distances have shortened for some and lengthened for others, as land has expanded for some and become scarcer for others[4]. Faced with the need to move beyond the narrative of migration as a linear process, transit migration and locations have increasingly drawn the attention of researchers, international organisations, governments, and the media. However, the study of migratory phenomena has tended to focus on the migrant population, and other populations similarly concerned and affected by it have been left out of the analysis. Little "scrutiny has been directed at [migration's] impacts on local frontline hosts affected by the spontaneous migration generated by current migration regimes" (Bhabha, 2022: 50).

Migration has drastically impacted Necoclí's social, political and economic dynamics. Transit migration doesn't happen in a vacuum but is yet another phenomenon adding up to the existing dynamics in Necoclí, which include –but are not limited to– mass victimisation as a consequence of the armed conflict, marginalisation of the –mostly racialised– local population, the state's absence and/or precarious presence, and the territorial domination –and former dispute–

[3] "[...] [P]ersons who, individually or collectively, have suffered damage to their rights as a result of events occurring as of 1 January 1985 [...]" in relation to the armed conflict. (Art. 2, Law 1448 of 2011).
[4] Remark by Colombian anthropologist Ángela Facundo during the Academic Forum 'Integration and Mobility in Latin America' of *Sin Pasaporte* festival (Necoclí, August 17th, 2024).

by armed organised actors, mainly the AGC. These aspects will be explained in Section 1.4 and Chapter 4.

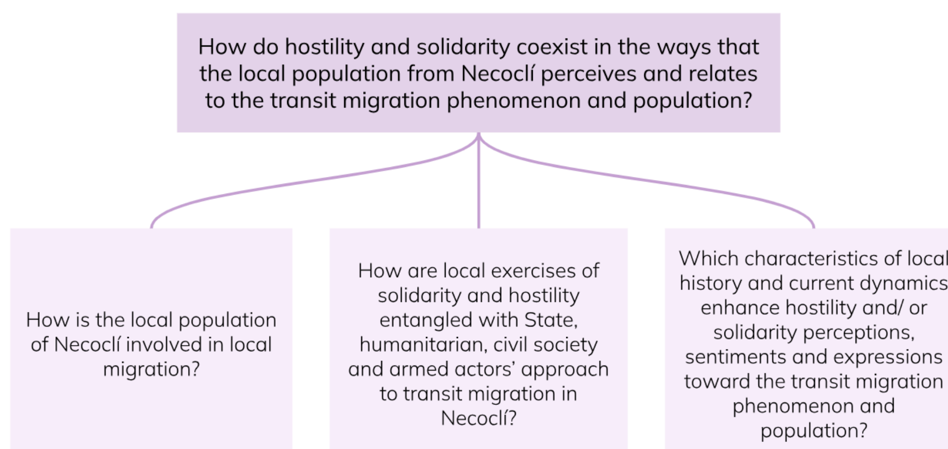
Given this precarious and volatile context, this study is based on the interest in understanding how solidarity and hostility coexist in the ways in which the local population perceives and relates to the transit migrant phenomenon and population. During my stay in Necoclí I was able to witness how many Necocliseñxs have gotten involved with transit migration, either directly or indirectly, through businesses, Civil Society Organisations (CSO), humanitarian assistance, etc… Necocliseñxs engage with transit migrants in different manners, determined by their local social, political, and economic background, which I also sought to understand.

This research was born from the conviction that social sciences must include the study of the perception of the social world in order to understand that world as built both by what occurs in it but also by how the people engaged in specific phenomena, such as transit migration, make sense of it (Bourdieu, 1989: 18). What makes Necocliseñxs relate in specific ways towards transit migrants? Do these ways of relating exist in isolation of each other or are they mutually constituted? Simply put, I refused to accept that dynamics occur in specific ways just *because*, and was convinced that there is always something more, something underlying that the naked eye cannot see.

1.3. Research Questions

To understand the ways in which Necoclíseñxs and transit migrants engage and unpack the dynamics existing in Necoclí, I worked with one research question and three sub questions. Based on the literature, I identified two categories into which the relationships between them could be categorised: hostility and solidarity. As will be shown below, neither of these two categories is easily defined or reducible to a specific behaviour –what in one context can be seen as solidary can be considered as hostile in another– nor can they be isolated from each other.

Figure 1. Research Questions



Source: author

In this research paper, for analytical purposes, I define solidarity as all acts and perceptions that either intentionally or coincidentally make transit migrants' journey easier in some way.

Activities of support, hospitality, understanding, provision or services, and respect, among others, are included in the solidarity category. I do not equate solidarity with hospitality but rather consider the latter to be part of the former. In parallel, hostility includes all acts and perceptions that either intentionally or coincidentally truncate or make the migrant journey harder. Annoyance, xenophobia, suspicion, mistrust, and aporophobia are some of the behaviour interpretations included in this category.

Although these categories are usually portrayed as opposite and parallel (Álvarez-Velasco, 2022), one of the main findings of this research is how this opposition is but apparent and not reflected in practice, where they can be both entangled and chained. Given the aforementioned, I also sought to explore how these enchainment and entanglements are expressed in Necoclí and how, in the context of a poor and state-forsaken territory, they can compensate for the lack of an adequate response to locals' and migrants' needs. This, in the provision of goods, services, and even governance by paralegal actors.

This research seeks to dignify the ways in which Necocliseñxs have faced a major phenomenon that came knocking at their doors. It attempts to do so by rejecting the essentialisation and criminalisation that has characterised the media and institutional approach of transit migration in the region. My main goal is to provide a stage –however small– so that the voices of the local population are not only heard, but also understood and made sense of in their specific territory. No one acts a specific way just *because*, and reducing acts as essentially good or bad deprives Necocliseñxs of their agency and ends up dehistoricising their lives. This research paper is an attempt to do the opposite.

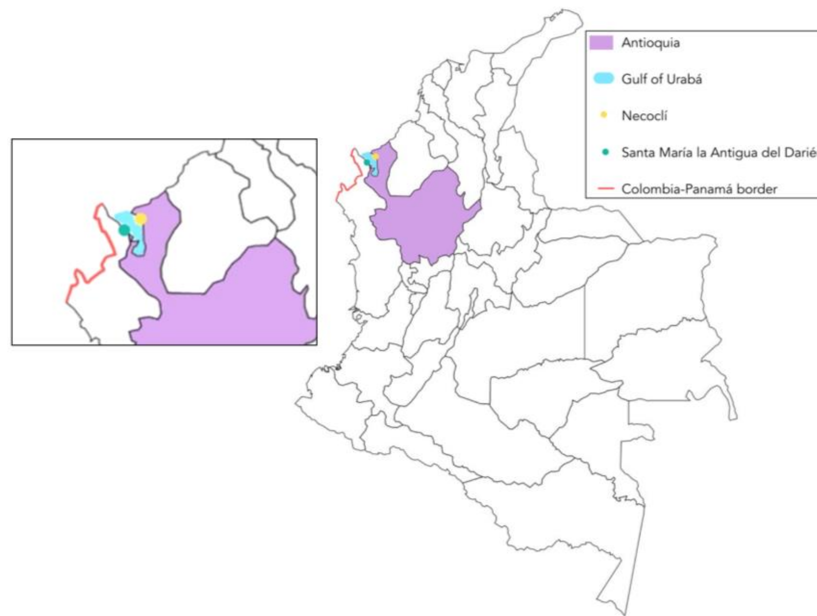
1.4. Background: *The Best Corner of The Americas*

Necoclí is a Caribbean town located in the Colombian department of Antioquia, in the region of Urabá. Even before the American colonisation process, this region held a strategic geo-political location (Espinosa-Peláez, 2024). The first European settlement in the continental Americas, Santa María la Antigua del Darién, across the Gulf from Necoclí, was founded in 1510 by the survivors of a ship wreckage and subsequent fighting against the Caribe indigenous tribe (Arango, 2019). Although the Spaniards' arrival to the Gulf was accidental, they soon realised they had stumbled upon a gold mine: *The Best Corner of the Americas* (Espinosa-Peláez, 2024). The Gulf is located on a very narrow strip of land that links South and Central America, and where the Pacific and Atlantic oceans and several rivers essential to the inland colonising mission converge (CEV[5] et al, n.d; Espinosa-Peláez, 2024).

Since the XVIth century, Urabá has remained a strategic region for commerce. The State's inability to control the territory resulted in timber, gold, and enslaved persons smuggling which eventually became that of drugs and weapons (Parsons 1996, as cited in Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 166). The tropical humid forest ecosystem and climate continue to hinder the State's ability to fully penetrate and control the region. Urabá links the dynamics of three Colombian departments: Antioquia, Chocó, and Córdoba (Monroy-Álvarez, 2013: 17), but also those of Panamá, given its proximity to the international border.

[5] Commission for the Clarification of Truth.

Map 1. Antioquia, el Darién and the Urabá Region in Colombia



Source: author

Urabá is known to be an inter-ethnic web (Monroy-Álvarez, 2013: 57) due to the arrival of displaced people, from the region itself but also from other departments, or even from other regions entirely. Indigenous groups, black, caribbean, and andean people converge in Urabá (Monroy-Álvarez, 2013: 17). One businessman from the region described the situation as follows

> Urabá was shaped by the dynamics of the conflict in Colombia. Most of the people who live there came displaced from other territories. The mobility of displaced people is tremendous. These dynamics shaped a territory amid cultural differences (CEV et al, n.d; author's translation).

The strategic nature of the region and the difficulty of the state to penetrate it made it an attractive place for illegal armed groups since the mid-1900s (CEV et al, n.d.). Urabá was one of the main settings of the Colombian armed conflict, which involved the state, guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and the private sector. At the same time, Urabá was the ideal place for banana and african palm monocrops by and large supported by the state (Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 166-169).

However, salaries were low and working guarantees non-existent and, while the judges did nothing to protect workers, they started to unionise and soon, the unions established relations with the two most powerful guerrilla groups in the region: the FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army) and the EPL (Popular Liberation Army) (Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 170). Unhappy with the unions and their allegiances, business owners responded with massive firings, unionists' murders, crop militarisation, and they allied with paramilitaries to counter their opponents: this was the war of "all against all" (Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 171).

The State was not absent from these dynamics. The army became the most prominent representative of the Colombian institutionality in the region and, in their major opposition against the guerrillas, they too became allied with the paramilitaries (Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 171). Armed

forces participated in –at least– two paramilitary massacres against the civil population (Ibid). Paramilitaries became the hegemonic power in the region –not without the state's collusion– and working for big agro-industrial companies (Chiquita Brands, Dole, Banacol, Unibán, Probán and Del Monte) installed a massive, violent dispossession and displacement pattern to expand the territories for banana, palm and cattle, and to secure the routes for drug trafficking (Vargas 2026, as cited in Poveda-Clavijo, 2018; Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 176-178; CEV, 2022a; CEV et al, n.d.).

Similarly, Urabá's ongoing and latent state of war "reproduces the social division of the social world between enemies and allies [and introducing] oneself guarantees the survival of oneself and that those close to one" (Monroy-Álvarez, 2013: 69; author's translation). The coexistence of people from different backgrounds fosters solidarity expressions marked by identity but also by shared subjectivities and experiences, such as those off mobility and displacement (Monroy-Álvarez, 2013: 73; Valenzuela-Amaya, 2019).

More recently, but in no way isolated from the local history, Urabá's geo-strategic location, the Global North's border securitisation policies, and the governance and armed actors' dynamics made Necoclí the scenario of very particular mobility and governance dynamics. According to the Panamanian Migration Office, the number of people entering Panamá through el Darién has dramatically increased since 2015, having dropped in 2017 –given the termination of the dry-foot/wet-food policy that granted Cuban nationals a right to stay in the US once they stepped on US soil (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2017)[6]– and 2020 –given the Covid-19 pandemic– as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of People Entering Panamá from Colombia Through el Darién Crossing

Year	Number of people	Adults	Minors
2015	29,289	N/A	N/A
2016	30,055	N/A	N/A
2017	**6,780**	**N/A**	**N/A**
2018	9,222	N/A	N/A
2019	22,102	N/A	N/A
2020	**6,465**	**4,812**	**1,653**
2021	133,726	104,202	29,524
2022	248,284	207,846	40,438
2023	520,085	406,905	113,180
2024[7]	238,185	188,030	50,155

Source: author based on Migración Panamá data (n.d.)

[6] This is relevant because between 2010 and 2019, Cubans made up 40.3% of all migrants crossing el Darién to enter Panamá (Migración Panamá, n.d.).

[7] Data until August 2024.

One of the reasons for the rise in numbers of transit migrants crossing el Darién was the exodus derived from the humanitarian and economic crisis in Venezuela, which so far has mobilised around 7.7 million people (Acnur, n.d.). Although in 2010–2019 Venezuelans barely accounted for 1–2% of crossings, since 2022 they account for 60.5% or more (Migración Panamá, n.d.). On their journeys, migrants usually take a boat from Turbo or Necoclí to Acandí or Capurganá, the two Colombian towns where the trek towards Panamá and across the jungle starts (MSF, 2023). At the time of this research, after arriving at Membrillo or Bajo Chiquito, migrants were subsequently registered by the Panamanian authorities to resume their journey.

