Master's Thesis in Geographies of Global Change

Department of Geography, University of Zurich

GEO 620

Precarious lives at the frontier

The Production of Victimhoods in María La Baja, Colombia

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Personal declaration:

I hereby declare that the submitted thesis is the result of my own, independent work.

All external sources are explicitly acknowledged in the thesis.

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Summary

This master's thesis analyzes the production of victimhoods in María La Baja, Colombia. The research focuses on the interactions between legal and economic policies and their effects on the rural population. This report is embedded in a broader discussion on the repercussions of the Colombian protracted crisis on rural populations. I show that not only physical violence increases the vulnerability of the *campesinos,* but that also forms of structural violence contribute to the production of victimhoods. I employ Judith Butler's notion of *precarity* to conceptualize these dynamics and focus especially on the mechanisms of (in-)visibilization that emanate from economic and legal policies and conduce to a differential allocation of vulnerability. In order to investigate these dynamics, I conducted five weeks of exploratory and intermittent field research in a village in the municipality of María La Baja in the hinterlands of the Caribbean coast in Colombia. I combined different types of interviews and participatory observation to generate empirical data. A reiterative process of data analysis and collection guided the research.

The internal armed conflict had detrimental impacts on the *campesinos* in the field study site, but their condition of *precarity* starts before the incursion of armed actors in their village. In the 1960s, the *campesinos* were displaced due to the construction of an irrigation dam that took place in the context of agrarian reform. In this process, they lost their land and had to re-establish their livelihood in new conditions. The resettlement process was undertaken by a government institution and is a telling example of the dynamics of structural violence that this master's thesis analyzes. With the incursion of the different armed groups into the village (leftist guerrillas and counterinsurgent paramilitaries), the *campesinos* were exposed to changing patterns of public authority. In the aftermath of a massacre, the majority of the *campesinos* left the village and sought refuge elsewhere. This exposed them to another type of victimhood, because they were converted into internally displaced persons and stigmatized.

In the months after the forced displacement, some of the *campesinos* decided to return to their village to re-establish their livelihoods. However, the increasing presence of armed actors made their life dangerous. The armed actors had established a type of public authority that was based on coercion, physical violence, and social control. It is in this period that the first oil palm plantations are being implemented in the region. Many *campesinos* sold their land to the company and yet another type of victimhood emerged. They lost their land access and became thereby dependent on labor opportunities in the oil palm plantations. This did not only alter their everyday lives, but also their collective *campesino* identity. This indicates that the category of 'victim' is not only linked to physical, but also to structural violence.

Content

1. Introduction

2016 was a historical year for Colombia. After more than fifty years of armed conflict between the government and the leftist FARC-EP guerrilla, the parties signed a Peace Agreement on September 26 (Redacción el Tiempo 2016). This day, thousands celebrated in the streets throughout the country. It seemed like an end to the armed conflict was finally near at reach. On October 2, the government called the Colombians to the ballots to vote on the Peace Agreement. And then the surprise: the Peace Agreement got rejected with 50.24 per cent (semana.com 2016). The media coverage on the rejection of the Peace Agreement indicates that the result was completely unexpected. The atmosphere changed from rejoices to perplexity (Sulbarán Lovera 2016). The government and the FARC-EP resumed their negotiations and a few weeks later they presented an adapted Peace Agreement to the parliament, it was accepted, and the armed conflict with the FARC-EP was officially over (Lafuente 2016).

The week after the plebiscite I traveled to Pueblo Nuevo[1]. This is a small village in Northern Colombia and the place where I conducted field research in 2016. I was curious about how the *campesinos* would react to the results of the plebiscite and how they would explain it to me. Pueblo Nuevo is situated in the municipality of María La Baja in the hinterlands of the Caribbean coast. The surface of María La Baja is 547 km² (Osorio Bonacera 2015, 261) and the main economic activity in the municipality is agriculture. About half of the cultivated area is covered in oil palms, followed by 25 per cent corn and 15 per cent rice (Alcaldía municipal María la Baja n.a., 34). The municipality also has many waterways, different swamp areas, and two big irrigation dams (Osorio Bonacera 2015, 261–62). The village is located at the shores of one of those dams that were built in the late 1960s as part of an agrarian reform program. The *campesinos* were resettled from another village to Pueblo Nuevo in the course of the dam construction. After the resettlement, the *campesinos* accessed land that was in proximity to the village and some received a land title. In the 1980s, the first guerrilla groups arrived in the area and in the late 1990s and early 2000s Pueblo Nuevo was severely affected by the internal armed conflict. All the belligerent parties – the FARC-EP and other guerrilla groups, the counterinsurgent paramilitary groups, and the formal armed forces – were present and contested over public authority. Many locals were killed. They lived in a constant situation of fear and despair. Since 2005, the situation is calmer in the village.

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[1] All the names, including localities, have been anonymized.

Figure 1: Geographical location of María La Baja. Source: wikipedia.org

How do people that were directly affected by the armed conflict react do the rejection of the Peace Agreement between the government and the FARC-EP? Macnelly, an elderly woman who recently returned from Venezuela, tells me that she was very surprised by the outcomes of the plebiscite. In her interpretation, the results are a symbol for the deep societal division that exists in the country. She says that the regions that were most

affected by the conflict with the FARC-EP voted in favor of the Peace Agreements, while the regions where the paramilitaries were strong voted against it (Informal talk with Macnelly, 5 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo) and Joaquín says: "We the *campesinos* suffer quite a lot" (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). This indicates that the conflict has had profound effects on the social and political structure of Colombia and that the *campesinos,* the ones living in the countryside and producing foodstuff, have been differentially exposed to the perpetrated violence. It is in this context that I situate the research of this master's thesis.

1.1. Academic debate on the Colombian conflict

Much has been written about the internal armed conflict in Colombia. The scholars argue that the conflict is essentially about the renegotiation of public authority and land control patterns (Grajales 2011, 783) and that its origins lie in the unequal distribution of the access and control of natural resources in general, and land in particular. This is related to the way agricultural frontiers have been extended. The process is based on an initial phase of colonization through migrants and the subsequent accumulation of the cleared land through rural entrepreneurs. The *campesinos* that lived on the accumulated land were either incorporated into the large-scale landholdings as wage laborers, or they migrated to another region where they repeated the colonization process. In this process, the influential rural elite has been concentrating large amounts of land to the detriment of small-scale *campesinos* (LeGrand 1989, 2003).

In the 1950s and 1960s, several guerrilla groups emerged in Colombia (Rivas Otero 2016, 245). Based on different socialist ideologies, the guerrillas aimed at replacing 'the state' and distribute the land more equally (Rivas Otero 2016, 245). They kidnapped and coerced rural elites who eventually organized themselves in so-called self-defense groups in order to fight the insurgency (Grajales 2011, 771). These self-defense groups were the precursors of the paramilitary units who gradually coopted the formal sphere and established public authority in many parts of Colombia (Grajales 2011, 773–74). The paramilitary units, and to a lesser extent also the guerrillas, forcefully displaced millions from their homes, accumulated their plots, and established their own business ventures on the land (Meacham 2014, 9). The legitimacy of the paramilitaries was constructed based on the counterinsurgency ideology they shared with the formal sphere (Avilés 2006, 387). This led to the *de facto* criminalization of rural dwellers in regions where the guerrillas were present because the paramilitaries alleged that the *campesinos* were collaborators of the insurgency (Insuasty Rodríguez, Valencia Grajales, and Restrepo Marín 2016, 19).

Accounts on the paramilitary phenomenon indicate that the self-defense units took advantage of legal policies in order to implement their respective economic projects and thereby legalize land tenure (Grajales 2011, 2013). In many cases, the scholars use the implementation of oil palm plantations in order to illustrate the territorial and social effects of this collaboration (Ojeda et al. 2015). The field study from Pueblo Nuevo shows, however, that not only the cooptation of the formal sphere through the paramilitary units has had an impact on the *campesinos,* but also legal mechanisms that were put in place

before the consolidation of the paramilitary units in the 1980s. It is this correlation between structural violence – exemplified through legal frameworks – and the marginalization of the *campesinos* and their way of life that I am interested in.

The research question this master's thesis aims to answer is the following:

How are victimhoods produced in rural Colombia and to what extent do formal policies participate in this process?

The aim of this master's thesis is to move beyond the definition of 'victim' as it is stipulated in the widely cited Law on Victims and Land Restitution of 2011 by analyzing the mechanisms that produce victims without using physical force. Additionally, I analyze the discourses that make these provisions socially acceptable and, thus, legitimate. The research project suggests that the ability to 'produce' victimhoods is intrinsically linked to the establishment of a socially accepted frame that excludes the ones that are being made victims. The thesis therefore also takes into account the patterns of public authority that are not necessarily 'a part of' the formal sphere.

In order to answer the research question, I combine two conceptual lenses. The first approach is Judith Butler's notion of *precarity* (Butler 2004). Precarity is the politically induced situation of increased vulnerability of a specific group. I use this concept to analyze the ways in which structural violence is being produced and how it contributes to the production of victimhoods. I therefore define victimhood as the result of precarity allocation. I will focus especially on the dynamics of (in-)visibilization and (de-)humanization of these groups of people (Butler 2004, 2009). It is in this context where the second concept comes in: the frontier. The frontier is used to analyze the dynamics that emerge when two apparently exclusionary systems – in the case of this master's thesis, systems of agricultural production – compete over a given space. The concept stipulates that the emergence of the frontier is always accompanied by a discourse that legitimizes one type of system to the detriment of the other (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 10). In the consulted literature, this discourse includes notions such as 'development', 'civilization', and 'progress' (Eilenberg 2014). I use the frontier notion both as a background to the analysis of the agrarian dynamics in Colombia and as a discourse that contributes to the differential allocation of vulnerabilities and, thus, the production of victimhoods. This research contributes therefore to the discussion about the exposure of *campesinos* to different types of violence. This discussion becomes ever more important in a context where the majority of the recognized participants of the internal armed conflict have been demobilized.

1.2.   Structure

The next chapter introduces the methods that I used during in order to collect empirical data in Pueblo Nuevo. Chapter 3 presents the conceptual frameworks through which I analyze the empirical data from Pueblo Nuevo. The Chapter starts with *precarity* and explains then the features of the *frontier* concept. Chapter 4 and 5 analyze the dynamics in the Colombian countryside and their influence on the *campesinos* in Pueblo Nuevo. The chapters follow a historical approach. Chapter 4 narrates the dynamics that happened before the paramilitary incursion in Pueblo Nuevo, while Chapter 5 focuses on the developments during and after the presence of paramilitary units in the village. This division is based on the empirical data: the *campesinos* make a stark distinction between these two periods. I will conclude this report with Chapter 6 where the research question will be answered.

2. Methodology

This master's thesis analyzes the production of victimhood practices in Pueblo Nuevo, a village in the municipality of María La Baja in the Montes de María region in Colombia. In order to study these dynamics, I conducted five weeks of exploratory and intermittent field research in the Montes de María region and spent approximately three weeks with the community in Pueblo Nuevo. The fieldwork took place between August and November 2016. Before travelling to Colombia, I established contact with the *Observatorio de Territorios Étnicos y Campesinos*[2] or OTEC, a research institute of Javeriana University in Bogotá. This was due to the exploratory nature of the research, the relatively short time available, and security concerns. When I told OTEC about my interest in social and territorial dynamics at the Colombian oil palm frontier, they advised me to conduct my research in the municipality of María La Baja where I would be able to study the processes I was curious about. Furthermore, the Observatory had a long working experience in María La Baja and collaborated with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that would provide me access to the field study site. I therefore decided to collaborate with the non-governmental organization *Corporación Desarrollo Solidario* or CDS. In order to receive the credentials from Javeriana University and thus increase the legitimacy and security of my field study, I enrolled at Javeriana University as a guest researcher. I also participated in various conferences and workshops held at said institution.

Once in Pueblo Nuevo, I initially focused on the dynamics of land access and exclusion at the oil palm frontier. This was related to my observations during the first travel to the field. On the way to the village, I spotted different extensions of oil palm plantations, from several hundreds of hectares to a couple of palms virtually in the backyard of the dwellings, while there were also fields where other crops were grown (Field diary, 16 September 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). So I wondered how this coexistence between apparently opposing systems of agricultural production was possible and how the access to the respective plots

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[2] Observatory of Ethnic and *Campesino* Territories.

was negotiated. I started to get in contact with the local *campesinos* and asked them about how they access their land and to what extent the arrival of the oil palms had altered these dynamics. It was in this context that I realized that the oil palms are only the latest development of inclusion and exclusion in Pueblo Nuevo, and that these processes have become an integral part of the *campesino* identity. This is why I started to investigate the meanings of *being a campesino* and their interrelatedness to dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that emanate through differential access to land, the renegotiation of the collective *campesino* identity, and legal policies on rural development and land reforms.

2.1. Finding and accessing the field

The access to the field study site happened in two steps. First, I participated in workshops held at the local office of CDS in the municipality of María La Baja. I spent several days at this office and received thereby background knowledge on the overall dynamics in the municipality and more specifically the ways in which CDS and other NGOs support the *campesinos* in re-establishing their livelihoods after decades of armed conflict and the implementation of oil palm plantations. One day, the two NGO employees that stayed with me at the office took me to Pueblo Nuevo where they had to deliver tools for a house garden project. They presented me to Leidy, a leader from a local *campesino* organization, and other inhabitants of the village and we told them about my research interests. After this short trip, I went back to Bogotá to reflect on the first impressions I had gathered both at the office of CDS and in Pueblo Nuevo. A week later, I went back to the office in María La Baja and spent another week there, participating in workshops and doing background research. It was at one of these workshops that I met Yeison, another *campesino* leader from Pueblo Nuevo, and I asked him if it was possible to conduct a field study in his village. He agreed and told me that I could stay at his place and he would show me around and introduce me to the *campesinos.* On my next trip to María La Baja, I traveled for the first time on my own to Pueblo Nuevo and started to conduct field research in the village. Shortly after my arrival in Pueblo Nuevo, there was a workshop in La Guayaba, a small town in proximity to Pueblo Nuevo, where social leaders from different villages of the area participated. They invited me to present my research interests and myself.

It was in this context that the questions about my position towards the field and the way its inhabitants perceive me caught my attention. I told the *campesinos* that I was interested in doing a field research about land access in the context of the oil palm expansion. They told me that they found the topic very interesting and relevant for Pueblo Nuevo and surrounding villages, but that they would only talk to me if I could guarantee them that they would not suffer any negative consequences for their involvement in the research. After clarifying the measures of confidentiality[3], Leidy told the *campesinos* that she had already met me at the CDS office and that I was therefore someone they could trust. This means that the access to the field was only possible due to previously established contacts

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[3] I anonymized the names of my respondents and the villages I conducted interviews, and chose names according to regional customs. In order to enable the reader to contextualize my research, I maintained the name of the municipality (María La Baja). Furthermore, I did not anonymize the name of the village where I conducted the interview with the mayor because it is not in immediate proximity to Pueblo Nuevo.

with CDS and OTEC, another point of reference for the *campesinos*. At the same time, however, it also indicates that since the very beginning the *campesinos* in Pueblo Nuevo and the surrounding villages associated me with CDS and their ideology. I was therefore not an 'independent' researcher, but embedded in a broader picture of social activism. The issues of identity renegotiation and the construction of the category of 'victims' are highly politicized in Pueblo Nuevo, especially when they are related to the implementation of oil palms. Due to the way I accessed the field, it is therefore possible that my research is biased (Field notes presentation of research project, 6 October 2016).

2.2.   Data collection

The sampling of my respondents is intrinsically linked to this embeddedness in the structures of social activism. Due to the exploratory nature of my research and my lack of knowledge of the site-specific context, Leidy accompanied me or selected respondents for most of my interviews. Leidy is a social leader of the community in Pueblo Nuevo and is involved in manifold ways in the activities and workshops the NGOs provide to the villagers. This means that she has a broad knowledge about the issues I explore in this master's thesis, but that her position to them is also quite clear. She is opposed to oil palm plantations and convinced that the people in Pueblo Nuevo have the right to get integral reparation for the damages they suffered during the armed conflict. The interviewees she selected shared mostly her political view, hence adding another bias to the collected data. I aimed to balance these biases by re-defining the criteria for sampling selection from a snowball (Valentine 1997, 116–17) to a more "purposeful" (Patton 1990) method. I thereby chose my respondents based on their land access patterns and occupation (*campesinos,* wage laborers, palm grower). Furthermore, I was able to conduct an interview with the mayor of María La Baja in order to analyze his view on the raised issues. It soon became clear that the mayor is a declared supporter agribusiness, and the calendar from the palm oil company on his desk was quite a telling example thereof. In totality, I used eight interviews as the empirical basis for this master's thesis and triangulated them with observations I made throughout my stay in Pueblo Nuevo, and relevant literature (see references).

The interviews were either semi-structured or un-structured. I chose the method according to my research interest and the context in which I talked to the persons (Brüsemeister 2008, 105; Gläser and Laudel 2009, 42). The un-structured interviews were often held in the backyard of the house where I was staying while the *campesinas* washed their clothes or cooked, or neighbors came for a visit. In these contexts, we talked about the everyday lives of the *campesinos,* cultural and gastronomical differences between Colombia and Switzerland, and recent development in sports or politics. The semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, were directly concerned with answering my research questions. I developed an interview guide that I adapted on a regular basis in order to generate more specific data. I conducted most of the semi-structured conversations in the backyards or in the streets of Pueblo Nuevo. It was common to be interrupted or that other people joined in the conversation, and the boundaries between interviews and group

discussions were regularly transgressed. Throughout this thesis, I differentiate between "Interview" and "Informal talk". This differentiation is based on my decision to only record interviews with key informants, such as Gladis or de mayor. Recording the talks gave them a more 'official' atmosphere and this is why I refer to them as Interviews in this text, whereas informal talks were not recorded but still semi-structured.

2.3. Data analysis

I used a reiterative process the framework of *Grounded Theory* (Strauss and Corbin 1996) suggests and divided the data analysis in three steps. The first step of data analysis consisted in re-reading and adding details to the notes I took during the informal talks (Döring and Bortz 2016, 340), or in listening to or transcribing the recordings of the interviews. This provided me with an overview of the collected data while at the same time pointing out issues that I wanted to explore further or where information was contradictory. Transcribing the recorded interviews was at times quite challenging due to language issues. In case I did not understand what the interviewee said, I put a bracket to indicate the missing parts. The second step of data analysis was the classification of the gathered information through a coding system that I developed while analyzing the data. I used MAXQDA 12 as software for this part. Gradually, I consolidated the different codes into more complex categories that showed the interrelations between the narrations of the different interviewees. I undertook an initial coding while I was in Colombia in order to adapt interview questions according to the discovered specificities, and repeated this step several times in order to gain a multifaceted understanding of the collected data (cf. Saldaña 2009).

3. The precarious frontier

The topic of this master's thesis is the production of victimhoods in Pueblo Nuevo in the Colombian Caribbean region. These victimhoods are created through a combination of discourses, imaginaries, legal policies, and specific (violent) actions that emanate both from the local *campesino* community and 'external' agents such as state institutions, (il-)legal armed actors, or oil palm companies. I use the notion of *victimizing practices* to conceptualize the ways in which these factors contribute to the increase in vulnerability of the local population. The analyzed victimizing practices are therefore not restricted to physical violence, but also include structural violence (Galtung 1969). The different types of violence that lead to the victimization of persons or groups – victimization being the result of victimizing practices (Janoff-Bulman and Hanson Frieze 1983) – are not to be interpreted as independent from each other, but rather as mutually reinforcing. I will use two conceptual lenses that are helpful to understand the victimizing practices in Pueblo Nuevo.

The first approach is Judith Butler's notion of precarity that conceptualizes the dissimilar distribution of vulnerability (Butler 2004, 2009a). In my understanding, the analyzed victimizing practices in María La Baja increase the precarity of some, while decreasing it for others. In this master's thesis, I will analyze how these victimizing practices have been emerging and to what extent they contribute to the construction and renegotiation of rural identities and victimhoods. It is in this context that I will use Butler's reflections on dehumanization and recognition that form an integral part of the "differential allocation of vulnerability" (Murphy 2012, 82; cited in Drichel 2013, 20) and, thus, precarity. The second analytical lens I will use is the frontier. This concept describes the sociological and territorial dynamics that emerge when different systems of agricultural production compete over a given space. The frontier is always accompanied by a specific set of discourses that enables the spatial expansion of a given system of agricultural production to the detriment of another, and this ideological framework has an impact on the identities of the involved actors and their social and economic practices Eilenberg 2014; Korf and Raeymaekers 2013; Tsing 2005). I use therefore the frontier notion to understand this ideological framework that creates a situation where certain types of agricultural activities are being made invisible in order to facilitate the implementation of other forms of agricultural production. In my interpretation, the frontier ideology is a means through which the differential allocation of precarity is being legitimized.

This chapter consists in a description of the conceptual framework that I use to analyze victimizing practices in Pueblo Nuevo. I will first introduce Judith Butler's work on precarity. The section starts with Butler's reflections on the inherently social and vulnerable nature of human existence (*precariousness*). I will then reflect on how political systems allocate this precariousness differently and thereby reveal the dissimilar status of populations and their vulnerabilities within the political systems in question (*precarity*). In the following step, I will exemplify these general reflections with Judith Butler's

interpretations of public mourning that took place in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States and the subsequent war in Afghanistan. It will become clear that precarity is not only about the differential allocation of grief, but also about how lives are or are not recognized in public discourses. This differential recognition dehumanizes some populations while affirming the humanness of others and indicates therefore the impacts of structural violence on the differential allocation of precarity.

