

**A Conflict Transformation Analysis of Local Peacebuilding Initiatives in the Montes de
María Region of Colombia: The Case of Sembrandopaz**

by

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Abstract

The thesis is a response to criticisms of conflict transformation *and local peacebuilding* as idealistic and with no power of leverage. In this context, it did not intend to provide a new theory but to explore in depth an example of conflict transformation and its contribution in the strengthening of local peacebuilding in a post-accord setting.

The study explores local peacebuilding in Colombia under the framework of conflict transformation by analyzing the Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz (Sembrandopaz), translated as Sowing Seeds of Peace. Sembrandopaz is a local NGO operating in Montes de María, one of the regions most affected by the internal armed conflict in Colombia. Through participant observation and personal interviews, the research found that Sembrandopaz embraces tenets of conflict transformation, such as its multidimensional approach to peacebuilding, strengthening of relationships, inclusion of different actors, promoting a long-term vision, and constructing relational platforms. The thesis findings also support literature highlighting the importance of hybrid approaches that combine local peacebuilding initiatives and with top-down approaches. The study found that Sembrandopaz integrates elements of conflict transformation, traditional approaches to liberal peace, nonviolence, social justice and a long tradition of campesino movements in Montes de María.

Keywords: Conflict transformation, Local peacebuilding, Colombia, Montes de María

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Dedication

To Juan Camilo and Gabriela. May they finally enjoy a Colombia in peace

To Sembrandopaz and the campesinos in Montes de María, the real maestros in building
peace

To peacebuilders in the world, whose already complicated work become more intricate
due to the 2020 pandemic

To Cesar, Victoria and Sol

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List of Abbreviations

ANUC	Asociación de Usuarios Campesinos/ <i>National Association of Rural Workers</i>
ASVIDAS	Asociaciones para la Vida Digna y Solidaria / <i>Associations for Dignified and Solidary Life</i>
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia / <i>United Self Defence Forces of Colombia</i>
BACRIM	Bandas Criminales / <i>Criminal Bands</i>
CECAR	Corporación Universitaria del Caribe/ <i>Caribbean University Corporation</i>
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINEP/PP	Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular – Programa por la Paz/ <i>Center for Research and Popular Education - Peace Program</i>
CRS	Movimiento de Renovación Socialista / <i>Socialist Renovation Movement</i>
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
ERCPMM	Espacio Regional para la Construcción de Paz en Montes de María / <i>Regional Setting for Building Peace in Montes de María</i>
EU	Unión Europea / <i>European Union</i>
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDMM	Fundación Desarrollo y Paz de los Montes de María / <i>Peace and Development Foundation of Montes de María</i>
JAC	Juntas de Acción Comunal / <i>Community Action Boards</i>
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional / <i>National Liberation Army</i>
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación / <i>Popular Liberation Army</i>
ICBF	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar / <i>Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing</i>
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JOPPAZ	Jóvenes Provocadores de Paz / <i>Youth Provocateurs of Peace</i>
JUSTAPAZ	Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta – Justapaz / <i>Christian Mennonite Association for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action</i>
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia / <i>Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia</i>
M-19	Movimiento 19 de Abril / <i>Movement of April 19th</i>
MAQL	Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame / <i>Quintín Lame Armed Movement</i>
MIR	Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria / <i>Revolutionary Leftist Movement</i>

MOPAM	Movimiento Pacífico de la Alta Montaña / <i>Peaceful Movement of the Alta Montaña</i>
MOVICE	Movimiento Nacional de Violencia de víctimas de Crímenes de Estado/ <i>Natiolla Movement of Victims of State Based Crimes</i>
OJFP	Organización Juvenil Fomentadora de Paz / <i>Youth Organization for Building Peace</i>
PACS	Peace and Conflict Studies
PAR	Investigación Acción participativa / <i>Participatory Action Research</i>
PDP	Programa de Desarrollo y Paz / <i>Peace and Development Program</i>
PDPMM	Programa de Desarrollo y Paz de los Montes de María / <i>Peace and Development Program of Montes de María</i>
PDET	Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial/ <i>Development Programs with a Territorial Approach</i>
PRT	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores / <i>Workers' Revolutionary Party</i>
SEMBRANDOPAZ	Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz / <i>Sowing Seeds of Peace Association</i>
UC	Universidad de Cartagena / <i>University of Cartagena</i>
UP	Unión Patriótica / <i>Patriotic Union</i>
US	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Chapter 1. The journey Towards Conflict Transformation

Introduction

After four years of negotiations in Havana, Cuba, the government of Colombia and the main guerrilla movement in the country, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP) signed a peace agreement in November 2016, to end 60 years of internal armed conflict. Far from a being a smooth transition, the peace agreement left a country deeply divided with several obstacles to its implementation, such as the rearming of FARCS’s dissident factions. One of the main contributions of the post-accord peace process is the prominence of local peacebuilding initiatives and their influence in the transformation of conflict.

As an approach to conflict analysis, conflict transformation arrived in Colombia in the late 1990s through the work of John Paul Lederach, when the intensity of violence was about to peak. Soon, scholars and practitioners adopted this approach in their work with communities and as a framework of analysis and intervention. Local peacebuilding is becoming the new *mantra* within policy and academic circles, and there is increasing interest in the concept and practice of conflict transformation as an appropriate approach for a post-peace accord society.¹ However, it is important to ask whether local

¹ The following authors have worked extensively on analyzing local peacebuilding: S. Autesserre, (2014). *Peaceland : conflict resolution and the everyday politics of international intervention*. New York: Cambridge University Press. J.P. Lederach, (1997). *Building peace. Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press; J. P. Lederach (2003). *The little book of conflict transformation*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books; J.P. Lederach (2005). *The moral imagination the art and soul of building peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; S., Appleby & J.P. Lederach, (2010). Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview. In D. Philpott & G. F. Powers (Eds.), *Strategies of Peace. Transforming Conflict in a Violent World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; R. Mac Ginty, (2010). Hybrid Peace: The Interaction Between Top-Down and Bottom-Up Peace. *Security Dialogue*, 41(4), 391-412.; R. Mac Ginty, (2012). Indicators+ : A proposal for everyday pecaie indicators. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 36(1), 56-63. P. Firchow, (2018). *Reclaiming everyday peace: local voices in measurement and evaluation after war*. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

peacebuilding initiatives in Colombia are strong enough and transformative enough for this new post-accord stage.

This thesis documents and analyzes the activities and results of local peacebuilding initiatives through the work of the Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz (Sembrandopaz), which translates as Sowing Seeds of Peace Association. Sembrandopaz is a nonprofit, community-based organization in the Montes de María region of northern Colombia. Sembrandopaz was started by Colombian Mennonites in 2005 through an organization called Justapaz, a sister organization from the Mennonite Church located in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia (Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz, 2019; Pardo García, Barajas Jaimes, Henao, & Huertas, 2018). Within Montes de María, Sembrandopaz is currently working in four communities: Alta Montaña, Libertad, Mampuján and Pichilín, each with its own history of violence and in different stages of their peacebuilding. This thesis focuses on the communities of Alta Montaña and Libertad because of the differences in their peacebuilding approaches and strategies in response to their particular context of violence.

I have been working in peacebuilding in Colombia for more than twenty years, and have witnessed the development of conflict transformation, especially from the grassroots levels, during the peace negotiations and in the post-accord stage. Despite Colombia's numerous local peacebuilding initiatives and the increased interest in conflict transformation, it is important to question its implementation and outcomes, and whether this approach is providing the foundations for a long-lasting, sustainable peace. Indeed, Paffenholz (2013) argued that conflict transformation as well as local peacebuilding only operates on small-scale settings and it does not address structural issues, deeming them

insufficient for the creation of a long lasting peace. *In this context, this study intended to respond to the following research questions: How has Sembrandopaz's local peacebuilding work focused on responding to violence and in fostering reconciliation in the Montes de María region in Colombia inform, critique, expand or accept the primary principles and methods of conflict transformation, and what is its influence and impact in the region?*

To respond to the aforementioned questions, this study had the following research objectives:

- To document the peacebuilding activities of Sembrandopaz in two communities of Montes de María: Alta Montaña and Libertad.
- Assess the impact of those peacebuilding activities in the region;
- Analyze the extent to which the philosophy and strategies of Sembrandopaz are or are not consistent with the tenets conflict transformation; and
- Identify what can be learned from the case study of Sembrandopaz to inform the theory and practice of peacebuilding elsewhere.

Montes de María is a subregion in the northern part of Colombia along the Caribbean Coast. Because of its geostrategic location and fertile lands, this region has been particularly affected by the internal armed conflict, since the main actors fought for its control. Nevertheless, it is also a region with a long-standing tradition of social movements and peacebuilding initiatives, which make it an exceptional example to better understand local peacebuilding in a postaccord setting. The analysis of two communities with different stories of violence and different approaches to peacebuilding provided the

opportunity to explore dynamics of local peacebuilding within a framework of conflict transformation and in a context of transition from war to peace.

The research is centered in four main theoretical frameworks: theories of peacebuilding with special emphasis on the theory and practice of conflict transformation, as well as critical scholarship on post-liberal peace; social justice, and theories of gender and peacebuilding.

This thesis was conducted to better understand the dynamics of local peacebuilding in internal armed conflict and its potential within post-accord settings to create the conditions for positive peace. In addition, it contributes to current debates on conflict transformation and post-liberal peace.

This exploratory research was inductive in nature, using qualitative research methods, and the case study as its main methodological approach. Far from finding a unified voice, it presents contending and contradictory voices, reflecting the different approaches and debates around local peacebuilding in Montes de María and its transformative potential in a post-accord context. The research also provided an opportunity for communities, leaders and policymakers to self-reflect on their activities, lessons learned, what needs improvement and to identify strategies for future action in a post-accord scenario.

Overview of the Chapters

The thesis is organized in nine chapters. Chapter 1 provides the context for the thesis, its research question, objectives and relevance. Chapters 2 and 3 address the contemporary emergence and evolution of the internal armed conflict in Colombia and in Montes de María. Chapter 4 provides the theoretical framework for the research. It is based on three frameworks: theories of peacebuilding with the emphasis on conflict

transformation; critical scholarship on post-liberal peace and, finally, social justice and theories of gender. Chapter 5 describes the methodological approach implemented in the study based on the contextual and theoretical frameworks as well as the fieldwork. Drawing from the general to the particular chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 are the empirical chapters that present on the findings of the study. Chapter 6 focuses on Sembrandopaz and its work on peacebuilding. It presents their internal organization, understanding of peacebuilding, areas of action and, their approaches and strategies to peacebuilding in Montes de María. In Chapter 7 the study presents Sembrandopaz's work in Alta Montaña while Chapter 8 explores the experience of Libertad, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses from a transformational perspective. It highlights the adaptability of Sembrandopaz according to the context and the effort to develop and sustain long-term peacebuilding in the form of platforms that are capable of developing short-term responses with a long-term vision. Chapter 9 presents the main lessons or overall key findings from the study as well as future research and praxis opportunities.

Conclusion

Parallel to the 60-year internal armed conflict in Colombia there is also a long history of peacebuilding initiatives that resisted and responded to different manifestations of violence in the country, especially at the local level. Sembrandopaz is one of these initiatives, and is the focus of this thesis because its approach to peacebuilding reflects the main tenets of conflict transformation. The theory and practice of conflict transformation has been present in the debates and the work of Colombian peace scholars and practitioners and it has been particularly embraced by grassroots peacebuilding initiatives, such as Sembrandopaz. Considering that the country is in a postaccord stage, it is important to

analyze the strengths and weaknesses of conflict transformation and its potential in local peacebuilding.

Far from romanticizing local peacebuilding, through the analysis of a specific initiative and under a conflict transformation framework, this thesis was a journey to better understand a rich legacy of local peacebuilding in Colombia, its impact but also its reach and challenges. This thesis intends to contribute to current debates in conflict transformation, local peacebuilding, and postliberal peace, but most importantly to provide information that is useful for practitioners and peacebuilders in Colombia.

Chapter 2. National Overview: The Context

Introduction

This chapter describes how the history of violence and peacebuilding initiatives in Montes de María is intrinsically related to the national context and its dynamics. The first part explores the conflict context and the spiral of violence that caused great destruction in Colombia outlining some of the key historical moments in the process. It is a complex, multi-actor, multicausal and persistent conflict that has evolved and adapted to national and international changes. The history begins with the polarization between Liberal and Conservative parties and how it created the conditions for the emergence of guerrilla and paramilitary groups. The main actors in the internal armed conflict are described, with especial emphasis on the government of Colombia, FARC guerrillas and paramilitary groups, because they are central to the conflict in Montes de María.

The second part of the chapter describes important Colombian efforts on peace negotiations and peacebuilding. Following Lederach's Approaches to Peacebuilding model (See Figure 1.), the second part of this chapter explores different peacebuilding initiatives in Colombia from top-down, high-level peace dialogues to grassroots peacebuilding.

Internal Armed Conflict in Colombia: Origins and Evolution

The contemporary internal armed conflict in Colombia can be traced back to 1948 when Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, leader from the Liberal Party, was killed by the Conservative right as a reaction to the party's modernizing reforms of the state and the economy. The struggle for power and control by these parties permeated all political and social aspects of life. Even the Catholic Church took sides by supporting the conservative party as its ally

against liberalism and communism. As a result, from 1948 to 1953, a wave of violence between conservatives and liberals called La Violencia (*The Violence*) devastated the country leaving 300,000 people dead (Benavides-Vanegas, 2009).

Despite different attempts to end the political conflict, state-based violence persisted during the 1960s. Social and economic policies were designed but they failed or were insufficient to respond to the demand. Anti-communist sentiments against liberal rebels prevailed, igniting a new wave of violence and creating the conditions for modern guerrilla movements to emerge. In addition, a number of repressive measures were incorporated into law² increasing the population's support for new guerrilla movements.

FARC emerged in 1964 as a legacy of failed negotiations between the government and a remnant of rural liberal guerrilla factions. Inspired by the Cuban revolution and following FARC's experience, additional guerrilla groups emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN- (*National Liberation Army*) is an example of these insurgent groups that are still active in Colombia, despite various attempts for peace dialogues (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2009).³

² Decree 1923 of 1978 was also known as the National Security Statute. This body of law incorporated the notion of the “internal enemy” who was any “political adversary that operates within the country's borders” (GMH, 2013, p. 132).

³ Since its foundation in 1964 there has been eight attempts of peace dialogues with ELN. The first one was in the 1980s under the presidency of Betancur (1982-1986); President Barco (1986-1990) dialogued with different guerrilla groups such as FARC, ELN, EPL and M-19 but only the latter demobilized. In the 1990s under President Gaviria (1990-1994) dialogues with FARC, EPL and ELN took place in México and Venezuela but they failed due to the kidnapping of former cabinet minister Mr. Argelino Durán Quintero by EPL. During the Presidency of Samper (1994-1998) and amidst political delegitimization, dialogues advanced with the support of Mexico and Germany. ELN insisted in the participation of Colombia's civil society calling for a National Convention. The process also reached a pre-agreement. Under Pastrana's presidency (1998-2002) the main emphasis was on reaching an agreement with FARC, but there were some rounds of dialogues in Venezuela and Cuba. During Uribe's presidency (2002-2010), there were exploratory dialogues but they failed due to Mr. Uribe's military policies in dealing with the armed conflict. During Santos' presidency (2010-2018), parallel to the peace dialogues with FARC that ended in the 2016 peace Agreement, there were some rounds of dialogues but not much progress. President Duque (2018-2022), who

In the late 1970s, landlords and emergent groups of drug dealers financed paramilitary armies to respond to leftist influences and the guerrillas' actions against the landlords' interests. They expanded their activities in different regions in the country and paramilitary practices became more and more brutal against guerrilla militants, human rights advocates, judges, union advocates and social leaders (Verdad Abierta, 2008a). The paramilitaries strategically managed to infiltrate the state, the economy, the army and local administrations.

Although this thesis describes the wars in Colombia as internal conflicts, there was a significant international component. The United States (US) became involved in the Colombian conflict as part of the US strategy to tackle communism and drug trafficking in Latin America, with political, economic and social intervention in the country (CHCV, 2015). Some authors claim that the US was not a mere external influence but it was an active actor in the Colombian armed conflict (Vega Cantor, 2015). With the complicit support of Colombian elites, the US influenced the conflict through military and technical assistance, as well as with covert operations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) (Vega Cantor, 2015). Under Pastrana Arango's Colombian government (1998-2002) and US President Bill Clinton, the cooperation between both countries was strengthened through Plan Colombia, an aid package to combat drug trafficking, that later turned into a counterinsurgency strategy. Human rights and social leaders have criticized Plan Colombia for the increase of human rights violations and US influence on national affairs (Amnesty

won the elections under the promise of weakening the peace accord with FARC has a strong stance for peace dialogues with ELN So far it has not been successful (Arboleda, 2017) .

International, 2015).⁴ During Uribe's presidency (2002-2010), US' influence in the country was at its highest⁵ and it has remained so through different agencies such as USAID.

Causes of Conflict

Colombia's political armed conflict did not emerge from a single polarity between specific groups. On the contrary, it is the result of the entanglement of different dynamics, actors and processes that evolved and changed with the conflicts. The United Nations (UN) asserts that in Colombia there "are many conflicts," each with its own logic and dynamics (United Nations Development Programme, 2003, p. 16).⁶ The underlying causes of the conflicts include: the lack of a strong state presence, especially in the peripheral areas; the elite class's lack of interest in building an inclusive nation; the exclusion of civil society in decision making processes; access to land and basic services for campesinos and increasing social and economic inequality; dissidents from paramilitary and guerrilla groups; the presence of criminal gangs aiming to control the drug trade; and the influence of the US in the region. The conflicts have devastated the country, especially in the rural areas where civilians were the main victims.

An integral analysis of the conflict highlights two key characteristics (GMH, 2013; González González, 2014). First, it is a complex conflict that covers a variety of inter-

⁴ Plan Colombia was started in 2000 and sent more than 8 billion dollars to Colombia in military support. By 1999, Colombia was the third country receiving military assistance from the US after Israel and Egypt (Vega Cantor, 2015, p. 37).

⁵ During Uribe's presidency the US received seven military bases in Colombia; unlimited access to maritime and airspace; it paid no taxes or customs and, no judicial investigation for crimes within the country by military personnel or private contractors (Vega Cantor, 2015, p. 43 and 45).

⁶ Although there are different conflicts in Colombia, scholars and practitioners refer to it as at the internal armed conflict (GMH, 2013; González González, 2014).

related manifestations of violence, such as political violence, human rights violations, organized crime, gender-based violence, domestic violence, structural violence and youth gangs, among others. Its complexity is also evident in its multiple causes and, the number of actors involved (guerrillas, paramilitaries, the military, organized crime, victims, NGOs, etc).

Second, the intensity of violence has been neither homogenous nor constant, ranging from low levels in the late 1950s and 1960s,⁷ to its highest peak between 1995 and 2002, to decreasing levels in 2005 as a result of the demobilization of paramilitary groups and an intense military campaign against the guerrillas (GMH, 2013).

Combatants involve civilians in the dynamics of war, ignoring the basic tenets of human rights and international humanitarian law (Arocha & Sánchez G, 1987; Hernández Delgado, 2012). In many ways the Colombian conflict shares some of the characteristics of Mary Kaldor's (1999) idea about new wars: degraded conflicts where the boundaries between war, organized crime and large-scale violations of human rights are not clear (p.2).

It is important to highlight violence against women and girls as one of the most egregious aspects of the war and with the highest levels of impunity for in the sixty-year old conflict. In 2008 the Colombian Constitutional Court acknowledged that violence against women is a “common, widespread, systematic and invisible practice”⁸ where all armed actors in the conflict are involved (Cepeda Espinosa, p. 24). It is difficult to know the magnitude of this type of violence since information is scarce. In addition to the absence

⁷ It took decades for the country to experience a transition from bipartisan violence towards the emergence of guerrilla groups.

⁸ Translation by the author

of a reliable database, victims do not report violence because of mistrust of the judicial system and fear of retaliation and rejection by their families and communities (Amnistía Internacional, 2012; CNRR, 2011b). In sum, the Colombian armed conflict is a protracted, dynamic and resilient conflict. It has adapted to the context and it has evolved over time.

From 1982 to the present, there were different attempts to end the internal armed conflict through peace dialogues or by military approaches to defeat the guerrillas and paramilitaries on the battlefield with mixed results. In 2005, President Álvaro Uribe began a demobilization process of paramilitary groups that was highly criticized by social organizations and human rights defenders who argued that it was a way to avoid justice for the paramilitaries, legitimize impunity and minimize the truth about paramilitary violence (GMH, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2010). In September 2012, President Juan Manuel Santos initiated the peace dialogues with FARC that concluded with the signing of an accord in November 2016. His government also began conversations with ELN guerrillas but no progress has been made in this dialogue. However, the post-accord implementation has not been easy. The new government of Iván Duque was elected in June 2018 under a platform opposed to the peace agreement and in promoting changes to it, especially with regards to the transitional justice provisions. In addition, the peace process with ELN currently is suspended indefinitely.

Who is Who in the Colombian Internal Armed Conflict?

To better understand the complexity of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, it is necessary to identify the major parties involved. The following section explores each of these actors with special emphasis on the government, FARC, and the paramilitary group

Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia –AUC- (*United Self Defence Forces of Colombia*) because of its significant presence and impact in Montes de María.

The government of Colombia.

With the exception of one short dictatorship⁹ the country has had periodic democratic elections that provided political stability during most of the 19th and 20th centuries (González González, 2014). Yet formal elections do not reflect the political context of the country. The use of violence as an approach to solve social and political conflicts was common over the past centuries (GMH, 2013). Parallel to repression, there is also a history of failed political and social policies as well as peace dialogues.

The period between 1958 and 1982 brought about a transition from party-based violence to the emergence of modern guerrillas. In an attempt to end *La Violencia*, leaders from the liberal and conservative parties reached an agreement to share power for a period of 16 years. The agreement was called Frente Nacional (*National Front*) and its goal was to gain control of the territory. However, the influence of local powers and landowners especially in the rural area was a significant obstacle to be overcome.

The National Front brought partisan violence to an end, although it silenced other outside political voices opposed to the traditional parties. Fearing a communist intervention, the government asked the US for support. President Dwight Eisenhower sent a special delegation of CIA agents who concluded that the country needed to respond both

⁹ In 1953 and with the support of Liberal and Conservative elites, General Rojas Pinilla took over power with the mission to end partisan violence and pacify the country (GMH, 2013). His government (1953-1957) was a combination of amnesties to liberal guerrillas and military actions against communism. Rojas Pinilla's government succeeded in dismantling liberal guerrillas, but his military actions paved the way for the formation of guerrilla groups in the early 1960s (GMH, 2013; González González, 2014).

to criminal bands and to implement social, political and economic reforms, especially in rural areas (GMH, 2013, p. 118).

The administration of President Lleras (1966-1970) struggled to implement rural reforms. To counterbalance the strength of landowners Lleras empowered the *campesino* movement by creating the Asociación de Usuarios Campesinos -ANUC- (*National Association of Rural Workers*). However, his successor President Pastrana Borrero (1970-1974) changed the government's approach focusing on capitalist agriculture and the protection of large properties. He also responded with political and military repression to the demands of social leaders (GMH, 2013, p.130). The presidency of Turbay (1978-1982) was especially brutal with the social movement. By releasing a body of legislation called the Estatuto de Seguridad Nacional (*National Security Statute*) the military was granted power to respond to social protest. Guerrilla groups responded to this legislation by strengthening their forces and military tactics.

From 1982 to 1996 the guerrilla movements expanded, paramilitary groups emerged, and the drug cartel consolidated its influence. Tensions between the government and the military were prevalent in this period. It manifested in repression of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the creation and support of paramilitary groups. The systematic assassination of political leaders deemed to be leftist or who threatened the interests of drug lords was a constant reality during this period.

Meanwhile, drug traffickers permeated different social and political spheres. The infiltration of illicit money into the campaign of President Samper (1994-1998) illustrated the extent of the cartels' reach in Colombian politics (Prados, 1995). President Pastrana Arango (1998-2002) was elected as a reaction to Samper's administration and the cartels'

involvement in his presidential campaign. Pastrana focused both on the strengthening of the armed forces and in initiating peace dialogues with FARC (GMH, 2013), although it was not enough to stop the paramilitaries from strengthening in rural areas (GMH, 2013). His effort to forge peace dialogues with FARC was a colossal failure due to FARC's ambiguity towards the dialogues, the opposition of mainstream elites that believed that the government was too generous with the guerrillas, and especially because both the government and FARC used dialogue as a strategy to strengthen their political and military positions. During this presidency, the US support of the Colombian government through Plan Colombia to provide military and economic support¹⁰ as a strategy on the war on drugs weakened even more peace dialogues.

The presidency of Álvaro Uribe Vélez deepened a radical approach in the understanding and response to the internal armed conflict. Through a policy called *Defense and Democratic Security*, Uribe combined all-out war against the guerrillas with negotiations with the paramilitaries. Four days after his inauguration the President declared a state of internal unrest for a period of 90 days,¹¹ allowing the restriction of civil rights as well as granting the army and the police extrajudicial powers. Thus, the armed forces had the power to arrest civilians without judicial order, to intercept communications, to restrict the displacement of people and goods, to control the media, and to restrict public meetings and demonstrations among others (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 170; Porras Mendoza,

¹⁰ According to the Center for Historic Memory Plan Colombia had a clear military emphasis. The resources were divided as follows: 74 percent for armed forces strengthening (60 percent to the military and 14 percent); and only 26 percent (Ramírez, 2006, p. 167 as cited by the CNMH, 2013).

¹¹ Decree 1837 of August 22, 2002. The initial period of 90 days established in decree 1837 was later extended two more times for 180 days. However, the Constitutional Court declared the second extension to be unconstitutional.

2014). The rationale behind this policy was that violence was an obstacle to economic growth and development. Safety and security in cities and villages were necessary requirements for a strong country (GMH, 2013).

Uribe's government assumed that once the country was safe and secure, the next stage was to recover the control of the territory through the strategic coordination of the military, the judiciary and the government (GMH, 2013; González G et al., 2014). The goal was to control the territory by strengthening state institutions under the leadership of the military to open the doors for national and foreign investments in the region (González G et al., 2014). As a result, the government created the Zones of Rehabilitation and Consolidation¹² defined as a geographic area affected by criminal groups where the state would implement extraordinary measures to “guarantee institutional stability and to restore the constitutional order, the integrity of the national territory and the protection of civil society” (article 11, Decree 2002 of September 09, 2002).¹³ Thus, on December 3, 2002, the Colombian government choose El Carmen de Bolívar, amongst other municipalities in Montes de María, as the first Zone of Rehabilitation and Consolidation¹⁴ (Pardo García et al., 2018).

At the same time, the Congress issued the *Justice and Peace Law* (Law 975/2005) that granted paramilitary combatants a maximum sentence of eight years in jail in exchange

¹² Decree 2002 of September 09, 2002

¹³ Translation by the author

¹⁴ The first Zone of Rehabilitation and Consolidation had the following municipalities: In the departamento of Sucre: San Onofre, Colosó, Chalán, Ovejas, Tolú Viejo, Sincé, Galeras, El Roble, San Pedro, Corozal, Sincelejo, San Juan de Betulia, Los Palmitos, Morroa y Bellavista. In the departamento of Bolívar: Mahates, María la Baja, Calamar, El Guamo, San Juan Nepomuceno, San Jacinto, Carmen de Bolívar, Córdoba y Zambrano, en Bolívar.

for full confession of crimes committed, reparation to victims,¹⁵ and guarantees of non-repetition.¹⁶

Uribe's presidency was a difficult time for CSOs. Arbitrary detentions, displacement and human rights violations against social leaders became a common practice in the region. Although massacres decreased from 2003-2007 due to the demobilization process for paramilitaries, selective killings of social leaders increased and 49,937 people were displaced (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 30). Some of Montes de María inhabitants were perceived and labeled as guerrilla supporters so that civilians had no choice but to cooperate with the armed forces. Many cooperated out of fear, yet some used this practice for money, revenge or power (Pardo García et al., 2018).

The guerrillas.

In the second half of the 20th century the Communist Party¹⁷ took advantage of the havoc of La Violencia to support a modern guerrilla movement (Guzmán Campos, Umaña Luna, & Fals-Borda, 2010; Verdad Abierta, 2013). International dynamics significantly affected what was happening in Colombia. The US dynamics during the Cold War in Latin America, the success of the Cuban revolution, and the influence of liberation theology within the Catholic Church created the conditions for strengthening guerrilla movements with strong Marxist foundations.

¹⁵ According to article 46 of Law 975/2005, restitution to victims includes: release of hostages, return of displaced people, and devolution of stolen assets.

¹⁶ According to article 48 of Law 975/2005 the guarantees of non-repetition, must consider: a. to disseminate information in a way that does not harm the victim or threaten her safety; b. to search for deceased and disappeared victims; c. a public apology that includes the acknowledgment of the harm done; d. the application of judicial sanctions, among others.

¹⁷ The Colombian Communist Party was formally founded on July 17, 1930 after the assembly of the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

From the movements that emerged in the late 1960s only FARC and the ELN are active (GMH, 2013). Groups such as the Ejército de Liberación Popular –EPL- (*Popular Liberation Army*) and the Movimiento 19 de Abril –M-19- (*Movement of April 19th*) demobilized between 1989 and 1990 (GMH, 2013). Groups such as Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores –PRT- (*Workers’ Revolutionary Party*) and the Movimiento Indígena Quintín Lame (*Quintín Lame Indigenous Movement*) that emerged in the 1980s, demobilized in the early 1990s. From these major groups some others emerged as dissidents. An example is the Corriente de Renovación Socialista –CRS- (*Socialist Renovation Movement*) a dissident group that split for the ELN that had a strong presence in Montes de María and that eventually demobilized in 1994 (GMH, 2013).

This study emphasized the role of FARC because of its influence in Montes de María. FARC emerged in 1964¹⁸ in the southwest of the country within the departments of Tolima and Cauca, as a result of unsolved conflicts over land tenure and demands of political rights by *campesino* and Aboriginal peoples (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013; Molano Bravo, 2014). Unlike other guerrilla groups such as the ELN, FARC’s foundations were mainly rural, expressed in its political discourse¹⁹ and its strong presence in peripheral areas.

¹⁸ Although 1964 is the official creation date, in their historical documents FARC states that their background goes back to 1949, the year after *La Violencia* started. However, the foundational milestone is the Operación Marquetalia (*Marquetalia Operation*). On May 14, 1964 the government, with the support of US intelligence, issued an attack on a guerrilla enclave in an area called Marquetalia, in the municipality of Planadas, department of Tolima. According to the story, 16,000 troops of the Colombian army confronted 48 campesino men and women without success. Other accounts by Colombian officials present in the attack stated that it was 2,000 troops against 250 campesino combatants. In all accounts, there was an evident asymmetrical military power imbalance. The army used indiscriminate airplane bombardments and chemical weapons. The brutal attack was highly criticized both in national and international settings. The Marquetalia Operation was the defining moment when FARC moved from self-defense groups into an offence guerrilla organization (GMH, 2013).

¹⁹ See, for instance the Agrarian Program of 1964, FARC’s foundational document that was later revised in 1993 during FARC’s 8th conference (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013, pp. 335-346). It is

In its fifty years of existence, FARC has adapted to the dynamics of the conflict. The Center for Historic Memory identified four main stages in the evolution of FARC.²⁰ In its early years (1949-1978) it justified its existence as a reaction to the violence of the state against marginal groups. It was mostly a self-defense guerrilla movement with strong ties to the Communist Party, and with little capacity to overthrow the state. FARC discourse emphasized the agrarian conflict, the lack of the state's presence in peripheral areas and the impact of *La Violencia* in the social, political and economic dynamics of the country (*Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013*). In sum, it was a guerrilla movement “without clear strategy, low profile, non combative and with a poor political impact” (*Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013*).

A second phase in the evolution of FARC took place between 1978 and 1991. An increase in social protests and the action of urban guerrillas brought about a strong political and military reaction from the state. It was a period of intense violence in the country that ended with the adoption of a new National Constitution. It was also a period of emergence and consolidation of drug trafficking and paramilitary groups in different regions of the country.

FARC adapted to this new context by expanding to different areas and by creating internal regulations and a Strategic Plan to take over the state. Indeed, as a result of its 7th National Conference in 1982, FARC developed an expansion plan towards territories of economic and strategic interest, with Montes de María as one of the main targets. This

important to highlight that many of the ideas in this document were discussed in current conversations in Havana.

²⁰ Different authors propose different phases in the emergence and evolution of FARC. This document relies on the latest work of the Center for Historic Memory because of its careful study and analysis of the issues.

conference is significant because for the first time FARC envisioned the possibility to take over the state by military and political means. The main goal was to take the power over a period of eight years, first by a military offensive, then by taking over the government and in defending the revolution. The military offensive demanded the creation of an army and a change in military tactics: from guerrilla tactics to conventional war tactics. For this purpose, the conference approved increasing the combatants from 3,000 to 28,000 through the recruitment (forced or voluntary) people between 15 and 30 years of age, and creating various military fronts, each targeting a major city. For this expansion, they proposed a budget of eight billion pesos that would be collected through extortion and kidnaping, especially from cattle ranchers (González González, 2014). In addition to a military strategy, the plan proposed training people about FARC's history and ideology, creating community radio, strengthening grassroots organizations such as agrarian unions, and creating a political party called Union Patriótica (UP)²¹. Overall, the goal of the strategy was to “combine all forms of struggle,” be they political or military, in order to achieve victory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013, p. 18; GMH, 2013; González González, 2014, p. 382).

Thus, in the third phase (1991-2008), FARC used any strategy available, from military actions to negotiations with the government, drug trafficking and kidnaping of civilians, to implement its Strategic Plan. However, with the support of the US and Plan Colombia's resources, the government responded with strong and successful military actions, weakening the guerrillas and forcing them to retreat to their traditional strongholds.

²¹ Eventually UP was decimated by the actions of right wing groups. This is also called the extermination or genocide of Unión Patriótica.

In addition, the government developed policies encouraging political participation and economic investment in rural areas. Meanwhile, FARC's increasingly brutal tactics eroded its support with public opinion turning against FARC²², creating an opportunity for the political, military and economic sectors to join together in efforts to strengthen paramilitary groups (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013; González González, 2014).

In the final phase (2008-2013), FARC acknowledged the impact of the government's military actions, especially during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010), and adapted to the new context by creating alliances with criminal bands, maintaining a war of resistance. As it will be described later²³, these new circumstances cemented the conditions for the current peace negotiation (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013).²⁴

The Ejército de Liberación Nacional –ELN- (*National Liberation Army*) is the second largest guerrilla group. It emerged in 1962 yet unlike FARC, whose origins are mainly rural, ELN foundational roots came from radical elements within the Catholic Church and university students. Internationally, the Cuban and Chinese revolutions and the Liberation Theology provided ELN's main ideological foundations, while within Colombia, the labour movement and the effects of La Violencia inspired the movement

²² An example is the peaceful demonstration that individual citizens organized through social media against FARC and its atrocities. With the slogan “A million voices against FARC”, four million people in Colombia and around the world marched against FARC's abuses such as recruitment of children, kidnappings of civilians (many of them in captivity for 6 to 12 years), massacres, displacement, landmines, among others (Semana.com, 2018).

²³ See the section titled, “Peace negotiations and institutional approaches” in this document.

²⁴ On August 29, 2019, a faction of FARC announced its return to the war, arguing that the government betrayed the agreement (The Guardian, 2019). Nevertheless, the government through its Presidential Counselor for Stabilization and Consolidation, Mr. Emilio Archila rejected FARC's rearmament and acknowledged that 90 percent of the former combatants are fulfilling their commitment to the agreement.

(GMH, 2013). Although urban in origin, ELN operated in marginal rural areas, under the belief that the revolution will come from the *campesinos*. Historically, its main income came from kidnappings and extortions, especially targeting oil companies and, in the 2000s ELN joined the drug trade (FSI Stanford, 2012).

One of ELN's main characteristics is its strictness on the military front and also in defense of its Marxist foundations (GMH, 2013). During the 1970s, military actions from the government almost decimated the group. However, by the 1980s, it made some changes in its ideology and actions. On the one hand, ELN favored the ideological legacy of the Sandinista revolution on Central America and it gave more importance to social and political actions. At the same time, it implemented an expansion plan where Montes de María was one of the targeted regions. On the military front, it increased its spate of kidnappings and extortions, to oil companies, cattle ranchers, drug traffickers and entrepreneurs.

The government tried various attempts at peace negotiations with the ELN, yet they failed due to the intransigence of the parties, to internal divisions and desertions within ELN, the increase of violence against civilians and, the increased pressure of paramilitary groups (GMH, 2013).

Self-defence and paramilitary groups.

Paramilitary groups are civilian organizations that use violence without the official approval of the state. Paramilitarism in Colombia is associated with right wing radical groups and drug traffickers. It is a clear manifestation of weak states and political institutions that are unable to control their territory (Romero Vidal, 2011). Paramilitary groups emerged in the late 1970s as important actors in the Colombian conflict with the

veiled support of radical elements that included landlords, drug traffickers, mercenaries and, sectors of the military opposed to peace negotiations. Later in the 1990s, the government of Colombia issued various pieces of legislation and policies that provided a framework that backed the creation and operation of paramilitary groups. For instance, the 1994 Decree No. 356 legalized paramilitarism through the creation of Surveillance and Security Cooperatives known by its Spanish acronym Convivir, as CSOs that supported the efforts of the police and the army. Regional elites found in the Convivir the perfect opportunity to legalize their informal and illegal armed groups. However, in 1997, the Constitutional Court forbid the Convivir's use of weapons and many began to operate informally outside the legal framework. Later that year, former Convivir and various criminal bands joined efforts to become part of a larger organization called Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC- (*United Self Defense Forces of Colombia*).

Scholars provide different explanations for its emergence. On the one hand, paramilitarism developed as a counterinsurgency tactic against guerrilla and social movements at the regional and local levels (GMH, 2013; Romero, 2002). Later in the 1990s, the emphasis turned to the lack of safety in rural areas for both campesinos and landlords, which discouraged investors. Politicians and the private sector advocated for creating self-defense groups to protect their assets and interests. They made a distinction between self-defense and paramilitary groups. The former refers to landlords and campesinos organized to protect their right to life and property. The latter refers to criminal organizations linked to drug traffickers (Romero, 2002). Human rights advocates fiercely opposed the creation of self-defense and paramilitary groups. They argued that in reality there was no difference between the two, since the outcome was the same: the use of

violence to oppress civilians and their paramilitary groups were created to prevent the participation of former combatants in democratic institutions (Romero Vidal, 2002). In this analysis, the paramilitaries' main goal was not be a counterinsurgency force but to weaken social and political leaders as well as to displace populations in order to take over control of their land and its natural resources (Ariel, 2019).

Public opinion initially perceived paramilitary organizations as saviors. Their actions were not always clandestine. Moreover, different sectors of the armed forces publicly defended paramilitarism as a counterinsurgency strategy, and provided them with protection, ammunition, and weapons (GMH, 2013). However, public favor changed into fear as the brutality against civilians increased. The government responded by issuing a number of laws to restrict paramilitary activity, however, the paramilitaries expanded and adapted to the new circumstances. One of their strategies was to venture into politics, creating political parties and immersing themselves in regional and local politics. In 1997, nine paramilitary groups from all over the country joined forces to create the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia –AUC- (*United Self Defense Forces of Colombia*), defined as a counterinsurgent political and military movement. Their goal was to control local territories, their resources and peoples, and eventually take control of the national government. As a result of strategic and methodical actions, paramilitary groups infiltrated the state, the economy, the army and local administrations (GMH, 2013; "Sentencia Salvatore Mancuso," 2014). Their efforts were successful in the 2002 legislative elections, when paramilitary-supported candidates received one-third of the congress seats. Then in 2003, they elected 250 mayors and nine departmental governors (GMH, 2013, p. 160).

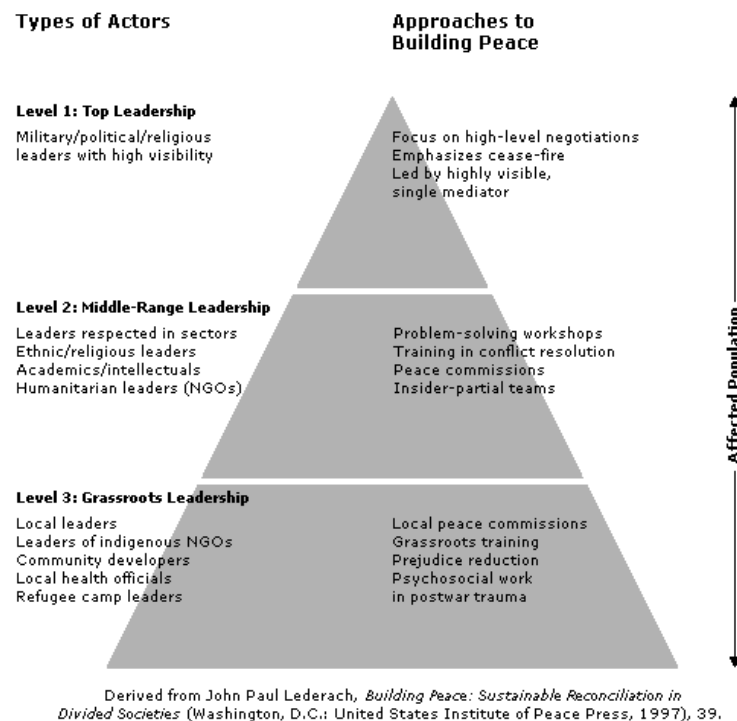
In 2005, the government of President Uribe (2002-2010) implemented a strong security and military strategy to weaken the guerrillas.²⁵ He also began a demobilization process for paramilitary groups with mixed results. Although 33,000 paramilitary combatants demobilized, social activists and human rights advocates criticized the process, arguing that it promoted impunity and legitimized drug-based economies (GMH, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2010). Indeed, in 2005 the government issued Law 979 that was also called *Law for Justice and Peace* to facilitate the demobilization and reintegration of combatants, creating special procedures for their prosecution. One of the requirements for ex-combatants to receive the law's benefits was to fully confess their illegal activities and crimes that included massacres, murders and displacement. As a result of their confessions, the connections between the authorities and paramilitarism were revealed, creating a dangerous situation for people in power. Paramilitary leaders were later extradited to the US under drug dealing charges, and some lower ranking members joined criminal gangs (Duncan, 2006; Verdad Abierta, 2008b). On numerous occasions, the former paramilitary commander Salvatore Mancuso denounced the paramilitaries close ties with Colombian elites. They even financed the re-election campaign of President Uribe in 2006 and were very active in regional politics (Caicedo, 2009; Semana.com, 2011). Despite the AUC's demobilization, paramilitarism has not ceased. It is still an influential element in the conflict and, after the peace process it has strengthened.

²⁵ This policy was called Democratic Security Policy.

Peace and Peacebuilding in Colombia: From Top-down Approaches to Grassroots Peacebuilding

Scholars assert that one of the most important characteristics of contemporary Colombian history is its continuous quest for peace (García-Durán, 2006; Hernández Delgado, 2012; Rettberg, 2006). Following John Paul Lederach's "Approaches to Building Peace" (1997), this section briefly explores the developments of peacebuilding initiatives in Colombia in general and, in Montes de María in particular. According to Lederach's model, communities and individuals have different approaches and strategies to peacebuilding depending on their location in the conflict (See Figure 1). People located at the top of the pyramid are visible political and military leaders that have the power to put an end to violence through a negotiation processes. It is assumed that they have the support of the population they represent and the power to take decisions on their behalf. This approach is usually called top-down approaches to peacebuilding or Track I. At the bottom of the pyramid are grassroots and local peacebuilding initiatives. Their main focus is to respond to the immediate effects of violence that individuals and communities faced in their daily lives. Conflict resolution, peace education and psychosocial support are some examples of peacebuilding at this level. Paffenholz (2013) calls this approach Track III. Finally, at the middle level there are actors that have connections and legitimacy in the top and grassroots levels, acting as bridges between both levels. Churches, universities, NGOs and, artists are some examples of this type of peacebuilding, also known as Track II or middle-range approaches (Paffenholz, 2013).

Figure 1. Approaches to Peacebuilding



Source: Lederach, J. P. (1997). Building peace. Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, p. 37. Used with permission.

Following Lederach's model, this section has four subparts. The first explores high profile peace negotiations and institutional approaches to peacebuilding in Colombia. It describes and analyses negotiations between the Colombian government with the main guerrilla and paramilitary groups from 1982 to 2014, and the respondent's perceptions noted during my fieldwork in Montes de María. The second part focuses on grassroots peacebuilding in Colombia, its main characteristics and initiatives. The third part concentrates on those actors and initiatives that intend to connect grassroots peacebuilding with high profile peace negotiations. After a national overview of peacebuilding in Colombia, the fourth part reports on the developments of peacebuilding in Montes de María. This final section illustrates how the national influences the activities at the local level.

Peace negotiations and institutional approaches.

Peace dialogues between the government, the guerrilla and paramilitary combatants are the most salient peacebuilding strategy, although they proved insufficient to address the main causes of the Colombian conflict. Parallel to a history of violence, there is a history of amnesties, dialogues, peace agreements and numerous public policies as key peacebuilding processes to end the violence.

There is not a single model for peace negotiations in Colombia. Moreover, there has not been a comprehensive negotiation that includes all the actors and that responds to the root causes of conflict. Instead, there have been several fragmented negotiations with each of the armed groups.

From 1982 to 2012 seven governments²⁶ tried different peace negotiation approaches. Some were successful but overall, the main guerrilla groups remained active. Scholars organize these approaches into four main strategies (Villarraga Sarmiento, 2013):

The first strategy was a combination of ceasefires and amnesties as a precondition for peace dialogues. President Belisario Betancur privileged this approach during his mandate between 1982 and 1986. Armed groups such as M-19, FARC, EPL and ELN joined negotiations that demobilized 1,423 combatants.

Numerous causes explain the failure of these dialogues. On the one hand, in the case of FARC this group was more interested in expansion than in negotiations. It increased military attacks as well as the kidnappings and homicides of civilians to finance its

²⁶ From 1982 to 2016 Colombian presidents and their parties included: Belisario Betancourt Cuartas, Conservative party (1982-1986); Virgilio Barco Vargas, Liberal party (1986-1990); Cesar Gaviria Trujillo, Liberal party (1990-1994); Ernesto Samper Pizano, Liberal party (1994-1998); Andrés Pastrana Arango, Conservative party (1998-2002); Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Colombia First party (2002- 2010); Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, National Unity party (2010-2018).

expansion plan. In Montes de María, for instance, during this period FARC created the 35th and 37th fronts. Also, paramilitary groups emerged as a counterinsurgency strategy against the guerillas from local and regional actors and drug cartels that strengthened their territorial influence, especially in public arenas (Cruz Rodríguez, 2007; González González, 2014). In addition, political parties, social and economic elites, the military, the Congress and even sectors of the Catholic Church opposed Betancourt's process due to the contradictions between the discourse of peace and the escalation of violence (González González, 2014; Villarraga Sarmiento, 2013).

Nevertheless, this initial attempt at peace negotiations brought positive outcomes. For the first time in recent history, peace was a matter of national debate and the guerrillas were acknowledged as a political actor. In terms of negotiation mechanisms and political participation, the dialogues brought important lessons for future processes (Villarraga Sarmiento, 2013).

During the 1990s the Colombian government modified the approach privileging political participation and the strengthening of state institutions in regions where violence was most intense. A significant element of this period was the demand by social and political actors to establish a National Assembly to change the National Constitution, as well as the design and implementation of public policies to tackle poverty and social exclusion (Villarraga Sarmiento, 2013). As a result, several guerrilla groups joined peace negotiations and the government signed peace agreements with M-19, EPL, the PRT and, the Quintín Lame Armed Movement –MAQL. Despite these efforts, the 1990s was also a

decade of unimaginable levels of violence by guerrilla groups, paramilitaries and drug cartels fearful of extradition to the United States (Villarraga Sarmiento, 2013).²⁷

The encouragement of individual combatants to desert and join reintegration programs without the mediation of a peace agreement or any formal demobilization process was the third strategy. Initially designed for the demobilization of guerrilla combatants, it has been applied consistently since the 1990, and it was expanded to the paramilitaries under the administration of President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010). Moreover, in 2004 the government issued a decree to give judicial and monetary incentives to those defectors that cooperated with the justice system.²⁸

CSOs opposed this decree since it threatened the reintegration processes and promoted human rights abuses. Moreover, the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court ruled that paramilitary actions were not political crimes so that they could not benefit from reintegration programs (Villarraga Sarmiento, 2013).