Map 2. The Colombia-Panamá Border and Main Human Mobility Routes

Source: author

The jungle crossing has been described as hell, and upon reaching the Panamanian side of the border, some migrants have said that, had they known what awaited them, they would never have attempted it. As mentioned above, the jungle is particularly inhospitable and practically inaccessible, filled with wide rivers, dangerous animals and cliffs (Sarrut et al., 2023: 31). These natural obstacles converge with the presence of legal and illegal actors engaged in migration (Ibid), which facilitate and hinder the migrant journey, as will be described in Chapters 2 and 4.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Migration Industries

The massiveness of the migration phenomenon has involved states, the private sector, criminal organisations, nonprofits and NGOs, and local communities in different ways, creating a world with specific roles and activities. Hernández-León conceptualised this world as 'the migration industries', which consists of

> [...] the ensemble of entrepreneurs who, motivated by the pursuit of financial gain, provide a variety of services facilitating human mobility across international borders. (Hernández-León, 2008, as cited in Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg-Sørensen, 2013: 6).

Indeed, this theory suggests a comprehensive conceptualisation of the –(il)legal and/or (in)formal– social infrastructure connecting origin and destinations in a migratory circuit, and their articulation and interaction with actors in the demand side of the international migration process (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg-Sørensen, 2013: 5). This theory advocates for the recognition of the diversity of agents, their contributions to the different stages of international migration, and the industry's high level of sophistication (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg-Sørensen, 2013: 6). Further developments have pointed out that not all intermediaries of the migration industries are exclusively driven by financial gain and that others do not engage within it through the provision of a facilitating service, but more so through the control of migratory flows (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg-Sørensen, 2013: 6). This means that overlapping actors engage with migration either through its facilitation or its constraint (Ibid: 10).

Consequently, three types of activities have been conceptualised within this framework: security (control), smuggling (facilitation), and solidarity (rescue) (Ibid: 6). Most importantly, we must recognise that these activities are not necessarily independent of each other, but often overlap in grey areas in which one or more actors' motivations are difficult to identify –and isolate– (Ibid: 6). This is precisely the case of local communities in the Urabá region, who have become increasingly involved in the migration industry.

Other authors have addressed similar topics, identifying, for example, the 'immigration industrial complex', where several actors, such as the media, politicians, and the private sector are benefitted by a culture of fear and immigration laws (Golash-Boza 2009, as cited in Vogt, 2018: 85). Similarly, Andersson (2014) stated that by seeking to combat illegality, immigration enforcement not only produces it, but also makes it profitable (as cited in Vogt, 2018: 85) through the "increased demand for more clandestine economies to move people, weapons, and drugs" (Andreas 2000 and Galemba 2017, as cited in Vogt, 2018: 85). Thus, securitisation, illegality, and other services have direct impacts on the ways that migration industries work and, consequently, on the value of migrants themselves.

In transit migration, migration industries mutate and adapt to the social conditions in which the phenomenon occurs. For example, Central American migrants are considered valuable commodities by the criminal actors managing migration in Mexico (Vogt, 2018: 84). In a context

where the border is always shifting and disputed –as happens to the one between Colombia and Panamá[8]–, the value of migrants –as exploitable cargo and in relation to labour–, their lives, and their deaths is in continuous flux (Harvey 2005, as cited in Vogt, 2018: 86). This means that, depending on the specific circumstances of the border, its dynamics, and the point where migrants are, their lives hold different values to the actors involved in migration industries. The *cachuco* –a derogatory way to refer to Central American migrants in Mexico– industry "is part of a global system fueled by cheap, exploitable migrant labor [sic] and exclusionary state policies that construct migrants as illegal, racialised, gendered others" (Vogt, 2018: 85).

In Mexico, the pervasiveness of criminal actors, the dispute over trafficking routes (for drugs, humans, and weapons), and the collusion of public officials have set the pace for a specific way in which the migrant industries come about (Ibid). Migrants have become the victims of robbery, kidnapping, and even homicides and mass executions, whose perpetrators cannot be easily identified due to the blurred lines between criminal actors, the police, and the local populations (Ibid: 88).

Border surveillance policies and the dangers that migrants can encounter at any part of the journey increase the need for smugglers to protect themselves from these risks, which illustrates the way supply and demand work in these contexts (Vogt, 2018: 99; Frank-Vitae, 2023). However, the lines between smuggling, surveillance and solidarity activities and actors are hardly clear. The governance and industrialisation of migration is in a continuum in which all actors, even those characterised by solidarity such as migrant shelters, can become spaces of profit (Vogt, 2018: 100-101). The immersion of actors and activities is in constant movement, exceeding theory through its complexities.

2.2. Hostility, Solidarity, and Trust

Solidarity and hostility are not merely theoretical categories and, given their meanings in this specific research[9], exploring the behaviours that can be understood as part of them and their backgrounds is essential to make sense of the ways in which the interactions between Necocliseñxs and transit migrants occur. The categories of hostility and solidarity have traditionally been perceived as positive or negative (Álvarez-Velasco, 2022), connotations that scarcely dig deeper into their backgrounds, expressions, and meanings.

To emphasise on the inextricable proximity between the hostile and the hospitable, French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida coined the term *hostipitality* (2000: 3; Bida, 2018: 120). Derrida understood hospitality as the stranger's right of *resort* –or right of visit– "for all men are entitled to present themselves in the society of others by virtue of their right to communal possession of the earth's surface" (Derrida, 2000: 5). At the same time, he sought to show how "hospitality can veil very different private experiences of being (un)welcome [...]", and how hospitality has been used to cover up discriminatory social norms in terms of race, gender, class, and sexuality (Bida, 2018: 121 and 127).

[8] Given the closing of multiple crossings by the Panamanian government and the historic cross-border relationships of indigenous communities, amongst others (BBC News Mundo, 2024; Agencia EFE, 2024).

[9] See the Section 1.3.

Hostipitality is part of the basis of this research, whereby I seek to understand how hostile and solidary expressions intertwine in social reality, further exploring

> a rich middle space that can illuminate the ways that the tourists' privilege can also restrict their sense of welcome to purely instrumental economic transactions, while the lack of privilege of vagabonds might still generate forms of social welcome (Bida, 2018: 121).

This is particularly important in Necoclí given the fact that researchers and practitioners have located it in a crossroads between tourists, residents, and migrants (Echeverri-Zuluaga, 2024). In this intersection, the relation between hostility and hospitality is so close that one cannot deny that each implies the possibility of the other (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018: 3).

In understanding why people act in solidarity or hostility towards others, trust becomes highly relevant as a vector for people's interactions. Being determined by specific circumstances, much of the social sciences literature has portrayed it as "a good thing for both the individual and the community that enjoy it [...]. And the more we have of it, the better" (Carey, 2017: 17). This framework leaves little room for a nuanced discussion of mistrust, usually portrayed as trust's negation, a "social acid" that corrodes social bonds (Ibid: 17). The dual approach draws the attention away from a more comprehensive understanding of trust and mistrust.

In the social sciences, trust has been analysed as: (i) a strategy whereby individuals act intentionally and rationally based on expectations; (ii) the vector that guides social relations, which can be identified in multiple settings (relations to the known, the unknown, and the broader system), and rarely a matter of choice (Simpson 2007, Putnam et al. 1993, and Seligman 1997, as cited in Carey, 2017: 20); (iii) the limiting of future possibilities "to confidence in one's expectations [that] depend on a certain degree of familiarity with either people, the world, or systemic representations of the real" (Carey, 2017: 21). Not unlike hostipitality, between trust and mistrust,

> Each implies its shadow: where people assume that others can be known and so trusted, they are also aware that sometimes this does not hold; and where they assume that others are largely unknowable, they are also aware that some are less unknowable than others (Carey, 2017: 25).

Lastly, in political science and sociology trust has been addressed as an instrument allowing the handling of others' agency, becoming a tool of social control (Dunn 1988 and Beck 1992, as cited in Carey, 2017: 21-22). Emphasising the difficulties in isolating trust from mistrust, Carey recognises that there is a limit to what can be known, and that the interiority of others is hardly representable to our own selves (2017: 25).

Besides the discussion on hostipitality and trust/mistrust, it is also relevant to understand the extent to which certain circumstances determine these perceptions and behaviours, make them entangled, exhaust them, and allow for their coexistence. Jacqueline Bhabha's research on *empathetic solidarity* is an excellent example of this. Focusing on migration settings –from a theoretical view

rather than a practical approach– the author differentiates *empathetic solidarity* from other types of solidarity, such as political or ideological (Bhabha, 2022).

Although related, the last two refer to solidarity exercised as a moral engagement to, for example, human rights advocacy, while the first is associated with reciprocal altruism and can frequently takes the form of providing goods to migrants in need (Ibid, 2022: 50, 54, 60, 70). As such, Bhabha distinguishes the solidarity that is enacted by organised and politically active individuals from solidarity enacted by the population most relevant to this study, "[...] those inhabiting spaces that, because of the intersection of legalized exclusion policies [...] are newly rendered frontlines or "hotspots" for distress migrants' seeking protection from harm" (Ibid: 61). Interestingly, these frontline communities tend to exist in spaces of transit, as opposed to origin and destination places (Ibid: 70).

The empathic solidarity that these persons show towards strange migrants comes from the recognition of a shared humanity that fosters the overcoming of the fear of the unknown, and can indeed alleviate migrants' loss, anxiety, and unfamiliarity (Ibid: 61-62). In line with this, the other is perceived as an equal with whom, despite that otherness, opportunities for proximity, however short and spontaneous, are created. This type of solidarity is, nevertheless, not all-encompassing.

The lack of support and recognition, and even the attempts at undermining empathic solidarity[10] can deeply affect its constancy and visibility (Ibid: 65). This lack of support may not only be discouraging, but also conducive to a solidarity fatigue within the community faced with the migratory phenomenon, who can perceive to be abandoned by the state (Ibid: 70). This abandonment of transit locations, in turn, forces migrants to extend their transit, further complexifying the relating dynamics between these two populations (Ibid: 70).

As the author sharply puts it, "[c]ommunities can tolerate disruption and unusual demands on their generosity for short periods of time, but beyond that support is essential" (Ibid: 70). Locals are more likely to express empathic solidarity if they know this won't burden them financially, especially recognising they usually come from state-abandoned and marginalised areas (Ibid: 74). If neither the needs of the locals nor those of the migrants are met, attitudes from the hosts are likely to mutate into xenophobia and rejection of the migrant population (Ibid: 51).

Sentiments of hostility, mistrust, abandonment, anger, and even xenophobia can be expressed either subtly or explicitly and can have serious negative impacts on the people that they are aimed at, and even promote ghettoisation and identity reinforcement processes which can broaden the cultural gaps (da Silva-Rebelo et al, 2021: 1143-1144; 1153). Governments' attitudes and media coverage can have deep impacts on the ways in which host communities receive people on the move (Bhabha, 2022; da Silva-Rebelo et al, 2021: 1150) and the ways they perceive and interact with each other (da Silva-Rebelo, 2021: 1144).

2.2.1. Relating Into Practice

Interactions between locals and transit migrants can be mediated by different vectors. Additionally, many actors engage in migration's management and end up getting involved and mediating these encounters. More recently, some of the most studied migratory cases have been that of the flows

[10] Such as criminalisation of solidarity, which is not the focus of this paper.

of refugees towards Europe since 2015 and the ever-growing migration from South and Central America towards North America. The section below shows how locals and transit migrants have interacted in these scenarios to then justify why the context of Necoclí differs from them and is worthy of being studied.

Europe and the Refugee Crisis of 2015

In 2015 around one million people reached the EU's territory after having crossed the Mediterranean Sea, or after a long terrestrial journey (UNHCR/IOM, 2015). There are many accounts of how the arrival of asylum seekers was addressed by local communities trying to balance hostility and solidarity.

Solidarity initiatives were marked by high levels of networking and transnational mobility and were enacted by local NGOs, civil society and spontaneous organisations, and locals (Kasparek 2016 as cited in Brković et al, 2021: 1; Svensson et al, 2016; Filippi et al, 2021). Spontaneous solidarity initiatives took place in the Hungarian towns of Szeged and Pecs, led by locals with previous experience in the humanitarian sector and NGOs (Brković et al, 2021). In Italy, locals from the southern and northern regions expressed solidarity towards migrants in different ways, given that some points are that of entry to the EU and others are transiting points between different EU countries (Filippi et al, 2021).

These experiences cannot be homogenised, neither in their motivations, nor in their strategies and effects. Some sought to compensate for the lack of adequate policy by providing humanitarian assistance and information, and even created alliances to safeguard migrants and act in the occurrence of disappearances or accidents (Svensson et al, 2021: 14; Filippi et al, 2021: 612-618). Some even traced their *raison d'être* to humanitarian roots, and the "duty to help" (Svensson et al, 2021: 8; 14-17). Others went beyond humanitarian assistance and promoted cultural changes in relation to migration and sought to strengthen the porosity of the border (Filippi et al, 2021: 612-614).

In the Italian island of Lampedusa, many neo-islanders[11] welcomed migrants in their own homes and maintained contact during the later stages of the journey, at the risk of criminalisation (Filippi et al, 2021: 616). Others took different measures that either constrained or enhanced migrants' agency. While some initiatives were assistentialist, others, such as Casa Cantoniera, in the Italian Susa Valley, rejected humanitarian approaches and promoted a self-managed safe space for migrants, where they were provided with information and shelter, but little follow-up after their departure (Ibid: 619).

Such initiatives can be considered part of what Vandevoordt and Verschraegen called 'subversive humanitarianism', rejecting humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality (2019: 104). This approach states that traditional humanitarianism deprives recipients of their agency by reinforcing the recipient-provider hierarchical relation, reducing recipients to their vulnerabilities (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019: 106). As an alternative, 'subversive humanitarianism' is "[...]a morally motivated set of actions which acquires a political character through their implicit

[11] Foreigners who came to the island decades ago but are still considered aliens by the locals.

opposition to the ruling socio-political climate" (Vandevoordt and De Praetere, as cited in Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019: 105).