3.1. Precarity

The life of every human being "is always in some sense in the hands of the other" (Butler 2009a, 14). The sustenance of our life depends on the social networks we are embedded in. We are dependent on other people, while other people are dependent on us (*ibid*). Life can be taken away from us or we can get injured through the acts of others, and at the same time we can inflict pain on the others as well (Butler 2009a, 26). The dependence on the acts of others entails a responsibility toward other human beings. The responsibility lies in our decisions how we deal with this power that is inherent to our existence and ties us to other humans, but also makes us vulnerable to the acts of others (Butler 2004, 16). Life can therefore only be understood in relation to other human beings and their agencies, and this makes life inherently conditioned (Butler 2004, 11). Butler calls this condition of helplessness and interdependency that is fundamental to all human beings *precariousness* (Butler 2009a, 14).

Precariousness is simultaneously a characteristic of the individual agent *and* the social networks he or she is embedded in. This is related to her statement that "[t]he body has its invariably public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine" (Butler 2004, 26). The same applies for our life that is, by definition, precarious. This puts into question our autonomy (*ibid*). The "shared condition of precariousness" does, however, not lead "to reciprocal recognition, but to a specific exploitation of targeted populations" (Butler 2009a, 31). This entails that even though all humans live a precarious life, the consequences of this precariousness are not felt the same way across society: a broad set of "forms of domination" (ibid) makes the lives of some more precarious than the life of others. Butler conceptualized this "politically induced condition" (Butler 2009b, II) of a "differential allocation of precariousness" (Butler 2009a, 22) with the notion of *precarity.* Precarity emanates from different scales: from "the microspaces of everyday life" (Ettlinger 2007, 320) to state institutions (Butler 2009b, II) and the globalized neoliberal economy (Neilson 2015).

In the consulted literature, Butler focuses especially on state policies and discourses and their repercussions on the populations they target. State institutions are in principle created to sustain and secure the lives of the people that form part of them (Butler 2009a, II). In Butler's understanding, however, they contain forms of power that fragment the population into groups with different degrees of precarity. These forms of power range from the use of physical force to legal policies and more implicit discrimination that put these groups at increased risks (Butler 2009b, II). Every political decision that aims "to manage populations involves a tactical distribution of precarity, more often than not

articulated through an unequal distribution of precarity, one that depends on dominant norms regarding whose life is […] worth protecting" (Butler 2012, 148). Contrary to precariousness, precarity is therefore induced from the 'outside'. It is inherent to political systems and categorizes the population of these systems into groups whose lives are deemed to be more or less worthy of protection and sustainment. Hence, precarity is the result of a wide array of physical and structural violences and influences our everyday lives (Butler 2009b, II). In order to function, the mechanisms that increase precarity need to be rationalized (Butler 2009a, 31). It is therefore necessary to analyze the discourses that justify the increase of precarity for some, while decreasing it for others. Butler uses the example of media coverage of the 9/11 terror attacks from 2001 and the subsequent war in Afghanistan to illustrate this rationalization process.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks, public mourning for the victims took place in the United States and all around the world. Butler observes, however, that in the United States not all victims of the attacks were mourned in the same way, or mourned at all: while the 'stereotypical' US-American victim[4] was mourned publicly through obituaries in newspapers and public ceremonies (Butler 2004, 32), other victims such as 'illegal' immigrants or non-US citizens did not get this public attention (Butler 2009a, 38). Butler argues that this (in)visibilization in the "sphere of [public] appearance" (Butler 2004, XX) bears a meaning on the status of the people it concerns. It establishes a "differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not" (Butler 2004, xiv). Through the public act of grieving, the person that is being lamented is recognized as this, a person, and his or her life counts as a life that is livable and, by extension, his or her death as a death that is grievable (Butler 2004, 32). The victims that were not mourned publicly do not enjoy the same status. Their "life cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as life at all" (Butler 2009a, 38). Public discourses therefore contribute to the "dehumanization" (Butler 2004, 34) of some groups, and this rationalizes their increased exposure to precarity (Butler 2009a, 29). It follows that for life to become livable and death to become grievable, they need to be recognized (Butler 2004, 35), and the same applies for efforts to decrease the precarity of persons or groups (Butler 2009a, 25).

The "differential allocation of precariousness and grievability" (Butler 2009a, 22) is especially salient in a context of war. The state uses physical force to decrease its own precariousness and, by consequence, increases the precarity of the population it attacks. The US justified the war on Afghanistan through framing the Afghani people – and Muslims more broadly (Butler 2004, 12) – as a possible "breeding ground" (Butler 2004, 11) of terrorism. Their lives were therefore not recognized as lives, but as a danger to the integrity of the US-American system of liberal democracy (Butler 2009a, 42) and the war against Afghanistan "as a justified act of self-defense" (Butler 2004, 4) of the United States against (the threat of) terrorism. In so doing, the US "asserts its own righteous

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[4] In Butler's interpretation, the obituary serves to depict the lives of the dead in a way that conforms to the stereotypical understanding of Americanness – "usually married, […] heterosexual, happy, monogamous" (Butler 2004, 32) – and, thus, as an "act of nation-building" (Butler 2004, 34).

destructiveness" because "it seeks to immunize itself against the thought of its own precariousness [...] [and] destructibility" (Butler 2009a, 48). These frames ('terrorists', 'Muslims', and 'dangerous' for Afghanistan; 'vulnerable', 'democratic', and 'free' for the United States) divided the populations explicitly "into those who are grievable and those who are not" (Butler 2009a, 38). It follows that the war in Afghanistan was in Butler's terms a way for the US government to assert the superiority of their political system, beliefs, and customs. This rationalized the military operations in Afghanistan. The non-US-American victims of the war in Afghanistan were not mourned publicly in the United States. There were no obituaries in the newspapers and they did not receive faces or live stories in the media. This took away the 'life' of the Afghani, thus invisibilizng them (Butler 2004). The US discourses of self-defense vindicated the use of violence against the Afghani civil population, precisely because their lives were not recognized as livable, and their deaths not as grievable (Butler 2004, 6).

Precarity is therefore intrinsically linked to the denial of recognition because it de-humanizes the lives of those upon whom an increased precarity is inflicted. This negates their lives, makes them unreal, and thus "neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral" (Butler 2004, 33–34). This means that "discourse itself effects violence by omission" (Butler 2004, 34). Violence is therefore not restricted to the use of physical force. Violence does not necessarily need a perpetrator that can be identified and persecuted. There is also a type of violence that "is built into the [political] structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung 1969, 171). This *structural violence* is at play when precarity is being deliberately allocated to some populations while taking it away from others. It follows that in order to decrease precarity, the vulnerability of the affected people needs to be recognized in the public sphere and the political system because "[v]ulnerability takes on another meaning at the moment it is recognized, and recognition wields the power to reconstitute vulnerability" (Butler 2004, 43). Hence, vulnerability and the recognition thereof are embedded in complex structures of power (Butler 2004, 44).

The recognition of vulnerability – be it from centralized structures of power such as the state and its institutions, or from the very people that are vulnerable – can contribute to the emergence of "new forms of sociability" (McRobbie 2006, 78) that are based on the shared precarity of a given group (Butler 2004, 19). Butler exemplifies this with the differential media coverage in the form of obituaries in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks. In her interpretation, the obituaries were used to create new forms of exclusionary sociability between the ones whose death was publicly recognized, and the ones whose death was not (Butler 2004, 32 et seqq.). In my case study, I will illustrate these dynamics through the analysis of specific legal frameworks such as Agrarian Reforms and the Victims Law that recognize the claims of some groups over land while denying it to others. This suggests that the structural power of formal state institutions is being used in order to rationalize the increase of precarity of some, while decreasing it for others.

By way of conclusion, this section has introduced two conceptual approaches that are useful for the analysis of the victimizing practices in María La Baja. The notion of precarity

indicates that even though life is by definition precarious, there are specific structural and discursive mechanisms that distribute this precariousness unequally among populations. This leads to a differential exposure to violence and suffering. It also shows that this dissimilar allocation of precarity is intrinsically linked to discourses that de-humanize and thus invisibilize the people upon whom this increased precarity is being inflicted. At the same time, it specifies that precarity can be the basis for the construction of collective identities such as the category of publicly mourned victims of the 9/11 terror attacks. The second observation that interests me here is the way political institutions fail to recognize the vulnerability of the ones that lead a more precarious life than others. It is only through mechanisms of recognition that precarious lives become 'livable' and worthy of protection and sustainment. The case study will show that in the Colombian context, legal frameworks are important mechanisms of recognition for the precarity of rural populations in general, and victims of the armed conflict in particular. The data indicates, however, that recognition can create new forms of vulnerability that increase precarity and contribute to new patterns of de-humanization.

The next section will apply the notion of precarity to rural contexts. I will use the frontier concept to show how precarity is being allocated in a situation where different forms of agricultural production compete over the same space. I will put the focus on the discourses that enable the implementation of one system of agricultural production to the detriment of another. The section starts with two classical accounts on the frontier: on the one hand Frederick Jackson Turner's conceptualization of the American frontier and its interactions with emerging state institutions, and on the other hand Igor Kopytoff's work on the African frontier that focuses on local frontiers that are situated between, but not isolated from, established societies. After these classical interpretations of the frontier concept, the chapter will concentrate on more recent accounts on the topic. It will show the intrinsic relationships between territorial practices and a specific ideological framework that enables them and, finally, relate the frontier concept with Judith Butler's reflections on precarity.

3.2.   The frontier

"Colombia, like Brazil, is a country of agricultural frontiers", Catherine LeGrand (1989, 6) wrote in her seminal paper on Colonization and Violence in Colombia. In her historical approach to social conflicts in rural Colombia, LeGrand establishes a link between the spatial expansion of agricultural activities and the perpetuation of violence, and uses the frontier notion to conceptualize these dynamics. She takes into account especially the economic dimension of the frontier, i.e. what happens if different systems of agricultural production overlap in a given space and how this contributes to conflicts in rural Colombia. In more recent accounts on the frontier, however, the meaning of the notion has been extended to also include an ideological dimension. Scholars argue that in order for the frontier to emerge, there needs to be a specific set of discourses that 'opens up' the land for the intrusion of new settlers, economic projects, or other 'civilizing' measures (Eilenberg 2014). These discourses are interesting for the case study in María La Baja because they

have a decisive impact on the construction and reconfiguration of rural identities and contribute significantly to the collective *campesino* identity. The aim of this chapter is therefore to give an overview of the main features of the frontier concept as it has been discussed in the literature.

3.2.1. From Turner to Kopytoff

The notion of the frontier was first introduced by Frederick Jackson Turner in the late 19th century (Kopytoff 1987, 3) to conceptualize the way in which US-American political institutions extended their spatial reach. In his reading, the extension of the institutions' scope happened on a spatial line – the frontier. During the colonization of the Western regions of the United States, representatives of different professions expanded the frontier in "successive waves across the continent" (*ibid,* 12) and brought development, civil society, and political institutions to the regions where they settled. The frontier is in Turner's understanding therefore "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (*ibid,* 3). The frontiersmen were attracted to these regions because of their "demand for land and the love of wilderness freedom" (*ibid,* 22). In each of these waves, the respective frontiersmen brought sets of customs with them. The combination thereof made up the specific configurations of the frontier area, influenced the character of the frontiersmen and shaped the political institutions (*ibid,* 38). Hence, the institutions had to "adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people" (*ibid,* 2) and this continuous adaptation process defined the character of these institutions. Due to this adaptation process and the specific characteristics of the frontiersmen, the US-American nation-building project and its institutions were based on democracy, individuality, and freedom (Tsing 2005, 31). In Turner's understanding, the colonization process through the frontier ended once the totality of the US-American landmass was civilized (Turner 1920, 38).

The frontier notion as Turner used it is specifically related to the US-American case. In 1987, Igor Kopytoff used and adapted Turner's concept in his important and widely cited book The African Frontier, his aim being to understand the "processes of pacification and inculturation of precolonial African peripheries" (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 10). In Kopytoff's understanding, frontiers are regions that are available for colonization. Kopytoff notes, however, that in most cases these areas are inhabited before the new settlers arrive, and that their emptiness is therefore created from the outside (*ibid,* 25). Frontiers are, however, not simply the borders of one society that expands geographically until it covers the totality of the area in question as Turner had conceptualized them. Rather, for Kopytoff (*ibid,* 9) frontiers are "politically open areas nestling between organized societies but 'internal' to the larger regions in which they are found – what might be called an 'internal' or 'interstitial frontier'". Frontiers therefore combine geographical and cultural marginality, but are not external to the established civilizations of nearby regions. This configuration leads to the emergence of a distinct type of societies at the frontiers. They are "short-lived social formations on the way, potentially, to becoming full-fledged societies" (Kopytoff 1987, 5). Hence, African frontiers contain a teleological aspect, operate on a more local scale, and there are many of them (*ibid,* 7). It follows that they do not expand in

Turner's tidal way, but based on a specific set of relationships between the frontiersmen and the organized societies they come from (*ibid,* 17).

3.2.2. Recent accounts on the frontier

In the recent past, the frontier has gained momentum in academia. There is, however, considerable confusion about the meaning of the concept, the central question being what types of phenomena can be described with the frontier notion, and where its limits are (Eilenberg 2014, 161). Generally speaking, the concept is being used to understand territorial dynamics that emerge if different political, social, or economic systems coincide in a given space. The notion therefore entails the reconfiguration and renegotiation of territorial realities. This relates to David Delaney's observations that "[t]erritorial configurations are not simply cultural artifacts. They are political achievements" (Delaney 2008, 12). It follows that because the frontier concept aims at understanding the emergence of territorial configurations in a specific context, it also sheds a light on the political environment that makes them possible. This contributes to the confusion surrounding this notion. Since this master's thesis focuses on the collision of different forms of agricultural production, the discussion of the frontier concept in this section will be restricted to this issue, nevertheless having in mind that the notion might also be applied to other contexts and other phenomena.

Scholars agree that frontier dynamics happen at the "geographical peripheries" (Fold and Hirsch 2009, 95) of the 'modern' and 'established' politico-economic system. The frontier is therefore a region where structures of power and public authority are not established yet. Public authority refers to the ability of social actors to manipulate and control the agency of other social actors (Sikor and Lund 2009, 8). In order to achieve this goal, the ones constructing public authority need to insert their "action and practices into a meaningful social frame or context" (Raeymaekers, Menkhaus, and Vlassenroot 2008, 13), and the installation of public authority is the result of the negotiation of this frame through the involved actors (Ribot and Peluso 2003, 158). The establishment of public authority is therefore related to the question about who is being included or excluded from the social frame (Lund 2006, 689).

In order to establish long-term public authority, the involved actors need to make sure that the social frame they propose is being socially accepted. This social acceptance is the basis for the construction of legitimacy. Public authority is therefore simultaneously the prerequisite for and the result of the construction of legitimacy (Sikor and Lund 2009, 7). The analyzed frontier dynamics are, however, not restricted to the establishment of public authority through political actors. They also include the expansion of a specific set of 'modern' economic activities, such as agribusiness, and their quest their impact on public authority. The frontier is therefore "a diffuse zone of transition from one set of social, political, and economic geography to a different set of geography" (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 12). These different and sometimes presumably contradicting patterns are inscribed onto space and, thus, territorialized. In this process, the emerging territories become "*constitutive* of the social orders whose features they express" (Delaney 2008, 10, italics in

original). These patterns are in constant interaction, which leads to their renegotiation and intrinsic instability (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 12).

The peripherous nature of the frontier is also related to the way the frontier and its inhabitants are imagined from the outside. They are seen as "leftovers from a premodern past, destined to become modernized" (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 10), and this is the ideological framework necessary to bring 'development' and 'civilization' to these regions. Moreover, frontiers are framed based on "promises of 'unoccupied' lands, unlimited economic advancement and instant riches" (Eilenberg 2014, 177) to attract representatives of the 'modernity' that are to 'develop' these frontier regions. This quest for modernization and the definition of how this is to happen form part of the ideological framework, but the *effects* thereof are also territorial. This means that the frontier has a dual character: it is both territorial *and* ideological. The ideological framework is one of the bases on which the frontier emerges and becomes simultaneously part of the very character of the frontier (Eilenberg 2014, 162). At the same time, however, it is also an enabling factor for the specific frontier-related territorialization practices: the frontier is "an imaginative project capable of molding both places and processes" (Tsing 2005, 31). This ideological framework is actively created and upheld through specific sets of discourses whose exact configurations are specific to each frontier. What they have in common, however, is that they frame the frontier in terms of what it is not (yet) (McCarthy and Cramb 2009, 113) and what it could become. Hence, frontiers are simultaneously spaces of absence and potential (Fold and Hirsch 2009, 95).

In these ideological frameworks, frontiers are imagined as "unruly spaces" (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 13) that are available for conquest and exploitation through new forms of economic activities (Eilenberg 2014, 162). In order for this availability to emerge, however, the frontiers need to be discursively – and oftentimes, physically – 'emptied' from the people living there (Tsing 2005, 30). In this undertaking, the locals are framed as "undisciplined or 'lazy' agriculturalists" that carry out "'backward' and 'unproductive' forms of agriculture", as McCarthy and Cramb (2009, 113) show for the prevailing discourses on inhabitants of the oil palm frontier in Malaysia and Indonesia. These farmers and their agricultural activities are seen as uncivilized and archaic. This is related to the perception that they form part of this premodern past that is simultaneously inherent to frontiers and to be overcome by rural development projects. These discourses have therefore "created a rationale for reordering smallholder practices in accord with particular concepts of rural modernity" (McCarthy and Cramb 2009, 113). This shows that these development projects and the discourses surrounding them do not only aim at 'modernizing' economic activities. They also have an impact on the people living in these frontiers regions, and influence the construction of their identities, because "[m]any of the most obvious forms of identity and ways of being that characterize modernity are directly tied to [...] territorial operations" (Delaney 2008, 11). It follows that the discourses imply and combine mainly two types of absences: the absence of civilization (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 10), and the absence of 'productive' ways to use the natural resources that these regions provide (Grajales 2013, 215).

The aim to bring 'civilization' and 'modernization' to the frontier and its inhabitants presupposes that there are people or institutions that define what it means to be 'civilized' and 'modern'. In this context, state institutions play a decisive role, because the people bringing 'civilization' and 'modernization' to the frontier are directly or indirectly linked to 'the state' (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 10) or the idea thereof (Nuijten 2003). This is due to the perception that in frontiers, not only economic activities and inhabitants are 'uncivilized', but that also state institutions are framed as being weak or absent. Frontiers are therefore seen as "zones of (national) exception that are lacking in key institutions and orientations that are said to characterize the state as a whole" (Ramírez 2015, 35), and where the "territorial and institutional penetration of the modern state has (not yet) been completed" (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 10). The economic and cultural 'development' of the frontier is therefore not to be seen external to state institutions, but as a way the ideology of these institutions is being territorialized and, thus, brought to the frontier. Hence, these agents "enact the state from its peripheral spaces and thereby produce a certain kind of state effect" (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 13). It follows that these territorial structures are "not simply cultural artifacts. They are political achievements" (Delaney 2008, 12).

Michael Eilenberg (2014) illustrates the political dimension of changing "territorial configurations" (Delaney 2008, 12) through the example of oil palm plantations in the borderlands in Borneo. He shows that their implementation intrinsically linked to state policies that aim at 'developing' the region, and that the discourses surrounding this follow the logic of the "frontier imaginary" (Eilenberg 2014, 160) described above. Even though state institutions do not directly undertake the implementation of the oil palm plantations in Borneo, the respective companies use the discourse of the state institutions and their perceived absence to establish their economic endeavors. Due to their proximity to the state institutions, these actors contribute to state formation at the frontier (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 13). Formal state institutions and its proxies that implement them on the ground (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 10) are therefore important, but they are not the only actors that territorialize their claims at the frontier. This is based on the observation that the frontiers are – despite contrary discourses – not 'empty' of people and their territorializing practices, and that frontiers are zones with "fragmented sovereignties" (Watts 2012, 464) that are renegotiated on a constant basis.

This part has shown that discourses contribute to the emergence of the frontier as both a constantly renegotiated territorial reality and an ideological project. These discourses have an impact on the identity and everyday lives of the ones inhabiting these regions. By depicting them as 'uncivilized' and 'backward', this ideological framework enables and legitimizes interventions from the outside that aim at 'civilizing' these people by introducing them into 'modern' ways of life and economic production (Delaney 2008, 11). This 'modernity' is the social frame in which the involved actors place and legitimize their action. It excludes the inhabitants of the frontier regions because their economic activities are framed as being 'outside' and 'incompatible' with the frame of modernity. As a result, these discourses invisibilize lifestyles that do not correspond with the modernity that is to

be brought to the frontier regions (Tsing 2005, 29–30). Their lives are not recognized as lives because they do not correspond to the 'modernity' that the external actors advocate. They therefore increase the precarity of these populations because they dehumanize them (Butler 2009a, 100). The ideological framework implies that in order for life to become life, the people are to form part of this 'modernity' (cf. Butler 2009b, IV). This legitimizes interventions from the outside because they are for a 'noble cause' – the introduction of the rural populations into the modern system that is deemed to be 'good' for them. This is further exacerbated through the teleological dimension of the frontier ideology that contributes to the invisibilization of the rural communities because they are framed as part of the past that is to be overcome (Korf and Raeymaekers 2013, 10). The example of the *campesinos* in María La Baja will illustrate this invisibilization and show that it is both discursive and material, because it contributes to changing land use patterns that are in alliance with the modernity the discourses promote while euphemizing or ignoring the impacts of these land use changes on the local populations.