The fourth strategy took place during Alvaro Uribe's (2002-2010) government that rejected previous peace negotiations and denied the existence of a political armed conflict. Uribe contended that guerrillas and paramilitaries were narco-terrorists and criminals, not political actors, threatening the legitimacy of the Colombian state. Peace negotiations were off the table and the government's policy was a combination of political, judicial and military power to defeat armed groups. Under this logic, the role of civil society was to be collaborators and informants of state authorities (González González, 2014). The goal was

²⁷ During this period, an alliance between drug cartels and paramilitaries killed a minister of justice, three presidential candidates, as well as numerous judges, political and social leaders, journalists and human rights advocates.

²⁸ Decree 2767, 2004

to force “illegal armed groups” to unilaterally decommission their arms as a requirement to discuss demobilization and disarmament. In exchange, they would benefit from the reintegration programs (González González, 2014; Villarraga Sarmiento, 2013). President Uribe’s strategy forced the guerrillas to retreat to their historical strongholds in rural peripheral areas and compelled the paramilitaries to negotiate.

The process had mix results. A total of 30,000 paramilitaries demobilized, including leaders and combatants. However, the process illustrated a strong division within paramilitary ranks between those who advocated for political status and those close to drug trafficking that defended their interests in the illegal trade (González González, 2014; Villarraga Sarmiento, 2013). In 2006, both the government and the paramilitaries called foul play and the process ended. Nevertheless, 268 paramilitary members were sent to prison, some were released or are about to be released after concluding an eight-year sentence;²⁹ twelve were extradited to the US and some collaborated with the Colombian authorities (Semana.com, 2014). Some Colombian scholars, such as González and Ávila have agreed that the negotiation process with paramilitaries during Uribe’s administration were largely unsuccessful because their activities did not end (González González, 2014; A. Ávila, 2019). In many regions they reinvented themselves as criminal bands linked to the drug trade and land dispossession (GMH, 2013).

This process was significant because it attempted to dismantle Colombia’s paramilitarism structure, creating the setting for a discussion of its origins, manifestation

²⁹ It is important to highlight that not all the paramilitaries currently in detention were processed and sentenced. The Colombian judiciary was unable to respond promptly to the amount of cases received. As a result, most of the paramilitaries were detained without a trial and they will be released because they fulfilled the eight-year jail time established by the Justice and Peace Law.

and impact in political, social and economic settings; many scholars contend that these issues have not been explored enough (Romero Vidal, 2011; A. Ávila, 2019). In addition, Uribe's strategy weakened the guerrillas, creating an opportunity that President Santos capitalized on to open the door for peace dialogues with FARC in September 2012³⁰ that culminated in the November 2016 Peace Accord.

Local initiatives.

In addition to high-level peacebuilding efforts, Colombian civil society has responded with massive mobilization and the development of a variety of peacebuilding initiatives, many are national in reach and others are locally based.

During the 1990s the number of community-based initiatives increased to respond to the violence individuals and communities faced on a daily basis, and to the gaps left by top-down approaches. Rettberg (2006) noted that there has been an evolution within these initiatives. Initially, they promoted national peace negotiations but later on, they expanded to demand solutions for conflicts within their own localities such as human rights violations, displacement, landmines, abductions, child recruitment, massacres, and governmental corruption, etc. As a result, women, Afro-Colombians, natives, *campesinos*, victims, youth, and church based groups gained prominence because of their effectiveness at the local and regional levels (Bouvier, 2006; Hernández Delgado, 2002, 2004, 2012). In many situations, these initiatives were able to empower local communities to negotiate directly with armed actors to secure safe passage, release hostages and remove landmines, among others. Colombian scholar Esperanza Hernández Delgado has extensive work on

³⁰ According to President Santos (2019), initial dialogue between the government and FARC took place between September 2010 and January 2012.

the analysis of community-based experiences from Aboriginal, Afrocolombian and campesinos that mediate conflicts between communities and armed actors. The experience of the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca), an association of indigenous communities in the Cauca region (south west of Colombia) created to defend their land, political participation, and protection of their cultural traditions is a noteworthy example (Hernández Delgado, 2004, 2012). These initiatives managed to encourage participation, conflict analysis, accountability and coexistence by focusing on context specific problems, and applying their own approaches to conflict resolution (Bouvier, 2006). In contrast to the top-down approaches, the role of women in local and grassroots initiatives is stronger and vibrant.

Colombia's grassroots peacebuilding efforts responds more or less and to a different extent, to the following characteristics: They emerge and evolve within a concrete community and respond to a specific political and social context; culture and traditions are important elements in their activities; although they interact with armed groups, they are independent from them; building relationships is central to their strategy along with creativity and risk taking; and, their main interest is to end violence both in its direct and structural manifestations through nonviolent methods. Some of the activities they developed include: Direct negotiations and mediation with armed groups, education and training, storytelling, community organization, nonviolent demonstrations and vigils, development projects, trauma healing, and conflict resolution.

These experiences illustrate that the peacebuilding agenda in Colombia is much more complex than the original model of state-centered negotiations between high profile actors. Nevertheless and despite its significance, the government as well as scholars and

politicians minimize the importance of these initiatives (Hernández Delgado, 2012). This is not a phenomenon exclusive to Colombia. Local based peacebuilding approaches, in general, is seen as inferior, irrational and backwards when compared with international and state led initiatives (Mac Ginty, 2010). Although there is increased interest in exploring local peacebuilding initiatives in the country, it is still an area that demands further research.

Middle range peacebuilding.

Actors located at the middle level have connections both at the top and at the grassroots levels. Catholic and Protestant churches and universities are some examples of middle range actors that facilitate the conversation between both levels.

In a country where Catholicism is prevalent, the church has played an important role in peacebuilding activities.³¹ It has facilitated secret dialogues between the government and the guerrillas, helped in the release of hostages, and provided safety to individuals committed to human rights and peace (Appleby & Lederach, 2010; Bouvier, 2009). At the grassroots level, the work of the Catholic church is vast and impressive. It has provided humanitarian assistance to victims of violence; facilitated disarmament campaigns shielded under the seal of confession and, they have promoted popular education, human rights advocacy and outreach. They also lead the Center for Research and Popular Education/Peace Program -CINEP-PP-, that is the largest research institute on human rights and peace in the country.

³¹ It is important to highlight that the Colombian Catholic church has not always been supportive of peace and human rights. Especially during *La Violencia* the church supported the state's use of violence to tackle the communist influence in the country. For a good summary of the role of the Catholic church in violence and peace in Colombia see: "Iglesia Católica y conflicto en Colombia: de la lucha contra la modernidad a los diálogos de paz" by González (2005).

Catholic bishops are the best example to illustrate the church's role in connecting high-level authorities and grassroots leaders. The Bishop's Conference has close connections with the national government and state institutions. At the same time and within their own ecclesiastical jurisdiction bishops have close connections with communities through the clergy's work and with its lay people. In this context, bishops are able to inform political leaders at the national level of the reality of what is going on at the grassroots level; and, at the same time they can assist in implementing national policies on human rights and peacebuilding at the grassroots level.

Over the numerous times when peace negotiations failed at the national level, the church continued to be in contact with the guerrillas and paramilitaries under the guise of "pastoral dialogues." According to the Bishop's Conference, Catholic priests and nuns have the obligation to dialogue with anybody who needs pastoral and spiritual support. Pastoral dialogues have been used for building communication bridges and in facilitating possible encounters between opposite sides in the conflict, despite the failure of formal peace dialogues (Bouvier, 2009).³²

Another salient example of the Catholic Church's connection role is its leadership in the development of Peace and Development Programs (PDP) in various regions in the country. PDP is a setting for different actors in a region (national and local authorities, public institutions, the private sector, international organizations, NGOs, social organizations and, churches) to work together for peace by coordinating financial and human resources. Bishops are the main leaders in the PDP with the support of lay people

³² People opposed to pastoral dialogues argued that any type of dialogue related with war and peace need the approval of the President. Despite the criticisms, priests continue creating channels of communication between different actors in the conflict.

and social organizations. In the following section, this document describes and analyses Montes de María's PDP, one of the oldest and controversial PDPs in the country.

The Catholic Church's experience as a peacemaker has not been easy. Many of its members have been criticized, threatened, persecuted and even killed for working for human rights and peace, nevertheless, they persist in their efforts and are considered one of the most legitimate peacebuilding actors both by armed actors and civil society (González G, 2005; Hernández Delgado, 2012).

Protestant churches are also significant middle level actors. It is important to highlight the work of the Mennonite Church and its 26 years work in Colombia promoting human rights, nonviolence, alternative dispute resolution, conflict transformation and restorative justice.³³ In fact, it was the first church to initiate debates about conflict transformation and restorative justice in Colombia. Although its work has mainly been at the grassroots level, it was one of the main actors in the creation of Montes de María's PDP. In recent years, and as a result of its strong work, it is supporting national authorities, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace; national NGOs such as the Redprodepaz, and the civil society's Permanent Assembly for Peace; international organizations like UNDP, the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ) and, national and international universities, among others. These multiple connections allow them to be an important mediator between opposite actors in the armed conflict (Hernández Delgado, 2012). Despite the fact that it is a small church, its experience

³³ The Mennonite Church officially arrived in Colombia in 1945. Initially it focused on missionary and pastoral work through local churches and education. Later, in 1975 it created the *Mennonite Foundation for Development* (MENCOLDES) and in 1989, it funded the *Christian Centre for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action –Justapaz–*, an organization that focuses on peace education, nonviolence, conscientious objection, conflict transformation, human rights, and alternative dispute resolution (Hernández Delgado, 2012).

and legitimacy are acknowledged both at the grassroots and top levels. However, its work has not been easy and it has been subject to threats and attacks. In addition, historical antagonisms between Catholic and evangelical churches still persist (Guzmán Campos et al., 2010). Although there are important ecumenical efforts, especially over the last decades, the relationship between the Catholic and Mennonite Churches can be defined as rocky, at best.

Each level of the peace approaches is important in this study. Although its focus is on the peacebuilding work of Sembrandopaz in Alta Montaña and Libertad, it is not limited solely to local initiatives. As it will be illustrated in the following chapters, actors from each of the levels have had a presence in the region and it is important to understand their roles, agendas and the outcomes of their efforts to nurture peace in Montes de María.

Havana Peace Process.

This thesis is about transformation. During the period of its design, fieldwork, data analysis and writing, Colombia went from peace dialogues resulting in an accord with one of the main guerrilla groups in the country to a plebiscite that almost invalidated the accord. The political whirlwind moved from the official signature of a reformed peace accord to the election of a government opposed to the agreement. This in turn led to the agreement's tortuous implementation. FARC dissidents emerged and returned to war alleging the government's breach of the peace agreement, while 90 percent of the former combatants affirmed their commitment to the peace process. Violence increased in the country as a backlash against the peace process and as a result of the uncovering of structural conflicts such as inequality, poverty and corruption that were hidden behind the internal armed conflict.

Given the impact of the Havana accord on current life in Montes de Maria this section explores the innovative aspects of the dialogues, such as including victims in the process, the gender commission, transitional justice provisions (peace jurisdiction, truth and reconciliation commission), and the concept of territorial peace. Despite the achievement of the agreement, the section also addresses the disappointment of the referendum where Colombians voted to reject the peace accord, and the discredit campaign behind it, illustrating the role of misinformation within an already deeply polarized society.

A methodical process.

Peace dialogues between the Colombian government and FARC that concluded with a peace accord on November 2016, reflected the lessons learned from past national and international experiences (Pearce, 2019; Santos, 2019). The process officially began on August 26, 2012 after six months of secret meetings. However, even after his inauguration speech of August 07, 2010 President Santos expressed a firm but direct invitation to FARC to take part in the negotiation (Santos, 2019).

In its structure and dynamics, the negotiation was methodical and organized; the accord was innovative and, according to the Kroc Institute, one of the most comprehensive agreements registered with the UN (Fisas, 2016; Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2017; Pearce, 2019; C. Ávila, 2016). The negotiations focused on five main substantive issues and one procedural, namely (1) rural development, (2) political participation, (3) illicit crops, (4) victims, and (5) conflict termination and the implementation procedures.³⁴ Victims were at the core of the process and the peace

³⁴ For the content of the peace agreement see: Final agreement to end the armed conflict and build a stable and lasting peace. In <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/herramientas/Documents/preliminary-final-agreement-to-end-the-armed-conflict-and-build-a-stable-and-lasting-peace-colombia.pdf>

agreement. This was evident in the participation of over 30,000 victims in regional forums organized by the Catholic Church, the UNDP and the National University of Colombia, to gather critical information that were submitted to the peace negotiations. In addition, between August and December 2014, five groups of 12 victims went to Havana to meet the negotiators and present their experiences during the conflict (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, 2016).³⁵ It was the first time in the history of Colombia's peace negotiations where victims had a voice at the negotiation table (Martínez Escallón, 2019). There is an acknowledgement that the participation of victims at the peace table humanized the process and was significant for the negotiators who were able to understand that beyond the political dimension of the negotiation, they were going to impact the lives of concrete human beings (de la Calle, 2019; Martínez, 2019; Pearce, 2019).

The support of the international community was also fundamental all the way from the secret meetings to the implementation of the agreement. Especially important was the support of Cuba, where the dialogues took place, as well as Venezuela, Chile and Norway who acted as observers, guarantors and supporters. In the international arena, the role of former negotiators in different peace processes was also important. Former negotiators from Northern Ireland, South Africa, the Philippines and El Salvador as well as the judicious study of different peace processes contributed to the success of the peace process (de la Calle, 2019; Santos, 2019). Transitional justice measures were another significant highlight of the peace accord that established a Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-repetition based on restorative justice principles. The creation of the

³⁵ In this group FARC victims, paramilitaries and the Colombian state participated, where 60 percent were women, 8 percent were Indigenous, 13 percent were Afro-Colombian, and 8 percent were from victim's organizations (Pearce, 2019, p. 118).

Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Truth Commission are also concrete examples of transitional justice institutions.

The idea of territorial peace was another innovation coined by the former High Commissioner for Peace, Mr. Sergio Jaramillo. Although he does not provide a concrete definition, there is an acknowledgement that the conflict emerged and evolved within a specific context, so that peacebuilding needed to be adapted to territorial realities (Jaramillo, 2015). The Commissioner's vision was to foster a new alliance between the state and the communities for building new institutions in its broader sense, both as state based as well as norms and practices to regulate public life. The spirit of territorial peace was present during the process in the numerous public participation settings where Colombians could send their proposals to the negotiation table, especially using the referendum to legitimate the accord. Unfortunately, the country rejected the agreement with 50.2 percent voting against it, and 49.78 percent in support of the agreement (Redacción Paz, 2016). Eventually the Colombian Congress approved a final version of the agreement on November 24, 2016.

It is important to highlight that until the government's recent peace process with FARC, women played a secondary role to say the least in peace negotiations. They never had a leadership role as decision makers. But this time around both the government and FARC assigned women to their negotiation teams. President Santos appointed two female negotiators and FARC appointed one (Pearce, 2019; UNWomen, 2013; Velandia, 2013). In addition, in September 2014 the parties installed a sub-commission on gender to assist negotiators in addressing the women victims of armed conflict. Members from the guerrillas, the government, and civil society organizations integrated the sub-commission.

Its goal was to identify the issues women faced during the conflict and presented them with proposals at the negotiation table (El País, 2014). In an acknowledgement that the conflict affected women, LGBTQ communities, Aboriginal and Afro-Colombian groups differently, the agreement adopted an inclusive approach in its various processes to respond to their needs. However, the agreements opponents promoted a disinformation campaign stating that underneath the accord was a veiled intention to impose a “gender ideology” as well as a homosexual agenda to corrupt traditional understandings of the family and the traditional roles of men and women in society (Santos, 2019). Moreover, they argued that because the agreement does not mention God and freedom of religion and conscience, it was a direct discrimination of Colombian believers and the “minimization of moral and religious beliefs” (Semana.com, 2016). This campaign proved to be effective (Santos, 2019). Many pastors and priests instructed their parishioners to reject the agreement in the referendum that took place on October 2, 2016.

Conclusion

The contemporary history of Colombia’s internal armed conflict dates back to 1948 and it is still active today. It is a multi-causal and multi-actor conflict that has evolved and adapted to social, political, economic and cultural conditions. Some of the main causes of this 60-year conflict include access to land and its natural resources, political participation, access to justice, economic inequalities, and human rights violations. The Colombian government, guerrillas and paramilitaries have been the main actors in the conflict, although external actors like the international community have also played an important role in escalating the conflict or/and in facilitating peace efforts.

Parallel to Colombia's history of violence, the country also has a rich experience in peace negotiations and peacebuilding initiatives in different levels of society, from formal peace dialogues between political and military leaders, to grassroots and middle range initiatives, each having different levels of success.

In this peace process, the role of civil society has varied. Some elements have supported violent approaches to conflict such as throwing in their lot with paramilitary forces, while others have resisted violence through social political organizations, and by implementing peacebuilding initiatives. This illustrates a civil society that is diverse in its positions but also rich in its responses to the internal armed conflict.

This chapter also focused on the peace dialogues between the Colombian government and FARC guerrilla, its subsequent agreement and rocky implementation. Signaled by many scholars as one of the most complete and innovative agreements in the world, within Colombia is still controversial and contested. Despite the long for peace in the country the agreement emerged in a deeply polarized and wounded country. A durable peace will require strong political will, financial and human investment and, especially international accompaniment and support.

The next chapter examines the context in Montes de María, its location and the description of the emergence, evolution and impact of the internal armed conflict in its territory, especially the actions of paramilitary groups who perpetrated the bloodiest massacres in Colombia. This chapter shows that behind the violence there is a strong interest in controlling a region rich in natural resources and strategically located.

Chapter 3. Montes de María Regional Overview

Introduction

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Montes de María region as context to understand the conflicts there. It begins with the geographical description of the region, highlighting its strategic location and natural resources. These factors are at the core of the internal armed conflict in Montes de María and have influenced its evolution and manifestations from 1948 until 2016 with the signing of the Peace Agreement with FARC. This chapter focuses on the communities of Alta Montaña and Libertad, the locations for the field research. To highlight the evolution and distinctive manifestation of violence in the region the information is organized in four topics: emergence and demobilization of the guerrillas; escalation and degradation of the armed conflict; defense and democratic security policies and; post-negotiation. As seen in the narrative of the previous chapter on national dynamics, violence and peacebuilding in Montes de María are interrelated and are manifested in particular contexts and needs.

Montes de María: Location and General Characteristics

Montes de María is located along the Caribbean Coast in the northern part of Colombia between the departments³⁶ of Bolívar and Sucre (see Figure 2. Map of Montes de María). Comprised of 15 municipalities,³⁷ Montes de María was considered the

³⁶ Departments are the equivalent of provinces in Canada or states in the US. They are a political and administrative division of the territory,

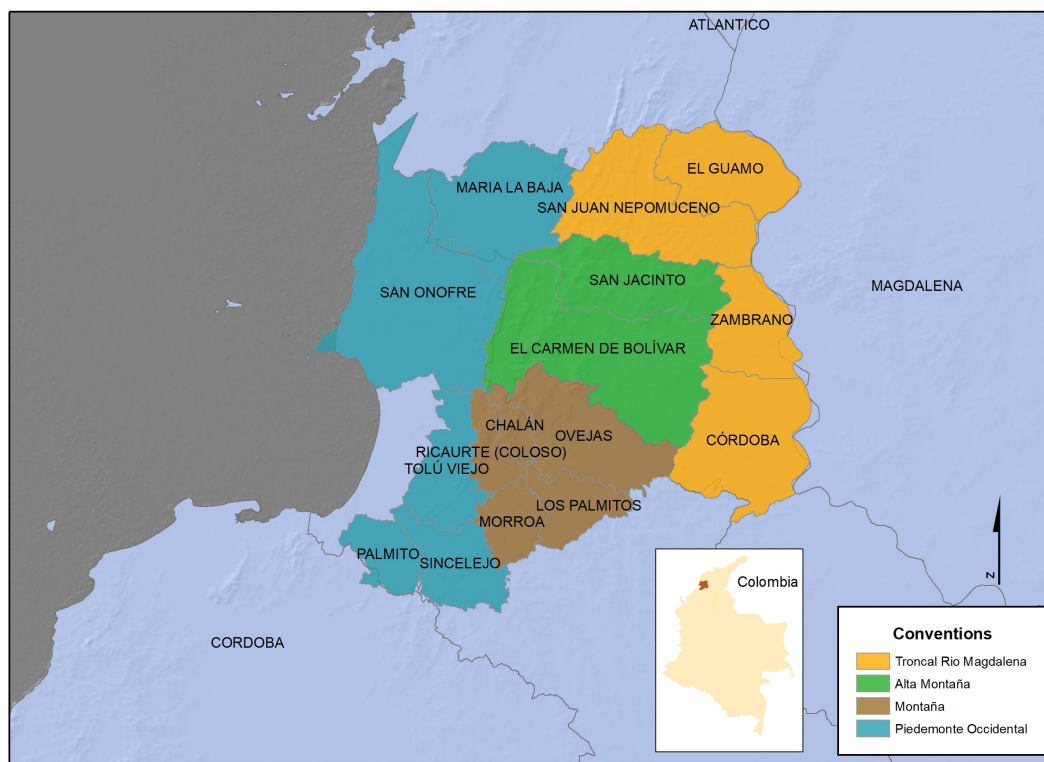
³⁷ The following are the municipalities that form Montes de María: María La Baja, San Juan Nepomuceno, El Guamo, San Jacinto, Carmen de Bolívar, Zambrano, Córdoba (from the department of Bolívar); San Onofre, Los Palmitos, Morroa, Chalán, Colosó, Ovejas, San Antonio de Palmito and, Toluviéjo (from the department of Sucre).

breadbasket of the region because of its fertile soils, abundant rivers, and proximity to the sea (PNUD, 2010). The varied topography of mountains, coast, and plains allows Montes de María to have a diversified economy based on agriculture, extensive livestock farming, fishing and ecotourism. Agriculture is its main economic activity, mostly on a small scale, although large-scale farming such as African palm and teak plantations has increased in recent years. Due to its strategic location and agricultural vocation, scholars highlight that the core of the armed conflict in Montes de María is based on land tenure and use (Porrás Mendoza, 2014).^{38 39}

³⁸ Land-based conflicts are not exclusive to Montes de María, and because it translates into economic wealth and political power, it is a prevalent phenomenon in the whole country.

³⁹ For more information about rural conflicts in Colombia, see the work of Absalón Machado, Alejandro Reyes Posada, Edelmira Pérez and César Ortiz, among others.

Figure 2. Map of Montes de María and its municipalities



Source: DANE, Marco Geoestadístico Nacional 2012. Nivel de referencia de veredas 2015.(2020)

Despite its richness, the region is below the national index for human development, with the rural areas the most disadvantaged (PNUD, 2010). Due to the lack of public services, poverty, and violence, only 26 percent of the population lives in rural areas and 66 percent of rural households have high levels of unsatisfied basic needs (Ramírez-Rojas, 2012).

With a population of 438,119, Montes de María is a multi-ethnic and multicultural region that includes Afro-Colombians, Aboriginal peoples,⁴⁰ and *mestizos* who are mainly

⁴⁰ The Zenú group is predominant in the region, especially in the municipalities of San Antonio de Palmito, Tolúviejo, San Onofre, Colosó y Morroa (Porras Mendoza, 2014).

rural workers or *campesinos*--small landowners or landless people (Porras Mendoza, 2014).⁴¹

Montes de María is also a strategic corridor that connects the Caribbean coast with the interior of the country. In this context, it was one of the regions most impacted by the Colombia's internal armed conflict, as various groups disputed the area to secure the safe passage of troops, weapons, illegal drugs, and to control natural resources such as mining and agriculture (Sánchez Gómez, Suárez, Rincón, & Machado Cartagena, 2009).

Social conflict and violence in Montes de María

This section explores the evolution and manifestations of the armed conflict in Montes de María since *La Violencia* (1948-1953) until 2014, with special emphasis on Alta Montaña and Libertad, the primary areas studied in this thesis.

The Caribbean coast suffered the impacts of *La Violencia* (1948 -1953) with less intensity compared to what occurred in the main cities. During this period, massacres, homicides, and displacements resulted from the political and ideological tensions between the Liberal and Conservative parties in the area that today is known as Montes de María (González G et al., 2014). Nevertheless, between 1953 and the 1980s violence in the region decreased, although social and economic conflicts related with land distribution and political participation persisted, prompting a strong history of social and political organization (Porras Mendoza, 2014).

⁴¹ Aboriginal communities in the region belong to the Zenu family. Regarding Colombians of African descent, the government divided them into the following categories: Blacks, Afro-Colombians and, Afro-descendants. Informal conversations with Dr. María Clemencia Ramírez, former Director of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History, indicate that the categorization of ethnic groups in Colombia is a controversial work in progress. There are a lot of debates amongst Aboriginal communities, Afro-Colombians, anthropologists, and sociologist to define what constitutes an ethnic group in a diverse country like Colombia.

In the 1930s and 1940s social organizations called *campesino* leagues were formed with the support of the unions. In 1967, the *campesino* movement strengthened with the creation of the ANUC which aimed to reinforce social organization and support agrarian reform (Pérez, 2010). During the 1980s and 1990s, the department of Sucre had one of the most vibrant and active chapters of ANUC, mobilizing *campesinos* to demand land distribution, technical assistance, and public policies towards rural development (Fals-Borda, 2002; PNUD, 2010; Porras Mendoza, 2014). However, the movement subsequently was severely weakened due to the lack of political support, the increase of violence in the region, and the introduction of political and economic policies that privileged agricultural industries, especially African palm and teak (Daniels Puello & Múnera Cavadía, 2011; PNUD, 2010; Pérez, 2010).

During the 1980s and 1990s the country went through a process of political and administrative decentralization and implementation of neoliberal policies that dismantled the institutions that protected the *campesino* economy. Without the proper institutional support, *campesinos* found themselves within a model based on competitiveness and economic efficiency for which they were not prepared (Daniels Puello & Múnera Cavadía, 2011; PNUD, 2010; Pérez, 2010). In this context, the guerrillas and the paramilitaries expanded their presence in the region in the 1980s, and in the 1990s violence escalated to previously unconceivable levels.

According to Porras Mendoza (2014), the contemporary manifestations of the armed conflict in Montes de María can be divided into three stages: (1) Emergence and demobilization of the guerrillas; (2) Escalation and degradation of the armed conflict, and (3) Defense and democratic security policies. This thesis adds a fourth stage, namely the

Havana Peace dialogues and the post-negotiation stage. These stages are explained in detail to better understand the dynamics of the armed conflict in Montes de María, with special emphasis on the villages of Alta Montaña in the municipality of El Carmen de Bolívar, and Libertad in the municipality of San Onofre.

Emergence of the guerrillas in Montes de María.

Guerrilla groups are not innate to Montes de María. They arrived in the 1980s from the south of the country as a result of their strategic expansion (Porrás Mendoza, 2014). During these years, the guerrillas focused mostly on political outreach and education. This approach was a strategy promoted by the Partido Comunista Colombiano- Marxista Leninista- (PC de C- ML) *Communist Party of Colombia – Marxist Leninist*, interested in expanding its political influence in the region through social work and political education (Pardo García et al., 2018). In this context, the first group to emerge in Montes de María was the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria or MIR (*Revolutionary Leftist Movement*). After various mergers with other guerrilla organizations, it demobilized in 1994 in the municipality of Ovejas under the name of Corriente de Renovación Socialista or CRS (*Socialist Renovation Movement*).

Concretely in the two areas included in this research, Alta Montaña and Libertad, two guerrilla groups were present there from 1985 until 1997: The Ejército Popular de Liberación or EPL (*Popular Liberation Army*) and FARC-EP, Fronts 35 and 37. The EPL arrived in the Alta Montaña area around 1967 (González G. et al., 2014, p. 155 as cited by Pardo Garacía, 2018), mainly as a guerrilla organization that emphasized political work and outreach rather than military struggle. Its objective was to get closer to the *campesinos* and their land movements through cultural and political activities, and by working the land

with them. By working hand in hand with the *campesinos*, it sought to blend with the community and adapt to its way of life (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 156).

As a result of this approach, people in Alta Montaña remember the EPL for its community work and sense of solidarity, and not for its military action. Moreover, its encounters with the armed forces were minimal (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 156).

By 1991 the EPL demobilized as a result of peace dialogues with the government. However, a dissident group, the Francisco Garnica Front, remained in Montes de María with a more military approach in its relations with the population (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 158). Further, to fill the void left by EPL in Alta Montaña, FARC-EP⁴² and various paramilitary groups also consolidated themselves in the region (José Francisco Restrepo, 2016).

Escalation and degradation of the armed conflict.

The end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium saw the escalation of the armed conflict throughout Colombia and particularly in Montes de María. The ELN, FARC and the paramilitaries, as well as the government increased their efforts and presence in the region. Thus, ELN and FARC occupied this empty space as part of their own strategic expansion and to capitalize on the legacy of social and political organization in the regions. FARC mobilized combatants from the south of the country, establishing fronts 35th and 37th that operated in the departments of Sucre and Bolívar mainly in the

⁴² Different guerrilla groups arrived in the region during the 1990s, as a result of the demobilization of EPL: FARC-EP, Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo –ERP- (*People's Revolutionary Army*), and Ejército de Liberación Popular –ELN. However, it was FARC presence that had more impact in the region due to the intensity of its actions (Cinep, 158-159).

Alta Montaña subregion until the year 2000 (Pardo García et al., 2018; José Francisco Restrepo & Jiménez Ahumada, 2016; Sánchez Gómez et al., 2009).⁴³

FARC arrived in Alta Montaña and Libertad displaying its military power, instead of implementing careful social and political work to win hearts and minds. Local communities were used to EPL's consensual and cooperative approaches through political and educational activities. FARC on the other hand, arrived as an imposing military force. Clashes between FARC and the army increased, as well as its imposition of "taxes" on farmers, cattle ranchers, merchants and public servants. Those who refused to comply with FARC's demands were subject to threats, fines, forced custody and seizure of agricultural products (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 161). These measures affected both the rich and the poor, and sowed the seeds for paramilitary groups to grow in the area.

Paramilitary dominance: Massacres and confinement.

Paramilitary groups, already strong in the west of the Caribbean coast, moved east to Montes de María following FARC's arrival. They established the front Heroes of Montes de María under the command of Marco Tulio Pérez Guzmán, a.k.a "El Oso" and Rodrigo Mercado Pelufo, a.k.a "Cadena." The former controlled San Onofre and lived in Libertad where he imposed strict punishments and controls, especially on women. He refused to confess to his abuse of women and girls to the Justice and Peace Tribunal. Consequently, "El Oso" lost the privileges established by the Justice and Peace Law and, in November 2018 he was convicted and sent to prison for 24 years (Regionales, 2018). On the other

⁴³ Front 37 also called Benkos Biojó was setup to honor a cimarron leader during colonial times, and had four main armed structures:

hand, “Cadena” is originally from the vereda⁴⁴ of Macayepo in the Alta Montaña. He is considered even by his own soldiers to be one of the most vicious paramilitaries orchestrating massacres under his command in El Salado, Macayepo, Chengue, Ovejas and Mampuján, all situated in Montes de María. He disappeared in 2005 during the dialogues with the government and his whereabouts are unknown. Nevertheless, he was convicted to 40 years imprisonment for the massacre of Macayepos and to 37 years for the killing of social leader Mrs. Yolanda Paternina (Verdad Abierta, 2010).

The paramilitary strategy included military actions against civilians, creating and strengthening alliances with local elites and authorities, and consolidating its national AUC network. The paramilitaries targeted not only combatants, but also anyone who advocated for social change. The paramilitaries sought to weaken social movements, and to control territory, natural resources, population, and strategic routes for the drugs and arms trade (CNRR, 2011a; Salinas Abdala & Sarama Santacruz, 2014). In Montes de María, the paramilitaries preferred using massacres as a strategy to sow fear among the local people. From 1980 to 2012 there were 1,982 massacres⁴⁵ in the country with sixty-three of these taking place in Montes de María (GMH, 2013, p. 47). Table 1 below details the massacres in the region from 1994 to 2013, showing that the paramilitaries were responsible for most.

⁴⁴ From an administrative point of view, rural municipalities in Colombia are divided into “veredas” and “corregimientos.” A vereda is the most basic administrative organization. It is a settled area within a rural context, often comprising scattered houses and fields, or alternatively a rural road with houses distributed alongside it that defines such a settled area. A group of veredas comprise a corregimiento. A corregimiento is a secondary administrative area outside the central town from which a municipality is governed. A group of corregimientos comprise a municipality (Thank you to translator Andy Klatt for his help with the translation of these concepts).

⁴⁵ Gutierrez-Sanín and Wood (2017) highlight that there is no formal definition of “massacre.” However, they propose the following : “Massacres are the simultaneous killing of individuals who number or exceed a specified threshold” (p. 30). The Center of Historic Memory of Colombia used a threshold of four or more people killed; and the Truth Commission of Peru used a threshold of five or more victims (p. 38).

Table 1. Record of massacres in Montes de María 1994-2001

Massacre	Municipality and departamento	Date	Perpetrator	Number of victims
Tasajera	El Guamo – Bolívar	October 01/1996	Non-identified paramilitary group	4 dead
Pichilín	Morroa – Sucre	December 04/1996	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	11 dead and the total displacement of the village
Libertad	San Onofre - Sucre	March 17/ 1997	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	5 dead
El Salado	Carmen de Bolívar – Bolívar	March 23/ 1997	Paramilitaries: Bloque Norte (<i>North Block</i>)	4 dead The village (7000 people) displaced
Colosó	Colosó -Sucre	December 3/1998	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	7 dead 7 families displaced
Capaca	Zambrano – Bolívar	August 16/1999	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	11 dead 3 people disappeared
Las Palmas	San Jacinto – Bolívar	September 28/ 1999	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	4 dead 500 families displaced
El Salado	Carmen de Bolívar Bolívar	February 16- 20 /2000	Paramilitaries: Bloque Norte (<i>North Block</i>)	60 dead 4000 people displaced. 5 villages disappeared
Mampuján y Las Brisas	María La Baja Bolívar	March 10/ 2000	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	11 dead and 300 people displaced
Hato Nuevo	Carmen de Bolívar Bolívar	April 13/ 2000	Paramilitaries: Paramilitaries Montes de María Block	13 dead
Palo Alto	San Onofre - Sucre	April 20/ 2000	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	4 dead 30 families displaced
La Libertad	San Onofre - Sucre	June 01/2000	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	5 dead

El Parejo or Chinultio	Colosó - Sucre	September 13/2000	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	11 dead
Macayepos	Carmen de Bolívar Bolívar	October 14/ 2000	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	17 dead 200 families displaced
Chengue	Ovejas- Sucre	January 17/ 2001	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	27 dead 100 families displaced
Retiro Nuevo	María La Baja Bolívar	April 19/ 2001	Paramilitaries: Montes de María Block	4 dead
Colosó	Colosó - Sucre	October 08/2004	FARC: Martín Caballero Block	5 dead

Source: Based on the information from Verdad Abierta.

Paramilitary groups used massacres as an expansion strategy. The terror that massacres produced allowed them to control the people and the territory. The cruelty of the violence and its “theatrical” visibility sent the message that despite the promise of protection by guerrillas and the government, the communities were alone. It was also a warning to any guerrilla supporter and a punishment to social movements. It was a challenge to the government’s authority and a demonstration of its strength or disagreement with the various peace negotiations.⁴⁶ Finally, it sent a message of the type of violence paramilitaries were capable of using if provoked. The guerrillas also used massacres, mainly to respond to paramilitary power and to challenge their control.

Massacres proved to be an effective strategy. The systematic killing of men, women, and children, the silencing of their leaders, the rape of women and men, the destruction of villages and the displacement of its population was intended to harm the community not only physically, but also at its social and cultural core. As the GMH (2013)

⁴⁶ A number of massacres took place during the presidency of Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) who tried peace negotiations with FARC (GMH, 2013, p. 51)

states, “the unfolding horror was intended to turn inhabitable the physical and social space” (2013, p. 53).⁴⁷

According to the Center for Historic Memory, within Montes de María, the municipality of El Carmen de Bolívar became the epicenter of paramilitarism in the region (Sánchez Gómez et al., 2009, p. 236) as can be seen in Table 2 below that illustrates the massacres in the municipality of El Carmen de Bolívar from 1997 to 2005.

Table 2. Massacres in the municipality of El Carmen, 1997-2005

Massacre	Date	Perpetrators	Number of Deaths	Aftermath
El Salado	March 23, 1997	Paramilitaries. Bloque Norte	4	7,000 people displaced
San Isidro and Caracolí (Alta Montaña)	March 11, 1999	Paramilitaries Heroes Montes de María	8	
El Salado	February 16-21, 2000	Paramilitaries. Bloque Norte	60	4,000 displaced people. Stigmatization as guerrilla supporters
Hato Nuevo	April 13, 2000	Paramilitaries Heroes Montes de María	13	
Macayepo (Alta Montaña)	October 14, 2005	Paramilitaries Heroes Montes de María	15	100 people displaced

Source: Ruta del Conflicto by the National Center of Historic Memory

In Alta Montaña, paramilitary groups emerged in the late 1980s as a response to the advancements of the *campesino* movement. However, their dominance was more

⁴⁷ Translation by the author.

prominent between the 1990s and early 2000 (Avila, 2019; Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 163). Political elites and landlords with veiled support from the authorities and the national navy began a wave of repression through intimidations and selective killings of those who they perceived to be the enemy.

Specifically, in Alta Montaña, the killing of landlord Eduardo Arroyo by the EPL guerrillas in 1989 marked the beginning of the paramilitary presence in the subregion (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 164). The Arroyo family was well known for their passion for arms and their authoritarian and violent relationship with the *campesinos*. Several times they were accused of stealing land and cattle, as well as threatening and displacing *campesinos*. Once FARC arrived in Alta Montaña extorting landlords and farmers, the Arroyo family joined with other elite families to counteract the actions of the guerrillas beginning a new era of radicalization and stigmatization in the region where civil society was in the middle of the confrontation and social leaders became targets as their work was identified as guerrilla motivated.

The war ended in 2008 for communities living in the Alta Montaña. After the demobilization of the paramilitaries in 2005, as a result of peace dialogues with the AUC, the defeat of FARC's front 37th and the 2007 killing of its commander Gustavo Rueda Díaz a.k.a Martin Caballero (González G. et al., 2014). Although the direct violence was over, the region had to deal with its impact, especially the mistrust and polarization within communities (González G. et al., 2014; Pardo García et al., 2018).

While Alta Montaña was the site of paramilitary massacres, Libertad was their base of operation. From 1997 to 2004, commanders "El Oso" and "Cadena" confined the community of Libertad, controlling its daily life, cultural and social practices, political

elections, leisure activities, mobility and the sexuality of its women (CNRR, 2011a; Pardo García et al., 2018). Women and the LGBT community were particularly affected as the Center for Historic Memory states (2011a):

[T]his construction involved a complex, sustained and constant process of control, regulation and discipline of social life, where bodies were molded, spaces were re-signified, the difference was named and enhanced, and they created explicit forms of social relationships and of being a man or a woman. In the case of San Onofre, paramilitary violence did not imply the absence of order but a specific way of ordering (p. 80).

The Center for Historic Memory (2011a) detailed the brutality of “El Oso” against women and LGBT communities that went from public scorn, violent punishments, domestic servitude, sexual harassment, and rape. The goal was to control the territory not only through military means but also by imposing conservative and patriarchal gender roles on men and women (p. 83). For instance, women gathering in street were accused of gossiping; women who partied were also punished for apparently neglecting their household duties and abandoning their husbands and children. Women from Libertad were particularly targeted and punished just because their actions were transgressing the ideal of “a good woman” that paramilitaries wanted to impose (2011a, p. 136). Girls were also subject to sexual harassment and rape. One of the most egregious examples was the beauty pageants with underage girls from Libertad that paramilitaries organized for local

festivities as part of their entertainment, and also as a strategy for sexually assaulting them (2011a; Pardo García et al., 2018).⁴⁸

“El Oso” demobilized in July 2005 as part of the negotiation process between the government and the paramilitary group. One of the requirements for ex-combatants to benefit from the transitional process of the Justice and Peace Tribunals was to confess for all of the crimes they committed. However, “El Oso” insisted his encounters with women were consensual and he refused to acknowledge or confess sexual violence against women and girls. A local nurse named Adriana Porras is a strong leader who empowered nine female survivors of this paramilitary commander to present evidence to the tribunal that eventually removed him from the transitional justice process. On June 20, 2019 “El Oso” was convicted and sentenced to 25 years in jail in a maximum-security prison. Interestingly, Ms. Porras highlighted that the women’s main concern was to “recover their dignity and clear their names before the town” (Montaño, 2015). It is intriguing that these survivors’ preference was to clear their names rather than recognize the physical and psychological harm done to them as a way to exert control and fear in their communities. Libertad is considered to be one of the main examples of how the Colombian internal armed conflict used gender-based violence as a war strategy.

Paramilitary violence and dominance in Libertad lasted until July 14, 2004 when the community confronted the group. During a party, the paramilitary’s local commander called Diomedes detained and threatened a young man called Juan Carlos because he was

⁴⁸ During the field work, paramilitary use of sexual violence emerged in the conversations, but it was a topic that respondents did not feel comfortable discussing at length, and I did not press for additional information. Rather, I relied on secondary resources, especially the Center for Historic Memory that has very complete reports.

“challenging him with his look.” Diomedes tied Juan Carlos up with the intention of killing him, however he managed to escape and hide in his uncle’s home. When Diomedes found Juan Carlos, his uncle publicly confronted him with the support of friends and neighbours. Being at a disadvantage, Diomedes and his comrades tried to run, but the enraged community captured and killed him, while allowing his subordinates to escape because they were from San Onofre (CNRR, 2011b). This outburst of resistance did not end with the death of Diomedes. Fearing reprisal from “Cadena,” the community united to protect their town. Armed with machetes and clubs they patrolled the streets and built roadblocks to control the entrances. Meanwhile, women organized to provide food and coffee for the men, so that they could keep watch over the town (CNRR, 2011b). The town sent a message to the army, which took three days to arrive in Libertad to regain state control.⁴⁹ People from Libertad understood this collective action as a triumph because they regained their autonomy over the territory. During field work in Libertad I met Manuel, a community leader, remembering that day he stated: “The town got tired of illegal armed groups. We have been the only town in Colombia that expelled the paramilitaries” (interview, November 28, 2015).

Defense and democratic security policies.

Under Uribe’s (2002-2010) presidency the government implemented the Defense and Democratic Security Policy as a long-term policy aimed to strengthen security in the country through the coordinated action of the executive, legislative and judicial branches and with the strong reliance of the military. The government decreed the state of emergency

⁴⁹ Even the Center of Historic Memory acknowledges that there is no agreement regarding the duration of the self imposed siege of Libertad. Some accounts stated that it was three days until the army arrived, yet other sources mentioned that it was a week and others that it was one month (CNRR, 2011b, p. 193)

and established *Zones of Rehabilitation and Consolidation*, with Montes de María the first zone to be established.⁵⁰

This policy was particularly hard for the region. In its annual report on Colombia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2004 denounced irregular arrests without proper court orders, or based on dubious informants or intelligence reports (Commission on Human Rights Economic and Social Council, 2004). Instead of protecting civilians, the state contributed to stigmatizing communities in Montes de María that were identified as guerrilla supporters as a result of their activism (Porras Mendoza, 2014, p. 369). They faced intimidation, persecution, false imprisonment and displacement.

Another measure of the Defense and Security Policy was negotiation with armed groups. The government of Uribe negotiated the demobilization of the paramilitary groups organized under the AUC. Specifically, in Montes de María, 594 combatants from the *Heroes of Montes de María* block were demobilized on July 14, 2005 in the corregimiento⁵¹ of San Pablo in the municipality of María La Baja in the heart of Montes de María (González G et al., 2014, p. 371; Porras Mendoza, 2014). However, paramilitarism did not end in the region because it transformed into several criminal organizations. The leader of *Heroes of Montes de María*, Diego Vecino stated during his demobilization: “Here, the AUC demobilizes, but not paramilitarism” (Garzón, 2005, p. 193; González G et al., 2014).⁵²

⁵⁰ See section *The government of Colombia*, in this thesis.

⁵¹ See footnote 42

⁵² Translation by the author.

Around 2005 and after the demobilization of paramilitary groups, private investors arrived to buy land from victims who, fearing violence in their communities, sold their land at very inexpensive prices (González G. et al., 2014). Concentration of land and displacement from the rural areas of Montes de María to the cities of Cartagena and Sincelejo increased, worsening already high levels of social and economic inequality in the cities.

To sum up, the militarization of daily life, the presence of illegal armed groups that controlled the drug and arms trades and the persistence of social and economic conflicts based on land distribution is still the current picture of Montes de María and the background where peacebuilding initiatives are taking place (Porras Mendoza, 2014, p. 373).

Post-negotiation stage.

After the demobilization of paramilitary groups in 2005, FARC's displacement from the territory in 2007, and the signing of the peace accord with FARC in 2016, the region entered a new phase in its conflict dynamics. The implementation of new legislation and institutions was insufficient to address the complexity of a conflict that has evolved and adapted to new manifestations of violence. Montes de María became a laboratory that illustrated the challenges the country later faced in 2016 after the peace agreement was signed with FARC. For instance, new conflicts emerged in the process of land restitution when two different *campesino* owners that were victims of either the guerrillas or the paramilitaries claimed possession of the same land. If there was any paperwork to prove ownership, it was dubious at best, and both demanded restitution under the Victims' Law. These challenges through the various land restitution processes has triggered discontent and protests from national and local *campesino* organizations. Moreover, the economic,

political and social power of the landowners persisted maintaining an unequal distribution of land, which is at the core of the conflict in Montes de María.

Another important challenge was the regrouping of former paramilitary bands and their attacks on *campesino* leaders, land claimants, victims' advocates, and human rights activists (Corcho, 2015). Between 2008 and 2015, 69 land claimants were killed in the country, many by these emergent groups (Caracol radio Medellín, 2015).

The violence in Montes de María has multiple causes and actors. The control of territory and its natural resources are at the core of the conflict, concealed under a veil of ideological struggles. It is a conflict whose effects are still present defining the social and political dynamics in the territory.

After the displacement of FARC from the territory and the demobilization of paramilitary groups in 2005, the region entered a new phase in the conflict. The implementation of new legislation and institutions was insufficient to address the complexity of a conflict that has evolved and adapted to new manifestations of violence. Montes de María became a laboratory that illustrated the challenges the county later faced after 2016 during the implementation of the peace accord. The next chapter will discuss the post-accord reality in Montes de María, and the current peacebuilding challenges.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the emergence and evolution of the internal armed conflict in Montes de María. Because of its strategic location and the richness of its natural resources, the control of the region and the population was essential for the different armed actors. Each of them had different approaches to show dominance in the region, however paramilitaries were especially brutal with the local population. With the defeat of FARC

in the region, the demobilization of paramilitary groups, and the implementation of the peace accord, the dynamics of violence mutated. Structural conflicts such as inequality and poverty that were overshadowed by the armed violence became more salient, and paramilitary violence persisted in some areas. Violence left a region wounded, communities divided and social organizations weakened. Although the peace process between the government of Colombia and FARC gave some hope the implementation process has been slow and rocky.

Chapter 4. Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The previous chapters presented the objectives of the study and its significance, as well as the context of violence and peace in Colombia. This chapter presents the peacebuilding frameworks that guided the research, with primary focus on the theory of conflict transformation as the guiding framework to approach a complex reality of peace and violence in Montes de María. Social justice and gender studies complement conflict transformation in the theoretical framework to better understand the type of change Sembrandopaz is envisioning in the region. Finally, the framework includes the critical discussions on postliberal peace as grounding to keep perspective on the impact of local initiatives.

Peacebuilding: Theory and Practice

Simply put, peacebuilding refers to the strategies, initiatives and activities used to achieve peace (Paffenholz, 2010). The term emerged after the Second World War and was used more widely in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War. Norwegian sociologist, Johan Galtung (1976) presented the first definition of peacebuilding in his essay *Three Realistic approaches to peace: Peacekeeping, peacemaking, peacebuilding*. Galtung defined peacebuilding as the mechanisms and structures to respond to the causes of war and to avoid its re-emergence. In 1992 the term was institutionalized when the United Nations' General Assembly approved the *Agenda for peace* (Ghali, 1992). The *Agenda* described post-accord peacebuilding as one of the four strategies to respond to the new challenges of

violence and conflict emerging after the end of the Cold War.⁵³ It is defined as a long-term process for the rebuilding of nations and communities after a negotiation process is over and to avoid the reemergence of direct violence. It includes activities such as the disarmament demobilization and reintegration of combatants, the repatriation of refugees, and the implementation or restoration of democratic institutions, etc. (Ghali, 1992).

These early definitions have been criticized as some scholars and practitioners highlight that the term *post-conflict* is misleading (Borer, Darby, & McEvoy-Levy, 2006; Galtung, 1976; Lederach, 1997). Experience shows that people living in conflict areas do not see an immediate change after a peace agreement is signed. On the contrary, it is common for violence to escalate, usually as a response of groups dissatisfied with the outcomes of the peace process, especially in the short term (Mac Ginty, 2008b). A peace agreement is a contract that marks the beginning of a new dynamic in a conflict where politics prevails over violence (Özerdem & Mac Ginty, 2019). However, although some results may be visible in the short term (demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration, etc), it may take many years to see a real reduction in violence and to achieve economic recovery. Colombia is not exempt from this debate where the term post-conflict is part of our current vocabulary, although it remains contentious. The current government opposes the peace agreement with FARC. It does not refer to a post-conflict or postaccord stage, but to “legalization” or peace with legality as their main policy.

Another criticism is that “peacebuilding” is imprecise since it depends on the definition of “peace” that is also contested.⁵⁴ According to Cortright (2008) the term “peace”

⁵³ The other strategies are: preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacemaking.

⁵⁴ When referring to peace there seems to be an agreement about its inherent goodness. Everybody wants peace, but what does it mean, what does it entail and how do we go about building peace is another issue. In addition,

is highly emotive and depends on cultural and historic contexts.⁵⁵ For instance, peace can be equated as social harmony, and also as obedience or acceptance of the *status quo* (p.6); for many years, peace advocates were treated as cowards, and during the Cold War, peace was described by some as a synonym for communism (Cortright, 2008, p. 6). In Colombia, various political commentators equate peace with rendition and impunity, and its advocates as supporters of the guerrillas (Guarín, 2012).

Other discourses state that peace is much more than the absence of violence and it includes the creation and nurturing of a society that responds to the basic needs of individuals and communities (Cortright, 2008).

Galtung's analysis of violence and peace has been the cornerstone in the theory and practice of peacebuilding. Galtung differentiates between direct violence and indirect or structural violence. Direct violence refers to those actions that affect people's mental and physical integrity (Galtung, 1969). Structural violence, on the other hand, is the harm caused by social, political, cultural and economic policies that results in unequal relations and unjust conditions for people. Poverty, corruption and illiteracy are some examples of hidden institutionalized violence. Structural violence is also called indirect violence because it is difficult to clearly identify the actors that generates and receives the harm (Cortright, 2008; Galtung, 1969; Paffenholz, 2010).

Richmond (2005) states that, "Peace is rarely conceptualized, even by those who allude to it. Not only has it rarely been addressed in detail as a concept, the theorization of peace is normally hidden away in debates about responding to war and conflict" (p. 2).

⁵⁵ For the analysis of the concept of peace and its traditional debates, see Oliver P. Richmond (2005), *The transformation of peace* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Based on the difference between direct, cultural and structural violence, Galtung also defined two types of peace: negative peace or no physical violence and positive peace or social justice. Negative peace refers to the absence of physical direct violence, and more specifically, as the absence of war. Although this concept is relevant, it is rather limited. Peace is much more than the absence of war between states or armed actors. It entails the development and maintenance of a just society protected from the abuse and exploitation of powerful groups and individuals (Howard, 1971, p. 226 as cited by David Cortright). Galtung (1969) later developed the concept of “positive peace” to refer to the creation of structures and institutions to enhance social, political, cultural and economic equality in society that will enhance people’s opportunities for self-realization. Galtung (1969) equates the concept of “positive peace” with social justice.

Davenport, Melander and Reagan (2018) went a step forward and focused on the quality of peace, highlighting that peace has different manifestations and variations in response to the context and its complexities (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 15). They propose to study peace as a continuum, where the negative end refers to open violence and genocide and is the opposite of positive peace, or what the authors refer to as “political mutuality,” meaning “a quality of respect and fundamental good will between relevant actors” (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 2). A peace continuum allows us to understand how peace varies over time and in different societies, providing a richer and complex approach to peace and peacebuilding and the effects of peaceful interventions.

Political science and international relations influenced the early developments of the theory and practice of peacebuilding (Ramsbotham, Miall, & Woodhouse, 2017). In this context, the state and the international community were the main actors and focus of

peacebuilding. Civil society was a marginal actor and intrastate or ethnic conflicts were not a concern. However, as a result of the impact of nonviolent social movements struggling for peace, the emergence and consolidation of peace studies, as well as critical debates on peacebuilding, scholars and practitioners expanded the concept to respond to both inter-state and intra-state conflicts, as well as acknowledging the role of different actors in peacebuilding, particularly the role of civil society. Lederach's (1997) definition of peacebuilding illustrates this trend.

'Peacebuilding' is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities and functions that both precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition.

It is a dynamic social construct. (p.20)

This definition provides a broader peacebuilding vision that includes various actors, stages, initiatives and cultural approaches, emphasizing on-going processes instead of short-term outcomes. In this approach, there is a place for top-down peace negotiations as well as grassroots peacebuilding. Lederach's theory responds both to direct and structural violence. Instead of focusing primarily on negotiated agreements between selected actors, peacebuilders must implement various strategies and alliances that include multiple protagonists within different stages of the conflict cycle and different temporal frameworks, as well as different cultural perspectives in the implementation of peacebuilding.

Considering the richness of peacebuilding in Montes de María, the various actors involved, its manifestations, and broad scope of activities, this thesis utilizes Lederach's definition, as well as the theory of conflict transformation, as it will be explored below. Some of the questions this research explored were: How and in what way is Sembrandopaz's work transformative? What is the impact of Sembrandopaz's work in addressing structural violence and building the foundation for positive peace in Montes de María?

This thesis explores the understandings of peacebuilding behind the work of Sembrandopaz and its contribution not only to "stop the bullets" but also to respond to the roots of the conflict moving the process towards social justice and gender equality

Approaches to the Practice of Peacebuilding

Over time scholars have proposed different approaches or schools of thought about the theory and practice of peace and peacebuilding encompassed in what scholars are increasingly coming to call peace and conflict studies (PACS). Byrne and Senehi define PACS as a discipline of "inter or transdisciplinary study, theory and practice..." that has evolved and developed in different approaches or schools that respond to ever changing contexts. These authors classify these schools as follows: school of Conflict Management that emerged in the 1980s with the consolidation of Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms; later in the 1990s it emerged the Transformational Conflict Resolution School to respond to the gaps of the previous school. It included a more holistic approach to conflict where the main objective was not to resolve a concrete manifestation of conflict but to explore its roots and main causes. In the first decade of the 2000 emerges the Peacebuilding School to address the challenges of the conflicts after the Cold War. Also in

the first and second decade of 2000 emerged Critical and Emancipatory Peacebuilding approaches to explore that dynamics between international and local peacebuilding (Byrne, Matyók, Scott, & Senehi, 2020, p. 4).

Oliver Richmond (2005) presents four generations of theories and practice in peacebuilding: conflict management, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and alternative approaches. This evolution ends up in a consensus of what peacebuilding is, and how it should be implemented. Together with Mac Ginty, Richmond criticizes the prevalent “IKEA model” of peacebuilding as a pre-packaged prototype ready to be replicated by just following instructions (Mac Ginty, 2012b). Paffenholz (2010) builds upon the work of Richmond and presents five schools of peacebuilding: conflict management, conflict resolution, complementary, conflict transformation and, the school of alternative discourses. What these developments illustrate is that there is an evolution in the understanding and practice of peacebuilding starting with a clear emphasis on states and the maintenance of the *status quo* to advocacy for structural change, as well as the inclusion of different actors and activities to critical voices that question peacebuilding’s core foundations.

This thesis privileges conflict transformation’s concepts and tools as the main framework of my analysis. However, it also acknowledges the importance and contributions of different approaches such as *conflict resolution* as well as *critical approaches*. The former has been around longer and has concrete developments in terms of literature, programs and projects. Although a newcomer to the discipline, conflict transformation has been well received by scholars and practitioners alike, especially in Colombia.

These schools of thought provide frameworks to analyze the foundations, objectives, outcomes and impact of the work Sembrandopaz developed in Montes de María. Moreover, they assist in understanding of the interaction between the practice of peacebuilding and its theoretical foundations. The following section discusses each of these approaches, with especial emphasis on the theory of conflict transformation.

Conflict resolution.

The term *conflict resolution* refers to those mechanisms to end violence, solve conflicts and rebuild broken relationships in a plethora of areas such as civil rights, the workplace, and ethnic conflicts among others (Kriesberg, 2007; Paffenholz, 2010). As a field, conflict resolution emerged in the 1950s and 1960s at the height of the Cold War and in response to the escalation of nuclear conflict between both superpowers (Ramsbotham et al., 2017, p. 5). It is an interdisciplinary field that in its early stages was inspired by the developments of organizational relations and community mediation; from psychology, it draw from theories on frustration-aggression and the social psychology of group conflicts (Ramsbotham et al., 2017). John Burton added to conflict resolution as a field, with his work on “basic needs theory” and collaborative problem solving methods (Burton, 1990; Ramsbotham et al., 2017).

According to Burton, political conflict is the result of the lack of satisfaction of universal human needs such as security, identity and recognition. Thus, conflicts can be resolved through controlled communication and problem solving techniques towards the satisfaction of basic needs (Ramsbotham et al., 2017; Steinberg, 2013). In this context, the analysis and implementation of mechanisms such as mediation, negotiation and arbitration has been the main focus of conflict resolution. This model has been applied to a broad

selection of conflicts from interpersonal disputes, to collective bargaining, government negotiations and international diplomacy, responding both to direct and structural violence. An important contribution of this approach is that it focuses on the dynamics of conflicts as well as the mechanisms and tools for its resolution.

Conflict transformation.

Some scholars advocate for an integral peacebuilding approach that includes the active participation of different actors, time frames and activities, and that especially encourage the integration of theory and practice (as cited by Call & Cousens, 2008, p. 6). The theory of conflict transformation is relatively new and represents an important departure from an earlier emphasis on states and international organizations, shifting to a focus on local initiatives and non-state actors (Paffenholz, 2013).

Different scholars such as Johan Galtung, Adam Curle, Vincent Fisas, and John Paul Lederach have contributed to the evolution of conflict transformation. Galtung (2003) highlighted the idea of conflict as both contradiction and dynamism. Galtung asserted that for transformation to occur, it is important to consider long-term temporal frames and the structure in which the conflict is embedded. Thus, instead of focusing on short-term solutions, peacebuilders should focus on the sustainable transformation of the conflict (p. 132). In addition, Adam Curle (1971, 1982) highlighted the importance of relationships and the need for their redefinition as an important element of transformation. Lederach built upon Freire, Galtung and Curle. He emphasizes change as a key element in the process of transformation as well as the role of grassroots peacebuilding. Lederach (2003) provided the following definition of conflict transformation that was the guiding reference for this thesis:

Conflict transformation is *to envision and respond* to the *ebb and flow* of social conflict as *life-giving opportunities* for creating *constructive change processes* that *reduce violence, increase justice* in *direct interaction and social structures*, and respond to real-life problems in *human relationships*. (p. 14)

This definition characterizes conflict as a normal occurrence in society with the potential to elicit social change. For this to happen, conflict transformation strategically envisions the combination of the work of individuals and communities from different levels of society, within different temporal and structural frameworks. The goal is not only to respond to the day-to-day manifestations of conflict but also to build relationships and structures that respond to the root causes of conflict that can support a vision of sustainable peace in the long term.

By focusing on change, conflict transformation goes beyond a vision of peace that prioritizes the end of direct violence. Instead, it promotes a vision towards constructive social change and with an emphasis on how to “reweave the social fabric of relationships torn apart by decades and generations of hatred” (Lederach, 2005, p. 42). In this context, relationships are a core element in Lederach’s approach to conflict transformation and social change. Lederach (2005) noted the following in his theoretical development, namely,

What does it mean to have a relationship-centric approach to constructive social change? I have come to believe that the answer lies with how we approach and understand relational spaces in a given geography, the fabric of human community broadly defined as the crisscrossing connections of people, their lives, activities, organizational modalities and even, patterns of conflict....This approach asks us to

look at relationships through the lenses of social crossroads, connections and interdependence. (pp.77-78)

This approach does not imply that conflict transformation operates only on local and communal contexts. On the contrary, conflict transformation means change at the personal, relational, structural and cultural levels that are equally relevant in peacebuilding, and that demand the interaction of different leaders and actors (Lederach, 2003, 2005).

Jeong (2020) went a step further in qualifying relationships in conflict transformation. For him, relationships must be “self-supporting and durable” towards a goal of social justice (p.25).

Since the late 1980s some NGOs and scholars in Colombia embraced conflict transformation, especially through Lederach’s work.⁵⁶ Perhaps one of the reasons for this acceptance is that it is an approach that resonates with a legacy of discourses on participation and social justice in a country where economic and social inequalities are fundamental elements in the internal armed conflict.

Although initial conflict transformation efforts were mainly at the grassroots level, it has also expanded to the national level, embedded in the peace dialogues narrative with FARC and the subsequent peace agreement (Lederach, 2016). Despite these developments in Colombia, conflict transformation training and research has not been consolidated. Thus, many peacebuilding initiatives may have transformative effects without its main actors being aware of it. On the other hand, many peacebuilding initiatives designed to be transformative may not be fulfilling their mission.

⁵⁶ The Christian Association for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action –Justapaz- (acronym in Spanish), was the first CSO to embrace and promote conflict transformation in 1992.

Because the complexities of internal armed conflicts demand a more comprehensive approach, less focused on short-term outcomes and more on long-term and inclusive processes, conflict transformation is the best approach for this study. The following theoretical concepts are particularly important for this research: Theories of change, platforms for change, infrastructures for peace, the pyramid of leaderships, integrated peacebuilding frameworks and moral imagination.

Theories of change.

A theory of change is an explanation of how and why individuals and organizations implement particular activities to achieve the changes they wish to see. Its goal is to identify and understand the hidden assumptions and actions that make change happen at personal, relational, structural and cultural levels (Lederach, Neufeldt, & Culbertson, 2007). The theory of change asks: “what needs to change,” “at what level (personal, relational, structural or cultural)?”, “what do I need to do?” and “who do I need to work with”. Experience shows that most local initiatives focus on immediate change, and very few on structural and cultural levels.

This thesis explored the theories of change that inspire the work of Sembrandopaz; what has changed and, whether or not theories of change evolved and adapted to new contexts.

Platforms of change.

Platforms are formal or informal structures of connected people that constantly generate and sustain processes to respond to immediate conflicts, with a vision of long-term change (Lederach, 2003). Within conflict transformation, relationships and networks are pivotal elements in the analysis and intervention of conflict. Conflict emerges and

develops within a web of relationships and those relationships are also the foundation for creative responses. The spirit behind platforms is that connection for connection's sake is not enough for peacebuilding. The importance of networking lies in the ideas, processes, responses, dialogues and actions that are dissimilar yet connect people, communities, organizations and institutions. This capability is what platforms are about.

A platform is both a structure and a process. It is a structure because it is rooted in formal or informal relationships. It is a process because change is not linear, it implies periods of advances but also setbacks

According to Lederach (2005), the measure of a platform's success lies not in the content or the outcome but in the quality of the relationships to constantly generate capacities to sustain processes over time that help societies to move from relationships based on division towards relationships based on cooperation, and constructive interdependence (p. 97).

Platforms are not easy to see because they are rarely incorporated as legal entities. Sometimes they are under the guise of another activity. In my personal experience in the Philippines I had the opportunity to systematize the experience of the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI) in a one week training on peacebuilding geared to community leaders immersed in the conflict between Muslims and Christians on the island. After many years operating, MPI became more than a training week but the setting where actors in the conflict, community leaders, spiritual leaders such as bishops, priests, nuns, and ulamas, as well as victims of the conflict, Aboriginal people, human rights organizations, CSOs, authorities and institutions got together to discuss and find solutions

to the conflict in Mindanao. Training became an excuse for more intentional peacebuilding work.

One of the core elements of the platforms are “improbable dialogues,”⁵⁷ an expression coined by Lederach that refers to “conversations between different people and groups within polarized contexts, seeking a common strategy to achieve long-term transformations” (Comisión de la Verdad, 2018).⁵⁸ Improbable dialogues involves creating settings for the connecting actors with different agendas, even those perceived as enemies, that in normal circumstances would be unlikely for them to meet. It refers to purposeful conversations towards the transformation of conflict. Ricardo Esquivia, Director of Sembrandopaz calls these type of dialogues “Dialogues between equals in disagreement”.

How did Sembrandopaz create and sustain change platforms in Alta Montaña and Libertad, and what type of change are those platforms bringing about? How does Sembrandopaz develop improbable dialogues in Alta Montaña and Libertad and what are its outcomes?

These are some of the questions this thesis was designed to answer. In addition, this thesis explored the types of networks Sembrandopaz has created, their strength, how they serve the main theory of change and, whether or not they respond to immediate conflicts with a long-term vision.

⁵⁷ Translation by the author from the original in Spanish: Diálogos Improbables. In an informal conversation Lederach stated that the name came for discussions with Ricardo Esquivia, Director of Sembrandopaz.

⁵⁸ Translation by the author

Infrastructures for peace.

Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) is a concept close to platforms for change. I4P refers to the capacities and structures built to prevent the emergence of violent conflicts, manage the negative consequences of current conflicts and, to follow up with the implementation of peace agreements (van Tongeren, Ojielo, Brand-Jacobsen, McCandless, & Tschirg, 2012). A successful I4P will ensure that the roots of conflict will be addressed. A simple example of an I4P in Colombia is the various institutions at the national level working for peace: The Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, Victims Unit, Land Restitution Unit, National Department of Planning, the National and Municipal Councils for Peace, and the Peace Commission from the Congress. Lederach (1997) coined the term “infrastructures for peace,” which is gaining popularity in the peacebuilding world.⁵⁹ He acknowledged the appeal of the concept but he was also alert to its institutionalization and bureaucratization effects (Lederach, 2012). Although strong institutions are needed to manage conflicts, they can also become straitjackets that overshadow and obstruct peacebuilding. The main challenge peace infrastructures face is how to be creative and adaptive within a context of continuous change (Lederach, 2012, p. 11). Thus, I4P must go beyond a sum of formal institutions, it must comprise connections that allow mutual support and the exchange of ideas and resources, as well as to be able to adapt and respond to a context that constantly

⁵⁹ For more information about I4P see Berghof Dialogue Series No.10: *Peace Infrastructures - Assessing Concept and Practice* (PNUD, 2010); the special issue on Peace Infrastructures from the 2012 *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, 7(3); the website I4P International Network –Infrastructures for Peace- <http://www.i4pinternational.org/infrastructures-for-peace>; and numerous articles in the journal *Peacebuilding* as well as the work of Paul van Tongeren.

changes. For Lederach the platforms change concept is more adequate to analyze and strategize peacebuilding dynamics within contexts that are in constant change.⁶⁰

This thesis used both I4P and platforms for change complementarily. I4P helped to map and analyze formal structures and peacebuilding initiatives that Sembrandopaz fostered in its peacebuilding work or that have connections with Sembrandopaz (i.e. mayor's offices, municipal councils, NGOs, municipal councils for peace and, international organizations). The goal was to have a map of the interactions of Sembrandopaz with various organizations and initiatives in the region. On the other hand, platforms for change helped the thesis to focus on Sembrandopaz's formal and informal relationships and networks, its evolution, its quality, as well as the changes achieved and their transformative contributions towards social justice.

Pyramid of actors and approaches to peacebuilding.

As mentioned before, this model analyses the different peacebuilding approaches individuals and communities develop based on their location in the conflict.⁶¹ This study focused on the various actors that have connections with Sembrandopaz: from national authorities such as the High Commissioner for Peace, to middle range actors like Catholic and Protestant churches and universities, as well as grassroots organizations such as local NGOs and CSOs. This model assisted this thesis to understand the actors involved with Sembrandopaz, their strategic interactions, outcomes and reach.

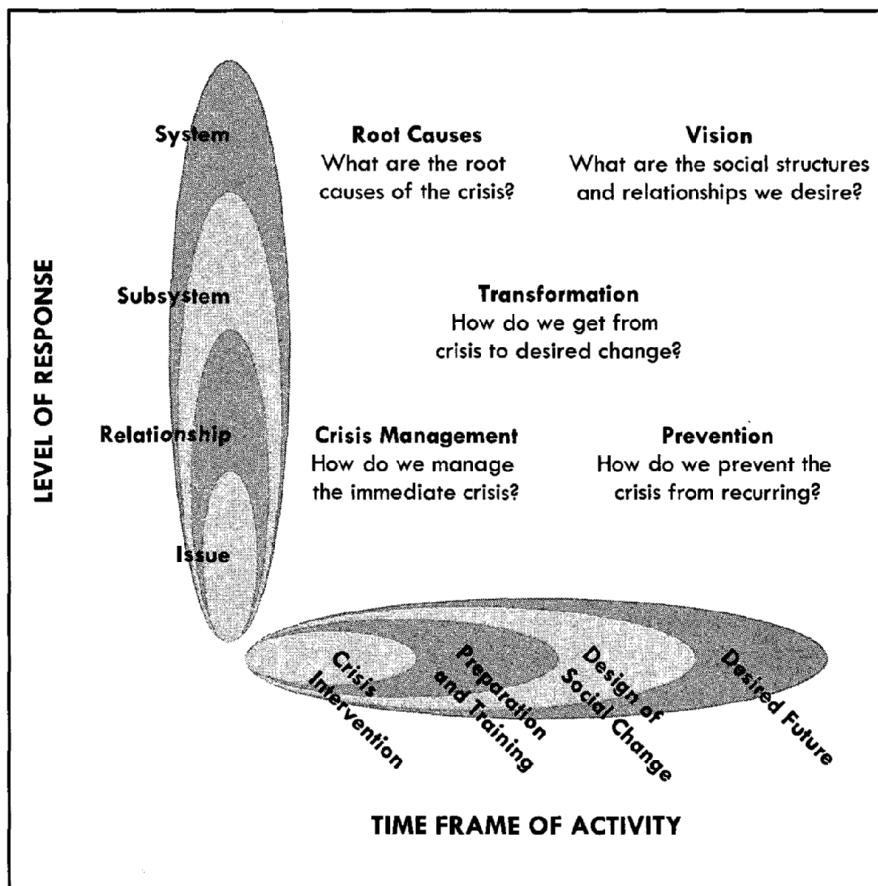
⁶⁰ Personal conversation with John Paul Lederach, October 31, 2014.

⁶¹ See section "C. Peacebuilding in Colombia: From top-down approaches to grassroots peacebuilding".

Integrated framework for peacebuilding.

Lederach (1997) first presented this model in his book *Building Peace* where it was originally named *Integrated framework for peacebuilding* based on the work of Maire Dugan (1996). After further development of the model, in the *Moral imagination* Lederach (2005) changed the model's name to *Expanded framework for peacebuilding*, as it will be presented. The model intends to explain the different approaches needed for “a transformative approach to constructive change.” According to this model, when analyzing peacebuilding processes, it is important to consider two main elements: time frame and the levels of response that peacebuilders have (See Figure 3 below). The following section explains the model's main elements.

Figure 3. Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding



Source: Lederach, J. P. (2005). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington D.C. United States Institute of Peace, p. 80. Used with permission.

Time dimensions in peacebuilding: Peacebuilders develop a number of activities that operate in different time frames. It is important for them to be aware of an adequate time frame necessary for the activities they are planning. Immediate crises require a different time frame than those activities that demand a long-term vision, as in the case of the design and implementation of public policies. Lederach (1997) proposes four time dimensions in peacebuilding: immediate action, short-range planning, decade thinking and generational vision.⁶² Usually, local peacebuilding initiatives are tied to financial projects of no more than five years, affecting their long-term theories of change. Considering the length and impact of the armed conflict in Montes de María, this model allowed me to analyze whether Sembrandopaz considers time frames as an element in the design and implementation of their initiatives.

Levels of response: Peacebuilders may intervene in a conflict at different levels. They can address the visible manifestations of the conflict through short-term actions. For instance, an interpersonal conflict between two internally displaced women arguing over access to services for their children might be addressed with mediation or negotiation

⁶² Stage 1. Short term crisis intervention: It is the first response to a crisis to address its immediate effects. Humanitarian aid, emergency relief and crisis interventions are some examples. This stage usually lasts a few weeks or months.

Stage 2. Short-range planning: Preparation and training: In this stage peacebuilders' goal is to better understand what happened so they can be better prepared for future crises. This stage usually lasts one to two years and it is when the "training agenda" becomes prominent. In this stage the peacebuilder asks "what are the approaches and skills needed to better assess and deal with crises resulting from violent and internal conflict?" (Lederach, 1997, p. 76).

Stage 4. Desired future: In this stage the peacebuilder imagines a vision of what is what he/she is trying to achieve in the future. In this stage the peacebuilder needs to think in terms of decades and generations. It involves thinking about sustainable development, self sufficiency, human needs and, interdependent relationships, etc.

Stage 3. Design of social change: This stage is the bridge between stages 1-2 with stage 4. It may last from five to ten years. In this stage peacebuilders take the lessons learned from previous years and apply them to plan a better future. Some peacebuilders call this stage "dispute system design" and it is the stage that makes the transition possible from the short term towards long term-desired future.

techniques. Other peacebuilders may focus on the root causes of the conflict, addressing the political and social conditions behind the access to basic services. Based on the work of Maire Dugan (1996) Lederach (1997) proposes four levels of peacebuilding response: issue, relationship, subsystem and system.⁶³

As the illustration states (Figure 3), the transformational approach is a bridge between a focus on short-term issues and a long-term approach interested in addressing the root causes of the conflict. For Lederach (1997) the middle range perspective is particularly important because it highlights the need for integration in three strategic ways: (1) to think in terms of decades allowing peacebuilders to link crisis management with a vision of long term time frames; (2) to understand that behind a crisis there are systemic roots. Thus, a peacebuilder must be able to respond to concrete issues considering relationships and subsystems; and, (3) to acknowledge the potential of middle-range leaders capable of making connections between actors in different levels of leadership (Lederach, 1997, p. 81).

The Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding suggests that for change to happen it is important to think not only in terms of years, but also in terms of generations. Strategic peacebuilders know that short-term actions must correspond to a long-term vision. Later in *The Moral Imagination*, Lederach (2005) expands the model to integrate a vision of the

⁶³ Level 1. Issue: It focuses on the issue that sparks the initial manifestation of conflict. The peacebuilder's response would be to intervene through mechanisms such as mediation and negotiation to resolve the immediate issue that created the conflict;
 Level 2. Relationship. The peacebuilder focuses in the relationships that surrounded the issue. His/her response would be to explore more in depth the relationships between the actors that ignited the conflict;
 Level 4. System. The peacebuilder focuses on the inequities in the system that lies at the root of the conflict (racism, poverty, sexism, etc). He/she focuses on long-term structural changes such as public policies, education campaigns etc.
 Level 3. Subsystem. This level is a bridge between levels 1 and 2 and level 4. This level focuses on the immediate system in which the conflict emerges and manifests.

past and its influence in the understanding of the cycles of violent conflict but also in the creation and implementation of peacebuilding efforts. Thus, the model includes four additional levels: recent events, lived history, remembered history and, narrative (see Figure 2)⁶⁴ and it is renamed “Expanded Framework for Peacebuilding.”

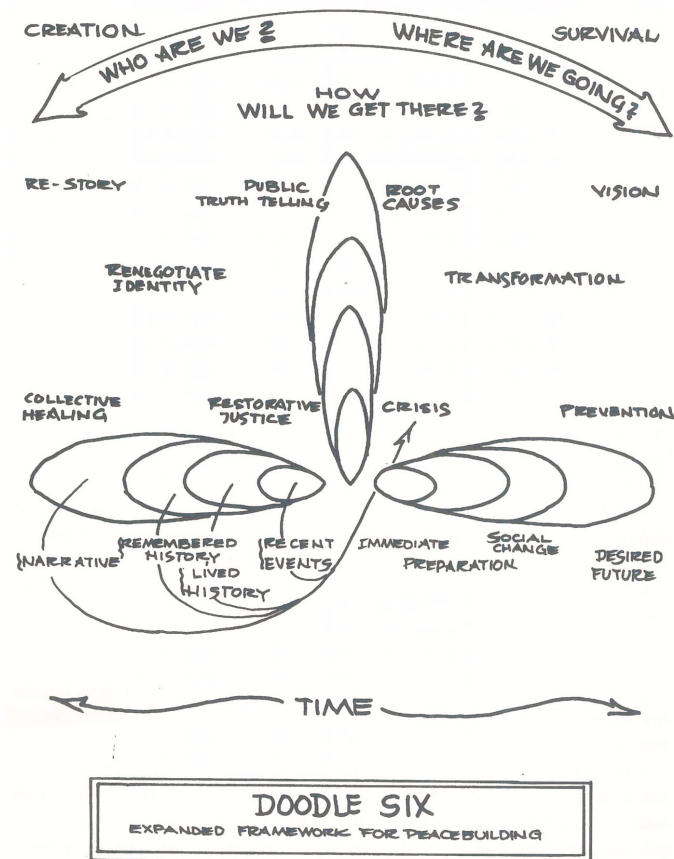
⁶⁴ Recent events. It refers to the most immediate manifestations of violence as expressions of social, political or economic conflicts. In lay terms it is what people would refer as the “drop that spilled the cup”. Its time frame is no more than two years (Lederach, 2005, p. 141). In the context of Montes de María it would be the recent increase of violence in the region, as well as the celebration of the III Reconciliation Festival in 2019.

Living history: It is a timeframe that is beyond the immediate. It encompasses the lifetime of a person or a community. According to Lederach it varies with the age of the individual or the community. A living history of a child is shorter than that of an adult and much shorter than a community or a country that can go back for decades. In the case of Montes de María a living history includes the different massacres that took place in the region, as well as the campesino movement that developed alongside (Lederach, 2005, p. 142).

Remembered history: It refers to the history that older generations remember and keep alive in the social psyche that passes from one generation to the other. It comprises those milestones that a community, or country consider significant in shaping their identity as a whole. Massacres such as those that took place in El Salado and Macayepos, and the displacement of the community of Mampuján are milestones that the natives of Montes de María remember with sorrow and that has shaped their collective narrative and future development (Lederach, 2005, p. 142).

Narrative: It is the most expanded timeframe and explores the group identity developed over generations. It refers to the interpretation and meaning that communities develop to help them understand their origins and guide them in their construction of the future (Lederach, 2005, pp. 142 - 143). In the case of Montes de María Narrative, it is usual to hear what they refer to as “montemarianos” or the native of Montes de María. Behind that name there is pride in the campesino and Caribbean cultures.

Figure 4. Expanded Framework for Peacebuilding



Source: Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p. 144. Used with permission.

For the purpose of this study, the Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding helped the me to explore and understand the different approaches, emphasis and scope that Sembrandopaz has placed in their peacebuilding work.

Moral Imagination.

In 2005 Lederach published *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, a book that he deems as a prequel of his previous works (Lederach, 2005, p. vii) and where he explores the deepest elements that makes peacebuilding possible. He inquires

“what disciplines, *if they were not present*, would make peacebuilding impossible?” (Lederach, 2005, p. 34). Based on his experience as a practitioner he proposes four disciplines that are the essence of the moral imagination: “centrality of relationships, paradoxical curiosity, creativity and risk” (Lederach, 2005, p.34). All of them involves high doses of imagination.

Centrality of relationships: Conflict emerges and evolves in a web or relationships, and it is within these relationships that violence can be transcended and conflict became a force of growth and change. At the core of this element there is an acknowledgment that we are all interconnected, that we are part of a web -or webs- that impacts us, but that we can also influence with our actions and choices. This element demands from individuals and communities the imagination to envision themselves in connection with friends and allies but also with enemies. As Lederach (2005) states:

Peacebuilding requires a vision of relationship. Stated bluntly, if there is no capacity to imagine the canvas of mutual relationship and situate oneself as part of that historic and ever-evolving web, peacebuilding collapses. The centrality of relationship provides the context and the potential for breaking violence, for it brings people into the pregnant moments of the moral imagination: the space of recognition that ultimately the quality of our life is dependent on the quality of the life of others. It recognizes that the well-being of our grandchildren is directly tied to the well-being of our enemy's grandchildren. (p.35)

Paradoxical curiosity: This element of the moral imagination embraces complexity without falling into polarization or categorization. It calls for the exploration of reality and

how people experienced and give meaning to it; it is an invitation to understand reality and its contradictions without judging or rejecting opposing points of view.

The creative act: The moral imagination embraces creativity because of its capacity to imagine something new and unexpected within the current conditions and the resources available. The creative act allows us to ask different questions, to imagine different venues and possibilities for change, and especially to design and implement different actions.

Willingness to risk: The willingness to risk is the last element of the moral imagination. It is the courage to approach and step into the unknown with the hope that change can happen but without any certainty or the results or even its own safety. For Lederach (2005) the willingness of risk is linked with vocation.

For the purpose of this thesis, the elements of the moral imagination helped me to be attentive on the creative process of Sembrandopaz in their approach of building peace that goes beyond techniques and strategies. Instead it encouraged me to go deeper in their assumptions, experiences and human touch, and to explore the risks peacebuilders took to respond to violence in their communities.

Debates Related to Conflict Transformation

Criticisms of conflict transformation.

Lederach's approach to conflict transformation has also received critical reviews. Some have argued that conflict transformation does not sufficiently address the role of power and political systems and regional and international contexts (Fetherston, 2000; Miall, 2004). Others assert that the framework lacks a critical view of "the local", providing a romantic and homogenous version of a complex and complicate concept (Paffenholz, 2013). Another argument is that conflict transformation is better tailored for small-scale conflicts at the

grassroots level and not for interstate and global conflicts.⁶⁵ Finally, some voices claim that Lederach's upbringing in the Mennonite faith influence his approach to conflict transformation, and it cannot be applied to other different contexts such as intra and interstate conflicts.

In a study on the role of the local in international peacebuilding, Paffenholz (2013) stated that Lederach's approach to conflict transformation does not reflect the evidence and has failed in fulfilling its outcomes. She argued that because Track II actors are not homogenous it is impossible to conclude that they are always capable of making connections between actors (Paffenholz, 2013, p. 9). Experiences show that some actors are stronger than others and their impact is not always successful.

Paffenholtz also questions Track II's potential to create and sustain infrastructures for peace by "trickle up to Track I and down to Track III." The author states that Track I actors and outsiders, have better chances in making substantial positive changes than middle range actors (Paffenholz, 2013). Track III, on the other hand, can be strong enough to make an impact without the support of Track II actors. Paffenholz (2013) heavily criticized the importance international organizations assign to NGOs and asserted that "traditional mass-based social organizations" have stronger legitimacy and potential for social cohesion than NGOs (p. 11).

Paffenholz concluded that the model is restricted because it does not contemplate connections between Track I and Track III without the mediation of Track II. Overall, Paffenholz finds that the emphasis on Track II or middle-range actors has been magnified

⁶⁵ Comments that I have heard in different academic settings both as a teacher and student. Most of those comments come from people unfamiliar with conflict transformation.

as a result of a narrow understanding of Lederach's model and it does not consider other dynamics between peacebuilding actors.

Another set of criticisms relate to the type of activities conflict transformation suggests that are needed to promote social cohesion. Peace education, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and conflict transformation workshops have proved to be ineffective during war and violent conflict, although they fare better results in a postaccord phase (Paffenholz, 2013, p. 13). These initiatives are usually detached from major socialization institutions such as the church, the school and the family so that it is very difficult for them to have some significant impact in change processes on society in the long term.

As Paffenholz acknowledges, most of her criticisms are based on Lederach's earlier work, which eventually evolved further after years of experience as a reflective practitioner working in protracted conflicts. One of these developments is the salient role of relationships, networks and strategies in connecting dissimilar actors from different tracks (Lederach, 2005). In addition, she acknowledges that international organizations selectively adopt some of the tenets of conflict transformation such as Track II, but not other fundamental elements of the theory, such as the agency of individuals and communities. For the purpose of this study, Paffenholz's criticism opens the doors to deeper research on various levels of local peacebuilding. There is an opportunity to explore the agency of local actors in peacebuilding, how and why peacebuilding actors from different tracks interact. It is also an opportunity to explore how international organizations as well as other actors understand and adapt conflict transformation to their own context and needs, or as Mac Ginty (2011) would say, whether hybrid processes emerge.

This research acknowledges the strengths and criticisms of conflict transformation and it intends to explore whether the criticism has credit or not, and to what extent.

Conflict resolution vs. conflict transformation debate.

In recent literature, there is a debate about whether there are substantial differences between conflict resolution and conflict transformation, or whether they are the gradations of the same conceptual approach. Ramsbotham (2017) noted that conflict transformation is “the deepest level of conflict resolution” and the result of its logical evolution, but in no way is it a separate approach. On the contrary, advocates for conflict transformation state that this approach is based on a different perspective that change the way individuals and institutions understand and respond to conflict (Lederach, 2003, p. 29). Reflecting on “the meaning and implications” ideas of conflict resolution and conflict transformation, Lederach (2003) asserted that conflict resolution focuses on concrete solutions to the most salient manifestations of a conflict rather than considering the context within which the conflict emerged, and the dynamics of relationships within which it develops. Conflict transformation advocates acknowledges the importance of conflict resolution yet insist that it is insufficient. Within conflict resolution it is possible to have a resolution without any significant change, yet it differs from conflict transformation for which structural change is fundamental (Mitchell, 2002, p. 20). In this regard, Lederach (2014) stated that conflict transformation is an umbrella that includes conflict resolution, yet conflict resolution does not necessarily include transformation (personal communication).

Ramsbotham (2017) dismissed the arguments of conflict transformation advocates, highlighting that they are simplistic and a “caricature of the field” and concluded that “it does not matter in the end which label is used as the umbrella term ... so long as the field

itself is coherent enough to contain the substance of what is being advocated in each case” (p. 11).

For the purpose of this research, the differentiation between conflict resolution and conflict transformation was important to understand the reach of local peacebuilding in Montes de María and especially the work of Sembrandopaz. Are the questions Sembrandopaz asks, its approaches more in tune with the logic and understandings of conflict and peacebuilding proposed by conflict transformation?

Critical Debates: Post-liberal Peace

Liberal peace has been the dominant framework for peacebuilding reconstruction in most post-Cold War violent conflicts (Oliver P. Richmond, 2004). It focuses on rapid democratization, security, and market liberalization as the main solutions to help fragile states move from a context of violence to a sustainable peace (Barnett, Kim, Madalene, & Sitea, 2007; Paris, 2004; Oliver P. Richmond, 2004). It is a top-down approach to peacebuilding where the states and international institutions are the main actors

Colombia is not exempt from this trend, as it will be reported in Chapter 6. The dominant approaches to peacemaking and peacebuilding have been state centric and top-down, with communities playing a secondary role.

However, criticisms of liberal peacebuilding have increased in recent years (Richmond, 2009). Rather than implementing sustainable peace, peacebuilding efforts may be contributing to destabilizing post-accord countries because the liberal peace framework may be inappropriate for the cultural, social, political and legal contexts in which it is implemented, either because the society is not familiar with a liberal tradition or because after a violent conflict, states do not have the resources and institutions required to

implement liberal peace initiatives (Richmond, 2004; Sriram, 2007). Richmond (2009) states that liberal peace is perceived to maintain existing structures and “hierarchies at the local, national and global levels” and with limited impact on everyday life (pp. 562-563). It has been argued that the liberal peace model privileges state-centric perspectives on peacebuilding leaving important non-state actors out of the equation (Richmond, 2011). Liberal peace’s dominant top-down approach has been unable to respond to concrete local needs on the ground. Moreover, it is perceived as “conditional, acultural and relatively unconcerned with needs, social welfare, or public services, and unfeeling and insensitive towards its subjects” (Richmond, 2011, p.4). Others contended that liberal peace is a neo-colonial tool for disseminating a Western model of governance based on liberal principles (Fontan, 2012; Liden, Mac Ginty, & Richmond, 2009; Paris, 2002; Oliver P. Richmond, 2011). As Fontan (2012) asserted, “...the same paradigm that was invoked for colonization is now serving to channel neo-colonial liberal peace efforts worldwide” (p.42). As a result, liberal peacebuilding approaches build empty states and institutions incapable of responding to the everyday needs of people and creating a “virtual peace” where violence is likely to reappear and escalate (Paris, 2004; Oliver P. Richmond, 2006, 2009).

To respond to these criticisms, scholars need to better understand the role of culture, consensus building, local agencies and the operation of local peacebuilding, not as a mere inclusion of local actors but as a recognition that communities also play an important role. Richmond and Mac Ginty highlight the need to explore local initiatives, their understandings of peace, and how they adopt, adapt or reject the liberal peace principles and how they complement them with their own approaches (Mac Ginty, 2008a; Oliver P. Richmond, 2009, 2011). They propose the concept of hybrid peacebuilding to incorporate

international norms, institutions and power structures with local agencies (Mac Ginty, 2008a; Oliver P. Richmond, 2015). For Richmond and Mitchell's (2012) hybridization of peace is a process where local and international actors "re-shape the norms, institutions and activities in question by means of everyday practices such as verbal interaction, organization and even overt conflict" (p. 1). It is a process defined by the actors and their understandings of peace and peacebuilding in their everyday practice, illustrating that peacebuilding is not static but in constant evolution and change or, as Mac Ginty stated, (2008a) "all peace-making is hybridized to some extent" (p. 157).

Within the research agenda of postliberal peace, Mac Ginty focuses on what he calls the local-local, the "micro dynamics of interpersonal exchange in deeply divided civil societies" (School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, 2019) where he gives special attention to "everyday peace." He defines everyday peace as those practices that ordinary individuals and communities develop and adopt to navigate their daily lives in societies divided by direct and/or structural violence (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 13). Some examples of "everyday peace" are the coping mechanisms that individuals and communities adopt to avoid controversial topics in social settings where different actors meet, such as sports competitions, cultural festivities, and church etc.

What is important about "everyday peace" is the power that it entails. In a conference at George Mason University on November 2019, Roger Mac Ginty stated that everyday peace is a form of power that has the potential to disrupt the logic of violence and conflict by strengthening different types of relations. It is a power that is emancipatory, because it is not based on political power, or the monopoly of force, or the control of the

means of productions. It a type of power that, from the bottom-up, contests, subvert and responds in a creative way to the routinization of violence.

Critical discussions on liberal peace provide a broader view of the concept of peace and its implementation advocating for a more emancipatory approach that responds to the everyday needs of people and the historical injustices they face (Oliver P. Richmond, 2010; Thiessen, 2011). Richmond (2006) refers to emancipatory peacebuilding as a graduation of the liberal peace that emphasizes the role of culture, consensus building, local ownership and agency; and where community based leaderships and social movements are central. Thiessen (2011) noted that the contribution of an emancipatory approach to peace is that “it calls for a fundamental change in tone and voice” (p. 120) that is reflected in the way peacebuilding is practiced and implemented from public policies to concrete everyday practices.

In sum, critical debates on post-liberal peace operate as a ground pole to assess the implementation of local peacebuilding. It is important to consider that grassroots as well as national and international initiatives are present at the local level. Post-liberal peace debates highlight the negative outcomes of well-intended initiatives, or the hidden agendas of donors. Assessing local peacebuilding and its transformational potential implies asking what is to be transformed, what is the vision of the future, and what strategies are transformational? The criticisms and proposals of post-liberal peace debates helped this study to explore whether Sembrandopaz engages in peacebuilding based on liberal peace principles without considering its content and impact; or whether hybridization processes are taking place where Colombians are creating their own platforms for peace that are disrupting the logics of violence.

A Path Towards Transformation: Social Justice and Gender Equality

This study relies on two additional frameworks to analyze the transformational character of Sembrandopaz in Montes de María: social justice and gender equality. One of the main arguments for the emergence and persistence of the internal armed conflict in Colombia is a deep social inequality that lies within Colombian society. If the conflict transformation tenets were followed, it would be expected that Sembrandopaz would be able to make changes that improve social justice and gender relations in Montes de María. The following section explores these frameworks, as well as their application to this study.

Social justice.

According to Minogue (1998) “‘social justice’ is an idea without precise referent” (p. 255). It is one of those terms embedded in common language, yet difficult to define. Social justice is usually referred to as distributive justice and concerns the fairness of the distribution of rewards and burdens in society (Hurlbert, 2011; Minogue, 1998). Access to education and health services, labour conditions, fair salaries, poverty, civil and political rights, and, human rights are all related with social justice. This study utilizes Hurlbert’s (2011) definition of social justice. He sees social justice is a set of ideas, values and social practices to ensure that all persons and groups enjoy economic security, can participate effectively in democratic decision making, exercise mutual respect, care for one another and live their lives in ways that protect and sustain the natural environment for future generations. Social justice is predominantly concerned with achieving the second pillar of justice: substantive or distributive justice (p. 59).

This definition highlights the distribution of social and material goods and the processes and institutions created for this purpose. It also supports long-term visions and structural change by considering the importance of future generations and their enjoyment of a sustainable environment.

During the 1960s, social justice movements in Latin America strengthened due in part to the emergence of Liberation Theology in the Catholic Church. Considered the first non-European theology (Gutiérrez, 1988; Maier, 2005), Liberation Theology emerged within the contexts of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and as a reaction to dire inequalities in Latin America. Some Catholic theologians saw the need to address and transform the roots of poverty, inequality and structural violence, stressing a “preferential option for the poor” and demanding transformations of socio-economic and political structures (Castrillón, 2018; Gutiérrez, 1988; Ospino & Luciani, 2018).

In 1968, the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops took place in the city of Medellín, Colombia, beginning a new chapter in Latin American Catholicism. The Medellín conference proved to be “one of the most successful exercises of appropriation of the Second Vatican Council at the continental level” (Ospino & Luciani, 2018, p. 20) influencing Catholic thought and action in Latin America in the following decades.

While many Catholics embraced the new theology, the Church hierarchy severely criticized and attacked it. Catholic leaders were concerned about the influence of Marxism in Liberation Theology. In the document Instruction *Libertatis nuntius*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith warned about the risks of deviating from the Christian faith when one uncritically borrows concepts and tools from Marxism (Ratzinger, 1986).

Nevertheless, Liberation Theology and especially Medellín provided important legacies for this research. First, Liberation Theology is explicit about the necessity of structural change in social, political and economic dimensions, changes that must begin at the grassroots level for the benefit of the common good and to further justice and solidarity (Ospino & Luciani, 2018). Second, it highlights participation, consultation and formation to strengthen human relationships as pivotal for social change (Ospino & Luciani, 2018). For this purpose, liberationists implemented the see-judge-act method developed by Cardinal Joseph Leo Cardijn of Belgium. This inductive method encourages people to critically analyze a reality of socio-economic and political inequalities, evaluate it from a faith perspective and work towards its transformation (Castrillón, 2018; Ospino & Luciani, 2018).

Liberation Theology emerged in a context of strong political and social upheaval encouraging and strengthening social justice discourses and movements in Latin America and particularly in Colombia.

In the current context of the implementation of the peace agreement with FARC, “peace with social justice” is part of the discourse of some practitioners, politicians and scholars, but it is not part of the mainstream consensus. Others, including the government and the private sector, emphasize a hard stance on security, development and foreign investment.

Gender and peacebuilding.

In the last century, significant developments on women’s rights and gender equality took place in the world and in Colombia. However, the gender and peacebuilding connection requires more study. Porter (2007) organized the literature regarding women, war and

security into three main themes: (1) effects of war and violence on women; (2) disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; and (3) peacemaking. Most of it is written under traditional conceptual frameworks of international relations and political science, where the state and international organizations are the main actors in issues of power, war and peace. However, these approaches do not challenge how traditional understandings of war and peace contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequalities and violence. Moreover, they do not challenge peacebuilding philosophical foundations and its indifference towards gender.

Feminists ask, *where are the women?* Skjelsbaek and Smith (2001), Pankhurst (2003) and Väyrynen (2010) highlighted that for a long time the social sciences have been blind to gender inequality, and within peace and conflict studies gender remains a marginal subject. For decades, most researchers were mainly men who generalized maleness as the framework to understand social reality. In response, more and more feminist scholars are contributing to closing this academic gap.

In general, Colombian women have been important actors in local peacebuilding, either because violence forced them to assume responsibilities traditionally assigned to men, or as part of their leadership in the community. No matter the reasons, their contribution has been significant, although not well studied. Feminist scholarship developed three theoretical alternatives on the role of women in peace and war: (1) essentialism, (2) standpoint feminism and, (3) post-structuralist, which will be explained in the following section (Väyrynen, 2010). In the context of this study, these frameworks will be a guide to understanding the roles and reach of women in peacebuilding initiatives in Colombia.

The **essentialist** approach states that women are peace oriented whereas men are inclined to violence and war. In its most basic form, essentialism argues that women are born to be caring, peaceful and have the natural skill for consensus building and “relational thinking,” allowing them to prioritize relationships over competitive and violent behaviour (Väyrynen, 2010).

Contemporary feminist theorists strongly reject the essentialist approach. They claim it is a simplistic view that contributes to perpetuating unchangeable visions of society that reinforces stereotypes of peace as feminine and militarism as masculine (Charlesworth, 2008; Väyrynen, 2010, p. 142).⁶⁶ Moreover, it is a framework that ignores the role of social structures and individual agency in shaping gendered behaviour among men and women.

The second theoretical approach is **standpoint feminism**. This view emphasizes people’s experience in war and peace and the roles assigned to man and women. Women are usually singled out as victims as if they were a homogenous group. This stereotype ignores the complex realities women experience during war. Cynthia Enloe (2010) illustrates that war not only affects women and men differently, but also women as individuals develop a variety of responses as war progresses. Men and women are influenced by a variety of factors, such as political identities and social and economic background. Within war and peace, women and men take on a variety of roles, including the role of warrior or the role of peacebuilder that goes beyond predefined stereotypes of victims or passive actors.

⁶⁶ Charlesworth (2008) summarizes essentialism’s main criticisms: (1) “it fixes sex with gender and presents a deterministic account of human nature” (p. 349); (2) it does not explain the role of women as combatants; (3) Essentialist arguments have been used to perpetuate inequality. Moreover, essentialism perpetuates binary oppositions and unchangeable roles; (4) It provides a very narrow understanding of global security; (5) In addition, it suggests that women and men are homogeneous groups without any variations within them.

Although standpoint feminism responds to the gaps of essentialism, neither of these approaches challenge peacebuilding foundations and its understanding of gender and peacebuilding. Moreover, both approaches fail in challenging stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, contributing to the perpetuation of dominant ideas and practices that excludes women's participation from the political arena.

As a reaction to the criticisms to both essentialist and standpoint feminists, post-structuralist debates propose a different approach. They ask social scientists for a careful analysis of the dynamics between gender and power and the connections between gender, war and peace (Väyrynen, 2010). This approach seeks to challenge deep-rooted concepts and methods in peacebuilding. It is a change of lenses from an un-gendered, general understanding of peacebuilding, to the analysis of what Väyrynen (2010) calls the "micropractices of power" (p. 145) which are present in every peacebuilding initiative. These new lenses allow peacebuilders to create the foundations for new and alternative peacebuilding approaches that are more in tune with social justice and positive peace goals.

In Colombia, there are significant developments in terms of gender and peacebuilding. According to Colombian feminist activist Rosa Emilia Salamanca, there has been four main waves in the women's movement in Colombia (CINEP, 2018). The first is the suffragettes wave that took place between the 1950s and 1960s, with a main focus on achieving full citizenship and the political participation of women in the country. The second wave emerged in the 1970s and 1980s focusing on equality between men and women in different settings such as the family, the school and the workplace. During this wave, women's groups such as the Red Nacional de Mujeres (*National Women's Network*) influenced the debates for the inclusion of provisions on gender equality in the National

Constitution. Within this wave, various initiatives such as the Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres emerged to raise awareness about the dire situation of the victims in the internal armed conflict, especially displaced women. Moreover, they began discussions relating to the role of women in peace negotiations and in peacebuilding. The peace agreement between the government of Colombia and FARC was the pinnacle of this wave. Both negotiation teams had female advisors and there was also a gender sub-commission to include this perspective in the final agreement. The fourth wave focuses on the design and implementation of public policies on gender equality at the national and local of levels.

According to CINEP (2018), the years 1998, 2004 and 2006 were particularly important for the mobilization of women's groups and the development of their peace initiatives, most were related to nonviolence and the promotion of peacebuilding and human rights (2018, p. 5). Each of these years included discussions that were crucial for the maintenance of peace in the country and women's groups were instrumental in promoting this dialogue.

Despite significant developments in terms of gender and peacebuilding in Colombia, essentialism and standpoint views were prevalent frameworks in this discourse. Nevertheless, in the last 15 years, post-structural feminist approaches intending to change deep structures of gender inequality have gained ground. An important example is the provisions in the peace agreement related with rural reform and political participation.

Considering the role of women in peacebuilding in Colombia, this thesis intended to understand whether gender was a significant ingredient in Sembrandopaz's work and what approach did they privilege the most. Did they favor a peacebuilding approach more in tune with essentialist or standpoint feminist frameworks? Or, on the contrary, did

Sembrandopaz respond to a post-structuralist feminist framework that challenged traditional understandings of peacebuilding, presenting alternatives that better respond to their interests and needs?

Some of the questions this study addressed include what is the role of women in local peacebuilding? Does Sembrandopaz consider gender in its peacebuilding approach? What are the strategies implemented by Sembrandopaz in the strengthening of women's participation in peacebuilding?

Conclusion

Addressing the question, how and in what ways is the peacebuilding work of Sembrandopaz transformative, required the integration of different theoretical frameworks. The main foundation was conflict transformation theory utilizing John Paul Lederach's perspective because of its trajectory in Colombia, and because he is one of the main representatives of this theoretical perspective. Lederach's concepts of platforms and theories of change will be especially important to understand Sembrandopaz's strategies in response to the causes of conflict over the long haul. Social justice and gender theories are also critical frameworks to understand the type of transformation that Sembrandopaz is envisioning and implementing. Post-liberal peace discussions served as an anchor to explore whether Sembrandopaz's peacebuilding is focused on a more emancipatory type of peace.

Chapter 5. Methodology

Introduction

This study sought to understand Sembrandopaz's local peacebuilding and conflict transformation work in terms of strategies, activities, results, and challenges in Montes de María. Consequently, qualitative research provided me with the depth and flexibility to fulfill these objectives. This exploratory research was inductive in nature; it is based on a qualitative research approach and it uses the case study as its main method of analysis.

Qualitative Research

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define qualitative research as “[a]n approach to social sciences that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subjects point of view” (p. 274). Qualitative approaches are concerned with the context and people's lived experience. Scholars that follow a qualitative approach assert that the best way to understand a social phenomenon is by observing it in the context in which it takes place. Although in qualitative research the analysis of outcomes is important, it privileges the processes and how people make sense of it (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It is important to understand in qualitative research how and why things happen, giving special attention to people's understandings, feelings and, motivations (Gray, 2004). Gray (2004) summarizes the main characteristics of qualitative research as follows:

- Intense contact with the real life setting and close contact with participants and informants. The goal is to capture social life “as it is experienced by participants,

rather than in categories predetermined by the researcher” (R. Schutt, 2003a, p. 278).

- The researcher’s objective is to gain an integral understanding of the setting under study.
- Data and results are shared and reviewed with participants in the study for verification.
- Its main focus is to understand how people act and to explain their actions. (Gray, 2004, p. 320).
- Data is open to different interpretations.

Qualitative research does not privilege any particular methodological practice. On the contrary, to have an in depth understanding of the phenomena under study, qualitative researchers use a variety of multi-method approaches such as interviews, case study, text analysis and, participant observation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Qualitative research has been criticized for being too subjective, difficult to replicate, and lacking transparency (Bryman, 2012). Bryman (2012) claimed that qualitative research depends on the subjective and unsystematic preference of the researcher in defining what is or not important. Also, the researcher’s close personal connection with the people being studied questions the objectivity of the research process and makes replication impossible. Generalization is another issue. Qualitative research tends to focus on a small number of people so there is not enough information to generalize the results to the whole population. Qualitative research is also criticized because it is not clear how the researcher reached his or her conclusions, since sometimes the criteria for sample selection and data analysis seems vague (Bryman, 2012). Compared with quantitative research, where the sample

follows a systematic process of selection and data analysis, qualitative research can appear to be less “scientific.” However, qualitative research can be rigorous in its design, sampling, data gathering and analysis. The following sections describes the methodological design and implementation of this research.

Case Study

Yin (2009) defines the case study as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear evident” (p. 118). The case study is the perfect approach when questions of “how” and “why” are central to the research; the researcher has little control over events; the focus is on a current and real-life situations and, (Yin, 2009, p. 57) when there is a need to understand a social phenomenon and its relationship with the context (Gray, 2004).

Despite its merits, many scholars do not accept case studies as an objective, trustable and legitimate research method (Simons, 2014; Yin, 1994 as cited by Gray, 2004). Most of the criticisms of qualitative research also apply to case studies, especially the researcher’s subjectivity and the difficulty of generalization (Simons, 2014).

For the purpose of this research the case study was an appropriate approach. Case studies are a preferred evaluation methodology (Simons, 2014; Yin, 2009) because it allowed me to focus on the how and why local peacebuilding has evolved over time in Montes de María, how it has adapted to a continuously changing context and, what is its transformational potential.

Finally, it is important to highlight that to implement this methodology this multi-method study used literature and documental review, semi-structured interviews with key

actors, and participant observation. Far from finding a unified voice, it presents contending and contradictory voices, reflecting the different approaches and debates around local peacebuilding in Montes de María.

Research Site

Montes de María is particularly appealing for the study of peacebuilding. It is a strategic region where the main actors in the internal armed conflict were present and the effects of the violence still rule daily life. Nevertheless, it is also the home of important Track I peace negotiations, strong grassroots peacebuilding initiatives, and social movements. The region is also a recipient of incredible amounts of financial resources from the international community (i.e. European Union, USAID, etc) and public and private funds.

This research focused on the work of Sembrandopaz, a local NGO currently working in four communities within Montes de María: Alta Montaña (the municipality of El Carmen de Bolívar), Libertad (the municipality of San Onofre), Pichilín (the municipality of Morroa) and Mampuján (the municipality of María La Baja). This case study focused on the first two communities: Alta Montaña and Libertad. The following section presents the criteria for the selection of these communities and the description of each.

Criteria for the Research Site

The following criteria was considered for the selection of Alta Montaña and Libertad as research sites for the thesis:

- ***Geographical and institutional representation:*** Montes de María is comprised of a total of 15 municipalities located in the departments⁶⁷ of Bolivar and Sucre. The community of Alta Montaña is located in the municipality of El Carmen de Bolivar in the Department of Bolivar, and Libertad is located in the Department of Sucre, in the municipality of San Onofre. The two departments are dissimilar in terms of institutional representation and economic development. The department of Bolivar is more prosperous and with stronger state institutions. Sucre, on the other hand, has higher levels of poverty, and corruption is rampant in the department.⁶⁸ The goal was to understand whether a strong or weak state presence influenced Sembrandopaz's peacebuilding work.
- ***History and dynamics of the conflict:*** Although both communities are located in the Montes de María region, the dynamics of the conflict and peacebuilding have been different. For instance, as it will be illustrated later in the thesis, guerrilla and paramilitary groups were present both in Alta Montaña and Libertad, however, in Libertad paramilitaries settled down imposing dynamics of violence in the community, especially against women and LGBT community. Thus, approaches to peacebuilding also varied. In Alta Montaña communities centered their action in social organization and political action, whereas in Libertad, this research found that strengthening cultural identity through music is pivotal for the community.

⁶⁷ A Departamento (department) is a political and administrative division of the country. It is comprised by a number of municipalities. It can be equated to provinces in Canada or states in the United States.

⁶⁸ According to the census of 2018, the poverty rate of the department of Bolivar was 32,4 percent whereas in Sucre was 39,7 percent (DANE, 2019).

This study intended to understand how Sembrandopaz's adapted its activities and strategies for each of the communities.

- ***Peacebuilding initiatives:*** A second criteria was to choose a community with a history of strong peacebuilding initiatives and another with weak initiatives. The goal was to understand what are the elements that define a strong and sustainable peacebuilding initiative amidst intense violence (i.e. strategic relationships, actors involved, design, infrastructures for peace, etc).

Research Site Description

This section describes each of the communities of Alta Montaña and Libertad addressed in this thesis. Going from the general to the particular, this section first describes the municipality and its community.

Alta Montaña – Municipality of El Carmen de Bolívar.

El Carmen de Bolívar is the largest municipality in the Montes de María region and it is a strong political center. It is located in the department or state of Bolivar, in the San Jacinto Serrania, a mountain system that gives its name to Montes de María. It was founded on August 6, 1776 and, during most of the 19th century was an economic center for agricultural products such as black tobacco, avocados and yams, and economic activities that still remain vibrant there. According to the 2018 census, the municipality has a population of 67,461 inhabitants where 51.5 percent are men and 48.5 percent are women. Out of the total population, 80.77 percent live in the urban area and 19.23 percent in the rural area.

El Carmen was also one of the municipalities most affected by the violence. Both FARC and the paramilitary groups were present in Montes de María and the municipality

had the highest number of armed confrontations between 1995 and 2005. Four significant massacres took place in El Carmen: El Salado in 1997 and 2000, Hato Nuevo in 2000 and, Macayepos in 2000 all were perpetrated by paramilitary groups; it also had the highest amount of homicides, landmines victims and displaced population in the region. Currently, it is the municipality most affected by massive land trade (PNUD, 2010). With the support of the government, displaced families are currently returning to their land, despite the threats from criminal organizations.

El Carmen de Bolívar also has an important history in the *campesino* movement, and it is also the home of important peacebuilding initiatives. For instance, in 2003 the *Colectivo de Comunicaciones Línea 21*, a collective of grassroots communication organizations won the National Peace Prize for their work in community radio, television and video.

Alta Montaña: A campesino community that fosters reconciliation.

Alta Montaña is a corregimiento comprised of 55 veredas⁶⁹ in the high hills of the municipality of El Carmen de Bolívar (see Figure 4 below). Both paramilitary and guerrilla groups were present in the Alta Montaña dividing its community between those who were perceived as guerrilla supporters and those perceived as paramilitary supporters. It is a territory with a long tradition of campesino political participation and activism that later was instrumental in their process of reconciliation.

Agriculture is the main economic activity in Alta Montaña where avocados were the signature product before the conflict decimated the crops. In Alta Montaña, Sembrandopaz's activities focus on the strengthening of a community based platform

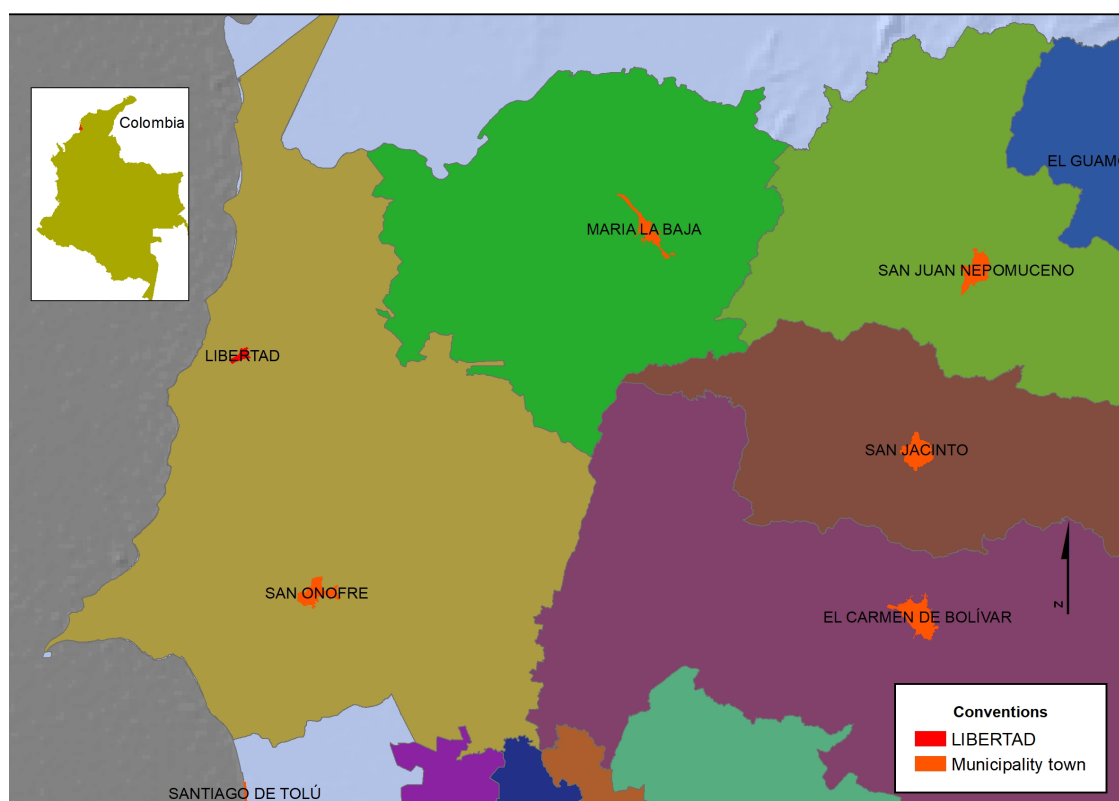
⁶⁹ See footnote 40 for definition of corregimiento and vereda.

conflict management, low social capital, high corruption levels, and weak and illegitimate leaderships (DNP, 2011).

Libertad: a Resistant Community of Campesinos and Fishermen

Within the municipality of San Onofre, Libertad is located in the Gulf of Morrosquillo in the Colombian Caribbean coast (see Figure 5). Its population is mainly Afro-Colombian and its most significant economic activities are farming and fishing. It was founded in 1933 after a dispute between the first inhabitants and colonizers who were after the control of a rich and strategic region. The dispute reached the courts who ruled in favor of the campesinos (Pardo García et al., 2018).

Figure 6. Geographical location of the corregimiento of Libertad, the municipality of San Onofre, Sucre



Source: DANE, Marco Geoestadístico Nacional 2012. Nivel de referencia de veredas 2015.(2020)

During the 1950s and 1960s the economy in San Onofre grew due to the construction of a highway that connects the departments of Sucre and Bolívar. In the 1980s, the construction of the Caño Limón or the Coveñas pipeline,⁷⁰ as well as the installation of a shrimp industry in 2005 (El Universal) boosted the economy of San Onofre, enhancing the strategic character of San Onofre as a bridge between the interior of the country and the Caribbean sea (Pardo García et al., 2018). Thus, during the 1980s, drug dealers bought massive amounts of land while paramilitaries arrived to confront the guerrillas and to make alliances with the new landowners for control of the drug trafficking.

The population of San Onofre is 93.8 percent Afro-Colombian, and 2.2 percent Aboriginal. This demography is reflected in its rich cultural traditions and political institutions. For instance, Libertad has a cabildo indígena (*Indigenous council*) and a consejo comunitario (*community council*)⁷¹ both are settings for community and political participation that are centered in strong cultural traditions.

San Onofre, and especially Libertad, was particularly affected by the paramilitary presence in its territory. Compared to other municipalities in Montes de María, the paramilitaries set up their command in San Onofre and, from 1997 to 2004 confined the population of Libertad, controlling people's lives, their mobility and, their cultural practices. They were especially brutal with women, girls and the LGBTQ community who

⁷⁰ The Caño Limón - Coveñas is a pipeline that transports oil from the east of the country near the border with Venezuela, with the Caribbean coast.

⁷¹ According to Law 70 of 1993 a consejo comunitario or *community council* is an administrative unit for the governance of a defined local area. The most common community councils are the Community Councils for Afro-Colombian Communities. The main objectives of the councils are to assign plots of land within the designed areas; to protect collective rights and cultural identity; protect natural resources within the borders of the council; choose the legal representative of the council, and mediate conflicts.

were subject to constant harassment and sexual abuse (CNRR, 2011a, 2011b; Pardo García et al., 2018). Homicides, torture, forced labor and land dispossession became the new normal during the paramilitary dominance of the region. Nevertheless, Libertad considers itself as a community of resistance that confronted paramilitarism through the recovery of their cultural practices.

Approach to the Research Site

I first contacted Sembrandopaz in 2015 via email and telephone to present the main idea for my study and to inquire whether they were interested in the research.

Despite the fact that many international organizations and universities have intervened in Montes de María, information about Sembrandopaz and its integration of peacebuilding and conflict transformation is still scarce. The Director of Sembrandopaz, Mr. Ricardo Esquivia, found the approach to the research innovative and useful for the organization. They had worked with John Paul Lederach for a number of years, yet their peacebuilding work has not been studied from a conflict transformation perspective.

Starting in September 2015, I conducted field work in different cities and communities. I visited Sincelejo, the capital of the department of Sucre, where Sembrandopaz has its main office. My goal was to ascertain a wide range of perspectives, opinions, and reactions from different actors such as Sembrandopaz's staff, NGOs, authorities, CSOs, local communities, and scholars. In Sincelejo, I also had access to public servants, NGOs, international NGOs and scholars with extensive knowledge about the history of conflict and peacebuilding in the region.

September 2015 was also a significant year for Montes de María since it was a period when local elections were taking place. I intentionally choose that month because I

wanted to see the dynamics of elections in Sincelejo, as it is one of the cities with the highest level of electoral corruption in the country. I also wanted to explore the electoral dynamics in Alta Montaña because a group of farmers were candidates for the local council. As I spent time with Sembrandopaz during the election process it allowed me to witness the difficulties the campesinos faced during the process and the role of Sembrandopaz as a supporter and guide to an already fragile peacebuilding process.

Despite the fact that the region is considered to be a violent place, I encountered no security concerns. People commented that as a result of the peace process, violence has decreased in the region and it was safe to travel around in the countryside. Nevertheless, I was very careful in following the recommendations of Sembrandopaz staff during my travels.

One of the challenges I faced during the fieldwork was research fatigue, as communities were tired of institutions, scholars and organizations questioning them repeatedly over the same topics without receiving any concrete outcomes or tangible benefits from the research. Communities call this activity “the vest parade” because every institution has its distinctive vest for the identification of its workers. During my visit, I came across researchers from the National Center for Historic Memory collecting the history of Alta Montaña, as well as colleagues from the Center for Research and Popular Education/Peace Program or CINEP/PP who were also doing a research in the area. The core of the peace agreement is its emphasis on victims and territorial peace. Consequently, community-based organizations have been overwhelmed with requests from individuals and organizations offering them resources in exchange for the opportunity to work with or to study with them. Unfortunately, this attention and demands has altered community-

based processes. As one of Sembrandopaz's coordinators stated, sometimes community organizations neglect their own activities because they are too busy responding to the needs of other organizations, especially if there is a prospect of financial resources.

In general, it was a privilege to meet such a varied array of people, that lived during the worst of the violence in Montes de María, and who are important agents of peace. Their invisible, and yet, visible work built in their everyday showed me the moral imagination of individuals and communities trying to creatively build something new with limited resources and the opposition from armed actors, landlords and people with interests in controlling the territory.

Data Collection

Document review

The research included reviewing primary and secondary sources as well as carrying out fieldwork in Montes de María. The primary sources used were newspapers, official documents from organizations and institutions, program reports, specialized webpages, judicial sentences, and policy papers.

Most of the secondary sources were books, research reports, theses, journal articles, videos and documentaries and official documents from organizations and institutions. It was not difficult to find information; the challenge was to identify the most pertinent and trustworthy information.

Semi-structured interviews

I applied different methods during the fieldwork, such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation, which allowed me to access the information

required, and to help the participants to feel comfortable during the process. Multiple methods empowered me to capture the participant's perceptions, feelings, and opinions.

Interviews are a qualitative method based on conversations between people where one person is the researcher (R. K. Schutt, 2004). There are exchange of information through responses and questions as well as the understanding of meanings on a specific subject (Hernández Sampieri, 2014). Interviews are particularly useful in exploratory research, because it allows the researcher to obtain rich information from people's views, feelings and meanings (Gray, 2004). In addition to gathering information, the interviews are useful for verifying information, and to complement other methods such as participant observation (Gray, 2004).

This thesis was exploratory in nature. Consequently, semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore different opinions, attitudes and points of view in the interviewees' own words (Gray, 2004; R. K. Schutt, 2004). Indeed, the researcher using semi-structured interviews is not bound to use standard questions or to follow a specific order that is the case with questionnaires and surveys. Instead he/she asks open-ended questions that respond to the researcher's list of issues that s/he is interested in. Semi-structured interviews empower the researcher to engage with people, ask follow up questions and explore different topics as the dialogue evolves (Gray, 2004; R. K. Schutt, 2004).

In Sembrandopaz I interviewed the staff, from the various professionals to the administrative staff, which gave me a complete view of the organization. In this process, Sembrandopaz assisted me to connect with different organizations and leaders in Alta Montaña and Libertad such as teachers, youth leaders, and council men, with whom I was able to have in depth interviews.

I made appointments with different organizations and individuals, and used the snowball sampling technique by which participants referred me to other individuals and organizations. Schutt (2004) defines snowball sampling as a method where informants themselves identify other people to be interviewed. For instance, while interviewing a university professor in Sincelejo I found that there were community conciliators in San Onofre which I contacted for an interview. It was a surprise to find community mediators in San Onofre, which I did not anticipate. I was also hoping to interview representatives from the Catholic Church but both in Libertad and El Carmen respondents reported me that priests are only present in religious festivities and activities such as baptisms and marriages. This snow sample technique is useful for hard-to-reach individuals and communities (R. K. Schutt, 2004). It helped me to reach people beyond Sembrandopaz's influence reducing the potential for bias, since one of my main concerns was that I would not be able to reach informants critical of Sembrandopaz.

I identified a list of peacebuilding actors to interview, organized by sectors. The goal was to have a broad selection of key actors and sectors representative of the communities. I also included both men and women, professionals and campesinos, as well as a range of ages and social classes. Table 3 presents the interviews completed according to sectors.

Table 3. Interview Sample

SECTOR	SAMPLE
Education	Corporación Universitaria del Caribe –CECAR- / <i>Caribbean University Corporation</i> Local school teachers in San Onofre and El Carmen and community mediators
Social Sector and NGOs	Sembrandopaz staff (4 interviews) Semana Foundation Fundación Desarrollo y Paz de los Montes de María/ <i>Peace and Development Foundation of Montes de María</i> <u>Campesino Organizations:</u> Red Montemariana : beneficiaries of the PDPMM (especially women) Espacio Regional de Construcción de Paz de Montes de María (ERCPMM) <i>Regional Setting for Peacebuilding</i> Plataforma municipal de organizaciones sociales /<i>Municipal Platform for social organizations</i> - Women of Mampuján - Peaceful Movement of Alta Montaña - JOPPAZ - JAC leaders - Jorge Montes. Leader of MOPAM <u>Cultural</u> Afromúsica Colectivo de Comunicaciones Línea 21 /<i>Communication Collective: Line 21</i>

Private Sector	Cement producers: ARGOS. Foundation “Crece en Paz.” El Carmen de Bolívar
Authorities and institutions	Historian in the city of Sincelejo. Currently member of the Truth Commission Mayor Office of San Onofre Mayor of El Carmen Justice House of San Onofre
Churches	Evangelical Pastor Mennonite Central Committee Volunteers

During the field-work, I conducted a total 20 individual face-to-face interviews and seven group interviews, for a total of 92 participants. Participants included Sembrandopaz’s staff and professionals, NGO members, schoolteachers, public servants, campesino leaders, youth leaders, and artists. (For a list of interviews, its affiliation and alias See Appendix A). From the face to face interviews 6 were men and 14 were women; but in the group interviews there were more men than women present. This in tune with an important finding in this research where male participation in public settings is more salient than female participation.

Of the people interviewed, 17 had professional training in universities or technical institutions; 12 had high school and two had primary school. Eleven of the participants were from Alta Montaña; five were from San Onofre, six were from Libertad and eight from Sincelejo.

The varied selection of informants allowed me to have a broad understanding of Montes de María and its history, as well as Sembrandopaz’s work in peacebuilding, its development, strengths and weaknesses.

The interviews asked open-ended questions inquiring about their understanding of the history of violence and peacebuilding initiatives in Montes de María, Sembrandopaz's origins and experiences in peacebuilding, theories of change, challenges faced, and vision for the future, among others. (See Appendix B for interview questionnaire both in English and Spanish). These unstructured interviews permitted me to follow up on the responses, and on other issues raised during the conversations. Interviews lasted between 40 and 120 minutes. I audio recorded all the interviews with the consent of the interviewees. Once in Bogotá I transcribed and processed all of the material following the instruction of University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board, as it will be explained in the section on Ethics Considerations.

Participant observation

Participant observation was also pivotal during the fieldwork because it allowed me to understand Sembrandopaz's dynamics and interactions in its peacebuilding work in Montes de María. Participant observation is a method where the "social processes are studying as they happened" (R. Schutt, 2003b, p. 282). The researcher observes and interacts with the people in their daily activities allowing him or her to better comprehend their understanding of the world. Since the researcher is immersed in the community, participant observation allows him/her to be vigilant of how his/her own biases, experiences and power shapes the analysis (Druckman, 2005).

From the beginning, I was aware that despite my connections with the territory through Sembrandopaz and the University of Cartagena I was an outsider and I was careful of not being intrusive or interfering with community's processes. Despite the fact that I am familiar with the work of Sembrandopaz, one of my main concerns at the beginning of the

fieldwork was cultural. I am a middle aged, middle class woman approaching rural communities that have suffered unimaginable violence. I am not from Montes de María, not even from the Caribbean coast. I am from Bogotá, the capital of the country, a big city of eight million people located in the mountains with a different cultural ethos. People from the coast usually refer to Bogotá as the “refrigerator” because of the weather as well as the perceived seriousness of its inhabitants. I was concerned that culture would be a communication barrier. Nevertheless, my connections with Sembrandopaz, the University of Cartagena and acquaintances I made since 1994, opened doors for me to people that otherwise would be difficult to interview. I frequently checked with Sembrandopaz if my work was creating any difficulties for the organization or the communities, and I followed their recommendations. I asked permission before participating in meetings and community activities. I took careful notes of my interviews and conversations I had with individuals and communities and in my journal, I reflected on what I saw and experienced.

The day I arrived I was invited to a meeting with Sembrandopaz staff where they were discussing the Holistic Plan for a Dignified and Solidary Life for the Youth of Montes de María (See chapter 6) This meeting introduced me to Sembrandopaz’s team and it was a perfect opportunity to understand their perspective of local peacebuilding within the context of peace negotiations with FARC and local elections. In subsequent days, I lived in Sembrandopaz’s main office and I was part of their ongoing peacebuilding work. I was invited to participate in meetings and workshops and I was able to accompany them in visiting communities in Alta Montaña and San Onofre.

While in Sincelejo, I stayed in Sembrandopaz’s house, which allowed me to better interact with the staff, volunteers and the many visitors that spent time there. During my

visits to San Onofre, I traveled by bus back and forth from Sincelejo, which allowed me to interact with people and listen to their stories and struggles. I also interviewed public servants, local mediators and students there. While in Libertad⁷² I traveled with Sembrandopaz on a motorbike and stayed in the house of the local doctor. I had the opportunity to meet members of the community council, young leaders and a youth group devoted to preserving their cultural traditions through theatre and music.

In Alta Montaña I lived in a guesthouse in El Carmen owned by a friend of a friend who, after the elections was appointed as Secretary of Education of the municipality. I also met people in the guesthouse that were involved in alternative media, which helped me with additional connections at the local level.

I also had the opportunity to attend conferences, forums and festivals related to Montes de María. I participated in a talk by Jorge Montes, one of the main campesino leaders of Alta Montaña who was incarcerated for his activism. I took part in the launch of the book *Aprendizajes de construcción de paz in Montes de María* and in a conference about peacebuilding and rural development. I also participated in the II Festival for Reconciliation in Montes de María that took place in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno and in the tribute from the Danish Embassy to Sembrandopaz and Ricardo Esquivia that took place in Bogotá.

⁷² Libertad is located one hour from the urban center. In this research, when I refer to my visits to San Onofre I am referring to the urban center of the municipality. When I refer to Libertad I mean intentional visits to the corregimiento.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an inductive process in qualitative research, whereby the researcher identifies patterns, themes, relationships and categories that emerge from the interviews and observations (Druckman, 2005; Gray, 2004; R. K. Schutt, 2004). Data analysis demands the researcher to make decisions about the relevance and organization of the information. In this context, it is an iterative and reflective process that begins right at the collection of the data and extends throughout the research. In the analysis, there is priority given to the subjects and the researcher's interpretations of their local milieu. Thus, I analyzed the data as I was collecting the information during the fieldwork. Indeed, while the interviewees were responding to my questions, I was reflecting on the different topics, patterns and relationships that emerged, as well as making connections with previous readings and identifying new issues that required follow up, or I discarded those that were irrelevant. I kept a journal where I collected my thoughts and analysis and that became very useful during the writing process.

After the transcriptions were completed, I carefully read the interviews several times, identifying the following common themes: violence in Montes de María; elements of conflict transformation; processes and strategies implemented in Alta Montaña and Libertad; challenges, outcomes, lessons learned, peace process and postaccord stage; and gender. This is a process called coding by which the researcher organizes large amounts of information into common categories that emerged in the process of revisiting the interviews and the field notes (Druckman, 2005; Gray, 2004). I did this process manually, organizing the information, first on an excel page and later in my notebook using colors according to each theme that permitted me to compare and contrast the different visions of

the people I interviewed. In this coding process, I always went back to the original document in order to guarantee accuracy and rigor.

Ethics Considerations

I defended my research proposal on July 2015 and on September the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba approved the research (See Appendix C. Approval Certificate). Since Montes de María is one of the regions most affected by the internal armed conflict in Colombia, ethical considerations and the well-being of my informants were a central concern. I was aware that my informants, their families and communities still feel the impacts of the conflict, and that they were in the middle of a national peace process that might ignite further violence in their region.

Gray (2004) noted that, “the ethics of the research concerns the appropriateness of the researcher’s behaviour in relation to the subjects of the research or those who are affected by it” (p. 58) In this context ethical concerns might arise at any stage of the research: from its planning, implementation, writing of the thesis and the reporting of the results, and includes the people directly interviewed and also the communities to which they belong.

During my fieldwork, I talked to different types of participants, such as campesinos, Afro-Colombians, victims, youth, teachers, social leaders, human rights defenders, and CSO and NGO workers, among others. I was concerned that my work might negatively impact my participants, especially their psychological and physical wellbeing. It was paramount that I ensured that the respondents felt safe participating in the research and I was vigilant about protecting their rights and their feelings.

Throughout the research, I complied with the following ethical principles: 1) Informed consent, 2) confidentiality, and 3) privacy. Gray (2004) reported that, “[t]he key to ethical involvement is not just obtaining consent but *informed consent*” (p. 59). Informed consent is the person’s voluntary participation in the research, knowing in full the objectives and scope of the research, the information being sought, who is funding the research, and the benefits and risks of participating (pp. 59, 400). To make sure that each person’s consent was informed, I gave my informants before each interview a consent form approved by the University of Manitoba’s ethics board⁷³ (See Appendix D. Consent Form - Spanish-). There is a stronger value on verbal communication because of the high illiteracy rate in the region. Consequently, I used oral consent procedures, where I read and I explained a Script for Oral Consent (See Appendix E. Script for Oral Consent English and Spanish). I handed each person a copy of the consent form with my signature on it. I also kept a signed copy of each form for my official records. I stated that all of the information they provided to me was both private and confidential. I assured them that only my advisor and myself have access to the data. In addition, I let each person know that I would not use her/his real names in the document and that at any point s/he could withdraw from the interview or/and the study. I was surprised that many interviewees had no objections to me using their real names. Nevertheless, for safety reasons, I decided to keep most of the respondents anonymous. The only exceptions are the names of public figures: Ricardo Esquivia, director of Sembrandopaz; Soraya Bayuelo, winner of the National Peace Prize in 2003; and Jorge Montes leader of the Peaceful Movement of the Alta Montaña.

⁷³ I sent the ethics office at the University of Manitoba an English and Spanish version of the form.

I asked each person's permission to tape record the conversation and I assured them that all records would be encrypted on a password protected computer and they would be kept locked in a safe place in my office. I was very careful in the management of the information. I personally transcribed the interviews and I kept my field notes safely locked. I identified interviews with a code and I used pseudonyms when quoting my interviewees.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study was limited as Sembrandopaz is currently working in five communities. However, it was a huge area for me to cover. Many of the veredas were difficult to reach due to the lack of proper means of transportation. Following my thesis committee recommendation, I narrowed the research to two of the four communities where Sembrandopaz is working, namely Alta Montaña and Libertad. Thus, the findings are not enough for generalizations about local peacebuilding in Montes de María. Nevertheless, they contributed to providing a different approach to conflict transformation and peacebuilding in Colombia.

I am also aware that communities are constantly changing and I acknowledge that this research provided a snapshot in time of both of these communities. If the research were conducted two years earlier or two years later it may have yielded different results.

Conclusion

The goal of this research is to explore conflict transformation and its contribution in local peacebuilding. The participant observation and interviews design of this research supported the research objectives of analyzing how and in what ways Sembrandopaz adopts, adapt or rejects the principles of conflict transformation. I choose the case study as the methodological approach because it allowed me to explore Sembrandopaz's approach

to peacebuilding and the various ways they understand and implement conflict transformation precepts. From the five communities where Sembrandopaz is working I choose Alta Montaña and Libertad because of the different manifestations of violence during the conflict and the different peacebuilding approaches Sembrandopaz took. This allowed me to compare and contrast how the organization adapts to the context and its different communities.

For the research, I chose semi-structured interviews and participant observation as the primary methods because they allowed me to approach a broad array of people from different ages, cultures and social classes, allowing me to better understand the region and its dynamics.

Considering the history of violence in the region and research fatigue by the communities, ethical concerns were my priority during field work. Sembrandopaz's advice throughout the field work allowed me navigate the process with sensibility and responsibility, as it will be illustrated in the following section where I explore Sembrandopaz's approaches to peacebuilding in Montes de María.

Chapter 6. Sembrandopaz's Peacebuilding Work

Introduction

This chapter presents data to provide an overview of the Sembrandopaz organization, its philosophy and its overall activities in the Montes de Maria region. Subsequent chapters will report on more specific findings related to the communities of Alta Montaña and Libertad.

History and Main Characteristics

The Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz--Sembrandopaz--is a nonprofit, community-based organization with its main office in the city of Sincelejo, Department of Sucre, in the Colombian Caribbean Coast. Officially incorporated in 2005, Sembrandopaz emerged from a sister organization based in Bogotá called Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta or Justapaz (*Christian Mennonite Association for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action*).⁷⁴ Thus, Sembrandopaz's presence in Montes de María dates back to twenty years work that has its origins in the work of the Mennonite Church in the region, strengthening community based organizations in areas such as peacebuilding, conflict resolution, education, governance, rural development, agriculture, environmental protection, food safety, humanitarian action, and trauma healing, among others (Pardo García et al., 2018; Sembrandopaz, 2019). Consequently, Sembrandopaz's history is intrinsically linked to the history of the Mennonite Church in Colombia and its coordinated work with Justapaz. Above all else, behind these efforts is the leadership of

⁷⁴ From 1990 onwards Justapaz has accompanied communities in the Caribbean coast through the promotion of nonviolence, conscientious objection, human rights, peacebuilding and restorative justice, among others (webpage + cinep book).

Ricardo Esquivia,⁷⁵ Sembrandopaz's team, and the commitment of the communities that work with the organization. A Mennonite himself, Esquivia has been working for peacebuilding in Colombia for more than 50 years, first in his practice as a lawyer and later as a social leader within the Mennonite Church in Bogotá and Montes de María.

In 1996 Esquivia was the Director of Justapaz in Bogotá, working with John Paul Lederach,⁷⁶ Vernon Jantzi⁷⁷ and Hizkias Assefa⁷⁸ in the development of a training program in conflict transformation called *Curso Permanente (Permanent Course)*. Esquivia was challenged by colleagues who questioned whether conflict transformation precepts could be implemented in contexts of violence. Esquivia and Lederach, along with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, developed a strategy in 1996 for building peace in the Montes de María region, where violence was increasing at alarming pace (Esquivia interview, October 14, 2015).

⁷⁵ Ricardo Esquivia is the Director and Legal Representative of Sembrandopaz. He is a human rights lawyer and a Mennonite activist for peace. He was one of the founders of the Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action (JUSTAPAZ) in Bogotá, where he was Director for 13 years. In addition, for 10 years he was representative of the Protestant churches to the National Peace Council, an institution created to advise the President of the Republic on issues related to peacemaking and peacebuilding. For 16 years he was general coordinator for the Commission on Human Rights and Peace of the Colombian Evangelical Council of Colombia on peace issues.

⁷⁶ John Paul Lederach earned a Ph.D. in sociology from Colorado University. He has devoted his professional life to the study and support of peacebuilding in countries in East and West Africa, as well as Colombia where he has worked since the late 1990s as well as Nepal, The Philippines, Northern Ireland and the Basque Country among others. He is the leading voice in conflict transformation and currently is an emeritus professor of International Peacebuilding from the University of Notre Dame.

⁷⁷ Vernon Jantzi is an emeritus professor at Eastern Mennonite University where he helped in the consolidation of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding. He has ample experience in Latin America and Colombia where he has supported organizations in peacebuilding and trauma healing.

⁷⁸ Hizkias Assefa is a well-known peacebuilder who has played an important role in the mediation of intrastate conflicts in Africa. He has been a teacher at Eastern Mennonite University and George Mason University. He established the African Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Network and helped in the consolidation of the conflict transformation program (now the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding) at Eastern Mennonite University.

The project called “Building a Peace Infrastructure for Montes de María” had the support of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace covering all the 15 municipalities of the region. Esquivia averred that the goal was to create the conditions, or peace infrastructure, so when the guerrillas signed a peace agreement with the government, there would be a strong foundation to support and implement the agreement. Esquivia remembered, “the core idea was to create space of trust where universities, communities, churches and the government could work together for peace” (interview, October 14, 2015). This meant going beyond ending direct violence or silencing the guns. It implied changing a system that had perpetuated violence in its different manifestations, from structural violence expressed through deep social, political and economic inequalities, as well as cultural violence shown in the marginalization of vulnerable groups such as women, youth, Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples.

This goal in Montes de María was daunting because paramilitary violence was at its peak. However, it was also a time when different institutions gathered to join peacebuilding efforts for the territory. UNDP, the governments of Bolívar and Sucre, the local office of the High Commissioner for Peace, and the Catholic and Mennonite churches worked together in this endeavor.⁷⁹ Esquivia recognized that it was a terrible time for the people in terms of violence but it was also an important opportunity for trust building with the communities and organizations in the region (interview, October 14, 2015).

Esquivia became aware that it was difficult to lead the program from Bogotá and in 2004 he resigned as Director of Justapaz and moved to Sincelejo to become Sembrandopaz’s coordinator.

⁷⁹ From the Catholic Church was present the Dioceses of Sucre

Sembrandopaz is committed to changing people's thinking and behaviors regarding political participation, community organization, and interaction with state authorities. Thus, for social transformation to happen Sembrandopaz encourages informed and active participation, inclusion and *buen vivir* (good living) (Sembrandopaz, 2019).

Esquivia highlighted that Sembrandopaz worked together with local and national authorities, aiming to promote sustainable economically independent and politically active communities (Sembrandopaz, 2018 141014_0003). In this context, Sembrandopaz's main goal was:

[T]o be a facilitative space to support and enhance civil society organizations in building a sustainable culture of peace through social justice, sustainable and integral human development and by being a pedagogical bridge between the people and state institutions in order to strengthen the public realm (Sembrandopaz, 2019).⁸⁰

As a "facilitative space" Sembrandopaz highlights the importance of relationship building but also the role of a facilitator as a non-controlling actor that provokes improbable dialogues between unlikely players fostering new ideas and resources for the protection of human rights, and the strengthening of civil society.

Internal Organization and Areas of Action

As a community-based organization working close with campesinos Sembrandopaz finds inspiration in nature to describe the values that support its internal organization and activities. Sembrandopaz uses a metaphor based on the mochuelo, a native bird from

⁸⁰ Translation by the author.

Montes de María known for its sweet song, to explain its internal organization. Sembrandopaz is organized into four interrelated dimensions that allow members to accompany communities in their immediate needs but also to help facilitate a long-term vision. The first two dimensions lie within the political culture and the generation of wealth and good living. These dimensions represent the mochuelo's wings, allowing the organization to take flight and navigate as political and economic actors. The bird has two legs that keep them grounded to their humanity and campesino traditions. Sembrandopaz notes that one of the legs corresponds to ethics and spirituality and the second is tied to aesthetics and the arts. The following sections explore each of these dimensions.

Political culture.

Political culture is the first wing of the mochuelo. Sembrandopaz believes that there is a need to redefine the concept and practice of politics in Montes de María from an understanding of politics as a corrupt system benefiting corrupt actors and their own interests, to a vision where power and its exercise benefit all sectors of society (Sembrandopaz, 2018). It is changing local people's perceptions away from a deep distrust of politics, the state and its institutions to a strong and vibrant democracy with a robust civil society at its core.

Changing the system is much more than a change of perception and good will. It implies deep structural political, economic and social changes in the way power is understood and exercised in the region; it is vast endeavor that surpasses the capabilities of a single NGO. Consequently, Sembrandopaz seeks to strengthen civil society as well as strengthening relations with organizations, institutions and communities as a strategy toward changing the power dynamics in Montes de María.

For this purpose, Sembrandopaz accompanies communities both in their own internal and organizational strengthening as well as in their interactions with local, regional and national authorities. Based on the ancient Greek tradition of the *agora*, Sembrandopaz created a setting for public dialogue, discussion and learning called Ágoras Ciudadanas (citizen *agoras*) in the communities where they work. The *agoras* are the main cells in Sembrandopaz's strategy for community participation, which converge in a regional meeting place called the Espacio Regional de Construcción de Paz de Montes de María or ERCPMM (*Regional Setting for Building Peace in Montes de María*). Its main goal is to educate individuals and communities in the main precepts of democracy, their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and to identify the main tools for political participation so that they could be able to influence decision making processes at the local, regional and national levels. As Esquivia stated, "they [the communities] have to understand what is the state and how it works; what are human rights, conflict resolution and peacebuilding; they need to learn how to dialogue and how to create trust. This is what we call political culture" (2019a conference at Javeriana University September 05).

The role of relationship building, improbable dialogues and accompaniment.

In addition to the *agoras*, Sembrandopaz acknowledges the role of various civil society institutions already present in Montes de María, such as NGOs, Juntas de Acción Comunal or JAC (*Community Action Boards*), churches, and social movements, among others. Sembrandopaz highlights the need to strengthen and join forces with them. As Ricardo Esquivia asserts, "it is better to add and not subtract or divide" (Informal conversation).

At the core of conflict transformation is relationship building, one of Sembrandopaz's main strategies in the region. Sembrandopaz works with regional and national government institutions, international organizations, private sector, churches, social organizations, NGOs and combatants. The more contacts they can make, the wider their impact is in Montes de María and beyond. Connecting and interacting with actors at different levels of leadership has allowed Sembrandopaz to gain visibility for them and the communities they work with to build alliances, maximize resources, and participate in high level decision making settings.

Using Lederach's (1997) Actors and Approaches to Peacebuilding model, Table 4. presents some of the actors with which Sembrandopaz has connections and their level of leadership within the structure of peacebuilding in Colombia (p. 39).

Table 4. Sembrandopaz's connections

Level	Actors in Montes de María
Level 1. Top Leadership Leaders with high visibility Military/ political/ religious	<u>Executive:</u> Peace Commissioner, Administrative Department for Social Prosperity, National Police – Navy, Office of the Attorney General. National Truth Commission, National Center for Historic Memory, National Council for Peace. <u>Legislative:</u> Congressmen: Iván Cepeda, FARC party <u>Judicial:</u> Peace and Justice Magistrates, Special Jurisdiction for Peace <u>Human rights:</u> National Ombudsman Office, Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado –MOVICE- (<i>National Movement of Victims of State based Crimes</i>) Ministry of Culture <u>International:</u> USAID, UNDP, SwissAid, Kroc Institute (Barometer project that follows up the Peace Agreement with FARC) <u>Embassies:</u> USA, Switzerland, Denmark, Canada
Level 2. Middle-range Leadership Leaders respected in sectors. Ethic/ religious leaders/ scholars/ intellectuals/ NGOs	Victim's Unit: Departments of Sucre and Bolívar <u>Media:</u> Semana Magazine (national circulation); Pacifista (alternative web portal) El Espectador (national circulation) <u>Universities:</u> <u>Universities in Sucre:</u> Corporacion Universitaria del Caribe <u>Universities in Bolívar:</u> Cartagena University Tecnológica de Bolívar <u>Universities in Bogotá:</u> Javeriana, National, Los Andes <u>Churches:</u>

	Catholic Church (Bishop's Conference), Mennonite Central Committee, Lutheran Church. <u>NGOS:</u> Justapaz, Cinep, RedProdepaz <u>Foundations:</u> <u>Foundations:</u> Fundación Crecer en Paz, Argos.
Level 3. Grassroots Leadership Local Leaders Leaders of indigenous NGOs / Community developers / Local Health officials / Refugee camp leaders	<u>Social Movements</u> ANUC: Campesino regional table of Montes de María <u>NGOs:</u> Narrar para Vivir Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres <u>Peacebuilding Initiatives</u> Bridges for Peace Citizens' Commission for Reconciliation Peace and Development Programs Community based councils of: Berrugas, Higueron, Libertad, Rincon del Mar, Boca Cerrada, Pajonal Cabildos Indigenas Victim's Association from Pichilin Victim's Table of Bolivar and Sucre. Association of Afrocolombian Peasants of Libertad Local Universities: University of Cartagena, CECAR, Technological University of Bolivar. Schools and teachers in the 15 municipalities in Montes de María

Source: Table assembled by the author during fieldwork.

These are not connections for connections sake, but a web of relations to exchange ideas, resources, mutual help, and conflict resolution. With some of these actors the connections are more regular, as it is with the members of the ERCPMM but with other are more sporadic, although not less significant, such as the National Council for Peace.

Strengthening civil society participation and fostering transformation requires more than knowledge about the state, its institutions, and its functioning. It also requires difficult conversations between actors divided by the dynamics of the conflict and with whom dialogue is almost unthinkable. Esquivia disclosed that Sembrandopaz fosters in their political dimension what they call “Diálogo entre improbables y reencuentro entre iguales

en desencuentro” (Improbable dialogues and reunion of equals in disagreement) (Sembrandopaz, 2018 141014_0003). Sembrandopaz identifies strategic organizations and leaders, as well as its strengths and weaknesses to allow this process to unfold organically. At the same time it acknowledges the cultural, ethnic, religious and gender based diversity of the communities, and especially the diversity of their experiences (Sembrandopaz, 2018). In its initial approach to peacebuilding, Sembrandopaz contacts educational institutions, JAC, grassroots organizations and churches. Once these organizations and communities get to know the work of Sembrandopaz, the organization reaches out to leaders and government institutions, many of whom have different visions and agendas.

Sembrandopaz plays an important role of accompaniment, which can be a delicate responsibility since it can collide with other type of leaderships in the community. For Sembrandopaz the role of accompaniment refers to provide support, advice and counsel to the communities while walking with them in their own processes. In a staff meeting with Sembrandopaz, they discussed the dilemmas they faced when accompany communities. In the discussion emerged that the person that accompanies cannot impose ideas, instead he/she has to be present asking difficult questions but also counseling and comforting, when needed. They also pointed out that sometimes Sembrandopaz’s role of accompaniment is not clear to the communities which can have adverse effects. Violeta, a participant in the meeting in representation of a civil society organization stated, “sometimes, because people feel that they are in good hands they do not take the effort to own and work for their movement, pending of what [Sembrandopaz] can do or provide” (group meeting October 26, 2015). Acknowledging these difficulties, Esquivia highlighted their role in accompaniment as follows (group meeting October 26, 2015):

I believe that the accompaniment role is to interpret the moment, to systematize the information that emerges and help in making it happen. Accompaniment does not replace leaderships. A leader can never be replaced. But I believe that there are moments, and it also happens to me, that you are so embedded in a situation that you cannot see things well, and you need a third party that helps you to see a different perspective.

In this quote, it is clear that accompaniment is a form of leadership that has the role to guide and to create possibilities for more visible types of leaderships. It is a delicate relationship since accompaniment is not meant to overshadow or block.

During the field work I witnessed Sembrandopaz's silent but strategic role of accompaniment. As it will be explored in depth in chapter 8, after a defeat in the local elections of 2015 where campesinos participated for a seat in the local council, I joined Esquivia and a Sembrandopaz staff member in a meeting with the campesinos. It was a difficult meeting where most of the time the Sembrandopaz representatives remained silent, only intervening to reflect on a previous intervention or asking questions when the situation was tense. For Sembrandopaz, accompaniment is a matter of relationship building especially in difficult situations. As Esquivia states: "when people are in its most difficult moments it is when they need a friendly hand in their shoulders that says 'go ahead!'... not later" (group meeting October 26, 2015).

These different approaches to foster a political culture allows Sembrandopaz to create the foundation for trust building and to foster dialogue between actors who have distanced themselves in such a way that dialogue is unlikely (2018).

The role of nonviolence in the political dimension.

The exercise of politics sometimes demands public action, and for Sembrandopaz such action has to be nonviolent to be effective. Esquivia recounted the following in his narrative:

We began to explain that it is possible to make demands without resorting to violence through nonviolent methods. We have discussed with the communities about the nature of politics and that in politics organization and discipline are important. So, we have told them that they have to mobilize but they have to mobilize in a completely different way than the rest of the people: in a peaceful way (interview, October 21, 2015).

The practice of nonviolence is a moral as well as a political stance by Sembrandopaz. Therefore, nonviolence has multiple purposes. First and foremost, it draws attention to the situation of violence in the region and demands that authorities respect human rights and fully implement agreements previously negotiated. Second, Sembrandopaz's commitment to nonviolence has allowed it to approach and work with different actors from local and national authorities, church leaders, international actors, CSOs, the military, and guerrilla combatants. Sembrandopaz has gained legitimacy and trust from amongst dissimilar actors, allowing the organization to create bridges between them.

The annual Reconciliation Festival illustrates this activity. Beginning in 2017, the festival takes place once a year during the first week of December as a setting where different actors in Montes de María meet to address the harms done during the recent violent past. It is a setting where victims and perpetrators share their stories, answer questions, and, if the situation allows it, acts of forgiveness and reconciliation may happen.

In addition to Sembrandopaz, different actors participate in the preparation for the Festival such as the Center for Historic Memory, the Truth Commission, UNDP, IOM, the governors of Sucre and Bolivar, the mayor's offices of the 15 municipalities of Montes de María, and of course former FARC and paramilitary combatants.⁸¹

Sembrandopaz supported various nonviolent mobilizations by local communities, which required preparation and tactics to educate participants about how to self protect against violence, how to respond nonviolently to provocations, how to coordinate with authorities, how to dress comfortably, how to march, and how to organize logistics around the events such as preparing meals and beverages. Table 5. below summarizes Sembrandopaz's support and participation in nonviolent demonstrations from 2009 to 2014.

Table 5. Semprandopaz's participation in nonviolent demonstrations 2009-2014

Date	Mobilization	Number of participants
December 2009	Community of Pichilín mobilized in Colosó	200 people
December 2012	Community of Mampuján demanded that the national government fulfill the reparations ordered by a Justice and Peace Judge.	600 people
April 2013	Communities from Alta Montaña mobilized in the city of Cartagena	1,000 people
September 2014	Communities from Alta Montaña organized a human chain along the highway in the municipality to protest the breach of the agreements from the April 2013 mobilization.	1500 people

Source: Tabulation from the following resources: Pardo García, M. F., Barajas Jaimes, J. A., Henao, L. C., & Huertas, J. D. (2018). *Aprendizajes de construcción de paz en Montes de María* (First ed.). Bogotá: CINEP/PP; also from interview October 21, 2015)

⁸¹ More information about the Reconciliation Festivals is located in Section 6.4.5

Communities realized through these collective actions that nonviolence works and they spread the news among other people and communities. Esquivia revealed the following in his narrative:

If people see that it works, other communities would like to replicate it. However, nonviolence implies many different elements: how to protect the group against violence, how to self-protect against violence, how to walk not to get tired, how to prepare the communities... we learned a lot” (interview, October 21, 2015)

Sembrandopaz (2018) fulfills the political dimension through three main concrete actions:

- Training in leadership, nonviolence, conflict transformation and human rights.
- Providing tools to identify, create or strengthen local capacities for peacebuilding and conflict resolution.
- Creating and/or strengthening settings or platforms for the promotion of community based participation and the generation of links within the communities and in relation with the state (Sembrandopaz, 2018, p. 2)

As a result of the political dimension Sembrandopaz (2019) highlights the following outcomes:

- Training more than 50 teams in local leadership in communities affected by violence.
- Creating platforms to coordinate CSOs in the region, and link them with regional and national institutions. One of these platforms is the Regional Setting for Building

Peace in Montes de María, an informal community-based network that gathers different peacebuilding organizations in the 15 municipalities of the subregion.

- Together with the Victim's Unit, regional and local authorities, and CSOs, it has created a setting for evaluating and following up on reparation processes for victims of violence.
- In 2011, it supported the leaders of Mampuján in a nonviolent demonstration to demand reparations as victims. As a result, Mampuján was the first community in Colombia to receive economic reparations within the context of the Victims' Law.
- Sembrandopaz assisted in organizing and developing various peaceful demonstrations (see Table 5 above).
- In 2013 Sembrandopaz supported leaders in the Alta Montaña in the organization of a nonviolent march towards Cartagena that resulted in 91 agreements between the local government and the Alta Montaña (see Chapter 8 for more information).
- Sembrandopaz is an active member of the Table for Guarantees for Human Rights Defenders in Sucre, and the Sucre Table for Peace. These are spaces where civil society meets with public and private institutions to address the situation of human rights in their communities.

In sum, Sembrandopaz believes that healthy political participation is the cornerstone of democracy, which demands the strengthening of civil society from within and in its relations with other organizations, the state, and the international community. This approach is different from the tradition in the region where violence tends to be the primary mean of exercising power. Sembrandopaz believes that by practicing democracy, change is possible, benefiting both the state and civil society equally (Sembrandopaz, 2018).

Generating Wealth Towards Good Living: From Vulnerability to Sustainability.

The mochuelo's second wing is called the Economy for Good Living. It is an approach to development and economic growth that goes beyond accumulating material wealth. Esquivia narrated this idea as follows:

How do we get our communities to realize that, in addition to political preparation they need to understand wealth and money? Money is usually mistaken with wealth, but we say no! Money represents wealth but it is not wealth. If money does not represent wealth, the lack of money neither represents poverty. We work with them to understand that their greatest wealth is the solidarity and cooperation that they could foster, because they have wealth, what they do not have is cash, but that wealth can be converted into money whenever they want (Esquivia, 2019b).

The focus on cooperation and solidarity highlights a different approach to development centered on people, relationships, and the common good. It is an option based on the tradition of the campesino movement and it is reminiscent of a past before violence broke the social fabric of society. Above all, it highlights that building relationships has political as well as economic connotations.

Consequently, Sembrandopaz's idea of economic development is inherent to social transformation because it responds to the basic needs of an already impoverished region, and it also provides a sense of self-worth and dignity to individuals and communities. The organization acknowledges that Montes de María is immersed in a context where large-

scale agriculture is becoming prevalent threatening a campesino culture and way of life, which is already fragile because of the internal armed conflict. Sembrandopaz strengthens local knowledge, and therefore supports agro-ecological alternatives where campesinos can compete in the marketplace and, at the same time, protect the environment and its communities. In this context, Sembrandopaz invests in community-based associations providing capital for productive projects. Esquivia explicated that Sembrandopaz has an experimental farm, Villa Barbara, located in the municipality of Morroa that promotes best practices in ecological agriculture (Sembrandopaz, 2018 ;41014_0003).

Some of the outcomes of the Generation of Wealth and Good Living dimension include the following:

- Support in the creation and development of more than 100 organizations in economic and agricultural development in the Caribbean Coast.
- Training in sustainable agriculture combining traditional knowledge and professional training, so that campesinos can be competitive in the market.
- An experimental farm for alternative, sustainable and ecological agriculture.
- Financing of productive projects, especially for youth; and
- Support of ecological initiatives

Despite the progress, Sembrandopaz faced important obstacles with regards to generating wealth towards good living. As it will be discussed further in Chapter 7, the lack of technical preparation, misunderstanding about the way international cooperation works, lack of communication, and bad luck were some of the main obstacles. At the core of this obstacle, there is also a discrepancy in Sembrandopaz's approach to the generation of wealth based on solidarity and mutual assistance instead of an accumulation of capital.

Ethic and Spiritual Dimension.

An ethical approach for Sembrandopaz implies the commitment and respect of human dignity above any political, social or economic impasse (Sembrandopaz, 2018). For example, Esquivia communicated that ethics are manifested in everyday life through acts of respect of one's neighbors, but also in the embrace of peacebuilding, nonviolence and protecting the environment (Esquivia, 2019b). The goal is to be able to guarantee future generations that they will have a place to call home where they can develop their full potential as human beings. Esquivia proclaimed that, "what do we gain if we win the war but we have a place with no water, with no birds or food?" (Esquivia, 2019b).

Sembrandopaz embraces a spiritual dimension that goes beyond any religious affiliation and acknowledges that all beings are connected, which implies humility, tolerance, and active listening. Esquivia averred that, "spirituality occurs when I accept the humanity in the other" (Esquivia, 2019b). Through psychosocial support, self-care, conflict resolution, trauma healing, and the recovery of historic memory Sembrandopaz contributes to the healing of the community (Sembrandopaz, 2018).

Aesthetic and Artistic Dimension.

The aesthetic and artistic dimension is the mochuelo's second leg. The fact that one is poor does not mean that one is not entitled to great beauty. Sembrandopaz explores art under this dimension as a means to connect with individuals and communities to foster peacebuilding and reconciliation. It appeals to a sense of vocation and surrender of the self to love and beauty. Under this dimension, Sembrandopaz supports a number of initiatives in theater, photography, painting, music, dance, gastronomy, and quilting.

During my stay in Sembrandopaz's house I met a group of high school students and their teacher rehearsing a play they wrote and produced together about their life in Montes de María. They were preparing for a theater youth festival in the city of Cali in the southwest of the country. Sembrandopaz also supported youth from Libertad to go to Bogotá for workshops on the theater of the oppressed. The goal was for these students to go back to their communities to share their experiences with other youth and replicate the experience so that other young people can benefit.

Photography is perhaps one of the main art activities that Sembrandopaz has supported. It has trained youth in photography so they can record campesino life in Montes de María. Some of the pictures are part of the Center for Historic Memory archives and were used in the report of the Alta Montaña titled “Un Bosque de Memoria Viva” (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018). Sembrandopaz has trained and supported youth groups in music and dance in order to preserve cultural traditions and as a means to close generational gaps. As it will be explored later, this work was particularly important in the community of Libertad where the youth merged traditional tunes such as bullerengue⁸² with modern dance and music styles such as rap, creating what they called bullenrap.

Gastronomy and quilting are also artistic manifestations in Mampuján where women of the community use them as part of their psychosocial therapy to overcome the trauma

⁸² Bullerengue is a dance, musical and festive practice that originated within Afro-Colombian communities in the Caribbean Coast. It emerged in the villages closer to Cartagena formed by runaway slaves, also called Palenques. From there it expanded to various municipalities in the departments of Bolívar and Córdoba. Some authors such as Guillermo Valencia states that the origins of Bullerengue was related with puberty and maternity rituals that changed with the social dynamics until it took on a festive character (Silva Ramírez, 2017). It expanded due to cultural exchanges such as religious festivities. Nevertheless, during most of the 20th century and due to the dominance of European values bullerengue, as well as other musical traditions, had to be whitened to be accepted in the dominant musical industry. In the 21st century where bullerengue has been strengthened as a political discourse of resistance by Afro-Colombian communities (Silva Ramírez, 2017).

of displacement and violence. Over time women in Mampuján created the organization *Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz* (Weaving Dreams and Flavor of Peace) that was awarded with the National Peace Prize in 2015.

Montes de María is home to different popular festivities. Music and dance play a fundamental role in the culture and the people's identity. However, violence silenced many of these communal artistic and expressive arts. Sembrandopaz's effort to recover and enhance artistic expression is a form of healing from trauma and also in strengthening the campesino identity.

Sembrandopaz's four dimensions not only represents their internal organizations, but it also lays down their theory of change. When questioned, Esquivá avowed that Sembrandopaz's goal is to change a lifestyle in individuals and communities in Montes de María that normalises violence in its different manifestations: from direct to structural violence. The goal is to move towards the establishment of sustainable communities, thus the importance to work on development, as well as in culture and political education (Interview, October 15, 2015). Each of the four dimensions explored are geared towards this holistic point of view. By addressing both the personal and relational with a vision of long term structural and cultural change, Sembrandopaz intends to disrupt the logic and dynamics of violence in the communities and the territory.

Sembrandopaz's internal organization

Sembrandopaz's organization has professional and administrative teams. The professional team consists of one director and three program coordinators. For example, in the Political Culture Area there is the coordinator who leads the activities in human rights, community outreach, lobbying and local people's participation. In this same area, there is

also a peacebuilding coordinator for Multitrack that is a six-year project in conflict transformation supported by the Swiss government. This professional organization also oversees community participation, relationship building and training.

For the area of Generation of Wealth, the organization also has a coordinator and an assistant in rural development that supervises productive projects providing technical assistance and commercialization support to campesinos and agricultural organizations. This area also has a professional that oversee Sembrandopaz's experimental farm, Villa Barbara.

In the arts and aesthetic area there are two artists that support different initiatives, especially the Festival of Reconciliation. It has an international coordinator who oversees international outreach with NGOs, international organizations and universities, especially for field visits. During my visit the organization also had two young volunteers from MCC's Seed Program,⁸³ one located in El Carmen de Bolivar and the other in Libertad. They remained with Sembrandopaz for a couple of years after their term finished.

In terms of administration, Sembrandopaz has an accountant, a legal advisor, and a janitor for Sembrandopaz's headquarters in Sincelejo as well as a foreman for the farm.

It is interesting to notice that Sembrandopaz's staff is mostly female, which was highlighted by one United States Institute of Peace's (USIP) officer as remarkable,

⁸³ Seed is a two-year program initiated by Mennonite Central Committee Seed for young adults interested in serving in local communities around the world assisting in peacebuilding, development, the environment, education.

considering that they operate in a very patriarchal context. It is a practice that separates Sembrandopaz from different organizations in the region and the country.

Sembrandopaz has its headquarters in the city of Sincelejo, in a big and comfortable house that in addition to the offices it also has accommodations for visitors. They recently acquired a house in El Carmen de Bolívar that serves as a community center for the campesinos in Alta Montaña, as well as the home of its volunteers.

Villa Barbara, Sembrandopaz's agroecological and experimental farm is located in the municipality of Morroa, 20 minutes from Sincelejo. It has crops on fruit trees like oranges, lemons, papayas and mangos as well as yucca, yams, and corn. It is also a sanctuary for endangered species such as turtles, birds and monkeys. Sembrandopaz's main goal with the farm is to educate campesinos in sustainable agriculture free of pesticides and the importance of the protection of the environment.

Funding for the organization comes mainly from the support of MCC and the development of projects with international organizations like Project Multitrack supported by the Swiss Cooperation Office and USIP. In addition to financial resources, Sembrandopaz values alliances the most. According to Ricardo Esquivia, communities are the main and foremost allies, followed by MCC who has been unconditional. Other important allies are USIP, UNDP, SwissAid, embassies such as Denmark, Mennonite churches in the US and scholars such as John Paul Lederach (interview, October 14, 2015). Esquivia acknowledges that the fact that organization's financing depends on external resources is problematic mainly for the stability of the staff and, as a result the dynamics in the community. Esquivia's dream is to be able to have an organization that is fully sustainable through the provision of services. At some point, Ricardo had the idea to rent

part of Sembrandopaz's house so people from the community they work with can develop a small business, like a coffee shop. But this type of ideas demand capital, time and training that the organization cannot provide.

Sembrandopaz's internal organization and action areas provides a picture of an organization that works for a holistic approach to peacebuilding and the needs of the region. The following section presents how Sembrandopaz develops its mission and vision in the region.

The Flight of the Mochuelo: Sembrandopaz's Presence in Montes de María

Sembrandopaz's approach to economic wealth, and political participation manifests differently in each of the communities they work in. It has been a journey in constant evolution based on the success, failures and the concrete needs of the communities.

This section focuses on Sembrandopaz's main strategies in Montes de María in general and their responses to the challenges they faced.

Building trust and economic development at the grassroots level: A humbling road of trial and error.

Sembrandopaz's strategies have varied over time to adapt to an ever-changing context of violence that is also rich in social movements and peacebuilding initiatives. It is a learning process full of achievements, failures and disappointments that illustrates the complex road of building peace in Montes de María.

When the Mennonite church, and later Sembrandopaz, began to work in Montes de María, around 1999, the political and social context in the region was tense. Communities

that were previously displaced were slowly returning to their lands, without any resources or support, and fearful for their safety. Estela, one of Sembrandopaz's program coordinators articulated that these communities were in survival mode where peace and development were not on their list of priorities (Interview, October 23, 2015).

Sembrandopaz's goal was to work with strategic actors located at different levels of leadership so it concentrated its work at the grassroots level by making contacts with strategic actors or what Lederach (2005) calls "the strategic who" that are "key agents of change" with the capacity "for building vertical and horizontal integration" (p. 183). The objective was to reach actors with a broader influence and scope allowing Sembrandopaz to expand its impact and their options.

Sembrandopaz focused on evangelical churches for these initial contacts because it has a strong background in the Mennonite faith and churches, both Catholic and evangelical, were the only social organizations that remained in the region during the peak of the violence. Indeed, social leaders faced persecution, threats and murder; communities were displaced, and even basic organizations like JAC were disbanded or turned ineffective. Moreover, Estela was of the opinion that church leaders were perceived as trustworthy and respectable, characteristics that violence had eroded in other community leaderships in the region (Interview, October 25, 2015).

The general strategy was to encourage churches to organize themselves to create non-profit associations for the implementation of development projects. Colombian Churches already have legal recognition as ecclesial entities, yet the goal was to organize them as associations so they can access resources from the state and especially from the international community. Initially, Sembrandopaz worked with 250 evangelical churches

from 30 different denominations establishing 150 Associations that they called Asociaciones para la Vida Digna y Solidaria or ASVIDAS (*Associations for Dignified and Solidary Life*). Sembrandopaz believed that dignity or the acknowledgement of self-worth is essential, yet it is not enough, so it included the solidarity element in ASVIDAS's name. Dignity refers to the personal dimension and the recognition of the impact of past harms, whereas solidarity is understood as mutual help and support between individuals with common interests, and it responds more to the social dimension. Sembrandopaz recognized that dignity and solidarity are essential, and in need of attention.

ASVIDAS emerged within the context of the Third Peace Laboratory. Ricardo Esquivia avowed that the aim was to encourage churches to advance their social dimension through strategic organization, to allow them to be central actors in the implementation of peacebuilding and development in the region.⁸⁴ “We said we were creating an infrastructure for peace,” Esquivia stated. The concept of infrastructure for peace as presented by Lederach in his book *Building Peace* (1997) originated in his work in Central America and it was well received in Colombia by scholars and practitioners to refer to the coordination and networking among institutions, communities, individuals and the relationships that bind them together. The early context of Sembrandopaz's development illustrates its intention to be strategic in reaching out to different actors and in going beyond local or regional settings.

⁸⁴ In these early stages, the work was limited to evangelical churches to build trust in communities that distrust outsiders. However, Sembrandopaz later expanded its action by including other organizations such as schools, public institutions and JAC, but always including them through the action of the churches.

Once Sembrandopaz contacted the pastors and the churches agreed to be part of the initiative, the organization worked with a group of no more than 25 people per church in an intense training in the analysis of the internal armed conflict, its origins, manifestations and dynamics, and especially in creating awareness of the plight of the victims. It also highlighted that it was a Christian duty to help those in need. In this context, and based on Bible teachings they discussed topics such as human rights, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, peace education, and nonviolence. Esquivia stated that, “we used the Bible to understand these concepts, because if the Bible already presents a code of ethics why would we invent a new one?” (Interview, October 14, 2015).

Sembrandopaz’s process with ASVIDAS was a humbling experience teaching its members about the hardships of building peace from the bottom-up. First, people were initially enthused with the proposal to create various ASVIDAS in Montes de María, yet as Esquivia asserts, “enthusiasm is interesting, but enthusiasm alone, can hurt. We learned that enthusiasm has to be realistic.” Few of the ASVIDAS managed to work with the state and others received resources from the Third Peace Laboratory. For example, the ASVIDAS of San Onofre obtained a grant for \$180 million pesos, yet it mismanaged the money because of inexperience and lack of financial education. This ASVIDAS decided to invest its money in the production of watermelons and chickens. However, a drought ruined part of the watermelon crops and thieves stole some of the produce. On the other hand, the chickens died due to the lack of proper care. As a result, Sembrandopaz had to return the 180 million pesos to the Third Peace Laboratory.

Other ASVIDAS could not even launch and, despite the hard work, they did not receive a single dollar. Esquivia recounted that conflict emerged within ASVIDAS’

members as they claimed that Sembrandopaz had misled them (Interview, October 21, 2015). It was a hard blow to Sembrandopaz's main goal to build strong relationships with, and within the communities creating a loss of trust in their work. This setback demanded an extra effort from Sembrandopaz to rebuild relationships with these nascent ASVIDAS.

The dynamics between international cooperation and local expectations was also challenging for the ASVIDAS and Sembrandopaz. The EU's institutional demands on local community groups attempting to access their resources proved to be difficult for community based organizations to comply with, mainly because they were not trained in project management. One of Sembrandopaz's professionals stated that, "The communities thought that to get funding it was enough just to organize themselves. They did nothing; they did not train themselves [in project management] and many of the organizations failed" (Interview, October 23, 2015).

As a result of these obstacles, the ASVIDAS were dismantled little by little. Out of the original 250, the number decreased to 15 as competition for external aid among the NGOs and CSOs culled their number. Currently, Sembrandopaz is working in five communities and each has an ASVIDAS association.

The cutback in ASVIDAS also reflected a change in Sembrandopaz' strategies. Sembrandopaz decided to assign each ASVIDAS a quota in order to strengthen decision making processes, and its members decided the type of project to invest the money in. In addition, each ASVIDAS established a common "life fund" fed with contributions from its partners as well as from the sales of what is produced. The idea was to strengthen the fund so the community could gain financial independence from Sembrandopaz. However, ASVIDAS members mismanaged the resources by assigning the projects to friends and

family. Esquivia made it known that “you have to be careful when you talk about projects, because people understand it as a donation” (interview, October 21, 2015). After these experiences Sembrandopaz decided not to give money directly to the ASVIDAS but to partner with them, with Sembrandopaz operating as an investment partner. The idea is to create a society where they work together and share the profits, without charging any interests to local community groups.

Sembrandopaz’s idea to work in partnership with communities through ASVIDAS proved to be a better strategy. At the time of my fieldwork Sembrandopaz was developing 89 projects that allowed it to be closer to their original objective to have strong, sustainable and independent communities. In this regard, Sembrandopaz’s agricultural specialist stated that, “knowing that they are producing, that they have food, that they can sell, that they have their economic independence, dignifies them a lot” (interview October 23, 2015). In addition, she noted that they feel empowered when they are partners with an organization that supports them and treats them like equals.

An unexpected result of ASVIDAS’s organizational process is its psychosocial effect. Since many local people were victims of violence, they felt alone, abandoned and forgotten. Sembrandopaz’s agricultural specialist expressed the view that ASVIDAS provides a safe space where people could share their experiences during violence and yearn for the past because “they feel they can talk... at least they can talk” (interview October 23, 2015). The village of Mampujan’s ASVIDAS through their initiative “Mujeres tejiendo sueños y sabores de paz” (*Women weaving dreams and flavors for peace*) focused their work on the psychosocial support for women victims of violence through quilting and the promotion of their culinary tradition. As previously mentioned, in 2005 this ASVIDAS

won the National Peace Prize for its work in memory and reconciliation and it is working to create a museum of memory dedicated to the victim's of violence in Montes de María in general and in the Mampuján in particular (Pardo García et al., 2018).

In sum, Sembrandopaz's economic strategy first focuses on helping communities to ensure food safety while the second step is the generation of resources so that communities have a good livelihood and are able to support their families. The third stage is towards the transformative development of strong and sustainable communities, through cooperatives and mutual assistance. Behind this plan, the role of the community organization is fundamental. This is illustrated by Nathan who is a farmer from the village of Macayepo who states that, "when Sembrandopaz came they supported us with seeds and tools. Then, they said 'we really want to work with you, but you need to be organized' " (interview, November 22, 2015). Sembrandopaz acknowledges that it is still in the first stage in the communities where it is working; ensuring food safety for individuals and their families. It acknowledges that it is not enough to provide resources and technical assistance if the community as a whole is not strengthened through its active participation in the process. Thus, Sembrandopaz is working on the design of a holistic plan called Plan de Vida Digna y Solidaria para los Jóvenes de los Montes de María (*Holistic Plan for Sustainable and Dignified Life for the Youth of Montes de María*) that encompass activities in the immediate, medium and long terms. The community organization is a cornerstone for building peace. Its main objective is the transformation of social and cultural practices that perpetuated inequality in the region. Sembrandopaz's professionals were of the opinion that this project focuses on the youth that will be responsible for the transition of

the society from violence to peace (group meeting with Sembrandopaz staff, October 26, 2015).

Holistic plan for a dignified and solidary life for the youth of Montes de María.

Sembrandopaz's long-term peacebuilding strategy focuses mainly on youth. They acknowledge that the armed conflict in Colombia was the result of the combination of different dynamics, actors and processes, but its roots are in the deep social inequalities that have prevailed for decades in Colombian society (group meeting with Sembrandopaz's staff, October 26, 2015).

Colombia is a weak peripheral state with poor political leaders that did not create an inclusive nation, or provide access to land and the inclusion and the participation of civil society. These are some of the causes behind the armed conflict. In fact, the Colombian state through its policies and actions or inactions have supported and promoted different manifestations of direct, to structural and cultural violence. This vicious circle of violence and armed conflict exacerbated social conflicts and vice versa, creating the foundation for a culture where violence was normalized.

These different types of violence have particularly affected the youth. Laura works for Sembrandopaz, and she notes that every actor in the armed conflict, guerrilla, paramilitaries and the state, have used young people to sustain the war and to strengthen their power (group meeting with Sembrandopaz's staff, October 26, 2015). Once the youth are socialized with these military skills and when they face real poverty, it is not difficult to imagine that criminality and drug trafficking become an opportunity for young people to make it out of the barrios. In this way, the youth are trained with values and attitudes that normalize and favor violence as an accepted practice in society. If these learning

frameworks and patterns are not changed, the different manifestations of violence will continue in the following generations. Laura believes that to break the cycle of violence, the youth needs to receive different messages and different opportunities (group meeting with Sembrandopaz's staff, October 26, 2015).

The Holistic Plan is a peacebuilding approach to respond to the current needs of the region with a long-term vision of cultural transformation where the youth play the role of building bridges between the generation that lived the violence and the post accord generation. Indeed, Esquivia reported that the Plan focuses on youth because it is an age group that will always be looking forward and has a vocation towards the future. This is what he had to say on the issue (group meeting with Sembrandopaz's staff, October 26, 2015):

Sembrandopaz opts for an individual and collective work that promotes processes of change for the transformation of perceptions of violence and conflict. We seek the creation of infrastructures of peace that consolidate sustainable communities based on the principles of nonviolence. Our main objective is to avoid the repetition of the victimizing actions that hit the region. Thus, we focus our efforts on the youth of Montes de María. We believe that if they are exposed to different concepts and practices, young people can change the teachings and behaviors they have learned from their parents and grandparents. For this to happen, change at the individual and structural level is required. The Holistic Plan of a Dignified and Solidary Life for the Youth of Montes de María is the proposal of Sembrandopaz to promote and develop these changes.

Esquivia explained each of the components of the Holistic Plan for a Dignified Life for the Youth of Montes de María as follows:

It is holistic because it integrates what Sembrandopaz considers to be the four dimensions that are important: political culture, the generation of wealth and good living, ethical and spiritual, and aesthetic and artistic. In fact, the Holistic Plan realizes Sembrandopaz's four dimensions. It is a Plan because it is long-term strategy that integrates individuals and communities from Montes de María, as well as institutions and international cooperation and organizations. It is oriented towards dignified life because it places emphasis on human rights in its broad sense including civil and political rights as well as socioeconomic and collective rights. The Holistic Plan relies on two main foundations that are in tune with Sembrandopaz's internal organization and areas of action. The first is a social and ethical commitment, and the second is sustainability (see Figure 6).

1) Social and ethical commitment: Sembrandopaz notes that every action must be based on ethical and social principles that guide the actions of its activities, allowing cultural change that privileges peace practices over violent practices. In this context, the ethical commitment comprises the development of three fundamental elements:

- **Nonviolence:** It is a commitment for respect for human life and dignity. It has a subjective and a strategic aspect. From a subjective point of view, it implies that the youth acknowledge and accept the principles of nonviolence. It also implies a personal stance to not use violence under any circumstance as well as rejecting the use of weapons and participating in war. From a strategic point of view,

nonviolence demands discipline and assertiveness in actions. Juan, a community leader communicated that young people who participate in the Plan will have a commitment to conscientious objection (group meeting with Sembrandopaz's staff, October 26, 2015).

A commitment to nonviolence also translates into the implementation of restorative justice as a mechanism to address and heal past harms. It is the acknowledgement of a traumatic history in Montes de María and it dignifies its people, its suffering, and it allows communities and regions to move forward.

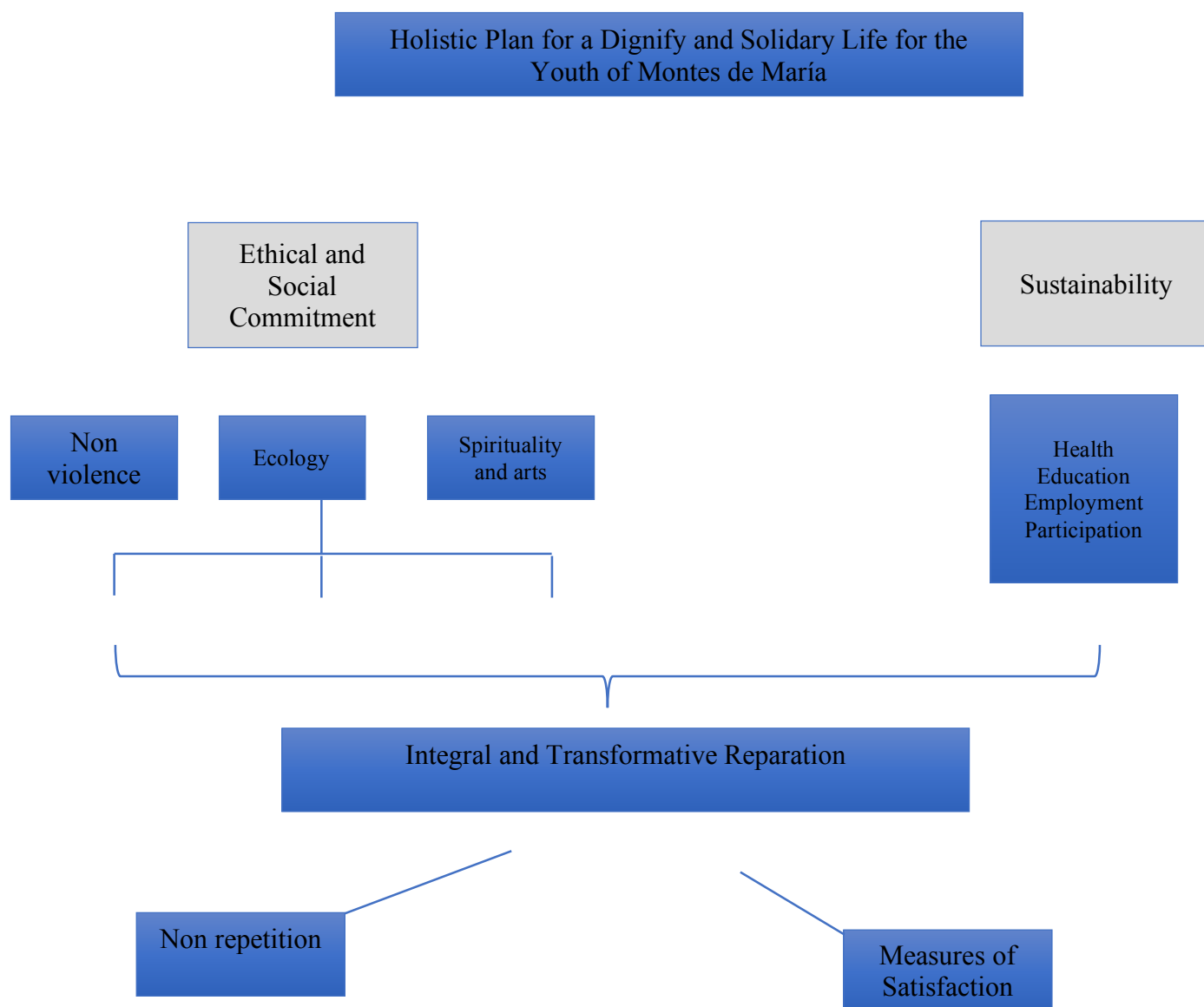
- **Ecological Commitment:** The dignified life must be lived in a concrete place, which demands taking care of the environment. In addition to a commitment to nonviolence, young people will deepen their awareness of the care and restoration of the environment and the implementation of ecological practices of agriculture. Dora reported that being aware of the environment is also part of the commitment to nonviolence (group meeting with Sembrandopaz's staff, October 26, 2015).
- **Spirituality and Art:** Spirituality and the arts respond to a deep connection with the culture and the traditions of Montes de María and they have the potential to help youth to reconnect with the territory and its communities.

2) Commitment to Sustainability: In order for young people to develop the social ethical aspect of peacebuilding, it is essential that their economic wellbeing is guaranteed. The state and society must guarantee people their human rights, especially their rights to health, work, education and political participation.

The Holistic Plan is the channel for transforming the territory over the long term. It envisions structural changes focused on the youth as a guarantee for not returning to violence. Norberto articulated that there have to be legal and institutional transformations for change to happen as well as a financial commitment from the state, so that young people have the assurance that they can devote their time for social transformation without worrying about the wellbeing of their families (group meeting with Sembrandopaz's staff, October 26, 2015).

Colombia has a historic opportunity to go beyond mere financial reparations for the violence inflicted, and to have a long-term integral vision where reparations are a transformative opportunity to address existing structural inequalities. Sembrandopaz calls this type of reparations Reparación Integral Transformadora (*Integral and Transformative Reparations*).

Figure 7. Holistic Plan for a Dignify and Solidary Life for the Youth of Montes de Maria



Source: Meeting with Sembrandopaz staff (group meeting with Sembrandopaz's staff, October 26, 2015).

From relationship building to institution building.

Although Sembrandopaz initially focused its work with the creation of ASVIDAS as a clear example of a bottom up peacebuilding approach, it also built connections with regional, national, and international institutions. One of Sembrandopaz's staff members

emphasized that behind each accompaniment Sembrandopaz goal is to find and foster connections. She had the following to say on the issue:

Our goal is to find connections and commonalities. We identify the initiatives that we believe they have potential to build peace in the long term. Sembrandopaz has a motto that says “*we enable life projects*”. We try to make things happen, to promote, inform and facilitate connections... this is something that is more active than mere accompaniment. Accompaniment is a word that doesn't mean anything anymore (group meeting with Sembrandopaz's staff, October 26, 2015).

This section explores Sembrandopaz's leadership in the creation of two key efforts that, in terms of Lederach, integrated actors located at different levels of influence (local, regional, national and international) with a vision of immediate, medium and long-term peacebuilding. The first is the creation of the Programa de Desarrollo y Paz de los Montes de María or PDPMM (*Peace and Development Program of Montes de María*) an institution created to channel the resources, especially those coming from international intervenors to support peacebuilding and development work in order to respond to violence in the region. The second is the creation of Platforms for improbable dialogues in the form of the Espacio Regional de Construcción de Paz (*Regional Setting for Building Peace in Montes de María*).

Programa de Desarrollo y Paz de los Montes de María – PDPMM- (Peace and Development Program of Montes de María.

Relationship building is a key characteristic of the Mennonite Church's work in their peacebuilding efforts in Colombia, initially through Justapaz and later through the

work of Sembrandopaz in Montes de María. Esquivia stated that during the 1990s, when he was Director of Justapaz in Bogotá, he made connections with the UNDP office in Cartagena, the Department of Bolívar and Sucre, the governorship of Bolívar Peace Table, and the Archdiocese of Bolívar as part of its efforts to strengthen its peacebuilding work in Montes de María. The Office of the High Commissioner for Peace was also instrumental in facilitating connections with local mayors and departmental authorities.

These different actors, with significant participation from the Mennonite church through Justapaz, joined the efforts to design a broader project to address the sources of conflict in Montes de María. They called this project the Plan Integral de Desarrollo y Paz de Montes de María (*Integral Plan for Peace and Development in Montes de María*). In this context, the UNDP financed a preliminary study developed by the University of Cartagena to research the region to determine its main needs (United Nations Development Program, Corporación Territorios, & Universidad de Cartagena, 2003). The study was called PROMONTES and it became the compass for the future intervention of these actors in the region that culminated in the creation of the Fundación Desarrollo y Paz de los Montes de María or FDPMM (Peace and Development Foundation of Montes de María) and later the Programa de Desarrollo y Paz de los Montes de María or PDPMM (*Peace and Development Program of Montes de María*).

The PDPMM followed the model of previous Peace and Development Programs in different regions of the country and in 2002, these programs joined together to create the Redprodepaz, a national conglomeration of networks of all the Peace and Development Programs in Colombia. Currently this network comprises 27 PDP in 609 municipalities in

the country. The Mennonite Church, through Justapaz is still an active member of Redprodepaz, but not Sembrandopaz.

Redprodepaz is a meeting place for the various Peace and Development Programs to exchange experiences and to coordinate the peacebuilding processes in the country (Barreto Henriques, 2016). It gathers together dissimilar actors such as community based organizations, the government, the private sector (oil and electric companies), NGOs, CSOs, churches and international agencies (Webpage Redprodepaz). Redprodepaz is a multilevel platform that integrates actors from different levels of leadership at the local, regional, national and international levels that complies with Lederach's (1997) transformational conflict resolution method (Barreto Henriques, 2016).

The Mennonite Church, through Justapaz and under the leadership of Ricardo Esquivia, was instrumental in the creating RedProdepaz. Esquivia remembered the creation of the network, "we gathered in the office of a Canadian oil company in Bogotá and we created RedProdepaz. Later, difficulties emerged. The navy rejected my participation [in RedProdepaz] because they thought I was going to divert money to the guerrillas; they thought I was a guerrilla commander", which he was not (Esquivia, Interviews October 14 and 21, 2015). This illustrates the constant stigmatization of Colombian social leaders by governmental officials in general and in Montes de María in particular. Years later, Esquivia requested the Colombian authorities to provide him with information about whether he was under surveillance. They sent him a 200-page report of his telephone conversations and his movements in the city.

The process that culminated in the creation of the PDPMMA and RedProdepaz was not smooth. Although the Mennonite Church was one of the founders of the FDPMMMA

with the Catholic Church, there were frictions with the latter, and eventually Sembrandopaz was excluded from the process. Esquivia was of the opinion that, “I was naïve to believe that it was possible to work together. Just as evangelical churches can be exclusive so it is in the Catholic Church. They oppose those of us who were evangelical, and closed the doors to us. At some point, they did not assign any projects or resources to us” (Esquivia, Interviews October 14 and 21, 2015). Eventually, Sembrandopaz was left behind not only in the allocation of resources but also in the decision-making processes of the Peace and Development Program. Another lesson learned from this experience is that institution building is not enough if mistrust between its members remains. The friction between the Catholic and Evangelical Churches is an intrinsic part of the cultural and historical legacy of Colombia that has had an immense impact that hinders individual and collective action in Montes de María, as the case of PDPMM clearly illustrates.

These adversities helped Sembrandopaz to be more assertive and strategic in relationship building. The Espacio Regional de Construcción de Paz de Montes de María (*Regional Setting for Peacebuilding in Montes de María*) is another example of relationship building that culminated in a platform where diverse actors exchange knowledge and coordinate activities in the region.

The reliance on funding from international donors and the lack of strong relationships within the communities were important lessons learned in this process. As Mary Anderson (1999) has extensively documented international aid especially through financial resources may create dependency in communities that are not strong enough to navigate participate economic dynamics.

Platforms for improbable dialogues: The Espacio Regional de Construcción de Paz de los Montes de María –ERCPMM-.

The creation of platforms geared towards social transformation at the local, regional and territorial levels, is where Sembrandopaz's political dimension is particularly evident. One of the most salient platforms is the Espacio Regional de Construcción de Paz de los Montes de María –ERCPMM- (*Regional Setting for Peacebuilding in Montes de María*). It was created under the leadership of Sembrandopaz in 2014 and with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace and Semana Foundation.⁸⁵ The ERCPMM defines itself as a setting where different social actors in Montes de María harmonize their voices and actions towards reconciliation, memory, human rights, the protection of the territory, and the strengthening of social participation in the region (Espacio Regional de Construcción de Paz de los Montes de María, 2019).

The ERCPMM emerged within a context of expectation about the peace dialogues and the imminence of a postaccord stage that demanded a process oriented thinking. Andrés is a member of the Truth Commission and a scholar from Sincelejo. He had the following to say on the issue:

... in the Victim's Table they told us: *hey, what about the postaccord* [stage]. We want to talk about the postaccord stage, because postaccord is just a name for a period of time and the processes that need to be strengthen are peacebuilding and reconciliation (Interview, November 27, 2015).

⁸⁵ Semana is one of the main political magazines in the country. The Semana Foundation is a private organization linked with Revista Semana (Semana magazine), one of the main magazines in the country. The Foundation worked in Montes de María, especially in the corregimiento of El Salado.

In this context, the ERCPMM emerged in a context where the High Commissioner for Peace begun consultations with regional organizations for the development of the concept of territorial peace. In fact, the ERCPMM initially was called Grupo Territorial de los Montes de María (*Territorial Group of Montes de María*). Andrés is also a member of the ERCPMM. He remembers this issue as follows:

There is a whole dynamic in this step towards regional peacebuilding. Perhaps you have heard the story that we first called ourselves *The Territorial Group of Montes de María*. We decided to have a meeting with people from different regions to discuss the concept of territorial peace. There is [an official] document with which I believe we all philosophically agree.

But they [the Office of the High Commissioner from Peace] wanted to ask us how to implement it in the territory. The response from the territory was that that was not going to happen in a half a day workshop. We had to continue with the discussions. Together with the Semana Foundation, the High Commissioner for Peace continued promoting the debate. It is within those meetings where the *Territorial Group* emerged (Interview, November 27, 2015).

During these discussions, the participants acknowledged that the concept was a significant development intended to include local voices. However, they believed that the High Commissioner's proposal was stiff and institutional, and the regions demanded a more flexible approach. During a meeting with the UNDP's special advisor, Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild, Ricardo Esquivia explained that their informal gatherings were "a regional

setting for peacebuilding,” an expression that was immediately adopted as the official name for the initiative (Interview, November 27, 2015).

ERCPMM’s main goal is to create and consolidate a network of trust in Montes de María where strategic actors gather to discuss and plan their peacebuilding actions based on the realities of the region in order to become a key factor in the mobilization and change. Andrés recounted that the participants see it as a setting for rational, not emotional debate, and a setting for deep deliberative democracy (Interview, November 27, 2015).

The ERCPMM is a meeting place where different actors from the 15 municipalities in Montes de María get together to discuss their concerns in terms of peacebuilding, to plan concrete actions, and to create the setting for improbable dialogues between actors that otherwise would not meet. Indeed, in 2018 the ERCPMM organized the II Reconciliation Festival of Montes de María, a public event where former guerrilla members, paramilitaries, and navy commanders met with victims from Montes de María to talk about what happened to them during the violence, why it happened, the impact on individuals and communities, and how they envisioned the future for Montes de María. The organization of the Festival demanded improbable dialogues between former enemies, and it was also an opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation to be embedded in Montes de María.

The Festival took place in the school in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno. Victims from all over Montes de María were present, as well as representatives from the Truth Commission, the National Center for Historic Memory, regional universities, and former FARC commanders as well as the commander of the Colombian Navy who was active during the peak of violence in Montes de María. Paramilitary commanders were also

invited. Although a.k.a Juancho Dique, former commander of the Heroes of Montes de María block and who is currently serving jail time, confirmed his participation in the process he did not take part in the dialogue.⁸⁶

The central event was a circle process where victims and perpetrators talked about how and why they arrived in Montes de María; what their life was like before and during the violence and, what was their role in the violence. The participants in the circle were equally men and women, and they belonged to different organizations. The rules were precise as only participants in the circle could talk, people outside the circle were observers that operated as support groups and note field note takers.

So far, the ERCPMM gathers more than forty community based and social movement processes, especially from the campesino, Afro-Colombians, Aboriginal, victims, women, youth and LGBTQ movements. Public institutions as well as the academy are also active participants in the ERCPMM. It is important to highlight the participation of the National Center for Historic Memory, the transitional justice tribunal, the Truth Commission, the Victims Unit, the University of Cartagena, the Technological University of Bolívar, the University Corporation of the Caribbean, the Kroc Institute for International Peace from the University of Notre Dame, and the municipal reconciliation table, among others.

For these organizations from outside the region, the ERCPMM is an important vehicle for joint efforts with social organizations in Montes de María. For instance, the Truth Commission drew upon the ERCPMM to connect with groups of victims and

⁸⁶ Juancho Dique did not participate in the Festival in 2018, but he did take part in the 2019 festival that took place in the municipality of San Onofre, in the Department of Sucre.

peacebuilding groups to document the impact of violence, as well as experiences of peacebuilding and resistance. The Center of Historic Memory prepared its report about violence in Alta Montaña titled *Un Bosque de Memoria Viva (A Forest of Live Memory)*, a document that was written together with the researchers of the Center and the campesinos of Alta Montaña. The Kroc Institute from the University Notre Dame which is responsible for the follow up of the Peace Agreements relied on the ERCPMM to measure the advancement of the implementation of the Peace Accord in the region, Victim's Unit also participates in the setting to coordinate actions with different victim's group, but also to socialize its advancements and difficulties in the region.

The ERCPMM's role as a platform is especially evident in the discussions around the implementation of the peace agreements. The peace agreement created a mechanism called the Programa de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial or *PDET (Development Programs with a territorial based approach)* as a planning and management tool for the implementation of the rural development section of the peace accord.⁸⁷ ERCPMM operated as one of the settings where communities came together to discuss ideas for a long-term plan for Montes de María. On November 2018, Montes de María finalized its PDET after a consultation of more than 13,000 people. It is a plan that aims to strengthen agriculture and improve food security, privilege small campesino farms, and to protect the environment. Thus, the PDET envisions for the year 2028 a region that is environmentally strong, with transformation and commercialization processes that guarantee food safety

⁸⁷ The first agreement of the Peace Accord is titled: Towards a New Colombian Countryside: comprehensive rural reform.

and sovereignty for local people. This plan is an affirmative position against mining and agro businesses in the region (Julienes, 2019).

Findings

From the work of Sembrandopaz and the analysis of my interviews with its staff, campesino leaders and peacebuilders, the following six themes emerged.

First, is the significance of *leadership* in peacebuilding dynamics in Montes de María. Interviews and observations revealed a strong tradition of leadership in Montes de María that has evolved and adapted to the context, assisting individuals and communities not only in resisting the impact of violence, but in imagining and building a different future for their communities

In regions where the state presence is limited, local leaders play an important role in local communities. Social leaders in Montes de María are the voice of their communities to bureaucratic institutions and authorities, and they act as bridges with other community leaders. They are the first to demand respect for people's fundamental human rights, and their right to development and social justice by acting as advocates, negotiators and managers for infrastructural, educational and health projects. They act as animators, mediators and educators within their communities. But one of the most important, although silent leadership roles of Sembrandopaz is its accompaniment to individuals and processes. Accompaniment manifests in support, counsel and comfort. It implies a recognition that the communities are the main protagonists of their own processes, as well as their achievements and mistakes. It is a very delicate approach to leadership that demands tact and discretion to not overstep on other leadership processes.

Participants in the research acknowledged Sembrandopaz's leadership as a significant peacebuilding actor in the region. NGOs and public organizations such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Center for Historic Memory, the Governors of Sucre and Bolivar, and local mayors seek out Sembrandopaz for advice or desire to join their efforts. This came up repeatedly in interviews where respondents commented that "Sembrandopaz is a trustworthy organization" or "without Sembrandopaz's blessing there is no way to work in the region." Sembrandopaz has earned the trust of different actors who turn to Sembrandopaz for advice, protection and support. Part of this success is due to the organization's staff, a group of mostly women with strong commitment, experience, and knowledge of the territory.

The role of its Director, Ricardo Esquivia is central to the success of the organization. He has gained legitimacy and recognition because of his leadership style in Montes de María and elsewhere in Colombia. Esquivia is firm in his convictions and in defending the weak, and he uses formal and informal institutions to do so. He uses the legal system to demand that the state fulfils its duties. He also takes advantage of informal opportunities to use mediation to resolve issues at the local level. His facilitation skills, and his ability to be present without imposing his opinions are some of his strengths, along with an openness to talk to and connect with any type of actor regardless of her or his origin and gender, class or political affiliation.

He is aware of the visibility he has and he provides a lot of support to his staff so they also receive recognition for their hard work. Moreover, he is mentoring and preparing the persons that will eventually replace him as leader when he retires in few years time.

However, for some interviewees the sense is that the organization will be different without him (Interview October 14, 2005).

This finding illustrates that leaderships in peacebuilding is multifaceted. It demands different skills and approaches, many of them invisible. But above all it implies ability to integrate different voices and perspectives, as well as allow processes to flow. For conflict transformation, leadership is an important element, as illustrated in Lederach's Approaches to Peacebuilding framework (1997) however, peace leadership has not been developed in depth within conflict transformation debates, although it is important to highlight recent developments in the literature of Peace and Conflict Studies⁸⁸ (Amaladas & Byrne, 2018; Ricke-Kiely, 2016).

The second salient finding is the importance of *platforms* and the role of Sembrandopaz in weaving, creating and enhancing relationships for exchanging ideas, resources and mutual support. From the interviews, and especially from observation of Sembrandopaz in the communities where they work, it emerged that their nurturing of relationships is much more than networking or the coordination of organizations for the implementation of a concrete project. It implies a commitment to work towards change, solving conflicts together, sharing resources to have the type of community they envision. A successful platform is built on trust carefully nurtured by constant interaction among its members and accompaniment from leaders and allies. Without relationships based on trust, the platform is weak and it is no more than a meeting place. Participation is another important element of platforms. By bringing different voices to the fore not only makes

⁸⁸ For more information see the work of Stan Amaladas and Sean Byrne (2018) as well as the work of Theresa Ricke Kiely (2016).

decision making process more inclusive, but from a transformative approach, participation is the cornerstone of improbable dialogues or, as Esquivia calls “dialogues of equals in disagreement.”

The interviews and the observation showed that Sembrandopaz not only creates platforms like in the case of the ERCPMM, but they accompany others like the MOPAM and support emerging ones like JOPPAZ. From the interviews, it was also clear that in Montes de María there are not one single platform but many of them operating and interacting in the region. This finding has important implications in the way conflict transformation can be understood, designed and implemented beyond infrastructures for peace but with a focus on “the quality and nature of people’s relations” (Lederach, 2005, p. 76).

A third important theme is the understanding and application of *nonviolence* in Montes de María. From its mission and objectives, Sembrandopaz has a clear stand for nonviolence permeating its internal organization, strategic plan and concrete actions. The experience of the participants highlighted how Sembrandopaz adapted and strategically implemented nonviolent actions to respond to the needs the communities. Interviews with campesinos showed that nonviolent actions generated in them a sense of confidence, pride and ownership in their demands. Nonviolence allowed them to approach peacebuilding in different and strategic way. This finding has implications for the design and implementation of future strategies in peacebuilding. In addition, it opens the discussions around the relationship of nonviolence and conflict transformation.

A fourth finding is the relevance of *religion* in peacebuilding. Informants stated that during the peak of violence, churches were the only organizations that remained in the

territory accompanying the communities in resisting violence. They are still perceived as trustworthy and one of the most important institutions in the territory because of their convening power. As an organization with its origins in Mennonite connections, Sembrandopaz has worked with evangelical as well as Catholic churches, with mixed results.

In a country where religion is still part of the social and cultural fabric this finding stresses the need for a better understanding of the role of religion in peacebuilding but also in the escalation of violence.

The fifth finding is Sembrandopaz's approach to peacebuilding *incorporates key tenets of conflict transformation*. For instance, during the field work it was evident that Sembrandopaz incorporates actors from different leadership levels cultivating relationships and encouraging improbable dialogues between the grassroots, the middle, and the top levels. They develop activities considering different time frames and scopes by integrating training, education and nonviolent actions with social and economic development.

Participants stated that Sembrandopaz is methodical in their approach to communities and very respectful and supportive of their processes, even when human and financial resources are scarce.

During field work it was evident that Sembrandopaz's close relation with the communities feeds their own strategies. It is a sort of circular relation between the needs of the communities and the strategies the organization implements.

This chapter also highlighted that Sembrandopaz's strategy is the result of many lessons learned in continuous process of trial and error. For instance, participants highlighted that organization for the sake of organization is not enough and it is not a

guaranteed for reaching success. It demands purpose and clear objectives, but also the responsibility of the participants in preparing themselves and working towards a proposed goal. The research findings also highlight the reality that a small organization like Sembrandopaz have limitations, and although they wanted to have a larger coverage, experience showed them that they are more effective focusing on fewer communities where they can devote all their attention.

Since conflict transformation does not propose fixed recipes for building peace, this finding provides important insights and lessons learned for future strategies in local peacebuilding.

The sixth finding is the *importance of the arts in peacebuilding*. In its strategic organization Sembrandopaz gives the arts a special place, not only as a source of joy and beauty, but because of its transformative potential. During the field work participants highlighted the importance of arts in their processes as means to approach and understand conflict; to heal wounded communities, and to bridge broken relations between generations and unlikely actors. Participants highlighted the positive impact of music, painting, photography and theatre in their communities. However, there is a need to better explore the transformative potential of arts in peacebuilding in Colombian and how to integrate it as a fundamental element of peacebuilding interventions.

Conclusion

Sembrandopaz's presence in Montes de María has been a journey of adapting and responding to the needs of the territory. In this process, it has succeeded in building relationships of trust with diverse actors. The holistic approach to peacebuilding encompasses both responding to direct violence and laying the foundations for positive peace by envisioning actions towards change at structural and cultural levels. The following chapters address more specifically Sembrandopaz's peacebuilding work in two communities, Alta Montaña and Libertad.

Chapter 7. Sembrandopaz and the experience of Alta Montaña

Introduction

Sembrandopaz has a significant presence in the corregimiento of Alta Montaña by directly supporting local peacebuilding initiatives, and through its involvement in various local and regional activities promoting peacebuilding throughout the region. This chapter has two main sections. The first addresses the impact of violence in Alta Montaña in order to highlight the significance of a reconciliation approach to peacebuilding. The second part explores in detail *the Peaceful Movement of Alta Montaña*, its origins, relationship with Sembrandopaz as well as its strategies, with special emphasis on nonviolent actions such as the 2013 march to the city of Cartagena.

Lingering Effects of Violence in Alta Montaña

During my fieldwork, the leaders of the Alta Montaña highlighted that the main impact of the conflict in their communities was the erosion of the social fabric, especially the weakening of community-based leadership. Both the army and the guerrilla involved civilians in the conflict through a well-tailored strategy of stigmatization, control and fear that affected their daily activities, their organizational dynamics and the development of the territory in general. The goal was to silence and to dismantle social processes and community dynamics.

The protagonists in the conflict abused *campesinos* in Alta Montaña, violating the main principles of international humanitarian law. Indeed, when FARC-EP arrived in Alta Montaña it confiscated cattle and agricultural produce, especially cargos of avocado, the main product in the region. Farmers, cattle ranchers, drivers and *campesinos* were equally

affected by FARC's actions although each reacted in different ways. Farmers and cattle ranchers lost their products and looked towards paramilitary groups to protect their interests. Drivers were forced to sell the produce in the markets and give the profit to the guerrillas, increasing the perception that they were guerrilla supporters (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 162). *Campesinos* were also identified as guerrilla supporters although most were forced to provide shelter and food to the guerrillas while they were crossing their fields.

On the other hand, to prevent the guerrillas from receiving food and medicines, as well as to control the population, the army demanded the registration of *campesino* families with the closest military battalion. A *campesino* I interviewed stated that around the years 2002 and 2004 it was common to find roadblocks where the army confiscated groceries from *campesinos*. Moreover, *campesinos* had to obtain a special permit if they wanted to bring extra groceries home, but they feared retaliation if they were seen at the battalion offices because they could be accused of being army informants. Dario, a *campesino* leader and member of the Peaceful Process of Alta Montaña communicated that, “for me to bring home a pound of rice was difficult because the army said that I was smuggling food to the guerrillas, that everything I was carrying was for the guerrillas. It was worse to go to the battalion for a permit to carry extra food for my family because people might say ‘I saw him in the battalion snitching information’” (Group interview, November 27, 2015).

In general, *campesinos* in Alta Montaña felt trapped and powerless in a war that was not theirs. For example, a pastor described his experience, “It was bad if I came to El Carmen, and it was worse to stay in the countryside. We had to be neutral. I believe it was

God himself that took care of us because there were people questioning us whether we were supporting one actor or the other” (Group interview, November 27, 2015).

Violence also impacted cultural traditions as well as social organizations in the region. Soraya Bayuelo, a community leader in El Carmen and recipient of the National Peace prize narrated his story as follows:

Before, we lived quietly [in El Carmen], in the full sense of the word. That is, you could go out without fear. Even in the neighborhood where I grew up, the doors were never closed. We played in the street with neighbors and friends, as it is in many places on the Caribbean coast. We played guitar in the park, read poetry and performed theater. In the 60s and 70s El Carmen was a quiet town, but also a prosperous one because of tobacco plantations and tobacco industries (Bayuelo, interview December 03, 2015)

Bayuelo emphasized that the past was not idyllic, yet she acknowledged cultural and social dynamics rooted in the communities that violence sought to undermine. The main outcomes included the control of the population, its relations, as well as social and economic dynamics.

The campesinos of Alta Montaña also recognized that the violence dynamics undermined their cultural traditions. The violence discouraged festivities, religious celebrations, and popular dances, once central to daily life and the foundation for social integration. Dario, Luis and Pastor explicated that the violence displaced many people to the cities and, after 10 or 15 years they made a new life there, losing their rural culture (Group interview, November 27, 2015). The youth were particularly affected since they left Alta Montaña as babies or they were born in the city. The hardships of farming and a

campesino culture become less appealing for this group, as they opted instead to immerse themselves in other activities such as in construction, commerce and transportation. There was a concern during my fieldwork that because of the lack of jobs in Montes de María the youth could opt to join gangs associated with drug dealing.

Alta Montaña's economy depended on agriculture especially avocado production, which was severely impacted by the conflict. As a result of the population's displacement, the crops were unattended and a fungus identified as *Phytophthora*⁸⁹ infected the roots of the avocado tree affecting 80 to 90 percent of the production.⁹⁰ Daniel, a community leader in Alta Montaña and founding member of the Peaceful Movement of Alta Montaña averred that poverty increased in the region because the economy was mainly based on the production of this fruit (interview, December 02, 2015).

Yet perhaps the most important effect of violence in Alta Montaña was to reduce community participation. This was once a region strong in social and political participation, and then armed actors particularly targeted community leaders and human rights advocates. Their strong relationships within their communities, their advocacy and convening power to demand people's rights before authorities, landlords and armed actors made them targets. The effects were severe. Communication channels between communities weakened. Socialization settings were reduced and controlled, and campesinos restrained

⁸⁹ To date, the Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario or ICA (*Colombian Agricultural Institute*) has been unable to find a solution to the disease.

⁹⁰ While I was doing the research work, *campesinos* provided me with different explanations about the infection of the avocado trees. The main argument was that it was due to the displacement because the *campesinos* were unable to tend to the crops; another version highlights that the Colombian navy spread a herbicide like Agent Orange to force the guerrillas out of the forest (Documento Centro de Memoria Historica Bosque de Memoria p. 276). Some campesinos divulged to me that they witnessed how soldiers planted strange substances in the land.

themselves from visiting neighboring communities for fear of not coming back. Luis, an agriculture and community leader from the Peaceful Movement recounted that in public, community leaders avoided introducing themselves as leaders, fearing stigmatization and being targeted by armed actors (group interview, November 27, 2015).

Dario revealed that suspicion and mistrust emerged between communities, tearing apart what was once a vibrant social and economic fabric (interview November 27, 2015). Thus, imaginary borders between communities were established where some communities were perceived as FARC supporters, and others were seen as paramilitary supporters. Jorge Montes, a campesino leader, highlighted the impact of the division in Alta Montaña in the following way. “There was an invisible line between the communities from Macayepos upward and Macayepos downward... We were branded as guerrilla members and leaders from Macayepos were identified as paramilitaries”⁹¹ (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, p. 156) Moreover, according to Sandra, one of Sembrandopaz’s program coordinators, armed actors took advantage of the situation co-opting those community leaders that they perceived were favorable to their interests (interview, October 14, 2015). One campesino, Wilson described it in the following manner:

The government didn’t invest in us because the leaders of Macayepos told them that this area was allied with the guerrillas. Instead of investing in us and guaranteeing our rights what they did was to incarcerate our leaders... Many people were imprisoned. People that we knew were not involved in anything. They were

⁹¹ Macayepos was perceived as paramilitary supporters because the paramilitary commander Rodrigo Mercado Peluffo, a.k.a Cadena was originally from Macayepos.

just *campesinos*. It was in retaliation because this area was branded as guerrilla (interview, December 2, 2015).

The rivalry between communities altered leadership strategies. Dario highlighted that *Campesino* leaders limited their interaction within their own community and restrained their contacts with other leaders, which they preferred to keep in secret (interview, November 27, 2015).

Resistance, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding

The division between communities and the escalation of coercion and violence evolved into a humanitarian crisis in the region (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018; Pardo García et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the *campesinos* responded with strategic mobilizations and acts of resistance. The following sections explore three main collective actions that illustrate the response of the Alta Montaña to violence in the region that constitute a milestone in their own history and where Sembrandopaz played important roles: 1) improbable dialogues leading towards reconciliation; 2) the march towards Cartagena and 3) the human chain (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018; Pardo García et al., 2018). Behind these collective actions *campesinos* were slowly consolidating what Lederach (2003) calls a conflict transformation platform or a structural system that has “the capacity to generate and regenerate change processes” (p.45) that respond both to concrete episodes but also to core challenges from the context. It is a structure because it is based on organized and persistent activities from the Peaceful Movement and the Peaceful Process, grounded in leadership, strategies and activities. It illustrates how leadership can adapt to the context and the hurdles the conflict and peacebuilding process pose to them.

Improbable Dialogues Towards Reconciliation: The Assembly of Lázaro

The violence left the community divided between Macayepos and the other veredas. This division was especially displayed in the hostility between two key leaders, Aroldo Canoles, leader of Macayepos, and Jorge Montes, leader of the corregimiento of Lázaro. However, family ties, religion, soccer, and commerce between communities gradually lessened those divisions and prompted improbable dialogues between its leaders and eventually between the communities. Indeed, soccer and baseball are sporting events as well as social settings where people meet and talk about the game, their communities, and their lives (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018; Pardo García et al., 2018). In the aftermath of the games the idea emerged of a gathering between the two main leaders, Aroldo and Jorge. It was not an easy task and there was a lot of skepticism that it would ever happen (Pardo García et al., 2018).

Sembrandopaz acted as a facilitator in 2012 when leaders from opposite communities in Alta Montaña reached out to each other. Daniel recalled that they realized that the division between their communities was harmful and it was perpetuating their own structural problems of poverty, and lack of education and health centers (Interview, December 02, 2015).

This process of improbable dialogues between individuals and communities perceived to be enemies (Comisión de la Verdad, 2018) required a number of meetings to create a safe space to rebuild the relationships and the trust. The first meeting took place in Macayepos, which was symbolic because the village was at the core of the violence in Alta Montaña. Five leaders with deep differences amongst them were present at the gathering. Ricardo Esquivia and a MCC volunteer acted as facilitators, focusing the conversation on

the issue of reconciliation. This initial encounter was tense but nevertheless it led to additional meetings. One meeting in the village of Lázaro was the most significant because it was the first time that Aroldo Canoles and Jorge Montes participated together. The choice of Lázaro as the meeting place also had a symbolic and strategic meaning, since it is located at the intersection of both divided communities (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 182).

Several more meetings took place, covering all the veredas in Alta Montaña. Moreover, governmental institutions such as the navy, the Victims Unit, the police and the ombudsman's office were invited to participate. Daniel, a community leader from Alta Montaña made it known that the key goal was to respond to the allegations that the process was a strategy from the guerrillas to regain control of the territory, despite the fact that this group was defeated in the region a number of years ago (interview, December 02, 2015).

Sembrandopaz's presence in these dialogues was strategic. The *campesinos* knew of its peacebuilding experience, and liked Sembrandopaz's legitimacy and nonbiased approach in their work. Thus, they wanted Sembrandopaz to be the facilitator and guarantor of the process (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 182).

Many of the participants were skeptical about making alliances with leaders from Macayepos and in general about a reconciliation process ever happening.

Various outcomes emerged from this process. First, all of the visible and influential leaders such as Jorge Montes and Aroldo Canoles, that were once strong adversaries found a safe place where they could face each other and share their experiences during violence as well as their vision for the region. This improbable dialogue demanded risk and courage from both leaders, yet it served as an example for their own communities. If these adversaries could reconcile, it was possible for the others to do so too.

Another process outcome was that the communities realized that they were mere pawns for the actors in the conflict, and their communities were the most affected weakening their organizational and participatory processes. Jorge Montes emphasized this very point:

We realized that this [the armed conflict] was an invention of the government; they encouraged us to fight but we were the main people affected because the government is not even interested in us living in peace. Interests in this country are economic and political. There is no interest in the poor people, the poor class (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, p. 157).

In this reconciliation process religion played an important role as inspiration and spiritual support for individuals and strength for the communities. *Campesinos* from Alta Montaña remember that in one of the assemblies Jorge Montes invited Aroldo Canoles to attend a mass with him. Canoles accepted the invitation and prayed alongside Montes. Afterwards they talked for a long time consolidating their commitment to reconciliation between their communities. Jorge Montes believed that the support and accompaniment of the Christian evangelical churches through prayers for their leaders and in support for reconciliation was a fundamental incentive for them as leaders and for all of the peacebuilding process in general (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, p. 158). The role of religion in the reconciliation process in Alta Montaña is discussed further later in this chapter.

Alta Montaña's reconciliation process is remarkable in the sense that individuals and communities as well as victims of violence acknowledged the past and its impact, taking a

stance to confront the powers that led them to disunion and discord. It began by strengthening relationships through improbable dialogues between former enemies, mediated by trusted facilitators who helped them understand their past as well as envisioning a common future. It eventually developed into a social movement called Proceso Pacífico de Reintegración de la Alta Montaña (*Peaceful Process of Reconciliation and Integration of the Alta Montaña*) and later into a political-civil movement called Movimiento Pacífico de la Alta Montaña (*Peaceful Movement of the Alta Montaña*) that participated in the local elections of 2015. Daniel, one of the main leaders in the Alta Montaña refers to the Process and the Movement as follows (interview, December 02, 2015):

Now we have to separate them [the Process from the Movement] because we are currently a political organization but the process is still valid. That is why we have named it differently. The *Peaceful Process* is the father of the movement and it is of *Reconciliation and Integration*; and the political aspect is the *Peaceful Movement* of Alta Montaña.

Both the Process and the Movement illustrate the importance of third parties in community-based dynamics, such as Sembrandopaz whose legitimacy allowed it to operate as conveners, facilitators, guarantors, and animators.

The March Towards Cartagena

The initial reconciliation dialogues between former adversaries in Alta Montaña created the foundations and the trust for collective action for all the Alta Montaña (Bosque, 2018, p. 160). The *campesinos* wanted their voice heard not as victims but as citizens whose basic needs were denied. In 2013, they approached Sembrandopaz to seek advice about

how to develop an action plan. The following section explores one of the main nonviolent actions that Alta Montaña's *campesinos* developed, namely the march towards Cartagena, and the role of Sembrandopaz in organizing it. This march paved the way for the consolidation of the Proceso Pacífico de Reintegración de la Alta Montaña (*Peaceful Process of Reconciliation and Integration of the Alta Montaña*) and the Movimiento Pacífico de la Alta Montaña (*Peaceful Movement of the Alta Montaña*).

Background: Learning from the experience of Mampuján

Alta Montaña's *campesinos* were familiar with the work of Sembrandopaz in Montes de María. During the Macayepo massacre, Sembrandopaz gave refuge to the families from Alta Montaña in their experimental farm Villa Bárbara. The *campesinos* also learned that Sembrandopaz accompanied the Mampuján community (municipality of María la Baja) in a peaceful demonstration to demand the fulfillment of the judiciary verdict to compensate them for the atrocities of the displacement and the massacre of Mampuján-Las Brisas citizens.⁹²

Due to the Supreme Court's slow implementation the verdict to compensate the victims of the massacre and displacement of Mampuján and Las Brisas communities, representatives of Mampuján's victims went to Bogotá to consult with the magistrates that issued the verdict, and with lawyers, NGOs, churches and allies. As a result, the community

92 On April 27, 2011 Colombia's Supreme Court, with sentencing number 34547, found paramilitary commanders a.k.a. "Diego Vecino" and "Juancho Dique" guilty of aggravated homicide, displacement of the civilian population, kidnapping, aggravated larceny, trafficking and the illegal possession of weapons,.. The Court ruled that reparations be given to the communities of Mampuján, Las Brisas y San Cayetano and ordered the integral reparation for those communities. The integral reparation includes compensation, reparation rehabilitation, assurances of no-repetition, and collective reparation.

This judicial ruling was given within the framework of the Justice and Peace Law (Lay 975, 2005) and it is particularly significant because it is the first ruling of Colombia's Justice and Peace Jurisdiction and it became the framework for the Justice and Peace jurisdiction's future judicial decisions.

decided to promote a peaceful 83-kilometer march to the city of Cartagena to demand compliance with the verdict. Sembrandopaz supported the communities in designing a careful strategy in terms of logistics, participation, and negotiation skills that involved coordinating with regional authorities such as the governor's office, the police, the army and the fire department (Ruiz, & VivenSias, 2013, p. 92). It gained the support of the regional and local authorities,⁹³ international advocates,⁹⁴ national and local NGOs,⁹⁵ churches,⁹⁶ congress representatives,⁹⁷ and research institutes⁹⁸ (Ruiz- Vivensías- 2013).

Seven hundred people left from Mampuján on December 12, 2011 and arrived in Cartagena the next day. After arriving in Cartagena, *campesino* leaders met with representatives of regional institutions such as the Secretary of Government, Education, Public Works, and a representative of the governor of the department of Bolívar.

One of outcomes of the peaceful demonstration was the creation of a monitoring table between authorities and community leaders to follow up on the commitments from the Supreme Court verdict (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 95). Another outcome of the nonviolent demonstration was the session that the Tribunal Superior de Bogotá, Sala de

⁹³ Some of these authorities are: The Government of Bolivar, the Assembly of the Department of Bolivar, police, Comision Nacional de Reparacion y Reconociliacion (National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation), the mayor's offices of San Juan, Turbaco and, Cartagena; indigenous authorities who policed the march together with the local police force.

⁹⁴ Especially the UNDP.

⁹⁵ Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular or Programa por la paz (Center of Research and Popular Education/ Peace Program CINEP-PP); Fundación Red Desarrollo y Paz; Instituto Latinoamericano para la Sociedad y un Derecho Alternativo or ILSA (Latinamerican Institute for Society and Alterantive Law); Colectivo de Comunicaciones de los Montes de María; JUSTAPAZ.

⁹⁶ Especially the Mennonite Church through the Mennonite Central Committee, Justapaz and Sembrandopaz. The Catholic Church was also present.

⁹⁷ Congressmen Iván Cepeda from the Polo Democrático Party, a left wing party.

⁹⁸ Especially the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular or Programa por la Paz (*Center for Research and Popular Education Peace Program*).

Justicia y Paz (*Justice and Peace Courtroom of the Superior Court of Bogotá*) held in Mampuján. The court moved from Bogotá to Mampuján to listen to the victims and to follow up on the commitments of the historic verdict. Mampuján's leaders stated that the presence of the High Court in the village was significant in many ways. It was the first time the paramilitary commanders⁹⁹ involved in the Mampuján–Las Brisas massacre and subsequent population displacement, faced the community and asked for forgiveness. In addition, it was an important call to public institutions to expeditiously obey the judicial mandate (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 95; Ruíz, 2013, p. 111).

“The mountain moves”

Alta Montaña's community was impressed by Mampuján's experience and the attention it received from regional, national and international actors. They believed that by replicating a similar mobilization they would obtain the same outcome. They approached Sembrandopaz director, Ricardo Esquivia, knowing that Sembrandopaz had accompanied the Mampuján process.

In these initial contacts, Alta Montaña's *campesinos* expressed that they wanted to mobilize as soon as possible. Sembrandopaz's staff articulated that Esquivia listened to the community and their needs, highlighting the fact that it takes time, hard work to mobilize people to take place nonviolently (interview October 14, 2015). Traditionally, demonstrations in El Carmen ended up in riots that included blockades on the highway to Cartagena that necessitated the intervention of the army, and that resulted in very poor and violent outcomes.

⁹⁹ Uber Enrique Bánquez Martínez a.k.a Juancho Dique and Edward Cobos Téllez a.k.a Diego Vecino

The *campesinos* of Alta Montaña together with Sembrandopaz began a strategic process to organize a 129 km nonviolent march to Cartagena. The preparations took six months. The *campesinos* contacted the leaders of the 52 *veredas* and visited each one to present the initiative to the communities and highlight the peaceful spirit of the mobilization. Sandra, a program coordinator from Sembrandopaz avowed that it involved multiple meetings with local and departmental authorities such as mayors, the police and the navy, as well as with churches, social organizations, the Victim's Unit and the UNDP (interview October 14, 2015). She went on to say that they had meetings with truck and bus drivers to inform them about the demonstration and its peaceful spirit, assuring them that the highway was not going to be blocked (interview October 14, 2015). In addition, Ricardo explained that when they prepared for the marches, they considered the internal organization of the group: the logistics (food, water, bathrooms, first aid, legal aid, etc), how to walk (pace, distance, chants, posters, etc), and the creation of mechanisms to resist violent provocations (interview, October 21, 2015).

Several needs motivated the mobilization of Alta Montaña. First and foremost, the *campesinos* wanted to draw attention to their abandonment by the state and the deterioration of their economy due to the decimation of the avocado trees. In this context, they demanded a safe and dignified return of displaced *campesinos* to their land, as well as government subsidies to the avocado farmers to recover from the harvest loss. Second, they demanded transformative reparations for Alta Montaña as well as the corregimiento of Macayepo, for the suffering and the damage caused by the armed conflict.¹⁰⁰ They also

¹⁰⁰ According to the Victim's Law (Law 1448/2011) the victims in the armed conflict are entitled to restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and measures for non-repetition. These measures cover both

wanted to fulfill their social and economic rights, and the construction of a much needed infrastructure, especially roads, health centers, schools and electricity. Daniel made it known that they claimed that the three schools they have are insufficient to cover the demand, and in terms of health care, there are some health centres with not enough doctors and medicines available to the people (group interview, December 02, 2015)

More than one thousand people joined the mobilization. On April 5, 2013 the march left from Arroyo Arena village in Alta Montaña heading towards Cartagena marching parallel to the main highway (Troncal de Occidente). The goal was to go through the towns of San Jacinto, San Juan, Maria La Baja and then Cartagena. On the first day, the march arrived in San Jacinto where the marchers slept. On the April 6, the governor of Bolivar and his main advisors met the campesinos and its leadership in San Jacinto before they continued their journey, setting up seven working groups in which where national authorities also participated.

The Peaceful Movement reached 92 agreements with the government and created various follow up mechanisms (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, p. 166).¹⁰¹ The *campesinos* reported that the implementation of these agreements was slow and some have not been implemented at all. The *campesinos* noted that the march and the negotiations that followed were significant milestones in the history of the territory. One

individual and communal victims of violence. In Montes de María the government acknowledged collective reparation for Macayapo, but not for the rest of Alta Montaña.

¹⁰¹ Some of the main agreements were: “1) Paving of the Montes de María highway from Carmen de Bolivar to the town of Chinulito, Department of Sucre 48 Km; 2) Installation of five cellphone towers in strategic areas in Montes de María; 3) the provision of staff for five health centers; 4) Donation of two one terrestrial and one aquatic ambulances; 5) improvement of roads between veredas; 5) improvement of educational infrastructure with computers, internet, libraries, laboratories; 6) individual and collective victim reparations; 7) agriculture projects; 8) organization and collection of the historic memory of the region; 9) the creation of community based radios; and, 10) implementation of technical education” (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, p. 166).

of the achievements of which they are most proud is the pavement of the Montes de María highway, which is now 70 percent completed and it makes a significant difference for the development of the region. Nevertheless, Daniel reported that the *campesinos* acknowledge that the highway is insufficient for the development of the region if the tertiary roads are inadequate (interview, December 02, 2015).

Not everybody joined the march. Wilson disclosed that some leaders in the Alta Montaña did not support the process because distrust, resentment and fear are still present in the territory (interview, December 02, 2015). He went onto to say that some of these leaders needed to take time to better understand the *Peaceful Movement's* goals and objectives by participating in the meetings and getting to know the leaders they realized that “it was what the region needed and not what other people were saying.” It became a learning process based on relationship building, improbable dialogues, consensus building and networking.

CINEP (2018) highlighted that the peaceful mobilization of the nonviolent march to Cartagena marks an important milestone in the history of the Alta Montaña because the reconciliation process between Macayepo and the rest of the Alta Montaña took place through its planning process (p. 179). Moreover, it demonstrates that putting together a careful nonviolence strategy with a long-term vision of transformation can work.

Response to challenges: A human chain

The march towards Cartagena was an important landmark for Alta Montaña, however, there was also a backlash from extremists to this nonviolent action. Five months after the march threats arrived in Alta Montaña in the form of flyers signed by the AUC and the BACRIM declaring that the *Peaceful Movement* and its leaders were military

targets (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, p. 16). Days later, on September 12, 2013, Jorge Montes was detained and accused of rebellion,¹⁰² displacement, extortion and murder against protected persons (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, p. 167 ; 14202_0042). His arrest highlighted the contradiction of a state that promotes political and social participation through legislation and public policies and programs, yet once a nonviolent movement pressures the state by demanding the people's rights, the government responds by obstructing participation with threats (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, p. 170).

The movement issued a statement demanding truth, justice, and protection for its leaders, as well as guarantees for their right to political participation (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, p. 169). Opponents of the movement hoped the movement might disappear if it attacked its most visible leader. These violent tactics worked in the past, with various social movements in Colombia,¹⁰³ but it was not the case in the Alta Montaña. To protest the injustice of the detention of Jorge Montes and to demand the government's compliance of the 92 agreements that emerged out of the march towards Cartagena, the *Peaceful Movement of the Alta Montaña* organized a human chain of 1,500 people that took place from September 8-9, 2014, within the framework of the National Day of Human

¹⁰² Jorge Montes was accused of being a member of FARC's 35th Front that was already defeated in the region.

¹⁰³ Perhaps the most important example is the extermination of the Unión Patriótica or UP, a left based political party made up of members of different guerrilla groups. It emerged in 1985 as a result of the signature of a peace agreement between the Colombian government and FARC. As a strategy for the reincorporation of combatants into civilian life and the participation in politics, the former combatants created the UP to participate in the local elections of 1986. Paramilitary groups killed close to 1,500 UP militants in what was called the Genocide of the UP. A Justice and Peace Tribunal acknowledged the political genocide, and in 2016 president Santos, on behalf of the Colombian state, acknowledged the responsibility of the state in the execution of the UP (Verdad Abierta, 2016).

Rights and the National Week for Peace. *Campesinos* held hands alongside the highway without interrupting the traffic.

Sembrandopaz assisted in the organization of the human chain. It was easier to prepare, since people were already familiar with the principles of nonviolence (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 187). Moreover, the participation of youth and women from different Montes de María communities increased, illustrating the people's recognition of its importance as well as the strength of the movement.

Far from Jorge's detention dispersing the movement, the community adapted to the new circumstances and reinvented itself. Jorge is a very visible and charismatic leader but he was not alone; beside him there were other individuals willing to continue the work. Thus, new leaders took over the coordination of the Movement, not as replacements for Jorge Montes but each with their own leadership strategies. Amongst these leaders was Aroldo Canoles, who in the past was Jorge Monte's main adversary. One of Sembrandopaz's coordinators, Laura, states that this response from Alta Montaña's *campesinos* illustrates the depth and strength of the process, and also their commitment, vocation and talent to reinvent themselves in the face of severe difficulties (interview, December 02, 2015). The following statement summarizes this point of view:

The government thought that the stigmatization between us still persisted and they said, "we capture Jorge Montes and this is over, because we can convince Aroldo and Ciro to stop participating in this." *Y ahá!*, One got nervous, but we kept meeting and we decided to be united. Since we came from a process, we decided to continue with or without Jorge. Aroldo took over the leadership of the movement and the process continues, because the process was strong, not from a few individuals, but

from many communities. What I want to say is that Jorge was not arrested out of the blue, that was because of politics! (as cited by Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 186).

Various elements are worth noting from this testimony. First, the strength of the *Peaceful Movement* relies on its capacity to respond to the immediate challenges without losing sight of its long-term goal. For this to happen, it was crucial to have strong relationships between its members. This was fundamental, not only to protect themselves and the movement from fragmentation, but to be able to continue with their work. The strength of the Movement relied on the quality of the relationships of the individuals. It also illustrates that despite the personal opinions and personality conflicts between the leaders, they prioritized the wellbeing of Alta Montaña. Finally, Jorge Montes' detention ignited a new leadership ready to respond to the challenges through creative and strategic initiatives to make the people's voice heard. The organization of the human chain as a collective nonviolent action is an example of this agency and empowerment.

The reinvention and continuation of leaderships despite the hurdles have been a common trend in Montes de María. Mateo is a staff member from PDPMM. He had the following to say on the issue:

Despite they have been threatened, that they have been displaced to other regions of the country, they continue with their leadership. In La Pelona they said to us, "I had to leave, but I supervised from the distance, I made alliances and promoted our experience." (interview November 20, 2015)

Jorge Montes remained in jail for five years without any formal accusation from the government. He was released on October 5, 2017 after receiving an amnesty as a result of the peace agreement with FARC. Jorge still maintains his innocence, claiming that he

was persecuted by the state for helping the poorest of the poor (Forero, 2019). After his release he continued to receive threats that forced Montes to leave El Carmen in February 2020.

Lessons Learned

During my fieldwork the interviewees reported that the most significant outcome was the reconciliation of their communities as reflected by leaders from opposite sides working together defending the same cause for truth, justice and non-repetition. Daniel expressed that it is important for the people the whole process that is behind their actions (interview, December 02, 2015).

Another outcome was the confidence that leaders and communities acquired during the process, especially in their relations with the state. In previous dealings with public institutions the *campesinos* felt that the state looked down on them, dismissing their petitions because they were perceived to be guerrilla supporters. The *Campesinos* felt that the peaceful movement contributed to changing negative perceptions of the Alta Montaña and in improving the relationships with the government. For example, Daniel expressed the following in his narrative:

Today the government listened to us. They used to make promises but didn't fulfill the agreement. This was because the government believed we were guerrilla supporters. Today they listened to us because they know there are no guerrillas in the area and they see that former enemies are united. This gives us more strength (interview, December 02, 2015).

Moreover, *campesinos* learned that when they have a claim that they should send a delegation to go to the respective institution and present their case to establish a new

dialogue and negotiation dynamic with the government (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 179). As a result, *campesinos* accompanied by Sembrandopaz sent a delegation to government institutions in Bogotá, or what they call the “lobby week to Bogota.” This initiative emerged from the authorities lack of responses to the *campesinos*’ demands or sending them from one place to another, without any effective outcome. Sembrandopaz inquired about whether the *campesinos* wanted to sit down with the authorities to discuss their claims. Rosa, a program coordinator for Sembrandopaz remembered the following in this story:

We asked them whether they wanted to sit down with the institutions that can answer to their demands. They say “yes, but we don’t know how to do it.” They might know what institution at the national level can respond to their demands, but they do not know how to access them. And we began to talk about the lobby week and the communities were very motivated.

We identified the main demands, the responsible institutions and made the necessary appointments. We cited INCODER, the organization responsible with land restitution, because none of the individuals have ownership of their land. We also schedule meetings with the Victim’s Unit; the Ministries of Health, Education and Agriculture, and the Ombudsman Office. At the end of the week we scheduled and appointment with the Swiss ambassador (Interview October 23, 2015).

Prior to the departure, Sembrandopaz helped the delegation to prepare the visit. It was an exercise of defining their arguments and petitions. A delegation of eight

campesinos, two for each of the communities where Sembrandopaz works,¹⁰⁴ went to Bogotá in September 2015. The number of leaders participating was an intentional strategy. On the one hand, they supported each other, but also it was a way to be more efficient in debriefing the communities. During this week, Sembrandopaz's role was one of accompaniment. Rosa articulated that the campesinos directly led the discussions and negotiations with the institutions (Interview, October 23, 2015).

This visit from Sembrandopaz was a courageous risk. Although the communities supported the visit, the delegation was prepared and they had logistical support in Bogotá, the outcome was uncertain and could have been a waste of their time. Rosa is one of Sembrandopaz's program coordinators. She stated that communities now feel more confident to challenge institutions, to demand their rights and to lobby government (interview October 23, 2015). On the other hand, she noted that there was a change in the various governmental institutions' perceptions of Sembrandopaz and its work, and an acknowledgement that they have a solid partner to cooperate with (interview October 23, 2015).

Sembrandopaz proclaimed that the visit to Bogotá was very positive for the *campesinos* and the institutions. It helped the *campesinos* to realize that they were capable of lobbying the government at the national level. They also realized that processes involved different actors and would require time and perhaps more visits to Bogotá. Consequently, Sembrandopaz stated their role during the visit as: "we only verified the schedules and

¹⁰⁴ Rosa reported that each of the communities chose their own representative to the delegation. Two men were sent from the Alta Montaña and Libertad because the leadership is mostly male.. A team of men and women were sent from Pichilín and Mampuján (Interview, October 23, 2015).

whether the delegation forgot any of the demands.” Meanwhile the government institutions gained first-hand information of what was going on in the territories.

Finally, it is important to highlight that in Alta Montaña, Sembrandopaz has prioritized an approach that is focused on reconciliation and the strengthening of nonviolent demonstrations. Sembrandopaz also encourages the community’s participation in political action. It is a process that demands patiently weaving relationships at the local level, but also risk taking.

Preparing the Next Generation: Jóvenes Provocadores de Paz or JOPPAZ

Sembrandopaz is concerned with generational renewal to guarantee its long-term sustainability of peacebuilding processes in Montes de María so the youth is fundamental in its work. The inclusion of the youth is in its guidelines and the organization makes sure that youth are active participants in peacebuilding initiatives. Indeed, Montes de María’s youth grew up in the middle of the internal armed conflict and they are still dealing with the consequences. A *campesino* youth leader stated that, “even without knowing each other, there were grudges among us as a result of the armed conflict (Diario de Paz Colombia, 2019).” However, the organization called Jóvenes Provocadores de Paz or JOPPAZ (*Youth Provocateurs of Peace*) ensures that the youth are committed to break a pattern of violence inherited from decades of conflict by “provoking actions of peace.”

Sembrandopaz noticed that in Alta Montaña there were many young *campesino* leaders involved in the march towards Cartagena and in the Human Chain. These youth also showed admiration for Jorge Montes and his activism, as well as the work of MOPAM. Sembrandopaz encouraged leaders from Alta Montaña to involve its youth in the movement and to create a separate chapter for these young leaders. With the support of a

MCC volunteer, young and older leaders met several times. In the beginning, few youth leaders responded to the call, however they eventually organized and created JOPPAZ. This was a way for younger people to contribute to generational renewal in the Montes de María's *campesino* movement, and also to fight for their own youth priorities. One of their main goals was the strengthening of community based leadership by transforming traditional social organization practices that they deemed to be corrupt or inefficient (Pardo García et al., 2018). Currently, JOPPAZ has five main areas of work that include peacebuilding, reconciliation, culture, protection of the environment, and recovery of the avocado plantations (Diario de Paz Colombia, 2019).

JOPPAZ followed MOPAZ's example by joining with the efforts of JAC in one key approach to create a broader societal impact and to invite new members to join it (Pardo García et al., 2018). The goal was to create networks with an already established organization such as the JAL, and at the same time to recruit two or more youth per vereda into its membership base (Pardo García et al., 2018). Currently, JOPPAZ has representatives in each of Alta Montaña's 52 corregimientos and it has established groups in 37 (Diario de Paz Colombia, 2019).

Training is another important component of every community-based organization. However, in addition to training in leadership, conflict resolution and the environment, JOPPAZ organizes cultural and sports activities that are more in tune with their youthful preferences. Dances, camping, soccer and ultimate Frisbee matches are organized to foster reconciliation, integration and environmental awareness (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 189). An interesting activity is what they call "cacicazgos," a version of the traditional beauty pageant where the contestants compete based on their knowledge of the environment and

the gowns are made with recycled materials. The name “cacicazgo” is in itself provocative and it is an attempt to assert cultural traditions. In pre-Columbian times the *cacique* was the Chief of the tribe. JOPPAZ sees the beauty queen as a tradition that comes before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, the image of the oppressor, whereas the *cacique* is a leader, close to his own roots with whom the youth identify (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 189).

JOPPAZ incorporates gender awareness in every one of its activities. Half of the leaders are women in their leadership body, and in every conference or activity they make sure that at least one woman actively participates and represents the group (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 189). For example, JOPPAZ was one of the organizations invited to provide a speaker at the conference organized by Bogota’s seven universities on rural development and peacebuilding in August 2018. JOPPAZ stressed that it has an internal mandate that leaders must take turns when they are invited to events and, it was the turn of a female to lead. She was part of the panel on social inclusion and reconciliation alongside professors and experts in rural development from different universities and research organizations.

JOPPAZ is aware that it is part of something bigger in Montes de María. It emerged from MOPAM’s experience, and it wants to grow as an independent organization. It has discussed getting its own legal status to be able to access national and international resources. Sembrandopaz has advised JOPPAZ to learn and consolidate more before taking that step. Experience shows that many initiatives fail because they do not have administrative and organizational strength and experience. In this context, youth’s lack of education has been an important obstacle for JOPPAZ. One of its leaders states that annually around 250 students graduate from high school in Alta Montaña’s 52 communities

but only one percent have the opportunity to go to the university (Diario de Paz Colombia, 2019). He questions how Montes de María and the country can advance if its youth have difficulties in accessing higher education. He stated the following in his narrative:

Through our history, we know that the only way to get ahead is to educate ourselves. If we have education, we have peace; if there is peace, there is stability in the territory, and if there is stability, there is wealth and we can grow as a territory (Diario de Paz Colombia, 2019).

JOPPAZ's work has attracted attention from researchers and universities, such as the Center for Historical Memory, the Technological University of Bolívar, the University of Cartagena, and Javeriana University in Bogotá. These connections have empowered JOPPAZ to share its experiences as a youth organization in a postaccord setting, and to voice its concerns to different audiences.

JOPPAZ has become an important initiative, not only as a hinge between the old and new generations aiming at guaranteeing long-term sustainability to its various peacebuilding initiatives. It has been innovative in the way it connects with stable organizations such as JAC and MOPAZ in Montes de María, as well as national organizations. At the same time, it has managed to focus on its own interests and to foster its own strategies and interests. It is still a young organization learning from stronger more established organizations as well as trying to survive in an already competitive environment.

Female Leadership

My fieldwork found mixed results about women's leadership. There is an acknowledgement of strong female leadership in Montes de María, even from the time of

the ANUC, that remained during the period of violence and that continues to the present. A Sembrandopaz coordinator named Estela highlighted the example of Margarita, an old *campesino* woman who during the peak of paramilitary violence refused to leave her land in the vereda of Macayepos in Alta Montaña despite that one of her sons was killed and two others are suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder. Today, in her old age she continues to advise her community, and especially young women, about how to sustain themselves and their families. She says, “I am a woman and I have to face this. I have my production and I sell it. I can take care and heal of my sons” (Interview October 23, 2015).

Margarita is the glue that unites the community and because of her support Sembrandopaz was able to enter into the community. When Ricardo Esquivia initially approached the community he was perceived as an outsider, but Margarita provided him with shelter and later welcomed MCC volunteers helping them integrate into the community. Another program coordinator from Sembrandopaz, Estela stated that, “I believe all the community [of Macayepos] has consulted her, looking for advice, to listen to her, because she is very wise and loved.” Currently Margarita is very active in Sembrandopaz’s initiatives and is a judicious partner in the development projects. However, there are no women in leadership positions in the MOPAM.

During the field work Sembrandopaz reported to me that there was only one woman, a teacher, in MOPAM’s list for the local elections of 2015. Monica, a school teacher and cultural leader in El Carmen, states that the lack of female leadership in the movement is one of its main weaknesses, and as a result, they are perceived by outsiders as conservative and backwards (Interview August 12, 2015).

Sembrandopaz believes that the role of women has been overshadowed by a patriarchal culture that limits their leadership potential. Women in Alta Montaña and Libertad are very active and have the recognition of their immediate communities. However, the obstacles they face constrain their participation in larger political, cultural and economic organizations. First and foremost, inequality is an important factor. Tertiary roads that connect veredas are inadequate or completely nonexistent. To mobilize between veredas people have to walk long distances or pay for rides in motorbike and cars, price that is not cheap. When a family have to decide who goes to a meeting, they have to consider the cost in terms of money and time. Another factor is who takes care of the family and farm while the meeting is taking place. Since they do not get pay for participating in a meeting and they cannot afford to lose a day's work, it is a tough decision to make and sometimes it is the man who participates in community activities, while the wife looks after the children and the farm.

Another factor emerged during field work when female respondents reported that they are seen as housewives and men see them as competition when they work similar projects. For instance, in a focus group with PDPMM, women reported that they want to access financial support for yam production, but men blocked the initiative because it is an activity that they usually develop. Moreover, they reported that on many occasions men refuse to support women as leaders because “in the chicken coop the one that sings is the rooster” (interview November 24, 2015). Other men are more sympathetic and acknowledge the critical role of women in rural development and in improving domestic economies encouraging them to organize to access projects on poultry and pigs.

Sembrandopaz addresses these challenges by encouraging female participation in leadership positions and in the design and implementation of development projects. JOPPAZ's board of directors illustrates this point. The organization has made a conscious effort to include a man and a woman as coordinators; and every time JOPPAZ is invited to an event, they insist on sending a man and a woman as representatives.

Women in Alta Montaña were also organizing to access Sembrandopaz's financial support for agricultural projects. It has not been an easy task. During field work I had the opportunity to participate in a meeting of farmers working together with Sembrandopaz in development projects. Although most of the participants were male, a small group of women presented the results of their small poultry project and its impact in their lives. Afterwards, I asked about the reduced participation of women to one of Sembrandopaz's program coordinators who was leading the meeting. She acknowledged that women face a number of challenges to be able to be more active in different projects and it is an area where the organization has to work more.

Findings

In *The moral imagination*, Lederach (2005) describes the work of arachnophiles, an “unusual community” of scientists, who study spiders, their webs and invisible connections made of thousands of silk strands, which the scientists reveal by sprinkling cornstarch on the webs in order to see them more clearly (p. 102). In this thesis, I was like those scientists armed, not with cornstarch but with theoretical and methodological frameworks, as well as curiosity, respect and love for the people and the history of Montes de María. I sought to discover the complexities of peacebuilding made of invisible connections and linkages of individuals, communities, organizations, NGOs, international organizations and

authorities, joining efforts not only to overcome direct violence but to also lay the foundations for social change in Montes de María.

Chapter 7 illustrated the intricacies of local peacebuilding in Alta Montaña after the cornstarch was tossed. It presented the ebb and flow of peacebuilding where individuals and communities intended to create reconciliation from a fractured social fabric.

The following four findings emerged from my interviews with its staff, campesino leaders and peacebuilders in the exploration of the peacebuilding in Alta Montaña.

First is the pervasive *impact of violence* in Alta Montaña. Violence was used to control the territory, but also to debilitate communities, their organizations and leadership. All participants highlighted that armed actors stigmatized Montes de María and its inhabitants as guerrilla supporters, breaking the social fabric of their communities, reducing participation in social and political activities, as well as harming citizen interaction with state institutions. Through sports, family ties, religious and cultural activities, they realized they were pawns in a war that was not theirs and that they needed to join efforts to heal past wounds and to work together for reconciliation in the region. Communities themselves took the first step towards reconciliation and later looked for the support of Sembrandopaz who seized this call as an opportunity.

Second, the success of Sembrandopaz arises from *a balance of serendipity and strategy*. Even though the Holistic Plan provides a framework to advance Sembrandopaz's mission and vision, the immediate dynamics of the daily life of the communities and the continuing effects of the violence shape the organization's work. Some of the most successful aspects of Sembrandopaz's work did not result from a grand strategy based on logic frames, but from responding to particular needs and opportunities that arose. The Marches toward

Cartagena and the Human Chain were key nonviolent actions that emerged as Sembrandopaz responded to community needs and invitations. Similarly, Sembrandopaz was able to facilitate improbable dialogues between alienated community leaders in response to invitation. But such invitations only come if an organization is already on the ground, and has demonstrated its trustworthiness to a wide range of actors. One successful action led to another, eventually leading a well-structured visit to government institutions in Bogotá.

But Sembrandopaz does not work only through unanticipated one-time undertakings. It structures on-going programs, such as the variety of youth initiatives described in this chapter. Through the combination of community-initiated special projects and on-going programs, Sembrandopaz realizes a vision of change in Montes de María. This is an inductive and circular process between the opportunities the context presents, the experiences of the communities, and the way Sembrandopaz transforms them into concrete plans and actions.

These plans in turn impact the context by diminishing the effects of violence, strengthening leadership and social organizations, or by creating new opportunities for action. In this process relationship building, serendipity, ingenuity and strategy are central elements in interpreting the context and proposing new and innovative ideas. Early in the field work, Esquivia warned me that “We don’t do conflict transformation. We work for peace.” It was a clear message that in the real world of peacebuilding, theories are just one element of an intricate web of activities, alliances, decisions, failures and serendipity.

Following Mac Ginty’s concept of everyday peace, Sembrandopaz has the ability to identify those “micro dynamics of interpersonal exchange” that individuals develop to

navigate in divides societies. Through meetings, religious services and, cultural and sport activities Sembrandopaz facilitate the healing of fracture relationships and the nurturing of nascent leaderships. The organization not only identify and strengthen these dynamics but propel them towards other levels and settings of leadership. Sembrandopaz's local-local work based on relationship building not only is disrupting violent dynamics in the region but it is also taking a proactive stance by creating a platform of trust and safety to address structural violence more in tune with a social justice vision.

A third finding is *the careful craft of building relationships*. Far away from cookie cutter recipes, programs and projects, peacebuilding in Alta Montaña showed me that skills and techniques are just a fraction of the work. Paraphrasing Lederach in the Moral Imagination, peacebuilding is a creative process developed within a familiar landscape of violence and towards an ideal that does not yet exist. It relies on building and nurturing relationships, accompaniment, generation of new ideas, trust, good faith, as well as many failures and disappointments, but also successes and changes.

Sembrandopaz's interactions between regional and national institutions and the grassroots level is one of its strengths. This dynamic has important implications in the way local peacebuilding initiatives can operate both to respond to concrete needs at the grassroots level as well as to the dynamics of formal and institutional approaches to peacebuilding.

An important example is the creation of MOPAM and their participation in local elections which demanded former enemies to work together for a common purpose. Another example is the creation and work of ERCP as a meeting place, a platform for different actors in the region to work for peace. Perhaps the main lesson in this finding is

that relationships for relationships sake are not enough. For relationships to be a platform requires constant nurturing and accompaniment. Strong platforms such as ERCP and MOPAM, rely on the quality of relationships and its strategic use.

Fourth, the presence *of resilient community leadership was critical to the successes in Alta Montaña*. When the central leader of Alta Montaña, Jorge Montes, was imprisoned, new leaders took his place while he continued to be involved from a distance. Instead of weakening the process, his imprisonment actually reoriented it.

Community leadership is often voluntary work that demands vocation and sacrifice. Campesinos sometimes lose a day's work to participate in meetings, which is more difficult for women with children. This challenge is also in tune with the literature on gender and peacebuilding that highlight that the role of women in peacebuilding is overshadowed and limited to care but not to as decision makers.

The fifth theme to emerge is that *success in one activity produced the confidence to undertake further improbable tasks*. One of the most significant examples of Sembrandopaz's work is the one-week delegation of campesinos from different municipalities to lobby different institutions in Bogotá in September 2015. Campesinos began to realize that they have the agency to meet as equals with Bogotá's bureaucratic elites to discuss the challenges of land restitution programs in Montes de María. It is difficult to measure the sense of confidence and trust that has developed among the campesinos, yet it makes an important difference in leadership and in the implementation of concrete actions. As a facilitator, Sembrandopaz encouraged communities in making real their vision for peace in Montes de María by providing resources, but especially by building confidence and trust in the communities' own strength and skills. Intangible ideas

and dreams eventually turn in to concrete projects, that eventually ignite new ideas. It is a constant cycle of ideas, nurturing relationships, cultivating confidence, and implementing concrete projects and programs.

Conclusion

Violence in Montes de María was carefully tailored to silence and dismantle social processes and political participation, by reducing community participation, controlling channels of communication as well as socialization sites.

The youth has been particularly affected by the violent conflict. Many of them lost family members and grew up in neighboring cities losing their *campesino* identity. There is no incentive to go back to Alta Montaña due to its weak economy and lack of economic opportunities. Despite this grim context, the various peacebuilding processes in Alta Montaña have become an example for other communities in Montes de María because of the quality of its leadership and their strategic approaches to peacebuilding. Campesinos in Alta Montaña took a nonviolent stance to confront the disunion in the social fabric by convening secret meetings, taking advantage of sports events, and by holding improbable dialogues between key leaders.

This chapter also illustrated that communities in Alta Montaña's are not homogenous, and distrust is still present as a result of the divide and rule strategies of the government, the paramilitaries and the guerrillas during the violent conflict so that some sectors are critical of nonviolent initiatives such as the Peaceful Movement and the Peaceful Process. Moreover, these initiatives also face the pressure and threat of armed actors still prevailing in the region.

Finally, as a researcher it was interesting to witness how building relationships was the foundation for the creation of platforms such as the ERCPMM. One of the key elements of conflict transformation are relationships and very obvious and yet very difficult to accomplish in contexts where violence is still prevalent.

Chapter 8. Sembrandopaz and the experience of Libertad

Introduction

Compared to the experiences of other municipalities in Montes de María, paramilitary groups settled down in Libertad controlling every aspect of its daily life. In fact, from 1997 to 2004, Libertad was a confined community where the paramilitaries committed torture, selective homicides, sexual violence, forced labor, dispossession of people from their land, confiscation of their goods, and the restriction on the people's practice of their cultural traditions (Pardo García et al., 2018).

During field work, social and political leaders from Libertad asserted that violence continues to manifest itself in terms of social and economic inequalities, where unemployment, lack of access to schooling, universities and sports arenas make the youth easy prey for criminal gangs and drug addiction (interviews, November 21, 2015; November 29, 2015). Leaders from the community council went on to especially highlight the paradox that *campesinos* in Libertad are in need of land for agriculture, however, there are two thousand hectares of unproductive land in private hands, most of it is owned by the now closed shrimp industry (interview November 29, 2015).

Manuel is one of the members of Libertad's Community Council. He highlighted the effects of violence in a community that despite its poverty has had strong social cohesion and culture. This is what he had to say on the issue.

Libertad was a very healthy town. We didn't have electricity. We didn't have doctors. The doctors were my grandmother and grandfather. They were the midwives and they taught many people how to deliver babies. With traditional

medicine, they attended people from different *corregimientos*. All of this was lost after the arrival of the armed groups (interview November 29, 2015).

Indeed, the paramilitary's military strategies to control Libertad operated in two main dimensions. First, they prohibited ancestral cultural practices such as festivals, dances, songs and wakes. Second, they controlled people's bodies through abusing women, girls and members of the LGBTQ community, who were targeted and forced to comply to strict conservative gender roles. Sexual violence was used as a weapon to control the population.

After 2004, when the community revolted against paramilitary dominance, Libertad has worked hard to regain its self-determination through strengthening its participatory settings, and recovering cultural practices. It is a process of ethnic recognition as means of resistance and towards the healing of a broken social fabric after years of oppression, and it is especially an example of an intergenerational dialogue and peacebuilding activism from the youth's perspective (Garay, 2016; Pardo García et al., 2018)

Libertad was wounded and weakened from the paramilitary domination of the region. Yet it found in its traditions the strength to resist and to organize itself, especially through creating a Community Council and strengthening youth organizations. This section focuses on two significant forms of organization in Libertad, namely the Community Council and Afromúsica.

The Community Council of the Black Communities of Libertad

According to the 1993 Colombian Law 70, community councils are legal entities for the protection and preservation black communities' collective lands, its natural resources, and respect for their cultural traditions.

The creation of the community council is part of a self-recognition process of black communities living in Montes de María (Pardo García et al., 2018) that begun in the late 1990s through the support of the work of organizations such as the Red de Consejos Comunitarios del Caribe (*Network of Community Councils of the Caribbean*) and the Mesa Afro de los Montes de María (*Table for the Afrocolombian communities of Montes de María*) (Pardo García et al., 2018). Libertad, with Sembrandopaz's support, established its community council in 2008, initially with three members, because many of the traditional leaders left San Onofre during the peak of violence. Currently, the council has 15 members organized in committees relating to health, education and youth (Pardo García et al., 2018). Members of the council highlighted that after the paramilitaries left, different organizations emerged within civil society, each with its own agenda and visions for Libertad deteriorating an already fragile community social fabric. Delia articulated that as a response, the Council decided to gather leaders from these different organizations so they could work together to forge a common vision (interview November 29, 2015). Thus, most of the community council members are also members of *campesino* based organizations, women's groups, and youth groups, among others.

Jaime, a youth leader from Afromúsica revealed that during this consolidation process they acknowledged and valued Sembrandopaz's support and assistance since 2007, especially in strengthening their internal organization with the support of an MCC volunteer (interviews November 21, 2015; November 28, 2015). In addition, the Community Council also had the support of local and regional institutions such as the mayor's office, the governor's office, The Instituto Nacional de Bienestar Familiar or ICBF

(*Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing*) and international organizations such as USAID.

As a result of its work, the Council achieved the construction of 189 houses for displaced people and it is planning to build a water aqueduct in Libertad. The recovery of local people's cultural traditions is another of the Council's noticeable achievements. The Council also negotiated with the Victim's Unit to get musical instruments for youth groups to ensure that traditional songs and dances were performed. Moreover, after many years, the Council organized two bullerengue festivals and it is supporting youth groups such as Afromúsica.

However, the Council has faced a number of challenges that can be divided into internal and external. My interviewees highlighted that one of the most salient internal challenges in Libertad is related to leadership. Indeed, the people's distrust of each other was one of the destructive legacies of Libertad's violence that is reflected in the escalation of conflict between community-based organizations. Leadership positions within the community is an ungrateful endeavor for elected council members to undertake, since, they always face criticisms no matter what they do. Delia recounted that, "communities do not appreciate, do not value the work that community leaders do" (interview November 28, 2015). Women face further criticisms that are a legacy of the presence of paramilitarism that imposed strict rules on women and minimized its leadership. Delia is a Council member and she recounted the following in her narrative (interview November 28, 2015):

They tell my husband that I go out dancing. The stigma is that we are partying, but I tell you that to be a leader you need to be blind, deaf and mute. But in time people realise that what we really want is to work. We have to change many things and people

need to support its leaders. This council is not mine. I owe this to each of the members of the community organizations because they are the ones who helped me day-after-day to get here.

Libertad women struggle with the perceptions that other community members have of them that also lies within their own families. For example, Verónica, also a member of the community council of Libertad had the following to say on the issue (interview November 28, 2015).

We are not only housewives and mothers. We are also community leaders. Maybe we need to work more with families to make them understand that it is not that I want to be all the time outside the home; but that I love this and that I want to fight for a better community that will also benefit them. What I say is ‘look, what we want is a future where our daughters have a different vision for this community.’ There is so much to do, not only here in Libertad, but in the whole municipality and even in the other municipalities of Montes de María.

The respondents highlighted the imminent postaccord setting as a central external challenge for the Council. Councillors acknowledged that they are facing an enormous uphill struggle, for which they do not have proper support. Indeed, as a community, Libertad knew back in 2005 the consequences of a poorly orchestrated reintegration process with paramilitary groups. Former combatants regrouped into criminal gangs to control the drug trade. Various leaders alerted me that if there are no employment opportunities, Libertad could face a new wave of violence. Council members were very critical of peace negotiations and their aftermath. They asserted that recent peace negotiations with FARC do not address deep social and economic inequalities that are at

the core of the conflict, and if they are not addressed, violence will emerge again. Veronica is a female councillor and she asserted that, “If they [the guerrillas] only surrender their weapons and there are no solutions for lack of education, health, employment and basic services, so where is peace?” (interview November 28, 2015). Moreover, the council has faced a number of challenges in its relationships with state institutions, sometimes because the institution ignores them, while at other times the council does not meet the legal requirements for the petition that it is putting forward. For instance, Delia expressed the point that it put forward a petition for the construction of a childcare center, a cultural house and a sports field, and due to the fact that the land was not legalized, the council lost the bid and its financial resources (interview November 28, 2015). In another example, the council bought 30 computers for the school, and ten were stolen. Despite its best efforts, its lack of knowledge of public procedures, and dynamics as well as corruption became hurdles in it achieving its goals.

In addition, one of the council’s key concerns is the lack of opportunities for the youth. It insists that one of its main priorities is to prepare the next generation of leaders for Libertad. Nevertheless, its relationships with youth organizations have not been easy.

Youth Tradition, Resistance and Defiance

Libertad’s work with youth is crucial for the survival of their political organizations and cultural traditions. There are two main youth organizations in Libertad, namely the Organización Juvenil Fomentadora de Paz or OJFP (*Youth Organization for Building Peace*) that was established in 2014, and Afromúsica that was created in 2015 after its separation from OJFP. Both organizations work towards the inclusion, integration and

strengthening of youth initiatives in San Onofre and to the reconstruction of the society's social fabric by building bridges between the generations.

Jaime, avowed that OJFP and Afromúsica arose from youth leaders' concerns about the role of children and youth in Libertad, and from the breach of trust from the Peace and Development Foundation of Montes de María to Libertad's youth and its leaders (interview November 21, 2015). Indeed, during one of its visits to Libertad, the Peace and Development Foundation expressed its will to assist youth and their organizations. They set up two meetings to brainstorm ideas with a group of young people, however the Foundation failed to attend both of them. Fearing that youth would lose interest, its own leaders at Libertad began to work with them, initially with improvised workshops just to keep the youth's interest and attention. The first activity was a workshop to "overcome shyness and embarrassment," where participants had to choose an object and convince their friends to buy it.

The Foundation felt that it was out of ideas and it was concerned that young participants were going to lose interest so it turned to Sembrandopaz for help, who at the time was working in Libertad to strengthen the community council.

Sembrandopaz listened to the Foundation's needs and begun to work with Libertad's youth focusing on three main topics: peacebuilding, community organization and environmental protection. Carlos reported that its first workshop together focused on the analysis of Libertad's context where the participants analysed their perceptions of the community and how they could be agents of change (interview November 21, 2015). Later, Sembrandopaz invited leaders from JOPPAZ to Libertad to analyze the current context of Montes de María and to present their own experiences of peacebuilding. Jaime revealed

that the goal was to create networks and platforms between peacebuilding initiatives, and especially, if it was an effort to connect youth leaders from different corners of Montes de María. As a leader from Carlos said this on the issue (interview November 21, 2015):

Leaders from JOPPAZ came to Libertad because they are a group that was organized before us, and we wanted to know how they organized themselves and how did they started in their community, so we could have a reference point to start our organization. Sembrandopaz brought three leaders from Alta Montaña and they explained to us their process. They began by bringing the community together and explaining them that young people wanted to work and be productive.

Libertad's youth, following the example of JOPPAZ and its environmental initiatives, decided to implement a project on reforestation in the locale. However, after several attempts, the initiative failed because of the geographical conditions and lack of technical and financial support to buy the plants and to take care of them. OJFP learned in a tough way that it has to find its own path because an initiative might be successful in one community yet not in another. After this failure, OJFP joined Sembrandopaz in a diagnostic of all its four communities of influence. It was a good opportunity for OJFP to meet youth from different municipalities, make connections and exchange ideas. The information collected confirmed the inequality in Montes de María but also the variety of interests of its youth. Jaime communicated that together with Sembrandopaz it decided to design a project that includes culture and the environment and, at the same time it generated employment opportunities and it strengthened local knowledge (interview November 21, 2015).

The project is a multifunctional about the recovery of traditional medicines and their uses that is also based on Sembrandopaz's Holistic Plan for a Dignified and Solidarity Life for the Youth of Montes de María. The intent was to ask the government to finance the project with the resources destined to maintain the army. Thus, instead of paying the soldiers a salary, the state would finance a project that supports education, culture and the environment. In addition, OJFP believed that private companies forced to return land bought illegally during the conflict in Montes de María should also provide some land for the *campesinos*. Over the long term, it wants all of the youth organizations in Montes de María to work together to end inequality, and to access the land. For this to happen a new leadership is needed as well as strengthening youth organizations and building strategic relationships with national and international organizations.

Another important element for Libertad's youth is the recovery of cultural traditions, especially through music, dance and theater. Consequently, Afromúsica emerged in 2015 to respond to this need, initially as part of OJFP and later as its own independent organization (Pardo García et al., 2018). It is an intergenerational project that joins elders and youth in a common goal to heal the community through the arts such as music, dance, storytelling, theatre, and drama (Pardo García et al., 2018, p. 135). Its leaders define Afromúsica as a project that combines tradition, resistance and rebellion (Rodríguez, 2018). Through research and dialogue with its elders, especially Mrs. Isabel Martínez de Guzmán, a.k.a. "Chavelo" and Mr. Domingo, the youth learned about traditional instruments such as the "llamador" and the "alegre," drums that are essential in the *bullerengue*, a traditional tune from the Caribbean Coast. Moreover, the youth created a new musical genre by mixing *bullerengue* with rap, hip-hop and other urban tunes that they call

bullenrap,¹⁰⁵ where they sing to their daily life in Libertad and their vocation for peace.

Elena is a young member of Afromúsica and she stated that, “I see Afromúsica as a way to recover the memory of our people by working together with the elders and to bring a message of peace in each song” (interview November 19, 2015). A sample of the lyrics in Table 6 below illustrate this point.¹⁰⁶

Table 6. Afromúsica song

Aunque pasó la violencia y nuestra vida cambió Y el dolor y la tristeza nuestra tierra marcó, No somos un pueblo de guerra, somos un pueblo de paz: Como la juventud que sueña en el pueblo de Libertad.	Although violence passed through and our lives changed And pain and sadness marked our land We are not a people of war, we are people of peace. Like the youth that dream in the town of Libertad.
Suenan tambores de resistencia, de gente negra, <i>bullenrap</i> , ritmo autóctono de la tierra. Ya no más guerra, quiero paz en los territorios. Suenan tambores que te hacen rechazar el odio.	The drums of black resistance sound, <i>bullenrap</i> , native rhythm of the land. No more war, I want peace in the territories. The sound of drums makes you reject hate.
Rescatar el bullerengue es lo que más anhelo. Estamos cantando aquí Afromusica y Chavelo Recuperaste en mi pueblo las tradiciones, las hermosas costumbres y la rica sazón.	What I desired the most is to reclaim bullerengue. We are singing here with Afromusica and Chavelo. You recovered the traditions of my town, the beautiful customs and the rich spice.

¹⁰⁵ See Bullenrap’s official video available in Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv5a8FuCr4o> . Other videos are:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVwePhGnRZU&list=RDMmkVwePhGnRZU&start_radio=1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7O41IB_3T0&list=RDMmkVwePhGnRZU&index=5

¹⁰⁶ Thank you to Angela Lederach for help in translating this poetry.

Afromúsica has received national and international praise and recognition for its contribution to the recuperation of traditions, building intergenerational bridges and its approach to building peace (Pardo García et al., 2018; Rodríguez, 2018).

The role of Sembrandopaz was significant both for OJFP and Afromúsica. It assisted in their organizational processes, accompanying and guiding them in building strong internal relations and also with their own community and other actors in the municipality and the region. Sembrandopaz has provided resources for training, psychosocial support and exchanges with leaders from other organizations and institutions. Yet most important of all is that these groups feel acknowledged as important partners in the Holistic Plan for a Dignified and Solidarity Life for the Youth of Montes de María, empowering them to envision a long-term plan for Montes de María. Perhaps one of the most significant outcomes in Sembrandopaz's work in Libertad is changing youth's perceptions and their potential. This is especially significant in the empowerment of women. Music and theater provided young women with the setting to express themselves. As a young musician, Elena revealed the following in her story (interview November 19, 2015):

Sembrandopaz sponsored two youth to study theatre in Bogotá. There was one student and they did not want him to go alone. And because he was male, Sembrandopaz wanted a woman in the training. It was a challenge for me. Bogotá is the largest city in the country... and it was very cold! But I said "it doesn't matter, let's do what we came for."

And when we began doing theatre with the group I felt confident because many people around here shut us up saying “You talk too much.” Here [doing theatre] I did find what is mine. I can be free!

Sembrandopaz has played a role in Libertad mainly by strengthening its community based organizations and its members. Carlos is also an OJFP youth participant. She summarized the role of Sembrandopaz as follows (interview, November 21, 2015):

With Sembrandopaz we are working in that project [The Holistic Plan] that in one way or another is strong. We are also working on psychosocial issues; they gave us accompaniment and financial support when they covered our expenses to go to Bogotá for training in theater and to replicate it with other youths. Every time we go to meet and argue with Argos,¹⁰⁷ it is Semprandopaz who provides the resources. With Sembrandopaz you work hand-in-hand.

Sembrandopaz’s support has been significant, yet it has been a process with numerous obstacles. For example, Elena revealed that youth leaders highlighted that one of the main obstacles was the negative stereotypes people from Libertad and the community council had of the youth, calling them crazy, disrespectful and lazy (interview November 19, 2015). Even their own families rejected their participation in youth groups. She noted that the situation was especially dire for women, whose parents reprimanded them for leaving their traditional role as women helping their mothers with house chores.

¹⁰⁷ Argos is a cement company with activities in Montes de María. It was accused of dispossessing people from their land in the municipality of El Carmen de Bolívar

As a OJFP leader expressed the following in her narrative (interviews November 21, 2025; November 25, 2015):

Mary was punished many times and it made me very sad. We are neighbors and I listened when her father reprimanded her badly. He did not want her to go to the meetings, because he said that she would waste time, instead of washing dishes. Flor and Aurora were also scolded a lot.

As a young woman from Afromúsica Elena remembers that her neighbours used to call them crazy because they were walking the streets with musical instruments on their way to rehearsals and community meetings (interviews November 21, 2025; November 25, 2015).

Despite the positive rhetoric emanating from the Community Council, its relationships with OJFP and Afromúsica have not been easy. Youth leaders complained that the Council's leadership monopolizes the resources the town receives. For example, the Victim's Unit sent Afromúsica musical instruments and computers for children and youth, yet the Council controls and restricts its use, even though youth leaders did all the lobbying for these resources. As a result, there have been arguments between the Council and OJFP. OJFP feels that the Council's leadership does not represent its members and it is advocating for change that is more inclusive and representative of its demands.

OJFP and Afromúsica's strategy to respond to these challenges was to approach the elders in the community. Carlos articulated that their theory of change was straight forward as "the Community Council has six leaders, whereas the elders are more than 200. It was strategic because we really needed help" (interview November 11, 2015). They got

recorders from an NGO to interview the elders about their lives when they were young; how they dressed, what their feasts, dances and relationships between the generations looked like, how they courted, and the use medicinal plants, among other topics. Through this strategy youth leaders managed to forge a relationship with the elders who eventually understood the work of OJFP and Afromúsica. Carlos is a leader from Afromúsica and had the following to say (interview November 19, 2015):

At the beginning they rejected us, but when we found the way to approach them everything changed. Elders like to tell stories. They like to talk a lot. When we forged that relationship, we got their support and ways to work with them. We had a double intention: One, was to make them realize that we were not the kind of people they thought we were: lazy and disrespectful drug addicts. [The second intention was] to have their support and to learn from them.

Jaime noted that another strategy used by youth groups to gain the favor of the community was to contribute to communal activities such as the cleaning of the cemetery (Interview November 19, 2015). Before paramilitary violence, the community used to get together to clean the cemetery to commemorate the Day of the Dead. This tradition was lost as a result of the violence, the cemetery that was once a meeting place for the community, was neglected. The OJFP organized a day to clean up the cemetery. They got paint and candles from the Victim's Unit to paint the vaults and to honor the dead. There was a potluck at the end-of-the- day, were the community shared a meal together after a day of cleaning. The OJFP and Afromúsica used these actions to change local people's perceptions about their work by learning about their past and building relationships within their community and with other organizations and institutions.

The Peace Agreement: Between Skepticism and Uncertainty

During the fieldwork, the participants shared with me different appreciations of the peace process. There was a sense of uncertainty and expectation of “what is going to happen” and there were also critical voices rising doubts about the process. For some of the participants, they contended that the dialogues were insufficient and would not respond to a context such as Montes de María. For example, Teresa a young social worker from San Onofre noted that, “what is the purpose to talk about [peace], when at any moment, armed groups can take over the town?” (interview, November 24, 2015). Moreover, there was a feeling of disconnection between the dialogues in Havana, while violence in the country continued unabated. A young female artist from Libertad named Helena stated that, “while peace dialogues are happening, the ELN is kidnapping and killing people. They are talking about peace in Havana, and they are negotiating and killing people. I do not see any logic” (Interview, November 19, 2015). This comment is an example of one of the main criticisms made by people to the government during the peace process about the lack of an adequate pedagogy within the negotiations, its objectives, reach, and dynamics. The people’s misperceptions that the dialogues with FARC would solve all of the conflicts in the country, or that it would usher in the guerrillas’ surrender were also common. Thus, the peace process was perceived as a path towards impunity and an award to the guerrilla after years of violence. This is what Yasmin, a public servant in San Onofre, had to say on the issue:

I believe that If they, [the guerrillas] are going to sign the peace agreement, they must be mindful of what they have done. We are not going to give them everything

on a silver platter. They have to earn it! I do not agree to give them a seat in the Congress (Interview, November 24, 2015)

People were also tired of false promises. From previous dialogues with other guerrillas and more recently with the demobilization of paramilitary groups, communities learned that neither an agreement, nor even a law, is a guarantee for the successful implementation of the accord. Referring to the implementation of the Victim's Law (Law 1448, 2011) Raul, a university professor in Sincelejo stated that communities are resentful because they have not received any individual or collective reparation that was promised by the government. He noted that they feel they have been fooled (interview, October 24, 2015) and, Carlos a cultural youth leader reported that fearing a return of violence, some missed President Uribe's firm approach to control the region (Interview, October 21). For other participants, like Helena and Raul, the peace process was perceived as something foreign that did not respond to their needs such as access to land, which is at the core of the conflict in Montes de María, and domestic violence which is an immediate concern at the local level (Interviews, October 24, 2015; November 19, 2015).

Nevertheless, they are aware that the signing of the peace agreement might bring money and communities must be prepared to access and administer these resources. Jaime, a youth leader from Afromúsica commented: "... when the agreement is signed it will rain money, but we have to be prepared because money is not everything... but I am not really sure how to prepare myself. I don't have enough information. We don't discuss about this in the group" (interview, October 25, 2015).

Rosa, one of Sembrandopaz's coordinators highlighted that through a number of trainings and workshops Sembrandopaz encouraged individuals and communities to

approach the dialogues as an opportunity to be active peacebuilding agents for the benefit for Montes de María (interview, October 23, 2015). Nevertheless, many concerns remained. Yasmin avowed that one of the most salient issues was what they called the “privatization of peace,” where corporations from the private sector, many of them accused of stealing land in Montes de María, will settle in the region with financial muscle and obstruct local social processes” (Interview October 24, 2015).

In sum, although there were positive expectations about the peace process, previous experiences with peace dialogues and peacebuilding initiatives raised doubts about whether it would actually be implemented. The following statement from a Yasmin summarized the atmosphere in Montes de María:

I would like to know how peace is going to happen, hopefully peace will come and we will all be aware of what peace is and what is that peace process about. Let's see! There are many people who say that peace will never come, because if there is hunger there is no peace; if bullets stop, other things do not (interview, October 24, 2015).

Despite Colombia's history of violence, Montes de María has been the center for important peace negotiations and peacebuilding initiatives. For instance, it has been the location for various demobilization processes for guerrillas¹⁰⁸ and paramilitaries.¹⁰⁹ It is

¹⁰⁸ In 1991, the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores or PRT (*Revolutionary Worker's Party*) signed a peace agreement with the government in the village of Don Gabriel in the municipality of Ovejas. A month later, combatants from the Ejército de Liberación Popular or EPL (the *Popular Liberation Army*) demobilized in the municipality of Córdoba. Finally, in April 1994 the Corriente de Renovación Socialista or CRS (*Social Renovation Movement*) signed a peace agreement with the government in the village of Flor del Monte in the municipality of Ovejas (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica & VerdadAbierta.com, 2014).

¹⁰⁹ The paramilitary group Heroes of Montes de María demobilized in 2005.

also home to numerous grassroots initiatives mainly on human rights, land restitution, victim support, and peace and development, among others.

Findings

The previous chapter highlighted the role that strong relationships played in Alta Montaña in the aftermath of extreme violence, chapter 8 is about the difficulties of building peace in a context where people do not feel safe, and leaders have been more cautious. In Libertad the work of Sembrandopaz centers on the supporting of the Community Council and the work with youth. It is a careful craft of weaving and healing relationships in a community where paramilitary violence was especially brutal. Compared with Alta Montaña, Sembrandopaz takes a step back to strengthen political and cultural leadership. From the analysis of my interviews and participant observation, the following four significant findings emerged:

The first finding is the widespread *skepticism to the ongoing peace process between the government and FARC*. In contrast with Alta Montaña, most of the participants interviewed in Libertad were very critical of the peace process, perceiving it as a path towards impunity and a reward for committing crimes against humanity. Others indicated that the peace process seems distant and many were uninterested since they do not perceive a change in their everyday life. For instance, respondents highlighted that violence against land claimants increased during the peace dialogues. It is not easy to believe in the state when historically its presence has been weak, especially during the peak of paramilitary violence.

Fewer participants were slightly more optimistic in the opportunities that a peace agreement could bring, especially the investments that might arrive in the territory bringing

development and employment. However, they are aware they are not prepared for the challenges of the postaccord.

This finding came as a surprise. Considering the progress of the peace process by 2015, I was expecting to find more support for the dialogues, especially as a result of Sembrandopaz's work in Libertad and the surrounding area. Instead I found suspicion, mistrust and disinterest. Compared to Alta Montaña, peacebuilding initiatives in Libertad are more restricted to the local arena, thus Sembrandopaz's approach has been at a slower pace and focused in strengthening local leaderships. Moreover, the research did not show that there are significant strategies to connect and involve regional and national institutions in peacebuilding.

Although it still requires more research, perhaps the case of Libertad is in tune with Paffenholz's (2015) critical assessment of the local turn in peacebuilding, and there is a need to better understand local elites and nascent armed groups related with drug trafficking, and the power they wield. This represents an enormous challenge not only for Sembrandopaz but to any peacebuilding initiative intended to intervene in Libertad where violence still permeates political and social relations in the territory. Nevertheless, through the arts and leadership support, Sembrandopaz attempts to disrupt cycles of violence in Libertad by providing youth with different settings to learn, to socialize and to grow as leaders.

The second finding is the distrust on leaders and its effects on Libertad. Similar to Alta Montaña, leadership emerged as an important element in Libertad. Violence left a legacy of distrust in Libertad that seriously obstructs participation in the corregimiento. Some participants complained of stagnant leaderships of older leaders that are incapable of

understanding the needs of younger generations. Accusations about favoritism and mismanagement of resources emerged as significant obstacles for participation. On the other hand, youth were perceived as irresponsible and not ready for leadership roles. Leaders interviewed complaint that they feel unappreciated for their effort and sacrifices, which is particularly salient for female leaderships. These are not surprising findings considering that prevalence of a patriarchal culture. Sembrandopaz has learned that building peace in a context where violence left a broken and wounded community and where peace is an empty word, transformation begins with capacity building and accompaniment before embarking in more structural changes.

The third finding is the role of youth in building bridges between generations.

While in Alta Montaña youth focused on the environment as their work niche, in Libertad they found in music and theater the means for their leadership. It has been valuable in closing generational gaps, and in recovering cultural traditions; at the same time, it has also allowed them to participate in other participatory settings in the corregimiento. Arts has allowed young women to increase their self confidence and to envision their role as leaders.

Sembrandopaz played an important role in training and accompany the youth and in strengthening their organizational process. My research found that Sembrandopaz's focus on youth and the arts was important to change the negative perception of this group in Libertad, but especially in empowering female leaderships. Considering the dire violence against women in Libertad this approach might help in engaging more women and girls in social and political processes.

The fourth finding refers to impact of Sembrandopaz in Alta Montaña and Libertad. The previous chapters presented Sembrandopaz's approach to peacebuilding

and focused on their differentiated work in two dissimilar communities in Montes de María. Sembrandopaz has implemented a holistic approach to peacebuilding based on relationship building which has provided important outcomes for a region needed of healing and reconciliation.

In terms of relationship building Sembrandopaz has important accomplishments at local, regional, national and international levels. However, they have not managed to have sustainable and economic independent communities. They have taken important steps with the implementation of agricultural projects, but the outcomes are still weak.

In terms of political participation, MOPAZ, JOPPAZ and the Community Council of Libertad are significant examples of their role in strengthening social and political organizations. However, MOPAZ have not yet get political representation in major institutions, like the municipal council. In Libertad, the Community Council struggles with the lack of legitimacy of its leaders.

Sembrandopaz long term approach to peacebuilding and its preference for building relationships has proved to be effective at the personal and relational levels and even change at a cultural level but remains to be seen changes at more structural levels.

Conclusion

Peacebuilding initiatives in Libertad are still in its early stages and the leadership is weak and contested compared to what I found in Alta Montaña. The youth criticized the older leaders as inefficient and blind to the needs of youth, whereas the elders saw the youth as uncommitted and indolent. Sembrandopaz's approach to assisting Libertad focused on building bridges between both of these groups as well as cultivating youth leadership through the strengthening of cultural traditions. Nevertheless, Sembrandopaz's

peacebuilding work in Libertad has been slow and the conditions for peacebuilding are still fragile. The perception that people have on the peace process illustrates this point. None of the participants were against the peace process, but there was skepticism on the real intentions of the parties and the road towards implementation. Currently in Libertad, paramilitary groups are currently trying to regain control of the territory and people are wary and cautious of participating in political, cultural or social activities. After a long history of violence in Montes de María people cannot be blamed of their doubts on peacebuilding.

Chapter 9. Discussion

Introduction

The journey for this research began in 1995 when as a young lawyer I explored community-based conflict resolution, and got acquainted with the Mennonite Church and its work in conflict resolution and restorative justice in Colombia. At that time, peace negotiations in Colombia were rare and limited to the government's arena. There was, however, a growing curiosity amongst scholars scattered around the world about a new concept, namely conflict transformation. Many years have passed since that time. Colombia signed a peace agreement with FARC guerrillas, and has entered into a shaky postaccord stage. Meanwhile, peace and conflict studies have consolidated as a field of study nationally and internationally, and conflict transformation is part of the parlance of the field, although it continued to be elusive for me.

When I began my research in Montes de María, I wanted to understand conflict transformation, how it has been adapted in Colombia and what contributions the country is making to its theory and practice. Thus, this thesis was much more than the analysis of a particular NGO, it was also a journey through the intricacies of local peacebuilding in Colombia with Sembrandopaz, a small community-based organization in the heart of Montes de María. Sembrandopaz's close connections to the work of John Paul Lederach provided me with the lenses through which I made sense of what I saw.

Far from romanticizing the local, this thesis was a process that allowed me to reflect about how peacebuilding works at the local level, its transformative potential, and

what contributes to the transformation or escalation of conflict when divisions are still present as a result of decades of violence.

As many other peace scholars before me have highlighted, there are no recipes for building peace. Far from being a straight-forward exercise of strategies and techniques, peacebuilding is messy, contradictory, and requires lots of imagination, and above all else patience, persistence and commitment. Sembrandopaz does not deviate from this pattern. Compared with large (I)NGOs, think tanks and the national government, Sembrandopaz is a small organization with a limited budget. So, why is Sembrandopaz's experience significant? What can peacebuilding and peace studies scholars and practitioners learn from Sembrandopaz and its contribution to conflict transformation? The answer is simple: sometimes peacebuilding initiatives are transformative and it is important to know why, especially within a context of more than 60 years of internal armed conflict and during a fragile implementation of a peace accord.

This chapter discusses the main surprises, learnings and obstacles that I found in Sembrandopaz's work, tying it back to some of the relevant literature including Lederach's conflict transformation idea. The chapter has six sections. It begins with the discussion on Sembrandopaz's embracing of conflict transformation precepts; analysis that I based on the Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding and the Platforms of Change models. In the second section I analyze leadership, its different manifestations and importance in building peace. The third section introduces the discussion on the understanding of change and how it can be measured. In this section I propose the integration or collaboration between Everyday Peace Indicators and Conflict Transformation. The fourth section analyzes the work of Sembrandopaz from the perspective of the critical discussions on postliberal peace.

Then, the fifth section addresses the main obstacles and challenges that Sembrandopaz faces. I close the chapter with final conclusions.

The research in Montes de Maria was conducted during a period of prolonged negotiations between the Colombian government and FARC, yet the present discussion must necessarily address some of the subsequent dynamics in the postaccord situation that have emerged since my field work was completed.

“We don’t do conflict transformation, we work for peace.” Sembrandopaz and the main precepts of conflict transformation

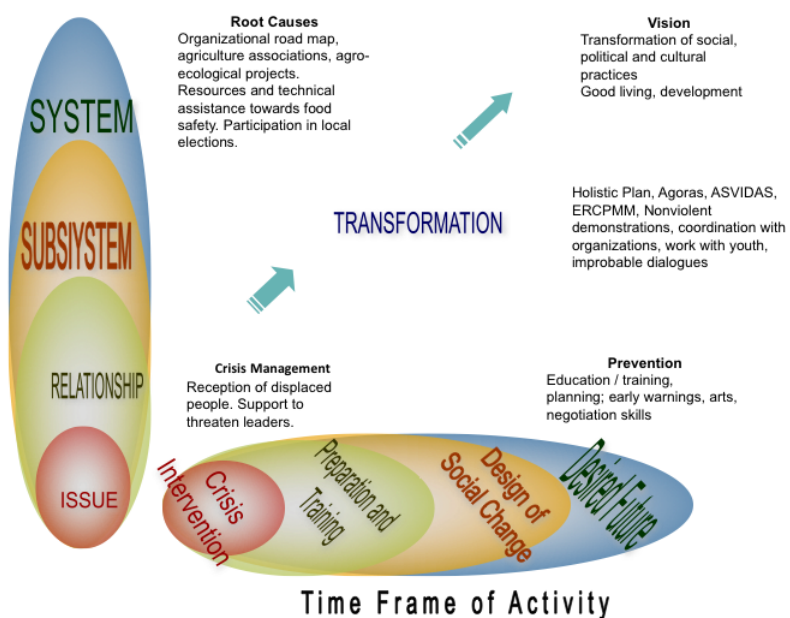
One of the most significant quotes from Ricardo Esquivia was: “we don’t do conflict transformation, we work for peace.” As an activists and practitioner Ricardo highlights that they do not follow an academic theory, instead they respond to the everyday needs of the community with a long-term vision that they have for Montes de María. However, the research illustrates that Sembrandopaz’s approach on peacebuilding reflects the precepts of conflict transformation, whose lessons learned can be a good example for other Colombian regions dealing with the difficulties of a postaccord peacebuilding stage.

Comparing Sembrandopaz activities with Lederach’s Integrated Framework for Building Peace model

In this thesis, several elements stood out. First, Sembrandopaz has a comprehensive vision in the way to approach conflict in Montes de María that goes beyond of the visible manifestations of the internal armed conflict. Instead, Sembrandopaz intends to approach conflict in the region as a system and a process that incorporates different levels of intervention, perspectives and actions. This is consistent with Lederach’s (1997) Integrated

Framework for Peacebuilding, as shown in Figure 7. This framework will be used to analyze how Sembrandopaz activities address each of the levels proposed in the model.

Figure 8. Sembrandopaz Activities vis-à-vis Lederach Integrated Framework for Building Peace



Source: Lederach, J. P. (1997). Building peace. Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, p. 80. Used with permission.

Crisis management: According to the model, peacebuilders that emphasize this approach focus on responding to humanitarian crisis to alleviate human suffering during the conflict (Lederach, 1997). Although Sembrandopaz is not a humanitarian response organization, the dynamics of the conflict in Montes de María demand that the organization be able to respond in timely manner to any crisis. The welcoming of displaced people in Sembrandopaz's farm, Villa Barbara, is an example, as well as the support to Jorge Montes during his incarceration, and the providing psychosocial assistance to victims of violence.

Root causes: According to the model, peacebuilders that intervene in this level focus in the systemic factors that underline the structural analysis and core the causes of the conflict (Lederach, 1997, p. 79). Sembrandopaz's Internal Organizational and Areas of Action, exemplifies how they intend to address the root cause of conflict from a systemic perspective by integrating a combination of political, economic, ethical and aesthetical dimensions. Sembrandopaz's premise is that to prevent direct violence in the long term, it is important that communities strengthen themselves by participating in local affairs, learning about the functioning of the state, defending and promoting human rights and practicing conflict resolution. The Agoras and the ERCPMM are some concrete examples of political action that Sembrandopaz supports. In these settings, individuals and communities from all over Montes de María meet to discuss the region's problems and to find possible solutions. These are settings for dialogue, negotiation and planning to address pressing structural problems in the region.

The political dimension in Alta Montaña and Libertad took different paths but with a common purpose: the strengthening of political participation. With a stronger and longer tradition of political participation, during the peak of violence Alta Montaña struggled to maintain their traditional settings for local participation such as JAL, churches and sports and cultural activities. Nevertheless, it was these same settings that fostered reconciliation. In Libertad, violence decimated cultural traditions and participation settings, and Sembrandopaz's approach was to support the reconstruction of these settings.

Generating wealth through agro-ecological projects and creating agricultural associations is another element of Sembrandopaz's approach to addressing economic inequality, one of the main root causes of conflict in the region. Through technical

assistance and creating cooperatives, Sembrandopaz promotes collaboration and participation as a cornerstone to their approach to economics.

Prevention: In this approach, peacebuilders work to prevent the recurrence of crises by developing skills to make it less likely that people will resort to violence. Training in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, human rights and nonviolence are some examples of prevention. Equally important are the connections with authorities and institutions at the local, national and international levels for early warnings in case of possible human rights violations. The ERCP plays an important role as a setting to discuss the situation of violence in the region. For instance, the Ombudsman Office regularly reports at the ERCP the status of the early warnings for the region. Both in Alta Montaña and Libertad education and training has been pivotal. In Alta Montaña, the main emphasis has been on nonviolence and political participation. The arts have been important in both communities. In Alta Montaña photography and theater are promoted to document daily experiences and the struggles in campesino life. In Libertad music is the vehicle to heal past wounds, to recover cultural traditions and to affirm their Afro-Colombian identity.

Vision: Under this perspective peacebuilders focus on the desired social and political structures for a society, as well as the future relationships between contending groups (Lederach, 1997, p. 81). The focus on youth, culture and protection of the environment present in Sembrandopaz's organizational roadmap and in the Holistic Plan for a Dignified and Solidary Life sets forth a comprehensive social and economic long-term vision for the future.

Transformation: According to the model transformation requires the integration of all the approaches mentioned above. The goal is to move from the crisis to a desired vision

of constructive relationships (Lederach, 2005). For this to happen, transformation operates at personal, relational and structural levels or what it is called the Theory of Change. Sembrandopaz's Internal Organization and Areas of Action (see Chapter 6) is the roadmap for an integral approach to peacebuilding that integrates these different levels. The ethics and spiritual areas of action are geared towards change at the personal and relational dimension; whereas the generation of wealth and political culture target change at the structural dimension. Also, the political dimension as well as the aesthetic and artistic dimension targets change at the cultural dimension. Every concrete action is designed to contribute to the long-term vision for the region. There were no surprises when I asked participants for their vision of Montes de María in 30 years: they picture reconciliation and a united community, but they also envisioned development, schools, universities, roads and hospitals.

An important theme that emerged from the research was the integration of different actors. As presented previously, Table 4 illustrates the different actors with whom Sembrandopaz has connections. This is much more than a list of actors. Each of the actors that Sembrandopaz has connections with have as well their own connections and approaches to peacebuilding. Because of these linkages and as a result of it, Sembrandopaz benefits from them, but also influences those approaches. Many organizations resorted to Sembrandopaz for information, connections, support or validation of their work. It is a reciprocal relation of mutual benefit where new ideas emerge strengthening at the same time the relationship.

Platforms for change

From Lederach's work the Integrated Framework for Building Peace and the Actors and Approaches to Peacebuilding are perhaps the most familiar models for scholars and practitioners (Lederach, 2005). Although it was not the intention, the author acknowledges that these models can be understood as templates for the "engineering for social change" (p. viii) as part of a broader concept of Infrastructures for Peace. Platforms, on the other hand refer to those formal and informal structures that make possible the connection of different actors to exchange ideas, resources and the planning of concrete actions. The platform main strength lies in the quality of the relationships weaved in the interaction of its members.

This study illustrated some elements of a strong platform. First, is the nurturing of relationships through the interaction between its members that goes beyond formal meetings. It is an attitude of care for the other and the community where he or she belongs. Trust is another important element that is cultivated through participation and the opportunity to have improbable dialogues or "dialogues of equals in disagreement."

Not all platforms are strong and the case of the PDPMM is an example of that. Designed to gather different actors from the public, private and social sectors to work towards the development of the region, eventually dissolved due to lack of resources and trust between its members. The ERCPMM on the other hand, has been active for almost five years as an informal, nonprofit and voluntary setting. Although there have been disagreements between its members the doors are open for them to participate when they see appropriate.

This study showed that there are different and dissimilar platforms operating and interacting in Montes de María. Sembrandopaz has been a creator of platforms, like in ERCPMM but also a participant like with the National Peace Council, and it has also abandoned platforms when they consider that their participation is not fruitful.

Platforms are not easy to see because most of them are informal or are embedded within institutions and organizations. The creation, operation and interaction of platforms open doors for further research to better understand local dynamics of peacebuilding and to improve its impact in the region.

Leadership and moral imagination

In recent years, there has been increased interest in peace leadership. Although Boulding (1967) was the first to address this issue, the topic is new even for leadership studies. It is important to highlight the work of Amaladas and Byrne (2018), McIntyre-Miller (2016), and Ricke-Kiely's (2016) contributions to the debates on the nature of peace leadership including the peace leader's role, responsibilities, practices and challenges. Despite the richness of Colombia's peacebuilding initiatives, peace leadership is an area that has not been explored by PACS programs in the country and much less in relation to conflict transformation.¹¹⁰ Sembrandopaz's experience illustrates that the analysis of leadership at different levels is a fundamental ingredient for the transformation of conflict. Sembrandopaz's experience can provide important lessons for the future training and operation of peacebuilding leaders.

¹¹⁰ Three of the oldest programs in PACS in Colombia, Javeriana University, University of Cartagena and Los Andes University do not integrate leadership as a subject in their programs.

One of the most significant lessons garnered from this research is the importance of peacebuilding leadership. Leadership has many shades. It can be bright and visible like Ricardo Esquivia and Jorge Montes. But it can be more discrete like the role of teachers, farmers, JAC presidents, women's groups, youth groups, priests and pastors. Their actions can be public and spectacular, but also silent, slow and patient as it is in accompaniment.

Despite violence, leaders in Montes de María learned to reinvent to respond to violence: new leaderships emerged, many lowered their visibility and others continued to lead from the distance. Leaders serve as the voice of the communities, as their advocates for their rights before institutions and authorities, and as mediators between their members and other communities. This is not to romanticize the role of leaders. This research identified obstacles such as the apathy of the communities, the lack of appreciation to leaders' work, gender imbalances, rivalry between older and younger generations of leaders, lack of preparation and corruption.

The framework of the moral imagination was essential to better understand Sembrandopaz's approach to peacebuilding in general, and to leadership in particular. Lederach (2005) defines the moral imagination as the "*capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist*" (p. 13). He also identifies four disciplines of the moral imagination, that without them peacebuilding would be impossible: relationships, curiosity, creativity and risk. Perhaps the most difficult challenge for a leader in Montes de María is how to imagine something new when violence has been so ever present and part of the everyday life. It is remarkable that a region that is living through the consequences of 56 massacres in its

territory is “capable of giving birth” to strong peacebuilding initiatives and social processes such as Alta Montaña’s Peaceful Movement and Afromusica.

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted the importance that Sembrandopaz gives to relationship building. Esquivia’s phrase: “it is better to add than to subtract” is an acknowledgement that individuals, communities, institutions and armed actors are interconnected and their participation necessary in peacebuilding, no matter their affiliations or role in the conflict. Without their involvement, sustainable peace in Montes de María would be difficult and incomplete. This stance implies an open mind to embrace complexity and to understand how people experienced and responded to the realities of violence without judgement. The Festival of Reconciliation that takes place every year, with victims, perpetrators, civil society and institutions participating, is an example of a setting to hear from different actors their understanding of the causes of the armed conflict and how violence impacted their lives. The ERCPMM, on the other hand, is an example of relationships building towards the coordination of actions in the region. But Sembrandopaz’s accompaniment to MOPAM and JOPAZ illustrates that relationship building requires constant and subtle attention.

In the experience of Sembrandopaz creativity and risk are also important leadership traits. Creativity was especially evident in the organization and implementation of the March towards Cartagena and the Human Chain. Together with the campesinos and based on nonviolence teachings Sembrandopaz helped in the organization of these collective actions that eventually led to negotiations with regional authorities.

Building peace in Montes de María takes place at great risk for campesinos and its leaders. During violence leaders were stigmatized, persecuted, displaced and killed. Even

after the region was stabilized and peace negotiations were taking place, threats against leaders continued. The incarceration of Jorge Montes as a result of the March to Cartagena is an example of the price leaders face for their leadership.

Uncertainty is another type of risk leaders take on daily bases. Sembrandopaz's abysmal failure with poultry and watermelon projects in its early years was a tough and expensive learning experience that eventually led to changes in the agriculture program and to also Sembrandopaz's priorities and approaches to the communities. Almost all of the leaders I interviewed were displaced from the territory for a number of years. Their friends and family members were killed, and when they returned home they found their property abandoned or in the hands of others. Their willingness to take risks without the certainty of success and out of a sense of vocation is at the core of their leadership. Their love for their land was a strong call that could not be ignored. Afromúsica, JOPPAZ, the Peaceful Movement and even Sembrandopaz's leaders persist in building something new in their territory without any guarantee of success but with the hope to forge a better future for themselves and their children.

The main lesson from Montes de María is the significance of leadership for social organization, resistance to violence and the people's continuing resilience. This thesis illustrated that far from a romantic and idealistic enterprise peacebuilding demands nurturing relationships, a high dose of creativity and an awareness and acceptance of failure and risk. Many social organizations disappeared or weakened when they faced threats, displacement and massacres, yet the social leaders' strength and guidance were pivotal to regroup and rebuild the organizations.

Measuring Everyday Change: Everyday Peace Indicators

This thesis documents examples of Sembrandopaz's impact in the region. However, an overall assessment of the work is difficult to quantify. Based on critiques of the liberal peace's top-down peacebuilding efforts and the increased focus on local peacebuilding and everyday peace, Mac Ginty (2012) and Firchow (2018) propose what they call "everyday peace indicators" to measure the impact of peacebuilding on the everyday life of communities. Firchow (2018) defines everyday peace indicators as "the signs we look to in our daily lives to determine whether we are more or less at peace" (p. 3). It is an effort to more accurately capture the "on the ground situation in a textured way that is meaningful to local communities" (Mac Ginty, 2012a, p. 56). The importance of these indicators is that they go beyond traditional indicators that are more in tune with top-down approaches that privileges governance, security and development, but not relationships, healing and reconciliation (Firchow, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2012a). Everyday peace indicators are locally based, and designed by local communities so that they open new doors to explore different perspectives of social relations within a community affected by violence. They are also flexible and susceptible to change as the conflict evolves (Mac Ginty, 2012a). The everyday peace indicators model and the conflict transformation theory of change framework empowered me to identify the alternative impacts of Sembrandopaz's work in Montes de María.

The interviewees working and cooperating with Sembrandopaz identified the emergence of different types of change as a result of their actions and accompaniment. For instance, Sembrandopaz's facilitation of improbable dialogues between former enemies in

the Alta Montaña contributed to a sense of safety in the neighbouring veredas, allowing its inhabitants to go to communities that were restricted during the violence.

The emergence of new leadership in Libertad and Alta Montaña is another example of change that emerged in the daily life dynamics within the communities. The youth have struggled to have a voice in participatory settings, yet their leadership has been acknowledged and integrated into decision making processes through music, sports, the practice of cultural traditions and networking outlets. The examples of Libertad's Afromúsica and Alta Montaña's JOPAZ highlight this point.

Finally, one of the most significant examples of Sembrandopaz's work were the ripple effects observed from the September 2015 *campesino* delegation to lobby government institutions in Bogotá. This visit produced two types of changes. First, *campesinos* began to realize that they have the agency to meet as equals with Bogotá's bureaucratic elites to discuss the challenges of land restitution programs in Montes de María. Santiago is one of Sembrandopaz's program coordinators. He stated that communities now feel more confident to challenge institutions, to demand their rights and to lobby government (Interview October 23, 2015). On the other hand, Santiago noted that there was a change in the various governmental institutions perceptions of Sembrandopaz and its work, and an acknowledgement that they have a solid partner to cooperate with (interview October 23, 2010). It is difficult to measure the sense of confidence and trust that has developed among the *campesinos*, yet the interviewees reported that the visit to Bogota made an important difference for their leaders, giving them the confidence in their capabilities.

Peace indicators are an evaluation approach that emerged mainly from the analysis of international interventions in local settings advocating for including local voices and perspectives in the evaluating programs (Firchow, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2012a, 2014). Conflict transformation academics note that including local voices is not enough, and what is needed are indicators that emerge from the desired transformations that the community itself defines and the initiatives it develops (Lederach, 1995; Lederach et al., 2007). Sembrandopaz's peace work in Alta Montaña and Libertad illustrates that communities are aware of the conflict dynamics in their home territory, the changes they desire, and the steps needed to reach them. There is no need to reinvent the wheel as conflict transformation and its tools can benefit from the development of peace indicators and vice versa. For instance, these two frameworks can contribute to better understand the operation and the impact of platforms of change, as mentioned above.

Postliberal peace and conflict transformation

Sembrandopaz's study illustrates that the organization works with conflict transformation elements, but it also adopts certain liberal peace components to implement its own peacebuilding program based on nonviolence, Mennonite teachings, and a long tradition of *campesino* movements in Montes de María, as well as their organization's 15 years of experience in the region.

In many ways, Sembrandopaz is a remarkable peacebuilding initiative that reflected the tenets of conflict transformation. Their social justice vision as well as their sustainable and integral development framework suggests that it has a vision towards creating long term positive peace that is also in tune with the organization's image of "sustainable communities that serves as an inspiration and model to other communities." However,

Sembrandopaz does not aim to replace the state or create a new sociopolitical system, rather it seeks to reinforce the public realm by strengthening state institutions from the bottom up. Nevertheless, Sembrandopaz's work also contains elements of a more emancipatory peacebuilding approach, privileging bottom up methods, the inclusion of civil society and a vision of social justice and inclusion (Oliver P. Richmond, 2006).

The concepts of sustainability and '*buen vivir*' (good living) are central to Sembrandopaz's peacebuilding approach and constitute its compass. Through these concepts the organization distances itself from traditional development approaches that equate economic growth with the accumulation of wealth (Sembrandopaz, 2018). On the contrary, *buen vivir* is a holistic approach that encompasses environmental, social, political and economic conditions to surpass inequity, ignorance and poverty (Sembrandopaz, 2018). It is a grassroots approach that encourages human dignity towards creating a just society based on nonviolence, spirituality, solidarity, dialogue, democracy and respect for the environment (Sembrandopaz, 2018).

The peace process between the Colombian government and FARC guerrillas considered by many as one of the most complete since 1989 (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2017), created the expectation for a new chapter to unfold in the history of the country. Yet, as many of the interviewees in this thesis illustrated, peace negotiations were seen as a process between combatants without a connection with people's real problems or in responding to the issues at the heart of the conflict such as access to land, human rights violations, political participation, inequality, and poverty. Experience has taught communities that peace dialogues were not a guarantee that violence would cease at the local level nor how they should respond to long-term structural violence.

There was scepticism about the sincerity of the actors in the peace process and of the effectiveness of the accord. A university professor from the city of Sincelejo named Raul stated that, “how are we going to begin a post-accord stage if we haven’t healed the conflict?” (interview October 24, 2015).

I initially expected to see significant changes in terms of reconciliation, economic well-being and political participation as a result of Sembrandopaz’s work. In terms of reconciliation, the experiences of Alta Montaña and the ERCP are really significant. The work that Sembrandopaz has done in bringing former enemies together and in encouraging them to participate in Alta Montaña’s Peaceful Movement illustrates a careful effort in relationship building in a society divided by violence.

However, progress has been very slow in terms of both political participation and economic wellbeing. Despite the *campesinos*’ participation in two local elections, the outcome was disappointing. In 2017 the Peaceful Movement from Alta Montaña lost the election to the municipal council and in 2019 none of the candidates nominated for the mayor’s office won the election. It has been hard for the *campesinos* to fight against a political machinery that defends powerful economic and political interests in one of the wealthiest regions of Colombia in terms of natural resources, agribusiness and strategic location. As one of the *campesino* leaders named Paulo stated, “social processes are easier than political work.” *Campesinos* recognized that political participation equates to the electoral process, yet the political implications of their work it is not clear within their communities. In other words, the social is political.

Despite Sembrandopaz’s efforts to encourage a more equitable approach to economic development, their efforts have not been fruitful in the short term. Creating a

sustainable development process demands investment, technical assistance and access to markets, issues that are still difficult to inculcate in the region. Further, violence in the country and in the region has increased since I conducted the fieldwork. In January 2020, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported an increase in the murders of human rights defenders with 109 human rights activists killed during 2019 and a social leader was murdered everyday in January 2020 (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). During the second half of 2019 social leaders in Montes de Maria denounced the resurgence of paramilitarism in the region (Forero, 2020b), and in the municipality of San Onofre, human rights defenders denounced the complicity between illegal armed groups, the navy and the mayor for the control of drug trafficking corridors (Forero, 2020a). Jorge Montes, the leader of the Peaceful Movement left the region in February 2020 amidst threats to his life.

Obstacles and challenges

During the research, I identified four types of obstacles to peacebuilding in Montes de María. The most obvious obstacle is the continuing effects of violence in the region and the resulting rupture of the social fabric, psychosocial effects, as well as the collapse of the infrastructure in the communities.

Another set of challenges came from the organization's relationships with international organizations such as the European Union and USAID, as well as NGOs and foundations. These organizations provide substantial resources to Montes de Maria, and sometimes they try to influence their agenda for the region, creating divisions within the community and in their leadership dynamics. The history of violence and the subsequent resistance to peacebuilding initiatives means that some communities became more visible

than others. El Salado and Mampuján are some significant examples. Both were targets of paramilitary violence in 2000. The activism of their leaders ensured that these communities gained broader recognition. National and international organizations poured resources into these so-called “success stories.” The communities fearing the loss of resources, adapted their dynamics to please the donors, neglecting the people’s participation in other more strategic settings that, although important, do not involve access to much needed resources.

Finally gender imbalances are a continuing obstacle to peace in the region. As described in Chapter 2, during the peak of paramilitary domination in Montes de María, violence against women was part of a systematic strategy to control the territory and its population, and Libertad was one of the most affected communities. Female leaders are embedded in a patriarchal culture that prevails in the region perpetuating traditional understandings of the role of women in society.

These challenges are in tune with prevalent literature on gender and peacebuilding, especially the essentialists argument that highlights that women peacebuilding leaders are limited to care but not in visible decision making settings (Väyrynen, 2010).

These obstacles are not uncommon for Colombian community-based organizations. What is important is Sembrandopaz’s response to overcome them. For instance, Sembrandopaz has struggled to compete with the financial resources some organizations bring to the table. Their response has been to increase the accompaniment and encourage them to be critical and protective of their own social processes.

Gradually over time the communities that work with Sembrandopaz became aware of their potential and began to demand and lead their own agendas. To respond to generational renewal, Sembrandopaz is intentional in preparing young leaders to participate in decision-

making processes. Sembrandopaz accompanies JOPAZ in Alta Montaña in its strengthening as a youth organization with a special focus on the environment. In Libertad, Sembrandopaz has helped in smoothing over the frictions between older and younger leaders by supporting its cultural traditions.

Future research

This thesis was an immersion in the understanding of conflict transformation and local peacebuilding work of Sembrandopaz in two communities of Montes de Maria. In the process of this investigation, several areas for future examination emerged. First, more research needs to be done to explore the scope, reach and potentialities of conflict transformation and how its tenets can be translated into concrete processes, initiatives and even public policies. Colombia is an interesting case to explore how conflict transformation can be implemented from the top-down and bottom-up peacebuilding, but also how to be more strategic in the integrations of these approaches. There is also a need to look closer to conceptual frameworks such as platforms and the expanded framework for peacebuilding and how they can be implemented, replicated and strengthened. This area of research can contribute to recent discussions on peace indicators, quality of peace, legitimacy and peace leadership.

Second, more research needs to be done on peace leadership, its development, manifestations, impact, strengths and weaknesses. How does leadership emerge, adapt and evolve in contexts of intractable conflict? How to include and strength less visible leaderships and how to prepare new generations of leaders? In particular, more research is needed on the important leadership contributed by women and youth in peacebuilding,

despite the challenges they have to overcome. Their skills and legitimacy is contested and minimize.

From the perspective of peace studies in Colombia, a third area of research emerges. The concept of territorial peace is one of the legacies of peacebuilding in Colombia adopted in the peace accord between the Colombian government and FARC. This concept reflects most of the tenets of conflict transformation such as theory of change, importance of relationships, bottom-up peacebuilding, long-term views, improbable dialogues, among others. More research is needed to explore the scope, extent and potentialities of the term in a post-accord setting.

Conclusion

During my fieldwork, I was traveling with Sembrandopaz's staff to a meeting with community leaders in Montes de María. It was a two-hour road trip of small talk and gossiping about the peace process between the Colombian government and FARC, as well as serious debates about local and national issues. In addition to Sembrandopaz, there was also a TRC staff member present who, with determination and certain authority, stated, while waving a copy of Lederach's *The Moral Imagination*, "this is what we have to do in Colombia." This comment highlighted, once again a common peacebuilding in general, and about conflict transformation in particular. People assume that building peace is a matter of clean-cut social engineering based on a check list, or the development of concrete projects and conflict resolution skills.

This is not a surprise considering that the professionalization of peacebuilding has privileged skills and techniques over the creative process (Lederach, 2005). However, the work of Sembrandopaz showed me that skills and techniques are just one part of the work

and perhaps not the most important. Most of the work relies on creativity, building relationships, accompaniment, trust, failures and disappointments.

In many ways, Sembrandopaz is a remarkable peacebuilding initiative that embraces many of the tenets of conflict transformation. Although they are a grassroots initiative they have connections with actors in different levels of leadership, allowing them to have a broader reach in the region. They are both strategic and flexible allowing them to adapt to the context while keeping its focus on a long-term vision.

After many months analyzing Sembrandopaz's work I believe that they have two main power sources. The first one is its capacity to disrupt the logic and the narratives of violence prevalent in the region. Sembrandopaz takes away space and legitimacy from violent actors by promoting and supporting different ideas and initiatives. For instance, it disrupts economic order by emphasizing cooperation and respect for the environment as opposed to accumulation and depredation; it disrupts political corrupt dynamics through education in human rights and governance, but especially through active accompaniment that gives individuals and communities the confidence to participate in local public institutions or to go to Bogotá to demand their rights before national institutions.

Sembrandopaz's second power source is their ability to imagine a different future for Montes de María and to build it with the resources available. Although they have had failures due to a mix of excessive self-confidence, optimism and naïveté, this power source has allowed them to have legitimacy and credibility.

Despite the extensive research and interventions in Montes de María the analysis on peacebuilding, and especially local peacebuilding, is still scarce. The case of Sembrandopaz illustrates that it is possible to implement peacebuilding under the

framework of conflict transformation providing important lessons for similar experiences in the country.

The peace agreement between the Colombian government and FARC created significant expectations that the country would turn the page on violence. However, its implementation is proving that it is not an easy task and will take years maybe decades to see significant changes. One of the main legacies of the agreement is the concept of territorial peace that emphasizes the importance of local actors and local dynamics in building peace. Conflict transformation can help in the consolidation of this concept providing the lenses to better understand, and strengthen the dynamics of local peacebuilding.

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Appendices

Appendix A. List of Interviewees and aliases

PLACE	AFFILIATION	ALIAS
Sincelejo	Director Sembrandopaz	No alias
Sincelejo	Sembrandopaz Program Coordinator	Sandra
Alta Montaña	Community leader. Alta Montaña Campesino	Hector
Alta Montaña	Líder Alta Montaña Campesino agricultor	Nathan
Sincelejo	Sembrandopaz. Program Coordinator	Rosa
Sincelejo	Sembrandopaz. Program Coordinator	Estela
Sincelejo	University Professor	Raul
Sincelejo	Community leader	Edwin
Sincelejo	MMC Volunteer	Laura
Libertad	Youth leader Afromusica	Elena
Sincelejo	PDPMM: Coordinator and assistant	Fernando Antonia
Libertad	Youth leaders from Afromúsica.	Jaime Carlos
Sincelejo	Public servant Justice House of San Onofre. Social Worker	Teresa
Sincelejo	Programa Desarrollo y Paz. Community Women	
San Onofre	House of Justice San Onofre Work with youth USAID Project	Yolima
San ONofre	Public servant Justice House San Onofre Program coordinator	Yasmin
San Onofre	School teacher San Onofre. Community mediator	Ivan
San Onofre	School teacher San Onofre. Community mediator	Clara
San Onofre	Public servant Justice House San Onofre. Program coordinator	Ana
El Carmen. Líderes sociales	Community leaders of the Peaceful Movement of Alta Montaña	Dario Pastor

		Luis
Sincelejo	Historian. Public servant. Truth commission	Andrés
Libertad	Community Council of Libertad	Manuel Delia Verónica
El Carmen	MCC	Lauren
Alta Montaña	Community Leaders JAC La Cansona Peaceful Movement	Daniel Wilson
El Carmen	Directora Línea 21 Premio Nacional de Paz	No alias
El Carmen	Crece en Paz Fundación Argos	Maria
El Carmen	Community leader: Plataforma municipal de organizaciones sociales	Liliana
El Carmen	School teacher. Cultural and social leader	Mónica
Cartagena	Ombudsman Office. Human Rights defender	Ingrid

Appendix B. Interview questions in English and Spanish

Semi-structured interviews English and Spanish

- Organizations and Institutions. English
- Organizations and Institutions. Spanish
- Key leaders and peacebuilders. English
- Key leaders and peacebuilders. Spanish
- Local beneficiaries and participants. English
- Local beneficiaries and participants. Spanish

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

Questionnaire

I. Creation and purpose of the organization

1. When was the organization created?
2. What was its original purpose and objectives?
3. Describe the context in Montes de María when the peacebuilding initiative began.
4. How did your organization identify the need to create this initiative?
5. What did you wanted to change with the initiative and how did you intend to achieve it?

II. Activities

1. What activities did you developed to respond to the original purpose?
2. Have the activities varied over time?
3. What is the role of women?

III. Alliances

1. Who are your allies? Who are your closest connections?
2. How do national and international dynamics affect your work in peacebuilding?
3. Who are the actors you would like to connect to reach your goal?

IV. Outcomes

1. Do you think the original purpose and expected changes have been achieved? What has changed?
2. What do you thing are the main impact of your organization in the Montes de María region?
3. What are the main lessons learned during these years?
4. What challenges did you have? How did your organization respond?

V. The future

1. How do you see Montes de María in 30 years?
2. What changes needs to happen for that future to be achieved?
3. Are you preparing for a postaccord scenario, if the peace process with FARC is successful? How?

VI. Background Information

- Participant Number:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Marital Status:
- Level of education:
Primary school – High school– Technician– University– Graduate – Non
- Place of origin:

ENTREVISTA SEMI-ESTRUCTURADA PARA ORGANIZACIONES E INSTITUCIONES

Cuestionario

I. Creación y propósito de la organización

1. ¿Cuándo se creó la organización?
2. Cuáles fueron los propósitos y objetivos originales?
3. Describa el contexto de los Montes de María cuando la iniciativa en construcción de paz inició.
4. ¿Cómo identificaron la necesidad de crear esta iniciativa de paz?
5. ¿Qué cambios querían alcanzar con esta iniciativa y cómo pretendían alcanzarla?

II. Actividades

1. ¿Qué actividades desarrollaron para responder al propósito original?
2. ¿Cambiaron las actividades con el tiempo?
3. ¿Cuál es el papel de la mujer?

III. Alianzas

1. ¿Quiénes son sus aliados? ¿Cuáles son sus conexiones más cercanas?
2. ¿Cómo afectan su trabajo en construcción de paz las dinámicas nacionales e internacionales?
3. ¿Con cuáles actores le gustaría conectarse para alcanzar su meta?

IV. Metas

1. Ud. cree que el propósito original y los cambios deseados se alcanzaron? ¿Qué ha cambiado?
2. ¿Cuáles son los principales impactos de su organización en los Montes de María?
3. ¿Cuáles son las lecciones aprendidas durante estos años?
4. ¿Qué desafíos enfrentaron? ¿Cómo respondió su organización?

V. El futuro

1. ¿Cómo ve a los Montes de María en 30 años?
2. ¿Qué debe cambiar para que ese futuro sea realidad?
3. ¿Si la negociación con las FARC es exitosa, se están preparando para una etapa de post-acuerdo? ¿Cómo?

VI. Información del participante

- Número del participante:
- Edad:
- Género:
- Estado civil:
- Nivel de educación:
Primaria – secundaria – técnica – universidad – postgrado -- ninguna
- Lugar de origen:

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR KEY LEADERS AND PEACEBUILDERS

Questionnaire

I. Peacebuilding activities

1. Tell me about your work for peace
2. When did you begin your work for peace?
3. Why did you start working for peace?
4. Describe the regional context when you began to work for peace?
5. What did you want to change and how did you intend to achieve it?

II. Activities

1. What activities did you developed?
2. Have the activities varied over time?

III. Alliances

1. Who are your allies? Who are your closest connections?
2. Who are the actors you would like to connect to reach your goal?

IV. Outcomes

1. Do you think original purpose and expected changes have been achieved? What has changed?
2. What do you thing are the main impact of your work in the Montes de María?
3. What are the main lessons learned during these years?
4. What challenges did you have? How did you respond?

V. The future

1. How do you see Montes de María in 30 years?
2. What changes needs to happen for that future to be achieved?
3. What is your opinion about the peace negotiations in Havana?
4. Are you preparing for a post-accord scenario? How?

VI. Background Information

- Participant Number:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Marital Status:
- Level of education:
Primary school – High school– Technician– University– Graduate – Non
- Place of origin:

ENTREVISTA SEMI-ESTRUCTURADA PARA LÍDERES Y CONSTRUCTORES DE PAZ

Cuestionario

I. Actividades en construcción de paz

1. Cuénteme sobre su trabajo en construcción de paz
2. ¿Cuándo empezó su trabajo por la paz?
3. ¿Qué lo motiva a trabajar por la paz?
4. Describa el contexto regional cuando empezó su trabajo por la paz.
5. Qué cambios querían alcanzar y cómo pretendía lograrlo?

II. Actividades

1. ¿Qué actividades ha desarrollado?
2. ¿Han variado con el tiempo?

III. Alianzas

1. ¿Quiénes son sus aliados? ¿Cuáles son sus conexiones más cercanas?
2. ¿Con cuáles actores le gustaría conectarse para alcanzar su meta?

IV. Resultados

1. Ud cree que el propósito y expectativas originales se cumplieron? Qué ha cambiado?
2. ¿Cuáles son los principales impactos de su trabajo por la paz en la región de Montes de María?
3. ¿Cuáles fueron las lecciones aprendidas durante estos años?
4. ¿Qué desafíos se presentaron? Cómo respondió?

V. El futuro

1. ¿Cómo ve los Montes de María en 30 años?
2. ¿Qué debe cambiar para que ese futuro sea realidad?
3. ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre las negociaciones de paz en La Habana?
4. ¿Se están preparando para el post-acuerdo? ¿Cómo?

VI. Información del participante

- Número del participante:
- Edad:
- Género:
- Estado civil:
- Nivel de educación:
Primaria – secundaria – técnica – universidad – postgrado -- ninguna
- Lugar de origen:

SAMPLE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR LOCAL BENEFICIARIES AND PARTICIPANTS

I. Peacebuilding project

1. Tell me about your community and the regional context before your participation in the peacebuilding initiative.
2. How did you find about the peacebuilding initiative?
3. What was your expectation with this initiative?
4. What did you want to change?

II. Activities and outcomes

1. What activities did the initiative developed?
2. Did the activities changed over time? How?
3. What did you liked the most of this project?
4. What needs to be improved?
5. Did you face any challenges during your participation in the project?
6. What did it change in your life and community as a result of the project?
7. Were your expectations met?
8. What do you thing are the main impact of the peacebuilding initiative in the Montes de María region?
9. What are the main lessons learned during these years?

III. The future

1. What is your opinion about the peace negotiations in Havana?
2. Are you getting ready for a postaccord scenario? How?
3. How do you see Montes de María in 30 years?
4. What changes needs to happen for that future to be achieved?

IV. Background Information

- Participant Number:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Marital Status:
- Level of education:
Primary school – High school– Technician– University– Graduate – Non
- Place of origin:

ENTREVISTA SEMI-ESTRUCTURADA PARA BENEFICIARIOS

I. Proyecto en construcción de paz

1. ¿Cómo era el contexto regional y de su comunidad antes de su participación en la iniciativa en construcción de paz?
2. ¿Cómo se enteró de la iniciativa en construcción de paz?
3. ¿Cuál era su expectativa de esta iniciativa?
4. ¿Qué tipo de cambios buscaba?

II. Actividades y resultados

1. ¿Qué actividades desarrolló la iniciativa?
2. ¿Han variado con el tiempo? ¿Cómo?
3. ¿Qué le gustó más de este proyecto?
4. ¿Qué necesita mejorar?
5. ¿Qué desafíos debió enfrentar durante la implementación de este proyecto?
6. ¿Qué cambió a nivel personal y en su comunidad como resultado de este proyecto?
7. ¿Se cumplieron sus expectativas?
8. ¿Cuáles cree que son los principales impactos de las iniciativas de construcción de paz en Montes de María?
9. ¿Cuáles fueron las lecciones aprendidas durante estos años?

III. El futuro

1. ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre las negociaciones de paz en La Habana?
2. ¿Se están preparando para el post-acuerdo? ¿Cómo?
3. ¿Cómo ve los Montes en 30 años?
4. ¿Qué debe cambiar para que ese futuro sea realidad?

VI. Información del participante

- Número del participante:
- Edad:
- Género:
- Estado civil:
- Nivel de educación:
Primaria – secundaria – técnica – universidad – postgrado -- ninguna
- Lugar de origen:

Appendix C. Approval Certificate



Research Ethics and Compliance
Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)

Human Ethics
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3T 2N2
Phone +204-474-7122
Fax +204-269-7173

September 16, 2015

TO: **Maria Lucia Zapata**
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Dr. Lorna Guse, Chair**
Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB)

Re: **Protocol #J2015:100**
"An Analysis of Local Peacebuilding Initiatives in the Montes de Maria region - Colombia"

Your above-noted protocol has been reviewed by JFREB. The review process has been completed, and some additional information, clarification and revision are required.

1. *Participants.* More information is need on the selection of participants:

- a) What kinds of "organizations and institutions" will you be approaching? Please identify them.
- b) Who are the key leaders and peacebuilders that will be approached? Please identify them.
- c) Who are the beneficiaries of peacebuilding initiatives? Please identify them.
- d) "Initial contacts" are individuals that the researcher knows through a previous role in Columbia. What was that role and does it still continue? Does the researcher have a positon of power in relation to any of the potential participants?

2. It says that, "The researcher will ask these participants for further references to be interviewed." The recruitment protocol seems to be "snowball". The protocol is acceptable to JFREB in one of the following two ways: 1) the participant can approach a potential participant on behalf of the researcher and provide information on the study (the researcher must prepare an information sheet for this purpose) and the potential participant can choose to contact the researcher if he/she wishes; or 2) the participant can provide the information sheet to the potential participant and ask if he or she would like his/her contact information

passed along to the researcher. Under no circumstances can the participant provide contact information to the researcher on potential participants without their knowledge. Which of the above two protocols will be used in this study? Please provide a copy of the information sheet to JFREB. That participants will be asked to identify others must be in the consent form/s.

3. *Appendix 2.*

a) It says that, "In this context, your contact information will not be shared with anyone." Does this mean that if participants decide to be identified that their contact information will be shared with others? This statement is also in the consent form. Please provide clarification.

b) Please replace "anonymous" with "confidential". You will know who participates so the participants can never be anonymous.

c) Please add that this study has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board and that should there be concerns, the participant can contact you, your advisor or the Human Ethics Coordinator, and provide her telephone number and email address.

d) Please add to all of the documents in Appendix 2 the name and contact information for your advisor.

4. Please explain why written consent is not the primary approach. It says, "If requested, consent in writing will be available if anyone would like it." It isn't up to participants to ask for a written consent form; it is up to the researcher to offer it. If they decline (likely for the reasons you have given) that is acceptable and you will have to document verbal consent information.

5. Feedback/debriefing. It says, "Depending upon the responses, the researcher may request to meet with respondents individually or as a group to follow up." Following up with individuals is acceptable. Following up in a group format (focus group?) is not because it involves issues of protection of identities and confidentiality of responses/data. If you want to follow-up in a group, more information on the protection of identities and confidentiality of response/data must be provided to JFREB. If the researcher decides to defer your decision on follow-up in a group until after the study has started, then an amendment must be submitted to JFREB. (There is nothing in the consent forms on follow-up in a group.)

6. *Appendix 3.* Written and oral consent forms. Some changes are required:

a) Please replace "anonymous" with "confidential".

b) Please use the title "Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board".

c) Please add the Human Ethics Coordinator's email address:
margaret.bowman@umanitoba.ca

d) It says, "Unless you explicitly state you wish your name to be published, the researcher will not reveal identifying characteristics such as names, addresses and specific employment details."

So the default is that you will protect identities – unless the participant asks to be identified. So why is there a check box at the end of the form that says, "Do you want to remain anonymous?" Clarification is required. (The meaning of check boxes is not always clear. Should it be "yes" or "no" rather than a check box.)

e) Please provide a space for those who want a summary of findings to indicate their email or ground mail addresses.

f) Please see item #3a) above.

g) In the written consent form, please say (as you have in the oral consent form) that a participant may withdraw at any time up the publication of your dissertation and that should this happen, his/her data will be destroyed.

h) If the researcher will be using snowball sampling, this information and what is being asked of participants must be provided.

i) Clarify what the risks are. The researcher mentions in the application that she might be stopped by police and would not like to have consents with her. If stopped by the police, there may be audiotapes. What are the real risks to participants in this study of talking with the researcher? JFREB needs to learn more about risks to the researcher and risks to participants. Please be detailed in your response to JFREB's concerns for risks.

Approval is pending your response to the above items. Your written response, **including a cover letter which addresses the above item, and includes any revised forms** (with revisions underlined), should be sent to Margaret (Maggie) Bowman, Human Ethics Coordinator, Room 208-194 Dafoe Road (CTC Building), or by email to Margaret.Bowman@umanitoba.ca. **(Please note that there is no need to re-submit the entire submission, just those pertinent sections.)**

Appendix D. Consent Form



Ph.D. Program in
Peace and Conflict Studies

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Título del proyecto: Análisis de la construcción de paz local en Montes de María, Colombia.

Investigador principal: María Lucía Zapata. Estudiante de doctorado. Estudios de Paz y

Conflicto. zapatalm@myumanitoba.ca

Supervisor de la investigación: Dr. Dean Peachey, Director Ejecutivo, Coordinador Global College, Programa Derechos humanos, Universidad de Winnipeg. Número de teléfono: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Correo electrónico: d.peachey@uwinnipeg.ca

Arthur V. Mauro Centre
for Peace and Justice
at St. Paul's College
252-70 Dysart Road
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone: (204) 474-6052
Fax: (204) 474-8828

Este formulario de consentimiento, de la cual tendrá una copia para su archivo y referencia, es parte de un proceso de consentimiento informado. Le proporciona una idea básica de esta investigación y lo que su participación implica. No dude en preguntar si requiere más detalles o información adicional. Por favor, tómese su tiempo para leer detenidamente este formato y la información adicional.

Ha sido invitado a una entrevista con la investigadora María Lucía Zapata sobre su experiencia en construcción de paz local en Montes de María, Colombia. Esta investigación es parte de los requisitos de grado del programa de doctorado de la Sra. Zapata en la Universidad de Manitoba, bajo la supervisión del Dr. Dean Peachey. El objetivo principal de esta investigación es comprender las diferentes iniciativas de construcción de paz en Montes de María y su impacto en la región. Las entrevistas se realizarán en las horas del día en un lugar conveniente para ambos. La entrevista no llevará más de dos horas.

Le preguntarán sobre sus experiencias en construcción de paz en Montes de María; cómo y por qué decidió trabajar por la paz; sus percepciones de los cambios alcanzados y su visión de futuro. Sin embargo, comparta su historia y experiencias de la manera que sea más cómoda para usted. A lo largo de la entrevista, puede dirigir la discusión y proporcionar información que considere importante para comprender mejor sus experiencias en la construcción de la paz local en los Montes de María.

La entrevista es voluntaria y confidencial. Sin embargo, Ud decide si quiere que sus datos y su nombre se den a conocer o, si lo prefiere, que sus datos y sus comentarios se mantengan confidenciales. De ser así, su información de contacto no se compartirá con nadie. Con su aprobación, la entrevista se grabará. Si no está de acuerdo, la investigadora tomará notas.

Tenga en cuenta que a menudo compartir la historia personal trae consigo el riesgo de experimentar estrés y angustia. Por lo tanto, se adjunta una lista de recursos de asistencia psicológica. Sin embargo, puede resultarle beneficioso narrar a una persona interesada las experiencias que encuentra satisfactorias o angustiosas. En el largo plazo, estará contribuyendo a la comprensión de la construcción de paz en Colombia.

Después de la entrevista, es posible la investigadora deba contactarlo nuevamente para obtener mayor información o clarificación, lo cual se podrá hacer por correo electrónico o por teléfono. Esta nueva entrevista es opcional y se le solicitará nuevamente su consentimiento.

Al finalizar el proyecto, el cual será aproximadamente en Septiembre 2016, tiene la opción de recibir un resumen de los resultados. La investigadora, presentará los resultados a su comité de investigación. Adicionalmente, los presentará en publicaciones o en conferencias profesionales. Salvo que Ud. claramente haya aceptado que su nombre sea publicado, la investigadora no revelará datos de identificación personales tales como nombres, direcciones y detalles de empleo u oficio. Sin embargo, considerando la escasa población de Montes de María, existe el riesgo que otras personas identifiquen algunos elementos de su historia. La investigadora únicamente usará citas de la entrevista después de remover cualquier detalle de identificación.

umanitoba.ca/mauro_centre



FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Las únicas personas que tendrán acceso a la información del proyecto son la investigadora y su supervisor. La Universidad de Manitoba podrá solicitar acceso al archivo con documentos relacionados con su entrevista para determinar que la investigación se está haciendo de manera adecuada y segura. Aún así, toda la información es estrictamente confidencial. Los documentos relacionados con las entrevistas se guardarán en el computador personal de la investigadora, protegido con una clave de seguridad. La investigadora transcribirá las entrevistas y, en el proceso, removerá toda identificación personal. Cualquier información personal será destruida inmediatamente después que la investigación haya concluido en Septiembre 2016.

Su firma en este formato indica que ha comprendido a satisfacción la información relacionada en el presente proyecto de investigación y acepta participar en el mismo. De ningún modo su aceptación implica la renuncia a sus derechos legales ni exime al investigador de sus responsabilidades profesionales y legales. Hasta la publicación de la investigación, Ud es libre de retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento. En este caso, su información será destruida. También puede abstenerse de responder cualquier pregunta que no quiera responder, sin consecuencia alguna. Su participación durante la investigación debe ser tan clara como su consentimiento inicial, por lo tanto puede hacer preguntas o solicitar información en cualquier momento.

Esta investigación ha sido aprobada por la Facultad Colectiva de Investigación Ética de la Universidad de Manitoba. Si tiene alguna inquietud o queja sobre este proyecto puede contactar a la Secretaría de Ética Humana (Human Ethics Secretariat), al teléfono de larga distancia número (1-204) 474-7122.

Si está de acuerdo con los siguientes enunciados, por favor señálelo en el paréntesis correspondiente. Si no está de acuerdo, por favor déjelo en blanco:

	SI	NO
He leído o me han leído los detalles de esta formulario de consentimiento	()	()
Mis preguntas han sido respondidas satisfactoriamente	()	()
Yo, _____ (nombre), acepto participar en este estudio	()	()
Quiere que sus datos permanezcan confidenciales?	()	()
Autorizo que los resultados de este proyecto (los cuales pueden incluir citas), sean publicados o presentados sin que se revele mi identidad.	()	()
Autorizo que la entrevista sea grabada	()	()
Autorizo que me contacten vía telefónica o correo electrónico si se requiere nueva información después de la entrevista	()	()
Le gustaría recibir un resumen de esta investigación?	()	()
Cómo le gustaría que se enviaran? Correo electrónico o correo nacional?	()	()
Por favor, indique su correo electrónico: _____		
Por favor indique una dirección a donde enviar el resumen: _____		

Finalmente, la investigadora le podrá preguntar por referencias adicionales de individuos y/o instituciones que podrían estar interesadas en esta investigación. No está obligado a proveer tal información, pero si cree que hay personas y/o instituciones interesadas en esta investigación, la señora Zapata le dará su tarjeta personal e información del proyecto, para que Ud pueda entregarla al participante potencial.

Firma del participante _____ Fecha _____

Firma del investigador _____ Fecha _____

Appendix E. Script for Oral Consent English and Spanish

My name is María Lucía Zapata. I am a Ph.D. student of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba in Canada. I am working on my research project on local peacebuilding in Montes de María. My goal is to understand the various peacebuilding initiatives in Montes de María and their impact for the region.

I would like to talk with you about your experiences in peacebuilding in Montes de María. I would like to record the interview to make sure I got all the information you gave me; however if you prefer that the conversation not be recorded, I will take notes so I can remember our conversation. No one except my supervisor and me will see the notes, or hear the conversation that will take place between you and me. The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This interview is voluntary and confidential. You may choose whether you wish to have your name attached to my study, or whether you prefer that you and your comments remain confidential. In this context, your contact information will not be shared with anyone.

I will ask questions such as “tell me about your work for peace”, “why do you decided to participate in peacebuilding”, “what changes have you seen?” This interview will last about half an hour to two hours.

Sometimes experiences are difficult, so if you feel uncomfortable, we can skip the question or stop the interview. It is your choice. If you decide to stop the interview I will not use any of the information you have given and I will delete the conversation. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, up to the publication of the dissertation. In this case, your data will be destroyed. You can also refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. The interview is completely voluntary.

It is important for you to know that just because (*previous participant's name*) referred you, you do not have to participate. If you chose not to, I will not inform them of your decision. Participation in this interview won't have any direct benefits for you, but it will help me to understand local peacebuilding in Montes de María.

After the interviews, I will process the information and I will write my thesis. After my research committee approves the thesis, I will give you a summary, likely by the end of 2016.

The University of Manitoba's Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board Committee has approved this research. If you have any concerns or complaints about this research you can contact them directly at [REDACTED] or to the Human Ethics Coordinator, Margaret Bowman to margaret.bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Here is my card with all my personal contact information if you need to contact me. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Dean Peachey. If you want to contact him regarding the research, you can call him at [REDACTED] or write him to his office email address:

d.peachey@uwinnipeg.ca

Do you have any questions or concerns you would like to address?

Would you like to start the interview? If **no**, thank you for your time, and consideration.

If **yes**, do you agree to audio-recording?

Thank you so much, and now we will begin the interview process.

Spanish Script for Oral Consent

Mi nombre es María Lucía Zapata. Soy estudiante de doctorado en Estudios de Paz y Conflicto de la Universidad de Manitoba en Canadá. Estoy realizando mi proyecto de investigación en construcción de paz local en Montes de María. Mi objetivo es entender las diferentes iniciativas de paz en Montes de María y su impacto en la región.

Me gustaría hacerle algunas preguntas relacionadas con sus experiencias y opiniones sobre la construcción de paz en Montes de María. Quisiera grabar la entrevista para asegurarme que tengo toda la información que me dio, sin embargo, ud puede rechazar la grabación. Si no se siente cómodo con que yo grabe la conversación, escribiré notas para recordar esta conversación. Salvo mi supervisor y yo, nadie más tendrá acceso a la grabación o a las notas de esta entrevista. La Universidad de Manitoba podrá solicitar acceso al archivo con documentos relacionados con su entrevista para determinar que la investigación se está haciendo de manera adecuada y segura.

La entrevista es voluntaria y confidencial. Sin embargo, Ud decide si quiere que sus datos y su nombre se den a conocer o, si lo prefiere, que sus datos y sus comentarios se mantengan en la confidencialidad. De ser así, su información de contacto no se compartirá con nadie

Haré preguntas tales como “cuénteme sobre su trabajo en construcción de paz”, “por qué participa en iniciativas de paz?”, “qué tipos de cambios ha visto?” Esta entrevista durará entre media hora y dos horas, aproximadamente.

Algunas veces la experiencias son difíciles, por lo tanto , Si se siente incómodo, podemos pasar a otra pregunta o dar por terminada la entrevista. Es su decisión. Si desea dar por terminada la entrevista no usaré la información que me dio y borraré la conversación. La entrevista es completamente voluntaria.

Es importante que sepa que aunque (*nombre del anterior participante*) me refirió su nombre, ud no tiene que participar. Si decide no hacerlo, no le informaré a el/ella de su decisión. La participación en esta entrevista no le dará beneficio directo alguno, pero sí me ayudará a entender la construcción de paz local en Montes de María.

Después de realizar las entrevistas, procesaré la información y escribiré mi tesis. Una vez mi comité de investigación la apruebe, le entregaré un resumen más o menos en Septiembre de 2016.

El Comité y Junta Ética de la Universidad de Manitoba aprobó esta investigación. Si tiene alguna inquietud o queja acerca de esta investigación, puede contactarlos directamente al siguiente número telefónico [REDACTED] o con la Coordinadora de Ética Humana, la señora Margaret Bowman en margaret.bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Esta es mi tarjeta con mi información por si necesita contactarme. Mi supervisor de investigación es el Doctor Dean Peachey. Si quiere contactarlo en relación con esta investigación lo puede llamar [REDACTED] o escribirle a su correo electrónico: d.peachey@uwinnipeg.ca

Tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud que quisiera abordar?

Quiere que iniciemos la entrevista? Si la respuesta es **no**, gracias por su tiempo y consideración.

Si la respuesta es **si**, le parece bien su grabo la entrevista?

Muchas gracias y ahora iniciamos con la entrevista.