Most of these initiatives can be compared to Bhabha's (2022) politicised and advocacy-committed solidarity, associated with a human rights and humanitarian approach, even if questioning the mainstream way in which these services have been provided (Svensson et al, 2016; Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019; Filippi et al, 2021). However, solidarity expressions such as the one from neo-islanders towards refugees in Lampedusa seem to fit in more in the category of empathic solidarity by being associated with a shared humanity and experience –that of mobility– (Filippi et al, 2021; Bhabha, 2022).

It was difficult to find literature on hostile attitudes from locals of transit spots towards transit migrants. Many reasons have been suggested as drivers of anti-immigrant sentiments, and they tend to be clustered in two categories: economic and cultural concerns (Golder 2003 and Haunmueller and Hopkins 2014 as cited in Hangartner et al, 2019: 445). One study carried out on the western Greek islands found that locals from transiting spots tend to be more hostile towards transiting asylum seekers, despite most leaving the islands within 24 hours (Hangartner et al, 2019: 453). This is, the higher the exposure and disruption of everyday life, through the massive entry of people, the higher the hostility towards migrants (Ibid: 453-454).

Similarly, although not located in one of the hotspots of the 2015 refugee crisis, the case of Spanish enclaves in Northern Africa exposes how solidarity expressions from locals and humanitarian organisations are met with hostility by the local population, because of migration's criminalisation and border securitisation policies (Marconi, 2023). In fact, volunteers have been the target of harassment and threats, which reflects how anti-migrant sentiments are extended to the people that seek to support people on the move (Ibid: 70).

These cases show how locals can react to the massive entry of people to their hometowns. As such, the uncertainty about others' behaviours and the lack of social control over them (Carey, 2017) during a short transit fosters the emergence of mistrust amongst local communities (Hangartner et al, 2019). This type of mistrust can be extended to locals perceived as welcoming that unknown body which, in a context of border securitisation, has been portrayed as dangerous and even become profitable for some (Marconi, 2023; Golash-Boza 2009 and Andersson, 2014, as cited in Vogt, 2018).

Latin America in the Way Towards the North (and South)

A lot has been written about Latin America as a transit spot in the journey to the US and Canada. Trying to reach Canada and the US or not (Vogt, 2018; IDB & OECD, 2021), any person going to Central or North America from South America must pass through Colombia and, most likely through the Darién Gap.

Santiago Valenzuela-Amaya (2019) studied solidarity expressions in Turbo in 2016, when Cuban migrants were stranded there. He identified that forced displacement, widespread violence, and death's pervasiveness stood as frameworks of shared meaning between the local population and transit migrants, and that they fostered the emergence of solidarity from the former towards the latter (Valenzuela Amaya, 2019: 117-177). In Urabá, fear and violence have served as

instruments through which people can identify with others, and around which communities created social values (Ibid: 133), especially in a context where illegal actors' networks are highly elusive (Echeverri Zuluaga & Ordóñez, 2023).

Turbeñxs interacted with migrants on different levels and even the one-off interactions demonstrated their conscience that a good part of the solidarity expressed could be traced back to their own experiences of forced displacement (Ibid: 143). The People's Defender's Office described the locals' reaction as "spontaneous solidarity" –possibly empathic in Bhabha's terms– and compared it to the one that existed to care for the armed conflict's victims (Ibid: 145-146). Through shared experiences, transit migrants were read and understood through shared signifying lenses (Ibid: 147).

Beyond communities that host them, migrants also establish links amongst themselves on their journeys. While in constant movement, migrants form a 'transient community' that provides them with "(1) an identity; (2) strategic information relevant to the journey; and (3) resources that help to compensate for the help that their kinship ties cannot provide" (Díaz de León, 2020: 897-898). In this context, in response to the exhaustion, isolation and precariousness that migration implies, migrants are coming up with new ways to cope with exclusionary policies and xenophobia (Ibid: 898).

Despite the creation of these networks, 'transient communities' are far from being a case in which solidarity can be equated with trust, and in fact, migrants create *solidarity without trust* amongst each other (Ibid: 898). Interactions between migrants –as between migrants and locals– tend to be one-off and based on the assumption that they will never see each other again (Ibid: 899). These interactions involve broader group(s) of people who are migrating, almost as in a bounded solidarity, where "facing a common adversity together can lead a group to develop a sense of camaraderie and identity between strangers" (Ibid: 899).

Migrants self-identify as part of a broader "accidental community of memory" borrowing the term coined by Malkki (as cited in Díaz de León, 2020: 903). These communities are usually brought together by shared understandings and narratives, not shared experiences (Malkki 1995, as cited in Díaz de León, 2020: 898 and 903). Increased cooperation and resource exchange are marked by caution, and they are in line with the recognition of how previous help from strangers has made their journeys easier and the will to extend that help to those that are coming after, as longs as those interactions don't put them at risk (Díaz de León, 2020: 906-908). This is a perfect example of how solidarity and trust do not necessarily go hand in hand and can coexist.

Vogt (2018) chronicled how migrants and host communities in Mexico experience massive migration in relation to solidarity, familiarity, activism, and violent experiences along the migrant track. Although her research mainly focused on how violence sets the pace of transit migration, Vogt also observed how transit migration in the Mexican-Guatemalan border fosters the emergence of *constellations of care* (Ibid). In relation to violent dynamics of the migration context, Doña Alicia, a local woman running a migrant shelter, stated that

> [...] you cannot understand violence without also understanding hope. They are two sides of the same thing. You have to see what we are doing here… We work on the tracks with tears in our eyes, but also with hope in our hearts. (Ibid: 187-188).

In migrant shelters, carers are actually "interconnected, not only within transnational economies of migration, but also within transnational constellations of care and social justice" (Ibid: 188), creating a clear dialogue between the micro and the macro, the intimate and worldwide phenomena. Transit migration across Mexico is in the intersection between widespread violence and care (Ibid: 29-50, 82-104) where state presence is ambiguous and shadowy –just as in Necoclí–, and where all actors, even those characterised by solidarity such as migrant shelters, can become spaces of profit for those already hovering over human mobility (Ibid: 100-101, 191).

Solidarity has also been identified in settings mediated by shared senses of spirituality, as Hondagneu-Sotelo et al (2004) found in the wall-separated Mexico-US border. The *Posada Sin Fronteras* seeks to draw a parallel between a migrant family's search for refuge and that of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al, 2004: 134). Despite the religious traditions of Latin and North America being very different, the *Posada sin Fronteras* brings together migrants, potential migrants, and locals from both parts of the wall to question and reject governments' approach to the situation. It is an expression of "politicized spirituality" (Ibid: 135). Despite participants not sharing the same religion, there appears to be a sense of shared moral beliefs, and "the appeal of religious authenticity combined with the political message allows persons with diverse identities to coalesce in these events" (Ibid: 136), which could be understood as a way to recognise one's humanity in others and vice versa, as Bhabha's empathic solidarity suggests (2022).

Migrants are also met with not-so-welcoming arms in some places. For example, Venezuelan forced migrants in Peru have faced high levels of criminalisation by the local population and public institutions (Freier and Pérez, 2020). Wide sections of the Peruvian society have manifested apprehension, fear, and mistrust towards Venezuelan migrants (Ibid: 115). These expressions tend to be related to negative media and political discourses –usually benefitting from promoting these negative perceptions about migrants– and to the perception of Venezuelans as economic competitors for locals in the Local Market (Ibid: 115; Hangartner et al, 2019; Golash-Boza 2009 and Andersson, 2014, as cited in Vogt, 2018).

Further north, in Honduras, different local regions express diverse attitudes towards migrants. Negative attitudes are concentrated in the regions crossed by the main road migrants use on their journey north, and in the northern border with Guatemala, Honduras' exit point (Acevedo and Richards, 2024: 2, 10, 14). Migration is more visible there given border externalisation policies by the US, reflected in the Guatemalan militarisation of the border, which in turn causes migrants to get stuck there for long periods, waiting for a safe moment to cross (Ibid: 2, 10).

Because Honduras is a migrant-sending country, people express solidarity towards transit migrants because they understand what they or their kinship has or hopes to go through (Ibid: 13) –similar and different from the shared subjectivities identified by Valenzuela-Amaya (2019)–. In line with Bhabha's (2022) argument, the authors found that if "local hospitality and humanitarian services are overwhelmed, local communities may experience prolonged exposure to transit migrants" (Acevedo and Richards, 2024: 14), fostering hostile attitudes towards them.

The above initiatives contribute greatly to the understanding of migration dynamics around the globe, their similarities, and their differences. The coexistence of solidarity and security actors in Europe, and of them with smuggling actors in Latin America demonstrates how, as Hernández

León (2013) stated, the lines between the three activities of migration industries are blurry and difficult to identify. Even more illustrative is the example presented by Vogt, which shows not only how one actor can be involved in more than one activity, but also how these activities can be enchained (2018: 191).

In fact, European cases, except the one in Lampedusa (Filippi et al, 2021), appear to be more associated with political engagement while in Latin America, solidarity seems to be motivated mostly by shared subjectivities and the recognition of oneself in the migrant other, which relates to Bhabha's (2022) empathic solidarity. Similarly, hostility expressions in both scenarios are mostly found in places most affected by the arrival and transit of migrants, such as the Eastern Greek Islands and the Honduras-Guatemala Border. They are explained not only by cultural and economic threat, but also by the saturation derived from lack of institutional response and its subsequent enormous shock on local populations (Hangartner et al, 2019; Freier and Pérez, 2020; Acevedo and Richards, 2024).

Both in Europe and in Latin America, migrants can reach their destinations using different routes. In Europe they can use the Balkan or Mediterranean route and in Central America, the routes to use are mostly defined by guides or smugglers (IOM, 2024; Aguilar et al, 2024). This is, migrants have a wide range of options when it comes to entering Europe or navigating Central and South America. This is not the case in Necoclí.

Located in the Urabá region, the jungle of El Darién is the only terrestrial path from South to Central America (Pappier and Yates, 2023), and the only way to get to the jungle of el Darién is from Turbo or Necoclí. These towns are a bottleneck: from the world to the jungle. This specificity clearly differentiates transit migration through Necoclí from transit migration in other scenarios and makes the understanding of encounters and interactions between Necocliseñxs and migrants even more interesting. As Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh state, "to understand the relationship between hospitality and hostility, we need to pay close attention to the spatiality, temporality, and texture of social relations" (2018: 3). Thus, the context and specific circumstances of Necoclí must be understood and considered when studying solidarity –including hospitality– and hostility.

Having sought to understand the ways in which solidarity and hostility can be enacted in these migration settings and explaining why Necoclí differs from them, these studies do not lose their analytical value. How is solidarity enacted in Necoclí? Is it politically engaged, more based in altruism, both, or none? How do the migration industries' actors interact and impact each other's operations? What are the grey zones –or lack thereof– between activities, actors, and relating vectors –such as trust and mistrust– that influence and determine how the local population perceives and reacts to transit migration? I try to answer these questions in the following chapters.

Chapter 3. Methodological Approach

3.1. My Plan vs. That of the Field

Participant and non-participant observation, and qualitative interviewing promised to be very useful in answering my research questions. They appeared to hold intrinsic value –and feasibility. I designed three interview questionnaires, one for each population I thought to be relevant for this research –transit and permanent migrants, migration-related businesses and grassroot organisations, and 'ordinary people'. Simultaneously, in preparation to carry out ethnography (more specifically, participant and non-participant observation) I thoroughly went through my Ethnographic Research course's readings, notes, and assignments. Spoiler alert: things did not go as I expected them to.

As I had been told –and failed to really believe– being in Necoclí drastically changed my research questions the way in which I addressed them. Given how the local context is marked by the elusiveness of networks associated with the control of armed actors (Echeverri and Ordóñez, 2022) and the pervasiveness of mistrust and silent and hostile surveillance, formal interviews lost their usefulness very quickly. I realised that framing a conversation as an interview and asking participants to sign written consent forms would truncate the fluidity of the interactions. This, not to mention the risk of approaching people as a researcher on the first encounter, I would have generated suspicion due to the armed actor's surveillance of Necoclí. In these circumstances, I never took the interview questionnaires out of my bag nor checked them during any of the chats. I, however, did try to steer the conversations towards my research interests. My fieldwork came about in two different phases.

The mention of my research and the consent request came about orally and informally; I described my research questions and interest in a manner that –in my opinion– was more digestible and would generate less suspicion to my interlocutors. Similarly, before and after engaging in any conversation, I explicitly asked the participants if I could use our conversations as part of my research paper, always emphasising that all information and details would be changed to guarantee their anonymity. Every participant –except the ones who explicitly authorised the use of their real names– have been pseudonymised.

The first one took place between July 2nd and 17th, 2024 and was marked by observations made in the El Caribe Beach, where the two piers of Necoclí are located and where most migrants that are "in beach situation"[12] live. Many tourism-related businesses are also located in the vicinity of this beach. I mostly engaged in conversations with transit and permanent migrants, locals associated with tourism and migration-related businesses, and other residents of Necoclí. Transit migrants in Necoclí are very diverse and have different needs, characteristics, and ways of relating to the locals, as is explained in Chapter 4. I did not specifically focus on one specific migrant population.

The second phase took place between August 11th and 19th, in a slightly more delimited setting. I stayed in the same hotel I had stayed the first time but, this time, my days revolved around

[12] In Colombia, homeless people are referred to as "street inhabitants" or "people in street situation", this is where the Necocliseña expression of "beach situation" comes from.

the different events that took place within *Sin Pasaporte* festival, which took place between August 13th and 19th. The festival was the setting for plays, artistic workshops, academic talks and panel discussions, and much more. I got to witness and participate in many of these activities and, at the same time, got to revisit many of the places and people I had met the first time I had visited Necoclí.