In the next chapter, I will trace the emergence of two sets of frontiers in Colombia: the *colonization frontier* and the *industrialized agricultural frontier.* The section starts with an account on the colonization patterns of peripheral regions in the aftermath of Colombia's independence from Spain in the early 19th century. I will then show how changing economic policies and international demand contributed to the industrialization of the Colombian agricultural sector and, thus, to the spatial expansion of the industrialized agricultural frontier. In the next step the chapter reflects on the discourses that surrounded the expansion of the industrialized agricultural frontier and the consequences of the introduction of new types of agriculture on the *campesinos* and their land tenure. This will illustrate the interrelatedness of the ideological frontier framework and the differential allocation of precarity.

4. Phase I: The Colombian agrarian frontiers

> Colombia, like Brazil, is a country of agricultural frontiers (LeGrand 1989, 6)

At the moment of Colombia's independence from Spain in 1819 (Carvajal Hernández 2014, 104), the majority of its population lived in the central Andes region and in urban centers along the Caribbean coast (Palacios 1995, 19 et seqq.). The rural areas surrounding the prosperous urban hubs were organized in estates that Spanish colonizers owned and where locals worked as tenants (Kalmanovitz 1994, 47). The remaining areas of the newly independent country – the hinterlands of the Caribbean coast where María La Baja is situated, the tropical lowlands, and the Pacific and Amazonian regions – were sparsely populated by indigenous peoples or afro-Colombians[5] and belonged predominantly to the

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[5] In the case study area, there are different villages that were founded as *palenques.* This means that the ones initially settling in these villages were former slaves that escaped from Cartagena, the major trade hub for slaves in Latin America during colonialism. In some villages – most prominently in San Basilio de Palenque

state[6] (LeGrand 2003, 168). Eventually, migrants from urban centers arrived to these regions. The squatters made the *monte*, a generic term used to describe wilderness (Rojas Parra 2015), arable for small-scale subsistence agriculture and established their dwellings on the cleared land (Gutiérrez Sanín and García Reyes 2016, 97). This converted the squatters into *campesinos*[7] that based their collective identity on taming nature (Anderson 2010, 93), subsistence agricultural activities and the geographical marginality of the regions where they settled. The significance of land for the *campesinos* was therefore dual: it provided them with a living and simultaneously constituted the basis for their collective identity construction (Montenegro Lancheros 2016). Their land tenure was, however, not formally recognized (Thomson 2011a, 333) and happened therefore "at the fringes of governmental power" (Van Teijlingen 2016, 910). The *campesinos* had "limited access to state services" (Pizarro Leongómez 2015, 58) and were only marginally included into the nation-building project of the 19th century (Erazo Coral 2008, 42). This contributed to the perception that formal state institutions were 'absent' from these regions and that the *campesinos* had to look after themselves (Ramírez Lamus 2016, 217). I use the terms *colonization frontier* to conceptualize these "scattered" (LeGrand 2003, 169) territorial dynamics.

In the second half of the 19th century and due to international demand, a partial industrialization of the agricultural sector took place (LeGrand 1984). Export-oriented activities such as coffee production, cattle ranching, and banana plantations were added to Colombia's economic portfolio (Estrada Álvarez 2015, 6). With this, the appeal of the colonization frontiers increased considerably and the *campesinos* established thriving economic hubs where they combined subsistence with export-oriented agriculture (LeGrand 1989, 33). The formal sphere framed the land at the colonization frontiers as being a provider of profitable labor opportunities for migrants (Congreso de Colombia 1905, 164–89). As a result, entrepreneurs from urban areas arrived to the colonization frontiers in order to establish large-scale estates that were to produce export-oriented goods. In this endeavor, the entrepreneurs seized the colonized land from the *campesinos* (LeGrand 1989, 33)*.* The *campesinos* that lived on the appropriated land were either incorporated as labor force into the estates (LeGrand 1984, 27–28), or they were forced to migrate to areas where these industrialized forms of agricultural production had not arrived yet (Reyes Posada 2016, 17), and where they repeated the aforementioned colonization process. The formal sphere incentivized the introduction of industrialized agriculture through a favorable legal framework that abolished export taxes and facilitated the privatization and formalization of state land for entrepreneurs (Kalmanovitz 1994, 106–7, 114–16).

The expansion of this *industrialized agricultural frontier* was therefore based on the strategic enclosure and subsequent displacement / incorporation of rural communities

and to a lesser extent the field study site – this is an important constitutive factor of their collective identity (Camargo and Lawo-Sukam 2015).

[6] In 1850, the renowned geographer Agustín Codazzi estimated that approximately 75 per cent of the land in Colombia was state owned (LeGrand 1989, 6).

[7] Peasants.

through entrepreneurs (Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas 2015, 255). This initiated the concentration of land in the hands of the entrepreneurs (Chaparro Amaya and Galindo Hernández 2009, 15) and eventually converted them into a rural elite with considerable economic and political power (Solano, Bolívar Flórez, and Malkún 2010). This means that with the expansion of the industrialized frontier, the social structure of the rural areas where these processes happened changed significantly. The *campesinos* entered into a relationship of dependence with the large-scale landholders that concentrated land and established public authority at the frontier (Kalmanovitz 1994, 113). These mechanisms of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003) led "to social conflict over public lands" (LeGrand 2003, 169) and the rural elite legitimized the (violent) expansion of industrialized agricultural endeavors by framing them as conducive to bringing 'civilization' and 'development' to the frontier regions (La Rota-Aguilera and Salcedo 2016, 145, referring to Rausch 2010). This discourse was in line with the formal sphere's vision on rural development and this further facilitated the accumulation of land through the rural elite. The entrepreneurs that defined the meaning of 'development' and 'civilization' were therefore related to state institutions, but not necessarily a part thereof (Gutiérrez Sanín 2012, 249).

The dynamics that led to the expansion of the colonization and industrialized agricultural frontiers can be conceptualized with precariousness and precarity. In an initial phase, the *campesinos* and the entrepreneurs shared a precariousness that was based on the adverse conditions that settling in marginal areas entailed. They established a living at the fringes of the formal sphere and were left to rely on themselves and their social networks. The entrepreneurs took advantage of this precarious situation to found profitable estates and simultaneously establish public authority in a context where formal state institutions were allegedly absent. The formal sphere recognized these economic activities by establishing a favorable politico-economic framework and conferring land titles to the rural elite. This made the entrepreneurs and their economic activities visible to the formal sphere and their lives became thereby livable and worthy of protection. The *campesinos,* on the other hand, did not get the recognition from state institutions for their land tenure or economic activities. They were either converted into cheap labor force for the estates or evicted from their land. Their access to land, the basis for their collective identity construction, was therefore intrinsically transitional and exposed to a variety of structural and physical violence from 'external' actors and formal state institutions. The transitional nature of their land access remains a constitutive part of the *campesino* identity that is therefore intrinsically unstable. The frontier ideology that framed the *campesinos* as undeveloped was an underlying factor for the legitimation of the differential allocation of precarity.

This section has illustrated the emergence of two agricultural frontiers in rural Colombia in the 19th century. The colonization frontier refers to the process of clearing *monte* through squatters, and the industrialized agricultural frontier conceptualizes the subsequent introduction of the arable land into capitalist forms of production. The entrepreneurs concentrated land, established public authority, and were thereby converted into a politically and economically influential rural elite. The implementation of large-scale

estates led to recurrent social conflicts in rural Colombia. In most cases[8], the *campesinos* were either incorporated as wage laborers into these large-scale estates, or they were forced to migrate to frontier regions where these capitalist forms of production had not arrived yet. It has become clear that these mechanisms were related to public discourses on rural development that facilitated the implementation of large-scale industrialized agriculture to the detriment of the *campesinos* and their economic activities. The rural elite became thereby visible to the formal sphere, whereas the *campesinos* remained unrecognized. This led to a differential allocation of precarity and the transitional nature of the *campesino* collective identity.

The next section will illustrate policies from the formal sphere that aimed at recognizing and formalizing land tenure in order to remediate conflicts in rural Colombia. In a first step, I will summarize the different forms of land tenure that were being recognized in the late 19th century. It will become clear that the recognition of different forms of land access were a reaction from the formal sphere to recurrent social conflicts in rural areas. At the same time, however, the accumulation of land through the rural elite continued. It is in this context that I will introduce the provisions of Law 200 (1936) that scholars interpret as the first attempt of the formal sphere to carry out a redistributive land reform whose impacts are still felt in contemporary rural Colombia. The provisions of Law 200 allocate a specific and exclusionary "social function" (Botero 2006, 95) to land, and this was the basis for the recognizability of land tenure. I will then show that the rural elite used Law 200 to accumulate more land to the detriment of the *campesinos.* Finally, I will relate these legal provisions to precarity and show that they may be interpreted as an attempt to decrease the vulnerability of rural populations and remedy conflicts over land.

4.1.   Legislation on land tenure

The central government reacted to the recurrent social upheavals in rural areas by passing two Laws that aimed at clarifying the legal status of land tenure (LeGrand 1984, 37). Law 61 of 1874 states that individuals that cultivate unused *tierras baldías*[9] continuously and for more than five years, and establish dwelling on the same land, become its possessors[10] (Congreso de los Estados Unidos de Colombia 1874, Articles 1, 4, 6). Already after one year of occupation, these settlers can only get evicted "through judgments handed down in ordinary civil proceedings" (*ibid,* Article 6). It follows that in Colombia, the formal sphere recognizes three forms of land tenure: land property that is based on a notarized land title,

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[8] There are exceptions to this general dynamic of "colonization-conflict-migration-colonization" (Fajardo Montaña 2015, 7). In Antioquia and Santander Provinces, for example, small-scale agriculture coexisted with large-scale estates, the *campesinos* received land titles from the formal sphere, and achieved to remain on their land (Kalmanovitz 1994, 63–64).

[9] *Tierras baldías* is land that formally belongs to the state.

[10] In Law 61 of 1874, the terms "possessors" and "proprietaries" are used synonymously. For conceptual clarity, however, I differentiate these two terms based on the type of legal recognition they enjoy. Hence, land proprietaries hold formal titles over their land, whereas the possessors do not. It follows that the possessors' land still belongs to the state or, in some cases, to large-scale landholders (Reyes Posada 2016, 30–32). This differentiation will become important in the context of current land conflicts and the ways through which oil palm plantation are being established in María La Baja.

land occupation that is based on the peaceful occupation and subsequent cultivation of the land, and finally land possession that requires the continuous occupation of the land for a given period of time (Reyes Posada 2016, 21–23). This "legal pluralism" (von Benda-Beckmann 2002) remains a distinctive feature of the Colombian countryside and there is considerable uncertainty on the spatial distribution of these different forms of land tenure[11] (*ibid,* 27-28).

Law 48 of 1882 reiterates the legal provisions that Law 61 established and strengthens further the rights of possessors to remain on the land, even if the legal status thereof changes (Congreso de la República 1882, Article 9). Law 48 indicates that the settlers lose the right of possession, however, if the land remains unused for more than 10 years (*ibid,* Article 7). Also, the Law limits the area of land that can be allocated to companies or individuals to 5'000 hectares and states that "between one and another [of these] plot[s] there needs to be left a plot of at least the same size that the nation reserves exclusively for *cultivadores* [i.e. *campesinos*]" (*ibid,* Article 11). Through these limitations, Law 48 recognizes the concentration of land in the hands of the elite as conducive to social conflicts in rural Colombia. This is related to the observation that the public authority of the rural elite was based on the control of land, but that they left large areas "unproductive, unused or not employed for livestock" (Backhouse, Baquero, and Costa 2013, 12). These two Laws "profoundly influenced the settlers' perception of their own situation" (LeGrand 1984, 38), because it gave them the impression that the government was "on their side" (*ibid*), increased the legitimacy of their agricultural activities, and contributed to the emergence of *campesino* movements that claimed their rights through juridical proceedings (*ibid,* 38-39). This shows that the Laws contributed to the visibilization of the *campesinos* and their economic activities in the public sphere. It empowered them to claim their rights and participate in the political discourse. Despite these legal frameworks that recognize the presence of *campesinos* on state land, the rural entrepreneurs continued to displace them in their quest to establish estates for industrialized agricultural activities. This further exacerbated land concentration (Pérez Martínez 2004, 66) and the issues of violent land accumulation and forced displacement of *campesinos* remained, therefore, unresolved.

In 1936, the government passed Law 200 (Congreso de Colombia 1936) and scholars qualify this Law as the first attempt to carry out a redistributive agricultural reform in Colombia (Gutiérrez Sanín 2010, 236). The central assumption of Law 200 is that land has to comply with a "social function" (Botero 2006, 95) that is based on its productive use. This forms the basis for the recognition of land access through the formal sphere (De Zubiría Samper 2015, 19). Law 200 introduces the possibility to annul and redistribute land in case it is occupied or owned, but not used productively for more than 10 years

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[11] There have been several attempts since the second half of the 20th century to clarify the legal status of the land that is used for agricultural purposes. However, the cadastral system is "poorly structured and administered" (Reyes Posada 2016, 15) and it is estimated that about half of the agricultural land does not have formal land titles (*ibid*, 16). The 2016 Peace Agreement between the government and the FARC-EP guerrilla demands for the clarification of land tenure and the actualization of the cadastral system within seven years of its enactment (Santos Calderón and Jiménez 2016, Point 1.1.9, 15-16).

(Franco-Cañas and De los Ríos-Carmenado 2011, 102). The Law therefore interprets the productive use of land as more important than formal land titles (Reyes Posada 2016, 30). These provisions that recognize different forms of land use were to contribute to the reduction of social conflicts between *campesinos* and rural entrepreneurs (Franco-Cañas and De los Ríos-Carmenado 2011, 102). The redistributive dimension of Law 200 is questionable (De Zubiría Samper 2015, 19–20) because it enabled the large-scale landholders to legalize their land tenure while still pursuing accumulation by dispossession (Botero 2006, 95). Additionally, it is important to note that the social function the Law 200 allocates to land is restricted to its productive use and does not take into consideration the important role land plays in the construction of the *campesino* collective identity (Montenegro Lancheros 2016, 176). Hence, Law 200 did not resolve the conflict over the access to land in Colombia. Its legal provisions remain important, however, because they set the basis for the 1961 land reform and the overall legislation on the adjudication of state land (Villaveces Niño and Sánchez 2015, 10–11).

These reflections indicate that the people living at the frontier seek the formal acknowledgment of state institutions for their respective activities (Martínez Basallo 2015, 79). I interpret the legal provisions on land access described in this section as "norms of recognition" (Butler 2009, 5) from the formal sphere. In this sense, they decrease the precarity of the *campesinos* because their land tenure is being recognized and, thus, made visible. It also shows that the differential allocation of precarity leads to social conflicts and that the formal sphere responds to these conflicts by passing legal provisions that are aimed to decrease the precarity of the opposing parties. These provisions recognize different forms of land tenure and convert the *campesinos* into recognizable subjects, as their social movements of the early 20th century illustrate. The fact that the dynamics of accumulation by dispossession through the rural elite continued to operate indicates, however, that the formal sphere is not the only "bundle of powers" (Ribot and Peluso 2003, 158, referring to Ghani 1995) that allocates recognition and precarity. The rural elite had the physical and discursive power to disavow the formal sphere's recognition of the *campesinos* and their land access. This is related to the exclusionary definition of the social function of land that Law 200 established. The rural entrepreneurs used these provisions to formalize their land tenure, while the identitary role land plays for the *campesinos* remained unrecognized.

This part has described early attempts to resolve social conflicts in rural areas through the implementation of a legal framework that recognizes different forms of land tenure. While the legal provisions were intended to decrease the precarity of rural settlers in general, and *campesinos* in particular, the elite used them to legalize their land tenure and continue to accumulate land. This indicates that the recognition of land access does not emanate exclusively emanate from the formal sphere. In the next section, I will further elaborate on the interrelatedness of state policies and social unrest in rural Colombia. The first part will describe the "civil war" (Fajardo Montaña 2012, 58) that struck Colombia between 1948 and 1958. It will show that social unrest in rural areas in not only related to unequal land access and violent forms of land accumulation, but also to an exclusionary political system.

In a second step, the section will make a link between the civil war and the enactment of the 1961 Land Reform. Finally, I will illustrate the mechanisms that the formal sphere established to implement the land reform and the strategies the rural elite used to inhibit it.

4.1.1. *La Violencia* and the 1961 Land Reform

The political system in Colombia is based on the prevalence of two political parties: the Colombian Liberal Party and the Colombian Conservative Party (González González 2014, 33). On April 18, 1948 Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a popular liberal leader, was killed in Bogotá (Meacham 2014, 7). Gaitán's assassination was the culminating point of an increasing radicalization of political views (Rivas Otero 2016, 245) and led to a popular uprising "of the Liberal supporters from the urban lower class and of the socialist-leaning poor" (Meacham 2014, 7) that spread throughout the country and especially to rural areas[12] (Gutiérrez Sanín 2010, 237). It ensued a ten-year armed conflict, often referred to as *La Violencia*[13], that forcefully displaced or killed many thousands persons (Pécaut 2001, 137). In rural areas, the left-leaning wing of the Liberal Party started to organize themselves in "independent republics" (Pizarro Leongómez 2015, 30) that denounced the political oppression from the conservative government (González Arias 1991, 72). These independent republics were the precursors of the different guerrilla movements that were consolidated in the mid-1960s (Rivas Otero 2016, 245). Representatives of the formal sphere framed the incipient leftist insurgency as being "beyond the control of the state" (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 121, in reference to senator Álvaro Gómez Hurtado) because they were situated in frontier regions where 'the state' had not arrived (yet).

In 1958, the political establishment reached a compromise on a two-party "power sharing agreement" (Meacham 2014, 7) that formally ended the civil war. This agreement is also called *Frente Nacional*[14] and was in place until 1974. The parties were to take four-year turns in presiding over the country (Pizarro Leongómez 2015, 27). During the period of the *Frente Nacional*, the Conservative and the Liberal Parties were the only legitimized political actors (Rivas Otero 2016, 245), leading to a political system that Darío Fajardo Montaña (2012, 58) qualifies as "excluding" and elitist. Even though the agreement marked the formal end of *La Violencia,* it did not resolve the issues of land concentration and leftist insurgency in rural areas (Meacham 2014, 7). It is in this context that the call for an agrarian reform grew louder, as the Decree 2061 of 1960 illustrates. It states that "the increase of the living standard of the rural population of Colombia and, generally, the economic development of the country require the reform of the social agricultural structure" ("Decreto Número 2061 de 1960" 1960).

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[12] In rural areas, *La Violencia* led to a substantial renegotiation of land access patterns. The opposing parties and opportunists aimed at establishing public authority based on territorial control and large numbers of *campesinos* had to flee their land (Villamil Chaux 2015, 17).

[13] The Violence.

[14] National Front.

Law 135 of 1961 enacted the agricultural reform, and aimed at integrating the *campesinos* into the "national development" (Villamil Chaux 2015, 19). This "social land reform" (Congreso de Colombia 1961) focused on the economic use and more equal distribution[15] of land (Franco-Cañas and De los Ríos-Carmenado 2011, 104). These issues were perceived as "major problems of the Colombian countryside" (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 117). The agricultural reform was conceived as a way to bring 'development' to rural areas, contribute to the pacification process in the aftermath of *La Violencia* (Martínez Basallo 2015, 85), and formalize land tenure (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 121). It was also meant to destabilize the leftist insurgency by taking away their ideological basis – unequal land distribution and rural poverty (Carvajal Hernández 2014, 108) – and prevent a socialist revolution as it had happened in Cuba (Gutiérrez Sanín 2012, 242) or China (Berry 2006, 133). The productive use of land was important due to population growth, the stagnation in food production, and the resultant increase in food prices throughout the 1950s (Berry 2006, 133).

The proposition of Law 135 was to give each *campesino* family one *Unidad Agrícola Familiar*[16] or UAF. This was meant to ensure and formalize their access to land, guarantee food security for the rural population, give them the possibility to commercialize the surplus production, and eventually increase their living standards (Rey Gutiérrez, Lizcano Caro, and Asprilla Lara 2014; Martínez Cortés 2013, 18). Article 50 of Law 135 (Congreso de Colombia 1961) determined the size of one UAF based on the estimated "labor force of one family" (Franco-Cañas and De los Ríos-Carmenado 2011, 103), the "agro-ecological conditions", and the "representative production systems of the region" (Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi (IGAC) 2012, 51). It follows that the UAFs differed between regions. According to Yerlis, the UAF for the field study area is between 14 and 16 hectares (Field notes from OXFAM workshop, 6 October 2016, La Guayaba). The goal of this system was to "create prosperous rural proprietaries […] without affecting the large-scale land property" (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 121). Hence, the 1961 Land Law focused on the formalization and productive use of the land.

Law 135 created the *Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria*[17] or INCORA that was to carry out its provisions on the ground (Congreso de Colombia 1961, Chapter II), and that had a decisive impact on the field study site. INCORA was given the possibility to acquire land for redistribution and subsequent formalization in different ways: direct purchase, expropriations, donations, and through annulment of ownership as Law 200 of 1936 had foreseen (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 125). Unsurprisingly, the possibility of expropriation and redistribution was met with considerable resistance from the rural

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[15] In 1961, Carlos Lleras Restrepo – at that time Minister for Agriculture, and between 1966 and 1970 president of Colombia – wrote that approximately 56 per cent of agricultural operations happened on farms that were smaller than 5 hectares. They covered, however, only a bit more than 4 per cent of the area that was exploited for agricultural purposes. The 3.6 per cent of agricultural holdings that exceeded 100 hectares, on the other hand, controlled 64 per cent of the agricultural land. This is indicative for the high rates of land concentration in the 1950s, and Lleras Restrepo used these statistics to legitimize his call for a redistributive agricultural reform (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 118).
[16] Family Farming Unit.
[17] Colombian Institute for Agricultural Reform.

elite. As a consequence thereof, the focus of the Land Reform soon changed from redistribution to the allocation and formalization of state-owned *tierras baldías* to the landless *campesinos* (Martínez Basallo 2015, 85; Thomson 2011b, 337)*.* Berry (2006, 133) observes that "the Law was basically designed to undertake directed colonization, with the state supplying the infrastructure, both economic and social", and that between 1962 and 1970, only a bit more than 8 per cent of INCORA's spending consisted in land purchases. Despite the change of focus during the implementation of Law 135, the idea to 'develop' rural areas and to include the *campesinos* into the formal economy remained core features of the implementation of the 1961 Land Reform (*ibid*). This indicates that the frontier ideology that frames the land as lacking in 'proper use' is an important contributing factor to the emergence, enactment, and adaptation of Law 135.

In the meanwhile and despite the Land Reform, the leftist insurgency continued to operate and in 1964, the central government attacked Marquetalia, one of the independent republics. In the aftermath of the attack, the insurgents founded the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército Popular*[18] or FARC-EP and declared war on the establishment (Insuasty Rodríguez, Valencia Grajales, and Restrepo Marín 2016, 77). They declared that their ultimate goal was the replacement of the capitalist state system (Grajales 2011, 773). The consolidation of the FARC-EP initiated the 'current' armed conflict (Pécaut 2001, 138) and was followed by the creation of other guerrilla groups, such as the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*[19] or ELN (Giraldo Moreno 2015, 16) and the *Ejército Popular de Liberación*[20] or EPL (Insuasty Rodríguez, Valencia Grajales, and Restrepo Marín 2016, 75). Different currents of socialism[21] provided the ideological basis for the guerrillas (Pécaut 2015, 24) and they demanded, among other things, the redistribution of land from large-scale landowners to landless *campesinos*[22] (Albertus and Kaplan 2012, 203). In an initial phase, their main strategy of income generation was the extortion and kidnapping of representatives of the elite, and "agro-industrialists, cattle ranchers, and drug barons were among their most common targets" (Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas 2015, 258). Eventually, the guerrillas added the production and trafficking of drugs to their revenue base (Pécaut 2001, 138–40). Furthermore, they recruited young people from economically and socially marginalized groups to their cause (Carvajal Hernández 2014, 118) and forced the local populations to abide by their rules and political ideology (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 35). The consolidation and spatial expansion of the guerrillas contested established patterns of public authority and threatened the rural elites and their economic projects (Ávila González 2015, 117).

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[18] Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.
[19] National Liberation Army.
[20] People's Liberation Army.
[21] The emergence and consolidation of the Colombian guerrilla groups is to be understood in the context of the Cold War and the Cuban revolution (Carvajal Hernández 2014, 107; González González 2014, 13)
[22] Other guerilla movements operated in urban areas. The most prominent example is M-19 that was founded in 1970 and formally demobilized in 1990 (García Durán, Grabe Loewenherz, and Patiño Hormaza 2008). M-19 was, however, not present in María La Baja and their relevance for the case study site is therefore negligible.

This part has indicated that there is an intrinsic relationship between high rates of land concentration, an exclusionary political system, and the emergence of the leftist guerrilla insurgency. The internal armed conflict that has been developing since the consolidation of the guerrilla groups is therefore related to questions about land access and control, but also to contested opinions on the 'proper' use of the land (Thomson 2011b, 351). This is linked to the aforementioned expansion of the colonization and industrialized agricultural frontier that led to the concentration of the land in the hands of the rural elite while simultaneously pushing the *campesinos* to ever more remote areas of Colombia where 'the state' was allegedly 'absent'. Discourses on development legitimized the dehumanization and invisibilization of the *campesinos.* With the emergence and consolidation of the guerrillas, the frontier and its inhabitants received another meaning. They were converted into a threat to established forms of public authority. The formal sphere attempted to ward off this threat through the enactment of the 1961 Land Reform. The Law recognized the precarity of the *campesinos* and established that this precarity was linked to insecure land access and the encroaching economic activities of the rural elite that were exacerbated during the armed upheavals of *La Violencia.* Land access and control were thereby politicized and associated to questions about security and stability for the formal sphere and the rural entrepreneurs for whom the guerrillas posed a threat. Through Law 135, the *campesinos* became once again visible to the formal sphere and their lives were momentarily recognized as livable and worthy of protection.

The next section illustrates how the provisions of Law 135 were to be implemented. I will focus on government policies that created and collaborated with a grassroots *campesino* organization that was to carry out the redistributive land reform on the ground. The section will show that this organization has had a decisive impact on the visibility of the *campesinos* and their political recognition through the formal sphere. I will reflect on the repercussions of this visibility on the *campesino* identity and then illustrate how a changing political environment in the early 1970s transformed this visibility into vulnerability and, thus, increased the precarity of the politically engaged *campesinos* and their grassroots organization.

4.1.2. ANUC

The large-scale landholders contended against the implementation of the 1961 Land Reform and up until the mid-1960s, "no serious agrarian reform was being implemented" (Zamosc 1986, 47). In the same period, an economic crisis hit Colombia: international prices for coffee were low, the high migration rates from rural to urban areas contributed to increasing unemployment rates, and the production of national industries was stagnating (*ibid*). Furthermore, the leftist insurgency consolidated into different guerrilla groups that declared war on 'the state' and the elites, spread insecurity, and demanded a more equal distribution of land (Albertus and Kaplan 2012, 203). Hence, the intensification of agricultural production through the mechanisms that Law 135 of 1961 established became even more important to boost the Colombian economy and weaken the social support of the guerrilla insurgency (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 128). The

government decided to accelerate the Law's implementation through the creation of the *campesino* grassroots organization *Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos*[23] or ANUC in 1967 (Grajales 2011, 776) and the Association became the social basis for the reform (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 28). The organization was framed as "a communication channel between the *campesinos* and the government to promote and utilize the services the government offered to the Colombian agrarian sector" (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2010, 213). These services included lending schemes, outreach programs, commercialization support, and education programs for rural populations (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2014, 43). The aim of this collaboration between the government and ANUC was to combine top-down pressure from the government with bottom-up pressure from the *campesinos* in order to implement the agrarian reform (Gutiérrez Sanín 2012, 243). In 1968, the government passed Law 1 that formalized its alliance with ANUC (Franco-Cañas and De los Ríos-Carmenado 2011, 104).

This meant that the *campesinos* became political actors (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 504) and, thus, "full citizens" (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2010, 177). The collaboration between the government and ANUC led to a "revitalization of the agricultural reform" (Balcázar et al. 2001, 13), and ANUC became the most important *campesino* organization in the 20th century in Colombia (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2014, 43). Their traction was especially strong in the Caribbean region where they contributed significantly to the "moderate success" (Gutiérrez Sanín and García Reyes 2016, 93) of the 1961 Land Reform. One way ANUC proceeded in their quest to carry out the land reform was to occupy land that was to be redistributed through INCORA in accordance with Law 132, but "where reform demands had not been met" (Albertus and Kaplan 2012, 204). ANUC focused in these undertakings on land that formed part of large-scale *haciendas,* but was not used productively (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 53). Through the land occupations, ANUC put the landholders under pressure to sell the land in question to INCORA, who would then redistribute it to the *campesinos* (Gutiérrez Sanín and García Reyes 2016, 98). These land invasions were confronted with considerable and often violent resistance from the rural elite (*ibid*) who saw their "monopolistic system of land tenure" (Ávila González 2015, 117) threatened. The rural entrepreneurs' land tenure and economic activities were therefore not only affected by extortions and kidnappings through guerrillas, but also by land claims from politically organized *campesinos* that enjoyed support from the central government.

With the election of conservative President Misael Pastrana Borrero in 1970 (Insuasty Rodríguez, Valencia Grajales, and Restrepo Marín 2016, 76), the political environment became less supportive to the demands of the *campesinos* (Balcázar et al. 2001, 14). The government's policy on rural development was reverted toward a capitalist agricultural economy based on large-scale landholdings and, thus, to the *status quo* that was in place before the 1961 Land Law. In 1972, Pastrana, landholders, and representatives of the liberal and conservative parties signed the Chicoral Agreement that formally dismantled the provisions of the 1961 agrarian reform (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016,

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[23] National Association of Rural Workers.

497). The Agreement ended the political support from the government to ANUC (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2010, 176), and the Association started to disintegrate and was split up into different subsections (Balcázar et al. 2001, 14). Despite a changing political environment that dissolved the collaboration between the government and the *campesinos*, activists associated with ANUC continued to invade and claim land (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 493), and they were especially dynamic in the Montes de María region (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2014, 41). In the same period, different guerrilla groups extended their activities to lands that ANUC claimed to be redistributed and integrated some of the *campesino* activists into their ranks (Escobar Arango 2013, 114). This increased the vulnerability of the *campesinos* in general, and members of ANUC in particular. They were *de facto* criminalized: between 1971 and 1978, more than 100 *campesinos* were assassinated due to their (alleged or actual) proximity to guerrillas (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 504).

The persecution and assassination of these *campesinos,* many of which formed part of ANUC (Escobar Arango 2013, 111), was possible – in Butler's sense – because public discourse had dehumanized them. They were no longer framed as political subjects, but as possible guerrilleros. This converted them into a threat to the formal state institutions and justified their annihilation. The alleged proximity of ANUC with the guerrilla insurgency also took away the legitimacy of the *campesinos'* demands for more equal land distribution, because these demands were framed as being communist (Escobar Arango 2013, 114) and therefore a threat to the integrity of the formal state institutions. The formal sphere formalized the dehumanization of the *campesinos* through the Chicoral Agreement that ended the collaboration between the government and ANUC. The precarity of the *campesinos* increased therefore through a combination of structural violence that is reflected in state policies and public discourses that dehumanized them, and physical violence that was legitimized based on this dehumanization. These changing public discourses did, however, not emanate from a supposedly autonomous and unified 'state' (Martínez Basallo 2015, 82), but were significantly influenced by the demands of the rural oligarchy that aimed to maintain their monopolistic access to land. This indicates that the rural elite used and influenced the counterinsurgency discourses to legitimize the violent re-establishment or preservation of their exclusionary land access patterns. The discursive alignment of the political demands of the *campesinos* with the guerrillas' has been an important victimizing practice in rural Colombia, as will be illustrated in more details in the upcoming pages.

Despite the consolidation of the guerrillas and the shift in focus, Law 135 has had an impact on territorial configurations in rural Colombia. The next chapter will show the effects of Law 135 in María La Baja where its provisions led to the construction of two irrigation dams, the resettlement of *campesinos,* and the partial formalization of land tenure. The first part of the chapter will describe the effects of the dam construction on systems of agricultural production in María La Baja. The subsequent section focuses on the displacement and resettlement of *campesino* families that was related to the implementation of the irrigation dams. I will show that the implementation of the dams

and the resettlement of the *campesinos* were facilitated by development discourses Law 135 stipulated, the frontier ideology, and the invisibility of the *campesinos* to the formal sphere.

4.2.   Law 135 in María La Baja

> Here happened two displacements. First, we were displaced
> because of the dams and then because of the violence
> (Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo)

In María La Baja, Law 135 initiated a phase of rural development that was to increase the productivity of agricultural activities. In this ambition, the enactment of Law 135 led to the construction of two dams, Matuya and San José del Playón (Osorio Bonacera 2015, 262) in order to implement an irrigation district for the region that today covers more than 11'000 hectares (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2010, 77). This technological endeavor was undertaken in the late 1960s (Ávila González 2015, 115–16), and its objectives were mainly two: the dams were to reduce the risk of droughts or floods in the fertile lowlands of the municipality, and the constant availability of irrigation water was to increase the productivity of the lands in proximity of the dams (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2014, 60). These lands were to be used for a diversified rural economy based on crops such as rice and plantain. The augmented productivity was to contribute to increase food security in the Caribbean region (Ávila González 2015, 115–16). The importance of the dams has become such that in the municipal anthem, the water that flows from the dams onto the fields is compared to the tricolor of the Colombian flag that these fields metaphorically represent (Alcaldía municipal María la Baja n.a., 8).

The increase of agricultural productivity that was related to the implementation of the irrigation districts converted María La Baja in the "food pantry of the Caribbean" (Unidad de Restitución de Tierras 2014, 341). In this context, the *campesinos* I talked to mention especially the rice production that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. Joaquín narrates that this generated jobs for the *campesinos* (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo), and Felipe argues in the same lines and says: "you maybe went [to the plantations] to cut the rice and earn some money" (Interview with Felipe, 5 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). Furthermore, a rice processing plant was established in the early 1970s that employed approximately 200 to 300 *campesinos* (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo)*.* The processed rice was then exported to the Caribbean region and other parts of the country (Interview with Felipe, 5 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). Leidy mentions that even though rice was produced as a monoculture, it was more 'welcoming' for the *campesinos* because rice is a crop that they traditionally produced as well (Interview with Jhon, Edwin, and Leidy, 8 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). This shows that the implementation of industrialized agriculture and the subsequent integration of the *campesinos* into these new forms of economic production have manifold repercussions, and that in the view of the *campesinos* I interviewed, it depends on the type of crop that is being produced.

4.2.1. Development-induced displacement

The establishment of the dams required the relocation of several *campesino* families that lived in Pueblo Viejo and whose land would be flooded. Before the relocation, the *campesinos* lived on their respective farms and had access to land to cultivate their foodstuff (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). Several *campesinos* I talked to lived this resettlement. Joaquín, for example, told me that back in the 1960s, the people from INCORA arrived on mules to Pueblo Viejo to make soil measurements, meet the *campesinos,* and inform them about the dam project (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). According to Álvaro, INCORA promised the *campesinos* to compensate them financially, allocate them land to build their houses and plant house gardens, and that they were to get a plot of land each to cultivate food crops. Álvaro goes on telling me that the *campesinos* did not really have a choice. They had to "flee from the land" because INCORA told them that they would expropriate those who did not want to "sell[24]" their land. INCORA would deposit the money for the plots in the bank and if the *campesinos* did not want to take it, it was their loss (Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

The construction of the dams and the way the relocation was organized put the locals into a passive position, negating them the possibility of active contribution to the negotiation of the terms and conditions of the resettlement. Álvaro says that there were people who lost their land and all their money "because they did not want to sell [the land] and did not want to get money" for their plots (Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo)*.* This refusal to accept the money is related to the perceived inadequacy of the price, and the *campesinos'* strong sense of belonging to the land they live and work on. Joaquín says: "most of them were not used to going away" from their farms and Leidy agrees, declaring that "it is difficult to leave your home" (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). This hints at just how violent this resettlement was for the *campesinos* in question. The violence was not exerted through the use of weapons, but through the withdrawal of the very basis of their everyday lives and identity construction. This is therefore an indicative example for the structural violence *campesinos* were exposed to in the course of the installation of the dams.

Leidy brings into consideration that back in the 1960s, the *campesinos* did not have the necessary skills or knowledge to negotiate with INCORA. Many of them could not read nor write and all they were concerned about was to "sow, for the women to give birth, to eat, and to live" (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). The *campesinos* did not know the economic value of their land and could therefore not negotiate its price. Leidy expresses that there was an imbalance between the educated people from INCORA and the illiterate *campesinos*, because the latter did not think about the future and were not able to

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[24] Álvaro uses the word *vender* (to sell) when he talks about these proceedings. In my interpretation, and based on the way Álvaro speaks about it, the *campesinos* were reimbursed for their relocation without having the choice if they wanted to cede their land to INCORA or not. However, I do not have more specific data on the nature of these transactions, and for authenticity reasons I chose to use Álvaro's words to describe the process.

assess the long-term consequences of the installation of the dams and their resettlement, whereas the former were well aware of that. Joaquín argues in the same lines, saying that the *campesinos* did not have "a broader view of things", and Leidy concludes that the resettlement affected the social fabric negatively and "initiated its fragmentation" (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). This indicates that in the case of the "development induced displacement" (Connell and Connell 2016) that the construction of the dams entailed, the ideological framework of the frontier played an important role. The *campesinos* perceive that INCORA took advantage of their lack of "a broader view of things" (Joaquín during the informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo) in Pueblo Viejo.

The ideological framework that perceives the *campesinos* as 'uncivilized' is not simply imposed from the outside – in this case, through INCORA. The *campesinos* mobilize this discourse as well. In my opinions, this is a strategy they have developed to make sense of the structural violence they have been experiencing. The ideological framework that is related to the frontier is in this case based on different types of marginalities that the *campesinos* mentioned during the interviews and informal talks, and that are related to the mechanisms of the extension of the colonization frontier. Joaquín says that the resettlement was a "deceit" because the *campesinos* were isolated and they did not have "orientation nor the possibility to find out what was going on" (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo), and Álvaro and Leidy mention the unequal validation of knowledges and that the expertise of INCORA was perceived as superior to the *campesinos'* (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo; Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

These are factors that are integral to the construction of a *campesino* identity (Montenegro Lancheros 2016) and to the ideological framework related to the frontier. The *campesinos* are being framed (and frame themselves) as outsiders to 'civilization' that do not know how the formal system works. They are therefore 'undeveloped' and vulnerable to development projects such as the dams. It is key to understand that it is specifically the perceived exclusion from the formal sphere that contributes significantly to the construction of the *campesino* identity and to their victimization. This remains an important aspect of the collective *campesino* identity and Edwin illustrates this thought when he says:

> Even though we [the *campesinos*] are educated [now], we don't have the same civilization as someone that lives in a city. [...] If you go to the city the people there will single you out right away. 'You are from a village, right?' And I said, 'yes, I am a *campesino*' (Interview with Jhon, Edwin, and Leidy, 8 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

Being a *campesino* means therefore not only to live in rural areas, but also at the fringes of 'civilization'. The implementation of the dams shows that this marginality becomes problematic if the *campesinos* bar the way to 'progress' and if they are to be included into these development projects. It is this process of violent inclusion and the framing of the *campesinos* as undeveloped that makes them vulnerable to the structural violence I described above, because the inclusion into the formal system entails a change in the

everyday lives of the involved *campesinos,* their land access, and their independence*.* Due to the constructed imbalance between the *campesinos* and external actors – in this case, INCORA – possibilities of resistance are restricted as the example of the ones not accepting the money for their plots illustrates. The *campesinos* are left with the choice of being included into a system they do not really fit in, or to find their luck in yet another frontier region from which they could eventually be evicted.

4.2.2. Resettling in Pueblo Nuevo

After the phase of reunions and biophysical measurements, INCORA consulted with the *campesinos* about the place for their new settlement and offered them several options. Joaquín says that they went to different spots in the municipality of María La Baja, and finally chose an area close to where one of the future dams would be. He points out that the *campesinos* picked this location because it would offer them the possibility to fish in the dam and *tirar machete* (pull the machete), i.e. to work on the fields in the proximity of the future village. He reiterates, however, that the *campesinos* did not "think about other things" and that they were unable to see the long-term consequences of this relocation. The *campesinos* were given rather small plots of land for their houses and gardens, and all the plots were situated in the same area (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). This means that they were no longer dispersed on a vast area as they were before the relocation, and that they did no longer live on their own farms. Instead, they started to work on land that was in proximity to the village (Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). The majority of this land belonged to a large-scale landholder, which meant that the access to the land was contested but possible because there was land available where the resettled *campesinos* could cultivate yam, yucca, corn, and rice (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). Even though the new settlement was easier accessible due to its proximity to the road and an already existing village, living in a village community had an impact on the way of life of the *campesinos.* As Joaquín says:

> What we had there [in Pueblo Viejo], we don't have here [in Pueblo Nuevo]. What we did there, we have never done here (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

He relates this to the 'independent' lifestyle the *campesinos* had in Pueblo Viejo: they were living on their respective farms and had consistent access to land that they did not have to negotiate with others. This shows that the impact of the resettlement goes beyond the mere geographical relocation of the *campesinos*. It made them dependent on the mercy of other people, such as the large-scale landholder on whose land they cultivated food.

Macnelly says that INCORA "dumped" the *campesinos* in Pueblo Nuevo and did not give them adequate assistance for the re-establishment of their livelihoods (Informal talk with Macnelly, María Lourdes, and Dolores, 5 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). Leidy argues in the same lines, saying that the *campesinos* settled "as well as they could" because of the "total state abandonment" after the relocation (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). This state abandonment further consolidates the interpretation that the

campesinos were exposed to structural violence during the relocation process, and that the resettlement increased the precarity of their existence. The effects thereof were, however, mediated due to the possibility to access and cultivate land in proximity to the village. This means that despite the structural violence and the dependency on external actors, the *campesinos* managed to re-establish their livelihoods in Pueblo Nuevo. At the same time, their existence remained precarious because their access to land was dependent on the benevolence of the large-scale landholder. In order to decrease their dependency, the *campesinos* collaborated with ANUC to formalize land tenure and make the *campesinos* and their economic activities recognizable to the formal sphere. The consolidation of ANUC in nearby Sincelejo had therefore a decisive impact on the access to land for the *campesinos.*

Yerlis is a former leader of a local ANUC branch and lives in Pueblo Bonito, a nearby village. She says that in the 1970s, 120 *campesinos* from five villages demanded from INCORA to redistribute 920 hectares that belonged to a landholder. The Institute agreed to redistribute and formalize the land, but insisted that they were obliged to allocate plots that corresponded to the Family Farming Unit for the region (14-16 hectares). There was therefore not enough land available for all the claimants and the remaining families continued their activities as land occupants. Yerlis narrates that the leaders from ANUC were exposed to considerable intimidations in the aftermath of the land redistribution. The paramilitaries that arrived in the 1990s killed one of the ANUC leaders and Yerlis fled first to Bogotá and then to Venezuela. She re-established her livelihood in Pueblo Bonito after the demobilization of the paramilitary units in 2005 (Field notes during OXFAM Workshop, 6 October 2016, La Guayaba). *Campesinos* from Pueblo Nuevo also participated in ANUC's efforts. Joaquín explains that in Pueblo Nuevo nine plots were available for redistribution. Because there was not enough land for everyone, the interested *campesinos* had to register and INCORA undertook a lottery to decide whom they would allocate land to. However, not all the *campesinos* wanted to participate in this lottery because they were afraid that "it was communism" and that signing up would have negative repercussions for them (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016).

This created a situation where some of the *campesinos* were formally recognized as proprietaries of the land they were working on, whereas others continued their activities as land occupants. Joaquín, Felipe's parents, and Álvaro were allocated plots of land and formal land titles (Interview with Felipe, 5 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo; Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo; Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). In their narrative, however, the created imbalance between land proprietaries and occupants plays a minor role. This is related to the availability of land the ones without formal land titles could cultivate and the thriving local economy in the 1970s and 1980s that provided the community with employment and food (Interview with Jhon, Edwin, and Leidy, 8 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). Furthermore, the violence the paramilitary units perpetrated in the village in the late 1990s and early 2000s changed the land access patterns to such an extent that the formal land titles INCORA had allocated lost their significance. Álvaro narrates that even though he received a title from INCORA, he did not register it at the municipality because of the violence and forced displacement that the

paramilitaries brought to Pueblo Nuevo. He says that he is now thinking about re-applying for a land title (Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

In the eyes of the mayor of María La Baja, the 1961 agricultural reform converted some of the *campesinos* in "*pequeños riquitos*" ("little rich men"). However, he says that many of the *campesinos* that benefitted from the land reform and the subsequent formalization of land tenure were "very disorderly" and did not know how to "manage the allocated properties and payments" because of a lack of education (Interview with mayor, 8 November 2016, María La Baja). This shows that in the mayor's perception, the agricultural reform and the 'development' the dams brought to the region required an effort and specific type of 'civilization' from the *campesinos.* The alleged inability of the *campesinos* to manage property forms part of the ideological framework of the frontier. It depicts the *campesinos* as outsiders to the formal system and 'civilization' – represented by education –, and at the same time questions their ability to form part thereof. This invisibilizes the structural violence that resulted in the resettlement of the *campesinos.*

The resettlement from Pueblo Viejo to Pueblo Nuevo illustrates the repercussions of structural violence on the everyday lives and identity construction of the *campesinos.* It has had manifold impacts on land access patterns, recognizability, and the allocation of precarity. The resettlement was possible because of the invisibility of the *campesinos* that lived at the colonization frontier. The formal sphere did not recognize them as subjects and judged the economic 'development' of María La Baja as being of paramount importance. Once resettled in Pueblo Nuevo, the *campesinos* remained invisible to the formal sphere, as the insufficient support for the re-establishment of their livelihoods illustrates. Through pressure from ANUC, some *campesinos* were given formal land titles and thereby recognized as subjects. This decreased momentarily their precarity because it guaranteed their land access. The *campesinos* that did not receive land titles worked on land that belonged to a landholder or they generated income through wage labor on the rice cultivations or the processing plant. They entered a relationship of dependence with external actors and remained invisible to the formal sphere. This created a situation where precarity was allocated unequally. However, the interviewed *campesinos* say that the differences were negligible due to the availability of work opportunities for the ones that were not given formal land titles. This indicates that the institutions of the formal sphere – in this case, mainly INCORA – were not the only entities that had the ability to allocate precarity to the *campesinos,* and that local circumstances that are not necessarily controlled by formal state institutions play a decisive role in the mitigation or increase of precarity.

These mechanisms, combined with settling in a village, contributed to the renegotiation of the collective *campesino* identity. They were not living at the colonization frontier anymore, but at the industrialized agricultural frontier. The rice production generated income and economic prosperity, but inhibited the independent production of foodstuff. Also the *campesinos* that received formal land titles say that their everyday lives changed. They were not living on their own farms anymore and the expanse of their plots was restricted. The resettlement in Pueblo Nuevo therefore illustrates that structural violence

at the colonization frontier produces different types of victimhoods that are based on changing land access patterns, new relationships of dependency, and the renegotiation of the *campesino* identity. The guerrillas added yet another set of victimhoods to the precarious lives of the *campesinos.* They arrived soon after the partial formalization of land tenure through INCORA. The next section will illustrate the victimizing practices that the guerrillas exerted on the population in María La Baja.

4.3. Guerrillas in María La Baja

In the mid-1980s, several guerrilla groups[25] arrived to the municipality of María La Baja because of its "intricate topography" (Ávila González 2015, 117) that allowed them to hide from public armed forces and transit hostages (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones 2015, 74) Their main sources of income consisted in the theft of cattle and the kidnapping of cattle ranchers. This challenged the established patterns of public authority (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo 2003, 14). They exerted social control over the inhabitants of Pueblo Nuevo, perpetrated selective killings against representatives of the formal sphere and *campesinos,* blocked road access, and forcefully recruited (underage) locals[26] (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones 2015, 72–79). Joaquín declares that the arrival of the guerrillas meant that many of the *campesinos* abandoned their land because they were afraid of the violence the *guerrilleros* perpetrated. He and his family, however, stayed on their land despite the presence of the guerrillas (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). This indicates that for some *campesinos*, a coexistence with the guerrillas was dangerous but possible, while others left their land when the guerrillas arrived. Joaquín reiterates, however, that "also the guerrilla [and not only the paramilitaries] bothered" the *campesinos* in Pueblo Nuevo (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

Joaquín narrates the story of a landholder that owned land in Pueblo Nuevo and was kidnapped by the guerrilla. The landholder's son negotiated with the guerrilla and the insurgents freed the father and took the son instead. After his release, the landholder left María La Baja and went to live elsewhere (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). Leidy also talks about this kidnapping. She says that the landholder ceded a part of his estate to the *campesinos* so that they could work on the land. Eventually, he sold the land to INCORA who was to formalize five plots of 14 hectares each to the *campesinos* who worked on them (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). According to Joaquín, this formalization never happened and four years later,

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[25] These groups included the ELN, EPR, and FARC-EP guerrillas (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones 2015, 72–73).

[26] The recruitment of minors through illegal armed groups has been a recurrent practice in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia. The personal stories of demobilized guerrilleros and paramilitaries show the systematicity of these dynamics: about half of the demobilized guerrilleros from ELN and FARC-EP were recruited before attaining the age of 18 years, and in the case of the AUC the rate is at 38 per cent (Springer 2012, 27). The demobilization process of the FARC-EP guerrilla has shed a light on the issue. The district attorney's office indicates that the FARC-EP recruited more than 11'500 underage persons between 1974 and 2014. The exact numbers of recruited minors from the FARC-EP and other armed groups are, however, difficult to estimate (González Cepero 2016).

another entrepreneur bought the estate. The *campesinos* remained on the plots they were cultivating but did not receive a formal land title for them. While narrating this story, Joaquín repeats several times that the *campesinos* occupied these plots "with good intentions" and that their activities were in accordance with the kidnapped landholder's intentions (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 10 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

It is interesting to note that according to the mayor of María La Baja, the guerrillas did not occupy the land that formed part of the irrigation district because the physical features of large-scale rice monocultures made it more difficult to hide compared to the 'untamed' *monte*. At the same time, the agricultural production within the irrigation district was of strategic importance to the formal sphere and would therefore prompt a more immediate reply from the formal armed actors in case the guerrillas were to establish themselves on these lands (Interview with mayor, 8 November 2016, María La Baja). This indicates that the presence of state institutions in María La Baja was related to the economic value they attributed to the land. This strategy to push the guerrillas back from economically valuable land did not have a lasting effect, however, because the rice processing plant – the most representative feature of the industrialized agriculture in that period – was abandoned by the end of the 1980s due to the recurrent kidnappings through guerrillas (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

The guerrillas contested established patterns of public authority in Pueblo Nuevo and this enabled them to distribute precarity in accordance with their ideology and politico-territorial interests. The formal sphere in general, and the rural elite in particular, were the declared enemies of the guerrillas' political project. This made them vulnerable to violent actions from the guerrillas and their precarity increased considerably. The guerrillas interpreted the landholders' lives as unworthy of protection and posed a threat to their physical integrity. This led many members of the rural elite to abandon their estates and seek security elsewhere. These dynamics contributed to a renegotiation of land access patterns that was, momentarily, beneficial to some of the *campesinos* that stayed in the village despite the guerrilla presence. They received the possibility to work on land that landholders had abandoned. This means that the *campesinos* became visible to the pattern of public authority that the guerrillas established and that their precarity that was based on restricted land access decreased. At the same time, the presence of the guerrillas in Pueblo Nuevo increased the precarity of the *campesinos* because they lived in a context of fear. The guerrillas recognized their lives only as livable if their actions corresponded to the ideology of the insurgents.

5. Phase II: Paramilitarism and land use change

Yes, in this village everyone suffered abuse from both parts.
Abuse from the guerrillas, abuse from the paramilitaries.
(Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo)

In the Colombian context, paramilitary units were the result of a complex trajectory of shared counterinsurgency efforts from the government, the 'traditional' rural elite, and drug barons that were coupled with economic and regional political interests. In an initial phase, the rural establishment organized private self-defense groups to protect them from the threat the guerrillas posed to their physical integrity and economic projects (Hristov 2010). Gradually, these self-defense groups were consolidated and started to coopt the formal sphere, transforming them into paramilitaries[27]. The groups that acted initially on behalf of the specific economic and security-related interest of members of the rural oligarchy developed their "own internal metabolism, gaining vast amounts of lands, businesses, and weapons, while eliminating political opponents and protecting their most lucrative activity, drug trafficking" (Ballvé 2013, 66). It follows that the paramilitaries and their associates reconfigured significantly the structures of power and public authority (Grajales 2013, 213). The presence of guerrilla groups and the incrimination of rural populations converted the frontier regions into a threat to the formal sphere and its fragmented patterns of public authority that were embodied predominantly, but not exclusively by the rural elite. The territorial control of these regions became a political project that aimed at counteracting and eventually annihilating the guerrilla insurgency in order to (re-)establish a type of public authority that was in line with the formal sphere and its politico-economic visions (Escobar Arango 2013, 29).

The control over local populations and land access were in this context of guerrilla insurgency therefore of paramount importance to the paramilitary units. They established their public authority through a combination of different types of violence. The paramilitaries committed massacres, carried out targeted killings and tortured members of rural populations that were alleged to be supporters of the guerrillas. Furthermore, they established a regime of social control that impeded the free movement of the locals and restricted their economic, social, and cultural activities (Ojeda et al. 2015, 108). The violence and generalized atmosphere of fear led millions of rural dwellers to abandon their land and homes and seek shelter in urban areas (Rodríguez Triana 2016, 309–18). A recent report from UNHCR indicates that at the end of 2015, 6.9 million people were internally displaced in Colombia. This is the highest number of internally displaced persons worldwide (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2016, 30). The massive

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[27] The two terms – self-defense groups and paramilitaries – are often used indiscriminately. For conceptual clarity, I use self-defense groups to describe the initial phase (from the 1960s until the 1980s) of the non-state counterinsurgency efforts and paramilitaries for the consolidated form thereof (after 1980s until the demobilization in 2006).

displacement led to the abandonment of approximately 8 million hectares, corresponding to roughly one third of Colombia's arable land (Acción Social 2010, 114). Internal displacement has manifold reasons (Grajales 2011, 783) and cannot be uniquely allocated to paramilitary violence. However, scholars indicate that the peak of paramilitary power in the late 1990s and early 2000s increased the numbers of internally displaced persons considerably, especially in regions where paramilitaries and guerrillas violently contested land access patterns and public authority (Rodríguez Triana 2016, 307). This was the case for the Montes de María region.

Massive forced displacement 'emptied' the countryside from its inhabitants and enabled the paramilitaries to accumulate land in order to territorialize their public authority through the implementation of economic projects. Forced displacement became thereby a "land grabbing strategy" (Grajales 2011, 783) and the cultivation of oil palm plantations on forcefully accumulated land is a telling example of these dynamics (see for example Ballvé 2012; Grajales 2011; Ocampo Valencia 2009). The ensuing reconfiguration of power structures did, however, not happen 'outside' the formal sphere of the state, but in close interaction with it. Facilitated by a common counterinsurgent ideology that legitimized the existence of the self-defense groups, the paramilitaries "deployed their violent capital and social capital […] to obtain influence over local institutions and eventually […] over central agencies" (Grajales 2011, 773–74), and the political elite used the paramilitaries to reinforce their public authority (Ávila Martínez 2010, 81). The legitimacy of the paramilitaries was further strengthened due to the presumably weak state presence in regions where guerrillas operated (Hristov 2010, 33–36) and the "privatization of repression" through legal frameworks (Avilés 2006, 381). Contrary to the guerrillas, the paramilitaries did therefore not aim at replacing 'the state', but used its institutions for their own economic and political interests, and simultaneously influenced the enactment of legal provisions that further consolidated their power structures (Grajales 2011, 773). The relationship between the formal sphere and paramilitaries was (and to a certain extent, still is) therefore "dialectical in nature" (Hristov 2010, 47).

The paramilitaries' actions titillated between legality and illegality (Grajales 2013) and they combined physical and structural violence in order to establish public authority and enforce their economic interests (Meacham 2014, 9). They contributed significantly to changes in land use patterns and the implementation of a neoliberal agricultural system that corresponded to the formal sphere's vision on rural development (Ballvé 2012). This is referred to as an *agrarian counter-reform* because it reversed the provisions of the 1961 Land Reform, further concentrated land in the hand of a few individuals, and focused on the implementation of a neoliberal development agenda that has had manifold repercussions on the Colombian countryside (Thomson 2011, 338). The Colombian paramilitary phenomenon has been widely studied from an array of Colombian and international scholars and activists. These accounts focus on mainly four interrelated issues: (i) the emergence and spatial expansion of the phenomenon, (ii) the penetration of the formal sphere through paramilitaries, (iii) the repercussions of the economic projects the paramilitaries established on the rural population and their land access, and (iv) the

formal demobilization of paramilitaries in the early 2000s and the subsequent enactment of the 2011 Law on Victims and Land Restitution. These are important aspects to understand the territorial dynamics and victimizing practices in María La Baja, where paramilitary units were present in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Osorio Bonacera 2015, 263–364).

This chapter traces the main arguments of the consulted literature on paramilitarism in Colombia. Based on my research questions and due to the complexity of the phenomenon, I will put the focus on the interrelationships between public discourses on the guerrilla insurgency, the state policies on the provision of public security, and the gradual cooptation of the formal sphere through paramilitaries. In a subsequent chapter, I will illustrate the repercussions of paramilitary incursion on the rural population with examples from Pueblo Nuevo. This chapter starts with an account on the emergence of private self-defense groups and will then link this to formal state policies and discourses to fight the guerrilla insurgency and provide public security in areas where the insurgents were present. This will show the interrelatedness of paramilitarism and state policies. The second part of the chapter focuses on the increasing militarization of the countryside in the early 2000s and the change of counterinsurgency discourse in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States. It is in this period that the fight against guerrillas enters the global discourse of a 'war on terrorism', thus legitimizing the excessively violent armed attacks on the guerrillas and their alleged supporters. I will then illustrate how the Álvaro Uribe Vélez administration formally demobilized the AUC in 2006, granted the majority of the paramilitaries far-reaching amnesty, and recognized the rights of the victims of the armed conflict. The last part of this chapter consists in an overview of the limits of this Law and the subsequent enactment of Law 1448 in 2011 that provides the legal framework for the current efforts to indemnify the victims of the armed conflict.

5.1.   The emergence of counterinsurgent self-defense groups

With increasing guerrilla activity and the implementation of the 1961 land reform through politically engaged *campesinos* (Área de Paz Desarrollo y Reconciliación del PNUD 2010, 20), the rural elite saw their "monopolistic system of land tenure" (Ávila González 2015, 117) and physical integrity threatened (Gutiérrez Sanín 2012, 247). They perceived 'the state' as incapable of providing them with security (Thomson 2011, 328, in reference to Sánchez 2001) and reacted with the creation of private self-defense groups that were the precursors of paramilitarism (Grajales 2011, 771). The ideological basis for the creation and gradual consolidation of these militias was a "zealous anti-Communism" (Ballvé 2013, 66) that was in line with "the counter-insurgency objective of the Colombian armed forces" (Avilés 2006, 387). This gave the self-defense units the legitimacy to act together with, on behalf of, or 'independently' from the formal armed forces to fight the guerrilla insurgency (Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas 2015, 258).

Decree 2298 of 1965[28] illustrates this concurrence of objectives from the formal sphere and self-defense groups to annihilate the guerrillas. The Decree establishes that the "subversive activities that the extremist groups propagate" require a "coordinated effort of government bodies and [other] actors of the nation" and that "civil defense" is "not the exclusive responsibility of the [formal] armed forces" ("Decreto Legislativo Numéro 3398 de 1965" 1965, 1). This indicates that the government handed away its alleged "monopoly of the legitimate use of violence" (Weber 1946, 334) in order to fight the guerrillas. This legitimized therefore the existence and consolidation of the self-defense groups and they became important allies of the formal actors in their efforts against the insurgency (Thomson 2011, 341).

In the same period as the emergence and consolidation of the self-defense groups in the 1970s and 1980s, a new business boomed in Colombia: the production and trafficking of cocaine (Moser 2000, 21–22). The contestation of the control of areas where cocaine was produced and smuggled added yet another layer to the armed conflict in Colombia (Oslender 2016, 13). It also led to the emergence of powerful drug cartels (Echavarría 2012, 7). The drug barons "invested in massive quantities of land" (Grajales 2011, 777) for drug production and the laundering of drug money (*ibid*). They became part of the rural elite, and therefore possible targets for the violent actions the guerrillas perpetrated (Duncan 2015, 24). This motivated them to cooperate with the 'traditional' elite – landholders, businessmen, and politicians – in the constitution of self-defense groups. An example of this cooperation is the creation of the organization *Muerte a Secuestradores*[29] or MAS in 1981 that followed the kidnapping of Marta Nieves Ochoa whose brothers were high ranking members of the infamous Medellín drug cartel (LeGrand 2003, 181–82). This was the first concerted effort of the rural elite and drug traffickers to tackle systematically the threat of kidnappings and extortion through guerrillas (Pizarro Leongómez 2015, 59). Since the 1980s, drug trafficking has become a major source of income for the self-defense groups and guerrillas, and played therefore a significant role in the consolidation and spatial expansion of these groups[30] (Ballvé 2012, 610).

The public discourse on guerrillas changed momentarily in 1982 when Belisario Betancur was elected president of Colombia. He conducted a set of peace processes with different guerrilla groups – FARC-EP, ELN, M-19 – that culminated in several truce agreements that were signed between 1984 and 1986. They established a formal ceasefire between the government and the insurgents (García Durán, Grabe Loewenherz, and Patiño Hormaza

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[28] Decree 3398 was enacted through Law 48 of 1968 (Congreso de Colombia 1968).
[29] Death to Kidnappers.
[30] The cultivation of coca shrubs – the basis for cocaine production – also led to a renegotiation of rural identities, land access, and public authority in the affected regions. They entered into relationships of dependence with the groups that produced and trafficked the drugs and were exposed to the violent renegotiation of public authority and land access, while at the same time being subjected to repressive measures from the formal sphere (see for example Consejería Presidencial para los Derechos Humanos 2014, 1:163; Fajardo Montaña 2012, 59–61; Guerrero, Londoño, and Jaramillo 2016, 219–25). In Pueblo Nuevo there was no cocaine production, but the cocaine boom influenced the belligerent activities in the region. María La Baja was an important corridor for drug trafficking because of its proximity to the Caribbean coast (Osorio Bonacera 2015, 206).

2008, 22). President Betancur promulgated amnesty for the *guerrilleros* (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 17) and agreed to reestablish the public armed groups as the sole providers of public security (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 135), while the guerrillas agreed to desist from extortion, kidnapping, and any other forms of "terrorist acts" (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 24). Furthermore, the government enabled the guerrillas to form their own political party, the *Unión Patriótica* or UP (Ballvé 2013, 65). In the 1986 elections, the recently consolidated UP was the most successful party of the left wing and won several political posts on local, provincial, and national levels (La Rota-Aguilera and Salcedo 2016, 92). The left movement gained thereby considerable visibility in the formal political realm. Despite their promises, however, the guerrillas did not desist from coercing and kidnapping members of the rural elite, continued to attack formal state institutions[31], and increased their troop strength and spatial reach despite the truce agreements (González González 2014, 35). After a battle with the army that killed 24 militaries, the government officially declared the failure of the truce agreements in 1987 (Echavarría 2012, 14).

The truce agreements were not only challenged by violent guerrilla activities, but also met with opposition from representatives of the Colombian armed forces and rural elites (González González 2014, 35). They argued that the negotiations with guerrillas did not reflect the reality of the regions where the guerrillas were present and that kidnappings and extortions through the insurgents continued despite the formally declared ceasefire (Wills Obregón 2015, 31). Representatives of the Colombian army asked large-scale landholders and businessmen from rural areas to support the non-state self-defense groups financially, thus further consolidating and legitimizing the provision of public security through non-state actors (Thomson 2011, 341). In the aftermath of the 1986 elections where the *Unión Patriótica* gained considerable traction, the self-defense groups and representatives of the Colombian armed forces increased their violent actions against the guerrillas and their formal political party (Wood 2012, 185). This led to the assassination of several elected officials and hundreds of activists from the *Unión Patriótica,* but also of people that were incriminated with alleged shared interests with the UP (Medina 2010, 554).

The annihilation of the UP meant that the political left was yet again invisibilized and deprived from the participation in formal politics. It also illustrates the increasing influence and power of the self-defense groups and their interrelatedness with formal armed actors. The extermination of the UP and their alleged sympathizers indicates that the battle against the guerrillas transformed into a "dirty war" (Escobar Arango 2013, 40) against anyone that was purportedly opposed to the political convictions of the self-defense groups and the political establishment, or barred the way to the implementation of their respective economic projects (Grajales 2011). These dirty war strategies were legitimized through ideological claims to counteract the insurgency. They led to the incrimination of rural

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[31] In 1985, for example, the M-19 guerrilla sieged the Justice Palace in Bogotá, took more than 200 hostages, and killed several magistrates and other people that were present in the Palace (Insuasty Rodríguez, Valencia Grajales, and Restrepo Marín 2016, 91–94).

populations that lived in areas where guerrillas were present or that were of economic interests to paramilitary units, drug barons, or actors from the formal sphere (Insuasty Rodríguez, Valencia Grajales, and Restrepo Marín 2016, 19).

The influence of the counterinsurgent self-defense groups grew exponentially throughout the 1980s and 1990s[32], and culminated with the creation of the umbrella organization *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*[33] or AUC in 1997 (Thomson 2011, 341). The paramilitaries used their social and violent capital to gradually and continuously coopt the formal sphere and its institutions. They influenced the elections of public officials that were in line with their counterinsurgency ideology and economic interests (Pérez Salazar 2011, 85–86), killed political opponents (La Rota-Aguilera and Salcedo 2016, 82), and simultaneously benefitted from neoliberal policies that the formal sphere implemented (Ballvé 2012). The paramilitary units combined their integration into the formal sphere with physical violence in order to establish public authority and access to profitable natural resources. They perpetrated selective assassinations, massacres, torture, sexual violence, and forced displacements (Avilés 2006, 380–81) to achieve territorial and political control. The physical violence that the paramilitaries and their allies from the formal sphere exerted peaked in the early 2000s (García Pérez 2016, 233) and for the years 2000-2002, the *Unidad para las Víctimas*[34] registered more than 2 million victims of the armed conflict[35]. This corresponds to roughly one quarter of all the victims the government body registered (9.6 millions) for the period between 1 January 1985 and 1 April 2017 (Red Nacional de Información 2017).

The cooptation of the formal sphere through the paramilitaries is often referred to as *parapolítica* (see Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 249–55; Escobar Arango 2013; Gill 2009) and was uncovered in the course of the demobilization process of the paramilitary units in the early 2000s, where several high-ranking paramilitaries declared their links to representatives of the formal sphere (Valencia Agudelo and Mejía Walker 2010, 71). The subsequent investigation revealed the systematicity and reach of these relations: as of December 2012, approximately 2'500 politicians, members of the Colombian armed forces, and other public servants have been formally accused of having had links with the paramilitary units (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 250). The repercussions of *parapolítica* are far-reaching and still felt in contemporary Colombia. Scholars argue that it

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[32] In 1989, the government formally prohibited non-state self-defense groups ("Decreto 1194 de 1989" 1989). In 1994, however, it passed another Decree ("Decreto 356 de 1994" 1994) that legalized "the use of assault weapons for security firms operating in rural areas, and the training of their members by the military" (Grajales 2011, 778), a measure that was seen as a "way to bring paramilitary groups under public regulation" *ibid*. *De facto,* however, Decree 356 legalized the self-defense groups again, thus further contributing to the propagation of paramilitarism (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 158).

[33] United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia.

[34] Victims Unit. This is the government body that was established in the context of the 2011 Law on Victims and Land Restitution in order to attend and redress the recognized victims of the armed conflict (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Article 48).

[35] The numbers correspond to the declarations of the affected populations and are disaggregated by year of occurrence. It follows that the data does not correspond to the actual number of victims of the armed conflict because some of the affected persons may have made several declarations about victimizing practices that happened in different years (Red Nacional de Información 2017).

undermines the legitimacy of the Colombian Congress and its jurisdictional system (Escobar Arango 2013, 79–80), hampers the dismantlement of the power structures that paramilitaries had established (Hristov 2010, 46), and continues to facilitate the implementation of economic projects that benefit people with proven proximity to the demobilized AUC (Gutiérrez Sanín and García Reyes 2016, 103–4).

This section has traced the emergence of counterinsurgency self-defense groups that were to become paramilitary units. It has become clear that these self-defense groups are to be understood in relation to the formal sphere and its fight against the guerrilla insurgency. They are, therefore, not 'independent' from the formal sphere, nor is the formal sphere independent from them as the section on *parapolítica* has indicated. The paramilitaries need the formal sphere to implement and legitimize economic projects, and the formal sphere draws on the paramilitaries to establish a specific type of 'public security' and meet the economic and political interests of its members. I will further clarify this interdependency with the example of the oil palm business that was expanded despite high rates of violence. This part has shown that paramilitarism is a decidedly complex phenomenon that is simultaneously highly localized and national in reach.

The next section will further illustrate these issues. I will put the focus on the interactions between the increased militarization and securitization of the countryside during the two administrations of Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2006 and 2006-201), the demobilization of the paramilitaries in 2005, and the implementation of the Victims Law in 2011. The first part will summarize the main aspects of Uribe's security policy and relate it to the global 'war on terror' in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. In a second step, I will describe the features that defined the demobilization of the AUC in 2005. Finally, I will relate the paramilitary phenomenon to the allocation of precarity and the renegotiation of the collective *campesino* identity.

5.2.   Militarization and paramilitary demobilization

The paramilitary units legitimized their violent actions through a combination of counterinsurgency and public safety discourses (Área de Paz Desarrollo y Reconciliación del PNUD 2010, 19). President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, elected in 2002, shared this ideology (Escobar Arango 2013, 59–60) and pursued a military solution to the crisis[36] (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 185), thus "dismissing any alternative of a political negotiation of the conflict" (Moncayo Cruz 2015, 63). The focus of this so-called "democratic safety policy" (Moncayo Cruz 2015, 63) that Uribe's administration established lay on the "recuperation of territories where illegal armed groups were present, the protection of economic infrastructure, and the development of a program for road safety" (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 185). In this pursuit, Uribe modernized and increased the troop strength of the

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[36] Uribe's predecessor, Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998-2002) conducted peace negotiations with the FARC-EP and ELN guerrillas. The negotiations failed, however, and coincided with an increase of armed confrontations between paramilitaries, formal armed forces, and guerrillas. Simultaneously to the peace negotiations with the guerrillas, Pastrana Arango implemented *Plan Colombia,* the military agreement with the United States (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 139–81)

Colombian armed forces and between 1998 and 2010, the size of the Colombian army doubled from 215'000 to 445'000 soldiers (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 179). Even though president Uribe Vélez declared his determination to combat "any type of illegal armed actors" (Moncayo Cruz 2015, 63), the military operations "exclusively targeted the FARC-EP" (Franz 2016, 572). With the enactment of the democratic safety policies and the increased militarization of the countryside, the areas controlled by the guerrillas decreased significantly (Insuasty Rodríguez, Valencia Grajales, and Restrepo Marín 2016, 192), while public security in strategically important regions augmented: once again it was possible to travel by road "without the fear of being kidnapped" (Redacción el Tiempo 2002).

The United States of America supported Colombia financially and strategically in the fight against the guerrilla insurgency and drugs through the so-called *Plan Colombia.* The agreement was initiated in 2000 and is still ongoing (D. Franco 2016). The initial objectives of *Plan Colombia* was "to eliminate the production of illegal drugs, to end violence and human rights violations, and to foster economic and social development" (Franz 2016, 564). The US armed forces trained their Colombian counterparts and participated in military operations against the insurgency. In so doing, and due to the considerable amount of money spent[37], *Plan Colombia* contributed significantly to the increasing militarization of rural Colombia (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 187). After the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001, the Colombian and US governments declared the guerrillas as 'terrorists', thus aligning their military interventions and the objectives of the Plan with the global 'war on terrorism' (Estrada Álvarez 2015, 39). *Plan Colombia* has been highly controversial because of the US-American financial assistance to and direct involvement with the Colombian armed forces despite their well-documented human rights abuses and collaboration with paramilitary units and drug traffickers (Ballvé 2012; Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas 2015; Martínez Cortés 2013, 7; Ojeda et al. 2015).

The implementation of Uribe's democratic security policy coincided with "one of the periods with the greatest paramilitary violence" (Insuasty Rodríguez, Valencia Grajales, and Restrepo Marín 2016, 192). The democratic security policy established public 'safety' in areas of special economic interest, while simultaneously augmenting the vulnerability of rural populations (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 180). They were converted into military targets because of their alleged proximity to the guerrillas. In 2002 – the year the democratic security policy initiated – approximately 750'000 persons were forcefully displaced from their homes. This corresponds to the highest number of internally displaced persons throughout the conflict (Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) 2017). Paradoxically enough, the AUC declared a unilateral ceasefire on 1 December 2002 and requested the government to initiate a dialogue that was to lead to their demobilization (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia 2002). They asked for the establishment of a legal framework that was to protect them from extradition for drug trafficking to the United States and was

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[37] Between 2000 and 2006, the US government spent US$ 7.5 billions on *Plan Colombia* (Franz 2016, 564). In February 2016, Santos and Obama renewed the collaboration between the US and Colombia. The US government promised US$ 450 millions for the peace efforts in Colombia (D. Franco 2016).

reprieving for their war crimes and crimes against humanity (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 191).

In 2005, the government passed the *Ley de Justicia y Paz*[38] or Law 975 that established the legal basis for the demobilization of the paramilitaries and other illegal armed actors (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 45). The Justice and Peace Law recognized thereby the paramilitaries as an illegal warring party and put them in the same category as the guerrillas (Delgado Barón 2011, 182). The illegal armed actors that participated in the demobilization process[39] had the possibility to get a partial amnesty if they collaborated with the Colombian authorities. The ones that were eligible for the amnesty program[40] could be sentenced to prison terms of between 5 and 7 years (Congreso de Colombia 2005, Article 29). So as to benefit from this partial amnesty, the demobilizing actors were obliged to issue a voluntary statement (*versión ilbre*) and "provide a full confession of all the crimes they participated in, committed, or knew of; [...] indicate all the goods of legal and illegal origin that they have [...] so that they are being handed over and used to guarantee the reparation of the victims" (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 45). The Law also provided that "if possible" (Congreso de Colombia 2005, Article 44), land the armed actors accumulated during the conflict was to be restituted to the ones that occupied or owned it before the belligerent activities. In order to get the land restituted, the claimants had to register with the government and comply with a specific set of requirements (Congreso de Colombia 2005, Articles 43-46). These requirements were, however, only met by a small proportion of the internally displaced (Lid 2012, 206–7) and the land restitution was "not satisfactory" (Valencia Agudelo and Mejía Walker 2010, 60).

Law 975 formally demobilized the AUC and recognized the rights of the victims of the armed conflict. However, it did not stipulate the measures necessary to implement the reparation of the victims, nor the dismantlement of the power structures the AUC had implemented (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 195) as the continuously high numbers of forced displacements[41] (Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) 2017) and the involvement of persons with links to the AUC in formal politics illustrate (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2014, 19). In the official discourse, however, the demobilization of the AUC was framed as successful and paramilitarism was discursively invisibilized (Hristov 2010, 17). After the demobilization of the AUC, a presumably 'new' set of illegal armed actors has been emerging in Colombia: the so-called *bandas criminales emergentes*[42] or BACRIM (Lid and García-Godos 2010, 267). They consist of members of the AUC who have been demobilized

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[38] Justice and Peace Law

[39] The numbers of demobilized of illegal armed actors vary according to the sources. Whereas Alfonso Insuasty Rodríguez and colleagues (2016, 145) indicate that "approximately 7'000 members of the AUC surrendered and put down their weapons", data from the government put the number of collectively demobilized AUC entities at a bit over 30'000 persons (Valencia Agudelo and Mejía Walker 2010, 67).

[40] The ones that committed the most serious crimes were not given this possibility. They were judged in another type of legal proceedings and their prison sentences were higher (Lid 2012, 206–7).

[41] Between 2002 and 2008, approximately 450'000 people were forcefully displaced per year (Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) 2017).

[42] Emerging Criminal Gangs.

or not, drug traffickers, demobilized *guerrilleros*, and common delinquents (Insuasty Rodríguez, Valencia Grajales, and Restrepo Marín 2016, 16).

The official discourse argues that these BACRIM collaborate with guerrillas to control the drug business and do therefore not qualify as paramilitaries. The government thereby "differentiates between the former AUC and the BACRIM on the basis of their alleged purpose" (Lid and García-Godos 2010, 267): while the violent actions of the AUC were legitimized through a counterinsurgency ideology that was in line with the discourse of the formal sphere, the actions of the BACRIM are based on pure economic rationales (*ibid.*). Scholars and social activists argue, however, that these BACRIM deploy their violent and social capital to pursue their economic and political goals – drug trafficking, the implementation of agribusiness projects, and the cooptation of the formal sphere – in a similar manner to the paramilitaries (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 193). It follows that for many, BACRIM are the result of an incomplete and unsuccessful paramilitary demobilization (Vizcaya Rodríguez 2015, 22).

This chapter has given a summarizing account on the emergence, consolidation, and demobilization of counterinsurgent self-defense groups and their interrelatedness to formal state policies and structures of power. The emergence of the self-defense units is linked to the ideological framework of the frontier that frames the formal sphere as being 'absent' from the frontier regions. The rural elites were exposed to extortion and kidnappings through the guerrillas that threatened their physical integrity and exclusionary land control patterns and therefore increased their precarity. Due to the alleged absence of formal state institutions and the resulting incapability to provide public security, the rural elites organized themselves in so-called self-defense groups that performed this task. The formal sphere supported these dynamics through the enactment of legal frameworks that externalized the provision of public security in frontier regions to private actors. The enactment of these legal provisions was linked to the recognition of the rural elites through the formal sphere that framed their lives as being worthy of protection. Gradually, the self-defense groups developed into a "bundle of powers" (Ribot and Peluso 2003, 158, in reference to Ghani 1995) that was able to allocate precarity through its interactions with the political and armed structures of the formal sphere and the use of physical violence.

The demobilization of the paramilitary units in 2005 meant that the formal sphere officially recognized the self-defense groups as a warring party that broke the law. The demobilization process also led to the visibilization of the victims of the violent acts the paramilitary units and other illegal armed actors had been perpetrating. In so doing, the formal sphere humanized – at least, discursively – these victims and aimed at reducing their precarity by acknowledging the necessity to redress them. The formal demobilization of the paramilitary units only marginally dismantled the structures of power and domination they had established. The formal sphere, however, has been insisting that the demobilization was successful and that the paramilitary phenomenon has ceased to exist. This has created a schism between the formal discourse and the actual power relations in Colombia, as the emergence and consolidation of the BACRIM as well as the dynamics of

parapolitics illustrate. As a consequence, the victimizing practices of these allegedly 'new' armed groups are being invisibilized and their victims are not being recognized as such.

5.3.   The Law on Victims and Land Restitution

The discourse on the necessity to redress the victims of the internal armed conflict gained momentum in 2011 when the administration of Juan Manuel Santos passed the *Ley de Víctimas y Resitución de Tierras*[43] or Law 1448 in 2011. The law is to be understood in continuity of Law 975 from 2005 (Martínez Cortés 2013, 12) that recognized the existence of the armed conflict and its victims, but did not provide concrete measures for their reparation (Villarraga Sarmiento 2015, 195). Law 1448 establishes that it is to be seen in a context of transitional justice and that its "ultimate goal" is the establishment of "national reconciliation and lasting and sustainable peace" (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Article 8, cited and translated in Summers 2011, 220). This is remarkable because the internal conflict was still ongoing at the moment of the promulgation of Law 1448 (Martínez Cortés 2013, 12). The provisions of the law create the legal and institutional framework through which "measures of attention, assistance, and integral reparation" (Aguilera Díaz 2013, 11) of the victims are to be concretized. It acknowledges that the victims of the armed conflict have the right to truth, justice, and a guarantee of non-repetition of the victimizing practices (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Articles 24-26, 141).

In order to receive these rights, the petitioners have to be recognized as victims of the armed conflict. Article 3 (Congreso de Colombia 2011) states that "[…] victims are considered persons that individually or collectively suffered harm from incidents [that happened] after 1 January 1985 as a consequence of infractions to the International Humanitarian Law or of serious and manifest violations of the international norms of human rights in the context of the internal armed conflict […]." Persons that experienced hardship related to the confrontations between armed groups before 1985 do, therefore, not enter the category of 'victims' the Law stipulates[44]. Law 1448 further states that it considers only those people that suffered from violent acts of actors that are recognized as forming part of the armed conflict as victims. This means that the victims of 'common' crime do not enter the category (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Article 3, Paragraph 3). The decision which types of crime and actors form part of the armed conflict is an intrinsically political one. The case of the BACRIM illustrates this point. The government frames these armed groups as 'criminal gangs' that are 'different' to the recognized armed actors of the conflict and do thus not form part thereof. The victims of their violent actions are therefore being made invisible because they do not enter the victims' category Law 1448 stipulates (Martínez Cortés 2013, 13–14). These limitations of the victims' category raise the question on the boundaries of the notions 'internal armed conflict' and its actors in a situation of "generalized violence" (Oslender 2016, 13) and the hybridization of 'illegal' and 'legal'.

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[43] Law on Victims and Land Restitution.
[44] Article 4 of Law 1448 states that people that suffered harm because of violence that happened before 1985 have the "right to truth, symbolic reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition" and that these measures are provided for groups and not individuals (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Article 4).

Article 9 (Congreso de Colombia 2011) contributes to this confusion, stating that the status of victim is given "regardless of whom the author of the crime is", but that "the state" cannot be made responsible for the violent actions that are recognized as being victimizing. The role of "the state" as a victimizing force of the internal armed conflict is therefore treated in an evasive manner[45] (Amnistía Internacional 2012, 7). As described earlier, the boundaries between 'the state' and 'the criminals' are, however, blurry and often transgressed. Article 9 (Congreso de Colombia 2011) indicates that the Law separates "the process of acquiring victim status […] from the process of condemning the person responsible for victimization" (Summers 2012, 226) and does therefore not address the issues of the interrelatedness of the formal sphere and the non-formal armed actors. In order to be recognized as victims, the solicitants need to register themselves at the responsible government bodies and file evidence of the events that converted them into victims (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Articles 154-156). The legally recognized victims receive state assistance for the re-establishment of their livelihoods. This includes access to special job skills programs and other social services and preferential admission to housing grants (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Articles 49, 51, 52).

The Law also indicates that forcefully displaced persons have the right to get their land restituted and formalized (Congreso de Colombia 2011, 72). Land restitution is, however, restricted to land that was violently accumulated after 1991 (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Article 75). The recognized persons or groups (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Article 152) also receive the right to physically go back to their land with the assistance of the relevant state institutions that are to provide them with security, prevent their re-victimization and discrimination, and stimulate the re-establishment of their "communitarian, social, and political settings" (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Article 149). The Law recognizes different forms of land tenure (ownership, possession, and occupation) in its provisions that regulate land restitution (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Articles 72-73). Law 1448 also takes into consideration the diverse ways through which armed actors accumulated land. The recognized mechanisms include physical violence, threats, and land transactions that were facilitated by the conflict scenario (Summers 2012, 228). The Law indicates that the beneficiaries of the land restitution are legally allowed to sell their land two years after its restitution (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Article 101). While Law 1448 interprets this as a protective measure, local structures of power may actually take advantage of this provision to pressure the receivers of land to 'sell' them the restituted plots (Gutiérrez Ossa 2014, 159). In case the physical restitution of the violently accumulated land is not possible, the Law stipulates either financial compensation or the allocation of a plot with similar characteristics (Congreso de Colombia 2011, Article 72). Land restitutions have been met with considerable difficulties. By the end of March 2017, a bit more than 200'000 hectares have been restituted (Unidad de Restitución de Tierras 2017). This corresponds to roughly

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[45] Article 149 defines the measures that aim at guaranteeing the non-repetition of the victimizing practices. In subsection n., the Law states that it wants to promote the establishment of an "effective control of the formal Armed Forces through civil authorities" (Congreso de Colombia 2011). This indicates that the Law acknowledges to a certain extent the involvement of the public Armed Forces in victimizing practices.

2.5 per cent of all the forcefully abandoned land registered in 2010 (Acción Social 2010, 114).

The provisions of the 2011 Victims' Law encompass the majority of the victims of the armed conflict. However, not all the victimizing practices the armed actors have been perpetrating are recognized equally. The temporal restriction of the victims' category (after 1985) and the restitution and other reparation measures (after 1991), as well as the partial invisibilization of the formal sphere's involvement in the victimizing practices create therefore a "hierarchy of victims" (Amnistía Internacional 2012, 6) and, thus, a differential allocation of precarity. Furthermore, the Law does not take into consideration the economic and legal policies that contributed to the emergence and consolidation of armed actors and therefore invisibilizes their symbiotic relationship (Grajales 2013, 212). This means that the Law invisibilizes a broad set of victimizing practices. Furthermore, the political discourse surrounding the BACRIM phenomenon illustrates that the delimitation of armed actors that form part of the conflict leads to the invisibilization of their victimizing practices and, by extension, the victims thereof.

The Law 1448 becomes thereby a mechanism that is enabled to allocate recognition and precarity differentially. The implementation of oil palm plantations is a telling example of the types of victimizing practices the Law only partially recognizes. These mechanisms are especially found in legal policies and discourses on rural development that stipulated the implementation of these plantations, thus legitimizing the expansion of the oil palms. In the next chapter, I will illustrate these dynamics. The chapter starts with interrogating the dynamics of economic development in the context of internal armed conflict. It will become clear that there is an intrinsic relationship between the presence of armed actors and the subsequent implementation of the oil palm plantations. I will then analyze the discourses from the formal sphere and economic actors that legitimized the establishment of the agribusiness. Afterwards, the chapter reflects on how legal frameworks facilitated the rapid expansion of the oil palms. The subsequent step consists in illustrating the two business models (large-scale plantations and small-scale contracted farming) of the oil palm sector in Colombia. Finally, I will reflet on impacts of the agribusiness on the allocation of precarity and, thus, the production of victimhoods.

6. Palm oil

> *"For many the palm tree has become a symbol of terror and*
> *injustice; for others the same tree is an icon of Colombia's*
> *potential for economic growth."* (Thomson 2011, 348)

In mainstream literature on the economic effects of armed conflicts, it is argued that there is a negative correlation between war and development (Gates et al. 2012, 1713). In this perception, armed conflict leads to a "development in reverse" (Collier et al. 2003, 13) where resources are used for destructive means, thus stymying economic development (Elhaway 2008, 87). The scholars argue, as David Maher (2015) shows in reference to a

large body of literature, that armed conflicts are also deemed to have negative impacts on international trade, an important pillar of economic development in a globalized world. The Colombian palm oil [46] industry, however, does not fit into this correlation (Thomson 2011). Despite the intensification of the internal armed conflict and forced displacements in the early 2000s (Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas 2015, 258), the area sown with oil palms doubled from 150'399 hectares in 1999 to 300'146 hectares in 2006, and in 2015 a total of 466'185 hectares was sown with palm trees (Fedepalma 2004; 2007; 2010; 2013; 2016). This makes Colombia the leading producer of palm oil in Latin America, and the fifth biggest globally (Ballvé 2012, 618). The oil palm plantations are situated in the tropical lowlands, especially in the Eastern and Northern parts of the country (Fedepalma 2016, 45). The rapid growth of palm oil production in "a context of generalized violence" (Oslender 2016, 13) shows that "certain types of civil war violence can buttress economic growth" (Maher 2015, 300). Scholars have argued that 'illegal' armed actors and oil palm companies alike have actually been taking advantage of the Colombian armed conflict to implement oil palm projects (Grajales 2013, 214) and that they have been interacting with the formal sphere in this process (Grajales 2011; Maher 2015; Ballvé 2012).

Representatives of the formal sphere and rural entrepreneurs perceive the implementation of oil palms as a way to diversify the agricultural economy while simultaneously contributing to the 'modernization' of the countryside (Ballvé 2012, 618). It is argued that the oil palm plantations – among other incentives of rural development – generate new job opportunities for the rural population (Departamento Nacional de Administración 2003, 229). Furthermore, palm oil production responds to the increasing global and national demand for agrofuels (White and Dasgupta 2010, 593). Bioethanol produced with palm oil is to contribute to the mitigation of climate change and decrease the dependence on fossil fuels (Coronado Delgado and Dietz 2013, 94). This global economic context incentivized the government to establish a favorable environment for the implementation of the plantations. In 2007, for example, Decree 2629 established that as of 2010, diesel commercialized in Colombia has to contain 10 per cent of biofuels (Artículo 2), and Law 939 of 2004 – the basis for the Decree – states that palm oil is one of the crops to be used for domestic biofuels production (Congreso de Colombia 2004). This Decree is "[o]ne of the major stimulants of palm oil production" (Grajales 2013, 226). Export subsidies (Thomson 2011, 342) and significant tax exemptions (Ajila and Chiliquinga 2007, 13) further promote the plantations. This made the implementation of the plantations "attractive to the paramilitary, as the oil palm sector presents a combination of considerable profitability, public subsidies and possibilities for money laundering" (Grajales 2011, 785). This raises

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[46] The oil palm (*elaeis guineensis*) is an oleaginous plant from Western Africa (Corley and Tinker 2016, 1–2). Due to its high productivity, oil palms have become "one of the world's most rapidly expanding equatorial crops" (Koh and Wilcove 2008, 60). They require a tropical climate with regular rainfall or artificial irrigation systems. The perennial crop produces it first harvestable fruit after approximately three years and reaches its moment of maximum production after seven to ten years (Mingorance, Minelli, and Le Du 2004, 23). The industrial cultivation of oil palms requires the use of fertilizers and pesticides to increase production and prevent the spread of diseases (Corley and Tinker 2016, 513). The life span of an oil palm is of around 50 years (Mingorance, Minelli, and Le Du 2004, 23).

the question how the oil palm plantations have been implemented and how this relates to the internal armed conflict.
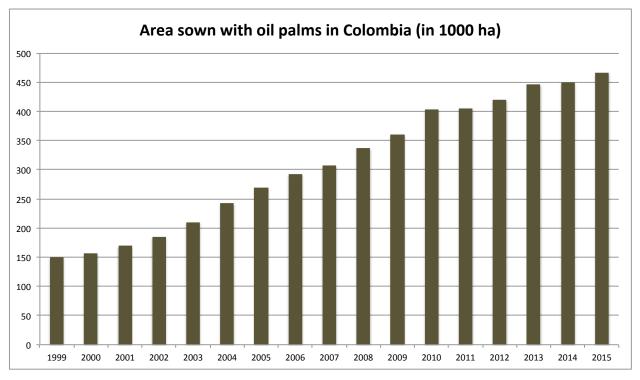

Figure 2: The expansion of oil palms in Colombia between 1999 and 2015. Own diagram based on Data from FEDEPALMA[47] (Fedepalma 2004, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016).

The first step for the implementation of oil palm plantations is to acquire control over the land in question and subsequently 'empty' the land from its inhabitants and their economic activities (Marin Burgos 2014, 81). The involved actors, predominantly paramilitary units and drug barons that sometimes collaborated with the Colombian armed forces[48] (Ballvé 2012; Thomson 2011, 342), used coercive means to obtain control over the land (Grajales 2013, 214). The coercion included physical violence – massacres, selective assassinations, forced disappearances and other types of violence – and the spread of a climate of fear and terror through the threat to commit physical violence on the population if they were not to comply with the demands of the armed actors (Rodríguez Triana 2016, 277). As a consequence, many rural dwellers abandoned their land and sought refuge in other regions of Colombia[49].

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[47] FEDEPALMA is an acronym for *Federación Nacional de Cultivadores de Palma de Aceite* (National federation of oil palm cultivators)

[48] The configuration of involved actors is case-specific and it is not possible to make general claims about the involvement of the Colombian armed forces in the process of land accumulation that is related to the implementation of oil palm plantations. There are case studies, however, where this collaboration has been unveiled. The most widely discussed case is situated in the Urabá region in proximity to the border between Colombia and Panamá, where members of the Colombian armed forces and paramilitaries evicted the local populations from their land and where oil palm plantations have been installed on the accumulated land (V. L. Franco and Restrepo 2011; Ballvé 2012; Grajales 2013; Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013, 40–42). The relationship between violent land accumulation and the subsequent implementation of oil palm plantations is, however, a recurrent dynamic in Colombia (Maher 2015).

[49] A recent report from UNHCR estimates that by February 2017, more than 7 million Colombians have been internally displaced (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) 2017, 1). This corresponds to

Scholars conceptualize the establishment of land control through violent means with David Harvey's notion of *accumulation by dispossession* (Harvey 2003, 137–82) that relates the "expansion of a model of economic development that is based on the commodification and privatization of natural resources [...] in favor of a specific group to the eviction and pauperization of broad parts of the rural population" (Rodríguez Triana 2016, 277). In the Colombian case, the generalized violence of the conflict contributed significantly to the accumulation of vast amounts of land by the armed actors and associated companies (Hristov 2010, 19). This led to a "reconfiguration of the relations between the state, national territories, legal and illegal economic actors and the market" (Grajales 2013, 229). The paramilitary units legitimized the violent eviction of rural populations through the combination of counterinsurgency and public security discourses. This 'justified' the violence and subsequent eviction of the *campesinos* because they were framed as the social basis for the guerrillas and, thus, potential insurgents (Rivas Nieto and Rey García 2008, 50–51).

The implementation of the plantations and the subsequent commercialization of their produce requires the 'legalization' of land tenure (Grajales 2011). The armed actors and oil palm companies have been using several strategies to achieve the formal recognition for their violently established land control: they pressured the *campesinos* into 'selling' their land[50] (Hoffmann 2016, 33), they forged land titles (Grajales 2015, 546), and they coopted formal authorities on different scales to provide them with the required certificates of land transactions (Thomson 2011, 345). The "weak forms of tenancy that characterize small farming in Colombia" (Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas 2015, 266) further smoothed the way for the legalization of land tenure "as new occupants can easily claim [...] ownership" (*ibid*). The spatial expansion of oil palms was therefore not simply the result of a violent process of accumulation by dispossession, but also intrinsically linked to interactions between the armed actors and the formal sphere (Grajales 2011, 783), while the internal armed conflict has been used as a "cover for massive land expropriation, and a violent transition from small-scale farming to commercial agriculture had taken place" (Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas 2015, 259). The government provided the institutional framework that facilitated the legalization of violently accumulated land and enabled thereby the armed actors to make profit out of the usurped areas. The public institutions thus recognized "new forms of authority intimately related to private violence and crime" (Grajales 2011, 783) and thereby legitimated violently accumulated land (Grajales 2013, 229). Hence, the implementation of oil palm plantation did not happen in a "lawless situation" (Grajales 2015, 547), but was the result of "the convergence between legal strategies, violent coercion and criminal networks" (*ibid.*).

In the Colombian palm oil production industry coexist two business models. The first model corresponds to large-scale landholdings that cover several hundreds of hectares and

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approximately 15 per cent of the Colombian population (Population data from United Nations 2015, 14, calculation of IDPs based on numbers from UNHCR 2017).

[50] A recurrent phrase they used was "Sell us your land, or we'll negotiate with your widow" (Ballvé 2012, 610), thus threatening the *campesinos* to kill them if they do not hand over the land.

cultivate approximately 75 per cent of areas sown with oil palms (Leech 2009, 3). The vastness of these plantations is predominantly due to the relatively high set-up costs of oil palm plantations, processing plants and supply chains (Mingorance, Minelli, and Le Du 2004, 24), and their arguably higher productivity (Maher 2015, 309). The large-scale plantations are in most cases operated and exploited by agro-industrial companies. They hire wage laborers that usually work on short-term contracts. The availability of labor opportunities – one of the arguments mobilized to legitimize the implementation of oil palm plantations – changes seasonally and depends on the age of the oil palms: the older the palms, the less work needs to be done. The most labor is needed to prepare the plots for the oil palm crops and to sow them. In the early phase of a plantation, the plots need to be kept 'clean' from shrubs and this is another labor-intensive process. Once the palms are big enough, these labors become obsolete and the main work consists in harvesting or establishing/maintaining irrigation canals (Cárdenas 2012, 324–25)

The second model of oil palm plantations is based on so-called *productive* or *strategic alliances.* This means that the *campesinos* enter a scheme of contracted farming with the oil palm company and remain, therefore, the owners/possessors of the land in question. The oil palm companies organize the farmers in producer associations and in María La Baja this association is called ASOPALMA[51] (González Posso and González Perafán 2013, 23–24). The "integration of the *campesino* economy into industrial development" (Ávila González 2015, 119) is seen as a way to bring economic development to rural areas, convert the *campesinos* in entrepreneurs that benefit from the neoliberalization of the agricultural sector (Ballvé 2013, 68), and provide them with an alternative income in case the plantation is located on a plot where coca shrubs were produced before its implementation (Ocampo Valencia 2009, 176). The *alianzas productivas* have been receiving generous support both from the Colombian government[52] and international donors, such as the United States and their *Plan Colombia* (Ballvé 2013, 68). In these contracting schemes, the oil palm company provides the *campesinos* with financial assistance to sow and maintain the plantations. The contract establishes that the small-scale producers are to sell their harvest to the oil palm companies and that the company retains an agreed-upon percentage of the generated income until the small-scale oil palm cultivator has repaid the amount of financial assistance to the company (Álvarez Roa 2012, 13).

In sum, this section on palm oil production has challenged the orthodox understanding that there is a negative correlation between armed conflict and economic development. It has become clear that in the Colombian case, there is an intrinsic relationship between the internal armed conflict and the establishment of the plantations. Representatives of the oil palm sector and paramilitary units have used the armed conflict as a pretext to 'empty' the land from its people. The formal sphere has provided a legal and economic environment that increases the profitability of the oil palm business, thus further incentivizing its

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[51] ASOPALMA is an acronym for *Asociación de Productores de Palma de Aceite del Distrito de Riego de María La Baja* ("Association of oil palm producers in the irrigation district of María La Baja").
[52] This financial support from government bodies included "grants, loans, and tax breaks" (Ballvé 2013, 68).

(violent) implementation. These dynamics, coupled with counterinsurgency and rural development discourses, contributed significantly to the creation of the oil palm plantations. This territorializes both the renegotiated patterns of public authority and the precarity of the *campesinos.* The majority of the *campesinos* living in areas with palm oil production enter in a relationship of dependence with the agribusiness company. They either work as wage laborers on the plantations or in the processing plants, or they externalize the control over their land through participating in a productive alliance. This indicates that the oil palm companies establish public authority over the regions where their economic projects are located, and that it is them that receive the power to allocate precarity. At the same time, the longevity and territorially exclusionary features of the oil palm plantations indicate that these structures of power have a long-term impact on the Colombian countryside and its inhabitants.

In the next chapter, I will illustrate the effects of these dynamics on the *campesinos* in Pueblo Nuevo, their land access, and the subsequent renegotiation of the *campesino* identity and production of victimhoods. The section starts with a brief account on the escalation of the internal armed conflict in Pueblo Nuevo, focusing on the forced displacement the paramilitary units perpetrated in the village in 1997. I will then reflect on the impacts of this forced displacement on the collective identity of its victims and introduce the category of "the displaced". The subsequent step consists in the analysis of the implications that this new identitary and legal category had on the allocation of precarity. Afterwards, I will introduce the main features of the oil palm business in the municipality of María La Baja and show the interrelatedness of the armed conflict with the spatial expansion of the agribusiness. I will then reflect on the implications of oil palms on the renegotiation of the collective *campesino* identity and the way in which it changed the forms through which precarity is being distributed in Pueblo Nuevo. It will become clear that the allocation of precarity does not only happen through the oil palm company and its business models, but also through the *campesinos.* This is related to the manifold connections that the *campesinos* in Pueblo Nuevo have towards the oil palm plantations. The final part of the chapter will examine the meanings of the victims' category for the interviewed *campesinos,* oil palm workers, and the mayor of María La Baja and relate them to the provisions of the 2011 Victims Law and the collective *campesino* identity.

7. Generalized violence and land use change in María La Baja

"When the bad times arrived here in the region,
we left our farm."
(Yerlis during OXFAM Workshop, 6 October 2016, La Guayaba)

The municipality of María La Baja and the broader Montes de María region were an epicenter of the internal armed conflict in the late 1990s and early 2000. With the incursion of paramilitary units in 1997, the intensity of the conflict grew considerably (Ojeda et al. 2015, 108). The violent clashes between guerrillas and paramilitaries led to an

environment of generalized fear and despair that reached unprecedented levels at the turn of the century: between 1999 and 2001, the paramilitary units committed 42 massacres that killed 354 persons in the Montes de María region (Rojas Berrío 2015, 53). The armed clashes between the belligerent parties displaced more than 200'000 persons and led to the violent dispossession of more than 80'000 hectares of arable land between 1997 and 2007 (Ojeda et al. 2015, 108). An "effective combination of coercive and juridical strategies" (*ibid*) facilitated the ensuing land accumulation and agribusiness projects through paramilitary units and their allies from the formal and economic spheres. The massacre in El Salado in the municipality of El Carmen de Bolívar was one of the cruelest acts of violence the paramilitary units committed throughout the conflict (Garzón Martínez 2009, 160). In El Salado, the paramilitaries assassinated 60 persons in early 2000[53]. They also committed psychological and physical torture and sexual abuse, leading to the forceful displacement of the inhabitants of El Salado and surrounding villages (Jaramillo Marín 2010, 221–22). The massacres in El Salado and other villages in the region also influenced dynamics of forced displacement and fear in Pueblo Nuevo (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

In 1997, the incursion of paramilitary units also occurred in Pueblo Nuevo and they killed several *campesinos* in Pueblo Nuevo and surrounding villages. Despite the paramilitary presence, the guerrillas continued to operate in the region and even increased their troop strength (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones 2015, 78–79). The violence the paramilitary units and the guerrillas perpetrated increased over the following years and in 1999, the paramilitaries launched another massive incursion in Pueblo Nuevo. On August 17, the AUC killed five persons in the village, burnt vehicles of public transport, and destroyed two food pantries and a week after these assassinations the ELN guerrilla killed two *campesinos.* This sweeping atmosphere of violence led the vast majority of the people living in Pueblo Nuevo to abandon their homes and seek refuge in urban areas or other villages (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones 2015, 79–81). Leidy says that the people had no other choice (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). There occurred also cases where the paramilitaries directly threatened the *campesinos* to leave their plots, as it happened to Gladis' father. She narrates that the paramilitaries gave him and his family five days to leave the plot and that after these threats, "they did not wait even one day and everyone left the village running and sought refuge in the city" (Interview with Gladis and Leidy and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba). This converted the *campesinos* from Pueblo Nuevo into Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), an identitary and legal category I will describe in the following section.

7.1. Los desplazados

The forced displacement meant that the *campesinos* lost access to their land and therefore the very basis for their identity construction. They had to re-establish their livelihoods

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[53] The paramilitary units already committed a massacre in El Salado in 1997. They killed several social leaders of the village and forcefully displaced its inhabitants. Three months after this first massacre, about half of the forcefully displaced people returned to El Salado and re-established their livelihoods until they were displaced after the massacre in 2000 (Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación 2009, 102–4).

away from their homes and were no longer considered as *campesinos* because they did not live in the *campo,* the countryside, anymore (Interview with Jhon, Edwin, and Leidy, 8 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). The *campesinos* were thereby converted into *los desplazados* – "the displaced". Hence, the individual and collective hardship of the *campesinos* that was based on the suffering of violence and the forceful displacement from their land and homes was being amalgamated into this new category (Oslender 2016, 13). The formal sphere contributed to this process by passing Law 387 in 2011 where it acknowledges its responsibility to attend the *desplazados* and prevent internal displacement (Arias Rodríguez 2011, 79; Congreso de Colombia 1997). In so doing, the government converted the group of the *desplazados* into a legal category. Law 387 defines the *desplazados* as follows:

> *Desplazado* is every person that has been forced to migrate within the national territory, abandoning his or her location of residence or regular economic activities because his or her life, physical integrity or personal liberties have been violated or are directly threatened in the context of one of the following situations: the internal armed conflict […], generalized violence, mass violations of human rights, […] or any other circumstances that emanate from the aforementioned situations […] and alter drastically the public order (Congreso de Colombia 1997, Article 1).

This very broad definition of *desplazados* does not take into consideration the specificities that led to the forced displacement, nor the differential necessities of its victims (Osorio Pérez and Lozano Velázquez 1999, 76–77). Law 387 stipulates that the internally displaced are entitled to humanitarian aid from the government. These measures include the provision of "alimentation, […] health and psychological care, […] and decent accommodation" (Congreso de Colombia 1997, Article 15). In order to benefit from this assistance, the *desplazados* are to register with the responsible government entity (*ibid,* Article 32). The internally displaced therefore have to identify as forming part of this category to receive aid from the government bodies and they must therefore "reconstitute their identity around the figure of the 'desplazado'" (Arias Rodríguez 2011, 84). The conversion from *campesinos* to *desplazados* is therefore not only imposed from the 'outside', but also undertaken by the affected populations themselves in order to obtain humanitarian, legal, and health support.

However, not all of the displaced *campesinos* from Pueblo Nuevo registered themselves with the government to receive these aids. Gladis, for example, says that her father did not want to register. He thought that registering might increase his vulnerability and that the government would "track him down" (Interview with Gladis and Leidy and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba) and Leidy says that she knows several *campesinos* that did not register for the same reason. This shows that the displaced *campesinos* from Pueblo Nuevo saw the government institutions as possible perpetrators of violence. This is indicative for the generalized atmosphere of fear and despair that reigned after the displacement. It also shows that for the *campesinos,* it was not clear if the measures from the formal sphere to decrease their precarity would not have the opposite effect. This shows that the violent displacement from their land did not only alter the everyday lives and identity of the affected populations, but also their relationship with the formal sphere

and its institutions. They were to enter in a relationship of dependence with these institutions if they wanted to benefit from the provisions of Law 387, but they were reluctant to do so because of their fear of possible retaliations. Gladis says, however, that after a while her father decided to register as a *desplazado* because he found "people that explained him well" (Interview with Gladis and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba).

The *desplazados* were also exposed to discrimination and marginalization through the dwellers of their areas of refuge. Law 387 coupled the possibility to receive humanitarian aid to the condition of having been internally displaced, while the urban dwellers associated the *desplazados* with the guerrillas. This led to the stigmatization of the *desplazados* and questioned the legitimacy of their requests for humanitarian assistance (Arias Rodríguez 2011, 84). Leidy indicates that while she was living in Cartagena, the people "looked down" on the *desplazados* and "they isolated [the *desplazados*] because they said that they are thieves, that they are *guerrilleros*, because they are [perceived as] this, nobody wanted to be a *desplazado*" (Leidy during Interview with Gladis and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba). These dynamics are to be seen in a context of poverty that also affected the dwellers of the urban areas that had not been forcefully displaced. They were afraid that the *desplazados* would take away the scarce resources from the municipality and thus further increase their precarity. The category of the *desplazados* had therefore a dual character. On the one hand, it gave the affected populations the possibility to receive humanitarian assistance, while on the other hand it exposed them to a re-victimization through the local population in the cities of refuge (Osorio Pérez and Lozano Velázquez 1999, 78).

According to Gladis and Leidy, the manifestation of these discriminatory dynamics changed significantly with the consolidation of the aid programs from the (non-)governmental organizations. This converted the status of *desplazados* into an opportunity. They indicate that the urban dwellers started to make declarations with the respective institutions saying that they had been displaced, even if this was not the case. Gladis narrates:

> In the neighborhood where I lived, a close friend of my family went and registered himself as a *desplazado*, but he was *never* [displaced]! (Interview with Gladis and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba)

Leidy says that urban dwellers asked her several times about the details of the forced displacement in Pueblo Nuevo because it was necessary to know them while registering as a *desplazado.* Hence, the *desplazados* became a resource for the urban dwellers to obtain the same benefits, while the stigmatization of the *desplazados* remained high (Arias Rodríguez 2011, 84). The *desplazados* were faced with the difficult task to decide if to stay in their city of refuge and establish a livelihood in a social surrounding that perpetrates their status as *desplazados* (Arias Rodríguez 2011, 84), or to return to their village of origin in a context where the violence the armed actors perpetrated was still present and threatened their physical integrity (Acción Social 2010, 134).

Leidy, who returned after three months to Pueblo Nuevo (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo), also indicates that most of the projects that aim at assisting

the internally displaced are located in urban areas and that it is more difficult to access them in the countryside:

> So the ones living in cities take advantage of this. [It has become a way of] income generation [for them]: housing [...], foodstuff, maybe free education and labor opportunities for the victims [of forced displacement]. We that live in rural areas and that really lived what we lived, for us there are not that many opportunities (Leidy during Interview with Gladis and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba).

This indicates that even though the legal framework of Law 387 encompasses all the internally displaced, its implementation is based on a selection process. This selection process divides the large group of internally displaced into subgroups with different degrees of visibility to the formal sphere. It shows that the ways in which the aid programs were organized and implemented led to a re-victimization of the *desplazados* that decided to go back to their villages. This time, their victimization was not based on their alleged proximity to the guerrillas, but to the geographical marginality of the villages. Hence, the frontier ideology described above re-emerges inadvertently in these aid programs and contributes to the structural violence of their exclusionary implementation. The result of these processes was a differential allocation of precarity.

The next section illustrates the difficulties the *desplazados* faced after their return to Pueblo Nuevo. These challenges are based on mainly two aspects: the perpetration of high degrees of violence and social control through the paramilitary units and guerrillas, and the implementation of oil palm plantations. In the case of Pueblo Nuevo, the two phenomena are interrelated and co-constitutive. The section therefore starts with a general account on the features of the palm oil business in María La Baja. I will then illustrate the everyday lives of the *campesinos* during the reign of violence and despair in the early 2000s, focusing on the ways through which the paramilitary units established public authority in the village. Afterwards, I will relate these dynamics to the recurrent occurrence of land deals and productive alliances between *campesinos* and the oil palm company. The final part of the section consists in a reflection on the impacts of the oil palms on the *campesinos* living in Pueblo Nuevo, the renegotiation of their collective identity, and the renegotiation and allocation of vulnerabilities.

7.2.   Oil palms in María La Baja

> *"Here was a paddock before. Now the land is covered with oil palms. Right here. The oil palms are right here. The palms are very close. They surround us."* (Interview with Felipe, 5 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo)

In María La Baja, the first oil palm cultivation (100 hectares) was planted in 1998 (Menco Rivera 2011, 2). The implementation of this first plantation happened at a moment when María La Baja was a "stunted and impoverished" (Menco Rivera 2011, 3) municipality. The incentive for this pilot project was a "profound crisis" (Ávila González 2015, 118) of the agricultural production in the municipality and high-ranking politicians established a

productive alliance between the oil palm company Hacienda Las Flores and local *campesinos* in order to boost agricultural development in the municipality (*ibid*)*.* In the following years, the expansion of the oil palm plantations grew exponentially and in 2014, the plantations covered 9'800 hectares (Alcaldía municipal María la Baja n.a., 34). This corresponds to almost half (48.13 per cent) of the arable land in María La Baja (*ibid*) and produces 213'150 tons of palm oil annually (*ibid,* 42). The oil palm plantations are therefore of "high significance" (*ibid,* 47) for the local economy. This raises the question how it was possible to implement these plantations at such a rate and extension, and this is where the armed conflict comes back in.

In the months following their forced displacement from Pueblo Nuevo in 1999, some *campesinos* decided to go back to their village in order to re-establish their livelihoods. Leidy, who returned after three months, says that she went back to Pueblo Nuevo without any assistance or guarantees from 'the state'. Back in the village, she resumed her agricultural activities and grew food crops (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo) and Pueblo Nuevo was a "ghost village" (Field notes during OXFAM Workshop, 6 October 2016, La Guayaba). The *campesinos* only gradually came back, and some remained in their areas of refuge and abandoned Pueblo Nuevo for good (*ibid*). In this period, both the paramilitaries and the different guerrilla groups were present in the region and competed over public authority (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones 2015, 187). Leidy remembers these years (especially 2000 and 2001) as the most difficult ones of the armed conflict (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

Progressively, the paramilitaries banished the guerrillas from the village and established a system of public authority that was based on coercion, intimidation, and social control (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones 2015, 187). They settled in the village and hanged their hammocks in the backyards or verandas of the locals and controlled their everyday lives and movements. They committed targeted killings, obliged the locals to hand them over food and other merchandize, and prohibited staying outside after the sun had set (Informal talk with Leidy, 6 October 2016). Felipe, who lived in Cartagena during this time, says that the paramilitaries also controlled who accessed and left the village:

> When the paramilitaries were in the area, they wanted to know exactly who entered the village. Sometimes, they would make you get out of the car to control your ID, just like any army would. This happened to me on a 31 of December. I worked in Cartagena and wanted to spend New Year's with my family. I remember that I left Cartagena at 10 in the morning and arrived in Pueblo Nuevo at 6 in the evening. Why did I arrive so late[54]? Because the paramilitaries had built a roadblock [...]. And what did they do? They made everyone get out of the car. [...] I was afraid. These were blokes with fusils in their hands that killed everyone. [...] Afterwards they called us one at a time and wanted to see our ID cards. [...] Fortunately that day nothing happened [...] and everyone that was in the vehicle survived (Interview with Felipe, 5 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

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[54] Usually it takes about 1.5 hours to travel from Cartagena to Pueblo Nuevo.

This is a telling example of the hardship the *campesinos* lived during the time the paramilitary units had enforced their system of public authority in Pueblo Nuevo. It goes without saying that this increased the precarity of the *campesinos* to an unprecedented scale. The situation in Pueblo Nuevo changed with the paramilitary demobilization in 2005 that re-established a certain degree of public security (Aguilera Díaz 2013, 7) and "tranquility" (Gladis during Interview with Gladis and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba) for the inhabitants of the village.

In the same period as the paramilitaries reigned in María La Baja, many land deals between *campesinos* and the oil palm company were signed. The empirical data indicates that this was a recurrent phenomenon, but that there existed exceptions. Not all of the plots the *campesinos* worked on were sold to the oil palm company. Leidy's family and Álvaro, for example, re-established their respective land access after the demobilization of the paramilitary units in 2005 and did not plant oil palms (Interview with Jhon, Edwin, and Leidy, 8 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo; Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). This is an interesting phenomenon, however the empirical data does not provide answers to why Álvaro and Leidy's family were able to re-establish land access. I asked Álvaro how he managed to do this and he answered simply:

> Well, I abandoned my land and afterwards I came back and occupied the land again (Interview with Álvaro, 2 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

Others, such as Joaquín, obtained land access to plots through negotiating with a landholder (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). However, Felipe indicates that many *campesinos* sold the land "because of the war" (Interview with Felipe, 5 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). He says that the person from the company took advantage of the generalized insecurity in the region to lower the prices for the plots (*ibid*), while the mayor of the municipality indicates that these land deals happened "without cooption" (Interview with Mayor, 8 November 2016, María La Baja).

Other *campesinos* from the area entered into productive alliances and planted palms with the financial and technological support from the company, while maintaining ownership of the land. Gladis, for example, owns 10 hectares where she has been growing oil palms since 2010[55]. She narrates that she made the contract because the productive alliance seemed a good way to exploit the land after her father's death:

> I had this idea in mind that the owner of a plot needs to exploit it by himself[56]. He doesn't have to wait for someone to exploit or work the land for him, only giving him a small portion of what the land produces. That was one of the reasons [for entering the productive alliance] (Interview with Gladis and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba).

In the initial phase of the implementation, the company gave Gladis a monthly subsidy. This was, however, not enough to cover the cost for the contracted wage laborers and Gladis was obliged to pay the difference. After two years of its implementation, the plantation started to produce and Gladis sold the palm fruit to the company. The agribusiness

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[55] She declares that she was not coerced into entering the productive alliance.
[56] Gladis uses the masculine form in this context.

company receives 30 per cent of the income the plantation generates. Asking about her opinion on the oil palms now that she grows them, Gladis says that the biggest disadvantage of having a plantation is the susceptibility of the plants to diseases and that this might generate considerable financial loss. She also tells us that a few months before the interview, someone burnt a part of her plot, but she does not know who did it nor why exactly. However, she seems to be content with her decision because she underlines that growing palm trees also has many advantages. The most important ones for her are the regular income and the facility to sell the harvest[57] (Interview with Gladis and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba).

The quote from Felipe at the beginning of this section indicates that the oil palms are situated in immediate proximity to the village. This enclosure and the spatial expansion of the plantations inhibit the majority of the *campesinos* in Pueblo Nuevo to pursue 'traditional' agricultural activities. This has a negative impact on the food security of the villagers and obliges them to buy foodstuff they used to produce by themselves before the implementation of the oil palm plantations (Field notes during OXFAM Workshop, 6 October 2016, La Guayaba). It also limits the possibilities of income generation for the *campesinos* that do not have access to agricultural land:

> So, why did I start working on the oil palm plantations? [...] It was the lack of other labor opportunities. [...] What else should I do here? It is difficult to open a profitable business here in Pueblo Nuevo because all of us are poor (Interview with Jhon, Edwin, and Leidy, 8 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo).

The availability of labor opportunities in the oil palm plantations depends on the season, the age of the plantation, and the degree of mechanization (*ibid*). The necessity to earn a living puts the *campesinos* without land in a relationship of dependence with the palm company or the small-scale oil palm growers. In their perspective, the oil palm plantation therefore not only monopolized land use and access patterns[58], but also the possibilities of *campesinos* to obtain financial income. This dynamic indicates that the ones growing palm trees are enabled to allocate precarity to the ones who do not, thus victimizing them.

The *campesinos* that do not work in the oil palm plantations agree that the wage laborers have virtually no other choice than selling their labor force to the oil palm growers. They infer, however, that the wage laborers and small-scale oil palm growers are not *campesinos* anymore (Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 7 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo) because they do not cultivate their own foodstuff nor are they independent in their work schedule (Leidy during Interview with Gladis and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba). This indicates that the ones that do not grow or work in oil palm plantations allocate precarity

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[57] The oil palm company provides the transport of the palm fruit to their processing factory and pays Gladis every month for the harvest (Interview with Gladis and Leidy, 7 November 2016, La Guayaba).

[58] Another example of this monopolization is the access to water from the dams. Due to the immediate proximity of the oil palms to the dam and the extensive areas they cover, the companies established the *de facto* authority over the use of the water the dam provides (Ojeda et al. 2015). During the dry season, it sometimes occurs that the water level of the dam decreases significantly and that the water does not reach the houses of the villagers anymore. This creates conflicts between the local communities and the oil palm producers (Junieles Acosta 2017) and is another dimension of the differential allocation of precarity.

to the ones that do by excluding them from the collective *campesino* identity*.* This mechanism indicates that in Pueblo Nuevo, the collective *campesino* identity is being renegotiated. When I asked Gladis, who grows oil palms, if she considers herself a *campesina,* she affirmed and said:

> Yes because we live in this environment and maybe because in our everyday lives we hear *campesino.* […] *Campesino* means to work in the countryside and to produce foodstuff for others. A *campesino* is a person that works a lot and earns exceedingly little. […] That's why I am *campesina* in every way.

Gladis therefore aligns being *campesina* with a situation of precarity that she defines as being poor. It is interesting to note that she also says that *campesinos* are to produce foodstuff and that she considers herself *campesina* even though she grows oil palms. This indicates that despite the renegotiation of the meaning, the socially legitimized frame in which the meaning is embedded remains preponderantly one of diversified agricultural production, independence, and externally imposed precarity.

The propagation of oil palm plantations in Pueblo Nuevo has had a decisive impact on the everyday lives of the villagers and led to a renegotiation of belonging and identity. The ensuing victimizing practices do not only stem from the oil palm companies, but also from 'within' the local community. They define that being a *campesino* means to "work the land" (Leidy during Informal talk with Joaquín and Leidy, 6 October 2016, Pueblo Nuevo) and produce foodstuff (Interview with Felipe, 5 November 2016, Pueblo Nuevo). The substantial changes in land use patterns that the oil palm plantations materialize create a situation where only a small faction of the people living in Pueblo Nuevo do this, work the land and produce foodstuff. The others are obliged to enter into a relationship of dependence with the oil palm company in order to make a living, thus losing the basis for their belonging to the *campesino* category. This means that they become invisible within this social frame that is quasi hegemonic in Pueblo Nuevo while they simultaneously continue to identify themselves with this category. These dynamics therefore create a 'new' type of victimhood that is based on their exclusion from the *campesino* category and therefore the very basis of their identity construction. Legal provisions such as Law 1448 from 2011 that aim at reducing the precarity of the *campesinos* only partially address these issue. The legal definition of 'victim' does not include the repercussions of the armed conflict on the identity construction of rural populations. This happens because Law 1448 only partially acknowledges the structural violence that contributed significantly to physical violence such as forced displacement, and at the same time facilitated the implementation of large-scale agribusiness projects. They thereby invisibilize the aforementioned victimizing practices.

8. Conclusions

This research project has looked into the local and institutional dynamics that lead to the production of victimhoods in Pueblo Nuevo in the municipality of María La Baja in Northern Colombia. The production of victimhoods brings different sets of violence into interaction. The focus of this master's thesis lies particularly on the effects of structural violence – exemplified through different legal and economic policies from the formal sphere – on the production of victimhoods. The research has shown that the production of victimhoods is situated at the interstice of formal recognition and invisibilization, and that these dynamics also have a decisive impact on the construction of rural identities. I used Judith Butler's notion of *precarity* to describe the interactions between structural violence and the everyday lives of the interviewed *campesinos.*

In order to investigate this issue, I conducted five weeks of exploratory and intermittent field research between August and November 2016. I used participatory observation and semi-/un-structured interviews to generate qualitative empirical data. Throughout my stay in Colombia, I adapted the interview guides in order to capture the essence of the topic, while at the same time remaining open to new perspectives. The interviewees were mostly *campesinos* that live in the village and work either in subsistence agriculture or the palm oil business. The access to the field study site was obtained through a non-governmental organization that has been working in Pueblo Nuevo for several years. Even if I conducted my research independently from the organization, the *campesinos* perceived me as a part of the NGO. This has had two effects on my research: on the one hand, it helped me to build trust to the interviewees, and on the other hand it increased the bias of the research. This is why I aimed to talk to persons with different backgrounds in order to increase the validity of the collected data.

The first part of the research was dedicated to understanding the ways in which agricultural activities were expanded in the decades after Colombia's independence from Spain in the early 19th century. Migrants from urban centers set out to rural areas where they made the land arable and established small-scale subsistence farming. These activities were not formally recognized from the state and happened therefore 'outside' its reach. The migrants were thereby invisibilized through the formal sphere and they constructed a collective *campesino* identity that was based on their economic activities, but also on their geographical and political marginality. The partial industrialization of Colombia's agricultural sector in the second half of the century contested the land access regimes the *campesinos* had established. The entrepreneurs took hold of their land and either introduced the *campesinos* as wage laborers into their estates or displaced them. In my interpretation, these proceedings were facilitated by legal and economic policies from the formal sphere that invisibilized the *campesinos* while simultaneously fostering the industrialization of the agrarian sector. The notion of the *frontier ideology* conceptualizes these dynamics. The contestation over land access between the *campesinos* and the rural elite led to recurrent uprisings in rural Colombia. In order to decrease the vulnerability of

the *campesinos,* the government passed different Laws that recognized the non-formalized land tenure of the *campesinos* and provided them with the possibility to obtain land titles for their plots. The state therefore aimed at making the *campesinos* 'visible' through recognizing them as persons that are worthy of protection. The rural elite, however, took advantage of these provisions to formalize their land tenure while still extending their agricultural estates.

In the 1950s, a new set of actors appeared in rural Colombia: left-wing guerrilla groups. They denounced the unequal distribution of land and threatened the physical integrity of the rural elite through violent actions. The emergence of the guerrilla insurgency and a fatal civil war impelled the government to pass an agrarian reform that was aimed at redistributing and formalizing land, while simultaneously boosting economic development in rural areas. In the municipality of María La Baja, the implementation of the 1961 Land Law led to the construction of two irrigation dams. The *campesino* families that lived on the land where the dams were to be installed had to abandon their plots and were resettled in Pueblo Nuevo. The resettlement was, following Judith Butler's argumentation, facilitated by the invisibility of the *campesinos* to the formal sphere that was induced due to the informality of their land tenure and their geographical marginality.

The implementation of the 1961 land reform also led to the creation of a grassroots *campesino* organization (ANUC) that was to take forward the redistribution of unproductively used plots. In Pueblo Nuevo, several of the resettled *campesinos* received formal land titles through these means, while the others occupied plots without formal recognition. Eventually, the guerrilla groups arrived to regions where ANUC claimed land to be restituted. The rural elite and members of the formal sphere therefore aligned the activists from ANUC to the guerrilla. Gradually, these dynamics criminalized social organization in rural areas and led to the production of victimhood for the *campesinos* that was based on their alleged proximity to the guerrillas. Hence, the legitimacy of the claims for land redistribution of the *campesinos* was taken away and framed as a threat to the integrity of the formal state system. This dehumanized the *campesinos* because their lives were no longer framed as livable or worthy of protection.

The paramilitary units used and consolidated the dehumanization of the *campesinos* in order to legitimize their violent incursions in Pueblo Nuevo. In the late 1990s, different guerrilla groups were present in the area surrounding the village and the paramilitaries alleged that the *campesinos* were collaborators of the guerrillas, while the guerrillas alleged the opposite. This exposed the *campesinos* to a lot of types of violence and eventually led them to abandon their village. This created another type of victimhood that was based simultaneously on the forced displacement and the alleged proximity to guerrilla groups (*los desplazados*). At the same time, being an internally displaced person meant that the *campesinos* were to re-establish their livelihoods in cities or other regions that were foreign to them. For many, this was very difficult and they decided to return to their village despite the presence of the armed actors. In the years after the forced displacement, the paramilitary units established public authority in Pueblo Nuevo and controlled the everyday lives of the *campesinos,* and they were the ones that allocated vulnerability.

Simultaneously to the presence of 'illegal' armed actors, land deals between landholders and *campesinos* took place in Pueblo Nuevo. In many cases, these deals were the result of violent coercion and threats. This created yet another type of victimhood because the affected *campesinos* lost access to their land. In the early 2000s, the implementation of palm oil plantation commenced in the areas surrounding the village and covered many of the abandoned or sold plots with the monoculture. Hence, the victimhood of the *campesinos* that is based on their incapacity to access land for their agricultural activities was perpetrated and still persists in contemporary Pueblo Nuevo. The implementation of the oil palm plantations happened in the context of favorable frameworks the formal sphere implemented, such as tax exemptions or export subsidies. This illustrates that the oil palm plantations in Pueblo Nuevo are not solely the product of violent accumulation through economic actors that took advantage of the armed conflict, but that they are also influenced by structural violence from the formal sphere.

The exponential growth of oil palm plantations since the early 2000s led to a renegotiation of the collective *campesino* identity. The *campesinos* that work in the palm oil business do not qualify as *campesinos* anymore because they do not work independently nor do they produce foodstuff. They are therefore excluded from the socially accepted frame that defines the meaning of *campesino.* At the same time, they still identify with this identitary category, but restrict its meaning to living in the countryside. It follows that the collective *campesino* becomes at the same time more exclusive and more general. The definition of the exact features is therefore being renegotiated. This leads to new types of victimhoods because it excludes some rural dwellers from the category that forms the basis for their very identity construction.

The implementation of the Peace Agreement between the government and the FARC-EP guerrilla stipulates the reintegration of the insurgents into civil society (Santos Calderón and Jiménez 2016, Punto 3). It is probable that this will produce a new set of victimhoods where further investigation would be interesting. How are the former insurgents included into civil society? What types of vulnerabilities emerge? How do the former insurgents define their identity after they ceased their weapons? How do they position themselves toward the formal sphere? How does the formal sphere position itself toward the demobilized *guerrilleros*? These questions indicate that the production of victimhood is an ongoing process that is intrinsically linked, but not restricted to, the interactions between legal policies and the everyday life.

9. References

9.1. Table of figures

9.2. Interviews

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