Preface and acknowledgements

In 2011 I attended a two-day conference on 'displacement and reconciliation'. It was not one of the big alienating conferences covering an array of themes and topics. On the contrary, everyone in the room, presenters and audience, was there because they work on or have interest in the two themes. During the engaging discussions one question came up again and again: What do we mean by 'reconciliation'? It is a fair question to pose considering that reconciliation has no unitary form, that it can never be total or include everyone, and yet it is so frequently offered as an indisputable response to post-conflict processes. The query was well received among the audience, inviting a great deal of reflection. Nevertheless, I was puzzled that while the meaning of reconciliation managed to generate a reflective and critical discussion, no similar question was posed in relation to displacement – What do we mean by 'displacement'? The presenters used the expression uncritically, as if displacement were an unambiguous event, lacking the complexity of reconciliation, a unitary experience affecting millions of people in similar kinds of ways. But what would that experience be?

I wrote this book in response to the lack of critical engagements. What displacement is for those who have lived through it was the question underlying my research. With it, my aim was to put individuals in the focus, to better understand the nuances and the complexities of the phenomenon.

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Chapter 3 has heavily drawn upon material from within: Celestina, M., 'Displacement' before Displacement: Time, Place and the Case of Rural Urabá. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 48(2): 367–90 © Cambridge University Press 2015, reproduced with permission. Mario Martínez prepared the map of Colombia. Rob Lucas anonymised the map drawn by one of the participants, which the designers at Coventry University later turned into a black-and-white version.

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