This paper is based on data consisting of notes taken during the two fieldwork phases mentioned above. Additionally, I had two follow-up interviews, one with Iván Darío Espinosa-Peláez, a researcher who currently works as an advisor for the mayor's office, and a second with Jonathan Echeverri-Zuluaga, professor of anthropology at the Universidad de Antioquia with experience in migration. The fieldwork notes and transcriptions of the interviews were translated into English and later codified in Atlas.ti for analysis. I also used secondary data, such as media outlets, reports, and national statistics to contextualise Necoclí as a town marked by poverty, violence, and state abandonment.

3.2. Positionality

Like many scholars, I find myself troubled by dominant Western research, "in which [I, too] recognize the power imbalances that exist between [me] and the people who are objectives of research" (Alonso Bejarano et al., 2019: 6). I knew I didn't want to reproduce an approach that leverages on power imbalances to produce 'objective' knowledge (Ibid: 7). To avoid this, I had to understand the impacts that my identity and positionality might have on the people and settings I wanted to do research on, and the limitations they carry.

I must not forget that while positionality is ever shifting, in Colombia, and particularly in Necoclí, I am a 'white', rich, and educated woman from the capital city. Especially in relation to the context where my research took place, it is important to state that I have never experienced widespread violence or been a victim of heinous crimes, I have never been discriminated against because of my race, and I have never been ostracised by the state, the media, or society in general. This, of course, is not the case when it comes to gender issues, but even in that case, my intersectional identity still puts me in a somewhat privileged position in relation to women from other regions of the country.

Aiming to work in a town with high levels of violence, poverty, and a highly racialised population, I was not willing to reproduce the extractiveness of traditional ethnographic research, aimed at exoticisation, academic consumption and knowledge ownership (Alonso Bejarano, 2019: 7, 29; Patel, 2016: 53). I recognise my identity, its similarities and differences from the Necocliseñxs, I acknowledge the privilege that I inherited through colonialism and decided to do everything that was within my power to counter it by taking different measures.

First, I decided to 'read' the context to adapt my methodology so that my research could be fulfilled, my security guaranteed, but also so that my participants felt comfortable and at ease when talking to me. All the conversations I held took place on the participants' terms, most of them not even having been planned. Second, I was lucky enough to revisit Necoclí, which was not only a great joy to me, but also demonstrated my commitment to the understanding of the Necocliseñxs lives to them. I was very warmly welcomed back by all the people I had met during

my first visit, and I went with my sister, which I believe also delinked Necoclí from being merely a research place for me in my interlocutors' eyes.

Lastly, I decided –but have not yet done so– to go back to Necoclí to share the results of my research with all the people I met there –and all whom I did not– who show an interest in my findings and analysis. Officers from the Mayor's office, members of CSO El Totumo Encantado (ETE), and many of my participants showed great excitement about my research and are very eager to find out how it might help them better understand and address Necoclí at the crossroads of migrants, tourists, and residents.

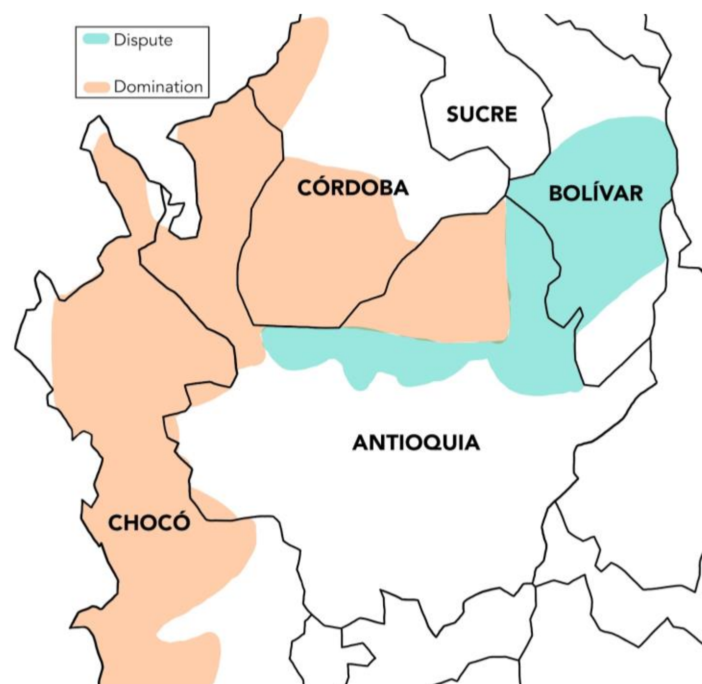
Chapter 4. Overlooked Entanglements and Apparent Contradictions

4.1. Overlapping Dynamics: Migration and the Armed Conflict

Despite efforts to control the region, and two transitional justice processes –in 2005 to demobilise paramilitary groups and in 2016 with the FARC-EP– criminal bands still dominate Urabá, where Necoclí is located. As of 2008, the AGC have consolidated their power, and "[s]ome even claim that the reduction in homicide rates in recent years is due to the hegemony of the AGC; there is no one to denounce or dispute their power' (CNMH 2017 and Valencia 2016, as cited in Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 185-186; author's translation). Studying the intersection of migration and armed conflict is relevant to contextualise local perceptions and ways of engaging with one in relation to the other. These are not isolated phenomena, and understanding the latter implies understanding its link to the former.

A report by Antioquia Cómo Vamos[13] reveals that the AGC is present in 53% (66 out of 125) of all Antioquian municipalities, having increased its municipal presence by 27% and its members by 93% between 2016 and 2024 (2023: 6, 146). The Colombian State still hasn't been able to reach Urabá in a consistent manner (CEV et al, n.d.) and the territories abandoned by the FAC-EP since the 2016 Peace Agreement were taken over by the AGC (CEV et al, n.d.). Map 2 illustrates the territorial dispute and control of armed group(s), including the Urabá region.

Map 3. Armed Groups' Territorial Control and Dispute



Source: author based on Antioquia Cómo Vamos, 2024: 150.

[13] A private sector lab to monitor territorial development plans.

Although some parts of Urabá escape the AGC's control, their presence and control are pervasive (Antioquia Cómo Vamos, 2024: 150; Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 185-187). This control is stronger in the illegal economic sphere, where nothing happens without their clearance (Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 187). The state has been unable to control Urabá, its institutional presence remains impressively low, and the local population is highly mistrustful of it (CEV et al, n.d.). In response, "the AGC not only regulate the economy and collect taxes, but also provide some state-like services" (Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 188; author's translation).

The AGC have gained significant influence due to their control over drug and weapon trafficking, migration, and key mobility routes (Pacifista 2016, as cited in Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 187; Ibid, p. 25). The AGC is a crucial actor for everything –and everyone– that crosses El Darién through (1) "forced taxation for all activities related to this phenomenon", (2) "containment of violence against migrants on the Colombian side of the border and", and (3) "authorisation or restriction of the use of maritime and land routes" (Cajiao et al, 2022: 3; authors translation; and Verdad Abierta 2015, as cited in Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 187). The AGC's protection of migrants stems from the need to draw authorities away from these areas to ensure the success of this and other illegal economic activities they are involved in (Cajiao et al, 2022: 3). The AGC's role will be explored in greater detail in section 4.3.2.

4.2. *Urabá Is So Much More*

I landed in Urabá on a July afternoon. In the aeroplane, the landscape changed rapidly from all-encompassing urban Bogotá to the Cauca River, surrounded by the Andes, and finally, to an endless horizon of banana and plantain crops. The crops were the undisputable sign that I was no longer in Bogotá, and as soon as I got off the aeroplane, the intense heat and humidity confirmed this. I gathered my things and stepped out to meet Mauricio, the driver who was picking me up and taking me to Necoclí. It took him 10 seconds to identify me, take my bags, and put them in the car. That's how easy it was to recognise me, an obvious researcher alien to Urabá, which welcomed me with a storm-cloud filled sky. The rain was almost upon us and the clouds followed us in the small Honda taxi for the one hour and a half ride. I realised that, in my mind, the region was much smaller than it revealed to be.

Mauricio became very talkative very fast, encouraging my curiosity and making me feel comfortable asking questions. In that hour and a half, we talked about agriculture, the dynamics between indigenous communities, urban populations, and the State, the gap between media portrayals and reality in the region, and the presence of armed actors. When I mentioned my research –which, at that point, was quite different from what it became afterwards– and my interest in solidarity, he looked interested. He immediately said that although migration still went through Necoclí, reality was very far from what the media showed and that, despite the armed actor's participation in that business, "Urabá is so much more".

Fast forwarding to when I had already completed my two fieldwork phases, Map 4 presents the sites I considered to be most relevant in the interactions –and lack thereof– between Necocliseñxs, migrants, and tourists. The map, representing the majority of urban Necoclí, will be referred to throughout the whole chapter.

Map 4. Necoclí's Urban Centre

Source: author

My first day in Necoclí, I explored to identify the places where migration was concentrated –and where it wasn't– and to grasp how that phenomenon involved Necoclí and its inhabitants. Outside my hotel, the environment was filled with warm air and migration's omnipresence. A few blocks away, the streets adjacent to the main pier (T shape in Map 4) were filled by street vendors selling all sorts of things, from cups of chopped mango to waterproof phone cases, trekking boots, and bug repellent –an indication of market demand in the town. It was loud. Some people were buying items for what seemed to be the jungle-crossing, vendors were trying to get my attention, and mundane conversations were being held between acquaintances.

I headed towards the main pier (see Figure 2) to get a sense of human mobility and to see the Gulf of Urabá in person for the first time. On the ramp up I couldn't help noticing an office of the National Police curiously shared with the Colombian Migration Unit –Migración Colombia. I then went to the East wing of the pier, leaned on a railing and stared at the landscape. On the West wing were the counters of a maritime transport company and next to it, a waiting room. One boat with around eighty people was leaving, and passengers were waiting to be called to hand their luggage, then handed a lifejacket and asked to proceed to the other boat that was parked and waiting to leave.

Some passengers were wearing long pants and long-sleeved t-shirts, trekking boots, hats with mosquito nets, and some were even carrying five-gallon bottles of water; not what tourists going to Capurganá would wear at 38°C. Of course… they weren't tourists. Meanwhile, two humanitarian sector workers or *chalequitos* (little vests), as locals disdainfully referred to them, were walking around with notepads and asking questions to the travellers. This will be explained in section 4.2.1. Although there were Police and Migración Colombia's officers on the pier, most passengers addressed men in civil clothing to ask questions about the journey, and other things I could not hear. I had read about the informal management of migration services, but I never expected to encounter such interactions so quickly and so explicitly. Welcome to Necoclí, I thought while Mauricio's words, "Urabá is so much more", echoed in my head.

Figure 2. Necoclí's Main Pier

Source: author

In less than one hour I observed migration's economic force, both in the informal –street vendors and men in civilian clothes giving directions– and formal economies –the maritime transport companies with counters and big and safe boats. I also saw how it drew the attention of humanitarian organisations, navigating the environment and fulfilling their missions under the vigilance of formal and informal institutions. The presence of Migración Colombia and the Police seemed like a perfect portrayal of state presence in the region: precarious, redundant, and reactive (Poveda-Clavijo, 2018; Quintero, 2018: 226). Precarious because two institutions handling some of the most intense local social phenomena –public order and migration– did not even have a separate space to carry out their activities. Redundant because despite being there, all questions from passengers avoided them while exclusively addressing the men in civil clothing. And reactive because, as I later would confirm, this –the town's exit point– was one of the few spots where they made presence.

4.3. A Convergence Point

People and commodities have always transited through Urabá. Section 4.3 illustrates how different actors have engaged with migration, the circumstances that determine their actions and perceptions, and the consequences these have had. Those at the centre of these findings are the local population –participating or not in CSOs and HOs– and transit migrants (section 4.3.1.), the AGC (section 4.3.2.), and local institutions (section 4.3.3.). The characteristics of Necoclí's residents, transit migrants, and the dynamics of governance and negotiation make this context increasingly valuable for understanding relating vectors and perceptions.

Until 2016, Necoclí's piers only offered *Días de sol* (Sunny Days) trips; boats leaving in the morning had to return with the same number of passengers in the afternoon. This was not useful

for migrants seeking one-way journeys, so most of them went to Acandí[14] from Turbo (See Map 3). The municipality had long aimed at positioning Necoclí as a unique tourist destination on the Antioquian Urabá Gulf. According to Antonio, a young middle-class Necocliseño working in a bank and not depending on tourism, Necoclí was a big vacationing site, particularly for Medellín's lower middle class, who could not afford the boat ride to Capurganá. Necoclí's touristic infrastructure –hotels, restaurants, and bars– had solidified, and the beaches were constantly filled with tourists. The interactions between migration and tourism will be further studied in section 4.3.1.

Transit migration was not foreign to Necoclí, but it had never been massive either. Yon, a restaurant worker, and Iván Espinosa-Peláez, researcher and advisor to the municipality from Medellín that has lived in Necoclí for twenty years, told me how for decades migrants had embarked in small boats on rural beaches to reach the other side of the Gulf. In 2016, Necoclí's piers started to offer one-way journeys, and tourists started getting there from Necoclí. The increased arrival of people, however, did not only include tourists. The one-way journeys from Necoclí also attracted the other population interested in those services: transit migrants, whose characteristics will be detailed below.

