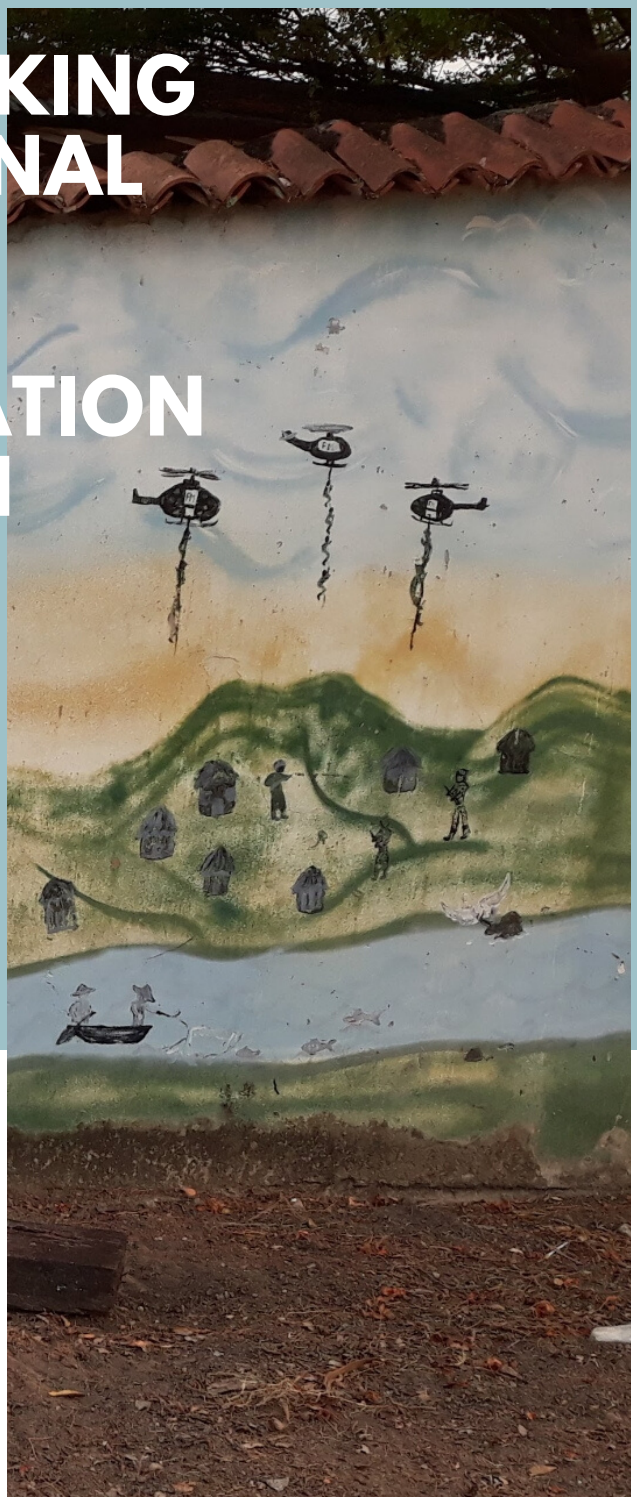
THE SHRINKING OPERATIONAL SPACE OF PEASANT ORGANISATION ACVC-RAN



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The Shrinking Operational Space of Peasant Organisation ACVC-RAN in Colombia
A case study on the restrictions of a civil society organisation's operational space and the counterstrategies it employs

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Abstract

Worldwide, the operational space of civil society has become more and more restricted. Human rights and environmental defenders have increasingly been subjected to threats, injuries, and killings. However, next to this direct form of violence, civil society has also experienced more hidden forms of violence. These restricting policies and actions have minimised organisations' room to manoeuvre. In this thesis, the shrinking operational space of the peasant organisation *Asociación Campesina del Valle del río Cimitarra – Red Agroecología Nacional* (ACVC-RAN) has been researched within the context of post-agreement Colombia. More concretely, the political context of Colombia, the organisation itself, and the policies and actions that influence the room to manoeuvre have been researched following the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012). These factors all play an important role on the number and severity of the restrictions on an organisation's operational space. It has been concluded that, even after the signing of the peace agreement in 2016, the political context of Colombia cannot be completely described by dichotomies such as peace and war, or democratic and authoritarian states. Rather, the Colombian political context exists out of fragmented sovereignty and hybrid political orders, as both state and non-state actors, such as guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, and social movements, contest the territories and its resources. Furthermore, ACVC-RAN is a grassroots, claim-making organisation, which members advocate for their human rights such as access to education, health care, and land rights. In addition, it has been found that the peasant organisation has been subject to a lot of policies and actions that have restricted them in their operational space, including threats, killings, stigmatisation, and criminalisation. However, it is important to note that these restrictions are not only emerging from outside forces but can also come from within the organisation. Furthermore, these restrictions play out in various manners across members of the organisation due to differences in gender. Lastly, it is fundamental to mention that the organisation is not simply the receiver of operational space, but also actively engages with strategies to counteract the restrictions placed upon them by both state and non-state actors. These include actions such as advocacy, international accompaniments, and public campaigns, but also the formation of alliances and remembering as an act of resistance.

Keywords: *Shrinking operational space of civil society / Social movement strategies / Post-agreement and post-conflict / Violence / Colombia*

Resumen

En todo el mundo, el espacio operativo de la sociedad civil se ha ido restringiendo cada vez más. Los defensores de los derechos humanos y del medio ambiente han sido objeto de amenazas, lesiones y asesinatos cada vez más frecuentes. Sin embargo, junto a esta forma directa de violencia, la sociedad civil también ha experimentado formas más ocultas de violencia. Estas políticas y acciones restrictivas han reducido al mínimo el margen de maniobra de las organizaciones. En esta tesis, el espacio operativo cada vez más reducido de la organización campesina ACVC-RAN ha sido investigado en el contexto del post-acuerdo de Colombia. Más concretamente, el contexto político de Colombia, la propia organización y las políticas y acciones que influyen en el margen de maniobra han sido investigadas siguiendo el marco de Van der Borgh y Terwindt (2012). Todos estos factores desempeñan un papel importante en el número y la severidad de las restricciones del espacio operativo de una organización. Se ha llegado a la conclusión de que, incluso después de la firma del acuerdo de paz en 2016, el contexto político de Colombia no puede ser descrito completamente por dicotomías como la paz y la guerra, o los estados democráticos y autoritarios. Más bien, el contexto político colombiano existe a partir de una soberanía fragmentada y de órdenes políticos híbridos, ya que tanto los actores estatales como los no estatales, como los grupos guerrilleros, los paramilitares y los movimientos sociales, se disputan los territorios y sus recursos. Además, la ACVC-RAN es una organización de base y de reivindicación, cuyos miembros defienden sus derechos humanos, como el acceso a la educación, la atención de la salud y la tierra. Además, se ha comprobado que la organización campesina ha sido objeto de muchas políticas y acciones que la han restringido en su espacio operativo, incluyendo amenazas, asesinatos, estigmatización y criminalización. Sin embargo, es importante señalar que estas restricciones no sólo están surgiendo de fuerzas externas, sino que también pueden provenir de dentro de la organización. Además, estas restricciones se manifiestan de diversas maneras entre los miembros de la organización debido a las diferencias de género. Por último, es fundamental mencionar que la organización no es simplemente receptora de espacio operativo, sino que también participa activamente en estrategias para contrarrestar las restricciones que les imponen tanto los agentes estatales como los no estatales. Estas incluyen acciones como la promoción, los acompañamientos internacionales y las campañas públicas, pero también la formación de alianzas y hacer memoria como acto de resistencia.

Palabras clave: Reducción del espacio operativo de la sociedad civil / Estrategias de los movimientos sociales / Posacuerdo y posconflicto / Violencia / Colombia

Preface

After four hours of driving on a dirt road in a *chiva*, a colourfully-painted, wooden bus, we reach the village of La Coopertiva, previously known as Puerto Nuevo Ité. It appears to be a green oasis after the long drive through burned fields and extensive grasslands used for cattle farming as well as the monotone look of the palm oil plantations. We have arrived for the annual assembly meeting of the peasant organisation *Asociación Campesina del Valle del río Cimitarra – Red Agroecología Nacional* (ACVC-RAN). Located where two rivers join together, we have to cross the river to enter the village, where we are greeted heartily by the *campesinos* and *campesinas* living there. Due to its location, the village was once the blooming centre of the peasant economy in the region, as it provided a strategic location for access to its hinterlands, which earned the village its name of The Cooperative. However, I soon learn that Puerto Nuevo Ité has not always been as tranquil as it appears today. The village and the peasants living there have had a long history of stigmatisation and criminalisation. Next to being largely overlooked by the Colombian state (the nearest health centre is four hours away by vehicle), the village has been subject to many violent actions. For example, it has been burned three times: in the years of 1989, 1996, and 1997. In one of these fires, the school was burned down, another time a woman disappeared and her whereabouts remain unknown to this day. On the front page of this thesis, a picture of the memorial for the victims of the burnings can be found. However, not even the memorial was left in peace, as it was molested by the national army.

The visit to Puerto Nuevo Ité raised many questions for me: How is it possible that the village was burned three times? Who was behind these burnings? What was the role of the Colombian state in this and how come they did not prevent this? What other challenges do the peasant organisation and the peasant farmers it represents face? How do they overcome these violent actions and restrictions?

In this thesis seen before you, I hope to answer all those questions and many more. Even though I only stayed a short period of time in Colombia, it has been enough to show me the many contradictions present in the country. It is a country of infinite diversity and richness, both in terms of people and nature. It is a country that has been marked by violent conflict, but also by its inhabitants' conviction and perseverance. Hopefully, this thesis will convey these many contradictions and do justice to the everyday lives of the Colombian peasantry.

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Alone, it would never have been possible to write this master thesis. Therefore, I would like to thank everyone involved with this process.

In the first place, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor at Wageningen University, Elisabet Rasch. To begin with, thank you for introducing me to ACVC-RAN. Even more importantly, thank you for all you help during the last couple of months. Your enthusiasm and constructive feedback have been most helpful and appreciated.

Secondly, I would like to thank all the wonderful people I met in Colombia. First, I wish to thank Raquel Méndez Villamizar, professor at the Industrial University of Santander, for providing initial contact with ACVC-RAN. Special thanks go out to my Colombian supervisor Yuranis Cuellar, Women's coordinator of ACVC-RAN, and Irene Ramírez, President of ACVC-RAN. You both have made me feel most welcome in your organisation. Although I could only stay for a short period of time, your conviction and perseverance in the fight for the defence of your territory has inspired me immensely, and I hope that this thesis has done justice to you, as well as to all members of ACVC-RAN.

Lastly, I wish to show my gratitude to my family and friends for their continuous support. To my parents, for supporting me during all of my studies, but also especially for welcoming me back home when I returned from Colombia sooner than expected. To Leonie, Eline, and Lisse, I really enjoyed working simultaneously on our theses the last couple of months. Thank you for your support and feedback.

Now the only thing that lasts me is following in the words of Jorge Acuña, an editor at the Prensa Rural, whose poem can be read on the following page: I would like to express my hope that we – each in our own way – keep on building paths of equity, paths of equality, paths of justice, and paths of peace.

Lenne Smeets
Wageningen, July 2020

¡A ti, mujer luchadora!

Mujer trabajadora, rebelde y soñadora
Llena de defectos y grandes virtudes
Llena de amor y comprensión
Llena de coherencia y firme convicción
De un profundo compromiso con la revolución

Mujer que luchas a diario
Que no concibes la realidad como la vives
Que estas inconforme con la injusticia
Y buscas para los tuyos futuro de vida digna

Mujer que con tu sonrisa y tu firmeza
Construyes caminos de equidad
Caminos de igualdad
Caminos de justicia
Y caminos de paz

A ti mujer valerosa y consciente
Mujer que con caricias y palabras fuertes
Logras que el mundo se despierte
Que la naturaleza sea diferente
Y que muchos nos animemos a ser disidentes

Gracias mujer por ser consecuente
Por pelear por lo que crees coherente
Por luchar por lo que amas así a la gente le cueste
Por entregarte a la transformación de un sistema diferente
Y no desfallecer ante tanta amenaza en este mundo inconsciente.

- Jorge Acuña (2013)

For you, fighting woman!

Working, rebellious and dreamy woman
Full of defects and great virtues
Full of love and understanding
Full of coherence and firm conviction
Of a deep commitment to the revolution

Woman how you fight every day
How you don't conceive of reality as you live it
How you are unhappy with the injustice
And you seek for yours the future of a dignified life

Woman who with your smile and your firmness
You build paths of equity
Paths of equality
Paths of justice
And paths of peace

To you brave and conscious woman
Woman who with caresses and strong words
You get the world to wake up
Let nature be different
And may many of us dare to be dissidents

Thank you woman for being consistent
For fighting for what you think is consistent
For fighting for what you love like that, people will find it hard
For giving yourself to the transformation of a different system
And not to faint in the face of so much threat in this unconscious world.

- Jorge Acuña (2013)

Index

List of abbreviations

ACVC-RAN	*Asociación Campesina del Valle del río Cimitarra – Red Agroecología Nacional* Peasant Organisation of the Valley of the river Cimitarra – National Agroecological Network
ANZORC	*Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina* National Association of the Peasant Reserve Zones
ELN	*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* National Liberation Front
FARC-EP	*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
IAP	International Action for Peace
JAC	*Junta de Acción Comunal* Community Action Board
PBI	Peace Brigades International
ZRC	*Zona de Reserva Campesina* Peasant Reserve Zone
ZRC-VRC	*Zona de Reserva Campesina – Valle del río Cimitarra* Peasant Reserve Zone – Valley of the river Cimitarra

Glossary

Campesino / Campesina	Peasant, small-scale farmer
Campo	Field
Don / Doña	Sir / Madam
Finca	Farm
Junta de Acción Comunal	Community Action Board
Resistancia	Resistance

I. Introduction

Worldwide, civil society actors, such as human rights defenders, environmental activists, and grassroots organisations, have faced more and more violence in their everyday work (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012; Buyse, 2018). This has resulted in that, over the last decades, the operational space in which civil society can perform their key tasks has been declining (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). Due to processes such as stigmatisation and criminalisation, civil society actors face challenges and restrictions in their work by both state and non-state actors. Ample examples of this can be found around the world (see for example Cortright, 2008; Buyse, 2018; Amnesty International, 2017), but one part of the world where human rights activists and environmental defenders have especially been targeted is in Latin America (Middeldorp and Le Billon, 2019). For example, in Colombia, several civil society organisations were accused of supporting insurgents when engaging in dialogue with guerrilla groups, thereby limiting their space to resolve the conflict non-violently (Cortright, 2008). This research therefore aims to illuminate the restriction of civil society's operational space by examining how one civil society actor experiences and counteracts the pressures they face by both state and non-state actors in Colombia.

Colombia has faced an internal armed conflict for more than fifty years between government forces, guerrilla groups, and paramilitaries (Sandvik and Lemaitre, 2013). In 2016, the armed conflict ended with the signing of a peace agreement with the Colombian government and the guerrilla group FARC-EP (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia)*. However, the armed conflict has had many impacts on Colombian citizens, including forced displacement. At the end of 2018, the number of people that has been forcibly displaced in Colombia amounts to almost 8 million people, with 98 percent of them internally displaced (UNHCR, 2020). Especially in the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, paramilitaries typically caused forced displacements of rural populations by taking hold of the land and resources (Sánchez-Cuervo and Aide, 2013). In this way, landowners and traffickers were able to expand their holding and increase the size of their cattle ranches (Cubides, 1999). Armed organisations collaborated with social organisations and local elites to expand their territorial and political control (Sánchez-Cuervo and Aide, 2013). The Colombian government was and continues to be largely sympathetic to the corporate interest of large land holders over the interests of peasant livelihoods (Hristov, 2005). Most of the displaced Colombians were individuals and small families that fled to small and mid-sized cities in their own region, or to the larger cities of Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín (Ibañez, 2008). The peasants that stayed in the rural areas faced many issues in relation to access of land, as the top 3 percent of the elite owns over 70 percent of the arable land, whereas 57 percent of the subsistence farmers live on less than 3 percent of the land (Giraldo, 1996, as referenced in Hristov, 2005). Furthermore, of those rural Colombians displaced by force from their territory, women have been disproportionately affected. Their displacement has isolated them from their family and social network, rendering them more vulnerable to violence (Meertens, 2010). Furthermore, other specific vulnerabilities and risks include forced displacement, gender-based violence and especially sexual violence by armed actors as a weapon of war, the imposition of patriarchal models of social control by local power holders, and the historical lack of recognition of women's rights that has facilitated their dispossession and violent seizure of their land (Meertens, 2010).

Colombia has known a long history of extractivism and conflict, but also of resistance. Within this context of armed conflict, many rural social movements emerged. A common ideology behind these movements was the concept of agroecology as political strategy. According to agroecological movements, the downward spiral of poverty, low wages, rural-urban migration, hunger, and environmental degradation can only be halted by changing the export-led, free-trade based, and industrial agriculture model of large farms into smallholder farms (Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012). These movements embrace the concept of agroecology as a pillar of food sovereignty which focuses on local autonomy, local markets, and community action for access and control of land, water, and

agrobiodiversity, which are of central importance for communities to be able to produce food locally (Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012).

One such social movement is the *Asociación Campesina del Valle del Río Cimitarra – Red Agroecología Nacional* (ACVC-RAN). ACVC-RAN is a peasant organisation, located along the river Cimitarra in the municipalities of Yondó, Cantagallo, San Pablo and Remedios in Colombia. This area contains a richness in natural resources such as petroleum and gold, but also forest reserves significant for its biodiversity. However, the area has been highly impacted by the armed conflict, as several illegal armed groups, both paramilitaries and guerrilla groups, were present in the area. As a result, many peasants experienced violence and were forcibly displaced from their lands. The Colombian state did not have the means (and/or the willingness) to protect these peasant farmers, let alone provide institutional support for agricultural development, education and health services (CODHES, 2005). Consequently, *campesinos* and *campesinas* from these regions united to ensure their own rights and bring about social change (PBI, 2020b). In 1996, when ACVC-RAN was established, farmers joined forces to organise meetings, dialogues with the government, and peaceful protest. In the words of Oscar Duque, one of the former leaders of the peasant organisation (PBI, 2020b):

> *"We were tired of being displaced to other regions of the country. It was out of necessity that we looked for the tools that would make the Cimitarra River Valley a region of coexistence, peace and harmony—a region where, in concrete terms, we could implement a development model that would bring social benefit to the community."*

ACVC-RAN has aimed to sustainably develop the region in many different ways. For example, the organisation has been a key player in setting up a National Network of Agroecology (Acevedo-Osorio & Chohan, 2019). Furthermore, since the existence of ACVC-RAN, peasant women have played a fundamental role in the defence of their territory (Correa Delgado, 2019). However, they have also faced many obstacles and experienced different forms of violence (ACVC-RAN, 2020a; PBI, 2020b). Since 2004, 16 extrajudicial killings have taken place in the Cimitarra River Valley region. In 2007, the main office of the organisation was raided by the military and several of its leaders were detained. Several settlements of peasants in the regions have been burned and (para)military groups constructed economic blockades to obstruct food and medicine reaching the peasant farmers, as the peasant living there were considered guerrillas. Moreover, even after the signing of the peace agreement, violence and conflict endures in the country. Since 2016, Colombia has seen an increase in violence against human rights and environmental defenders (The Guardian, 2020a). These examples raise many questions, including how it has been possible that the peasants were subject to these processes of stigmatisation and criminalisation, but also which strategies they have used to defend themselves and their territories.

Problem formulation

Although ACVC-RAN has reached great successes in their defence of their territories, its members still face many challenges regarding their territories and human rights. Continued pressures, for example by mining companies and successor paramilitary groups, might threaten their livelihoods. This is a trend which can be observed worldwide, as the operational space of civil society organisations has been declining in the last decades (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012; Buyse, 2018). Civil society's room to manoeuvre has been shrunk due to processes such as stigmatisation and criminalisation. This has also been the case for ACVC-RAN, as the operation's operational space has long been contested by both state and non-state actors.

According to Middeldorp and Le Billon (2019), studies of repression are mostly stemming from the political sciences, thereby largely overlooking socioenvironmental conflicts. However, political

ecologist tends to neglect killings, stigmatisation, and criminalisation as part of authoritarian systems of resource governance (Middeldorp and Le Billon, 2019). In addition, less research has been done on the interactions between repression and resistance (Rasch, 2017). Therefore, this thesis aims to overcome these limitations and answer the question in what manner the operational space of ACVC-RAN is restricted by looking at the political context in which they operate, the characteristics of the peasant organisation, and the policies and actions that restrict them in their political and social work. However, it is important to consider that ACVC-RAN is not just a passive recipient of operational space, but also an active agent in this process. Therefore, the counterstrategies of ACVC-RAN will be discussed as well. To study this process of shrinking and enlarging of operational space, the framework on shrinking operational space of NGOs by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) has been used, complemented with concepts from peace and conflict studies, theories on violence, and social movement strategies.

Moreover, due to the given factor that women have suffered disproportionate from the armed conflict (Meertens, 2010; Bouvier, 2016), I have used a feminist political ecologist approach (Rocheleau et al., 1996) for this research. Using this perspective provides the opportunity to interrogate how structural forms of power influence access and control of resources through multiple forms of social difference such as gender. Furthermore, taking a feminist political ecologist approach is useful as the differential impacts on gender of the shrinking operational space are often overlooked. Many researchers have placed feminist political ecology in relation to climate change knowledges and adaptation practices (Bee, 2016; Gonda, 2019; Ylipaa et al., 2019). However, feminist political ecology has not yet been studied extensively concerning social movements and shrinking operational space. It is important to study this, because social movements urge us to move towards an ethics of care, protection, and respect for the planet by grassroots activist actions, organised protest, and strategic communication (Imperial, 2019).

Research questions

This research focuses on the restriction of operational space of civil society actors. Building on this, the following main research question has been formulated:

> *Through what gendered processes is the operational space of peasant organisation ACVC-RAN restricted in the context of post-agreement Colombia?*

Knowing the answer to the question will allow us to understand how specifically ACVR-RAN and generally civil society actors experience restrictions and opportunities in their operational space. In turn, understanding how these processes work will provide insights into how civil society is hindered and benefited in their struggle for justice and social change.

Subsequently, the main research question is divided into a selection of sub research questions.

SRQ 1. What are the features of the Colombian political context?
SRQ 2. What are the characteristics and functions of ACVC-RAN?
SRQ 3. What are the actions and policies that restrict the NGO's operational space?
SRQ 4. What are the (counter)strategies employed by ACVC-RAN against the restrictions they face?

The first question focuses on the Colombian political context. To understand a social phenomenon, it is important to consider its social, political, economic, and historical context. Therefore, this question aims to provide an overview of the complex political situation in Colombia, which cannot easily be defined by dichotomies such as war and peace, or conflict and cooperation.

The second sub research question concerns itself specifically with the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN. The characteristics and functions of an organisation are important to consider, as these factors significantly impact the operational space of an organisation.

The third question approaches the shrinking operational space of civil society by looking at the restrictive actions and policies that organisations are challenged with. Therefore, it seeks to answer the question by what the kind of restrictive actions and policies ACVC-RAN is challenged.

Last but not least, the fourth question aims to understand which (counter)strategies are employed by the organisation, how they counteract restrictions placed upon them, and how these actions possibly contribute to change.

Overview of the chapters

In the following section, I will give an overview of the different chapters in this thesis. In this first chapter, I have introduced the subject. This will be followed by the methodology. After this, I will discuss the results, which are divided into four chapter, namely 1) the political context, 2) the organisation's characteristics, 3) the policies and actions that restrict operational space, and 4) social movement strategies. Lastly, a discussion and conclusion will close this thesis. The structure of the report will thus be as follows:

Chapter I – Introduction
In this first chapter, I have introduced the topic of this thesis and provided some background information, the problem statement, and the (sub)research questions.

Chapter II – Theoretical framework
In the following chapter, I will discuss the theoretical framework used in this thesis, which includes the introduction of the framework on restricting operational space by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), as well as several additional concepts from peace and conflict studies and social movement studies.

Chapter III – Methodology
In the third chapter, I will provide an overview of the methodological approach of this research. First, the theory and the implementation of the case study and the research methods used will be given. This will be followed by a reflection on the research, including the shift of the research focus, the limitations of this study, and how my own positionality within the field has shaped this research.

Chapter IV – The Colombian political context
This chapter opens with an overview of the armed conflict, from the initial stages to its ending, when in 2016 the peace agreement was signed between the government and the FARC-EP. Different concepts will be used to make sense of the complexity of Colombia's political situation, which can neither be described as neither peace nor war.

Chapter V – The characteristics and functions of ACVC-RAN
In the fifth chapter, the characteristics and functions of the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN will be outlined. These factors are essential to consider as civil society organisations differ greatly in what they represent and symbolise, and in the way they operate. The effects of restrictions on an organisation's operational space are therefore largely reliant on the characteristics of the organisation itself.

Chapter VI – Restricting ACVC-RAN's operational space
The sixth chapter highlights the different policies and actions that restrict the operational space of civil society organisations, especially in the case of the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN. To provide the

answer to this question, I have utilised the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) on shrinking operational space, complemented by different theories on violence.

Chapter VII – ACVC-RAN's strategies
This chapter stems from the idea that it is important to consider the way organisations use their agency and thereby also develop strategies to respond to and counter restrictions laid upon them. Civil society actors are not just receivers of operational space, but rather active agents in this process. Therefore, several response strategies will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter VIII – Concluding chapter
In the last chapter, I will provide some concluding remarks about this research, including a discussion on the theoretical framework, the findings, and wider implications. This will be followed by the conclusion.

II. Theoretical framework

Before it is possible to approach the previously discussed research questions, it is necessary to provide some theoretical context. Therefore, in the following chapter, I will elaborate on the theoretical framework used. The main starting point of this thesis is the framework on shrinking operational space of civil society organisations, developed by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012). Therefore, this chapter will first provide an overview of this framework, consisting of three main points: 1) the political context, 2) the organisation's characteristics and strategies, and 3) the policies and actions that influence operating space. In contrast to the original framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), the second point of the framework used in this thesis has been split into two parts, resulting in four chapters, namely: 1) the political context, 2) the organisation's characteristics, 3) the policies and actions that influence operating space, and 4) the organisation's strategies. Moreover, this framework will be complemented with several additional concepts. In the first place, concepts from peace and conflict studies, such as hybrid spaces and gray zones, as they add nuances which will be useful for understanding the complex political situation in Colombia. Secondly, different forms of violence will be discussed, as violence is not always direct, open, or occurring during times of war, but can also be hidden, dispersed, and occurring in times of peace. Therefore, these forms of violence will aid in comprehending these distinctions. In the third place, social movement theory will be used to provide more insight into the strategies of social movements to counteract restrictions placed upon them.

Shrinking operational space of civil society organisations

In the past decades, civil society actors, such as NGOs, social movements, human rights organisations, and grassroots initiatives, have increasingly experienced pressures and restrictions during their social and political work (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012; Buyse, 2018). Ample examples can be found around the world. To illustrate, in Ethiopia, the government has decreed a law stating that organisations working on human rights issues can only receive up to 10 percent of their funding from abroad (Buyse, 2018). In the Philippines, a counterterrorism measure was enacted in 2007, which uses an exceedingly broad definition of terrorism and allows suspects to be detained indefinitely (Cortright, 2008). In Nigeria, many people became homeless, were injured, disappeared, and were killed while opposing the forced displacement of 30,000 residents of Lagos by the state authorities (Amnesty International, 2017). Also in Latin America, many examples can be found. In 2007, thirteen people – most of them NGO staff – were arrested and charged with violating the Anti-Terrorist Law when they were demonstrating against the privatization of water provision in El Salvador (Cortright, 2008). An example of shrinking operational space in Colombia can be found in the fact that several civil society organisations, while engaging in dialogue with guerrillas, were indicted with supporting insurgents, thereby limiting their space to resolve the conflict non-violently (Cortright, 2008).

Civil society is a broad concept, which can refer either to a specific part of society, a specific type of society, and a specific space of public engagement (Edwards, 2011). In this thesis, civil society is seen as a specific part of society, separate from both the state and the market (Gleiss and Saether, 2017). The pressures and restrictions that they face influence the operational space in which they operate. However, not all civil society organisations face similar challenges, as some will face more or different restrictions than others. In this context, the operational space of civil society organisations means the capacity to function as an organisation and to perform their key tasks, in agreement with the principles of international law protecting civil society (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). Therefore, it defines this operational space as the room in which organisation can enjoy the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression (Buyse, 2018).

To understand how the operational space of different civil society organisations is restricted in distinctive settings, Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) have developed an analytical framework. In

order to understand the actual impact of these restrictions, "*it is important to distinguish between the very different challenges and threats that specific civil society organisations are facing in different political contexts and the way in which these affect their operations*." (p. 1066). Several factors should therefore be taken into consideration, namely: 1) the political context on different levels, 2) the characteristics and functions of the organisations themselves, 3) the particular policies and actions with which the organisation is confronted, and 4) the strategies employed by the organisation to counteract these restrictions. In the following subsections, these factors will be explained and discussed.

1) Political context

The first determining factor in the allowance and restriction of the operational space of civil society is the political context. It is important to note that there is not one specific political context, but that all experiences of organisations differ, even within the same country, since every organisation is impacted in a different way. Therefore, the restrictions and room to manoeuvre by each organisation will be experienced differently. However, it remains fundamental to consider the political context of Colombia to understand how ACVC-RAN was formed, how it functions, and how the organisation faces restrictions and counteracts them. As Colombia has recently lived through an internal armed conflict, concepts from peace and conflict studies will be useful in analysing the current political situation, which despite its peace agreement, still remains largely violent.

In the following subchapter, I will first introduce some of the debate around conflict and post-conflict settings, including the mainstream Western ideas about peacebuilding, but also the reactions to this, such as hybrid political orders and fragmented sovereignty. In the second section, I will focus on the more concrete conceptualisation used in the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012).

No war, no peace

In Western security policy thinking, poor state performance and violent conflicts are closely related. Terms such as fragile states, weak states (as in the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012), failing states or failed states are used to describe poor state performance (Boege et al., 2009a). The fragility of the state is regarded as provoking violent conflict, and in turn, this can lead to state failure and collapse.

This form of thinking is also reflected in mainstream Western ideas about peace and peacebuilding. Post-conflict peacebuilding was first defined by Boutros-Ghali (1992, p. 32) as *"the action to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people".* This provided the basis for liberal peacebuilding, where conflict is based on structural violence and social grievances, thereby providing economic development and political freedom as the panacea (Campbell et al., 2011). At the beginning of the 21st century, this liberal peacebuilding has received widespread attention. Liberal peacebuilding is based on the Westphalian paradigm, which is the belief that democracy and the rule of law can only be materialised within the boundaries of a sovereign state (Mallet, 2010). Therefore, it supports a particular form of liberal democratic politics. This form of politics is built on the assumption that in order to achieve peace in a post-conflict state, a central state needs to be consolidated, and that this goes hand in hand with economic growth. In this traditional liberal peace thinking, peacebuilding is thus equated to statebuilding (Mallet, 2010).

However, this linear thinking in liberal peacebuilding (see a.o. Boutros-Ghali, 1992; Doyle and Sambanis, 2000) does not adequately explain the complexity of a country's political situation. Following Richards (2005), the political and social situation in Colombia can best be described as 'no

peace, no war', where peace is understood as the absence of violence. He calls for an understanding of war as but one amongst many aspects of social reality, organised by social agents, and made through social action. Therefore, the specific social context needs to be understood.

The concept of hybrid political orders has been offered as one such alternative to liberal peacebuilding. This concept "*overcomes the notion of the state as being the superior and ultimate form of political order per se and frees the debate from its current state-centric bias*" (Boege et al., 2009b, p. 88). It thereby aids in looking beyond conventional perspectives on states and governments, and it closely represents the realities of countries in conflict or emerging from it. Furthermore, it provides a manner to move away from dualistic organising concepts, such as formal/informal, state/non-state, and legitimate/illegitimate (Boege et al., 2009a, 2009b; Mallett, 2010). Mallet (2010) argues that by using the concept of hybrid political orders, it helps us to detect and explain the various connections between supposedly non-state institutions and a central authority. Secondly, he argues that overlapping layers of institutions do not necessarily exist in competition with one another, but that cooperation between institutions also occurs.

The concept of hybrid political orders also shuns away from the term of ungoverned spaces, which are considered *"geographic areas where governments do not exercise effective control"* (Jacoby, 2004, as referenced in Mallet, 2010). As such, they are increasingly being recognised as potential safe havens for terrorists, and subsequently pose a considerable threat to the state's security. Nevertheless, in these 'ungoverned spaces', it does not hold that there is no governing structure in place. Often, there are a number of competing governance mechanisms and localised forms of authority, which might even be connected to the state through complex means (Mallet, 2010). Using the hybrid political orders helps us to locate these often multiple and at times more hidden governance mechanisms that are present in (post-)conflict settings. It thereby looks at what forms of governances ***are*** actually in place, instead of what forms ***are not***. In a similar fashion, Rasch (2017) proposes to understand conflicts about natural resource as 'hybrid spaces', where several actors compete for the same territory. It is thus important to consider not just the state, but also non-state actors, and see how they are intertwined and interacting.

Similar and closely related to the concept of hybrid political orders is the concept of 'gray zones', which warns against and helps to move away from dichotomies that are too rigid, such as conflict/cooperation and war/peace. Therefore, it is possible to look behind simple and at times misleading notions of the perpetrator and the victim, or the state and non-state actors (Auyero, 2006). In gray zones, informal actors can play an important role, as the state has lost its influence in these regions, or in some cases is altogether absent (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). However, state officials and political leader can also be present – or behind – collective violence through other actors (Auyero, 2006). Jaffe (2013) uses the terms 'hybrid states' to discuss the entanglement of multiple governmental actors, including politicians, police, and armed forces. Similarly, Davis (2010) uses 'fragmented sovereignty', defined as the existence of multiple, localised, and relatively autonomous cores of power, to describe how violence by 'irregular' armed forces poses a direct challenge to state authorities. Instead of associating sovereignty with the modern nation state as having all-compassing and centralised control over its population and especially violence, fragmented sovereignty focuses on how non-state – and often armed – actors contest the state's monopoly on violence.

An example can be found in a study about *La Violencia*, which was an episode in Colombian history that killed 200,000 people in the 1940s and 50s. During this time, not only did state officials 'encourage' violence against people in the region, but they also participated in partisan attacks (Auyero, 2006). Partisan refers to irregular military forces which are formed to oppose control of an area. State officials and political elites did not only tolerate the violence but utilised it for their own end – they were the conflict's perpetrators. Therefore, non-state actors can play an important role in (post-)conflict

settings and are thus important to consider when talking about the restriction of an organisation's operational space.

The concepts of hybrid political orders, gray zones, fragmented sovereignty, and hybrid spaces, as previously discussed, will be useful to analyse the case of ACVC-RAN, as the peasant organisation is located in a region which has historically been subject to violence. These concepts will therefore be useful to acknowledge the different actors involved with ACVC-RAN and help to explain the complex political situation in Colombia, whilst moving away from dichotomies that do not represent the actual context in which the organisation operates.

State capacity and regime

As a starting point of this thesis, I have used the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012). They have conceptualised the political context by using Charles Tilly's (2007) model of state capacity and political and civil liberties to show the deviations in political context (see Figure 1). In this model, the political regime is placed on one axis, which ranges from the more authoritarian states to the more democratic ones. The other axis is filled with the state capacity, which ranges from stronger to weaker states. Accordingly, four ideal-typical categories are formed: strong authoritarian states, weak authoritarian states, strong democratic states, and weak democratic states. It is important to keep into mind that within these categories, different gradations of state capacity and freedom can be found. Therefore, states can be positioned on the whole range of the two axes, and their position is always subject to change.

Political regime **State capacity**	**More authoritarian**	**More democratic**
Stronger states	Strong authoritarian state	Strong democratic state
Weaker states	Weak authoritarian state	Weak democratic state

Figure 1 State strength and political and civil liberties (Adapted from Tilly (2007) by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012))

The capacity of the state, as well as the type of regime, influence the space in which civil society actors can operate (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). In strong democratic states (upper right corner), civil and political rights are clearly defined. The state has the capacity to defend these rights, based on the rule of law. This means that the operational space of civil society organisations is secured by an effective legal framework and enforced by state protection. States thereby enhance civil society actors which respect human rights, strengthen the rule of law, and promote economic and social development (Cheema and Popovski, 2010). Organisations can thus play a political role within civil society and operate together with state agencies to reach consensus or make claims (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012).

Nevertheless, this ideal-typical state is often not the political reality. In authoritarian states, the political regime demands obedience, punishes opposition, and can be considered oppressive and inflexible (Levitsky and Way, 2010). In strong authoritarian states (upper left corner), the government is often benefited by having strong control over civil society, and in this way restricts civil society's manoeuvrable space (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). An example of this is the Chinese state, which wields considerable power and authority over its society, thereby restricting the political space for civil society actors (Gleiss and Saether, 2017). In contrast, in weak states – both democratic and

authoritarian (lower corners) – state capacity is often limited. This means that their capability (and/or willingness) to make and maintain rules and defend civil society is often limited. If this is the case, other actors can take up this open space. This way, the government, as well as civil society, can face serious challenges by informal organisations or criminal practices (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). In these contexts, civil society is often regarded as a countervailing force against a corrupt and unresponsive state (Veltmeyer, 2004).

Although this division of states into these four categories as discussed above does not completely illustrate the complex political situation in Colombia, it has provided me with a starting point from which to start analysing the Colombian political reality. However, as the transition from societies of war into peace is not always clear-cut, it is important to take a more nuanced approach. Therefore, the theories from peace and conflict studies, as introduced at the beginning of this section, including hybrid political orders, gray zones, and fragmented sovereignty, will help us move away from dichotomies such as democratic and authoritarian, and war and peace.

2) Characteristics and functions of an organisation

Next to the political context, it is also important to consider the characteristics and functions of a civil society organisation (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). These factors are essential to consider as organisations differ greatly in what they represent and symbolise, and in the way they operate. States can be in competition with civil society, but they can also be in cooperation. Civil society can support the state, but it can also demand changes and challenge the state (Cheema and Popovski, 2010). Therefore, the effects of restrictions on a particular civil society organisation's operational space are largely reliant on the characteristics of the civil society organisation itself. Similar restrictions distinctly affect different organisations, depending on the organisation's exact features and the broader context. In the original framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), they focus on one particular type of civil society actors, namely NGOs, which they consider to be voluntary, non-profit organisations, working for the common interests of a particular group or sector. Subsequently, they divide these further into claim-making and service-oriented NGOs. In the following section, the difference between claim-making and service-oriented NGOs will be discussed, complemented by discussions on the differences between grassroots organisations, social movements, and NGOs.

An important first distinction between NGOs that significantly impacts (restrictions on) their operational space is whether organisations are primarily service-oriented or claim-making and policy-oriented (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). Service-oriented NGOs include organisations that focus on for example provision of drinking water or on healthcare for pregnant women. Claim-making and policy-oriented NGOs include human rights work and lobbying organisations. However, the distinction between the two is not always clear. An example of this would be when the NGO that provides healthcare services would also take a stance on the provision of contraception. As a rule of thumb, claim-making NGOs are more vulnerable to restrictions, since the claims that they are making are more likely to lead to tensions (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). These restrictions often differ per time period. Some NGOs experience a continuous flow of pressures on their operating space, while others might only experience restrictions in specific time periods. Likewise, spatial differences occur, as NGOs working on the similar issues in the same country can still experience significant difference in whether and how their operating space is restricted (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012).

Similar to Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), TNI (2017) argue that it is important to acknowledge the variations between civil society actors, and subsequently, the impact on the shrinking space of actors. Civil society cannot be reduced to a homogenous entity. They divide civil society into *"highly professionalised NGO activism that is entertained and supported by the Davos class"* (p. 6) and grass-root activism, thus community-based social, economic, political and environmental justice movements (TNI, 2017). In a similar fashion, Veltmeyer (2004) argues that NGOs can generally be considered issue-

oriented, whereas social movements are generally focused on disputing state authority and power in order to bring about change in government policies. As a result of this claim-making, they are the ones that appear to be the most severely impacted by authoritarian governments and violent non-state actors.

Although in different designations, service-oriented NGOs can be considered professionalised NGOs receiving widespread support from donors due to their large size, bureaucratic set-up, and strong 'branding' (TNI, 2017), and claim-making and policy-oriented NGOs are respectively the grass-roots, community-based, and issue-focused organisations and social movements. When using the word NGO, often this first type springs to mind, thus NGOs being foreign funded, professionalised organisations. However, NGOs and civil society actors can also consist out of grassroots organisations and social movements. Therefore, I have chosen to mostly use the more neutral words 'organisation', 'civil society organisations', and 'civil society actors' in my research, which hopefully will not create these strong connotations.

3) Violence and restriction of operational space

In this subchapter, the theoretical concepts focused on violence and restrictions of operational space will be discussed. In the first section, various definitions and typologies of violence will be discussed, including structural, slow, and everyday violence. Secondly, these different forms of violence come forward in various restrictive policies and actions. In order to make sense of these different forms of restrictions faced by the organisation, the different policies and actions that can restrict operational space of civil society from the framework of Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) will be outlined.

Violence

According to Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004), violence is a slippery concept, as it is "nonlinear, productive, destructive, *and* reproductive." (p. 1, emphasis in original). A myriad of conceptualisations of violence have sprung up, of which Davies (2019) has provided a nice overview, including *" 'structural violence' (Galtung, 1969); 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1988); 'epistemological violence' (Shiva, 1988); 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1979); 'cultural violence' (Galtung, 1990); 'administrative violence' (Spade, 2015); 'gendered violence' (Pain, 2014b); 'colonial violence' (Fanon, 1963; see De Leeuw, 2016); 'insidious violence' (Marguerat, 1996); 'normalized violence' (Bourgois, 2001); 'objective violence' (Zizek, 2008); 'banal violence' (Yusoff, 2012); 'infrastructural violence' (Rodgers and O'Neill, 2012; Li, 2017); 'silent violence' (Watts, 2013); 'abstract violence' (Tyner et al., 2014); and 'violent inaction' (Davies et al., 2017) – to name just a few."* (p. 5). However, in order to try to make some sense of these different conceptualisations, different theories on violence will be discussed, including structural violence, slow violence, and hybrid violence.

Often renowned for being one of the first scholars to conceptualise violence, in his article "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", Galtung (1969) introduces the triangle of violence, which consists of three components: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. He does so in order to try to bring together peace and violence, where *"peace is the absence of violence"* (p. 1).

The first form, direct violence, is a classic form of violence, where an individual is affected by use of physical force. It is visible, intentional and direct and often manifests itself in eruptive, catastrophic events. It is attributable to a person or persons – there is a perpetrator who commits the violent act (Galtung, 1969). Similarly, Bourgois (2001) differentiates this form as violence as direct political violence, which encompasses targeted physical violence between official authorities and opponents. This form of violence is considered unacceptable and is also similar to the first form of restrictive actions outlined by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), namely physical harassment and intimidation.

The second form of violence conceptualised by Galtung (1969) is structural violence, which affects social groups. It is a crime without a criminal – so although there is a victim (someone who is injured by the inequities of social arrangements), it is hard to identify a perpetrator. The intention is absent, and this form of violence is normalised. This includes unequal access to opportunities and services such as education, health, and employment, as well as an inaccessibly built environment, poverty, and institutionalisation. Hence, there is an unequal distribution of resources, as well as the unequal distribution of power to decide over the distribution of resources. Bourgois (2001), following Galtung's example, defines structural violence as chronic, historically-based political-economic oppression and social inequality. Structural violence can for example be found in administrative restrictions and the pressure on spaces of dialogues when looking at the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012).

Cultural violence is another form of invisible, or less visible, violence. It includes fear, hatred, dismissiveness, negative perceptions regarding abilities, and pity. All of these are aspects of the symbolic sphere, the culture of our society that is used to justify, or legitimise, direct or structural violence. In the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), this form of violence can be found in, for example, criminalisation and stigmatisation practices. The criminalisation of human and environmental rights defenders, as well as stigmatisation of peasant or (other) marginalised communities justifies the actions and policies of the government and other actors which can be considered structural violence. Similarities can be found with Bourgois' (2001) symbolic violence, which is based on the internalisation of inequalities, and is maintained by racism and sexism.

Furthermore, Bourgois (2001) conceptualises a fourth form of violence, namely everyday violence. This form of violence can be found in daily practices and expressions of violence on a micro-level and are easily overlooked. Everyday and structural violence seem to find each other in Nixon's (2011) conceptualisation of slow violence. With this concept, he refers to "*a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.*" (p. 2). In contrast to how violence is normally viewed, namely as a one-time event, a rupture, a direct action, slow violence argues that violence is often not spectacular nor instantaneous. It builds up over time, its consequences are not always clear-cut, and its effects may become visible across various temporal scales. Thereby, it enlarges our idea of what violence practices are, and it helps to look beyond the immediate effects of violence. Often, this form of violence is hidden, embedded in the structures of society.

Slow violence shows many similarities to structural violence. According to Davies (2019), structural and slow violence are inextricably linked, since both concepts expand violence to go beyond only the personal, the direct, and the immediate. Instead, they acknowledge harm and suffering in a systematic normalisation of violence. Both forms can be considered hidden forms of violence, which happen out of sight. However, Galtung's forms of violence contain an embeddedness, due to its structural properties it is considered fixed and 'natural', which is in contrast to Nixon's slow violence, as it is less static and looks at forms of violence enacted over time (Davies, 2019). Furthermore, slow violence shows many parallels with everyday violence, as both are gradual and hidden forms of violence.

Both structural, slow, and everyday violence will be useful concepts to study how ACVC-RAN is restricted in their operational space. These concepts will help to focus on forms of violence that are not directly visible, but rather on the more hidden forms - the everyday policies and practices which are embedded in societal structures, such as stigmatisation and pressure on dialogue spaces – that shrink the manoeuvring space of the peasant organisation in Colombia.

Policies and actions that restrict operational space

These forms of violence become more concrete when looking at specific policies and actions that restrict operational space. Therefore, this subsection focuses on those different restrictions placed upon civil society, making use of the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012). In their framework, they divided the actions and policies into five pillars: 1) physical harassment and intimidation, 2) criminalisation, 3) administrative restrictions, 4) stigmatisation, and 5) spaces of dialogue under pressure. In Figure 2, a schematic representation can be found. All five pillars will be discussed separately, but it is important to keep in mind that the pillars are intertwined and interconnected. Certain processes, for example criminalisation and stigmatisation, often go hand in hand.

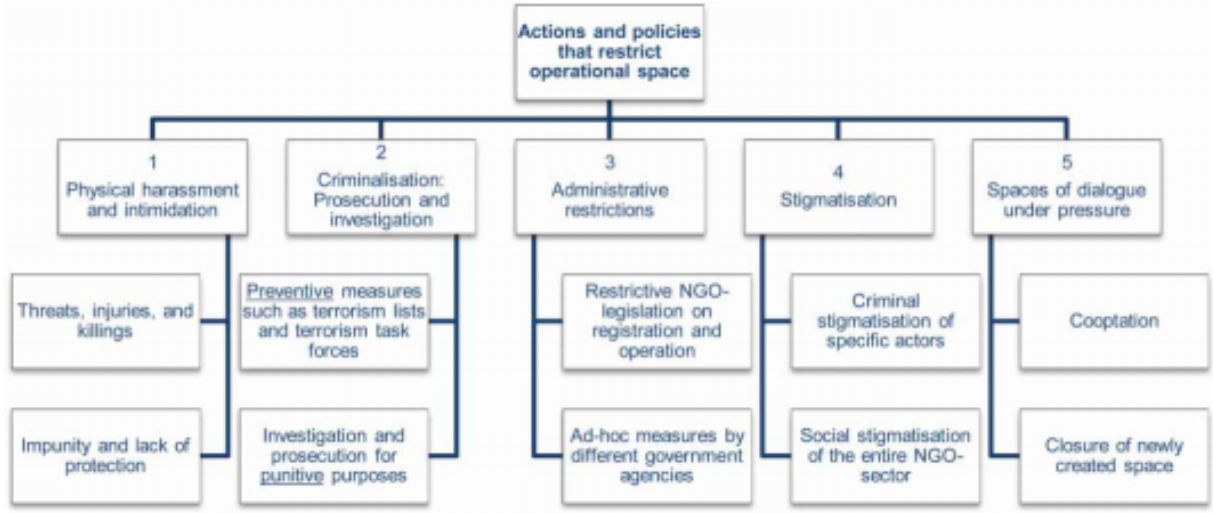

Figure 2 Framework of actions and policies that restricts operational space (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012)

The first actions that can restrict the operational space of civil society organisations are physical harassment and intimidation. Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) distinguish two different forms of repression and intimidation: 1) threats, injuries, and killings, and 2) impunity and lack of protection. The first form, threats, injuries, and killings, can be executed by the state or specific state task forces. However, often the attribution is unclear, as there is involvement in the threats or killings by criminal organisations or unknown third parties. The second form is impunity and lack of protection, which often occur in weak states. Impunity and lack of protection often occur in weak states (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). According to them, a weak state – and in particular a weak law enforcement sector – will have consequences for the protection of organisations. Both unwillingness and/or a lack of capacity of the state can lead to this, which means that powerful groups with vested interests, both inside and outside the state, can block the rule of law or judicial reform, and thus contribute to a climate of vulnerability and impunity, which can lead to fragmented sovereignty (Davis, 2010). Impunity means that there is an exemption from punishment for serious crimes and gross violations of human rights, where human rights and rule of law do not play a role (Impunity Watch, 2020), which therefore aids illegal actions and killings. These problems are important in countries where long periods of violent conflict have occurred and where societies are still deeply divided (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012), as is the case in Colombia. Often it is not in the interest of powerful perpetrators to aid the peace process – and therefore they frequently obstruct it.

The second measure that can restrict the operational space of civil society organisations is categorised by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) as either preventive or punitive penal measures. They define criminalisation as *"the act of isolating a generally defined conduct and labelling this conduct as criminal, thereby opening up the possibility of public – and sometimes private – prosecution."* (p. 1071). As a result, a sentence, such as a fine or imprisonment, can be imposed on a person found guilty under

state authority. Therefore, criminalisation involves a range of coercive measures that can restrict individuals, as well as organisations (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). Preventive measures include terrorism lists and terrorism task forces. States can thereby use legal frameworks with the aim to criminalise protestors, as well as social protest (Rasch, 2017). Punitive penal measures mean that there is an investigation and prosecution with the objective to inflict punishment. The restrictions put on people and organisations can include criminal investigations, such as raiding offices and seizing computers, as well as pre-trial detentions, which include travel restrictions, high costs for lawyers, and time in prison (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012), which might take up so much time, that there is no time left for activists to engage in activism (Rasch, 2017). These penal measures often occur in authoritarian forms of environmental and resource governance (Middeldorp and Le Billon, 2019).

The third pillar of Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012)'s model on restrictive actions and policies is focused on administrative restrictions. The first form of this can be found when legislation on civil society is issued that restrict fundamental human rights, which makes registration and operation both mandatory and difficult. The second form of administrative restrictions happen when governing bodies use their power to impose ad-hoc measures on organisations in order to control them.

The fourth pillar of the framework of Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) is stigmatisation, which means that groups or individuals are portrayed as threats to the social order or the security of society. However, there is no significant substance for the claims of portraying people as criminals or terrorists. Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) distinguish two different forms of stigmatisation: criminal and social stigmatisation. The first one, 'criminal stigmatisation', takes place when state agents or other actors use criminal labels in order to discredit specific (actions of) actors. For example, actors and communities that are involved with resistance are often depicted as 'anti-development' and subsequently, their resistance can be considered a threat to the internal security (Rasch, 2017). As a result of this constant misrepresentation, an organisation's operational space can be significantly affected and restricted. It is important to note that stigmatisation of actors does not only occur by government agents, but also by other social stakeholders, such as corporations and media. The second form of stigmatisation, 'social stigmatisation', happens when the civil society sector embodies certain values and ideas that are rejected by the country as they are seen as opposed to the dominant social norms and values, e.g. Western NGOs in strictly Islamic countries.

The fifth pillar distinguished by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) is the application of pressure on spaces of dialogue and interaction between governing parties and civil society groups. This pillar consists of two different forms, the first one being co-optation, and the latter being the closure of newly created spaces on the other stakeholder. The first form, the practice of co-optation, signifies that one person or more persons are convinced by the opposing party, agency, or system to join them. Often, propositions of material advances for the co-opted person, play an important part in these processes. The second form is the closure or disappearance of newly created spaces where civil society can meet with governing bodies, for example, seminars, social forums, and round tables. Extra problematic could be when spaces are created where groups participate in theory, but not in practice, which can lead to the disappointment of participating groups. Moreover, it could be seen as a legitimising practice in places where the law or donors require consultation with specific groups, instead of an actual opportunity for these groups to give voice to their needs and demands. Both forms are about restraining and/or reversing of interactions between governing bodies and civil society.

4) Civil society organisation's strategies

It is important to consider that civil society organisations are not just receivers of operational space, but rather active agents in this process. According to Cornwall (2002, p. 2), space is not simply *"taken up, assumed or filled",* but it is also made, reshaped, and claimed by the organisations themselves. In the words of Lefebvre (1991, p. 24): *"Space is a social product […] it is not simply "there", a neutral container waiting to be filled, but it is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control and hence of domination, of power."* It is therefore important to pay attention to the ways that organisations develop strategies to evade or deal with restrictions.

Much has been written about different strategies employed by social movements, ranging from resistance to protests, but I have chosen to focus on several strategies that specifically counteract the restrictions imposed upon the organisation. In this section, these different social movement strategies will be discussed. First, four different response strategies to shrinking operational space of NGOs by Terwindt and Schliemann (2017) will be explained. To better understand the strategies used by the organisations, additional concepts such as grassroots scalar politics, will be used to explain phenomena encountered during the fieldwork.

Response strategies to shrinking spaces of civil society

Many different styles in terms of the response strategies of civil society can be distinguished. According to Terwindt and Schliemann (2017), there are four response strategies which are most widespread and that can be categorised in the following categories: legal support, advocacy, emergency measures, and public campaigns. The first strategy is obtaining legal support. Organisations, as well as their members, require legal support in case they are faced with criminal charges or other lawsuits. The legal expertise, assistance of paralegals, and funding needed for the defence can be difficult to obtain. Often, processes take a long time as they challenge unconstitutional restrictive legislation. Furthermore, overcoming administrative restriction can also be a time-consuming process for the NGO. The second response strategy is advocacy for governmental and diplomatic intervention. This includes NGOs advocating to foreign governments and their embassies, as well as to UN institutions, as they can play an essential role in supporting civil society actors at risk by speaking out about the restrictions they are experiencing. Gleiss and Saether (2017) have identified strategically developing formal and informal ties with state actors as another form of civil society practices strategies. As a third strategy by Terwindt and Schliemann (2017), emergency measures against physical threats and attacks are stated. These measures include protective accompaniments, temporary relocations, or security training. The last strategy mentioned by Terwindt and Schliemann (2017) is the usage of public campaigns. Seeking the spotlight can help organisations and their members who are at risk to receive necessary support and therefore legitimacy to carry out their work. These public campaigns can exist out of urgent appeals on governments and the United Nations, calling upon the media, or emphasising the importance of the work by specific individuals through awards. Thereby it brings the work of civil society into the public sphere (Gleiss and Saether, 2017).

Grassroots scalar politics

However, these are not the only strategies that social movements (can) employ when being faced with restrictions on their operational space. Additionally, the framework of grassroots scalar politics (Hoogesteger and Verzijl, 2015) offers a lens to analyse how organisations engage in networks and create strategic alliances in order to consolidate their rights in terms of access to natural resources or to participation in political processes. Three key strategies are outlined: 1) the consolidation and control of (new) scaled spaces, 2) the creation of networks/alliances with actors at different spatial scales, and 3) the discursive and material fidgeting of existing scales and their importance. Through

these three strategies, organisations expand their capacity to make political claims. At the base of these strategies is the creation of engagements and alliances with actors and networks on different scales. As a result of these interactions, multi-scalar alliances fundamentally shape the outcome of the contested policies (Bebbington et al., 2008; Hoogesteger et al., 2017). This concept will be useful in this thesis to study how ACVC-RAN strategically forms alliances with other actors, both in Colombia and globally, and how this helps them in claiming their operational space.

Linking the concepts together

In this chapter, I have introduced the different concept and theories used in this research. In this section, the aforementioned concepts will be linked together. With the aim to place my research into the wider debate of post-conflict settings, violence, and social movements and resistance, I have tried to let the theoretical framework used in this thesis consists out of different theories and concepts. These concepts do not exclude each other, but rather complement each other and together provide an overview of the complexities of shrinking operational space of civil society.

As a basis, the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) has been used to study the shrinking operational space of NGOs. This framework consists out of four parts: 1) the political context, 2) NGO characteristics, 3) policies and actions that influence operating space, and 4) NGO strategies. The political context has been conceptualised by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) as the state regime and its capacity. However, to understand the current political environment of Colombia, which can be considered neither peace nor war, I have added various additional concepts from peace and conflict studies. These concepts, including hybrid political orders, gray zones, and fragmented sovereignty, will aid in comprehending the myriad of state and non-state actors in the region, and how these actors interact with each other. For the second part, the organisations characteristics, the original conceptualisation has been complemented by other theory on social movements, specifically the difference between grassroots, community-based organisations and NGOs. In the third place, the different conceptualisations of violence, such as structural and slow violence, will assist in understanding the restrictive policies and actions that the peasant organisation experiences. In the last part, I have emphasised the agency of organisations. In the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), limited attention is given to the social movement strategies. Therefore, additional concepts from social movement theory have been used to recognise ways in which organisations operate, as well as counteract these restrictions.

III. Methodology

Data can be obtained in a myriad of manners. In this case, the information in this thesis is mostly based on a fieldwork period of six weeks in Colombia with the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN, combined with literature studies and gray data. In this chapter, I will explain in more detail the methodology used in this research. This includes an overview of the research, including its setting and participants, as well as reflections on the research process and my own position within this. Therefore, this chapter is subdivided into several sections. First, I will describe the research design, including the setting in which the research has taken place. Secondly, I will explain how the focus of the research has changed after spending time 'in the field' with members from ACVC-RAN. In the third place, I will elaborate on the data collection strategies used for this research. After the data collection strategy, the data analysis procedure will be talked about. Lastly, I will provide a reflection on my own role as researcher and discuss the limitations and trustworthiness of this research.

Research design

For this research, I have performed a case study of the Colombian peasant organisation ACVC-RAN. A case study is a form of research that employs different methods in order to study a social phenomenon (De Vaus, 2013). This study normally finds place in the natural environment to obtain detailed interpretations and descriptions from the study's participants. Therefore, I went on fieldwork to Colombia. Originally, I had planned that this would take place between the beginning of February until the beginning of May 2020. However, due to the pandemic outbreak of COVID-19, the fieldwork was abruptly shortened to a couple of weeks only. In the end, the fieldwork took place between Monday 10 February 2020 and Saturday 21 March 2020.

In the first two weeks, I spent time in an exploratory manner to get familiar with the broader context of Colombia. My time was spent learning about the history of Colombia, especially the recent history as well as the current political and socio-economic situation. Furthermore, as my Spanish language skills, which I had obtained two years earlier in Nicaragua during a six-months stay for my bachelor thesis, had gotten a bit rusty after minimal usage, I decided to take Spanish classes for a week. The aim of these classes was twofold: first, to catch up on my Spanish language skills, and secondly, to get acquainted with the national and local dialect and word usage. In addition to this, I had my first meeting with the key informant of this research, namely a professor at the Industrial University of Bucaramanga. She had been involved with ACVC-RAN through earlier academic studies, and therefore could provide initial information about ACVC-RAN and arranged a meeting with key persons from the peasant organisation.

In the third week, I had my first meeting with representatives of ACVC-RAN in the city of Barrancabermeja. This city is located in the department of Santander and the headquarters of ACVC-RAN are located there. In Figure 3, an overview is provided of the locations where ACVC-RAN is active. In the meeting, we discussed how the research would take place and which activities would be possible for me to attend. As my original focus within this thesis lay on the subject of gendered knowledge production, it made most sense to attend activities and perform interviews in the region where these activities actually took place. These activities mostly occurred in the municipalities of Cantagallo and San Pablo, as this is where the women's committees and gender work started (Personal communication, 2020). However, as these municipalities are located within the department of Bolívar, which is coloured red on the travel advice map issued by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was not possible for me to visit those regions due to the safety regulations of Wageningen University. Before leaving for Colombia, I had anticipated this to a certain extent, however, I also assumed that there would be activities on gender within the municipalities of Yondó and Remedios as well, which would have been safe to visit. However, the focus of the organisation's gender work lay in the regions

of Cantagallo and San Pablo. Not being allowed to visit these regions posed a challenge, because as my supervisor and coordinator of the women's committee stated: *"How can you understand our work, if you cannot see where it started?"* (Personal communication, 2020).

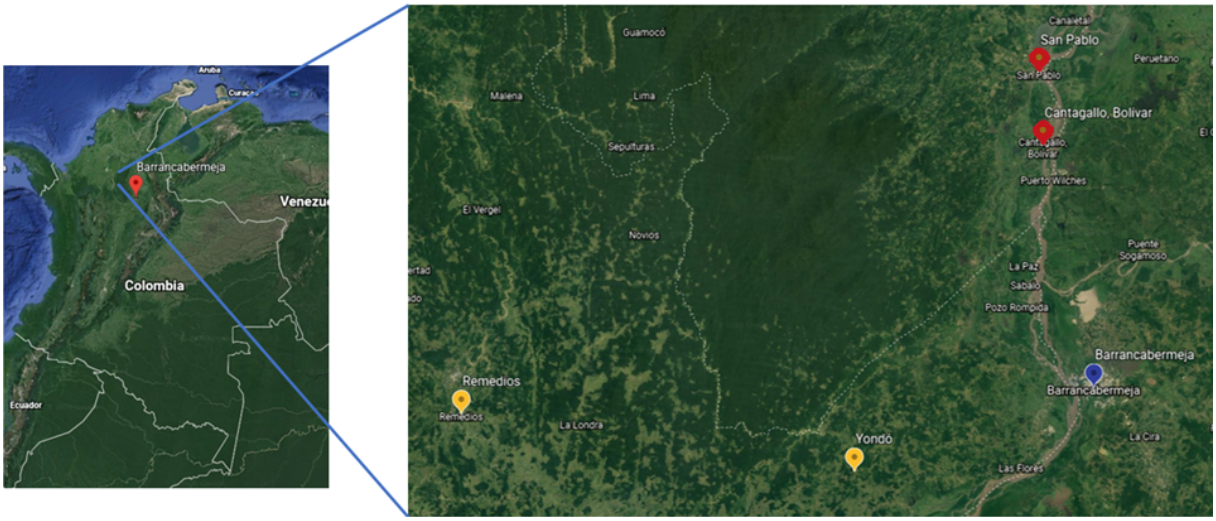

Figure 3 Location of Barrancabermeja and the municipalities where ACVC-RAN is active

Luckily, it was possible to work from the main office of Barrancabermeja. There, it was possible to learn more about the organisation through observations and informal conversations. Furthermore, another part of the research took place in the community of Puerto Nuevo Ité within the municipalities of Yondó, Antioquia. It was possible to join the annual meeting on the 15th of March, which proved to be a great opportunity as I had the possibility to talk to many different members of the peasant organisations. For example, coordinators from the main headquarters were there, as well as the field coordinators and members of the Community Action Boards (JACs: *Juntas de Acción Comunal)*. Moreover, accompaniments from both International Action for Peace (IAP) and Peace Brigades International (PBI) took place, so informal conversations took place with members from these organisations.

Changing the research focus

As collecting data is a dynamic process, the research design has continuously been changed and (re)adapted during the fieldwork, in order to meet reality. It was therefore not a linear movement of collecting data, but rather an iterative. Certain phases in the research process has thus been repeated for purposes of reflection to spark insight and develop meaning (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Due to the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, all students from Wageningen University had to return from their fieldwork abroad. Fieldwork has thus been limited as the pandemic considerably shortened the time that I could spent with the members of the peasant organisation. Therefore, I have only been able to conduct exploratory research during my time in Colombia. Although it can be debated what enough time would be to understand the situation, the originally planned three months would have been considerably better than the three weeks spent with the organisation (from the six weeks spent in Colombia in total). However, even this short period of time has provided me with a more detailed picture of the challenges and opportunities faced by the organisation. Especially the yearly assembly of the organisation in Puerto Nuevo Ité has helped me give direction to this research. In the first place, because it was inspiring to meet many peasant leaders from all different regions and to hear their stories. Secondly, it was also in this village that I was told its story of how its inhabitants endured many forms of adversity, including the burning of the village, displacement, and disappearances. It was a story marked by high levels of violence and stigmatisation, as still experienced in Colombia today by many *campesino*, Afro-Colombian, and indigenous groups. However, it was also a story of inspiration,

as peasant have continued their struggle to defend their land. Therefore, I have shifted the focus of the research from studying ACVC-RAN's gendered knowledge production to the shrinking operational space of the organisation.

Data collection strategies

In the following section, an overview of the methods that have been employed in the research can be found. The first part of the study has been a literature review to gain more information about the general context of Colombia and about ACVC-RAN. Examining the literature regarding a multitude of subjects has provided more in-depth knowledge. This has been useful as a preliminary basis for more research. For this part, both academic research as well as more popular sources have been used, such as the social network sites of ACVC-RAN.

Next to this, I have mostly made use of participant observation. According to Bernard (2011), fieldwork can be categorised into three different roles: the complete participant, the participant observer and the complete observer. When taking the first role, the role of the complete participant, many ethical issues arise as it involves deception, namely joining a group without making them aware that you are doing research on them. The third role, the complete observer, is a form of direct observation and mostly follows people around without any interaction. Therefore, most ethnographic research is based on the second role. Participants observation can consist both of an insider, who observes and records the phenomenon of study around them (observing participant), or an outsider who participates in some aspects of life around them and takes notes on this (participating observer). Additionally, participant observation can provide a method for triangulation, as it allows to see if what people say and what people do agree with each other (Bee, 2016). Before I went to Colombia, I aimed to perform the role of the participating observer, and to a certain extent this was possible. During the yearly assembly of ACVC-RAN, I participated in the sense that I was provided the opportunity to join the weekend and observe their meeting and the topics they discussed.

One of the methods that I have employed most during my fieldwork in Colombia is the semi-structured in-depth interview, which can be described as a list of open-ended questions which are flexible and can be deviated from during the interview (Heldens and Reysoo, 2005). The advantage of holding semi-structured interviews is to make sure that all key issues are being addressed, while leaving room and flexibility for the person interviewed to bring in other issues. Therefore, I decided to hold several semi-structured in-depth interviews with different members of the organisation. As the original theoretical framework was based on feminist political ecology, I focused on giving special attention to the experiences of women. As a result, I have held six semi-structured interviews with female leaders from ACVC-RAN during my fieldwork in Colombia. Two of those female leaders are in the current board of the organisation and are highly active in the Women's Coordinator at the headquarters. Another woman interviewed is also part of the Women's Coordinator. Three of the other persons interviewed are part of the Community Action Boards in their municipality. Furthermore, many informal conversations have been held with a range of actors, including university staff, members of international organisations, and a representative of a public institution on the implementation of the peace agreement.

Due to the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, the fieldwork was cut short. Therefore, besides the observations, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations I held in Colombia, I focused on gray literature, online sources, and literature review to complement the field data collected. Gray literature encompasses all forms of documents from governments, institutions, non-governmental organisations (Corlett, 2011). Secondly, I have used online sources to obtain information, including both international and national news websites. Furthermore, information from online seminars has been used for verification of the data collected. Thirdly, I have consulted a myriad of academic articles.

One of the limitations of this study is that the focus lay on the members of the peasant organisation. No interviews have been conducted with government actors, however, it would have been interesting to include 'the other side of the coin'. Additionally, non-state actors could have provided more information as well. An example could be the international peace brigades, which accompany members of the peasant organisation if need be. Although informal conversations have been held, it would be interesting to hold a more 'official' interview to gain additional perspectives.

Another limitation of this study is that I have focused only on this particular organisation, whereas civil society encompasses much more actors. ACVC-RAN proved an interesting case study, as it provides more information about the processes of restrictions by the government that this specific NGO endures, and the claiming of space that they perform themselves. In further research, it would be interesting to study more NGOs and other civil society actors, as every civil society actor has different experiences, restrictions, and opportunities. For example, it would be interesting to study peasant organisations in other parts of Colombia and other marginalised groups, such as Afro-Colombian and indigenous groups. This would provide an interesting perspective on how different organisations experience the shrinking of operational space, and how they counteract these restrictions.

Data analysis procedure

Once the data was (partly) collected, I started to analyse the data. As it is a qualitative study, the research is an iterative process which means that the data analysis has happened along with the data collection. This process of data analysis contained the following steps, as outlined by Creswell (2014). The first step has been organising the raw data, which consists out of the transcripts of the interviews, field notes, and possibly images. In the second step, I have read the data to gain an overall picture of the results, as well as to notice potential trends. My third step has been to code the data, followed by the fourth step: dividing the data into themes. In the fifth step, I have worked on interrelating and interpreting these themes. Lastly, I have examined the accuracy of the information by cross-checking, verification and triangulation of the data. For example, to ensure the validity of the results of the study, triangulation of methods has occurred by comparing the results from semi-structured interviews with (participant) observation and informal conversations.

Furthermore, it is important to take the security of the research participants into consideration. As described by Hristov (2005), Colombia is not the safest country for human right defenders and rural communities to mobilise and speak out against violators. Only in 2019, at least 107 defenders were killed, according to the UN (The Guardian, 2020b). Therefore, the security of the interviewees has been very important to take into account. I have tried to mitigate these dangers by using pseudonyms instead of actual names from members of the organisation, as well as only mentioning the representative's position within the organisation or any other information that can redirect to them, if it does not pose a threat and is necessary for the story. Next to this, I have asked the interviewees in what manner they would prefer to be represented in this research. Furthermore, as interviews are dependent on the answers given by the respondents, it is important that the people interviewed are well understood. The language barrier of talking in Spanish might result in questions and answers misunderstood and misinterpreted. To make this chance as small as possible, I have recorded my interviews after asking for consent and receiving it – with the exception of one interview – so that it has been possible to re-listen to the answers given.

Positionality and trustworthiness of the research

During the Master Development and Rural Innovation, I have been introduced to several scientific positionings. One that I would identify the most with is the concept of social epistemology, which

means that all people have different concepts of truth. How we view the world, influences how we act and what we say and therefore it shapes the world around us. It is important to be aware of our culture and background as it shapes the way in which we see the world. The constructivism vision of the world starts from the idea that institutions and organisations are socially constructed realities that exist in the process of conversations and discourses that constitute them (Ford, 1999; Ford et al., 2002). Therefore, it is important to remain self-reflexive and be aware of how your background influences the way in which you receive the world and how you interpret your findings and observations.

However, as a researcher you do not only interpret the world in a certain way, people also view you in a certain light. For example, as I am not a Colombian, or even Latin-American, and do not identify as a *campesina*, this means that I will be viewed as a foreigner and outsider. Doing cross-cultural research, it is important to be aware of the opportunities and challenges it might pose being a cultural insider or outsider. Being a cultural insider means that values, perspectives, behaviours, beliefs and knowledge are similar to a certain extent (Banks, 1998). This means that the researcher will be recognised as part of the community by the local people, resulting in more easy trust building, as the common background creates ties with local social and cultural practices (Suwankhong and Liamputtong, 2015). However, as the sociocultural context is mostly already known to the researcher, insiders might fail to see certain phenomena occurring. This is the advantage of the cultural outsider, as this researcher can approach phenomena from a different perspective. However, the downside is that it might take more time to gain trust from the local community (Suwankhong and Liamputtong, 2015) and, in some cases, having difficulty with fully comprehending what is it like to be in a certain situation (Berger, 2015). This has also partly been the case for me. During several interviews, participants told me stories of their lives, which often included a lot of violence and hardships. Growing up in the Netherlands, their reality has been very different from my own, which means I cannot fully comprehend their situation. However, they shared these stories very openly, even upon a first meeting.

It is also essential to consider that research *"is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions"* (Smith, 1999: p. 5). Therefore, it is important to aim for non-extractive research, which includes participatory co-production of knowledge when experiences and learning from communities' responses to environmental change (Clement et al., 2019). Following the example of Casas-Cortés *et al.* (2008), I have aimed not to do simply research "on" social movements, but rather "with" or "alongside" social movements. However, I am not sure to what extent it has been possible for me to perform this research alongside ACVC-RAN. Even though we live in an era of infinite possibilities of contact through the internet and social media, collecting the data from the Netherlands has altered the form of research considerably, as it is different from being 'in the field'. Therefore, although my initial plan was to perform research alongside ACVC-RAN, the short period of time spent in Colombia has made this more difficult. However, I hope that, even though I only shared a short period of time with the organisation, that this research shows accountability. According to Ybarra (2014), accountability of the research means that you give something back to the community. By having done this research, recognition to the cause of ACVC-RAN is given by an outsider. Furthermore, after translating it to Spanish, an overview of the co-produced knowledge will be given to the organisation.

IV. The Colombian political context

In this first chapter of the results, the political context of Colombia will be described, as it is one of the determining factors in the allowance and restriction of the operational space of a civil society organisation. When looking at the country of Colombia as a whole, it can be considered democratic, and its democracy has oftentimes been celebrated as one of the oldest and longest-standing in Latin America (Posada-Carbó, 2006, as quoted in Eaton and Prieto, 2017). From the time of the early 19th century War of Independence, Colombians democratically elected their presidents (Hanson, 1997). However, the political context of Colombia has been marked by a complex and violent history between many different actors. As a result, authoritarian practices persist at the subnational level (Eaton and Prieto, 2017). There, the contrast between formal democracy and undemocratic practices has been especially stark, as political power has often been in the hands of guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers (Eaton and Prieto, 2017). Different – that is, hybrid – political orders are present in the region (Boege et al., 2009a), as both state and non-state actors vie over access to and ownership over resources (Rasch, 2017). The monopoly over power and violence is not exclusive to the state, but rather, authority is fragmented (Davis, 2010).

In this chapter, the current political context of Colombia will be discussed. To understand the current situation of Colombia's politics, it is important to consider the country's history. Therefore, in the first place, a historical perspective will be given to provide an overview of the stages of the armed internal conflict. Secondly, an overview of the gendered effects of the conflict on the Colombian population will be given. In the third place, the end of the conflict will be discussed, namely the peace agreement between the FARC-EP and the government. Moreover, the question of whether the peace agreement truly signifies a post-conflict Colombia will be discussed. In the last part of this chapter, the influence of the political context on the operational space of ACVC-RAN will be examined, followed by a brief conclusion of this chapter.

The start of the internal armed conflict

The Colombian internal armed conflict is considered one of the longest in modern history, as it lasted over fifty years. Contestations around land, natural resources, and territorial control have been at the heart of the armed conflict (McKay, 2018). Its roots can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century, when the Colombian economy was largely dependent on rural activities, while its population started to grow at a faster pace than in previous decades (Theidon, 2009). This situation produced a demand for land redistribution, highly concentrated in the hands of a few landlords (Grajalas, 2011). At the same time, there was also a boom within the coffee sector. Many historians identify this struggle about land as the seed that started the *La Violencia* period, which was the conflict between the conservative and the liberal parties in Colombia (Grajalas, 2011). The conflict started when the liberal candidate was murdered during the presidential elections of 1948 and for over a decade, many confrontations took place, especially in rural areas (Castro Torres and Urdinola, 2019). The conflict ended in 1958 when an agreement was forged between the Conservatives and the Liberals (Theidon, 2009). Yet, the root causes of the social and economic conflict did not disappear, leading to the emergence of guerrilla groups and other illegal armed actors.

In the 1960s, the first guerrilla movements were formed in rural areas (Martínez Cortés, 2013). The first and (former) largest group, the FARC, was established in 1964, when the necessity of armed resistance became clear to them. This was in result to a campaign launched by the army against the autonomous zones which leftist groups had seized from the state (Advocats sans Frontières Canada, 2016). Based on Marxist-Leninist and Bolivian ideology, the guerrilla group fought against an exclusive political system, and quickly grew in size and influence, at its peak including as many as 18,000 people (Henshaw, 2020). However, over time, the ideology behind the movement faded away as the struggle

over land and resources for the production of illicit crops became the important factor (Theidon, 2009). For finance, the FARC turned to drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion, which meant that many critics started to identify the FARC not as revolutionaries anymore, but just another violent armed actor (Theidon, 2009). One of the reasons for this is that the FARC had been pushed to the peripheral regions by the Colombian military. They were supported and heavily funded under the US' *Plan Colombia*, which had the aim to combat narcotrafficking as well as leftist insurgents (Rochlin, 2020).

Next to the FARC, other guerrilla groups emerged. One important group is the ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*), the second largest guerrilla movement. In contrast to the FARC, which started in the rural areas, the ELN was mostly established by university students in the cities, who called for solutions to issues of poverty, political exclusion, and corruption (Theidon, 2009). However, similar to the FARC, the ELN lost its focus when they started engaging in illegal activities to finance their actions. As a result, many different groups fought for control over Colombia's territories and its richness in natural resources.

The conflict quickly intensified, when more and more actors became involved in the late 1970s. Illegal activities such as drug trafficking emerged, which deepened the conflict even more, as in the 1980s the war on drugs started. The then-president Turbay Ayala (1978-82) declared a state of emergency, which lead to a series of severe human rights violations by the military to regain autonomy (Richani, 2020). Furthermore, legal groundwork was laid for the creation of paramilitary groups (Richani, 2020). The conflict was then even further provoked as the corrupt government institutions and the paramilitary became involved. The paramilitary started in the early 1980s as "self-defence" groups against the guerrillas (García Perez, 2016). Many of them were legally constituted by Colombian politicians and army officials. Conversely, instead of protecting civilians from conflict, they opted to work for drug traffickers or large landholders. This increase in the number of armed actors involved intensified the conflict which led to the bloodiest decade in the Colombian history (Castro Torres and Piedad Urdinola, 2018). In 1997, several of these groups joined forces to become the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), which damaged popular movements, the political left, and civil society (García Perez, 2016). Under the Uribe administration (2002-2010), the demobilisation of the paramilitaries was negotiated (Grajales, 2011). However, even though several paramilitary leaders were convicted and placed under investigation, the space they left behind was quickly filled by relatives and friends, which has led to the 'capture' of the state by criminal actors in large parts of the territory (Grajales, 2011). The violent authority of these successor paramilitary groups thus continues in large parts of Colombia.

(Gendered) effects of the conflict

At the height of the conflict, military, paramilitary, guerrillas, domestic elites, and multinational actors competed in a bloody struggle for control over the many resources Colombia harbours. The Colombian armed internal conflict has resulted in over 220,000 deaths, 25,000 disappeared persons, and 6 million internally displaced people (Theidon, 2009). To this day, the number of displaced people in Colombia has grown to almost 8 million (UNHCR, 2012).

During the conflict, individuals of every gender have been subjected to death threats, stigmatisation, and criminalisation. In Colombia, specific groups have been targeted especially, including leaders of women's and LGBTI organisations, labour and peasant leaders, Afro-Colombians and indigenous leaders, journalists, and leftist politicians (Bouvier, 2016). Furthermore, especially the rural population has been vulnerable to displacement. According to Martínez Cortes (2013), the armed violence has not been lived and perceived in the same manner throughout Colombia. An urban-rural divide can be perceived, as "*The routinisation of violence on the one hand, and the rurality and anonymity at the national level of the vast majority of the victims, on the other, has resulted in an attitude of indifference,*

if not passivity, which is fed by a comfortable perception of economic and political stability." (GMH, 2013, p. 14). This shows how the same armed conflict has had differential effects on the Colombian population. Whereas some experiences of the armed conflict were similar to all, many experiences are embedded with different dimensions, such as class and gender (Bouvier, 2016).

During the armed conflict in Colombia, the male population was more likely to be arbitrarily detained, tortured, kidnapped, and forcibly recruited by the different armed actors (Bouvier, 2016). Especially the male youth – both non-combatants and combatants - was frequently killed during the armed conflict. Furthermore, 95 percent of all killed and injured by land mines were young men. Moreover, all the civilians killed under the pretence of being guerrillas, later known as '*los falsos positivos',* were male youths. These 'false positives' occurred between 2002 and 2010, under Uribe's presidency, when approximately 3,500 young men were killed by the army and presented as guerrillas (Bouvier, 2016). This main aim of these killings was to increase the number of enemies conquered by the state and to show advances in the counter-insurgency war (Gomez Correal, 2015; Bouvier, 2016).

In turn, women experienced other consequences due to the armed conflict. The conflict has had a considerable and disproportionate impact on women as they suffer specific risks and confront specific vulnerabilities because of their gender (Meertens, 2010). For example, they were more likely to be subjected to massive displacement and forced labour (Bavour, 2016). Additionally, gender-based violence and especially sexual violence, including rape, were utilised by armed actors as a weapon of war (Meertens, 2010). Furthermore, as survivors, women were more probable to uptake new roles as widows and single heads of households, and they were more likely to become caregivers for those who have become disabled by the conflict (Bouvier, 2016). This came on top of the historical lack of recognition of women's rights which has facilitated the violent dispossession of their land (Meertens, 2010).

The end of the conflict: the peace agreement

In 2016, after more than fifty years of violent conflict, Colombia signed its peace agreement. The then-president, Juan Manual Santos, received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts of negotiating a peace treaty with the armed forces of the FARC. The peace talks started in October 2012, when it was announced that the Colombian government and the FARC would attempt to create a peace accord - the first attempt in more than a decade (Bouvier, 2016). The previous government, under the presidency of Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010), had been systematically denying the existence of the armed conflict and instead ruled the country with law and order to overcome 'terrorist' groups (Martínez Cortés, 2013). However, under the presidency of Santos, new spaces for cooperation were opened. In Norway, the peace table was launched, however, only men were present – except for one female Norwegian moderator. In the next month, formal talks started in Cuba, and again, almost all participants of the peace table were male – with the exception of Tanja Nijmeijer, the Dutch guerrilla who joined the FARC in 2002. This shows the discrepancies between the (inter)national normative frameworks that stand for the inclusion of women during peace-making (Bouvier, 2016). However, even though officially women might not have been present, this is not to say that they did not play a role in the peace agreements. According to Bouvier (2016, p. 19), "*at the table, around the table, behind the table, and at side tables, women are having their say and shaping the path to peace*". Colombian women have advanced the peace process, shaping public opinion, as well as organising inputs for the peace talks (Bouvier, 2016). Furthermore, the participation of Colombian women at the peace talks in Cuba is being reflected by the more than 7,000 proposals brought forward by 301 women's organisations, as well as the participation of several leaders of women's organisations, and experts on sexual violence (Correa-Delgado, 2018). An important aspect of the proposals focused on land ownership, as the peasantry, and especially its female population, have historically been excluded.

In October 2016, less than two months before the signing of the final peace agreement, the president held a referendum about the accord in order to get support from the Colombian people. However, the referendum was rejected with 50.2 percent of the population voting against it, and 49.8 percent voting in favour (BBC, 2016). Several reasons have been identified for this. An important one is that the former president, Álvaro Uribe, led a no-campaign, whilst still receiving substantial backing from his committed base which does not support the FARC and objects to its political participation. The majority of Colombian citizens has been averse to the idea of forgiving or reconciling with former perpetrators, the guerrilla and paramilitary groups (Pineda-Marín et al., 2020). Furthermore, an objection was made to the gender dimension within the agreement, especially by more religious voters, as they thought that it would destabilise family values and promote homosexuality (Ruiz-Navarro, 2019). That the referendum about the peace agreement was denied, seemed to shock most of society, but it showed that not all of the population was being involved in the peace talks (Ruiz-Navarro, 2019). This shock also came forward during one of the interviews with a female representative of ACVC-RAN (Personal communication, 4.2, 2020):

> *"Well, in the case of the endorsement of the peace agreement, we had a difficulty because in the end it was not endorsed as we wanted, because there was a lot of disinformation and they used the gender focus for - let's say - demonising the process"* [1]

However, after some revisions and four years of negotiations, the peace agreement was signed in Havana, Cuba on the 24th of November 2016. The peace agreement is seen as an important step forward in the recognition of peasants. In the words of a representative of one of the women's committees of ACVC-RAN (Personal communication, 4.3, 2020):

> *"With the process that took place between FARC and the government, well, for us peasants, that agreement has been something fundamental, because we have been able to have - the word itself says it - an agreement between the government and FARC and in this way favour the peasantry a lot. Because the peasantry has always been affected by this conflict. So in that agreement, the peasantry has been very much benefited, because... not only the decisions of those in charge were taken into account, but also the needs of the peasants and the peasant women as well."* [2]

The agreement consists of six pillars: 1) integral rural reform, 2) political participation, 3) end of the conflict, 4) solutions on illicit drugs, 5) victims of the conflict, and 6) implementation, verification, and endorsement (Acuerdo Final de la Paz, 2016). An essential part of the peace agreement is its commitment to fulfilling the international human rights principles (McKay, 2018). In the 310-page document about the final peace agreement, human rights are mentioned 181 times, and in the introduction, the importance of human rights are explicitly mentioned (McKay, 2018; Acuerdo Final de la Paz, 2016).

Especially important for the *campesinos* and *campesinas* is the first pillar of the peace agreement: the *Reforma Rural Integral* (RRI, Integral Rural Reform). The reform encompasses democratisation of land access, by enabling and guaranteeing access to land to those who are landless or near landless on condition of environmental sustainability and community participation (McKay, 2018). Formalisation, restitution, and equitable distribution of land are key terms mentioned in the peace agreement (Acuerdo Final de la Paz, 2016). The peace agreement can even be considered progressive in this perspective, as it specifically mentions rural women and vulnerable populations concerning land rights. The peace agreement has been the first agreement that has a notion of gender (Personal communication, 4.2, 2020):

[1] For the original quotes in Spanish, see Annex 1.

> *"We can say that this agreement has a particularity, that for us as women is very important, since it is the first agreement from Latin America - even worldwide - that has a gender focus. […] It is the first recognition that has been given to the work that women carry out in the territory, and more so because the peasant women have carried out a double struggle, because they have already lived through the conflict, been displaced, buried their relatives, and even so they continue to resist within the territory and that is something - let's say - to admire, and that it is recognized today that this agreement carries the focus [...] this little word, but for us it is very important because from there we have been carrying out an important exercise of empowerment of the peasant women in the territory."* [3]

These words underline the importance of being part of the peace agreement, and thereby the acknowledgement and recognition of the struggles of the peasantry, and specifically of the female peasants.

Post-agreement Colombia vs post-conflict Colombia

After the signing of the peace agreement, the government, as well as media and international institutions, celebrated the beginning of Colombia's new era: a post-conflict Colombia. However, paradoxically, since the peace agreement, the country has seen an increase in violence against human rights defenders, social leaders, and environmental activists (The Guardian, 2020). In 2017, murders on human rights defenders increased by 30 percent, and the assassinations of women increased by 70 percent (Ruiz-Navarro, 2019).

This complex situation can neither be called war nor peace (Richards, 2005), and the results of the armed conflict can still very much be found in the Colombian society of today. This becomes evident by the words from Carlonia Sanín, a Colombian columnist, when in 2017 she wrote (translation by García, 2019):

> *"I wonder in what verbal tense we, Colombians, should narrate the war now, during the post-conflict: should we do it in imperfecto, which is the tense we use to tell dreams and nightmares that can come back and are always present, even if they happen somewhere else? Or should we do it in pretérito simple, which indicates that something is in the past and finished? Or should we use the historical presente, to make war more vivid? Or the present of the second-hand story, with which we tell the story or the film that someone else composed?"*

These first sentiments, of not being sure in which way to talk about the war, and that the same events and conflicts can flare up again, are also coming forward in the following quote by one of the female leaders of ACVC-RAN, who calls the current situation "a war covered up with the theme of peace" (Personal communication, 4.1, 2020):

> *"What has complicated things, is that there have been many mobilizations and what we are seeing is more repression, more assassination of social leaders, of female leaders. So that, well, what it provokes is... That we return to fear, that we return to the issue of displacement. The peace that was thought, well, it turns out that we are going to go back, to return to a war covered up with the theme of peace."* [4]

In line with her words, recent research has shown that displacement and different forms of direct political violence have been increasing since 2015 (Nilsson and González Marín, 2020). Furthermore, environmental degradation has also occurred, as in the two years following the signing of the peace agreement and the demobilisation of the FARC, fifty percent more forest was cut than during the peace

agreement negotiation phase from 2012 to 2016 (Murillo-Sandoval et al., 2020). Especially threatening, the countryside has become a battleground for (new) guerrilla groups, FARC dissidents, criminal gangs, and paramilitary groups as the demobilisation of the FARC has left a void in the power vacuum (Nilsson and González Marín, 2020). The International Committee of the Red Cross considers there to be five non-international armed conflicts to take place at the moment in Colombia. These conflicts are between the Colombian government and different guerrilla groups, including the ELN and the EPL (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*) (ICRC, 2019). Thus, there is fragmented sovereignty in these hybrid spaces, where state and non-state actors are immersed in a situation that can be considered neither war nor peace.

Next to this direct violence - this series of repeated ruptures, which include violent confrontations with armed groups, killings, and injuries – the Colombian peasantry has also been subjected to structural violence. This form of everyday violence weaves itself into the backdrop of "ordinary" life (Das, 2007, p. 7, as quoted in Lederach, 2017). Lederach (2017) uses Nixon's (2011) concept of 'slow violence', to show how attention to dramatic single events of environmental destruction omit the gradual processes of slow violence. These processes have a disproportionate effect on the daily lives of people in marginalised communities around the world, including peasant communities. He gives the example of peasants in the Alta Montaña region, who became displaced as a result of the armed conflict. When they were away from their fields, a fungus had the chance to infiltrate all of the avocado trees. Upon return, all the avocado trees were dead, leaving the *campesinos/as* with a sense of being lost and uprooted. This shows the mutual relationship of care between the *campesino/a* and the *campo* (Lederach, 2017).

It becomes clear that the peace agreement does not mean that there is no conflict anymore, and consequently, post-agreement thus clearly does not mean the same as post-conflict in the case of Colombia. This also comes forward strongly when talking to members of civil society, such as members of ACVC-RAN, as well as representatives of Colombian public institutions that are charged with implementing the agreements agreed upon in the peace accord, whom all talk about *posacuerdo* (post-agreement) rather than post-conflict. Furthermore, when asking one of the leaders of a Community Action Board what her opinion is about the peace agreement, she tells me that the most important thing that the government complies with the peace accord. However, at the moment, "*Le falta cumplir"*: the government has not yet complied with the agreements made in the peace accord. Laughing, she adds: "*Like the commandant said [during the yearly assembly], peace is more difficult than war."* (Personal communication, 2, 2020).

A democratic state with authoritarian features?

In the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), the political context is dependent on the state regime and its capacity. When looking at the Colombian context, the country has long been celebrated for its long history of democratically elected presidents (Hanson, 1997). On the national level, Colombia can be considered a democratic state, where the government represents and acts in the interests of its people. However, on the regional level, life has become more entangled with authoritarian regimes. The emergence of regional authoritarian sovereignties, or the so-called "parastates", has clouded the distinction between politics and organised crime (Gill, 2011). This shows that the hybridity of the political order in the region (Boege et al., 2009a, 2009b). An example is the countryside around the city of Barrancabermeja, which contains also the municipalities in which members of ACVC-RAN are located. According to Gill (2011), many peasants were displaced by paramilitaries from their land with the aim to pass on the land into the hands of (inter)national entrepreneurs and investors, as well as drug traffickers. The land became cultivated for export agriculture such as palm oil production, (illegal) gold mining, and hydro-electric projects. Many Colombian elites from the upper classes utilised paramilitary coercion to enforce their regional power.

In the article of Meger and Sachseder (2020), the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' is used to show how the interests of the Colombian state have converged with the interests of elite classes and paramilitary groups. This is done in such a way that the violence is outsourced to non-state actors, and as a result, gray zones are created (Auyero, 2006), where mutual dependence relations between the state and non-state militarist groups persist. Furthermore, Ballvé (2013) argues that paramilitaries have been able to seizure land for their own purposes, by systematically undermining the institutional form in place to protect the peasantry. In these hybrid spaces, conflicts over resources emerge (Rasch, 2017). For example, paramilitaries make use of laws on environmental protection and conservation against the expansion of drug trafficking to obtain areas of land. Thereby, they do not shy away from using violence to reach their goal. As previously mentioned, Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries for environmental and human rights defenders. According to Middeldorp and Le Billon (2019), the likelihood of threats and murders of environmental and land defenders seems higher among middle-income countries with semi-authoritarian regimes, as well as a recent history of armed conflicts or high homicide rates, and frequent conflicts around resource exploitation projects. These circumstances are often found in Latin America, and this is also the case in Colombia. The state does not hold the authority in the region nor the hegemony over violence, and as a result, fragmented sovereignty occurs (Davis, 2010). The strength of the Colombian democracy is undermined in particular by subnational authoritarian power structures, which include paramilitaries, guerrilla groups, and drug traffickers. Therefore, Colombian citizens continue to live in a situation of high conflict. Especially in rural areas, many armed forces remain fighting over the resources. Therefore, the Colombian situation continues to be a situation of neither war nor peace.

Brief conclusion of this chapter

In this chapter, I have strived to show the complexity of Colombia's political situation. Due to its history, including the armed internal conflict, the political arena of Colombia consists of a complex network of many different actors. These include the government, guerrilla groups, successor paramilitary groups, and civil society. The presence of the many non-state armed actors shows the hybridity in Colombia's political order and the high level of fragmented sovereignty of the state. Despite being celebrated for its long history of democracy, Colombia continues to be plagued by regional authoritarian actors, also called "parastates", which undermine its democracy. Examples of this include the high level of structural violence against environmental and human rights defenders, as well as land grabs for e.g. palm oil plantations.

Furthermore, this chapter provides an overview of the start of the armed internal conflict, as well as the end, when the peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government was signed in 2016. This peace agreement can be considered important for the peasantry, as it takes *"the needs of the peasants into account"* (Personal communication, 4.3, 2020). Especially for the *campesinas* it means a lot, as it is the first peace agreement to explicitly mention women and recognise the important role that they play in social and political work. However, the government has still to comply with many promises made in the agreement, and paradoxically, conflict against environmental and human rights defenders has increased in the years since the signing of the peace agreement. The end of the armed conflict does not signify that there is peace, if we believe peace to be the absence of violence (Richards, 2005). Even though the government celebrates the current situation as post-conflict, it is more accurate to follow the wording of Colombian civil society and call the current situation post-agreement.

V. The characteristics and functions of ACVC-RAN

In the following chapter, the characteristics and functions of the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN will be outlined. These factors are essential to consider as civil society organisations differ greatly in what they represent and symbolise, and in the way they operate. The effects of restrictions on an organisation's operational space are therefore largely reliant on the characteristics of the organisation itself. Similar restrictions distinctly affect different organisations, depending on the organisations exact features and the broader context. Therefore, this chapter will provide an overview of ACVC-RAN, so that in the following chapter about the restrictions placed upon the peasant organisation, it is clear where these stem from. Furthermore, it is fundamental to remember that civil society actors are not just receivers of operational space, but rather active agents in this process. Space is not simply "taken up, assumed or filled", but it is also made, reshaped, and claimed by the organisations themselves (Cornwall, 2002, p. 2). To this end, in Chapter VI, the strategies developed by the organisation to evade or deal with those restrictions will be discussed. However, first it is important to know the characteristics and functions of ACVC-RAN.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will focus on the peasant organisation itself. First, the general context of agroecological and *campesino* movements will be discussed. Secondly, ACVC-RAN will be introduced. In the third place, it will be described why ACVC-RAN can be considered a claim-making organisation. Furthermore, the structure of the farmers' organisation will be outlined. After this, the Peasant Reserve Zones will be discussed, as they are an important part of the organisation. Lastly, a brief conclusion of this chapter will be given.

Agroecology and campesino movements

As already briefly mentioned in the introduction, agroecology is an ideological idea employed by many social movements, including the international peasant movement *La Via Campesina* (McCune and Sánchez, 2019). Agroecology has different understandings, namely as an on-farm practice, as a science across academic disciplines, and as a movement and political tool (Méndez et al., 2013). Agroecology as an on-farm practice refers to various forms of agriculture practised by small-scale food producers around the world, for example by intercropping. Agroecology as a science is about combining the different knowledges, e.g. peasant knowledge with scientific research. Agroecology as social movements encompasses the struggle for food sovereignty and human rights related to natural resources within the political context.

Agroecology is seen as an alternative to large and industrialised agricultural land holders. These movements embrace the concept of agroecology as a pillar of food sovereignty which focuses on local autonomy, local markets, and community action for access and control of land, water, and agrobiodiversity, which are of central importance for communities to be able to produce food locally (Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012). Throughout Latin America, agroecology has mobilised not only *campesinos*, but also indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, to claim their rights to land, defend their territories and to cultivate crops according to their ecological and economical rationalities (Altieri and Toledo, 2011).

Therefore, agroecological movements are often involved with the politics of knowledge. Borras *et al.* (2009) show how a global campaign on land reform organised by *La Vía Campesina* illustrates how the construction of alternative visions about land (policies) is mostly based on competing and contested knowledges. For example, in the neoliberal discourse, land should be privatised, transferable, and efficient. However, in *Vía Campesina*'s global official discourse, land is owned by the community and it is considered a human right. This shows that it is a struggle over which knowledge is valued and counted.

Taking a look at its agroecological potential, Colombia is one of the strongest agricultural countries of Latin America. However, the agricultural sector experiences structural problems causing gradual marginalisation and stagnation (Romagnoli et al., 2018). Furthermore, in Colombia, state attacks against rural movements mobilising for agrarian reform have taken place. Courtheyn (2018) argues that this not just happened as a way of the state to preserve its wealth accumulation, but also due to the ideology of the 'internal enemy', which refers to anyone that threatens the status quo such as *guerrilla* groups and political enemies, but also including *campesino* movements.

Asociación Campesina del Valle del Rio Cimitarra – Red Agroecológica Nacional

As mentioned in the introduction, one such *campesino* movement that emerged in an area of high armed conflict is the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN. Peasants suffered the scourge of war, and therefore the association was launched for the defence of the territory and protection of human rights, which has now been carried out for more than 22 years. Their main aim is the creation of a dignified life. Their location can be found on the map in Figure 4. In 2019, they were awarded the National Human Rights Award for their work in the promotion and defence of human rights of peasant communities in the Cimitarra River Valley (ACVC-RAN, 2019).

Figure 4 Map of Colombia with an indication of the Cimitarra River Valley (PBI, 2019)

A claim-making organisation

As mentioned in the political framework, an organisation can be primarily service-oriented or claim-making and policy-oriented (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). ACVC-RAN describes itself as a social, non-governmental peasant organisation (ACVC-RAN, 2020). They actively engage in political, social and organisation work, making them a claim-making, grassroots organisation. Their overall objective is to promote the rights and conditions for a dignified life for *campesinos* and *campesinas* by taking political action and defending their territories (ACVC-RAN, 2017). The actions to achieve this are manifold. They range from active political participation in the implementation of the final peace agreement to giving workshops in communities to make the peasant farmers, especially the women, aware of their human rights. Furthermore, as organisation they defend the rights of their members by educational, juridical, and political actions, but they also have concrete projects to increase food security and agricultural productivity of the peasant families. One such example is the buffalo project in the region of Puerto Matilde with the aim to increase sustainable profits for the peasant living in that region. In 1996, the organisation bought two farms along with 70 buffaloes, and created a system in which peasant farmers received a buffalo. Every newly born buffalo is redistributed and passed on to another family. In fifteen

years, the numbers of buffaloes increased from 70 to 900, and 47 families are now beneficiaries of the project (Verdad Abierta, 2015).

ACVC-RAN was established by displaced peasant – victims from the armed conflict, who arrived in the Magdalena Medio region after fleeing the wave of violence in the 1950s. Upon their arrival, their situation was very critical, as armed groups such as the FARC-EP and the ELN were present in the territory. Next to this, they did not have access to any public services or any roads, making them isolated and lost (Verdad Abierta, 2015). They organised themselves into Community Action Boards to demand attention from the Colombian state. In the second half of 1996, ACVC-RAN was officially established, when peasants from the Magdalena Medio region joined forces and marched together to the city of Barrancabermeja (Cely, 2015). Barrancabermeja has been the epicentre of the conflict in the Magdalena Medio region during the conflict, due to its strategic location on the Magdalena river, its proximity to oil reserves and its importance as an oil refining centre, and the presence of various guerrilla groups (Gill, 2011). As a result, many people in the surrounding regions became displaced and fled to the city after being caught in the middle between right-wing paramilitaries and left-wing guerrillas (Gill, 2011). The mobilisation of the peasants was then the result of years of political and social conflict, as the region they live in has historically been shaped by three factors: colonisation, unresolved agrarian conflict, and resistance (Correa Delgado, 2018). Evidence of this conflict can be found in the emergence of the Petrol Workers Union (*Union Sindical Obrera*) in the 1920s, the ELN guerrillas in the 1960s, as well as a faction of the FARC (Cely, 2015). These Marxist-based groups demanded social change and fought against the exclusivist political system (Henshaw, 2020). In the 1980s and 90s, the conflict reached its height as paramilitary groups persecuted social leaders and targeted organisations. This also led to some social movements disappearing as massacres and killings continued (Suárez, 2017). In response to this violence, as well as the lack of infrastructure, health, and education services provision from the government, the *campesinos* and *campesinas* decided to unite and march to Barrancabermeja, where they took hold of the main squares and parks in the city (Silva, 2012). In 1996, they were then officially formalised as ACVC, seeking to defending their territory against agro-extractivist projects and landed elites (McKay, 2018).

The mobilisation of the peasant as social movement, as claim-making organisation, has been challenging the state for social and political change. In Latin America, breaking out of political, social, economic, or cultural marginalisation has been the focus of many civil society actors (Schönwälder, 2002). For ACVC-RAN, one of their main claims can be found in the access to and ownership over land. Acavedo-Osorio and Chohan (2019) agree that historic repression aimed at *campesino* social movements has influenced the way movements mobilise. In 1994, the *Zona de Reserva Campesina* (ZRC: Peasant Reserve Zone) was created as a legal tool and development model for territorial ordering in Colombia (Acavedo-Osorio and Chohan, 2019). Its aim was to make sure that *campesinos* continued to have access to land and to stop the concentration of land in the hands of agribusinesses (Acevedo-Osorio & Chohan, 2019). This was a response by the Colombian government to the mobilisation of *campesinos* who called for formal protection of their rights, as well as recognition (Vásquez, 2017). Its goal was twofold: 1) guarantee access to land for communities and resist land grabs, and 2) implement sustainable agricultural systems (Acevedo-Osorio & Chohan, 2019). However, the vision of the community on development clashes with the agro-industrial model that is being imposed by the national government at times (Boni et al., 2017). At the moment, seven ZRCs exist throughout Colombia, one of them being the *Zona Reservada Nacional Via del río Cimitarra,* where ACVC-RAN is located. In the peasants' own words, *"The ACVC's peasantry has organised itself to resist […] the permanent attacks of the supporters of an authoritarian and exclusive development model in the region, [which] […] has murdered, violently expropriated and displaced tens of thousands of peasant and urban dwellers in the Magdalena Medio region."* (ACVC-RAN, 2020a). In order to accomplish this, the peasant organisation focuses on the following areas: attention to the internal displacement of peasants, defence of human rights, implementation of productive projects for food security, planning

of local and regional development, substitution of coca crops, and training and promotion of peasant organisational processes (ACVC-RAN, 2020a).

This struggle for recognition and human rights by the peasant organisation still continues to this day. That the Colombian state has not been providing basic services to all peasant comes forward in the following quote by a representative of ACVC-RAN (Personal communication, 4.2, 2020):

> *"Well, this government's failure to comply is also not new, right? In all the rural territory there has been government neglect. The state has not been present, because it has not responded to the needs of the campesino communities."* [5]

This neglect also comes forward in the words of another representative of the peasant organisation (Personal communication, 4.1, 2020):

> *"The peasants have no land, no property, no land tenure. When are we going to get land titles? When will productive projects come here for us? When are we going to have a health post? And when are we going to have good days? Where is the investment that was going to be made in the peace agreement? Where is this improvement? What was going to come? Where is this peace? Where is everything I want? [small laugh]"* [6]

From their words, it becomes clear that the peasant organisation is a claim-making organisation and is also regarded as such by the Colombian government. The *campesinos* and *campesinas* are claiming basic services provision such as health care and education. Moreover, and more threatening for the economic interests of government, they are claiming land titles to ensure their access to and ownership over the land. This way, it becomes harder for agri-businesses to take hold of the land and in this process possibly displace the peasants. In the Peace Agreements between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, by its Spanish acronym), one of the pillars was the *Reforma Rural Integral* (Integral Rural Reform, RRI), which aims for democratisation of land access and thereby recognises and supports the Peasant Reserve Zones (McKay, 2018). Nevertheless, it still remains to be seen to what extent the government will comply with its promises. In 2016, Law 1776 was issued, regarding Areas of Interest for Rural, Economic and Social Development (ZIDRES: *Zonas de Interés de Desarrollo Rural y Económico*), thereby promoting agro-industrial development on public and underused lands, and consequently compelling peasants to become part of the agri-businesses' value-chains (McKay, 2018). As such, this new law enables (multi)national companies to 'develop' project on peasant and indigenous territories, designated as 'vacant areas' of land by the government. The claims of peasants for the defence of their territories can thus be leading to tensions with the aims and interests of the government.

Structure of ACVC-RAN

To understand how restrictions have influenced and continue to influence the operational space of this particular organisation, it is important to first understand how ACVC-RAN is structured. Therefore, the following paragraphs will provide insight into the characteristics of ACVC-RAN.

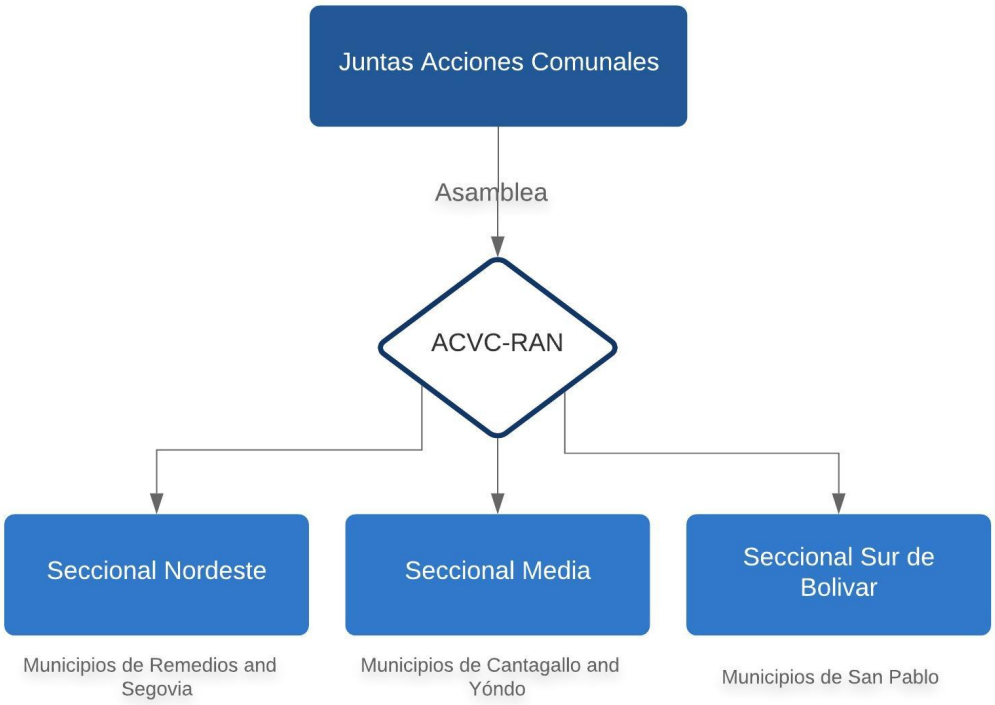

Figure 5 Schematic overview of ACVC-RAN

In Figure 5, a schematic overview of the organisation can be found. The organisation is divided in three sectionals, each consisting out of one or two municipalities. Each sectional has its own Coordinator, as well as a Field Work Team (*Equipo de Campo)*. At the head of the organisation, the *Junta Directiva* (Board of Directors) fulfils a political role, but also takes care of *"more legal work, of compliance with all legal administration"* (Personal Communication, 1, 2020). In addition to this, the organisation consists out of several general coordinators (Personal communication, 1, 2020):

> *"First there's the general coordination. Those who preside over it are the elders of the association, so they are the people who have historically been here on the organizational issue of ACVC, who constituted ACVC, and who in one way or another also establish decisions for developing the work plan."* [7]

These coordinators are therefore highly regarded within the organisation. During the (two)yearly meeting of all representatives, the General Coordinators propose the new members of the Board of Directors and can therefore be regarded as essential for the direction of the peasant organisation. One of the members of the Board of Directors is Carlos Martínez, a former president of the organisation. His wife, *doña* Marina, recalls that when she was young, she fled with her husband from their *finca* one night due to heavy conflicts in their area, and that their house was burned down. They fled to the village of Puerto Matilde, where they were taken care of by *doña* Irene Ramirez (the current president of ACVC-RAN), and clothes were collected for them within the community by one of the social leaders. They constructed a new house with the help of the housing project by ACVC-RAN. After this, they both became involved with the organisation. Doña Marina, together with other women in the village of Puerto Matilda, founded a cooperation for bread baking (Personal communication, 3, 2020). Don Carlos took up one of the leader positions, and his motivation was based on the injustices faced by the peasantry: *"The peasant always loses. If we are in one region, they say we are helpers of the guerrillas; if we are in another region, they say we are mixed up with the paramilitaries."* (Verdad Abierta, 2015). After Don Carlos had become one of the leaders of ACVC-RAN, he, amongst other leaders, was arrested and thrown in prison during a raid of the organisation's headquarters in 2007.

Even though this was a difficult period for the organisation, it opened up the presidency for *doña* Irene Ramirez (Correa Delgado, 2019). It was the first time that a woman took up this position within the organisation, thereby becoming an inspiration for many other women. In *doña* Irene's own words: *"The need to organise ourselves as women is urgent, because it is the only way to start believing in what women are capable of."* (Prensa Rural, 2015). Being president, she brought a new perspective to the organisation, focusing on horizontal relationships between members and the representation of the interests of both male and female members of ACVC-RAN (Correa Delgado, 2018). The organisation also began to focus on participation in political and academic spaces. An example of this is their participation in the first Latin American gathering of women of social organisations in Venezuela with the aim to share experiences and create alliances, which took place in November 2009 (Correa Delgado, 2018). Furthermore, in 2010, she went on a tour through Europe with the support from Peace Brigades International, to visualise the adversity faced by the *campesinos* and *campesinas* (Correa Delgado). Next to this, in 2017, a coordination of gender was established within the organisation (Personal communication, 1, 2020). This gender coordination has several aims. The first one is to visualise the inequalities between men and women, especially in terms of political participation. They strive for political participation of women on all levels, from the household to the (inter)national level. Empowerment and increased economic autonomy are also important, and therefore a lot of attention is given for training, education, and awareness to reach gender equity. This coordination also focuses on elimination of all forms of violence against rural women, which includes sexual violence and intrahousehold violence (Personal communication, 1, 2020). That intrahousehold violence is still very much present in the area, especially now that people are confined to their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, comes forward in the number of calls made to report domestic violence. The number of calls has increased with 79 percent since the confinement has started (Ojeda and Pinto García, 2020). The gender coordination of ACVC-RAN combats this with a set of recommendations for female peasant within the context of the quarantine, which can be found in Annex 2.

Furthermore, the Community Action Boards play an important role within the organisation. The organisation is made up of 120 Community Action Boards from the municipalities of Yondó, Cantagallo, San Pablo, Remidios, and the village Ciénaga del Opón in Barrancabermejara of the Magdalena Medio region. It integrates the purposes of the community through the Community Action Boards (JACs), as well as through cooperatives, fishing communities, and other groups of rural workers. These Community Action Boards are spaces in which the community comes together to discuss aspects related to the wellbeing and coexistence of the village. Examples include the grazing of animals, the establishment of closed seasons for fishing, and dialogues with legal and illegal armed actors about human rights (Quijana-Mejía and Línares-García, 2016). Thereby, they involve community members in the planning and development of their communities. Since 2007, these JACs have come together in Community Tables for a Dignified Life in the Region, which are spaces for discussion and debates about the development and main issues experienced in the municipality. Ideas for the future are debated, and proposals for the municipal administration are suggested (Quijana-Mejía and Línares-García, 2016). These Community Action Boards play an important role in overcoming the restrictions placed upon the *campesinos* and *campesinas*, since they are the first link to ACVC-RAN on the local level.

The Peasant Reserve Zones

Besides the Community Action Boards, the Peasant Reserve Zone plays an important role within the peasant organisation, as it is a territorial tool used to demarcate the region in which they live. It is therefore an important tool for being acknowledged by the state, and it helps the organisation to counter restrictive policies in this region. Therefore, it is important to know how the Peasant Reserve Zone – *Valle de río Cimitarra* is structured (ZRC-VRC), as in this particular ZRC, members of ACVC-RAN are located. In December 2002, the reserve zone was established after long campaigning by the

campesinos and *campesinas*. Already in 1996, the idea was born to establish a Peasant Reserve Zone, as captured in Law 160, known as the Rural Development Law. Created in 1994, the aim of this law is to promote and stabilise the peasant economy, overcome the causes of social conflict, and create conditions for peace (Verdad Abierta, 2015). However, in April 2003, under the law and order presidency of Uribe, the ZRC was suspended on the ground of *"aggravating conflict in the region"* (Quijana-Mejía and Linares-García, 2017; Martínez Cortés, 2013).[2] In February 2011, the peasantry managed to get the reserve zone reactivated. In the following paragraphs, some important aspects of the ZRC-VRC will be outlined.

In Figure 6, the demarcation of the ZRC-VRC can be seen. The light green area signifies The Yellow Line (*La Línea Amarilla*), which is a demarcation around the San Lucas mountain range. This was initiated by the *campesinos* and *campesinas* themselves to restricts the advance of settlements in this region (Quijana-Mejía and Línares-García, 2016). Due to the civil conflict, displaced peasant from other regions were coming to this region, and some of them became involved with the illicit crop production of coca. Therefore, in 1993, the peasants decided that a demarcation of the area was needed to conserve the pristine rainforest in the region (ACVC-RAN, 2018). Thereby they agreed to prohibit hunting, fishing, logging, or any other type of intervention on the fauna and flora in this area, as the rainforest area is home to rare endemic species. In order for the area to be recognised as a protected area, several actions have taken place. For starters, in ACVC-RAN's Sustainable Development Plan, a project was discussed for the Protection and Expansion of the Protected Area of the ZRC-VRC (ACVC, 2013). Furthermore, between April and May 2015, the peasant organisation teamed up with researchers from different national and regional universities, as well as environmental organisations and the local Community Actions Boards, to map and characterise the ecology in the southern part of the San Lucas mountain range, with the aim to identify specific conservation areas within the Peasant Reserve Zone (ACVC, 2015). In addition to this, ACVC turned for support to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Peace, whose main goal is the integration of conservation, environmental education, and production in areas affected by the conflict. In 2015, the initiative was made official by Resolution 1628 of the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development (*Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible)* in the village of Puerto Matilde, Yondó, when nearly 60,000 hectares of forest was officially demarked as a conservation zone known as the Yellow Line.

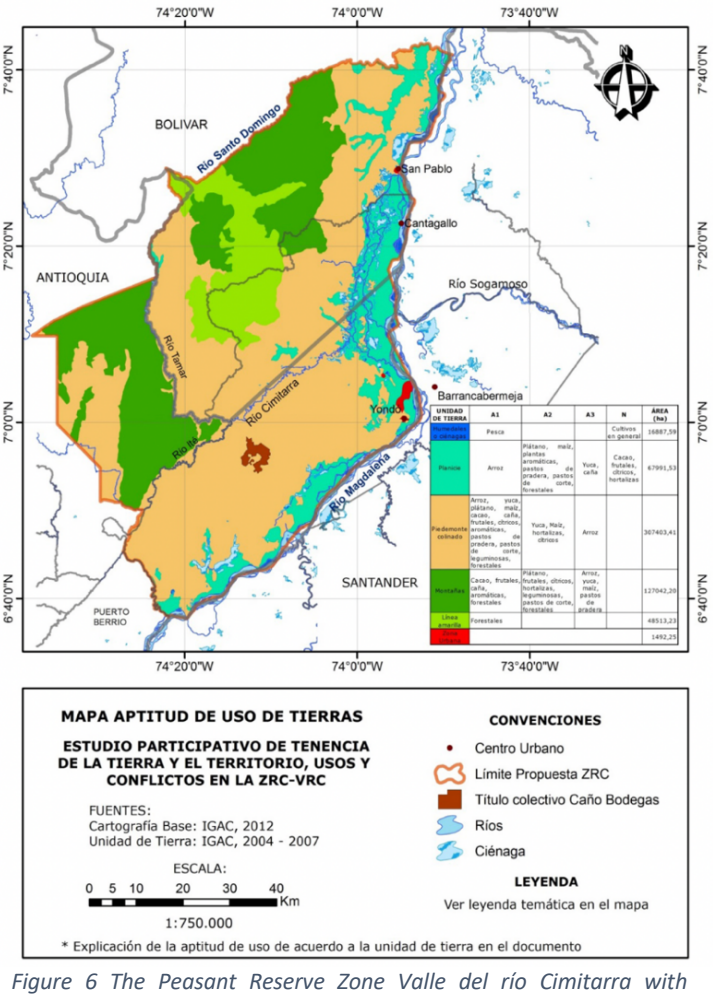

Figure 6 The Peasant Reserve Zone Valle del río Cimitarra with indication of the Yellow Line (Quijana-Mejía and Línares-García, 2016)

[2] The section on *Spaces of dialogue under pressure* in *Chapter VI. Restricting ACVC-RAN's operational space* elaborates more on the suspension of the Peasant Reserve Zone – Valle del rio Cimitarra.

Moreover, between 1988 and 1993, a land committee (*El Comité de Tierras*) was formed to democratise the access to land. Its main function was the demarcation of new plots, as well as regulating land size by identifying plots that exceeded 200 hectares and redistributing the excess land in favour of other *campesinos* and *campesinas* that did not own (much) land. The committee was composed of several peasants who enjoyed respect from the community as they had been settled in the region the longest. This agrarians reform initiated by the peasantry itself also focused on a series of community norm to ensure co-existence within the communities, and supported new families with inputs such as seeds, farm animals, and communal labour for the construction of their houses (Quijana-Mejía and Línares-García, 2016).

Brief conclusion of this chapter

To understand the specific challenges and restrictions a civil society organisation faces, it is essential to focus on the organisation itself. Therefore, in this chapter, I have made an effort to outline the characteristics and structure of the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN. Established in 1996 by displaced peasants in the region, the organisation engages in political, social, and organisation work. Examples of their work ranges from active political participation to human rights workshops, and from juridical defences to projects aimed at increasing food security and agricultural productivity. Using the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), the organisation belongs to the claim-making and policy-oriented organisations. Emerging from the grassroots – so from the peasant farmers themselves – they advocate for their human right to live a dignified life. Living in areas neglected by the government, their claims include access to land, as well as the provision of basic services by the state such as education and health care. Due the claims that the organisation makes, they are more likely to face violence and restrictions in their operational space. These restrictions on the operational space of ACVC-RAN will be discussed in the following chapter.

VI. Restricting ACVC-RAN's operational space

In the following chapter, the different policies and actions that restrict the operational space of civil society organisations will be highlighted, especially in the case of the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN. These different policies and actions are often violent measures. Therefore, I have added different conceptualisations of violence to this chapter in order to more fully understand the severity of the restrictive actions and policies. The main structure of this chapter follows the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), which is based on the subsequent five pillars: 1) physical harassment and intimidation, 2) criminalisation, 3) administrative restrictions, 4) stigmatisation, and 5) spaces of dialogue under pressure. All five pillars will be discussed separately, but it is important to keep in mind that the pillars are intertwined and interconnected. Certain processes, for example criminalisation and stigmatisation, often go hand in hand. Additionally, within each pillar, the different forms of violence will aid in understanding the restrictions placed upon the peasant organisation.

Physical harassment and intimidation

The first actions that can restrict the operational space of civil society organisations are physical harassment and intimidation. Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) distinguish two different forms of repression and intimidation, namely 1) threats, injuries, and killings and 2) impunity and lack of protection. In the following paragraphs, these two distinct forms of repression and intimidation will be applied to the case of ACVC-RAN in Colombia. First, a short definition will be given of what is meant by the different forms of repression, and secondly, the different restrictive actions will be discussed.

In the first place, threats, injuries, and killings have taken place when looking at ACVC-RAN. According to Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012), threats, injuries, and killings can be executed by the state other armed actors. In the case of Colombia, the occurrence of threats, injuries, and killings is high. Only in 2019, 107 human rights defenders were killed in Colombia (The Guardian, 2020a), which made it the country with the most deaths of human rights defenders (The Guardian, 2020b). Most of these deaths happened in rural areas, where poverty has higher-than-average rates and where illegal armed groups rule the day (The Guardian, 2020a). This trend seems to continue over most of Latin-America. According to Middeldorp and Le Billon (2019), the probability of killings of environmental and human rights defenders appears to be higher amongst middle-income countries with several aspects: a semi-authoritarian regime, a recent history of armed conflicts or high homicide rates, and frequent conflicts around resource exploitation project, as frequently seen in Latin America. This is a form of direct violence, considering its visibility and the intention behind the killings (Galtung, 1969). Often this direct political violence is targeted at the opponents of authorities (Bourgois, 2001). As the authority is shattered in many regions in Colombia, this fragmented sovereignty enables both state and non-state actors to target opponents.

Also within the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN, defenders of their territory have been threatened and killed. The violent conflict that was taking place caused a lot of displacement, especially in rural areas, as people fled for the violence and threats to their livelihoods. One of the female members of ACVC-RAN recalls how she and her husband had to flee the violence in her village (Personal communication, 3, 2020):

> *"We had to go to Puerto Matilda because of the violence, they were killing people. We were displaced."* [8]

At the end of 2018, the number of people that has been forcibly displaced in Colombia amounts to almost 8 million people, with 98 percent of them being internally displaced (UNHCR, 2012). Of the total number of these 8 million forcibly displaced people, it has been estimated that peasants

constitute 81 percent (Ocampo Prado et al., 2017). As a result of the armed conflict and subsequently the mass displacement, peasants have a sense of being lost *(perdido)* and uprooted *(desarraigado)* (Lederach, 2017). This shows how *campesinos* and *campesinas* experience slow violence, a violence which slowly builds up over time (Nixon, 2005).

However, these threats to their livelihoods are not the only difficulties and violence the peasants face. They also are faced with threats to their lives, especially the social leaders. One of the killings that took place was the murder of Nelcy Cuesta in 2002. She was the president of the Community Action Board of Puerto Matilde, which used to be the capital of the association, before it moved to the city of Barrancabermeja. On the second of April 2002, Nelcy Cuesta went to Yondó to restock her community store and restaurant with supplies. Going to Yondó meant she had to pass two check point, specifically a paramilitary checkpoint and a military one. At the first checkpoint, the paramilitaries took her out of the vehicle, robbed her, raped her, and left her dead on the sidewalk (Correa Delgado, 2018). It is important to ask why the paramilitaries did this to Nelcy Cuesta, and to what purpose she became a victim of sexual violence, torture, and murder. According to the CNRR and GMH (2011), female leaders play an important part within the community, and therefore sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war:

> *"The suffering they inflict, the marks and the desecration of the bodies of people considered enemies are messages of humiliation and contempt for the communities that the armed actor seeks to defeat and whose social fabric it seeks to destroy. Sexual violence against a female leader may be seeking all of the above, and this is due to the fact that women's bodies symbolically embody the reproduction of a community." (CNRR and GMH, 2011, p. 68)*

In this respect, female leaders are specifically targeted as they are the glue that holds the fabric of the community together. Nelcy Cuesta, when she was the president of JAC Puerto Matilde, supported the construction of the aqueduct, as well as the construction of the school in Puerto Matilde (ACVC-RAN, 2017b). She was therefore an inspiration to many women as she was both the head of the household and mother of five children, but she also stood out for her work within the public arena of ACVC-RAN (Correa Delgado, 2019). Her murder still has a significant impact on the organisation. For example, in the main office of ACVC-RAN, an A4 paper shows a drawing of Nelcy Cuesta, written beneath it: *Female leader of ZRC-VRC, tortured and assassinated by paramilitaries in the year 2002.* Furthermore, in a study about the collective memory of female members of ACVC-RAN, Nelcy Cuesta comes forward as one of the inspirations of the struggle and resistance of the women of ACVC-RAN (Correa Delgado, 2019).

Besides these direct threats, injuries, and killings, impunity and a lack of protection are also present in the context of Colombia. Impunity and lack of protection often occur in weak states (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). According to them, a weak state – and in particular a weak law enforcement sector – will have consequences for the protection of civil society organisations. Both unwillingness and/or a lack of capacity of the state can lead to this, which means that powerful groups with vested interests, both inside and outside the state, can block the rule of law or judicial reform, and thus contribute to a climate of vulnerability and impunity, which can lead to fragmented sovereignty (Davis, 2010). Impunity means that there is an exemption from punishment for serious crimes and gross violations of human rights, where human rights and rule of law do not play a role (Impunity Watch, 2020), which therefore aids illegal actions and killings. These problems are important in countries where long periods of violent conflict have occurred and where societies are still deeply divided (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012), as is the case in Colombia. Often it is not in the interest of powerful perpetrators to aid the peace process – and therefore they frequently obstruct it. This form of structural violence is in this case not the result of a mistake or an accident, but rather a deliberate decision over time to ensure who will be shielded from harm and who will suffer abuse (Eggers, 2016).

It is also a form of slow violence, as it systematically strengthens certain groups within society, while simultaneously undermining others. Gill (2011) argues how in the city of Barrancabermeja, new tensions and division between citizens were created by the paramilitary, and how the absolute impunity of the human rights violators resulted in the hope of survivors for social justice being crushed.

In Colombia, the state also does not have the willingness and/or capacity to act and protect the human rights defenders. Therefore, this space for necessary physical protection is filled with international actors. In the case of ACVC-RAN, both Peace Brigades International (PBI) and International Action for Peace (IAP) accompany the peasant organisation under threat on important missions, such as the annual meetings. These international accompaniments have as goal to "*protect people, organisations or communities at risk of political violence due to their communal, environmental, or human rights work.*" (IAP, 2020). According to international law, it is the governments that must ensure that the fundamental rights of their citizens are respected. However, when they fail to do so, the international community can be of help in order to prevent human right violations (IAP, 2020). International actors thus fill up the space left open by the government. PBI started to accompany ACVC-RAN in 2007, and in this year and 2008, ACVC-RAN publicly announced that they received threats from both paramilitary groups and the army. In response, PBI increased its level of accompaniments and political advocacy, to raise awareness for the issues faced by the peasant organisation (PBI Colombia, 2020b). Since 2011, IAP has accompanied the peasant organisation as well (IAP, 2020). Peasant organisations and other human rights and environmental defenders can ask for accompaniment by these international organisations, for example in cases of large gatherings, important meetings, or large journeys.

Examples of threats and lack of protection, as well as stigmatisation (which will be discussed later on in this chapter), can be found in the burning of Puerto Nuevo Ité. This village, in the department of Remedios, was burned down several times by paramilitaries, under the banner of it being a guerrilla stronghold. Big parts of the village were burned down, including the school (Personal communication, 2020). From 1994 onwards, harassment of the inhabitants of Puerto Nuevo Ité began, with bombings, burnings of the village, and murders by the army and paramilitary groups (Prensa Rural, 2009). This has caused a lot of displacements as well, but ACVC has been successful in consolidating resistance tactics such as solidarity networks and humanitarian refuge camps, where displaced peasants were received and accommodated. However, in spite of these achievements, many *campesinos* and *campesinas* have at best been prosecuted, and at worst been killed extra-judicially (Prensa Rural, 2009). By advocating, PBI and IAP try to raise awareness for international acknowledgement of the struggles by which many peasants and other marginalised groups are still challenged everyday, showing the structural violence these groups face, and thereby providing safety for the defenders of their territories.

The current coronavirus crisis poses even more threats. Local NGOs have warned that death squads in Colombia are taking advantage of the lockdown measures to murder rural activists (The Guardian, 2020c). While the government is focused on containing the pandemic, activists say that they are even more at risk. Several institutions designed to protect human rights and prevent violence have become less active as a result of the quarantine. As the number of coronavirus infections in Colombia increases and mobility becomes more limited, it has become increasingly difficult to rely on mechanisms that were in place to protect social leaders and peace activists. Existing preventive and emergency protection mechanisms for human rights defenders have been weakened, making them feel abandoned by the state. This lack of protection mainly affects the most vulnerable sectors of society, such as indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities. Moreover, those who are told to stay at home are now easier to find by those who want to harm them (PAX, 2020). Making matters worse, is the redeployed use of the military by the state. Ojeda and Pinto García (2020) describe how the Colombian government, as well as other illegal armed actors, have used the crisis to perform militarised surveillance and repression under the banner of "public health".

This shows that the situation in Colombia cannot be considered as absolute peace, but rather, that even after a peace agreement, many shades of violence and conflict can still be present and (re)emerge. War has become an ordinary aspect of daily life (Ojeda and Pinto García, 2020) and peace is not something that has been given. Instead, within the political arena harbouring many different state and non-state actors, peace is a process.

That these physical harassment and repression are and have been always present, comes forward in the story of *doña* Lucia (Personal communication, 2, 2020). After the annual meeting of ACVC-RAN in La Cooperativa, I met with *doña* Lucia. We sit outside the small school. She comes as the delegate of her junta (JAC) in the municipality of San Pablo. She was born in the department of Santander but grew up in San Pablo. She then met her husband and started a family there. She starts by saying that the region where she lives in, is subject to a lot of violence. Violence coming from outside forces, but also inter-household violence. They assassinated a lot of social leaders. There has also been a lot of displacement of the *campesinos* and *campesinas* in the region, as well as disappearances and massacres. All of this has generated a lot of panic. At the moment it is a little bit calmer, she says. But still, assassinations take place. San Pablo was a region which used to be '*muy mal'*, but now they have improved. In relation to ACVC, she tells me that they '*siempre está pendiente'*, always available to help, especially in the case of displacement issues, which are still happening. She tells me that in total, there are some 26,000 to 28,000 people displaced in the San Pablo. In her own family, two people went missing. First, her husband went missing, and only three years later, her seventeen-year-old son went missing. Now, after twenty years, she still does not know what has happened to them. It is still a process, and she is signing a document here, another document there, but until now she has not heard anything. She tells me that paramilitaries killed her husband. This also reflects the impunity of the armed forces and the lack of protection by the Colombian state of the *campesino* households. Consequently, it also shows the importance of moving away from absolute terms such as peace and war, but rather, to look at the hybridity of actors that are present in the region, and how these diverse groups interact with each other.

Criminalisation

The second measure that can restrict the operational space of civil society organisations are categorised by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) as either preventive or punitive penal measures. They define criminalisation as *"the act of isolating a generally defined conduct and labelling this conduct as criminal, thereby opening up the possibility of public – and sometimes private – prosecution."* (p. 1071). As a result, a sentence, such as a fine or imprisonment, can be imposed on a person found guilty under state authority. Therefore, criminalisation involves a range of coercive measures that can restrict individuals, as well as organisations (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). These restrictions are to a certain extent resembled in structural violence, as it sheds light on the different laws and policies that are used to restrict them (Eggers, 2016).

In the first place, preventive measures have taken place. Preventive measures include terrorism lists and terrorism task forces. In the case of the peasantry in Colombia, peasants are categorised as settlers who are seeking to expand the agricultural frontier and thereby misrepresented as 'eco-threats' due to illicit crop production and guerrilla groups. The consequences of this have been processes of criminalisation, exclusion, and eviction (Bocarejo and Ojeda, 2016). Furthermore, peasant communities have oftentimes been portrayed as guerrilla strongholds (Lederach, 2017). This also means that the state can act against peasants as if they were criminals. Holding many ties with stigmatisation, these processes go hand in hand. Due to the stigmatisation and portrayal of peasant farmers as illegal armed forces, they are considered criminals by the state.

Secondly, punitive penal measures mean that there is an investigation and prosecution with the aim to inflict punishment. The restrictions put on people and organisations can include criminal investigations, such as raiding offices and seizing computers, as well as pre-trial detentions, which include travel restrictions, high costs for lawyers, and time in prison. Those measures have also been taken against ACVC-RAN. An example of this can be found in 2007, which was a difficult year for the organisation ACVC-RAN in terms of political and organisational work, as many of the leaders of the organisation were detained. The government of Álvaro Uribe issued a prosecution against the organisation, which led to the arrest of the leaders Andrés Gil, Oscar Duque, Carlos Martínez, and Evaristo Mena during a raid on the ACVC headquarters in Barrancabermeja. In January 2008, two other important leaders, Miguel Ángel González Huepa and Ramiro Ortega Muñetón, were arrested while participating in a meeting of the Community Action Boards in the village of Puerto Nuevo Ité, as they were accused of the crime of rebellion (Correa Delgado, 2019).

Even though their arrests led to times of uncertainty and difficulties for the organisation, it is also precisely within this environment that space opened up to female coordination and leadership under Irene Ramírez, still the current president of ACVC-RAN. In January 2008, she took over the responsibility for the coordination of the peasant organisation from the headquarters in Barrancabermeja. Women have played an important part within the organisation and the defence of their territories, as one of the female leaders of ACVC-RAN states (Personal communication, 4.4, 2020):

> *"In the wake of the conflict, those who were left defending the territory were women, because it included them. When there was the height of the conflict, the majority who were displaced were men. Because the men were more persecuted, because they were more involved in the guerrilla fight, let's say. And the women were the ones who remained in the territories defending it, defending the territory, cultivating."* [9]

As a result, a female representative of the peasant organisation states how this has created the connection between women and the territory that they defend (Personal communication, 4.4, 2020):

> *"So there is a very close relationship between women and the land. Because they are the caretakers of the land. Because they are the caretakers of the seeds. And they are the ones who in one way or another have guaranteed food sovereignty in the territory."* [10]

Women are thereby responsible for taking care of the land and feeding their families. This has also become a tool for emancipation and empowerment of rural women in Latin America, as women use the networks created, e.g. by becoming part of *La Via Campesina*, and the link to food sovereignty to combat gender violence (Machado Brochner, 2014). At the organisation of ACVC-RAN, this integral approach could also be approached, as the activities organised by the organisation range from cultivating projects to human rights and from menstrual health to combatting intrahousehold violence.

Administrative restrictions

The third pillar of Van der Borgh and Terwindt's (2012) model on restrictive actions and policies is focused on administrative restrictions. The first form of this can be found when legislation on civil society is issued that restrict fundamental human rights, which makes registration and operation both mandatory and difficult. The second form of administrative restrictions happen when governing bodies use their power to impose ad-hoc measures on civil society actors in order to control them.

In the first place, administrative restrictions can occur when restrictive civil legislation is in place. An example of this can be found in the difficulty members of the Community Action Boards face when they want to get legalised. A representative of one of the JACs told me that her *junta* – her Community

Action Board – is not yet legalised, as it takes a lot of time and effort to do so. A lot of papers need to be filled in, as the institutions do not make it easy to register. However, she states that it is "*algo necessario"* that they become legally acknowledged. Setting up a women's committee faces similar challenges, as it needs to be registered by the DIAN (*Dirección de Impuestos y Aduanas Nacionales*: National Tax and Customs Administration) and the Chamber of Commerce (*Cámara de Comercio*). Due to all those bureaucratises, it takes a lot of time to get legalised (Personal communication, 2, 2020). Restrictive administrative measures are not always necessarily the product of legislation, but that they can also be the product of the willingness and ability to use bureaucratic power to obstruct organisations in their operations (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). In the case of ACVC-RAN, delaying registration of *juntas* can be such an example of administrative restrictions. This is a form of structural violence as it systematically undermines the position of certain groups within society. Making it more difficult for members of the peasant organisation to administer themselves, makes it also more difficult to organise themselves and consequently it becomes harder to advocate for their human and environmental rights.

Stigmatisation

The fourth pillar of the framework of Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) is stigmatisation, which means that groups or individuals are portrayed as threats to the social order or the security of society. However, often there is no significant substance for the claims of portraying people as criminals or terrorists. Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) distinguish two different forms of stigmatisation: criminal and social stigmatisation. The first one, 'criminal stigmatisation', takes place when state agents or other actors use criminal labels in order to discredit specific (actions of) actors. As a result of this constant misrepresentation, an organisation's operational space can be significantly affected and restricted, which forms the basis for criminalisation. Practices of stigmatisation and criminalisation go hand in hand, as stigmatisation of opposing parties in the media and documents often precedes legal courts. Stigmatisation provides the basis for legitimising acts of criminalisation, and in turn, these detentions and criminal trials provide a stigmatising effect. It is important to note that stigmatisation of actors does not only occur by government agents, but also by other social stakeholders, such as corporations and media. It is a form of cultural violence, as stigmatisation sustains the inequity in society (Eggers, 2016).

Many stigmas and myths weigh on the peasantry in Colombia. For example, they are often depicted as incapable of creating a business model of their farms and thereby not promoting development (Verdad Abierta, 2015). Furthermore, actors and communities that are involved with resistance are often depicted as 'anti-development' and subsequently, their resistance can be considered a threat to the internal security (Rasch, 2017). In the case of Colombia, peasant communities often became portrayed as guerrillas by the state (Lederach, 2017), or at least supporting the subversion (Verdad Abierta, 2015). This also means that the state can act against peasants as if they were criminals. These stigmatisation processes are often used strategically: for example, social mobilisations in rural areas can be delegitimised as 'guerrilla activity', which also poses direct threats to their physical security (Lederach, 2017). Thereby it lays bare the discrepancies between Colombian urban and rural life, as the social mobilisations in the capital city were celebrated as citizen participation, in stark contrast to the rural supposedly 'guerrilla activities' (Lederach, 2017). Furthermore, stigmatisation also occurs specifically against women defenders. According to Oxfam (2019), women defenders have been stigmatised (also for being peasant, indigenous, or Afro-Colombian) on all levels within the country, including its institutions. Moreover, stigmatisation can also happen between and within communities. The internal armed conflict has resulted in certain communities being considered as paramilitary strongholds, whereas other communities might house guerrilla groups, thereby creating 'invisible' barriers between these communities (Lederach, 2017). As mentioned by a member of ACVC-RAN, *"the peasantry has always been affected by this conflict."* (Personal communication, 4.3, 2020). This

ongoing cycle of displacement and stigmatisation does not consist of one sole rupture, but of structural inequalities (Lederach, 2017). Therefore, it can be argued that it is slow violence, weaving itself into the backdrop of ordinary life (Das, 2007, p. 7: as quoted in Lederach, 2017).

Due to these stigmatisation practises, it has been difficult for *campesinos* to obtain land rights. However, for female peasants this struggle has been even more difficult, as the work they perform in their territories has not been recognised (Personal communication, 4.4, 2020):

> *"Because if a peasant has managed to get a title today, they always give the title to the man, right. There is no recognition of the work that women do at home and in their territory. And this hinders the decisions that women should make even more, also within their families. There is no concrete autonomy - let's say - of the work that women do."* [11]

Gender inequality has been extra prevalent in rural areas, and even specific data on rural, indigenous, or Afro-Colombian women is missing, rendering them mostly invisible in official records (Oxfam, 2019). However, if women have access to land, 78 percent of them possesses small areas of land, meaning less than five hectares (Oxfam, 2019).

Apart from the problem of criminal stigmatisation, social stigmatisation can also occur. In the case of Colombia, especially under the presidential terms of Álvaro Uribe from 2002 until 2010, human rights defenders were labelled as terrorists: They were seen as "*politically interested individuals who hide themselves behind the banner of human rights and ultimately serve the cause of terrorism*" (Peace Direct, 2010). Moreover, both national and international human rights organisations were accused of being "*the political arm of the guerrilla*" (Peace Direct, 2010). Even after president Uribe's presidency, NGOs, social movements, and human rights defenders were still labelled as guerrillas. This equation of armed guerrilla movements with organisations promoting civil and political rights does not only serve to discredit the organisation itself, but it also endangers its staff when they are being depicted as enemies of the State (OMCT/FIDH, 2013). This cultural violence is used to legitimise the structural violence the peasants endure, as they are not only often overlooked by the state and other armed actors, but also actively harmed.

Spaces of dialogue under pressure

The fifth pillar distinguished by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) is the application of pressure on spaces of dialogue and interaction between governing parties and civil society groups. This pillar consists out of two different forms, the first one being co-optation, and the latter being the closure of newly created spaces on the other stakeholder. Both forms are about restraining and/or reversing of interactions between governing bodies and civil society.

The first form of spaces of dialogue under pressure is the practice of co-optation, which means that one person or more persons are convinced by the opposing party, agency, or system to join them. Often, propositions of material advances for the co-opted person, play an important part in these processes. Ballvé (2013) describes how paramilitaries managed to systematically make use of grassroots discourses and institutional forms often utilised by social movements and thereby undermine its original intent of political stance against violent forms of accumulation and rule in Colombia. This can be considered a form of structural violence, as fragmentation occurs under those who are marginalised (Egger, 2016).

Another problem that puts spaces of dialogue under pressure, is the closure or disappearance of newly created spaces where civil society can meet with governing bodies, for example, seminars, social forums, and round tables. Extra problematic could be the creation of 'fake spaces', for example, when

specific part of the population receives a seat at the dialogue table, but they are not listened to, which can lead to disappointment of participating groups. Moreover, it could be a legitimising practice in places where the law or donors require consultation with specific groups, instead of an actual opportunity for these groups to give voice to their needs and demands (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). It is a form of marginalisation and consequently structural violence, as it limits the choice and participation of specific groups within society (Eggers, 2016). An example of the closure of newly created spaces can be found when the creation of new Peasant Reserve Zones (ZRCs) was stalled in 2002. In 1994, Colombia saw a market-led agrarian reform programme, in which Peasant Reserve Zones were established with the aim to protect small-scale and peasant farmers. Under this Law 160, peasant farmers would be protected from having to sell their land and/or being forcibly displaced by the expansion of (agro)extractivist activities by the landed elite (McKay, 2018). Therefore, it is a legal mechanism that allows for the defence of peasant territory through the strengthening of its economy, formalization of property rights, prevention of land concentrations, and the closure of the agricultural frontier (Quijano-Mejía and Linares-García, 2017). However, it is important to note that, unlike indigenous and afro-descendant territories, these reserves are not autonomous and self-governed territories, but rather state-authorised rural areas (McKay, 2018). These ZRCs are thereby organised through Community Action Boards, which coordinate sustainable development projects in the communities (McKay, 2018). Six of these ZRCs were constituted throughout the whole country of Colombia in the time span of five years, from 1997 to 2002. This amounted to a total land area of 827,166 hectares, which is 0.72% of the total land surface of Colombia (McKay, 2018). However, when president Álvaro Uribe was elected in 2002, the creation of Peasant Reserve Zones was hindered and delayed as *"they were thought to be safe havens for the FARC and were in direct conflict with the expansionary interests of (agro)extractivist projects and landed elites."* (McKay, 2018, p. 168). These projects included mining concessions for gold and oil, as well as palm oil plantations (Molina Portuguez, 2011). Therefore, the suspension of the ZRC generated disputes between the peasantry and the state, as well as between the peasantry and the extractivist multinationals (Molina Portuguez, 2011).

These ideas about the Peasant Reserve Zones by the government also provided obstacles for the ZRC Valle de río Cimitarra (ZRC-VRC), in which ACVC-RAN is located. The reserve zone was constituted in 2002, but only four months after its declaration, the ZRC-VRC was suspended by the national government, on the grounds that it aggravated conflict in the region (Quijana-Mejía and Linares-García, 2017). At the same time, direct violence against the peasant farmers was at its highest, as in the span of three years, four leaders of the organisation were killed: Carlos Ramirez, Diomedes Playonero, Orlando Triana, and Nelcy Cuesta (Verdad Abierta, 2015). Under the presidential reign of Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010), the peasant organisation was a constant victim of political persecution (Correa Delgado, 2018). These killings, together with the suspension of the ZRC and the detention and stigmatisation of the association's Board of Directors in 2007 made this period one of the most difficult periods the organisation has experienced (Cely, 2015).

In spite of the suspension of the Peasant Reserve Zone, and in the midst of ongoing persecution by governing, military, and paramilitary actors, ACVC-RAN continued to resist forced displacement (Cely, 2015). For example, they created humanitarian refugee camps, where displaced peasants were received and provided with a temporary home. These spaces acted in turn as spaces for training and promotion for the defence of human rights, and which in turn led to formerly displaced peasants establishing other peasant organisations, such as the Corporation for Humanitarian Action for Coexistence and Peace in North-eastern Antioquia (CAHUCOPANA) which was created in 2004 (Cely, 2015). ACVC-RAN continued to develop its *Plan de Desarrollo Sostenible* (Sustainable Development Plan), thereby carrying out projects focused on human rights, food sovereignty, basic sanitation, and productive projects such as the buffalo farming in Puerto Matilde (Correa Delgado, 2018).

Only in 2011, ACVC-RAN managed to get their Peasant Reserve Zone acknowledged again (Prensa Rural, 2011). However, the organisation still does not receive much support from the government. In

the words of one of the members of ACVC-RAN, this is due to the "reproduction of a patriarchal capitalist system" (Personal communication, 4.4, 2020):

> *"Thus we have a law that prohibits economic activity within the territory, but [which states] that the peasantry has historically been there, producing, cultivating, working, developing their activities within the communities. So what is the interest of the government as such, not to give the land to the peasantry? It is because, obviously, Colombia is rich in gold, in many natural resources and what happens? These titles are given to big companies. So that they enter to exploit and finish with all that there is inside the territory."* [12]

By calling it a patriarchal capitalist system, she shows how the exploitation of nature is often paralleled to the exploitation of women, or in the very least, it highlights the restrictions placed upon women. Therefore, in the following section, these specific restrictions will be looked at.

Specific restrictions on women

Women face many obstacles and restrictions due to their gender. For example, the Colombian government does not recognise the role women play in the *campo*, and therefore there is *"the lack of government, of making presence, of at least establishing programmes for women, developing them."* (Personal communication, 4.2, 2020). The gender coordination has therefore started to train and support women, for example, by providing information to *campesinas* about their human rights and how to exercise those, to visualise the problems faced by women, and by accompanying them in order to lose their fear of speaking out (Personal communication, 1, 2020). The objective of this is to ensure that women are participating on all political levels, as support from the government often only exists on paper, and sometimes not even (Personal communication, 4.2, 2020):

> *"Look, here in Colombia, we have a lot of laws for women, but what happens is that even on paper they are not developed, they are not materialised. And that is a difficulty, because you ask an official and he tells us: "Yes, of course, there is recognition in the law, rural women are recognized." But then you go and look at if and how that law is materialised in the territories or if that law really meets the needs of women. And that is often not the case."* [13]

This quote shows the discrepancy between the laws made by the government and how these play out for the *campesina* women. Furthermore, restrictive actions can sometimes have an effect that disproportionally affect women. For example, the town of Puerto Matilde did not receive food transports as the paramilitaries constructed a blockade, thereby limiting and at times completely preventing food and medicine to reach the town. This form of everyday violence was done under the pretence of the town being symptomatic to guerrilla fighters. These restrictions have had a direct impact on the peasantry, straining local economies and enhancing forced displacements, but it also shows how women were impacted in their everyday activities (ACVC-RAN, 2020; CRHRP, 2003). Women were disproportionally affected as they are the ones that usually assume the roles of caretaker of the family (ACVC-RAN, 2020). Therefore, this economic blockade meant that it became harder for women to feed their children, which shows how restrictions can have different impacts on peasant due to their gender.

Restrictions from within the organisation

However, the challenges and restrictions faced by the members of ACVC-RAN are not always exclusively due to activities and policies from actors outside their organisation, such as the Colombian state or paramilitary groups, but they can also come from within the organisation. Social movements

are not homogeneous entities, but rather consists out of different persons, each with their own perspectives and challenges (Cheema and Popovski, 2010). In the case of ACVC-RAN, one of the challenges faced by many women is gender inequality within the organisation. One that is rooted in existing structures are the many tasks that women have within the household, as stated by a female leader from ACVC-RAN (Personal communication, 4.1, 2020):

> *"Then we find that series of obstacles, which has not allowed women to really develop in the field, develop in their family, develop in their vegetable garden. And also because of the thousands of tasks that women assume: women assume the tasks of the home, but they also assume care roles, they are also nurses, as well as teachers, because they are the ones who educate their children. They are the mothers who take care of everyone since their husbands are not assisting. So it is an arduous task that women perform, but one that is not recognised nowadays."* [14]

Due to these obstacles, it becomes more difficult for women to participate in organisational work for the organisation. Especially, in the case, when a woman's husband actively obstructs to her joining a meeting of ACVC-RAN. That this is something that still occurs often becomes clear when during the annual meeting, the (female) president of a JAC comes to ask advice from female ACVC-RAN leaders about this specific topic, as it is difficult to organise meetings when husbands hinder their wives' participation. Later, one of the female leaders from the Women's coordination of ACVC-RAN recalls (Personal communication, 4.1, 2020):

> *"Because men, as the 'compañera' said, when these events come, do not let their partner participate. [...] It happens a lot in the region. Machismo is still quite prevalent."* [15]

Due to this, it is a lot harder for women to participate in organisation, social and political work. In turn, as stated by the same female leader of the Women's coordination, this lack of participation can lead to bigger issues (Personal communication, 4.1, 2020):

> *"It makes it very difficult. The main problem is that we have not been able to have access to participation and consequently, many issues have arisen. So then there is violence against women. And then arises the femicide. And from there arise all these difficulties of violence that we encounter in the territory. And what we are looking for is to try to mitigate these situations."* [16]

That mitigation of these situations is essential comes forward in the high number of women who reported excessive violence in Colombia, as well as the 976 reported femicides in 2019 alone (Colombia Reports, 2020). The Coordination of Gender is thus an important step forward in acknowledging the role of women within the organisation and addressing the issues that are particular prominent due to gender inequalities.

Brief conclusion of this chapter

Many civil society organisations around the world are being faced with restrictive actions and policies. In this chapter, I have outlined the different policies and actions that restrict the operational space of the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN in the context of post-agreement Colombia. The peasant farmers face many forms of direct violence, which includes threats and killings of social leaders. Often, the perpetrators are not being held responsible by the state and even legitimised by processes of stigmatisation and criminalisation. Peasants are perceived of not being able to make their lands productive and are portrayed as guerrillas – or in the very least as supporting the insurgents. This cultural violence legitimises to a certain extent the systematic and structural lack of the government to provide basic services and land titles to the peasantry. Peasants also experience slow violence, a

violence that builds up over time, especially due to displacements which contribute to feelings of being lost and uprooted. Furthermore, administrative restrictions and closure of spaces of dialogue, such as the closure of the Peasant Reserve Zone (ZRC-VRC), make it more difficult for the peasant organisation to continue their political and organisational work. Both are forms of structural violence, as these measures aim to marginalise, fragmentise and limit the participation of peasant farmers. It is important to note that these restrictions on ACVC-RAN's operational space do not only come from state authorities, but also from other actors, such as paramilitary groups. Furthermore, organisations are not homogenous and uniform, but consist of different people. Restrictions are therefore not only imposed upon the peasant organisation from outside forces but can also be imposed from certain members of the organisation upon other members, e.g. when male ACVC-RAN members did not let their wives participate in activities organised by the Community Action Boards.

VII. ACVC-RAN's (counter)strategies

As briefly mentioned in the introducing paragraph of this chapter, it is important to consider the way civil society organisations use their agency and thereby also develop strategies to respond to and counter restrictions laid upon them. Civil society actors are not just receivers of operational space, but rather active agents in this process. According to Cornwall (2002, p. 2), space is not simply "taken up, assumed or filled", but it is also made, reshaped, and claimed by the organisations themselves. *"Space is a social product […] it is not simply "there", a neutral container waiting to be filled, but it is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control and hence of domination, of power."* It is therefore important to pay attention to the ways that organisations develop strategies to evade or deal with restrictions. Many different styles in terms of the response strategies of civil society organisations can be distinguished. In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on the four response strategies categorised by Terwindt and Schliemann (2017). Furthermore, these will be complemented by examples of alliances building on different scales from the concept of grassroots scalar politics (Hoogesteger and Verzijl, 2015). Furthermore, remembering will be discussed as a form of resistance. The chapter will be concluded with a brief conclusion.

Response strategies to counter restrictions

According to Terwindt and Schliemann (2017), there are four response strategies which are most widespread and that can be categorised in the following categories: legal support, advocacy, emergency measures, and public campaigns. In the following paragraphs, these four restrictions will be discussed and applied to the case of ACVC-RAN.

The first strategy is obtaining legal support. Organisations, as well as their members, require legal support in case they are faced with criminal charges or other lawsuits. The legal expertise, assistance of paralegals, and funding needed for the defence can be difficult to obtain. Often, processes take a long time as they challenge unconstitutional restrictive legislation. Furthermore, overcoming administrative restriction can also be a time-consuming process for the organisation (Terwindt and Schliemann, 2017). One legal organisation that provides support to ACVC-RAN is the Luis Carlos Perez Lawyers' Collective (CCALCP, by its Spanish acronym), which focuses on bringing the law within the reach of communities, and which uses a gender, differential, and territorial focus to support victims of grave human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law (PBI Colombia, 2020a). One of the issues in which they supported ACVC-RAN was the process of a community in Southern Bolivar in receiving recognition and the right to continue their traditional mining practices. The community lives in fear of eviction from the land, as the Colombian mining policy does not acknowledge traditional mining practices. CCALCP support the community by aiding them in the legalisation process. However, the request for formal recognition that they have filed in 2017 has still not received response (PBI Colombia, 2020a).

The second strategy is advocacy for governmental and diplomatic intervention. This includes civil society organisations advocating to foreign governments and their embassies, as well as to UN institutions, as they can play an essential role in supporting civil society actors at risk by speaking out about the restrictions they are experiencing (Terwindt and Schliemann, 2017). However, ACVC-RAN seems to be reaching out more to like-minded organisation and Colombian governing bodies, instead of diplomatic intervention. This will be discussed in the next section on the building of alliances.

Coming back to the four strategies of Terwindt and Schliemann (2017), a third strategy has been defined as emergency measures against physical threats and attacks. These measures include protective accompaniments, temporary relocations, or security trainings. Especially these protective accompaniments are a strategy often used by ACVC-RAN. During the (two)yearly meeting of

representatives of the whole organisation, both PBI and API accompanied the peasants in their journey towards La Cooperativa, the village where the meeting took place. Informal conversations with the accompanying organisations showed that, often, their presence was already enough to protect against physical threats and attacks. An important part of this was the visibility of the international accompaniments. While on the road, both organisations carried their flag with their logo clearly showing, and they were seated on the front seats next to the driver, wearing their safety vests explicitly. In case they were stopped by the police and army, their presence was often enough to ensure they could continue their journey swiftly. However, as one of the international members stated, they had only been stopped once in the time that he was there (which was more or less half a year).

The last strategy mentioned by Terwindt and Schliemann (2017) is usage of public campaigns. Seeking the spotlight can help organisations and their members who are at risk to receive necessary support and therefore legitimacy to carry out their work. These public campaigns can exist out of urgent appeals on governments and the United Nations, calling upon the media, or emphasising the importance of the work by specific individuals through awards. One of the strategies employed by ACVC-RAN is calling upon the media. However, they state that the mainstream media only informs about the acts, events, perceptions, and reflections from the perspective of the dominant economic and political establishment (ACVC, 2013). This is also reflected in the words of a representative of the peasant organisation (Personal communication, 4.2, 2020):

> *"One of the obstacles we also see in our system is the media, because they are in charge of misinformation all the time."* [17]

Therefore, they established an alternative communication project, named *La Agencia de Prensa Rural* (APR: The Rural Press Agency). Its main objective is to give voice to the inhabitants of those regions that suffer from oblivion and exclusion from decision-making. Several organisations are part of this APR, including several peasant organisations (Arauca, Catatumbo, and ACVC-RAN), as well as the Association of Agroecological and Mining Brotherhoods of Guamocó, the Humanitarian Action Corporation for Coexistence and Peace of North-eastern Antioquia, and the Union of Agricultural Workers of Sumapaz. However, at other times they did receive some support from important media outlets in Colombia. For example, in 2010, ACVC-RAN received Colombia's National Peace Prize, which is one of the first formal recognitions that the peasant organisation received from their social and political work. This National Peace Prize is awarded by several institutions, which includes the German research centre FESCOL (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Colombia), the United Nationals Development Programme and prominent media such as *El Tiempo, Caracol Radio,* and *Caracol Televisión.* Receiving this Peace Prize can be considered an important step as it recognised and thereby legitimises the work on human rights and defence of the territory that ACVC carries out.

All of these strategies have their own strengths, validation, and justification. However, a common downside is their focus on urgent needs, however, thereby forgetting to address the root causes of accelerating issues (Terwindt and Schliemann, 2017). Nonetheless, they provide an overview of how the peasant organisation counters restrictions opposed upon them by state and non-state actors. It is important to note that this list of counterstrategies is not exclusive, and several other forms of resistance exist. Therefore, in the following sections, the building of alliances and remembering as act of resistance will be discussed.

Building of alliances

The building of alliances is an important part of social movements and grassroots organisations. Grassroots scalar politics (Hoogesteger and Verzijl, 2015) aids in understanding how different alliances are built on different scales. ACVC-RAN has forged many alliances with different actors, including civil society actors, but also guerrilla groups. In the following section, these alliances will be discussed.

One of the alliances formed with another civil society actor is the alliance with the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organisations (CLOC: *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo*). Another example is the global organisation *La Via Campesina*. These alliances are built on international scale, but alliances are also formed on the national and regional scale. For example, ACVC-RAN has founded the National Association of the Peasant Reserve Zones (ANZORC: *Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina*), which brought together peasants from the different Peasant Reserve Zones with the aim 'to contribute to peace in Colombia and to guarantee the rights of peasants, as well as the Integral Rural Reform through the consolidation of the Peasant Reserve Zones'. However, due to this strategy of forcing alliances, issues might also emerge. For example, during a meeting of ACVC-RAN, it was mentioned that they are complying with ANZORC and all the 'bureaucratic hassle', but that this might lead to neglect of their own work. They mentioned that they should not forget 'to take care of their own' (Personal communication, 2020).

In addition to this, alliance building also takes place with guerrilla groups. To illustrate this, two examples will be given. The first example shows how ACVC-RAN cooperated with guerrilla groups to conserve the area known as The Yellow Line. In a documentary about the *Linea Amarilla,* one of the sectional coordinators of ACVC-RAN tells the story of how this alliance was formed (ACVC-RAN, 2018):

> *"It was a decision taken out from some agrarian gatherings. In the territory, there rose the discussion about the, so to speak, "invasion" of the avowed illicit drug crops. There were displaced peasants coming from other regions, they were coming to the south of Bolivar to grow coca. So, we saw a risky gateway through the San Lucas Mountain Range. We had to set a limit, a borderline, until where it was possible to colonise, and until where not, and we decided, to paint the nowadays called Yellow Line. It is a legitimate frame for us peasants. So, we did it together with all that were in the territory, Community Action Boards, environmental committees, and today it is not a secret – and one must say it – the process was also supported by the guerrillas in the territory such as the FARC and ELN. They supported us by signing up in an assembly in favour of the norm, the process, and guerrillas backed at the time and nowadays continue to support and defend the Yellow Line with us."*

This quote illustrates how guerrilla groups supported conservation of nature areas in Colombia, which even gained the name of 'gunshot conservation' (Murillo-Sandoval et al., 2020). After the signing of the peace agreement and the demobilisation of the FARC in 2016, forest disturbance has increased by 50 percent in contrast to the four year peace negotiation stage from 2013 to 2016 (Murillo-Sandoval et al., 2020). Furthermore, alliances with the FARC and other guerrilla groups are necessary for the implementation of the Integral Rural Reform and other aspects from the peace agreement. They will not implement themselves, but its success depends on the (inter)actions of state and civil society actors. In 2018, at a conference at the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá, a representative of the FARC stated this as follows: *"The peace agreements are a product of the correlation of forces in society; their implementation will be decided by the same correlation of forces. We must organise and mobilise to make these agreements a reality"* (Paraphrased and translated by McKay, 2018).

The second example encompasses the recent Political Declaration by the communities from Northeast Antioqueño, the South of Bolivar, Bajo Cauca, and Magdalena Medio. On the 28th of April, 2020, this declaration was issued in the face of the pandemic outbreak of COVID-19. An important aspect of this declaration was the support to the ELN of their unilateral cease fire for humanitarian reason during the periods of quarantine, and the call to resume dialoguing with the guerrilla group to 'reach a bilateral cease fire that will save more lives' (ACVC-RAN, 2020). This political declaration can thus be considered part of alliances building.

Historical memory

¡Hacer memoria es un acto de resistencia!
Remembering is an act of resistance!

This quote comes from the Booklet for Historical Memory and Peace from ACVC-RAN, which was published to celebrate '22 years of resistance and struggle for life and territory'. In the booklet, the origin and history of the organisation is told, as well as what it means to be a *campesino* or *campesina*. For example, *"To be a peasant is to be a cultivator of the land and a defender of the territory"* (p. 13), which shows how much resistance is part of their everyday life and identity. Historical memory is a concept often used in the contexts of post-war, armed conflict, and dictatorships, as it focuses on processes of truth, justice, and reparation (Correa Delgado, 2018). It can aid in processes of transition, consolidation, and deepening of democracy (Cancimance, 2013). As a result, reliving memories together – that is: remembering – allows for the participation and recognition of previously invisible actors (Correa Delgado, 2018). Remembering and referring to a common past allows oneself, as well as a group, to build feelings of self-worth and greater confidence (Jelin, 2002). It also helps to establish an identity, not only one's individual identity, but also a collective identity (Correa Delgado, 2018). Although many peasants share common experiences due to historical processes of displacement and violence, it is important to remember that it is not one homogeneous group. Peasants' experiences are not completely the same, but depend on the role they assume, and factors such as their gender, ideology, and ethnic group. However, these individual experiences and memories become collective when sharing them in a group (Jelin, 2002). Furthermore, remembering does not only recall traumatic events, but also provides a way to make peace with the past. For example, many murals have been created by members of the organisation. One of these murals portrays Nelcy Cuesta, the female leader who was murdered by paramilitaries in 2002. From this mural, peasants can take notice of the injustices suffered in the past in order to fight against those injustices that occur nowadays. Thereby it provides meaning to the present. The project of creating the peasant memory has been financed by the Fund for the Support of Colombian Civil Society Organisations, which is a multi-donor fund created to strengthen civil society actors. Objectives of the fund include supporting the peace process, empowering victims of the armed conflict, and strengthening democratic governance in relation to peace building (ACVC-RAN, 2020a). ACVC-RAN has thus employed this act of remembering as a form of resistance. In the words of one of the members of ACVC-RAN: *"It is a way of proclaiming to the country or the world that we exist as peasants"* (p. 15).

Brief conclusion of this chapter

Social movements can employ many different strategies in their struggle for social, political, and/or environmental justice. In this chapter, I have strived to provide an overview of some of the strategies employed by ACVC-RAN. To this end, this chapter starts with a discussion on the four counterstrategies to shrinking operational space by Terwindt and Schliemann (2017). The strategies they have highlighted include legal support, advocacy, emergency measures, and public campaigns. ACVC-RAN also uses legal support, for example from the CCALCP. Organisations such as PBI and IAP provide emergency measures by accompanying members of the organisations when necessary. The winning of the National Peace Prize is one of the examples of public campaigns that have aided in the recognition of ACVC-RAN. Moreover, to understand more about how alliances are built on different scales, grassroots scalar politics has been applied to look at the different alliances formed by ACVC-RAN, which include interrelations with other *campesino* movements and guerrilla groups. Furthermore, the concept of historical memory has been used to understand how remembering the injustices of the past has been a form of resistance for ACVC-RAN to fight the injustices they face nowadays.

VIII. Concluding chapter

In the following chapter, I will provide some concluding remarks about this research, including a discussion on the theoretical framework, the findings, and the wider implications. This will be followed by the conclusion. The objective of this research was to explore the shrinking of the operational space of civil society organisations, and the strategies employed by the organisations to counteract these restrictions placed upon them. To this end, I have done research with and on the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN in the context of post-agreement Colombia.

The framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012) proved to be a useful tool to study the shrinking space of civil society organisations. It provided me with a basis for understanding how the operational space of each organisation is restricted differently due to the political context, the specific characteristics of the organisation itself, and the policies and actions placed upon them. However, some parts of the framework can be considered quite simplistic and do not represent the complex network of actors and actions that constitute reality. Firstly, this comes forward in the original framework where civil society is reduced to NGOs only. However, it is important to consider that civil society cannot be reduced to one uniform and homogenous entity, but it is built up from a range of actors (TNI, 2017). To this end, I have chosen to use the more neutral term of 'organisation' or 'civil society organisation' in this research. However, defining civil society remains a complex issue, as the broad concept includes many different actors, such as human rights defenders, NGOs, and grassroots social movements. As a result of these differences, it is important to consider that not every civil society organisation's space is shrinking in the same way. Secondly, the political context is categorised in only four categories based on the state regime and its capacity. This categorisation does not properly reflect the complex political situation of Colombia. To fully understand how the political field of Colombia is influenced by its (contemporary) history and recent peace agreement, an in-depth perspective is needed. A first exploration of these issues was done by using concepts from peace and conflict studies, such as hybrid political orders, gray zones, and fragmented sovereignty, which show how Colombia is neither at war nor peace. Thirdly, the restrictions presented in the framework are all imposed upon the organisation from the outside. However, social movements are not completely homogeneous groups. Restrictions can also occur from within. An example of this was the restrictions placed on female members of ACVC to become active within the Community Action Boards. Fourthly, although the strategies employed by civil society organisations to counteract the restrictions placed upon them are briefly mentioned, it largely overlooks the agency that these organisations have. Limited attention to social movement strategies is given in the framework by Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012). Therefore, four counterstrategies from Terwindt and Schliemann (2017) have been added, complemented with alliance building and memory-making.

However, Lizarazo (2018) studied two organisations for gender emancipation in Colombia and found forms of both conscious and unconscious resistance which cannot be fully comprehended by explanations of violence and people's responses to it. She found that many organisations engage with resistance through everyday survival, rather than by facing oppression directly or by explicitly using political strategies: *"Resistance, like survival and social organization, should not be reduced to a confrontation or response that originates social movements"* (Lizarazo, 2018, p. 193). Therefore, more focus should be laid on the organisation itself. According to Choudry & Kapoor (2011), the dynamics, politics, richness of knowledge within social movements and activist contexts are often overlooked in scholarly literature. Along the same lines, Niesz (2019) states that limited attention has been given to the knowledges produced by social movements. As argued by Casas-Cortés *et al.* (2008), recognising movements as processes through which knowledge is generated, modified and mobilised, will provide important insights into the politics of contemporary movements. This is important as social movements urge us to move towards an ethics of care, protection, and respect for the planet. They do so through grassroots activist actions, organised protest, and strategic communication (Imperial,

2019). In addition to this, Munck (2020) argues that paradigms used to study Latin American social movements have been insufficient and opts for a new paradigm based on Foucault's (1979, p. 95) statement: *"Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."* According to Munck (2020), it is therefore not a question of resistance responding to power, but rather of understanding how power and resistance exist mutually and intertwined, and always in motion.

Looking at the findings, the results show how the operational space of the peasant organisation ACVC-RAN has been and continues to be restricted. This is in line with results from other studies on peasant organisations in Colombia. Lederach (2017) has written about the ways in which the armed conflict and forced displacement in the Alta Montaña have disrupted the life of *campesinos* and *campesinas,* and their 'mutual relations of care' to their fields, their *campo.* As a result of their displacement, their avocado forests died. She writes how this can be considered a form of slow violence, as the deaths of the avocado forests have fundamentally changed social, ecological, and economic life for these *campesinos* and *campesinas*. Furthermore, Bocarejo and Ojeda (2016) argue that peasants have been categorised as settlers who are seeking to expand their cultivation area for the production of illicit crops, thereby being misrepresented as 'eco-threats' and guerrilla groups. This misrepresentation has resulted in their criminalisation, exclusion, and eviction. Likewise, McKay (2018) argues that the new ZIDRES law, which prioritises agro-industrial development, excludes peasant production and increases already existing unequal relations of property, production, and power. These processes of restrictive actions and policies are not only found in Colombia, but throughout the whole of Latin America. Especially processes of stigmatisation are widespread (Rasch, 2017).

Furthermore, Buyse (2018) argues that the shrinking of the operational space of civil society has extended from a series of incidents to a structural global issue. According to him, halfway the 2000s, the trend of pressure on the operational space of civil society began to become noticed. Gershman and Allen (2006) were amongst the first to identify that it was not just a series of isolated accidents, but rather a structural issue of repressive measures against civil society organisations. These measures included constraints on work, co-optation, and even complete closure. However, they stated that it only concerned "*a relatively limited number of countries"* (p. 46). However, a decade later, it has become clear that it applies to a bigger part of the population. In 2016, six out of seven people worldwide were believed to live in a state where civil society was considerably under pressure (Buyse, 2018), which shows the importance of understanding the processes behind the shrinking operational space of civil society. According to Buyse (2018), four longer-term trends explain both the rise of civil society as well as the challenges placed upon them. These include 1) democracy and democracy promotion, 2) development and development cooperation, 3) terrorism, counter-terrorism, and securitisation, and 4) information and media technology.

However, there are also some other sounds emerging. Sogge (2020) argues that in many countries, civic space is not shrinking but expanding. Although it is indisputable that emancipatory actors in various settings are faced with severe adversity, many actors do not face such difficulty, and are at times even enjoying protection and promotion by the governing powers (Sogge, 2020). However, it remains fundamental to look at the different factors that influence the operational space of civil society actors. Whether operational space expands or shrinks is dependent on many factors, including the local context and the characteristics of the organisation itself. This is fundamental, as using a generic idea of civil society organisations tends to flatten the diversity in the struggles faced by grassroots social movements versus larger NGOs (TNI, 2017). It is therefore important to not depoliticise the struggle for social and environmental justice by many civil society actors around the world.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider that social movements, their restriction of operational space, and their resistance strategies are subject to change, and that these changes occur rapidly. It is a

dynamic process. One clear example of this is the current pandemic of COVID-19, which has had a widespread effect on civil society. Different states have reacted in various ways to the crisis by which they are challenged. Some governments have used the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 as an excuse to strengthen their power and consequently, high levels of violence against human rights and environmental defenders have been reported (Ojeda and Pinto García, 2020). Several grassroots and social organisations in Colombia, including ACVC-RAN, have issued a political declaration on the 28th of April 2020, addressing some of the concerns that they are challenged with in the face of the pandemic. These concerns include the deep economic crisis that they were already suffering and which is deepening, the lack of implementation of the peace agreements, and the lack of guarantees for the leaders of social or community organisations, as they continue to be persecuted by threats that are materialised in the presence of paramilitary successor gangs that still operate in the territory (ACVC-RAN, 2020b). Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on this recent development and how this influences the operational space of civil society organisations.

This brings me to the conclusion. Worldwide, the operational space of civil society has been more and more restricted. Human rights and environmental defenders have increasingly been subjected to threats, injuries, and killings. However, next to this direct form of violence, civil society has experienced more hidden forms of violence against them. These restricting policies and actions have minimised the organisations' room to manoeuvre. In this thesis, the shrinking space of peasant organisation ACVC-RAN has been researched within the context of post-agreement Colombia.

In the first place, it is important to consider the political situation of Colombia. Due to its history, including the armed conflict, the political arena of Colombia consists of a complex network of various state and non-state actors. These include the government, guerrilla groups, successor paramilitary groups, and civil society. The presence of the many non-state armed actors shows the hybridity in Colombia's political order and the high level of fragmented sovereignty of the state. Despite being celebrated for its long history of democracy, Colombia continues to be plagued by regional authoritarian actors, also called "parastates", which undermine its democracy. Examples of this include the high level of structural violence against environmental and human rights defenders, as well as land grabs for e.g. palm oil plantations. Contestations about the territories and its resources endure to this day, even after the signing of the peace agreement in 2016. This peace agreement takes the needs of the peasants into accounts, explicitly mentioning and recognising the role of women. However, the government has still to comply with many promises made in the agreement, and paradoxically, conflict against environmental and human rights defenders has increased in the years since the signing of the peace agreement. The end of the armed conflict does not signify that there is peace, if we believe peace to be the absence of violence. Even though the government celebrates the current situation as post-conflict, it is more accurate to follow the wording of Colombian civil society and call the current situation post-agreement.

Furthermore, to understand the specific challenges and restrictions civil society organisations face, it is essential to focus on the organisation itself. Looking at ACVC-RAN, the organisation was established by displaced peasants in 1996. The organisation engages in political, social, and organisation work. Examples of their work ranges from active political participation to human rights workshops, and from juridical defences to projects aimed at increasing food security and agricultural productivity. The organisation belongs to the claim-making and policy-oriented organisations. Emerging from the grassroots – so from the peasant farmers themselves – they advocate for their human right to live a dignified life. Living in areas neglected by the government, their claims include access to land, as well as the provision of basic services by the state such as education and health care. Due the claims that the organisation makes, they are more likely to face violence and restrictions in their operational space.

In the case of ACVC-RAN, these restrictive actions and policies come in many forms. The peasant farmers face direct violence, which includes threats and killings of social leaders. Often, the perpetrators are not being held responsible by the state and even legitimised by processes of stigmatisation and criminalisation. Peasants are perceived of not being able to make their lands productive and are portrayed as guerrillas – or in the very least as supporting the insurgents. This cultural violence legitimises to a certain extent the systematic and structural lack of the government to provide basic services and land titles to the peasantry. Peasants also experience slow violence, a violence that builds up over time, especially due to displacements which contribute to feelings of being lost and uprooted. Furthermore, administrative restrictions and closure of spaces of dialogue, such as the closure of the Peasant Reserve Zone (ZRC-VRC), make it more difficult for the peasant organisation to continue their political and organisational work. Both are forms of structural violence, as these measures aim to marginalise, fragmentise and limit the participation of peasant farmers. It is important to note that these restrictions on ACVC-RAN's operational space do not only come from state authorities, but also from other actors, such as paramilitary groups. Furthermore, organisations are not homogenous and uniform, but consist of different people. Restrictions are therefore not only imposed upon the peasant organisation from outside forces but can also be imposed from within the organisation.

Lastly, attention to the response strategies of the organisation allows for the consideration of the agency of civil society organisations. This is fundamental as the organisation is not simply the receiver of operational space, but also actively engages with responses to counteract the restrictions placed upon them by both state and non-state actors. Several response strategies can be distinguished, which include legal support, advocacy, emergency measures, and public campaigns. ACVC-RAN also uses legal support, accompaniments from international organisation as emergency measure, and has won Colombia's National Peace Prize. Moreover, to understand more about how alliances are built on different scales, grassroots scalar politics has been applied to look at the different alliances formed by ACVC-RAN, which include interrelations with other *campesino* movements and guerrilla groups. Furthermore, the concept of historical memory shows how remembering the injustices of the past has been a form of resistance for ACVC-RAN to fight the injustices of today.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown the importance of looking at the different experiences of civil society regarding the changes they face in their operational space. It is essential to pay attention to the political context, not only by looking whether a state is democratic or authoritarian, weak or fragile, but also at the different actors that are involved with the power struggle and contestations over natural resources. Both state and non-state actors can be involved with this, and the sovereignty and authority does not always solely belong to the state, therefore making it important to look at what actors *are* present in the region. Moreover, it is fundamental to look at the specific type of civil society organisation, as it encompasses many different sorts of actors. Grassroots, claim-making organisations experience more pressures than donor-funded, service-oriented NGOs. In addition to this, restrictive actions and policies that challenges the civil society organisation – both from within and outside of the organisation – can be considered different forms of violence, such as structural, slow, and cultural violence. Considering these different forms of violence helps us understand restrictions and violent actions that move beyond direct and open forms of violence, but rather highlight the systematic marginalisation of different groups within society over time, such as peasant farmers in Latin America. This also shows that violence and conflict often continue in 'post-conflict' situations. However, to fully understand how these restrictions are experienced by the civil society organisations, emphasis should be placed on the agency that organisations have and the social movement strategies they employ to counteract the restrictions placed upon them.

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Annexes

Annex 1 – Overview of the original quotes in Spanish

1. *"Bueno, en el caso de la refrendación del acuerdo de paz, tuvimos una dificultad, porque al final no fue refrendado como queríamos, porque hubo mucha desinformación y utilizaron el enfoque de género como - digamos - satanizar el proceso."*

2. *"Con el proceso que hubo entre la FARC y el gobierno, pues para nosotros los campesinos, pues ese acuerdo ha sido algo fundamental, porque hemos podido tener como - la palabra mismo lo dice - un acuerdo entre el gobierno y las FARC y así favorecer mucho al campesinado. Porque el campesinado siempre se había afectado por siempre ese conflicto que había. Entonces en ese acuerdo, pues el campesinado ha sido muy beneficiado, porque... no se tuvo en cuenta solamente las decisiones de los que estaban al mando, sino también de las necesidades que tiene el campesino y la mujer campesina también."*

3. *"Podemos decir que este acuerdo tiene una particularidad, que para nosotras como mujeres es muy importante, que es el primer acuerdo de Latinoamérica - incluso a nivel mundial - que tiene enfoque de género. […] Es el primer reconocimiento que le hacen a la labor que desempeña la mujer en el territorio, y más porque las campesinas han llevado una lucha doble, porque ya les ha tocado vivir el conflicto, desplazarse, enterrar a sus familiares, y aún así siguen resistiendo en el territorio y eso es algo - digamos - de admirar, y que se reconozca hoy que ese acuerdo lleve el enfoque. [...] La palabrita, pero para nosotros es muy importante porque desde ahí hemos venido haciendo un ejercicio importante de empoderamiento de las compañeras campesinas del territorio."*

4. *"Eso hecho que ha complicado las cosas, habido muchas movilizaciones y lo que se está viendo es que más represión, más asesinato de los líderes sociales, a las lideresas. Entonces eso, pues bien, lo que provoca es... A que volvamos otra vez al miedo, a que volvamos otra vez al tema de desplazamiento. La paz que se pensaba pues, resulta que vamos ese, a retroceder, los volveros a una guerra tapada con el tema de la paz."*

5. *"Pues ese incumplimiento del gobierno también no es nuevo, ¿no? En todo el territorio rural habido un abandono del gobierno. El estado no ha estado presente, porque no ha respondido a las necesidades de las comunidades campesinas."*

6. *"Los campesinos no tienen tierra, la propiedad, la tenencia de la tierra. ¿De cuándo es que vamos a tener el titulo? ¿Cuándo es que van a venir proyectos productivos aquí para nosotros? ¿Cuándo es que vamos a tener un puesto de salud? ¿Y cuándo es que vamos a tener buenos días? ¿A dónde está la tal inversión que iban a dar acuerdos de paz? ¿Dónde está ese mejoramiento que iba a venir? ¿Dónde está esa paz? ¿Dónde está todo lo que deseo?" [da una pequeña risa]*

7. *"Primero está la coordinación general. Que la presiden son los antiguos de la asociación, entonces, son las personas que históricamente han estado aquí en el tema organizativo de ACVC, que constituyeron a la ACVC, y que de un o otra manera también se establece decisiones para desarrollar el plan de trabajo."*

8. *"Nos tocó ir a Puerto Matilde por la violencia, estaban matando la gente. Nos tocó desplazar."*

9. *"En el marco del conflicto, las que quedaron defendiendo el territorio fueron las mujeres, porque la incluyó. Cuando hubo el ojo del conflicto, la mayoría que se desplazaban eran los hombres. Porque los hombres eran más perseguidos, porqué lo involucraban más en la lucha guerrillera digamos. Y las mujeres eran las que quedaban en los territorios defendiéndola, defiendo el territorio, cultivando."*

10. *"Entonces hay una relación muy cercana de la mujer con la tierra. Porque son las cuidadoras de la tierra. Porque son las cuidadoras de las semillas. Y que son las que de una u otra manera han garantizado la soberanía alimentaria en el territorio."*

11. *"Porque si algún campesino ha logrado hoy obtener un título, siempre el título se lo dan al hombre, si. No hay un reconocimiento de la labor que desarrolla las mujeres en su casa, en su territorio. Y qué eso pues obstaculiza aún más las decisiones que las mujeres también deberían de tomar dentro de su familia. No hay una autonomía - digamos - concreta del trabajo que desarrolla la mujer."*

12. *"Entonces tenemos una ley que prohíbe alguna actividad económica dentro del territorio, pero que el campesinado históricamente ha estado ahí, produciendo, cultivando, trabajando, desarrollando sus actividades comunitarias. ¿Entonces cuál es el interés del gobierno como tal, para no entregarle las tierras al campesinado? Es porque obviamente Colombia es rico en el oro, en muchos recursos naturales y qué pasa... Estos títulos se les entregan a las grandes empresas. Para que entren a explotar y acabar con todo lo que hay dentro del territorio."*

13. *"Mira nosotros en Colombia, tenemos una cantidad de leyes para las mujeres, pero que pasa: que aún en el papel no se desarrollan, no se materializan. Y eso es una dificultad, porque usted le pregunta un funcionario y nos dice: Sí claro, hay un reconocimiento en la ley tal, se reconoce a la mujer rural. Pero entonces vayan a mirar ustedes y esa ley la materializan en los territorios o si esa ley realmente... Si esa ley recoge las necesidades realmente de las mujeres. Y muchas veces eso no es el caso."*

14. *"Entonces encontramos esa serie de obstáculos, que no ha permitido que los niveles realmente desarrollan en el campo, desarrolla en su familia, desarrollo en su huerta. Y además por los miles de tareas que las mujeres asumen, pero las mujeres asumen las tareas del hogar, pero también asumen roles de cuidado, pero también son enfermeras, pero también son profesoras, porque son las que educan a sus hijos. Son las madres que cuidan a todo el mundo desde sus maridos no están asistiendo. Entonces es una tarea ardua que las mujeres desarrollan, pero que hoy en la actualidad no se reconoce."*

15. *"Porque los hombres, como lo dijo la compañera, cuando vienen estos eventos, no lo dejan participar su compañera. [...] Eso pasa mucho en la región. El machismo todavía se encuentra bastante impregnado."*

16. *"Dificulta mucho. El problema grande es que no hemos podido tener acceso a la participación y que de ahí se desprenden muchas cosas. Entonces, viene la violencia hacia las mujeres. Viene entonces los feminicidios. Toda esa serie de dificultades de violencia que encontramos en el territorio. Que lo que buscamos otro es tratar de mitigar estas situaciones."*

17. *"Uno de los obstáculos que también vemos en nuestro sistema son los medios de comunicación, porque ellos se encargan todo el tiempo de desinformar."*

Annex 2 – Recommendations for female peasants within the context of quarantine