Despite having the same immediate goal, not all migrants are the same. Intercontinental migrants come mostly from China, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Indian subcontinent. As Kamal (Nepal) and Timothy (Ethiopia) told me, most of them want to reach the US, their journeys are usually paid for in advance, and they have enough resources to pay for accommodation and food while in transit. In contrast, Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) migrants usually come in bad financial shape, mostly fleeing environmental and social disasters, as is the case of Venezuelan and Haitian migrants, the leading nationalities in this group.

Different migrant groups have had different impacts on Necoclí. Intercontinental migrants, racially distinguishable from locals, do not speak Spanish (except for the word "cerveza", as Timothy jokingly told me), make their way around from restaurants to bars, buy groceries and supplies in the Olímpica, an expensive supermarket, and stay in modest but decent hotels. I saw them bathing and using the sunbeds –subject to a minimum consumption– on all three beaches (Map 4). They are not usually in Necoclí for long and pay for their tickets shortly after their arrival or before it. Kamal and his friends were in Necoclí for two weeks and were the longest-staying intercontinental migrants I met. Most, like Timothy, stay for one or two days, and are rarely seen on the street. There, they rest and prepare for the upcoming voyage. Although shortly, they may make use of Necoclí's touristic infrastructure just as tourists.

Conversely, most LAC migrants arrive in Necoclí with barely any resources, planning to raise money for the ticket there, which extends their stay (El Hilo, 2024). Given the lack of free accommodation, they settle in tents on the beach. During my fieldwork, Aura and Mariana, from Venezuela, had been in Necoclí for eight months and one year, respectively, trying to raise money for their own and their relatives' tickets, which had proven very challenging. Gustavo, a 25-year-old man from Venezuela, told me that no one hires migrants and, when they do, the pay is extremely low, forcing them to remain on the beach. Unable to afford their needs, Necoclí's touristic offer is not an option for them, and many end up begging for money or selling candy

[14] When I say Acandí, I refer to Acandí and Capurganá because the latter a paradisiacal township of Acandí.

outside supermarkets (See Map 4). The cases of LAC migrants are good examples of how migrants' journeys can imply staying put for a prolonged time and are not necessarily marked by constant movement.

4.3.1. Business Opportunity or Empathy Trigger?

With few migrants leaving Necoclí and more arriving daily, the situation reached critical points. Lack of resources and border closures caused beaches to be overcrowded with migrants waiting to cross to Acandí. Sanitation was poor, tourism was collapsing, and, as some participants mentioned, domestic negligence was widespread amongst migrants in beach situation. The AGC expanded their migration business and new actors arrived. The local population, civil society organisations (CSO), and administration had to figure out how to respond to the unfolding crisis.

The media came to Necoclí to inform and raise international attention. News of human trafficking (Guarnizo, 2021), stories of death and anguish along the Darién (Jaimes-Osorio, 2022) and of difficulties faced by the municipality to cope with arrivals (Olivares-Tobón, 2024), and reports on the beaches' overpopulation and poor sanitation (Semana, 2022; Redacción Semana, 2024), filled media outlets. Many reports categorised the situation as a tragedy or hell (CNN Español, 2021; Ortiz, 2023; Hernández-Bonilla, 2024).

Arriving humanitarian organisations (HO) and local CSOs started offering a wide range of services to migrants. They supplied them with general, infant, and feminine hygiene products, medical assistance, daycare-like services, relevant information, and several meals a day, amongst others. Given the local origins and the participation of Necocliseñxs and Urabaenses mostly in CSOs, despite my focus not being on organisations, their stance and operation were relevant in understanding locals' perceptions and reactions to migration.

Some of the local CSOs I came across were the Apartadó Dioceses Community Kitchen (ADCK) and *Sin Pasaporte –Without Passport–* Festival. These are examples of how civil society has addressed the migratory phenomenon from different perspectives, from assistance to awareness raising. ADCK provided lunch to around 300 migrants on weekdays, organised events, such as the Family Day –providing recreation activities and food on a Saturday, which is usually a hard day for migrants because community kitchens close during weekends–, and occasionally distributed groceries to migrant families.

Figure 3. ADCK's Wall, it reads "Migrating is a right"

Source: author

The ADCK was managed by members of the church and COMPARTIR, an Urabá-born church organisation caring for the armed conflict's orphans and widows. They approached migration as a human right and through the recognition of humanity, and not only religion, as a relating vector between locals and migrants (See Figure 3). Like the *Posada Sin Fronteras* in the Mexico-US border, people from different religions –Colombian Catholics and Venezuelan evangelicals[15]– gathered around a sense of shared beliefs materialising in a political stance on human mobility (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al, 2004), critical of border securitisation and the denial of migrants' agency. According to participants, these initiatives were born out of the ecclesiastical charity duty –different from empathic solidarity–, but as opposed to some testimonials presented by Bhabha (2022: 55-56), not mediated by feelings of superiority but rather a recognition of the self in migrant others.

Similarly, artistic CSO ETE launched *Sin Pasaporte*, the first cross-border festival, promoting "integration and dialogue, where art and culture become bridges of union and reflection" (ETE 2024). ETE was born to keep youngsters away from the armed conflict, especially forced recruitment. Like ADCK, *Sin Pasaporte* started from the premise that migration was a new layer that further complexified local dynamics marked by the armed conflict, and sought to show how mobility is key in human history (See Figure 4). To get locals, transit migrants, and tourists to dialogue, ETE sought to identify their needs. For example, because one target population were people on the move, many activities took place where they are usually found: the beach. The festival featured the participation of representatives from Brazil –one of the Americas' main entry points for intercontinental migrants–, Colombia –the main transit spot on the way to Central America–, and Mexico –the exit point to the USA and Canada.

[15] The religion to which most Venezuelan migrants reported belonging.

Figure 4. Mural Painting in *Sin Pasaporte*, it reads "Migrating is natural"

Source: author

Sin Pasaporte and the ADCK are comparable to initiatives born in the Americas and Europe in response to human mobility, such as the one in Lampedusa where locals raised awareness and related migration issues to local ones (Filippi et al, 2021). As opposed to, for example, Hungarian initiatives (Svensson et al, 2021), *Sin Pasaporte* did not seek to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants but was rather focused on making the importance of the relations between the local and the foreigner visible and showing their virtues.

Despite the festival's efforts, conversations with attendees and intercontinental and LAC migrants revealed that its format did not respond to migrants' dynamics; they didn't see the point in engaging and relating with Necocliseñxs. This confirms Díaz de León's (2022) findings, according to which migrants are aware of their transient condition and act accordingly. While distributing festival's flyers on the beach, I came across a family I had met during my first visit and invited them to a play. The children asked their parents for permission and were allowed to come. This happened three times, the parents came none. Migrants came mostly to the events on the beach, which were but a small part of the festival's offer, and their participation was still very low. I only saw two migrants, Aura and Lorena, both from Venezuela, attending the festival's events. They both had been in Necoclí with their families for months and had built relationships with researchers participating in different events, which they stated as their motivation to participate of *Sin Pasaporte*.

For its first edition, *Sin Pasaporte* succeeded in bringing together humanitarian workers, public officials, academic researchers, journalists, artists, and permanent and transit migrants to discuss migration responses and experiences in Necoclí. Their concerns were shared and heard. Lorena, who was waiting for her refugee application response to the US, participated in several events, even as a panellist. Migration was connected to the armed local dynamics, biodiversity, and human history through panels, plays, and didactic activities.

While migrants kept arriving, the local population perceived two phenomena in Necoclí. Helena and Laura, mother and daughter and restaurant owners, expressed that media coverage of Necoclí was sporadic and essentialist, and news outlets rarely followed up on the migration stories they had published. Tourists stopped coming to Necoclí because of media reports portraying the situation as a stagnant and widespread crisis. Although many migrants lived in harsh conditions, that was not the situation for all of them and migration was concentrated in specific points, hardly widespread across the whole town. Many participants living off tourism agreed that the media approach had devastating consequences on their livelihoods. The sensation of alarm was generalised.

Nevertheless, the media was not the only reason for the decrease in tourism. One business owner recognised that tourists have come and seen the migration crisis first-hand, and because of word of mouth, this has also had a negative impact on tourism. To cope with this, business owners have requested workshops to adapt to new dynamics, and others have even proposed the construction of a migrant camp on the outskirts of Necoclí so that migrants in potential beach situation don't come inside the urban part of town. This proposal highlights what Margarita, a former humanitarian worker who settled in Necoclí, mentioned in one of our conversations: the rejection in Necoclí is not of migrants, but of poor migrants.

Tourism's decline caused Necocliseñxs to engage with migration in different ways. Some responded to migrant stranding crises with altruism and empathy. Seeing hundreds of families living in poor conditions prompted many to help, particularly young children and pregnant women. Initially, like Valenzuela-Amaya (2019) observed in Turbo, people gathered to buy and distribute groceries, and others welcomed migrants in their own houses. Antonio told me that he even befriended a Venezuelan family, and he ended up gifting them a gold chain when they embarked on the jungle journey in case they needed any money, and he followed up with them until they arrived in Mexico.

Others saw business as an opportunity to address migrants' demand and make a living. The two main opportunities for local businesses were selling supplies needed for the jungle (hiking boots, cooking supplies, tents…) and converting residences into accommodation at prices significantly lower than hotels. Street stalls such as the one in Figure 5 became common throughout Necoclí, mostly in the streets adjacent to the piers.

Figure 5. Street Vendor Selling Jungle-Crossing Supplies

Source: author

These initiatives haven't been harmless for locals or migrants. Gustavo, who had been in Necoclí for three months when I met him, told me that their prices are variable and sometimes become unpayable for migrants, particularly LAC. Similarly, Miguel, a young Venezuelan man who settled in Necoclí a few years before my visit, and Jacobo, a middle-aged man from the department of Córdoba, agreed that it has become extremely hard to rent a house. Landlords charge migrants in dollars and stack their houses up to fit as many people as possible. Hosting migrants has become a bigger source of income than monthly renting a house, so many people –most of whom didn't sign rent contracts– have been evicted.

Helena stated that these accommodations have also taken away the few workers of formal businesses –those that pay taxes and "abide by the norm". Her restaurant has had trouble finding cooks since people started engaging in such businesses. In her words,

> [N]ormally you paid [$11-$16 USD] a day, and now people are not interested in that, it is very little. Why? Because [they] have gotten involved in migration, they tell me 'you pay me [$16 USD] but [...] I [host] a family of 4-5 migrants in my house and I [charge] them [$4.5 USD] /person/night and [$5.6 USD] if they use the kitchen. So, I earn [$22.6-$28 USD] daily while sitting down, and they [share] what they cook [with me]'.

Some participants also manifested negative perceptions based on specific events and mistrust of migrants, given their non-compliance with social norms and their actions' unpredictability (Carey, 2017). Yon said that migrants are not to be trusted because "if you open

your heart to them, they will stab you in the back as soon as you turn around". He and Ricardo, from Barranquilla, both of whom had occasional and mostly informal tourism-related jobs, agreed that migrants are lazy and don't like to work, even when presented with opportunities that would be attractive for locals. According to them, migrants make no effort and are comfortable living off humanitarian aid and charity. Upset, they mentioned that when grocery bags would be distributed amongst migrants, many later tried to sell what they had been given.

CSOs workers also manifested mistrust of migrants. One morning, migrants started arriving at the ADCK to collect grocery bags in exchange for cards distributed on the beach. We eventually realised one grocery bag was missing, and Carmen, charged with the hand-out, did not hesitate in saying that one migrant must have taken it, stating that they are in a situation of great need but emphasising that some of them are "big liars". She also said that CSOs must be very careful because migrants' frustration can trigger violence and threats against them. Other accounts revealed how locals perceive drug consumption, gender-based violence, and robbery to be higher amongst migrants.

Laura and Helena told me they were especially stricken by children's conditions; some adults rent them to beg for money, and no one does anything about it. They told me about a woman living under a boat on the beach who had been in Necoclí for over a year with her 2-year-old child. She would go out partying frequently and you could even see her child drinking the "cunchos" –remainders– of beer cans. Although appalled, they acknowledged that, as mothers, they can't judge others who put their children through hardships, understanding that motherhood means always striving to do what's best for one's children.

One day, I was sitting with Ricardo and Guillermo, a public administrator and owner of a beach stall, at Guillermo's stall when they told me migrants took everything for granted. Necoclí's tap water is not drinkable, so all Necocliseñxs must buy bottled water. One day, HOs installed drinking water tanks for migrants on the beach, and they "carelessly" used that water for showering, having access to showers at the UNICEF's hygiene point. I noticed resentment and anger in their voices. They also mentioned migration's dire consequences on tourism. While we were chatting, a migrant came to us and asked them if he could take water from the stall's street tap. They agreed almost automatically, the migrant thanked us and filled his bucket with water.

Motivated by the desire to make migrants' lives easier, the need to make a living, or both, many locals engaged in migration through business or altruism; others couldn't or wouldn't do the same. Experiences such as the ones mentioned above, and migrants sustained beach-presence weighed on the locals' energy. Despite initiatives such as *Sin Pasaporte* and ADCK being essential in comprehensively addressing local dynamics, much remains to be done. As Margarita said, "migration was not going down, people got saturated… it was not their responsibility to take charge of what was happening anyways".

The accounts of Laura, Helena, Ricardo, and Guillermo reveal that apparently opposing discourses and actions regarding migration can coexist. Despite negatively talking about it, locals still expressed understanding and helped migrants within their capacities. These dynamics reflect how, as Derrida (2000) and Carey (2017) argue, both hospitality and trust imply the possibility of hostility and mistrust –and vice versa. An interaction can quickly go from being mediated by the one to being mediated by the other. Interactions can simultaneously be mediated by rejecting and understanding feelings, both hindering and easing migrants' journeys, even if locals do not intend or realise it.

4.3.2. Hidden in Plain Sight: Migration and the AGC[16]

Although the AGC is one amongst many actors, their power over Necoclí and migration is undisputed, widespread and all-encompassing. No actor operates without their authorisation, as will be detailed below. As a foreigner to local social rules, I never brought the AGC into any of my conversations, and discussed their presence only when my interlocutors, whom I trusted to be aware of established limits and constant surveillance, mentioned it. Everyone and anyone can belong to the AGC, and participants pointed out that the men in civil clothing I had seen on the pier during my first day were likely AGC members. These conversations reminded me of Echeverri and Ordóñez's *elusive networks*, "a highly organised criminal structure whose tentacles reached even the most intimate spheres of everyday life" (2023: 5).

In relation to migration, according to Margarita, "the system they have set up is very good. In Capurganá they provide [migrants] with accommodation, cantines, doctors, psychologists, and guides…". Several participants emphasised that no one is allowed to cross the jungle without a guide and that those that attempt it, usually fail. Every migrant must pay a *tax* to cross the jungle; $350-1,500USD/adult and about $200USD/child. The prices change between suppliers and guides. When the number of migrants on the beach reaches critical levels, 'barridas' take place, whereby people are charged less than usual to cross the jungle, to alleviate crowding on the beach (El Hilo, 2024). Some even mentioned that formal and informal migration-related businesses, including guides, are also charged a *tax* to conduct their business and use the AGC's routes, as Cajiao et al, mention (2022: 3).

The AGCs justify their activities as aid to migrants, but the reality is quite different. As mentioned earlier, they locally control one of the biggest and most profitable businesses in the world: drug trafficking. According to several participants, they control the routes for drugs, weapons, and people, and, just like every business, they must protect their products –routes– at any cost (Poveda-Clavijo, 2018: 187). This protection is not only visible on the routes themselves but also in Necoclí. The sensation of surveillance is constant, sometimes evident. Once, while talking with a migrant on the beach, a woman walked past us and stared at me, her gaze threatening, for a while. As I would later be told, hostile vigilance had recently increased. I was advised not to ask many questions and answer if ever approached.

Routes must be protected from potential competitors, governments and the international community. I was told that the AGC are very protective of their customers –migrants– when they are under their control. Some participants confirmed what Cajiao et al (2022: 3) stated; when on the Colombian side of the border, nothing happens to migrants, and most horror stories occur on the Panamanian side of the border. A Colombian migrant seeking to cross for the second time noted that guides do not cross the border. Once there, they instruct migrants to follow signs to get to receiving camps, and criminal actors take advantage of their vulnerabilities to rob or harm them, similarly to what happens in the Mexican context (Vogt, 2018: 85).

[16] The assertions I make come from my conversations and do not imply a comprehensive study of the AGC's functioning.

4.3.3. ***What About Necoclí?***

This section elaborates on the role local institutions have had to undertake since migration came to Necoclí. The local administration had to address the crisis quickly and consistently, while staying within its abilities and complying with the law. Necoclí is a sixth category municipality, meaning it receives few resources from the national budget and has many restrictions to its investment autonomy (DNP, 2019). Facing the incessant intake of migrants, Necoclí, with little autonomy and an already vulnerable population, saw its response capacity overflown (Espinosa-Peláez, 2024). The administration faced a dilemma: guaranteeing migrants' fundamental rights to health, sanitation, and human dignity or reinvesting resources in supporting the impoverished and victimised local population.

In August 2024, a judge ordered Necoclí and Antioquia to provide migrants in beach situation with a temporary shelter or risk being fined (Juzgado Cuarto Administrativo, 2024). Iván Espinosa-Peláez stated that this decision denotes a poor understanding of prolonged-transit migrants' situation, like Aura and Mariana, and that the option of a temporary shelter hardly alleviates it. Similarly, HOs are seen as unwilling to articulate their roles with each other, the municipality, and local CSOs. Despite the national and departmental governments' discourse of *all eyes being set on Necoclí*, and the missions of HOs, frustration and powerlessness has taken over the municipality's spirit. Iván's conclusion was "let them fine us, we are on our own".

This feeling was shared by locals who complained about the international community and the Colombian government abandoning them. Guillermo mentioned that HOs haven't tried to understand the local dynamics, and bring people from Bogotá and abroad who have no knowledge or interest in the locals' lives. HOs don't create opportunities for Necocliseñxs to get employed in the humanitarian response. In addition, the way that they have addressed the issue has been rejected because of it being in line with a logic of rights restoration –immediate and not sustained in time– instead of one based on human necessities/rights, benefitting all populations involved (Espinosa-Peláez, 2024).

Moreover, most migration-related resources remain in the informal sector –the AGC's *tax*, informal accommodation, street vending of goods… In fact, as the Mayor's Office mentioned on several occasions, the only migration-derived revenue left for the municipality is the port fee, "a municipal tax [...] charged to each [person using the pier], which could mean between [$468,000-$702,000 USD] this year for the municipality". As I was told, the law restricts how these resources can be invested and basically only allows their spending on touristic infrastructure, which is not a priority for the municipality anymore.

Necoclí's local population doesn't see their basic needs covered, there is an increasing population that lives in inhumane conditions, the economic bet on tourism has partially failed, the economic dynamism derived from migration stays in the hands of illegal actors and in the informal economy, and the mayor's office has its hands tied in the investment of the only resources that this situation has left them. The money can only be invested in a population no longer coming to Necoclí, and while locals' needs have become increasingly unsatisfied and poor migrants keep arriving, the sensation that migration comes to take and leaves nothing behind, deepens.

This is a perfect example of how the lack of support from organisations and institutions perceived as having more resources –coupled with perceptions directly on the behaviours of

people on the move– is fertile ground for negative sentiments and attitudes towards migrants, just as Bhabha (2022) argues. It also reinforces the idea that the state presence in Urabá is not only faulty, but also fragile (Monroy-Álvarez, 2013; Poveda-Clavijo, 2018). Necocliseñxs' perception of abandonment can be summed up in the phrase with which the mayor ended his speech at one of *Sin Pasaporte* events, "*And what about Necoclí?"*.

Chapter 5. Discussion

In this chapter, I detail the main conclusions derived from the collected data, their relation to the theoretical framework, as well as their relevance to Necoclí as a transit spot, and to understanding transit migration within a wider global context.

5.1. The Necocliseña Migration Industry

The Necocliseño example illustrates how various actors differently engage in migration. Necocliseñxs' actions and perceptions on migration can hardly be delinked from how other actors have related to it. No actor operates in a vacuum or complete isolation from others; they are in constant dialogue and interaction, as Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg-Sørensen state (2013: 6). They have different roles and, given local governance dynamics –faulty state presence and illegality and informality's omnipresence–, the AGC have positioned themselves as the most prominent actor in relation to all kinds of mobility in Urabá.

The AGC have implemented a very functional mobility market in Urabá and Necoclí. This market does not only concern migration, but also drugs and weapons, all highly profitable. The AGC manage Urabá and all its mobility routes, whatever they may be used for, and must protect them. As opposed to the Mexican case (Vogt, 2018), the Urabaense territory is not up for dispute between different armed groups (Antioquia Cómo Vamos, 2024: 150). Consequently, migrants' value is quite different in these two nodes of the migrant journey. As explained below, they are more valuable in Necoclí than in Mexico. Many Latin American countries are enchained migration nodes, and their responses vary due to local contexts.

Recognising that massive migration through Urabá was inevitable, the AGC engaged in it to protect their business and increase their profits. The need to protect their routes from both legal actors and illegal potential competitors has implied, as some participants stated, the protection of migrants as customers. Far from the aid and solidarity motivations the AGC argue, migrants are not protected in Necoclí and the jungle because their lives have some intrinsic human value to them, but because their deaths are too costly for business. Routes must remain hidden, which has become increasingly difficult given media coverage and the fact that, as opposed to drug and weapon trafficking, migration has a humanitarian factor to it that draws increasing attention.

The AGC's enormous power over mobility determines the way the local population, organisations, and government have addressed it. In fact, these actors engage in migration under the constant surveillance and control of the AGC. They work within the limits established by the AGC and anyone hardly ever crosses them, including migrants. The threat of reprisals is latent and in constant dialogue with the security perception in Necoclí. Many participants stated that Necoclí is a very safe town for anyone and that even me, a woman travelling alone, could walk the street at late hours and nothing would happen to me. As they emphasised, I was safe because if a local or a migrant was caught doing anything there would be consequences… At that point silence took over the conversation and resigned gestures occupied my interlocutors' faces. CSOs, HOs, and the local government are in constant negotiation too, trying to do as much as they can to improve the situation within the limits established by the armed actor (Echeverri-Zuluaga, 2024).

Locals engaged in migration directly and through local CSOs, mostly in activities of smuggling and solidarity. In my time in Necoclí, I noticed that the AGC taxes both businesses and guides/smugglers in different ways to raise profit and secure their power. Although some migrants criticised migration-related businesses' high prices and advantage taking of their needs, these became real livelihood alternatives for locals in a time where tourism was declining and migration rising. Given poverty and marginalisation, few Necocliseñxs had the capacity to diversify their investments and most turned entirely towards migration's relatively constant demand and, with it, a sufficient income.

When migration was high, its bonanza was visible on the streets, you could see money going from hand to hand, and people did not mention economic difficulties so frequently (Echeverri-Zuluaga, 2024). By then, migration implied a benefit for the local population, which had changed their income source from tourism to migration, for migrants, who, despite living in difficult conditions could access services both for free –CSOs and HOs– or for a fee –migration and tourism-related businesses. However, as detailed below, tourism is not the only sector that started to decline.

Irregular migration through Necoclí, not controlled by any actors of the local migration industry but by social, economic, political, and environmental events, is also a fluctuating phenomenon. This inability to control migration revealed how the AGC's human mobility market is not only functional but also highly fragile. The decrease in tourism made people invest in migration, and the decline in migration –detailed below– left the local population adrift, without their traditional and adapted livelihoods while no new revenue opportunities were in sight. The consequences of the fragility of the AGC's human mobility market will be detailed in Section 5.2.

5.2. Solidarity and Hostility in a Fluctuating Phenomenon

The Necocliseña population is deeply imbricated in a complex economic, social and governance context that has impacted all aspects of migration there. As shown above, the migration industry in Necoclí, although mostly controlled by the AGC, includes other actors. The constant dialogue between actors and activities, further developed in this section, makes it increasingly difficult to categorise Necocliseñxs' perceptions and reactions to migration solely as solidarity or hostility. The starting point for this analysis is the understanding of solidarity as all activities, intentional or not, that make the journey easier for migrants, and that of hostility as those that make it harder or hinder it. Using broad categories allowed me to better understand local dynamics without getting lost in undefinition.

Migrants' journeys can be eased through intentional and incidental activities mediated by profit and altruism. For this research, if the recipient of an act perceives it as having eased their journey, even if the emitter had no intention of expressing solidarity or noticed it, that action is understood as solidarity. This is a consequence of the gaps I identified between discourses and perceptions of some participants –such as Laura and Helena– and those between discourses, perceptions, and actions –like in the case of Guillermo–. This understanding of solidarity goes beyond previous definitions and understandings as humanitarian assistance –even if subversive– (Svensson et al, 2016; Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019; Filippi et al, 2021), the recognition of a shared humanity and experiences (Valenzuela Amaya, 2019; Díaz de León, 2020; Filippi et al,

2021; Bhabha, 2022), and the commitment to human rights and advocacy (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al, 2004; Svensson et al, 2016; Filippi et al, 2021).

The gaps between discourses, perceptions and actions reveal the ways in which mistrust can coexist both with solidarity and hostility. However, I encountered that different layers of mistrust towards different actors determine the ways in which the individual relations between one and another come about. In Necoclí, the lack of trust in the state and HOs from ordinary people, and the lack of trust from the local administration towards the departmental and national governments deeply impact the ways in which migration is perceived. This mistrust stems from the gap between these actors' discourse and actions in relation to migration and the daily local life.

Institutional mistrust is also coupled with mistrust of migrants in general as a consequence of them representing the unknown and uncontrollable, but also of specific actions that have undermined the benefit of the doubt that they were once granted (Carey, 2017). The perception that, in the addressing of the migratory situation by HOs and the state, locals are the only population out of the three –Necocliseñxs, migrants, and tourists– converging in Necoclí that does not get their needs addressed promotes the rejection towards poor migrants, unable to contribute to the local economy and perceived as distorting Necoclí's paradisiacal Caribbean image. This rejection comes not only from ordinary people, but also from public officials who, as Necocliseñxs, feel their hands are tied when it comes to improving the locals' lives. In this context, LAC migrants became a scapegoat for a wider sensation of abandonment that goes beyond migration.

Similarly, cases such as Guillermo's illustrate how, even in contexts of widespread mistrust, locals still show solidarity in the form of understanding, daily support, and sympathy towards migrants. These expressions bring us to Díaz de León's (2020) theory that migrants –and, in this case, Necocliseñxs– can express solidarity without trust. In fact, in Necoclí, solidarity is enacted in two ways differently expressed over time, and not necessarily requiring trust as a human-relating vector: market-based and altruistic.

Market-based solidarity takes place in migration-related businesses and operates as long as human mobility benefits the local population. As long as the –fragile– balance between long-term migrant presence on the beach and migration-derived livelihoods is maintained, this solidarity takes place and is fostered. Although hostility and rejection feelings take place, if the balance is kept, they are overthrown by the ways in which migration benefits the locals. Altruistic solidarity refers to those expressions that are not mediated by profit and even by a desire to help migrants. Necocliseñxs were part of such initiatives particularly in the first moments of the rising crisis but, given its long duration, they have been taken over by CSOs and HOs.

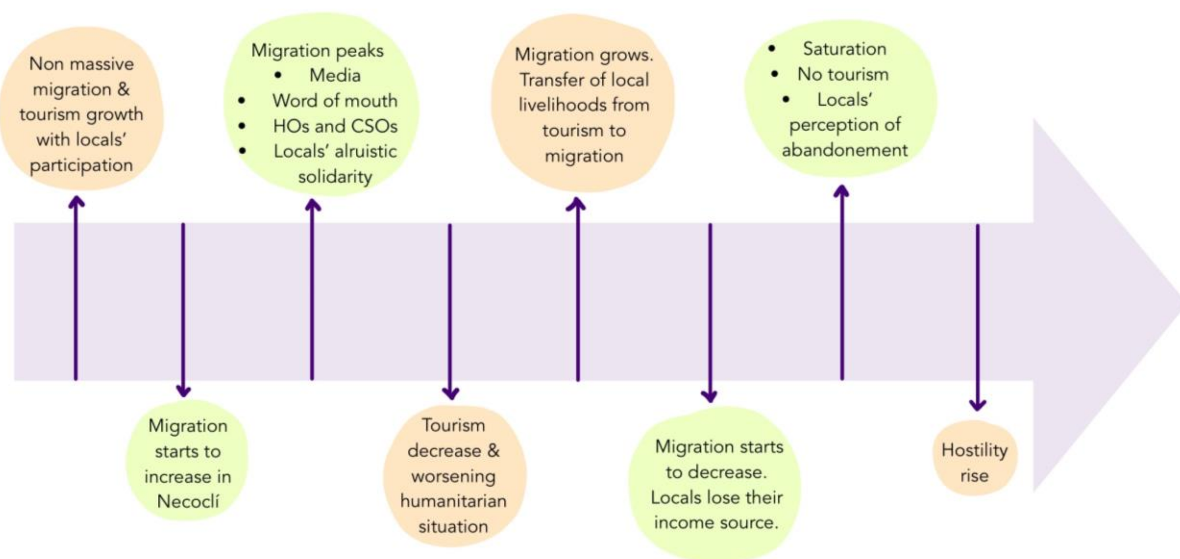
Although, in principle, it might be thought that these two types of solidarity are incompatible, the reality is that participants' accounts revealed how –again, in a precarious and marginalised context– in their own capabilities, their desire to improve migrants' conditions coincided with tourism's decline and the emergence of a new business opportunity. Such accounts are a good example of why reducing business approaches to migration in a marginalised context to "taking advantage of migrants" fails to recognise pre-existing local hardships and ends up essentialising locals as purely taking advantage of the situation or purely helping migrants when, in reality, they are not mutually exclusive.

Though business developments targeting migration have been criticised by the State, the media, and even migrants, for profiting Necocliseñxs, they have made the way of thousands of

migrants easier. These immediate services cater to the needs of two precarised populations: migrants and Necocliseñxs. Far from being definite solutions to either of their situations nor a miracle to the root causes of irregular migration, marginalisation, or the journey ahead, it must be noted that they do assist migrants in their current state when they arrive in Necoclí. As Daniela – a mother travelling with her husband and two daughters– said to me, even if the help is little and not necessarily a big effort, "anywhere I go I would defend the flags of Venezuelan and Colombia; this country has given me so much even without noticing".

However, in a fluctuating phenomenon, solidarity and hostility are not expressed in the same way over time. Locals' perceptions are determined by the temporalities of the phenomenon and how they reflect its dynamics, dimensions, and impacts. Figure 6 attempts to portray how, based on the collected data, locals' perceptions and reactions towards migration are enchained over time. It also seeks to reveal how migration is not an isolated phenomenon and the ways in which its interactions with pre-existing local dynamics impact locals' reactions to it. This timeline does not refer to a specific moment but to the ways in which solidarity and hostility are chained and co-constitutive of each other in Necoclí since migration's increase in 2021.

Figure 6. Temporalities of Hostility and Solidarity in Necoclí



Source: author

As mentioned above, with decreasing tourism resources, locals found subsistence resources in rapidly growing migration. For months, at least eight boats left daily from Necoclí to Capurganá, all filled with migrants seeking to cross the jungle. However, during my second visit, the situation had changed. Many of my acquaintances pointed out that during my three weeks away, migration had significantly declined in Necoclí. Some blamed this on the closure of border crossing points by Panamá and others on the recent elections in Venezuela (EFE, 2024; El País, 2024). However, it was challenging to confirm the exact cause. People had been laid off from maritime transportation companies, not more than four boats were leaving Necoclí each day, and businesses serving LAC and intercontinental migrants were downsizing and closing due to a drop in demand. Both tourist and migration-related businesses had been struggling for weeks and I

sensed a widespread feeling of tense calm across town. This is a good example of how migration's fluctuation can deeply impact transit places –especially when already vulnerable– and with it, their perceptions of the phenomenon that once benefitted them.

Perceptions of a phenomenon depend on the moment specific events occur. In this case, initial perceptions regarding migration differed from when its novelty started wearing off. As Antonio mentioned, during the first months, Necocliseñxs expressed altruistic solidarity towards migrants. Crisis awoke sentiments of urgency and pity but, as Margarita said, when a crisis becomes long-lasting, and there is little support to locals, energy runs out.

There is a cap in individuals' capacity to show altruistic solidarity towards migrants. The sustained presence of migrants on the beach saturated the local population and, as Laura and Antonio said, made them grow indifferent to it. This relates not only to the negative accounts presented in Chapter 4, but also to the perception of generalised begging amongst LAC migrants, the bad shape of the limited public space of Necoclí, and the sanitation conditions of migrants and the places they stay in. Even if feelings of empathy and pity are triggered, locals cannot afford to take care of a crisis at the cost of their own wellbeing (Bhabha, 2022). The lack of state and HOs support in the approach to the crisis and the lack of response to Necocliseñxs' needs sowed a sense of injustice and abandonment in the locals and drew them away from altruistic solidarity.

This, of course, does not mean that all rejection towards transit migration comes exclusively from the build-up and abandonment that locals have experienced. The perception that migrants –mostly LAC– have come to Necoclí to disrupt local dynamics set in place for decades by committing crimes, using drugs, misusing and damaging public spaces, and taking advantage of aid, promotes anti-migration feelings. As such, migrants that engage in such behaviours promote rejection and mistrust amongst the local population, who perceive them as being unwilling or unable to abide by local social norms.

In this case, the distinction between intercontinental and LAC migrants becomes increasingly important, given that when most locals refer to Venezuelan, Ñañxs (Ecuadorians) and Haitian migrants, they do so in a derogatory way, while intercontinental migrants –that use touristic infrastructure– are usually praised and talked about in a welcoming way. Despite migrants not being competitors to locals in the labour market, as both migrant and local participants mentioned, and cultural differences being wider between Necocliseñxs and intercontinental migrants than between Necocliseñxs and other LAC nationalities, rejection to the latter remains. As such, the question of hostility towards migrants in Necoclí is not one of xenophobia –the rejection of foreigners– but of aporophobia –the rejection of poor and disadvantaged people.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

I decided to do my research paper on solidarity and hostility in Necoclí out of a set of hunches. I sensed that although everyone spoke about migration there, few people had sat down to talk to the population that had been there before migration had come, that were still there, and that would remain when –and if– migration ever left. I had the hunch that, although most of what I saw in the media were dramatic stories and accounts of how migration had become a business and locals were exploiting migrants, that was not the whole story. I was convinced that where there is rejection, there is also welcoming. To put it in this study's terms, where there is hostility, there also had to be solidarity, and vice versa.

I wanted to answer four research questions about a phenomenon I had not experienced in a region I had never visited regarding a community I am not a part of. In Necoclí, I found that opposite and incompatible sensations, populations and reactions are actually rarely so. We human beings move in a world full of contradictions and nuances that radical academic abstraction have overlooked. Figure 7 illustrates a key convergence point I identified between transit migrants and Necocliseñxs.

This migrant kid from Venezuela had been in Necoclí for months while his parents tried to raise the money to pay for the family's ticket to Panamá. I ran into him a couple days after the ADCK's Family Day and asked if I could take his picture. I thought it summed up how the migrant population that, in the search for better dawns, endures unimaginable hardships, and locals from border territories marked by abandonment and violence –such as Necoclí– share the hope, the dream that tomorrow will be, at last, beautiful.

Figure 7. Migrant Kid with a Hat That Reads "Tomorrow will be beautiful"

Source: author

Conceiving hostility and solidarity as interconnected in time and space helps us gain a more encompassing understanding of the ways in which ancient local dynamics intersect with new ones to allow for the encounters of apparently clashing groups and interests. This recognition provides the ground to better grasp interactions between locals and migrants, with a more comprehensive picture of certain attitudes' dynamism and consequences. This, all the while dignifying the ways in which vulnerable populations –in this case Necocliseñxs and transit migrants– engage with each other in the search for better opportunities and futures. Such understandings allow for a fuller comprehension of how social phenomena take place and for more relevant and accurate approaches to the ways in which they can be tackled from the field of social policy.

Much remains to be understood and explained about the ways in which locals from transit places and transit migrants perceive and relate to each other. This research is but a starting point in the way to de-essentialise, historicise and contextualise the reactions triggered by new phenomena in populations that have been subjected to abandonment and violence. It is essential to further explore the minutiae of the background to these ways of relating. The inputs of fields such as governance and violence studies are essential to build a holistic understanding on the reasons that people react to certain phenomena in the ways they do – and their consequences.

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Appendix A. Methodological tool: semi-structured interviews

Questionnaire 1: transit & permanent migrants

Presentation and background: migration

1. Please tell me a little about yourself (gender, age, how long you have lived in Necoclí, family composition, place of origin, what you do for a living, etc...).
2. What reasons led you to make the decision to migrate and to do so specifically through the Darién rainforest? What do you seek to achieve by migrating and where? You do not need to share information that causes you any discomfort or that is particularly painful to remember; what you feel able and comfortable to share is more than enough.

Encounters and interactions: organisations and businesses Necocliseñxs and people on the move

3. What has your experience been like as a migrant in Colombia, specifically in Necoclí and its surroundings? What do you do, how do you spend your days?
4. Do you have memories of particular encounters or interactions from your time in Necoclí? What makes you remember these in particular?
5. In general, how would you describe the interactions between Necocliseñxs and migrants?

Shared and unshared subjectivities and meanings

6. What do you know about Necoclí, about this region and the society here? Is there anything that particularly stands out for you? What differences are there between here and your place of origin? What about the other places you have passed through on your journey?
7. What makes encounters and interactions between the people of Necoclí and migrants easier or more difficult? If yes, how have you experienced these factors in your interactions? How could you live together better?

The precarious state and the management of the migration phenomenon

8. How has your experience been in relation to the Colombian state and its management of migration? What examples can you think of?
9. What has been your experience of services for migrants by the normal population of Necoclí, and how has this experience been in relation to those working in NGOs?
10. How do you compare the response of all these actors in your process?

Questionnaire 2: Migration related business owners and workers; migration related grassroot organisations members, volunteers, etc....

Introduction and background: displacement and violence

1. Please tell me a little about yourself (gender, age, how long you have lived in Necoclí, family composition, etc...) and about your organisation/business. What other work experiences have you had? What would you work in if you could choose anything?
2. Have you or your family experienced migration - internally or internationally - at some point?

Migration in the Darién: knowledge and perceptions

El Darién, and specifically Necoclí, have in recent years become a key transit point for people from South America to North America,

3. If you had to describe migration in Necoclí in one word, what would it be?
4. According to you, how has migration through and in Necoclí evolved in recent years? How has Necoclí changed (economically, politically and socially)?

Encounters and interactions: organisations and businesses Necocliseñxs and people on the move

5. How would you describe your encounters with the migrant population? And in what ways has your business/organisation engaged with this population?
6. At what other times have you encountered migrants passing through Necoclí? How do you think you have impacted their experience of movement?
7. How would you describe the interactions between Necocliseñxs and migrants? What role do you think solidarity has played in the encounters between Necocliseñxs and the migrant population?

Shared and unshared subjectivities and meanings

8. How did you and/or your family experience violence and displacement in Necoclí? You do not need to share information that causes you any discomfort or whose memory is particularly painful; what you feel able and comfortable to share is more than enough.
9. Do you know some of the reasons why people migrate through the Darién? How did you find out about them and what do you think about them? What are the needs of migrants and Necocliseñxs?
10. What makes encounters and interactions between the people of Necoclí and migrants easier or more difficult? If yes, how have you experienced these factors in your interactions? How could you live together better?

The precarious state and the management of the migration phenomenon

11. How would you describe the presence of the Colombian state in Necoclí in general? In your life?

12. How would you describe the state response to the migration phenomenon? In what ways –apart from the institutional approach– have you seen the needs of the migrant population addressed? How has your business/organisation been involved in this?
13. How does the institutional response to the migration phenomenon compare to the rest of the needs that exist in Necoclí?

Questionnaire 3: local people who frequent places with a high presence of people on the move; local population (in general)

Introduction and background: displacement and violence

1. Please tell me a little about yourself (gender, age, how long you have lived in Necoclí, family composition, etc...).
2. Have you or your family experienced migration - internally or internationally - at some point?

Migration in the Darién: knowledge and perceptions

3. El Darién, and specifically Necoclí, have in recent years become a key transit point for people from South America to North America,
4. If you had to describe migration in Necoclí in one word, what would it be?
5. According to you, how has migration through and in Necoclí evolved in recent years? How has Necoclí changed (economically, politically and socially)?

Encounters and interactions: Necocliseñxs and people on the move

6. Do your jobs or daily activities involve continuous or occasional interaction with the migrant population? How would you describe these encounters? How do you think your experience of movement has impacted you?
7. How would you describe the interactions between Necocliseñxs and migrants? What role do you think solidarity has played in the encounters between Necocliseñxs and the migrant population?

Shared and unshared subjectivities and meanings

8. How did you and/or your family experience violence and displacement in Necoclí? You do not need to share information that causes you any discomfort or whose memory is particularly painful; what you feel able and comfortable to share is more than enough.
9. Do you know some of the reasons why people migrate through the Darién? How did you find out about them and what do you think about them? What are the needs of migrants and Necocliseñxs?
10. What makes encounters and interactions between the people of Necoclí and migrants easier or more difficult? If yes, how have you experienced these factors in your interactions? How could you live together better?

The precarious state and the management of the migration phenomenon

11. How would you describe the presence of the Colombian state in Necoclí in general? In your life?
12. How would you describe the state's response to the migration phenomenon? In what ways –besides the institutional approach– have you seen the needs of the migrant population addressed? How has your business/organisation been involved in this?

13. How does the institutional response to the migration phenomenon compare with the rest of the needs that exist in Necoclí?

Appendix B. ISS Research Ethics Review Form for RP Research Carried out by MA students[17]

Aim:

This Form aims to help you identify research ethics issues which may come up in the design and delivery of your Research Paper (RP). It builds on the session on Research Ethics session in course 3105 and subsequent discussions with your peers and RP supervisor/reader. We hope the form encourages you to reflect on the ethics issues which may arise.

The process:

The Ethics Review process consists of answering questions in the following two checklists: B1-Low-sensitivity and B2-High-sensitivity. Depending on the answer to these questions you might need to fill section **C-Statement of Research Ethics** too.

The background document "ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA Students" provides advice and detailed information on how to complete this form.

Step 1 - Fill checklists B1 and B2

Step 2 - After answering checklists B1 and B2, the process proceeds as follows:

- **If you answer 'yes' to one or more low-sensitivity questions (checklist B1):** please discuss the issues raised with your supervisor and include an overview of the risks, and actions you can take to mitigate them, in the final design of your RP. You can refer to the ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA Students for help with this.
- **If you answer 'yes' to one or more high-sensitivity questions (checklist B2)**, please complete section 'C' of the form below describing the risks you have identified and how you plan to mitigate against them. Discuss the material with your supervisor, in most cases the supervisor will provide approval for you to go ahead with your research and attach this form to the RP design when you upload it in canvas. If, after consultation with your supervisor, it is felt that additional reflection is needed, please submit this form (sections B1, B2, and C) to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) for review as follows:

When submitting your form to the REC, please send the following to researchethics@iss.nl:

1) the completed checklists B1 and B2 (or equivalent if dealing with an external ethics requirement)
2) the completed form C 'Statement of Research Ethics'
3) a copy of the RP design
4) any accompanying documentation, for example, consent forms, Data Management Plans (DMP), ethics clearances from other institutions.

[17] This checklist and statement is adapted from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Research Ethics Committee and informed by the checklists of two Ethics Review Boards at EUR (ESHCC and ERIM) and the EU H2020 Guidance – How to complete your ethics self- assessment.

Your application will be reviewed by a reviewer who is not part of your supervisory team. The REC aims to respond to ethics approval requests within a period of 15 working days.

Step 3 - Integrating the Ethics Review process into the RP:

- This Ethics Review Form (checklists B1 and B2) needs to be added as an annex in your RP Design document to be uploaded in the Canvas page for course 3105 and to be presented in May.
- If, as a result of completing sections B1 and B2 of this Review Form you also need to complete section C , add section C 'Statement of Research Ethics' and Section D 'Approval from Research Ethics Committee' (if available) as an annex to your final RP design to be to be uploaded in the Canvas page for course 3105 in July.

Project details, Checklists, and Approval Status

A) Project/ Proposal details

<table>
<tr><td>1. Project/Proposal Title</td><td>Solidarity in transit: between shared subjectivities, opportunity, and the migration industries in Necoclí</td></tr>
<tr><td>2. Name of MA student (applicant)</td><td>Tatiana Piñeros Rodríguez</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. Email address of MA student</td><td>695003tp@student.eur.nl</td></tr>
<tr><td>4. Name of Supervisor</td><td>Dr. Nanneke Winters</td></tr>
<tr><td>5. Email address of Supervisor</td><td>winters@iss.nl</td></tr>
<tr><td>6. Country/countries where research will take place</td><td>Colombia</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">7. Short description of the proposed research and the context in which it is carried out:

Research question: How do the experiences of the local population of Necoclí inform the practices of grassroot solidarity -organised or circumstantial- expressed towards migrants in transit?

Research objectives:
● Understand the extent to which shared senses from similar life experiences (in particular, violence and marginalisation) inform the ways in which the local population from Necoclí interacts with transit migrants. This will have a focus on solidarity, but cases of lack thereof will also be essential in understanding the interactions.
● Account for the different understandings and expressions of solidarity in Necoclí.
● Understand how community expressions of solidarity relate to an absent state that has</td></tr>
</table>

misunderstood and misaddressed the needs of every population concerned by massive migration in Necoclí.

- Understanding to what extent gender plays a role in the ways in which locals interact and express solidarity towards migrants.

Context: Necoclí is a small town in the department of Antioquia, in the region of Urabá. It has been marked by widespread violence, state abandonment, and in the past decade, the increase in transit migration flows. Currently, there is one major organised armed group that controls most of the traffics and flows that go from Colombia to Panamá. These are the AGC or Clan del Golfo who, as described with more detail in my design draft, are highly engaged in the migration business, especially in the transportation of migrants. Necoclí is the Colombian town from which migrants arrive in Acandí or Capurganá, which is where the trek through the jungle begins. The cultural collective El Totumo Encantado has several initiatives to counter violence and, currently, to understand its intersection with migration. These efforts will be channelled through the *Sin Pasaporte* festival, whose preparation and execution are my main interest and where I will carry my fieldwork.

B) Research checklist

The following checklist acts as a guide to help you think through what areas of research ethics you may need to address. For explanations and guidance please refer to the background document 'ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA students'. Please complete both sections (B1 and B2)

Please tick the appropriate box	**YES**	**NO**
B1: LOW SENSITIVITY		
1. Does the research involve the collection and or processing of (primary or secondary) personal data (including personal data in the public domain)?		**X**
2. Does the research involve participants from whom voluntary informed consent needs to be sought?	**X**	
3. Will financial or material incentives (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		**X**
4. Will the research require the cooperation of a gatekeeper for access to the groups, communities or individuals to be recruited (e.g., administrator for a private Facebook group, manager of an institution, or government official)?		**X**
5. Does the research include benefit-sharing measures for research which takes place with people who could be considered vulnerable? – please revise the background document (Guidelines) for more information.	**X**	

If you have ticked 'yes' to any of the above boxes (1-5), please discuss with your supervisor and include more information in your RP design describing the issue raised and how you propose to deal with it during your research.

Please tick the appropriate box	**YES**	**NO**
B2: HIGH SENSITIVITY		
6. Does the research involve the collection or processing of sensitive (primary or secondary) personal data? (e.g. regarding racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, biometric data, data related to health or a person's sex life or sexual orientation)	**X**	
7. Does the research involve participants for whom voluntary and informed consent may require special attention or who can be considered 'vulnerable'? (e.g., children (under 18), people with learning disabilities, undocumented migrants, patients, prisoners)?	**X**	
8. Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the research without their knowledge and consent (covert observation of people in non-public places)?		**X**
9. Will the research be conducted in healthcare institutions, in healthcare settings, or will it involve the recruitment or study of patients or healthcare personnel?		**X**
10. Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences for research participants, researchers, or persons and institutions connected to them?	**X**	
11. Could the situation in one or several of the countries where research is carried out put the researcher, individuals taking part in the research, or individuals connected to the researcher, at risk? Presence of an infectious disease such as COVID-19 is considered a risk – please provide information as outlined in the background document (Guidelines).	**X**	
12. Does the research require ethical approval or research permission from a local institution or body?		**X**

If you have ticked 'Yes' to one of the above (5-11), please complete section 'C' below describing how you propose to mitigate the risks you have identified. After discussion with your supervisor, please submit the form to the Research Ethics Committee. In addition, if you have ticked 'Yes' to a question on any kind of personal data, please also complete the privacy questionnaire.

YOU ONLY NEED TO COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO ONE OF THE QUESTIONS IN SECTION B2 ABOVE (Questions 5-11)

C) Statement of Research Ethics

Using the background document 'ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA students', please address how you are going to deal with the ethics concern identified, including prevention measures to avoid them from manifesting, mitigation strategies to reduce their impact, and preparedness and contingency planning if the risks manifest.

Please number each point to correspond with the relevant checklist question above. Expand this section as needed and add any additional documentation which might not be included in your RP *design, such as consent forms.*

[TO BE COMPLETED BY MA STUDENT AND DISCUSSED WITH THE SUPERVISOR. IF THE SUPERVISOR FINDS IT NECESSARY TO SEEK FURTHER REVIEW, THE STUDENT MUST SUBMIT THE FORM TO THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE]	
B1.2	I will draft a written consent form regarding participant observation and semi-structured interviews. This consent form will include the main characteristics of the research as well as the ways in which information will be treated. Unless considered necessary, participants of non-participatory observation in public spaces will not be asked to fill the consent form. I recognise that using a written consent form might negatively impact participants' ease in participating in the research, which is why it will only be used when deemed strictly necessary. In the rest of the cases, I will ask for participants' oral consent after having presented the characteristics of the research, its aims, and the ways in which participants' contributions will be used.
B1.5	As my research is focused on grassroot local initiatives and experiences of solidarity channelled through the *Sin Pasaporte* festival by *El Totumo Encantado* collective, the RP will be translated into Spanish so that the participants can get familiarised with the results of the research process. Similarly, having spoken with organising members of *El Totumo Encantado*, they expressed that one of the products they aim to have after the festival is a memoir of the festival's experiences, stories, etc… They are very eager to know the way in which my RP could be a part not only of the academic component of the festival, but also of the ways in which its memoirs will be captured. Additionally, as *El Totumo Encantado* is a cultural and artistic collective, they plan to adapt the RP's work and results in a way that is more digestible for their public, such as a fanzine. This stage of result and research sharing will abide by the referencing rules of the ISS.
B2.6	All the information collected will be anonymised as soon as possible –preferably daily– unless participants expressively manifest their will to be presented with their

	personal information throughout the research. This will be done only after participants are alerted about the possible consequences of their personal data being shared. This factor will be included in the written consent form and in the oral consent dialogue prior to data gathering exercises.
B2.7	The possibility of anonymising data will be presented to any migrants that agree to engage in conversations with me. Participants will also be free to anonymise their data on their own, this is, to provide fake names or information whose identification might imply a risk for any of them. Although migration has become an everyday phenomenon in Necoclí and most migrants are formally in Colombia (by holding a temporary permit), they remain a vulnerable population. Regarding the members of *El Totumo Encantado*, although their personal information might be anonymised, the name of the collective will likely be used given the difficulty of anonymising it due to the *sui generis* characteristics of the festival. If this is deemed too dangerous by them, I will request the ISS not to publish the RP on the library repository.
B2.10	The research could imply inducing psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences for all the people involved in it. **Researcher:** by coming to a region that carries the scar of previous and current (although much lesser) widespread violence, I may be psychologically affected by accounts of experiences by the local population. Similarly, hardships of transit migrants may also have an important impact on me. Having talked to several researchers on site, I believe the best way to address these possible situations is to maintain a network, both in Necoclí and outside, to which I can come in case of stress or anxiety. I am confident that having already established contact with locals, I will be able to seek support in Necoclí when needed. Similarly, I will continue with my therapeutic weekly appointments while in the field. **Participants (necocliseñxs and transit migrants):** by trying to track shared subjectivities of marginalisation and violence may cause distress for participants. This is why, the consent form and oral disclosure will explicitly highlight the fact that participants will be able to back off the interview at any point without any consequences or decide not to discuss anything they don't want to during our conversations and exercises. Similarly, I will disclose the fact that some questions might be triggering to avoid catching them by surprise. However, I do believe that my fieldwork being channelled by the preparations of *Sin Pasaporte* will mitigate the risks of such situations occurring, given that most participants there will likely already be willing to share such experiences and accounts of their lives.
B2.11	Migration governance in Urabá is highly controlled by the AGC. Having spoken with many researchers and locals, I am confident that the current situation significantly differs from that of unpredictable violence that existed before Necoclí became a migration hub

	and when migration and tourism were not as important for the local economy as they are now. However, I recognise that I must not ignore potential risks. This is why I have already established links not only with scholars that are or have been there recently, but also with members of el *Totumo Encantado*, who have shown their willingness to serve as my local anchors. In case an extraordinary situation of insecurity should arise, there are daily flights from Apartadó (20 mins away from Necoclí by bus) to Bogotá. I will have an emergency savings pocket in case I must suddenly leave Necoclí. However, I have been assured by many contacts that the situation has not come to that in years and that migration research and work has increased significantly in the last years, and with it, its local acceptance. One of them was Carolina Aristizábal –2022 ISS alumni– who carried out her RP on a similar topic in Necoclí, and who encouraged me to carry on with my fieldwork while being cautious.

D) Approval from Research Ethics Committee

*To be completed by the Research Ethics Committee only if

Approved by Research Ethics Committee:______________________ Date:________

Additional comments for consideration from Research Ethics Committee: