

THE ETERNAL RETURNS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN COLOMBIA



How Changing Opportunities and Framing Strategies affected
the Return of La Alta Montaña

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Maps of geographical location



Source: Fundación Programa de Desarrollo y Paz de los Montes de María. 1

¹ Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral <http://ccai-colombia.org/2012/06/09/consolidacion-y-restitucion-de-tierras-tensiones-crecientes-en-montes-de-maria/> (accessed June 18, 2014).



The 14 corregimientos of La Alta Montaña and the veredas visited during my fieldwork.²

² Own elaboration, this map shows the approximate location of the corregimientos and veredas.

List of abbreviations

AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia
CCAI	Centre for the Coordination of Integral Action (Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral)
CCRMM	Regional Coordination Centre of Montes de María (Centro de Coordinación Regional de los Montes de María)
CDAIPD	Departmental Committee on Integral Attention to the Displaced Population (Comité Departamental para la Atención Integral a la Población Desplazada)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional
ERP	Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo
FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
PCSD	Consolidation of the Democratic Security Policy (Política de Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática)
PDS	Defence and Democratic Security Policy (Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática)

Introduction

After a massive displacement that took place in La Alta Montaña³ in 2000 when violence rose, 21 peasant families of the community Macayepo managed to return to their land in 2004. Flown in with a helicopter from the armed forces, they encountered a destroyed village overgrown with trees, ruined houses and discovered the loss of their agricultural crops. With the Marine Corps providing security, a small part of the community arranged a collective return process and tried to rebuild their lives. Meanwhile, the other communities in La Alta Montaña coped with the same difficulties, but never received state accompaniment. Those communities either resisted the violence, returned individually, or are still displaced from their land. A division within the region, with Macayepo and its surrounding under paramilitary influence, and the higher part of La Alta Montaña being characterized by guerrilla presence, caused an invisible frontier between the two parts. Only in 2013 the two parts managed to join forces through the organisation of a peaceful march in order to claim their rights to an integral return process and collective reparations. As one community leader pointed out, “we saw that the conflict doesn’t originate from us, the conflict is between some who rebelled against the State and the State, but whom at some point involved the civilian population. We were able to understand that, forgive and to unite as one region.”⁴

The story of La Alta Montaña exemplifies a larger process of displacement in Colombia, with an estimated displacement of 3,9 million persons over the course of the fifty-year-old internal conflict (CODHES 2012, 8). The Colombian internal war is a complex conflict that has been characterized by the multitude of parties involved, ranging from guerrilla movements and paramilitary groups to government forces. Montes de María, in which la Alta Montaña is located, has been one of the regions with the highest intensity of armed conflict. Due to its strategic value, derived from its geographical convenient location for arms and drugs traffic and the former strong ideological support for the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC-EP), it has always been a desired region for territorial control by the armed groups. Consequently, in the last decades Montes de María has been characterized by conflict, massacres, disappearances, and forced displacement.⁵

Although the intensity of the conflict has decreased in the last decade, due to the demobilisation of the paramilitary groups and the weakening of the guerrilla movements, many of the structures and actors that caused the displacement are still present (Ibañez Londoño 2009b, 226). Security challenges and a lack of government capacity to accompany return processes continue to pose great difficulties to the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). As was shown, in the case of La Alta Montaña, Macayepo was the only

³ See Maps of geographical location. The region La Alta Montaña is located in the municipality Carmen de Bolívar in the department Bolívar which is part of the region Montes de María in Colombia. La Alta Montaña consists of fourteen *corregimientos* and about forty *veredas*, Macayepo is one of those *corregimientos*. *Corregimientos* and *veredas* are part of the administrative division of land in Colombia. *Corregimientos* are rural subdivisions of municipalities, often with their own urban centre. Every *corregimiento* is again subdivided in *veredas*, which are rural communities within the *corregimiento*.

⁴ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁵ Interview with UNHCR Coordinator of the Protection Unit Colombia, in Bogotá, March 12, 2014.

community that received accompaniment during their return. Furthermore, a survey from 2004 has shown that only 9,9 percent of the IDPs wanted to return under the circumstances present at the time (Ibañez 2009b, 226). However, changes in the Colombian context have contributed to an improvement in the possibilities to return.

Much research has focused on *why* internally displaced persons (IDPs) return to their land, highlighting the importance of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’, the role of social cohesion and economic incentives (see Ibañez and Querubín 2004, Haugaard 2006, Ibañez 2009). Considering the continuing challenges of return processes, it is reasonable to argue that IDPs were ambiguous about returning. This made me wonder if, regarding the return of IDPs, *why* is the right question to ask. A more valuable question to address would be *how* IDPs become convinced return is the right course of action? And, *how* IDPs organize collectively and mobilize for return? In her article on the state of research on returns, María Angélica Garzón Martínez (2010), points to the lack of focus on the practice of return processes. Both Juan Manuel Bustillo (2004) and Flor Edilma Osorio Pérez (2001) highlight the return processes of IDPs as one of the forms of collective organisation IDPs undertake, however they do not further elaborate on how this collective action is brought about. The above outlined context and the former research done on the return of IDPs in Colombia, has led me to consider that collective action theory is the most fitting theoretical frame to address the *how* question regarding the return processes of IDPs in Colombia. As Bustillo (2004) argues, present research largely lacks a focus on the returnees’ capacity to organize and demand their rights in front of the state. Little attention has been paid to research on *how* IDPs mobilize for their return. While the difficulties present in Colombia and the changes in the Colombian conflict point to the importance of investigating *how* IDPs become convinced return is the right course of action.

Within collective action and social movement theory several scholars have stressed the importance of the dynamic between political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing in explaining the process of mobilisation for collective action (King 2007, McAdam et al. 1996). I will focus my research on the dynamic relationship between political opportunity structures and collective action framing. In my view, the multi-causal focus of collective action theory largely contributes to an understanding of the processes of mobilisation for the return of Macayepo and the influence of changes in structural factors on those processes. Considering the complexity of the situation in La Alta Montaña, due to the many different actors present all pursuing their own personal agendas, studying the opportunity structures enabling and constraining collective action, the framing strategies employed to mobilize IDPs for return, and the way changing opportunities are interpreted and framed will give an interesting insight on how IDPs are mobilized and organize themselves collectively for their return. This led me to pose the following research question: *how did changing political opportunity structures and framing strategies affect the processes of mobilisation for the return of internally displaced persons in La Alta Montaña?*

One important point to make here is that, no clear definition of return processes is provided by the existing literature. Although most scholars refer to returns based on the UN Guiding

Principles on Internal Displacement, the concept of return is used without further explanation. I argue that return is not merely the process of going back home, but also the reestablishment of one's life. Although I will further elaborate on this problematic definition in chapter one, it is important to note that in this research, both the return of Macayepo in 2004 and the organisation of the peaceful march in La Alta Montaña in 2013, are seen as part of the same integrated return process. This implies that within the same process two different waves of collective mobilisation have taken place, which were influenced by different opportunities and framing strategies.

Theory

Collective action, which Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2007, 5) define as, “coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programmes,” forms the basis for this thesis. The theories of collective action and social movement know many strands, such as the resource mobilisation theory and the political process theory, both of which focus predominantly on the structural factors underlying collective mobilisation. Yet from the 1980's onwards, attention was drawn by several scholars to the importance of agency within collective action theory, emphasizing the role of framing strategies as affecting the collective mobilisation of groups to claim their rights additionally to those structural factors. These dynamics between structure and agency lie at the heart of this thesis.

As was introduced before, the focus of this research is on the dynamic relationship between political opportunity structures and collective action framing (King 2007, Benford and Snow 2000, McAdam et al. 1996, Gamson and Meyer 1996). To briefly explain this theoretical approach, political opportunities are those changes in the institutional structure or informal power relations of a country that enable or constrain collective action (McAdam et al. 1996, 3). Framing refers to the linkage of individual's and groups' interpretative orientations such that the goals and strategies of the group become coinciding (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). A focus on both of these concepts and the dynamic relationship between them enables me to highlight the importance of mobilisation processes in the return process of Macayepo. As will be argued, the dynamic relationship shows how changing opportunity structures interact with various framing strategies, which again affects different forms of collective mobilisation. Considering the emphasis of the before mentioned scholars on the mobilisation of social movements, the factor mobilizing structures might also be a decisive aspect (King 2007, McAdam et al. 1996). Since I will specifically focus on how communities or groups are collectively mobilized for returns, without focussing on social movements per se, I argue that political opportunities and framing will offer me the factors that can adequately explain this specific case of collective action.

According to Gamson and Meyer (1996, 275), “the concept of political opportunity structures is in trouble, in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment”. McAdam (1996, 24) shares this concern and seeks to define the concept of *political opportunity structure* by listing four dimensions within the political

system that influence collective action: (i) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system; (ii) the stability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; (iii) the presence of elite allies; (iv) the state's capacity and propensity for repression. The core idea is the opening and closing of political space and institutions: increased opportunity implies more space and fewer constraints. Important to note is that both the closing and opening of political space can lead to an increase in opportunities for collective action, sometimes the closing of political space might lead to increased mobilizing potency (King 2007, 117).

Although I share the position that conceptual clarity is essential when studying political opportunity structures, I will expand the definition proposed by McAdam. In the case of La Alta Montaña and the processes of return, a too narrow focus on the opportunities available within the state system might ignore the importance of other factors such as changes in culture, law and institutions. Gamson and Meyer (1996, 277-283) propose to expand the definition dividing political opportunities along two interrelated spectra. The *stable to volatile* spectrum and the *cultural to institutional* spectrum. They argue that some aspects of opportunity are embedded in political institutions and culture, while others are relatively volatile. According to Gamson and Meyer (1996, 277), "these volatile elements are at the heart of explanations of mobilization [...] that emphasize the interaction between movement strategy and the opening and closing of those oft cited windows of opportunity." As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the high propensity for state repression is a relatively stable factor within Colombia, while changes in policy addressing the situation of IDPs are more volatile. Whereas McAdam (1996) focusses on the stable opportunity structures, Gamson and Meyer (1996, 282) see opportunity structures as dynamic rather than static. The second division that Gamson and Meyer make is one between cultural opportunities and institutional opportunities. Besides those opportunities present within the political system, opportunities also have a strong cultural element, and action or mobilisation may be enabled or constrained by political culture and social mood. As will be argued in chapter four, a process of reconciliation might lead to changes in social relations and increase social cohesion which enables collective action.

Framing processes refer to the linkage of individuals' interpretative orientations with those of the group such that the individual interests, values and beliefs become congruent with the goals of the group. It is about signifying work and meaning construction, and it is a processual phenomenon that entails agency. Collective action frames, as Benford and Snow (2000, 614) define them, "are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization". Collective action frames are constructed through the negotiation of a shared interpretation of a problematic condition defined as in need of change, they articulate a set of strategies, and persuade others to act collectively to pursue change.

Benford and Snow (2000, 615-617) have distinguished between the following three core framing tasks. *Diagnostic framing*, which is the task of problem identification and attribution.

For example, Macayepo's leaders stated, "the city is not for peasants, we don't belong here,"⁶ thereby identifying their displacement as a problematic situation. The second task is *prognostic framing*, which involves the articulation of solutions to the problem and the strategies to carry out the plan of action. *Motivational framing* is the third task, which provides the rationale for undertaking collective action. This last task addresses the issue of agency and is about convincing adherents to engage in collective action. The following quote illustrates how both the prognostic and motivational task were attended to by Macayepo's leaders:

"The basic idea of the return was that the public forces would accompany us, and on the other hand, we have always been Christians and we always talked about God, about the confidence we have in God and that if God is with us, who would be against us?"⁷

Strategically, the frame stresses the need for a return process with state accompaniment. The motivational task is attended to by calling upon the faith in god to convince the macayeperos of the possibility of the return.

According to Benford and Snow (2000, 623), the literature on frame development suggests "that frames are developed, generated, and elaborated on not only via attending to the three core framing tasks discussed above, but also by way of three sets of overlapping processes that can be conceptualized as discursive, strategic, and contested". First, *discursive processes* are about speech, conversations and written communication of movement members that occur. Second, with *strategic processes* those framing processes are meant that are deliberately formed and directed to the main goal. In this process frames are developed for a specific purpose, it is about the linking of individual frames. By emphasizing the shared identity as peasants and as victims of the conflict, La Alta Montaña's leaders incorporated shared values of the population in their collective action frames, which illustrates such a strategic process. Third, there is agreement that the development and generation of collective action frames is always a *contested process*. All actors within the collective action arena add their bit to the construction of reality. One such contested process is counter-framing, which happened during the return process in Macayepo when some macayeperos discouraged others to return by emphasizing the lack of security. These three overlapping processes will be further elaborated on in the various chapters of this thesis.

Finally, the dynamic relationship between political opportunity structures and framing strategies is important, Gamson and Meyer (1996) call this concept political opportunity framing. Political opportunity structures and framing processes interact in a dynamic way. Opportunities open the way for collective action, but those pursuing action also make opportunities. According to Gamson and Meyer (1996, 283), "there is a component of political opportunity involving the perception of possible change that is, above all else, a social construction," thereby, implicitly referring to framing processes. On the one hand,

⁶ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁷ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

political opportunity structures may constrain or enable collective action frames. The framing of political opportunities is central to collective action frames, as it influences their effectiveness in persuading people of the possibility of success of collective action. On the other hand, as stressed by Gamson and Meyer (1996, 287), "movement activists interpret political space in ways that emphasize opportunity rather than constraint, they may stimulate actions that change opportunity, making their opportunity frame a self-fulfilling prophecy". Thus, collective action frames also create opportunities. This interaction between political opportunity structures and framing strategies forms a central component in my research in linking together those opportunities and framing strategies affecting the return in La Alta Montaña.

Research design

In this section the research design will be discussed. First, some remarks will be made on the methodology and method. Second, the selection of the case, the data collection techniques used and sampling will be elaborated on. Finally, I will discuss the challenges I came across during my research.

Methodology and method

In order to explain the method chosen, it is important to point to some ontological and epistemological aspects of my theory. The concept of political opportunity framing is based on a structurationist stance. As was explained before, political opportunity structures shape framing, but framing can also change opportunity. This implies that, on the one hand, action is constrained by structures, and on the other hand, action can also shape structures. Epistemologically, the theory has an interpretative view, seeking the meaning of social action and emphasizing the social construction of social life. As Gamson and Meyer (1996, 283) stress, an important aspect of political opportunity involves the perception of possible change, which is a social construction.

In order to gain the understanding necessary to research this problem, I worked with an interrelated method. First, the context in which displacement and processes of mobilisation took place, was studied through means of data analysis and expert interviews, to determine the relevant opportunity structures influencing the return and the main frame articulators. Second, further data was collected through in-depth interviews with frame articulators and experts to identify the framing processes and to further establish the influence specific political opportunities. Third, in-depth interviews were conducted with participants in the return process to gain some understanding of the frame resonance. Finally, a data-driven code was developed (Boyatzis 1998, 41), which enabled me to systematize the collected information and gain an understanding of the dynamic relationship between the political opportunities and framing strategies.

Case selection, data-collection techniques and sampling

In selecting the research population I was dependent on the access I was able to gain during my fieldwork. Prior to trip, I identified the region of Monte de María as a suitable location for this research, as the available information showed the area's reputation for 'successful' return processes and relative security. Several communities in Montes de María would have been suitable for the research, the main selection criterion being that the community had to have returned in a collective manner. Due to the still fragile situation in the region, I was dependent on the accompaniment by others during my fieldwork, which led to my cooperation with the NGO Sembrandopaz. Although Sembrandopaz accompanies several communities in the region in their return processes, the case of Macayepo and its wider integration with the communities of La Alta Montaña led me to believe that Macayepo was a suitable case in which the effect of changing opportunities and framing strategies on collective mobilisation would become apparent.

During my research, I used several data-collection techniques, including a literature research, expert interviews, and in-depth interviews with frame articulators. The literature research and review aided in gaining a better understanding of the context in Colombia. Due to a lack of data on the particular case of La Alta Montaña, I was mainly dependent on newspaper articles and the in-depth interviews to reconstruct the story of their return. Furthermore, the interviews consisted of nine expert interviews, as well as nine in depth interviews with frame articulators and participants of the return process.⁸ In the selection of the interviewees I made use of non-probability sampling techniques. For the expert interviews this was based on a purposive selection of those persons specialized in issues surrounding the return of IDPs and specifically the case of La Alta Montaña. With regard to the in-depth interviews with frame articulators I made use of snowball sampling (Nichols 2002, 67-70), contacting the relations of the NGO Sembrandopaz and of Macayepo's leaders. Although probability sampling would provide a more representative image of the researched phenomenon, in the case of La Alta Montaña this would not have been possible considering the complex situations returns happen in. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner (Curtis and Curtis 2011, 35), leaving room for interpretation which in my view led to a more sincere and spontaneous elaboration on the framing strategies.

Challenges

Although I tried to prevent distortions as much as possible, some challenges of the research need to be taken into account. First, due to the fragile situation in Montes de María gaining access to the research population posed some challenges. I was dependent on the accompaniment of others in my visits to the communities, because there still exists a lot of distrust towards outsiders. Therefore, the first month of my fieldwork was mainly spent establishing contacts in the region. Although several persons have helped me to establish

⁸ See Appendix I: Interviews list for further details.

contacts, the accompaniment of the NGO Sembrandopaz made the fieldwork and especially the visits and interviews in the region possible.

Second, even when access was assured, gaining the trust of the communities' inhabitants became the next obstacle. Several researchers, NGO's and government entities enter the communities annually, yet inhabitants do not see any visible change, resulting in feelings of disappointment toward these actors. Furthermore, they generally view outsiders as 'people from the city' who do not understand peasant life. By participating in the daily lives of the community such as sleeping in hammocks, hiking for two hours with 35 degrees or riding a mule to get to a community, this distrust was partially overcome. These kinds of everyday life events contribute to gaining the trust and respect necessary to conduct open interviews in the region.

Third, since the first wave of collective action in Macayepo occurred in 2004 there is the risk of memory distortion. Discrepancy in some of the interviews pointed to the existence of this risk, which was managed by trying to create a most plausible image as possible. Furthermore, the framing strategies expressed in interviews are a perception of the past. This can be seen as second degree framing and the interpretation of their strategies might have been affected by memory distortion too. Furthermore, they might frame the situation in another way to me as the researcher, than they did in the past. This is a problem that cannot be overcome, and was an important aspect to keep in mind during the research.

Fourth, the scope of the research did not allow for a full understanding of the frame resonance (Benford and Snow 2000, 619), which is about the influence, effectiveness and the mobilizing potency of collective action frames among the population. This makes it hard to establish the full effect of the proffered framing strategies and opportunities. However, I assume that any framing strategy in any kind of circumstance is bound to have some effect, although the extent of the effect cannot be claimed. Moreover, due to my dependence on the NGO Sembrandopaz and the leaders they accompany, they selected the interviewees I talked to, which might have led to a one sided view expressed in the interviews. For a broader understanding of the situation, it would be necessary to talk to a wider range of people, including those that did not participate in the return.

Finally, I am aware of the fact that this research is not all-encompassing. The second degree framing and the lack of capacity to research frame resonance, make it impossible to assert facts or causality about the effect of both opportunities and framing strategies. Moreover, it is important to note that the return of Macayepo was a unique and in some ways controversial return process. In this research I in no way assume the possibility to generalize the case as comparable to other return processes. However, my research will lead to a further understanding of those factors that affected the mobilisation of the communities in La Alta Montaña in their return process to a certain degree.

Outline

In the first chapter of this thesis a description is given of what a return process in Colombia actually looks like. Furthermore, attention will be paid to the definition of returns and the mobilizing structures available that enabled the return. Subsequently, in the second chapter, the dynamic nature of the conflict and the ways in which this affected the opportunities and framing strategies is addressed. In the third chapter, the changes in policies attending to IDPs and return processes, the opportunities these brought along and their effect on framing strategies are elaborated on. Finally, in chapter four, the pragmatic alliances deriving from the conflict and the following changes in social relations are highlighted. Importantly, all political opportunities and framing strategies highlighted in the different chapters interrelate. However, for the sake of the structure of this thesis they were separated and will be integrated in the conclusion of this thesis.

1. What a return process looks like

In this chapter an insight will be given in what the return process in Macayepo actually looked like to enable the reader to visualize the return of a peasant community more vividly. As elaborated in the introduction, the return process of Macayepo and of La Alta Montaña is seen as an integrated and ongoing process. Therefore I will start with a discussion on the definition of return. Second, a brief description of the return process of Macayepo will be elaborated on. Third, an overview of the organisation of the Movement of La Alta Montaña is given. Finally, some remarks will be made regarding the mobilizing structures available during both waves of mobilization that enabled the organization process.

1.1. Defining returns

As was mentioned in the introduction, there does not exist a clear definition of return processes in the literature. Even in María Angélica Garzón Martínez's (2011) article on the current state of the literature on returns no attempt is made to shed light on the different definitions used by scholars. Qualitative studies on return processes, such as the research of Ana María Ibañez (2009) mainly focus on the numbers, without really differentiating between those returns that received state accompaniment and families that returned individually and the conditions of those returns. Furthermore, in some case studies the concept return is used without further explanation, in which scholars seem to imply that the mere fact that a community or family turned back home means that return has taken place (Hernández Mercado 2010). A large share of scholars focus their work on the evaluation of public policy on return processes based on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and Law 387 of 1997 on attention to the displaced population in Colombia, although individual returns are often neglected (ILSA 2010a, Celis 2009, Haugaard 2006).

A first clarification should be made regarding the difference between individual and collective returns. So called individual or spontaneous returns, are those returns of individuals or families that return on their own account. Collective or institutional returns are returns accompanied by government entities or international organisations including at least ten families or fifty persons (ILSA 2010b). Whereas most studies focus on collective returns, there is a lack of attention to individual returns. Furthermore, national policies are focussed on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement that state that returns should happen with conditions of security, wilfulness of the displaced population and dignity. I will focus on those conditions as defining a integral return process. However, the practical return of communities should be seen as part of that process including those returning individually.

Within the definition of returns, as an academic told me during an interview⁹ and which Josep Zapater (2003) reinforces in his comparative study on return processes in different countries,

⁹ Interview with academic of the Universidad La Javeriana specialized in the displaced population, land inequality and gender, in Amsterdam, June 12, 2014.

there is a big difference between returns and sustainable solutions which is not recognized by all scholars. Sustainable solutions should include the restitution of rights lost due to the displacement. It is those sustainable solutions which I will focus on in my thesis. A recent shift in government policy has enabled to provide the communities that returned individually with a integral return process in retrospect. Furthermore, the government now focusses on the restitution of rights including return, collective reparations and land restitution, which if implemented fully could lead to those sustainable solutions. Whereas Macayepo received partial government accompaniment, the other communities of La Alta Montaña never received any accompaniment and returned individually. Both Macayepo and La Alta Montaña as a whole feel they never received a integral return process. Which is why I argue, that both waves of collective action in 2004 and 2013 should be seen as one integrated process in their struggle to truly return to their communities. When I talk about a return process, I move away from the practical act of returning and focus on the reconstruction of one's life both physically and psychologically on the basis of the internationally established guidelines and the recently introduced Colombian public policy. Moreover, it should be noted that those rights not merely apply for collective returns but also for individual returns, which has been largely neglected by scholars and NGOs that have evaluated the policy.

1.2. The return of the community of Macayepo

The inhabitants of Macayepo (macayeperos) were massively displaced in 2000, after the killing of three well-known peasants in the community by the FARC-EP in August 2000 and the massacre in their community on 14 October 2000. The massacre in Macayepo was not a typical massacre as committed at the time by the paramilitaries of the front Bloque Héroes de los Montes de María under the command of Rodrigo Mercado Peluffo alias 'Cadena'. Massacres in Montes de María like those in El Salado, Chengue and Pichilín took place in a central space of the community where several inhabitants were killed in front of the community's inhabitants (CNMH 2009, Wilson 2001). However, in Macayepo killings of two to three persons at a time occurred on the different roads to Macayepo and surrounding veredas, killing twelve to fifteen persons in total on October 14. This led to the fact that many macayeperos do not recognize the occurrences of October 14 as being a massacre, despite the fact that the distributed massacre did lead to massive forced displacement of inhabitants from the wider region (Defensoría del Pueblo 2012, 95-96).¹⁰

The majority of the macayeperos migrated to the nearest city Sincelejo, a smaller percentage moved to cities such as Carmen de Bolívar, Cartagena and Barranquilla.¹¹ During their displacement in Sincelejo the macayeperos had a rough and difficult time. There was a lot of poverty, a lack of job opportunities and coming from the rural area the peasants had never become used to pay for rent, public services and especially food. There was a common sense

¹⁰ Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Maceyepo, May 9, 2014; Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014; and several newspaper articles.

¹¹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

of not belonging in the big city. As one leader said, “the city is not for peasants, previously we would walk and live our land alive, while in Sincelejo we were dying psychologically and of starvation.”¹² And as another macayepero pointed out, “seeing your child being hungry, while at one and a half hour distance one is losing its crops, that is a hard thing to cope with.”¹³ Macayepo was and is a religious community with two main Christian churches, the Evangelist church and the Adventist church. Both churches remained active during the displacement in Sincelejo, organized community meetings and offered families mental and legal support, trying to provide some comfort for the community.¹⁴

By 2004 the situation of the macayeperos had not improved and it would become the third year they would not be able to harvest their avocado crops, their main source of income before the displacement. People were tired of the situation and the two church congregations decided to organize community meetings together to discuss possible solutions. Whenever such a meeting would take place, two macayeperos would get on their motorbikes and go from door to door to notify all macayeperos in Sincelejo of the upcoming meeting or happening. At one of the first of these meetings about thirty men expressed the desire to go back to their land and harvest their avocado crops to at least secure some income in Sincelejo. Accompaniment of the Marine Corps present in the region was the only way they saw to make this happen. The community handed in an official request with the Marine commander, and soon got the response that they would get accompaniment. In May 2004, some 25 to 30 peasants returned to Macayepo for a few days to harvest their avocados.¹⁵

That was the moment when some of Macayepo’s leaders started wondering, if harvesting our avocados with the accompaniment of the armed forces is possible, why would return not be possible? During subsequent meetings more and more macayeperos started participating reaching a number of 300 persons a meeting.¹⁶ On June 29 of 2004, during a meeting of the Departmental Committee on Integral Attention to the Displaced Population (CDAIPD), which included the municipal government, departmental government, Acción Social¹⁷ and the Marine Corps, Macayepo’s leaders expressed their wish to return (Defensoría 2012, 96). Although Acción Social was negative about the possibilities to return under the security

¹² Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹³ Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹⁴ Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014; Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 9, 2014; Interview 7 with pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

¹⁵ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014; Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

¹⁶ Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

¹⁷ The government entity responsible for attending displaced persons and organizing returns and resettlements. Acción Social was responsible for assessing and evaluating the possibilities and sustainability of proposed return processes and accompaniment of those returns together with the armed forces. By the time of the return process in 2004 Acción Social was called Red de Solidaridad Social, its name was changed in 2005 into Acción Social. However, for the sake of clarity I will refer to Acción Social throughout this whole thesis.

conditions present at the time, the commander of the Marine Corps agreed with the return process and promised military accompaniment of the marines during the return process.¹⁸

Between June and September several meetings were held with the community of Macayepo in which seventy families of Macayepo and its veredas expressed the willingness to return. Importantly, according to the Defensoría del Pueblo (National Ombudsman) around 600 families inhabited Macayepo and its veredas before the displacement, which means about 11 percent of the population actually wanted to return at the time (Defensoría 2012, 95). The Marine Corps explained the community that in order for an official return to be organized, the community had to organize itself legally, to which end the leaders established ASOPRAM – Association of Agricultural Producers of Macayepo. Around forty-five peasants inscribed themselves as founders of ASOPRAM and the official return was organized in the name of the association. The agreement was as follows: peasants from surrounding *veredas* were obliged to live in the urban area of Macayepo because of security concerns, the Marine Corps would first enter Macayepo to demine the urban area, followed by the men of Macayepo who would clean and rebuild the village, after which the families would follow for the official return.¹⁹ Furthermore, according to Law 387 under which the right to return was established, the government has the obligation to secure the dignity of the return process, by implementing projects focused on housing, sanitation, education, health and infrastructure (Defensoría del Pueblo 2012).

During the time leading up to the return the leaders of Macayepo went from door to door and to the market in Sincelejo to ask for donations from the macayeperos who were not planning to return. They received corn, rice and other preservable products, but also machetes and boots to be able to work in the field. Others even offered to lease-lend their lands for the long-term, and gave permission to harvest, use and occupy the land. However, according to some peasants interviewed, there was also hostility towards the returnees, some peasants did not want to have anything to do with the return, and said they would be killed or return to Sincelejo within a month.

Finally, the marines entered the area in August followed on the 9th of September by about thirty men and one woman from Macayepo who were flown to Macayepo by helicopter to start rebuilding the village.²⁰ The helicopter ride was an exciting and tense moment for many of the macayeperos. As one peasant joked, “we had never flown a helicopter in our lives, so those who returned, returned because they wanted to fly a helicopter for the first time.”²¹ Upon arrival the macayeperos found a ruined community overgrown with trees, roads had disappeared, and all houses made of palm leaves were destroyed. There was basically nothing and the first four months the men and women all lived in the healthcare centre in order for the

¹⁸ First interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Cartagena, March 25, 2014; Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹⁹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

²⁰ Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014; Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

²¹ Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

marines to provide the necessary security. The men worked during the day to clean the village, rebuild the houses and sow corn in order to be able to provide for their families upon return, the woman present was responsible for cooking for all the men.²² A few of the men spend the whole four months in Macayepo, however most returned every eight or fifteen days to Sincelejo and alternated with other macayeperos.²³ Those first months were a scary and exhausting time, since every night the peasants would hear explosives and shootings and during the day they would work long hours to rebuild the village.

The official return took place on the 21st of December of 2004, but out of the seventy families that expressed the willingness to return, only twenty-one families returned that day. It was a disappointment for the leaders of Macayepo, who had hoped for a larger turnout. With three helicopter flights the families, their belongings and some food supplies were flown from Sincelejo to Macayepo. In Macayepo the families were received by the inhabitants of the neighbouring *vereda* Caño Berruguita, who, although they had already returned individually, were also included in the benefits of the official return process. The women of Caño Berruguita had cooked for the macayeperos, and all in all a few hundred people participated and celebrated the official return to Macayepo.²⁴

The two years following the return, the macayeperos still needed military accompaniment to leave the village. The marines were always with them, when harvesting their crops, when leaving for Sincelejo, or even just to run an errand. It was a rough and fearful two years for the macayeperos, they had little freedom of movement, some soldiers were hit by mines during the work in the fields and due to the fact that the peasants were accompanied by the marines they turned into military targets of the FARC-EP.²⁵ After 2006 the situation in the region started to calm down and the lives of the macayeperos normalized. However, among the macayeperos there still existed disappointment about the return and the accompaniment of the state, they felt the government had only partially fulfilled its obligations during the return process.

1.3. The Movement of La Alta Montaña

From 2012 onwards the community of Macayepo and the whole region of La Alta Montaña started to organize themselves collectively to claim their rights to collective reparations and a comprehensive return process. In order to explain the organisation of La Alta Montaña and how it relates to the return process of 2004 in Macayepo it is necessary to go back to the period of displacement and resistance in La Alta Montaña.

²² Interview 6 with female peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

²³ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

²⁴ Interview 1 with male peasant and former leader of Caño Berruguita a community part of Macayepo, in Caño Berruguita, May 2, 2014; Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

²⁵ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014; Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

The region La Alta Montaña was characterized by division during the conflict. The high part²⁶ of the region that was under guerrilla influence, mainly the 35th and the 37th fronts of the FARC-EP, and the lower part dominated by the paramilitary group Bloque Héroes de los Montes de María, each part lived their own experience during the conflict. Whereas Macayepo and its *veredas* (the lower part) were massively displaced after the massacre, the higher part of La Alta Montaña was characterized partly by displacement, partly by resistance. Although a large part of La Alta Montaña was displaced during the violence around 2000, a significant amount of peasants returned individually after a few months of displacement identifying themselves as *resistentes* (those who resisted the violence) and managed to organize themselves during the ongoing conflict.²⁷

During their resistance, when La Alta Montaña was largely abandoned, about forty corregimientos and veredas were able to organize themselves in Juntas de Acción Comunal²⁸ and came together for community meetings. They managed to organize a first manifestation in 2003, marching to the municipal government of Carmen de Bolívar with around 1000 participants to claim improvements in the region. Due to lack of experience in organization, what was supposed to be a peaceful manifestation turned into a violent strike and a road block. The communities managed to negotiate some agreements with the government mainly focused on infrastructure, the construction of schools and health services. However, their leaders realized they had to organize themselves in a more sustainable and legal way in order to negotiate with the local government.²⁹ In 2004, the Juntas de Acción Comunal founded the Mixed Agricultural Association of María la Alta (Asociación Agropecuaria Mixta María la Alta). More peasants started to return to the region and the organization grew. In 2006, a second manifestation was organized, forcing the government to implement the agreements it had failed to comply with.

Although some improvements were realized in the region, the security situation actually became more difficult. The Marine Corps³⁰ and the army had entered the region to combat the FARC-EP fronts and saw every attempt at community organizing as a guerrilla stronghold. Massive arrests took place, innocent peasants were killed by the armed forces and represented as battle-deaths and people were persecuted based on false allegations of being a

²⁶ See Maps of Geographical Location, most corregimientos of La Alta Montaña belong to the high part, such as Santo Domingo de Mesa, Guamanga, San Isidro, Raizal etc.

²⁷ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014; Field research notes on several community meeting and informal conversations.

²⁸ Juntas de Acción Comunal are civil organisations within communities which are responsible for the management of veredas or corregimientos. They serve as a means of communication with the national, departmental and municipal governments and seek to create opportunities for participation.

²⁹ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

³⁰ The Marine Corps had a base in the corregimiento Cansona, which most peasants of the higher part of La Alta Montaña had to pass when travelling from their homes to the city Carmen de Bolívar and back.

guerrilla collaborator (PNUD 2010, 40).³¹ By 2007 most communities had become so afraid that they did not want to participate in the Mixed Agricultural Association of María la Alta anymore. However, the six communities Loma Central, Lazaro, Guamanga, Hondible, Saltones de Mesa and Camaroncito, managed to keep the organization alive. They continued working with a low profile in their own communities and could barely leave the region.³²

According to a community leader from Loma Central, although the paramilitaries demobilized in 2005 and the FARC-EP was supposedly wiped from the region by 2008, it was only in 2010 that the security situation for most peasants in the higher part of La Alta Montaña truly improved.³³ The recovery of security in the region opened the possibility to cross the invisible frontier between Macayepo and its veredas and the higher part of La Alta Montaña. However, due to mistrust between the communities this was a large barrier to overcome. From 2009 onwards, the leaders of Macayepo with some other leaders from La Alta Montaña started a process to repair the damaged social relations in the region. Existing family ties between the different communities enabled them to establish first contacts in the wider region. Stemming from the idea that sports would enable the region to reconnect, they organized several football tournaments between the different communities which led to further integration of the community members (La Semana 2014).³⁴ When this was achieved, first meetings with leaders from the region were organized in 2011, although, due to distrust, these were still met with reluctance by some of the leaders.³⁵

This process of reuniting the communities led to the recognition that the inhabitants of the peasant communities are all coping with the same necessities caused by the conflict and that all are victims of the same conflict. As one of Macayepo's leaders pointed out, "we saw that the conflict doesn't originate from us, the conflict is between some who rebelled against the State and the State, but whom at some point involved the civilian population. We were able to understand that, forgive and to unite as one region."³⁶ One of the main necessities of the region surged from the fact that a large part of the avocado trees died in the region, which led to rising poverty as for many inhabitants the avocados are their main source of income.³⁷ The lack of attention for this problem and the failure of the government to accomplish its obligations, as established during the return process of Macayepo and the manifestations of the Mixed Agricultural Association of María la Alta, led to a general discontent in the region.

From the perspective of Macayepo's leaders, they felt the community had never received a fully integrated return process, as was an established right in Law 387 of 1997. As one of the

³¹ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

³² Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

³³ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

³⁴ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

³⁵ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

³⁶ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

³⁷ Field research notes on several community meetings and informal conversations.

leaders told, “we are still continuing the same process we started in 2004, and the government is still executing some of the projects, nonetheless a lot is still lacking.”³⁸ They saw the renewed contact with La Alta Montaña as an opportunity for change and an opportunity to be heard. As one interviewee put it, “when we pressured the government between all of us, not only Macayepo, they saw ‘damn’ they all united, and the government had to listen to us.”³⁹ In 2012, the leaders of La Alta Montaña started to organize a pacific march to gain attention and reclaim their rights in front of the government.⁴⁰ After months of preparation, collecting funds, obtaining security measures and mobilizing the community’s inhabitants, the march took place on April 5 of 2013. The initial idea was to march from Carmen de Bolívar to the departmental government in Cartagena in five days where they would then force the government to negotiate with the leaders. About 1,500 peasants participated in the pacific march and after only two days the march was met in San Jacinto by government representatives (Leyva Villareal 2013a, 2013b; Álvarez Beleño 2013). La Alta Montaña’s leaders managed to negotiate an extensive agreement on theme’s such as returns, collective reparations, infrastructure, health, education and agricultural development with the different government entities present (Alta Consejería 2013).⁴¹

The process of reuniting, reconciling and obtaining rights in La Alta Montaña is still ongoing. During my time in the field I went along with the leaders of La Alta Montaña to several community meetings. Besides several weekly meetings, the movement of La Alta Montaña has a monthly assembly, which is held in a different community every month to create accessibility and visibility of the movement for all inhabitants of La Alta Montaña.⁴² At the moment of writing, more than one year after the peace march, about forty percent of the government promises have been implemented.⁴³ The leaders of the Alta Montaña continue working to reach the fulfilment of their rights. In the following section I will shortly discuss those mobilizing structures underlying the two waves of collective mobilisation, to highlight the importance of religion, social cohesion and existing organisations in those processes.

1.4. Mobilizing Structures

Many collective action theorists focus on the interaction between mobilizing structures, political opportunities and framing. Although, as was already discussed in the introduction, my main focus is on political opportunities and framing strategies, I would like to devote a

³⁸ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

³⁹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁴⁰ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014; Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

⁴¹ The Victims’ Unit, who is responsible for collective reparations and return processes, the departmental government of Bolívar and the municipal government of Carmen de Bolívar and their respective representatives in the different fields of negotiations.

⁴² Field research notes and participatory observation during several community meetings in May 2014.

⁴³ Information obtained from several interviews in the region in May 2014; Interview with Unidad de Víctimas official in charge of the collective reparations and return process in La Alta Montaña, in Cartagena, May 22, 2014.

few words on the mobilizing structures present during the two waves of collective action since those structures also influence the capacity of a community to organize. Mobilizing structures, as McAdam, McCarthy and Zald argue, are “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action.” Put more straightforward, it is about those informal and formal forms of organisation pre-existing of a collective action that affect the capacity of people to organize.

In Macayepo, as highlighted shortly above, there were two main mobilizing structures affecting the community’s capacity to organize. First, according to one of Macayepo’s leaders, the fact that the larger part of the community was displaced to the same city added to their capacity to organize themselves.⁴⁴ Whereas other displaced communities were commonly spread among various cities in the region, the majority of Macayepo’s inhabitants moved to Sincelejo facilitating easy communication between the community members. Second, as recognized by various macayeperos, Macayepo was and is a religious community with two main Christian churches, the Evangelist church and the Adventist church, and this also added to the unity and organisation of the community. Both churches were active during the displacement and worked together to organize the community as a whole. As an Acción Social official explained to me, there were little communities as well organized as Macayepo during their displacement, he mainly attributed this to the two churches which added to the capacity of the community to claim state accompaniment.⁴⁵

During the organisation of the movement in La Alta Montaña other mobilizing structures influenced their capacity to organize. First, the pre-existing associations ASOPRAM and the Mixed Agricultural Association of María la Alta joined forces. Building on the existing organizational structures and drawing on ASOPRAM’s already established relationship with government entities enabled their capacity to organize collectively. Second, the presence of family ties among the communities added to the possibility of gathering leaders and inhabitants from various communities. La Alta Montaña’s leaders used those family ties to connect to other communities and get in contact.⁴⁶ Finally, some NGOs and government entities supported the organisation of the pacific march which capacitated the movement of La Alta Montaña. They offered logistical support and focussed on the capacity building of the leaders of La Alta Montaña, which further enabled the organisation of the march in 2013.

⁴⁴ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁴⁵ Second interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 7, 2014.

⁴⁶ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

2. Changing Conflict Dynamics: From a controversial security strategy towards more peaceful coexistence

“The Democratic Security of Álvaro Uribe created a possibility for us, because he focussed on the national security and at the time the armed forces were there to listen to the requests of displaced persons. Though, looking back the policy created a total chaos, they violated the Law and the Human Rights of the people. Later on they started to minimize the human rights violations, which created more opportunities for the people to walk around. Because during the Democratic Security the armed forces became a risk for the population.”⁴⁷

The quote above is characteristic for the way changing conflict dynamics influenced the opportunities for social action in Macayepo and later in La Alta Montaña. The Democratic Security Policy and the Consolidation Policy introduced by the government led to renewed territorial control and state presence, but was also characterized by an increasing propensity for repression by the armed forces, involving human rights abuses of La Alta Montaña’s inhabitants. The perception of the Democratic Security Policy can be seen as a contested opportunity for the return of the community of Macayepo in which there was disagreement on the extent to which this new policy provided security. Further changes in the conflict and truly improved security after 2010 affected and enabled the organisation of La Alta Montaña as a whole.

The changing nature of conflicts removes conflict dynamics as an opportunity structure from the more stable opportunities present in a country, as highlighted by McAdam (1996), towards the more volatile side of the opportunity spectrum. As Gamson and Meyer (1996, 282) stress, “changes in the scope of conflict involve new definitions about who is or should be involved as well as changing the alliance possibilities and the resources involved.” However, the security policies implemented by the Colombian government between 2002 and 2010 also affected the relative openness or closure of the political system and the propensity for state repression, both dimensions of political opportunity structures as defined by McAdam (1996, 23).

2.1. Democratic Security as an opportunity for return to Macayepo

In 2002, President Álvaro Uribe introduced the Defence and Democratic Security Policy (PDSD), a policy based on the assumption that strengthening the Colombian military both in manpower and autonomy would lead to a weakening of the illegal armed groups present and would renew territorial control of the state (Rangel and Medellín 2010). Related to the dimensions of political opportunity structures as defined by McAdam (1996, 27), for some this policy was perceived as the opening of the institutionalized political system, for others it

⁴⁷ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

was not seen as an opportunity at all. As will be argued, the PDSD can be seen as a contested opportunity structure. This opportunity was elaborated on within mutually reinforcing framing strategies from the part of ASOPRAM's leaders and the military forces, which, however, did not lead to an overall consensus or frame resonance among Macayepo's population.

2.1.1. Uribe's Defence and Democratic Security Policy

The policy of President Uribe led to a change in the conflict dynamics of Colombia, and especially in Montes de María, since the government had a special focus on the region. The policy affected the relative openness or closure of the political system, since the militarization of Montes de María led to renewed territorial control and the establishment of state presence. In the case of Macayepo's return this territorial control was perceived as a necessary feature to enable the return of those macayeperos that participated in the collective return of 2004. However, a rise in the propensity for state repression by the armed forces enabled by the policy and a lack of convincing results scared off a part of the community in their willingness to return.

President Álvaro Uribe suggested with the PDSD the necessity to strengthen the activities and the presence of security entities and, at the same time, the obligation of the society to collaborate with the armed forces to achieve a military success (Rangel and Medellín 2010). With the introduction of the PDSD in 2002, Montes de María was declared one of the Rehabilitation and Consolidation Zones in the country, which implied a strong increase of the public forces in the region, the introduction of a network of informants, and counterinsurgency strategies to defeat the guerrilla movements (PNUD 2010, 32). The Rehabilitation Zones allowed for greater autonomy of the public forces, which included taking extraordinary measures in their pursuit to defeat the guerrilla, but also taking up social and civil duties to ensure the development of the region (Rangel and Medellín 2010, 132-133, PNUD 2010, 33). A further expansion of military autonomy was caused by the introduction of the Centre for the Coordination of Integral Action (CCAI) in 2004 coordinated by the military forces, making them responsible for territorial control, humanitarian assistance, economic reactivation, the strengthening of legal institutions and the reconstruction of the social cohesion in the region (PODEC 2011, 52).

Regarding the return processes of IDPs, President Uribe set the goal of returning 30,000 families to their communities in the first three years of his presidency, by including this promise in his national plan for development and security. Government funds were allocated towards return processes to enable the return of IDPs to the regions where territorial control was re-established. Consequently, the return processes became part of the aim to provide democratic security and were converted into measurable results of this national strategy (ILSA 2010a, 20). The policy on return processes in this period is seen as a controversial one, where in many cases the right as established by law (Ley 387 de 1997) to conditions of security, dignity and wilfulness of the community were not guaranteed (Daniels Puello and

Múnera Cavadía 2011, 39). Many scholars and international organisations claim that the return processes in this period were imposed on the people by the responsible government entity Acción Social, and even talk about ‘forced’ returns, which enabled the government to show positive results of the PDS (PCS 2003, ILSA 2010a, PODEC 2011).⁴⁸

In the Caribbean region of Colombia the number of soldiers reached 20,000 by 2005. The main military actor in Montes de María between 2002 and 2005 was the Marine Corps located in Corozal, with a permanent base in the corregimiento Cansona in La Alta Montaña. Although the presence of the FARC and the paramilitaries persisted in this period in La Alta Montaña, the arrival of the Marine Corps led to some territorial control in the region and the increase in manpower led to a perception of security among the leaders of ASOPRAM. As one of its leaders told me, “in 2004 we started to notice the results of the Democratic Security, and seeing the Democratic Security, we figured we had the right to benefit from this policy.”⁴⁹

However, as was stated before, the PDS can be seen as a contested political opportunity. As Gamson and Meyer (1996, 283) put it, “an opportunity unrecognized is no opportunity at all. There is a component of political opportunity involving perception of possible change that is, above all else, a social construction.” This also implies that opportunities can be contested: what is recognized as an opportunity by one, might not be recognized as an opportunity by another. On the one hand, the founding members of ASOPRAM and its leaders perceived the PDS as an opportunity for the return to Macayepo. Although there was still guerrilla and paramilitary presence in the community of Macayepo and its rural surroundings, they regarded military accompaniment sufficient to guarantee their security upon return. On the other hand, among a large part of Macayepo’s inhabitants the fear of the illegal armed groups had the upper hand in their perception of the possibility to return. They declared those willing to return as insane and played an important part in discouraging members of the community to return. Furthermore, returning with the Marine Corps was seen as controversial, since they were involved in several abuses of human rights and were accused of having connections with the paramilitaries, which will be further discussed in chapter four.

With regard to the allegation, earlier introduced, of Acción Social pressuring return processes during Uribe’s first presidential period, it seems this was not the case during Macayepo’s return process. Acción Social was against the return of Macayepo under the security conditions present at the time, and did not believe a sustainable return could be guaranteed.⁵⁰ Most macayeperos that participated in the return actually claim the pressure came from them, based on the argument, “whether you accompany us or not, we are returning anyway.”⁵¹ However, in my opinion this presumed pressure from the part of the government can be

⁴⁸ Interview with former Defensoría del Pueblo Bolívar and UNHCR Barranquilla official, March 15, 2014.

⁴⁹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁵⁰ Based on several interviews with peasants from Macayepo; First interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Cartagena, March 25, 2014; Second interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 7, 2014.

⁵¹ Interview 1 with male peasant and former leader of vereda Caño Berruguita part of the corregimiento Macayepo, in Caño Berruguita, May 2, 2014.

attributed to the Marine Corps, due to their willingness to accompany the return although true territorial control had not been established yet. As one macayepero asserted:

“I do not reject the statement that the Marine Corps put pressure on our return, because nowadays work is related to results. One does what one has to do to reach one’s goals, and if that goal is to return persons to their land they will do it. Doing the right thing can benefit them too.”⁵²

As can be derived from the above assessment of the PDS and its implications for the security in Macayepo, the situation was a complex one with various actors involved and different perceptions of the opportunity it brought to the community. What can be established is that the security situation was not very good at the time of return. Some of the macayeperos looking back on the situation stated, “it was madness that we returned when we did, illegal groups were still surrounding Macayepo, and we would hear explosions every night.” Furthermore, the fact that the macayeperos walked around escorted by the marines for two years long due to security concerns and were thereby turned into military targets themselves, also adds to the conclusion that the security situation was a very difficult one. However, the leaders of ASOPRAM managed to convince a part of Macayepo’s population to return, and in the following section we will focus on the framing strategies they used to accomplish this.

2.1.2. Framing non-existent security

As Benford and Snow (2000, 623) suggest “frames are developed, generated, and elaborated on not only via attending to the three core framing tasks, but also by three overlapping processes that can be conceptualized as discursive, strategic, and contested,” which I will elaborate on further in this section. It is important to note that there is consensus among scholars that frames are always contested processes (Benford and Snow 2000, 625), which can also be seen in the framing strategies deployed in Macayepo’s the return process. Regarding the framing of the security in Macayepo as an opportunity to return, several different forces were at play. First of all, the leaders of ASOPRAM were trying to convince the community of the positive security situation which would enable the return. Second, the Marine Corps reinforced those framing strategies by demonstrating their willingness to accompany the return and actively involving themselves in the organization of the process. Third, those with a negative view of the possibility to return were involved in a process of counter-framing, be it strategically or not, by discouraging inhabitants of Macayepo to return.

According to Benford and Snow (2000, 624), frames are developed and deployed to achieve a specific purpose, they are deliberative and goal directed. In that sense the questions who deploys a frame, when is the frame deployed, and where and why is it deployed become relevant. In the case of Macayepo the main frame articulators were the leaders of ASOPRAM who initially introduced the idea of a return process. By 2004 they recognized the first results of the PDS and the strategy of framing security became consistent with their own

⁵² Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Maceyepo, May 9, 2014.

perception of the situation.⁵³ Their timing was based on the idea that it would take time to inform and gather the whole population of Macayepo and let the idea of a return sink in.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the Marine Corps and other government entities had to be convinced and pressured to assure their accompaniment.⁵⁵ Informal meetings would be held with the community of Macayepo and official meetings would be held within the setting of the CDAIPD, where all government entities were present. Although this might be stating the obvious, their main goal was convincing the macayeperos and the government entities of the possibility to return.

Collective action frames are developed within discursive processes, which refers to speech, conversations, and texts mainly in the context of the collective activities (Benford and 2000, 623). Within those discursive processes the three core framing task are attended to in an interrelated way and reinforcing one another. The leaders of ASOPRAM applied the diagnostic task by calling upon the shared identity of the community as peasants, their main message being that the city is not for peasants, that the city caused famine while one has its land to grow crops on, a situation portrayed as in need of action. As one of ASOPRAM's leaders repeated the message of the community meetings:

“People, the only thing we want is to be at our land, we have become tired of all the difficulties of the city, we don't know how to live in the city, because the city is not for peasants, if we have to endure famine in the city, we better endure it on our land.”⁵⁶

The strategy to overcome this situation was the return with the accompaniment of the Marine Corps, which would provide the community with the necessary security and was the main motivational factor that was portrayed. Based on previous experience the leaders of ASOPRAM tried to convince Macayepo's population of the possibility and efficacy of a return process, by stating “we managed to take the temperature⁵⁷ when entering the region and recollecting our avocados, and we saw that with the help of the public forces we could enter the region again.”⁵⁸

Those collective action frames employed by the leaders of ASOPRAM were strengthened and invigorated by including cultural resources in the frames such as identity and religion. This extension of frames can be found in the strategic process called frame amplification, which “involves the idealization, embellishment, clarification, or invigoration of existing values or beliefs” (Benford and Snow 2000, 624). The role of identity was shortly touched upon above. As one ASOPRAM leader emphasized this: “the city is not for peasants,

⁵³ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁵⁴ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

⁵⁵ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

⁵⁶ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁵⁷ Free translation of “logramos medir como un termómetro”, literally translated as “managed to measure with a thermometer.”

⁵⁸ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

farmers, as the name implies, come from a farm.”⁵⁹ By attributing certain characteristics to those potential participants that suggest a certain line of action, the frame is strengthened and more recognizable for potential adherents (Benford and Snow 2000, 631).

Furthermore, the role of religion within the frames was clear within several interviews, as is evident in the way another ASOPRAM leader explained the strategy of the return process:

“the basic idea of the return was that the public forces would accompany us, and on the other hand, we have always been Christians and we always talked about God, about the confidence we have in God and that if God is with us, who would be against us?”⁶⁰

As Snow and Benford (2005, 209) explain in their article on the relationship between ideology and framing processes, ideology is one of the cultural resources that can be exploited for the purpose of constructing collective action frames and can facilitate framing processes. Linking the rational possibility of military accompaniment to religion and the faith in God when motivating the macayeperos tapped into emotions of fear and might have helped to overcome this fear. As became evident in the research several interviewees still thank God for the opportunity to return and claim that without God at their sides the return would never have been possible under the circumstances at the time, which points to a certain extent of frame resonance.⁶¹

The collective action frames transmitted by ASOPRAM’s leaders were reinforced by the willingness of the Marine Corps to accompany the return process. Although other government agencies, such as Acción Social, did not agree with the return process because the necessary conditions could not be guaranteed, the Marine Corps did. The fact that the other entities opposed the return, already implied that an integral return process as defined by the law would not be possible, since the Marine Corps capacity was limited to providing security and would not be able to implement an integral return process. As one peasant told me, “Commander Muñoz of the Marine Corps said, ‘my part, providing security, is ready, I will bring you to Macayepo’, but the other entities did not see the guarantees and did not want to go.”⁶² According to an ASOPRAM leader, the marines were the ones that really encouraged the return, they helped the community organize ASOPRAM and were the only entity willing to go.⁶³ This willingness demonstrated by the Marine Corps reinforced the frames deployed by the leaders of ASOPRAM and affected the perception of the return to Macayepo as a real possibility.

⁵⁹ Free translation from Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014, based on the following quote: “La ciudad no es para el campesino, el campesino tiene como dice el nombre CAMPesino, viene del campo.

⁶⁰ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

⁶¹ Interviews 3, 4, 5 and 6 conducted in May 2014.

⁶² Interview 1 with male peasant and former leader of Caño Berruguita a community part of Macayepo, in Caño Berruguita, May 2, 2014.

⁶³ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

Nonetheless, it should be reminded that only 21 families from Macayepo actually returned during the process, out of the 70 families that expressed their willingness to return in the first place. The security conditions were one of the reasons many families backed down, they feared for their lives if they would return. Important in this respect is frame resonance, since the degree of resonance is relevant to the mobilizing potency of the frame. The fear among the macayeperos affected the resonance of the collective action frames, and only a small part of the community believed in the efficacy of the proposed collective action. As became clear in the interviews, many men backed down, because they were discouraged by their families, which can be seen as a form of counter-framing. Counter-framing, Benford and Snow (2000, 626) argue, are those attempts by opponents to challenge, undermine or neutralize a movement's framing. As one of the returnees told me, the macayeperos would express their fear during the community meetings and say: "you are crazy to return, they will bring you back in a coffin, don't expose yourselves."⁶⁴ Due to the scope of the research, it is impossible to measure the extent to which counter-framing affected the turnout on the day of return and of the effectiveness of the frames proffered by ASOPRAM's leaders, however, it can be assumed that it had a certain extent of influence.

2.1.3. Overemphasizing security and the willingness of the Marine Corps to accompany the return

After outlining the policy regarding Democratic Security as a contested opportunity for the return process of Macayepo and elaborating on the framing tactics deployed by ASOPRAM's leaders and the effects of the reinforcement and counter-framing of the frames, I will now move to the existing dynamic relationship between the PDS as an opportunity and the framing of security by ASOPRAM's leaders. As was already clarified in the introduction, political opportunity structures and framing processes interact in a dynamic way, which comes down to, on the one hand, opportunities opening the way for collective action, but on the other hand, those pursuing action also creating opportunities.

The framing strategies of Macayepo's leaders linked the necessity to return, the rationale of state accompaniment and their faith in god to create collective action frames speaking to the minds of the inhabitants of Macayepo. In the case of framing security and the PDS, ASOPRAM's leaders clearly overemphasized the security conditions available for their return. As stressed by Gamson and Meyer (1996, 287), "movement activists interpret political space in ways that emphasize opportunity rather than constraint, they may stimulate actions that change opportunity." Considering the situation the community lived in during the first two years of the return, it can be stated that security conditions to live a normal uncomplicated life were not present at the time of return. However, the return process did lead to permanent presence of the Marine Corps in Macayepo, which in the end enabled the reestablishment of territorial control in the community. Gamson and Meyer (1996) would stress the leaders made their opportunity frame a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although this

⁶⁴ Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014.

statement might be exaggerated, the return process did lead to the long-term possibility of those twenty-one families to return and security was re-established.

Furthermore, I argue that the Marine Corps seized the opportunity of the willingness of the macayeperos to return. The pressure to demonstrate results of the PDSO made the eagerness of ASOPRAM's leaders to return a convenient circumstance to accompany the return. By encouraging the return, helping in the organization of ASOPRAM and also assisting in social aspects of the return, the Marine Corps played a significant role in the return process of Macayepo. Moreover, the fact that the government entity responsible for initiating return processes, Acción Social, did not agree with the return of Macayepo further points to the overly involved part the marines played. The intensive accompaniment during a period of two years seems an enormous effort, considering the manpower needed for such an operation, although it must be recognized that the Marine Corps kept its promise of securing the population and still has presence in the community.

Finally, it should be recognized that the return process of Macayepo involved only a small part of the community. The rest of Macayepo's original inhabitants were not convinced, either out of fear or other circumstances discussed in the following chapters, by the framing strategies and available opportunities to return to Macayepo. As Gamson and Meyer (1996, 290) argue, "the structures of political opportunity carry elements of both threat and possibility, and challengers must struggle to strike an effective balance." In that sense it can be argued that the collective action frames proffered by ASOPRAM's leaders were fragile and were not capable to strike this effective balance. The frames deployed by them only found resonance among a specific and small group of people.

2.2. An improving security situation as an opportunity for broader social organisation in La Alta Montaña

After the return of Macayepo the security situation in La Alta Montaña improved slowly. Although illegal groups had nearly disappeared from the region by 2008, the region was only perceived as safe after 2010 by the region's inhabitants. The economically difficult situation in La Alta Montaña and the re-established security was perceived as an opportunity for collective organisation by its leaders. By emphasizing the possibilities of a renewed and peaceful future and the improvements in the conflict dynamics in comparison to the past, the leaders framed the new situation as an opportunity for the collective organisation of a peace march to claim their rights to collective reparations and a comprehensive return process.

2.2.1. The Consolidation of La Alta Montaña

From 2005 onwards an improving security situation in La Alta Montaña created the opportunity for its inhabitants to come together again and act together in a peaceful way. The demobilization of the paramilitary group Bloque Héroes de los Montes de María in 2005, the

withdrawal of the FARC's 35th and 37th fronts around 2008, and a more righteous relationship between the population and the military forces, all added to the improved situation (Rangel and Medellín 2010, Cortes Reyes 2011, PODEC 2011). Theoretically speaking, the territorial control was truly re-established and the propensity for repression by the state decreased in the course of the years (McAdam 1996). The invisible boundary between the two parts of La Alta Montaña, at least practically speaking, disappeared and provided an opportunity for the inhabitants to reunite themselves again. Although some security challenges still persist and cannot be discarded, La Alta Montaña managed to seize this opportunity as part of their aim to claim an integral return process and collective reparations.

The demobilization of the paramilitaries started with the Agreement of Santa Fe de Ralito between the High Commissioner for Peace in Colombia and the representatives of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) on the 15th of July in 2003. From the signing of the agreement until August of 2006 a total of 31,617 paramilitaries demobilized and 18,051 arms were handed in (INDEPAZ 2013, Rangel and Medellín 2010). In Montes de María the paramilitary group Bloque Héroes de los Montes de María demobilized in 2005 with a total of 594 participants (Daniels Puello and Múnera Cavadía 2011, 41-42). Although 594 former paramilitaries officially demobilized, only an estimated 150 ex-combatants of the Bloque Héroes de los Montes de María took part in the reintegration programme offered by the central government (Daniels Puello and Múnera Cavadía 2011, 42). Moreover, new illegal groups emerged, called the BACRIM⁶⁵ that, although smaller in size and organisation, were based on the same tactics and structure as the former paramilitary groups. The BACRIM caused a rise in the violence in cities such as Cartagena, Carmen de Bolívar and Sincelejo, but the demobilisation led to a decrease in violence in the rural areas of La Alta Montaña (PODEC 2011, 83).

Another improvement in the security situation was caused by a strong reduction in the presence of guerrilla movements in Montes de María. The counterinsurgency strategy of the PDSO caused the decline of the 35th and 37th fronts of the FARC-EP, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) company Jaime Báteman Cayón and the demobilisation of the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) in Montes de María (Cortes Reyes 2011, 61). In La Alta Montaña, the main presence was that of the two FARC-EP fronts which had major influence in the higher part of La Alta Montaña. As many of the peasants interviewed assert, the death of FARC commander Martín Caballero of the 37th front during a bombardment by the military known as Operation Alcatraz marked the stabilization of the region (Cortes Reyes 2011, 67). According to the interviewed macayeperos, the FARC had disappeared from the region by 2008 and more families started to return due to the improved security situation.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Acronym for bandas criminales, Spanish for criminal bands or gangs.

⁶⁶ Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014; Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

Additionally, the PDSO was adjusted to cope with some of the negative consequences of the policy. First, during the first years of the democratic security policy there were complaints about infiltration of paramilitaries and guerrilla member in the Marine Corps, who according to leaders of La Alta Montaña worked as informants for the marines but also for their own armed groups.⁶⁷ With the introduction of the Caribbean Jointed Command, which was an integrated command structure between the Army, the Marine Corps and the Air Force, created in 2004 and present in La Alta Montaña from 2006 onwards, this situation improved and a strengthened coordinated counterinsurgency approach was initiated (Cortes Reyes 2011, 61). Second, in 2006 the government introduced a new policy succeeding the PDSO, the Consolidation of the Democratic Security Policy (PCSD). As part of the PCSD the Regional Coordination Centre of Montes de María (CCRMM) was founded in 2008. Although still coordinated by the military forces, it included a larger focus on the development of the region and the empowerment of the population of Montes de María (PODEC 2011, 67). Finally, General Rafael Alfredo Colón of the Marine Corps, founder of the CCRMM, and known in the region for his unique effort to persecute the AUC, was committed to improving the relationship of the Marine Corps with the population of Montes de María (PODEC 2011, 67, La Semana 2005).⁶⁸ These changes led to a reduction of the propensity for state repression which caused an opening in the opportunity for collective action.

Although for the macayeperos the situation had largely improved by 2008, for the high part of La Alta Montaña this was not the case. It took until 2010 for the situation to normalize, mainly due to the controversial relationship the communities had with the military forces. The inhabitants of the high part of La Alta Montaña coped with the stigmatization of being guerrilla collaborators and suffered human rights abuses by the armed forces. Food import restrictions, massive captures, killings of civilians and political persecutions of community leaders went on until 2010 (PODEC 2011).⁶⁹ Whereas the situation of the macayeperos improved from 2007 onwards, the period between 2007 and 2010 was actually the roughest period for the high part of La Alta Montaña according to one of its leaders.⁷⁰ However, with the disappearance of the FARC the relationship between the armed forces and the inhabitants of La Alta Montaña improved and by 2010 the situation was stable.

The improvement of the security situation provided the opportunity for La Alta Montaña as a whole to reunite again. Looking at it in a practical way, the invisible border between the two parts of La Alta Montaña disappeared. Since crossing this border was prohibited before by the illegal groups present, the withdrawal of those groups presented the opportunity to cross

⁶⁷ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014; Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014; Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

⁶⁸ Interview with former Defensoría del Pueblo Bolívar and UNHCR Barranquilla official, March 15, 2014.

⁶⁹ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014

⁷⁰ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

again.⁷¹ However, the barrier of distrust that existed between the two parts had to be overcome too, a process that will be discussed more in-depth in chapter four. For now, it is sufficient to state that the improvement in the security situation was perceived by the leaders of La Alta Montaña as an opportunity to work together and pursue a peaceful movement with all the communities of La Alta Montaña.

Finally, it is important to note that, although the security in the region improved, informants and militias of the illegal armed groups still persist in the region according to some national research institutes (CODHES 2010, ILSA 2012). Furthermore, the armed forces are still suspicious when it comes to community organization, which has led again to a stigmatization of the movement of La Alta Montaña as being infiltrated by guerrilla movements. Currently, one of the leaders of the movement is imprisoned in a high security jail based on allegations of being a collaborator of the FARC, which shows that tensions within the region still persist.⁷² However, although security concerns still existed the willingness to proceed with the organisation of the movement prevailed among the leaders. As a leader expressed in an interview that he said to the other leaders: “if they come to threaten me or to kill me, don’t let go of the march, but then all march in my name.”⁷³

2.2.2. Framing the negative from the past and the prospect of a peaceful future

The process of involving the Alta Montaña as a whole in the organisation of the peaceful march started with the inclusion of the community’s leaders. Thereafter, when all leaders were convinced, the framing strategies were mainly focussed on including the whole population of La Montaña. The improvement of the conflict dynamics in the region provided the right timing to reach out to the communities and visit the communities actively to secure its participation. The main reason for the process was the need for change in the region and the lack of government attention, recognition of this situation was triggered by the dead of the avocado trees. With regard to the framing of the security in La Alta Montaña as an opportunity for collective action, two strategic sentiments were called upon. First of all, the possibility of a better and peaceful future by moving away from the conflict and creating a peaceful movement was stressed. Second, an emphasis was placed on remembering the negative situation in the past, which emphasized a sense of what was not possible in the past, would be a possibility right now. By frame amplification and framing bridging processes a sense of inclusiveness among the population was reached that potentially strengthened La Alta Montaña’s willingness to participate in the peaceful march of 2013.

⁷¹ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

⁷² Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014; Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014; Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁷³ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

The prognostic framing task, which involves the strategies of carrying out a plan of action (Benford and Snow 2000, 616), was attended to by La Alta Montaña's leaders by stressing the possibility of starting a peaceful and inclusive movement to strive for better living conditions. As a leader from Loma Central explained the movement:

“we are a peaceful movement, and we try to reach our goals peacefully and through dialogue, because using dialogue and working together works better and we can actually reach something.”⁷⁴

The peaceful approach of the movement was emphasized often by the leaders as a way to underscore that the movement is not a part of the conflict, as can also be derived from the following quote:

“we know we can do something for this country and doing so in these conditions is not easy, because we live in a context of war in which we are not armed. The only arm one has, is the courage to confront this situation.”⁷⁵

The strategy of moving away from the conflict and focussing on peaceful approaches added to the motivational framing task in the sense that the improved security situation could be sustained through this strategy.

Regarding the motivational framing task, providing rationale and the possible efficacy of a certain collective action (Benford and Snow 2000, 617), the focus was put on comparing the difficulties from the past with the current positive possibilities for organisation. As a macayepero explained the willingness of the leaders in La Alta Montaña to organize themselves: “In the past nobody had the courage to lead an organization, and the threats set us back, but right now we have the possibility to lead openly.”⁷⁶ As a consequence the leaders were able to play a clearer role in convincing their communities by emphasizing the renewed possibility to move around in the region again and a regained autonomy for La Alta Montaña's population. As one of the peasants said: “The invisible border lasted until they killed Martin Caballero, but right now we can organize ourselves.”⁷⁷ The regained autonomy was stressed several times in the interviews, emphasizing the perception of efficacy of the prospective collective action. As one leader stated:

“It's not like before, when we organized a march and we had to accept everything the public forces and the government did; right now we have to autonomy to start deciding our own future.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

⁷⁵ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁷⁶ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

⁷⁷ Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014.

⁷⁸ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

This type of framing of the security situation enabled a sense of empowerment among the members of the movement of La Alta Montaña, and also stressed the importance to seize this opportunity now that the autonomy of the population was achieved.

Within the different transmitted collective action frames the leaders applied frame amplification strategies accentuating the value of inclusiveness, but also magnifying the significance of the movement by extending its scope from La Alta Montaña to the whole country. Frame amplification, involves the highlighting of certain issues, events or believes as more important than others (Benford and Snow 2000, 623). These frame amplification strategies become clear in the following collective action frame:

“we work together with Christian and non Cristian, we are diverse and there is diversity in thought and religion, but within this diversity we agree on something, in that we want a better Montes de María and that we want a better country.”⁷⁹

First, through emphasizing the diversity of the movement a sense of inclusiveness is reached; no matter what your background is, you are welcome to join the march. Second, stressing the need for a better country increases the significance of the movement beyond merely La Alta Montaña. Both framing mechanisms add to the reach of the proffered collective action frame.

An important remark should be made regarding the role of religion. Whereas religion played a significant role in the return of Macayepo, in La Alta Montaña as a whole religion was a less decisive factor. Since many macayeperos are either Adventist or Evangelist, for them it might have been an obstacle to work together with non-religious persons. As one leader emphasized, “the bible taught and we understood that two are more than one,”⁸⁰ and together it is possible to reach more, justifying the possibility to move away from acting solely from within one’s own church congregation. This example can be seen as the discursive process of frame transformation, which refers to changing old understandings and/or generating new ones (Benford and Snow 2000, 625). By drawing on the bible in their attempt to argue for inclusion and diversity of thought the leaders managed to create a frame salient with the value of religion although transforming the understanding of collective organisation known by many macayeperos.

The extent to which these frames resonated among the population is hard to establish, since during the fieldwork most of the research took place during community meetings attended mainly by the leaders of La Alta Montaña. The leaders signalled that, although 1500 persons participated in the march and supported the movement, there is also a part of La Alta Montaña’s population that does not want to be involved in community organizing. Furthermore, whereas in the case of Macayepo’s return process the Marine Corps reinforced their framing strategies, this was not the case with the movement of La Alta Montaña. According to some macayeperos, the Marine Corps felt betrayed by Macayepo’s leaders and

⁷⁹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁸⁰ Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

felt they deserted to the “other side”, still stigmatizing the high part of La Alta Montaña as being one of guerrilla influence.⁸¹ NGO’s such as Sembrandopaz did support the organization of La Alta Montaña and supported the movement logistically and intellectually. Their approach to community peacebuilding added to the capacity of the leaders to involve different communities and reinforced the importance of a peaceful approach.⁸²

2.2.3. An uncontested opportunity and the autonomy to decide their own future

In the case of the improved security in La Alta Montaña, this can be seen as an opportunity seized by the leaders of the process to deploy collective action frames. The opportunity created a new possibility for social organization. The opportunity did not lead directly to the framing of improved security as such to mobilize potential adherents. However, the renewed security contributed to the possibility to reunite again in the region. This was an opportunity seized by those that initially started the organization process.

The job of frame articulators is to convince potential challengers that their action leading to change is a true possibility (Gamson and Meyer, 286). The leaders of Macayepo and Lazaro that seized the opportunity to enter the high part of La Alta Montaña did so by framing the positive contrast between the past unsafety in the region and the renewed security. The improved security situation was thereby already taken as fact and the new possibilities this created for organisation were emphasized. In this case the opportunity of the improved security led to the possibility to pursue collective action and therefore the possibility to deploy collective action frames. Whereas in many cases opportunities are overestimated by frame articulators, regarding the security situation in La Alta Montaña the opportunity was uncontested and its existence created the possibility to frame.

Furthermore, the emphasis within the framing strategies on the possibility of a peaceful future was an appeal to the population to decide their own future. As Gamson and Meyer (1996, 285) state, frame articulators “define people as potential agents of their own history.” The frames focussing on the regained autonomy of La Alta Montaña’s population created a sense of empowerment which strengthens the perception of the possibility to indeed decide one’s own future. Related to this, the collective mobilization of La Alta Montaña in a peaceful movement is supposed to lead to the consolidation of the opportunity of improved security. Frame articulators emphasize the vision of a changing society, better policies and greater justice as possibilities which are affected and created by their action (Gamson and Meyer 1996, 286). By overemphasizing the possibility for change the movement might expand the opportunity, which could bring about a sustainable situation in the future consolidating peace and advancement of the region.

⁸¹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁸² Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

3. Changing Policies: From Narrow Returns to Holistic Approaches

“The country with the most beautiful laws is Colombia, and the country that least complies with the law is Colombia,”⁸³ a statement made during my fieldwork in Macayepo that is characteristic of this chapter. This quote illustrates the lack of government capacity, the frustration of the peasants from La Alta Montaña, and the need they felt to collectively organize themselves to demand their rights. Changing policies regarding the return processes of IDPs led to different perceptions of opportunities, framing strategies and forms of collective action. Although in Macayepo the right to return under Law 387 of 1997 was perceived as a framing opportunity to strengthen their demand to return, the actual implementation of this right was strongly lacking, which left a feeling of disappointment in the incomplete return process. The introduction of the comprehensive Victims’ Law in 2011 reinforced by frustrations in the whole region about the lack of government attention, created a contested perception of the Victims’ Law of 2011 as a renewed opportunity in La Alta Montaña to claim those rights which were never received in the past.

Theoretically speaking, the changes in policies concerning the displaced population led to changes in the opportunities within the institutional system of Colombia. According to Gamson and Meyer (1996, 282), policy changes are opportunities at the volatile side of the opportunity spectrum and those volatile elements are at the core of explanations of collective action. As the two writers put it, “policy changes involve a new rhetoric of justification and possible reframing of issues as well as in organizational changes and the distribution of resources” (Gamson and Meyer 1996, 282). In this chapter the changing policies will be discussed with an emphasis on how this led to different perceptions of opportunity and contrasting framing strategies.

3.1. Law 387: Return processes from a humanitarian perspective

The right to return under Law 387 of 1997, with conditions of safety, wilfulness and dignity, was perceived as a framing opportunity by Macayepo’s leaders. Framing the right to return strengthened their demand in front of the government for an accompanied return process and affected the macayeperos’ perception of what the return would entail. However, lack of government capacity led to a partial return, which left the macayeperos frustrated and disappointed in the outcome of their return process.

⁸³ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

3.1.1. Law 387 of 1997: The right to return

In 2004, during the return of Macayepo, the right to return was established under Law 387 of 1997 which deals with the prevention of forced displacement and attention to victims of forced displacement. Law 387 established three conditions based on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement under which the return or resettlement of displaced communities should take place. First, the return should be voluntarily based on the expression of a community of their willingness to return. Second, the safety of the community willing to return should be guaranteed, which is based on the principle of physical safety and on the principle of no repetition, but also on the right to life, food security and the possibility of commercial trade. Third, the community should be able to return with dignity, a condition which the Defensoría del Pueblo (2012) evaluates on the basis of indicators such as housing, sanitation, public services, healthcare, education and infrastructure (Ley 387 de 1997, United Nations 2001, Defensoría del Pueblo 2012). Concluding, under the law return processes should not only provide the possibility for actual return, but also the consolidation and stabilization of socio-economic conditions that make the return sustainable (ILSA 2010a, 29).

To guarantee the presence of those three conditions the return process is divided into five phases, consisting of exploration, institutional analysis, induction, the return, and the tracking phase. The government entity responsible for the national coordination of all programmes established under Law 387, including the return processes, was Acción Social. Within the departmental setting a committee consisting of the local Acción Social entity, the departmental and municipal government, the armed forces, and, depending on its meetings, the displaced population, called the CDAIPD, the entities would attend to requests for return processes handed in by displaced communities, as was the case with Macayepo.⁸⁴ Together the different entities would evaluate the conditions and possibilities of the return processes, the resources available, and, most importantly, the security condition of the prospective return (ILSA 2010a, 27). As was elaborated on earlier, Acción Social did not agree with the return of the community of Macayepo, due to worries about the guarantees of security and dignity. Furthermore, the Acción Social entity in Bolívar consisted of only two people who had to attend to the whole department and lacked the capacity to properly implement and coordinate all socio-economic projects necessary for the return processes.

As a former Acción Social official explained, when a community expressed its willingness to return, the security situation was always the determining factor in deciding whether the return was a possibility. According to him, the return processes were seen by the entities as a gradual process, which meant that all conditions as established under the law were not guaranteed before the actual return took place. When the armed forces would indicate a minimum security condition for a return could be guaranteed, the entities and community would go ahead with the return process. A food aid package and an agricultural kit including

⁸⁴ Based on several interviews with returnees from Macayepo.

seeds and fertilizer would be distributed upon return, while long term projects such as housing and education projects would be implemented during the course of the years.⁸⁵

However, Macayepo's leaders had a different perception of their rights under Law 387. As one leader said, "according to the Law 387, Macayepo would be clean, the roads reconstructed and houses rebuild upon return."⁸⁶ Although the leaders knew the socio-economic stabilization projects would not be ready on arrival, one leader told me they did expect the implementation of projects to start immediately upon arrival.⁸⁷ The leaders of Macayepo saw Law 387 and its rights regarding return as an institutional opportunity that would contribute to the possibility to return. Despite their knowledge of the general lack of government resources and willingness to implement development programmes, they had hoped to receive the attention needed in the case of their return.

Looking back on their return, the macayeperos are disappointed by the attention they received from the government and feel that their return was never fully implemented. As a macayepero told me, "our return was an abnormal one, according to the law there should have been integral guarantees, but during our return we never had those guarantees."⁸⁸ Upon return they found a destroyed town, fully overgrown with trees and ruined houses, while they expected the town to be reconstructed. The leaders of ASOPRAM consider they risked a lot during the return and seeing the non-compliance of the government entities with their compromises was disappointing. One leader told me they would never have returned in 2004 if they knew then that they would get this little support.⁸⁹ Due to the lack of progress in and focus on the community, the return process is still perceived by its leaders as an ongoing process.

To conclude, the full implementation of the right to return as established under Law 387 was already presumed impossible before the actual return to Macayepo. A lack of true security conditions in the region and the marginal capacity of government entities constrained the possibility to guarantee the three conditions of wilfulness, security and dignity. A common criticism related to this problem is the humanitarian approach taken in Law 387 to deal with return processes. By mainly focussing on emergency responses and short-term needs a sustainable return process including the reestablishment of one's life as before the displacement is impossible. Therefore a approach based on the restitution of rights, which implies administering justice, the reparation of damages and a true guarantee of no repetition, is necessary (Celis 2003, 289).⁹⁰ In paragraph 4.2 of this chapter this criticism and the policy changes it led to will be further discussed, as this changed the opportunity to claim an integral

⁸⁵ Second interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 7, 2014.

⁸⁶ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

⁸⁷ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁸⁸ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014

⁸⁹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁹⁰ Interview with academic of the Universidad La Javeriana specialized in the displaced population, land inequality and gender, in Amsterdam, June 12, 2014.

return. Even though the opportunity presented by Law 387 for the community of Macayepo was not ideal, its leaders did recognize the law as a possibility to claim the right to return. They actively deployed a collective action frame towards government entities and the community's population to enable the organization of the return.

3.1.2. Framing the right to return

As emphasized before, collective action frames are developed to achieve a specific goal. Frame articulators, in this case the leaders of ASOPRAM, focussed their collective action frames on convincing the government entities and Macayepo's displaced population of the legal possibility to return. Furthermore, some of the leaders received a course on the rights of the displaced population during their displacement, adding to their capacity to apply the law. On the one hand, they had to convince the Colombian state of its obligation to accompany the return, on the other hand, they had to assure the macayeperos that the government's commitment to the return process would lead to a sustainable return. Although the leaders of ASOPRAM knew the government would not fully comply with the right to the condition of dignity immediately, their hope was that the government would start generating this condition upon return of the community, which explains why it was in their interest to frame the right to return in a positive manner.

Within the setting of the CDAIPD, Macayepo's leaders mainly focussed their framing efforts on the different government entities. As one leader demonstrated their collective action frames, he stated they would say:

“We need to go to our land, we want to be on our land, we don't want to stay in the city any longer, we are coping with difficulties in the city, due to our own right to return you have to provide us with the security necessary, you have to help us with this, because we have a Law that says you have to support us and you have to provide us with the right to security and the right to life.”⁹¹

It is clear that in this collective action frame all three framing tasks are attended too. First, the diagnostic task is attended to by addressing the problematic situation for peasants in the city. Second, the need to return to their land and the reference to the right to return implies their strategy is focussed on a return process which covers the prognostic framing task. Third, the motivational task is mainly attended to by reminding the government entities of their obligation towards the displaced population. Furthermore, the repetition of several aspects within collective action frame strengthens its capacity to convince the audience.

The three core framing tasks are interrelated. This implies that the different framing tasks are regularly attended to within one or one part of a collective action frame and cannot always be seen separately from one another. For example, as Benford and Snow (2000, 615) have

⁹¹ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

highlighted, the diagnostic task is often deployed by creating an injustice frame. The identification of the cause of this injustice has an attributional component that may attend to the prognostic or motivational framing task too (Benford and Snow 2000, 616). Establishing an injustice often also calls upon the need for action. The injustice of the situation of displacement that becomes apparent in the above frame also refers to the need for action by claiming the macayeperos need to go to their land.

The leaders of Macayepo had to convince the government entities with powerful language. They would use logical arguments based on the law to convince the different institutions of their obligations. As a leader told me, “by convincing the institutions with logical arguments they felt obliged to accompany us and were committed to comply with their obligations.”⁹² From the perspective of a former Acción Social official it were mainly the leaders pressuring the government to accompany them. The leaders said “we are going, with or without accompaniment”⁹³, which led the government entities to believe it would be more valuable to accompany the return with limited capacity, than to let the community return on their own.

Towards the displaced population from Macayepo the ASOPRAM leaders also framed Law 387 as an opportunity for return. However, they clearly put more emphasis on the framing of security and military accompaniment in their attempt to mobilize Macayepo’s community to return collectively to Macayepo. The leaders were positive about their right to return in their collective action frames aimed at the macayeperos. They would say, “we are going to return and according to the Law 387, Macayepo should be clean, the roads reconstructed and houses rebuild upon return.”⁹⁴ As was described before, the expectations expressed in this frame did not come true. In Colombia a general lack of trust in the government’s willingness to comply with its obligations prevails, which might explain the minimum focus on law 387 within the proffered collective action frames towards Macayepo’s community. Nonetheless, the leaders kept the hope that the government would comply after the return, framing the prospects of the return with optimism.

The discursive process of frame amplification was also used during the framing of the right to return. In the following the collective action frame is being amplified by not only referring to Law 387 but also picturing the return as a Constitutional right:

“We started putting together the plan for voluntary return, with dignity and with national and international accompaniment. We organized ourselves and demanded our rights and that the government would comply with Law 387 of 1997. We claimed it with strength and power from the perspective of the Law and the Constitution of Colombia.”⁹⁵

⁹² Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

⁹³ First interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Cartagena, March 25, 2014.

⁹⁴ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

⁹⁵ Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

By including the Constitution in their collective action frames, the leaders idealized the value of the Constitution and the right to life. Drawing on authoritative sources in collective action frames strengthens the credibility of a frame. Especially, since the average macayepero lacked knowledge about their rights and the obligations of the state. Furthermore, claiming the return process based on the law strengthened the leaders' credibility in front of the government too, because not all communities had the knowledge to do so.⁹⁶

In the case of framing the right to return the emphasis was mainly on the government entities. The leaders knew it would not be a complete return process as promised by the law, but they were always optimistic towards the population of Macayepo and tried to encourage them to participate in the return. However, towards the government entities the collective action frames were stronger, calling upon the government's responsibilities towards the community of Macayepo. Therefore, it can be assumed that regarding frame resonance the frames had more impact on the government. As will be elaborated on in the following paragraph, an opportunity is only an opportunity when 'sold' or seized as one. In the case of Law 387 the leaders deliberately sold the right to return as an opportunity that would enable the return process, while they knew the chances of full implementation were limited.

3.1.3. Optimism about the right to return

The dynamic relationship between opportunities and framing, as explained in the introduction, assumes that opportunities influence framing strategies, but framing also shapes opportunities. The collective action frames proffered by Macayepo's leaders on the right to return were aimed at two different audiences. Framing the right to return directed at the government entities partially enabled the actual opportunity to return accompanied by the Colombian state. At the same time the collective action frame deployed towards the community of Macayepo was based on a framing opportunity, overestimating in their frames the right to return with the guarantee of all three conditions and "selling" Law 387 as a true opportunity.

With regard to the collective action frames deployed in the institutional setting, the leaders emphasized the obligation of the state to secure the rights as established in Law 387. This framing of rights influenced the government accompaniment of the return processes. However, the willingness of the state to accompany the return was also influenced by the reinforcement of the collective action frames by the Marine Corps, as discussed in chapter two. It is important to note that different collective action frames interact with one another leading to mutually reinforcing frames. Therefore, one opportunity cannot be seen as separated from others that influence the process of collective action mobilisation. Both the framing of security and the framing of Law 387 as an obligation of the Colombian state influenced the willingness of the state to accompany the process. Furthermore, the leaders' education on the public policy strengthened their claim in front of the government entities.

⁹⁶ Second interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 7, 2014.

Towards the displaced population of Macayepo the right to return was framed in a positive way. Although ASOPRAM's leaders were aware of the lack of capacity of the government entities, they hoped the government would comply with its compromises immediately after the actual return. As Gamson and Meyer (1996, 285-286) point out, frame articulators suffer from a systematic optimistic bias due to the need to sustain a collective action frame that includes the belief that conditions can be changed. To convince possible adherents, but also themselves, an optimistic view of the opportunity is necessary. Although the leaders were positive about the right to return, within their collective action frames towards the population they had a marginal focus on this right. This might indicate the leaders seized a framing opportunity without having much confidence in the implementation of the law themselves. The government did not comply with all its compromises, the frustration this caused and changes in the public policy led to new opportunities for collective action as will be discussed in the following section.

3.2. The Mountain is moving for Integral Reparations

The introduction of the comprehensive Victims' Law in 2011 reinforced by frustrations in the whole region about the lack of government attention, led to a perception of the Victims' Law of 2011 as a renewed opportunity in La Alta Montaña to claim those rights which were never received in the past. On the one hand, the difficulties with the implementation of the Law can be seen as the closing of political space, while, on the other hand, the Law provided an holistic approach to the problems faced within La Alta Montaña. Accompanied with collective action frames based on a victims discourse and a general lack of government attention, the Law provided political opportunity framing possibilities for the leaders to stimulate collective action.

3.2.1. Law 1448: The Colombian Victims' Law

After the return of the community of Macayepo in 2004 the public policy attending to IDPs in Colombia entered a process of transformation. First of all, from 2004 onwards the Constitutional Court declared the situation of IDPs as an "unconstitutional state of affairs" (Sentencia T-025 de 2004). The Constitutional Court started monitoring the Colombian government's attempts to improve the laws regarding IDPs and its implementation. According to María Paula Saffon (2010, 134), this process, which was put in place by the Court, led to pressure on the government and has largely contributed to the creation of the Victims' Law. Furthermore, in 2005, the Justice and Peace law (Law 975), which was created as part of the demobilization process of the AUC, included the right to reparations. Under Law 975 victims of the paramilitaries can claim reparation of their victimizers. Although collective reparation has been granted under this law, the law is seen as controversial and the complicated juridical process posed great difficulties to the victims to receive collective reparations. Both the Justice and Peace law and the Constitutional Court's pressure to reform

the laws on IDPs and victims of the conflict influenced the creation of the comprehensive Victims' Law (Ley 1448) in 2011.

The Victims' Law consists of the legal framework to provide the victims of the conflict with the right to truth, justice and reparation with a guarantee of no repetition (Ley 1448 2011, Article 1). The Law is seen as a big leap forward in attending to the victims of the conflict and is a very unique attempt at repairing the damages done by the conflict while the conflict is still ongoing. An important aspect of the Victims' Law is its definition of 'victims' as those persons that have suffered damage as a result of human rights violations or as a consequence of violence caused by the internal war. Whereas in former definition of victims in Colombia IDPs were not included, this new broad definition of victims led to the inclusion of all who suffered from the conflict including those displaced from their land due to the conflict (Ley 1448 2011, Article 3, Summers 2010, 228). A second important aspect of the law is the shift from claiming collective reparations in a juridical procedure to an administrative procedure, which led to easier access for the victims.⁹⁷ This expansion of the notion of victimhood and the improvement in access to the law enabled the inhabitants of La Alta Montaña to claim individual and collective reparations and a comprehensive return process. An important remark in this respect is that, whereas in former legislation reparations and returns were defined as separate measures, the Victims' Law defines return processes as part of collective reparations.

The government entity responsible for attending to the victims and the implementation and coordination of the Victims' Law is the Victims' Unit. With the introduction of the Victims' Law in 2011 the government entity Acción Social was reorganized into four different entities, one of which was the Victims' Unit, that is responsible for the collective reparations and return processes of the victims of the Colombian conflict.⁹⁸ While the reorganization of the different entities under the Victims Law only started in 2012, Acción Social was already dissolved at the beginning of 2011 (Comisión de Seguimiento 2012). The slow transition to the Victims' Unit led to a paralysation of all the government programmes that were undertaken in La Alta Montaña and a rising feeling of frustration due to the lack of government attention.⁹⁹ As a leader from Macayepo explained, "it seemed like all the institutions were asleep, and we felt the need to start a political process."¹⁰⁰ This lack of government attention between 2011 and the start of 2013 can be seen as a closing of the opportunity to receive the benefits of the public policy. However, a constraining opportunity can actually become an enabling factor in mobilizing a people to undertake collective action (King 2007, 117). In the case of La Alta Montaña, the rising frustration about their difficult

⁹⁷ Interview with Victims Unit official in charge of the collective reparations and return process in La Alta Montaña, in Cartagena, May 22, 2014.

⁹⁸ First interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Cartagena, March 25, 2014; Second interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 7, 2014.

⁹⁹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014; First interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Cartagena, March 25, 2014; Second interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 7, 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

situation and the lack of government attention enabled a mobilizing power to start a political process and claim their rights.

Apart from the difficulties with the implementation of the Victims' Law leading to mobilization, the rights established in the Victims' Law were perceived by the leaders of La Alta Montaña as an opening of the opportunity to claim their collective rights. First, the law establishes the right to individual and collective reparation. The Victims' Unit together with the community develops a plan based on the damages done by the conflict to the community as a whole. Apart from the collective reparation the inhabitants of the community also have the right to claim individual reparation. Second, the Victims' Law confirms the right to return with the conditions of wilfulness, security and dignity, which complements the collective reparations based on the condition of dignity and is not necessarily related to the damages done by the conflict (Acero Soto 2012, Ley 1448 2011).¹⁰¹ Importantly, those communities that returned individually in the past have the right to receive an integral return process in retrospect too.

Furthermore, by sentence (Auto 005/09) of the Constitutional Court in 2009 the community Macayepo was identified as one of the prioritized communities to receive government attention. Based on this sentence, the Victims' Unit started developing a collective reparation process with Macayepo at the end of 2012. By February 2013 the leaders of Macayepo indicated their preference to stop the process and initiate a collective reparations process with La Alta Montaña as a whole, since the region was already in the process of reuniting and organizing the peaceful march. The decision of Macayepo led to the prioritization of the whole region and enabled an accelerated process for collective reparations and support for the peaceful march from the Victims' Unit.¹⁰² Both the rights established by the Victims' Law and the prioritization of La Alta Montaña influenced the perception of the law as an opening in the institutional system enabling La Alta Montaña's claim to collective reparations and a comprehensive return process.

However, the Victims' Law also poses some challenges. In general, the implementation of the Victims' Law has been characterized by threats to community leaders and even selective murders (Human Rights Watch 2013). In the period leading up to the march a pamphlet with threats to the leaders of La Alta Montaña was spread through the region. Despite these threats, the march took place in April 2013. During the peaceful march in April 2013 about 1,500 inhabitants of La Alta Montaña participated in their aim to march from Carmen de Bolívar to the department's capital Cartagena. Supported by the Victims' Unit with t-shirts, water, logistical support and accompaniment, La Alta Montaña was able to negotiate 91 agreements with the responsible government entities, largely focused on collective

¹⁰¹ Interview with Victim's Unit official in charge of the collective reparations and return process in La Alta Montaña, in Cartagena, May 22, 2014.

¹⁰² Interview with Victim's Unit official in charge of the collective reparations and return process in La Alta Montaña, in Cartagena, May 22, 2014.

reparations, an integral return process and general improvements in the region.¹⁰³ The movement of La Alta Montaña is still in place to ensure the compliance of the government and to keep improving the region, and its leaders all share the idea that “we are working all for one, and one for all, and we will keep the process alive.”¹⁰⁴

Although initially the introduction of the Victims’ Law caused the closing of an opportunity, overall the Victims’ Law has led to a comprehensive framework for victims of the Colombian conflict to claim their rights. However, it still depends on the implementation of the Law to determine if it is a true success. As was stated in the section above, Law 387 of 1997 focused on humanitarian assistance, while the Victims’ Law focusses on the restitution of rights to those that lost them. By including return processes in the right to collective reparations a true sustainable solutions might be achieved. As was mentioned before, the closing of institutions may also be an enabling opportunity for collective action. However, there is no consensus in the literature on when the closing or opening of an opportunity structure actually leads to an opportunity or a constraint for action (Gamson and Meyer 1996, 282). This closing and opening of the opportunity to get government support led to the creation of framing strategies by the leaders of the Alta Montaña that, on the one hand, called upon the shared necessities of La Alta Montaña and the lack of government attention, and, on the other hand, adopted the government’s created victims discourse due to the expanded definition of victimhood. As Gamson and Meyer (1996, 282) state, policy changes involve the possible reframing of issues, which will be demonstrated in the following section.

3.2.2. Framing Victimhood

Whereas in the case of Law 387 the leaders of Macayepo mainly focussed their framing on the right to return, during the second wave of collective action the leaders of La Alta Montaña focussed their framing strategies on the lack of government attention and the government’s victimhood discourse stemming from the Victims’ Law. Their strategy was focussed on uniting the region in a peaceful march. As an ASOPRAM leader explained:

“when we pressured with everyone, not only Macayepo, they saw ‘damn’ they all united and they started listening to us. In the past we were with little and right now we are with many.”¹⁰⁵

The timing of the march was based on both growing frustration within La Alta Montaña about their fragile situation and the introduction of the Victims’ Law. Combining both the necessities of the region and the victimhood discourse in their framing strategies leading up

¹⁰³ Interview with Victim’s Unit official in charge of the collective reparations and return process in La Alta Montaña, in Cartagena, May 22, 2014; Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014; Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

to the march and during the march, led to a strong collective action frame attempting to convince both the responsible government entities and La Alta Montaña's population. As was stated previously, the leaders felt the government institutions were asleep, and the peaceful march was supposed to be a wake up call for those institutions.¹⁰⁶

The reuniting of La Alta Montaña as a whole through football games and community meetings led to the recognition that all were coping with the same necessities and all were victims of the same conflict. The diagnostic framing task was attended to by focussing on those necessities of all communities in the region. Especially the death of the avocado trees, which caused economic decline, was seen as an overarching problem.¹⁰⁷ As one leader explained the diagnostic situation: "we are all victims, we all have the same necessities and the state has violated the rights of all of us."¹⁰⁸ The closing of an opportunity, in this case the transition from Acción Social to the Victims' Unit, actually strengthened the leaders' diagnostic framing by holding the government responsible for the difficult situation in La Alta Montaña. The diagnostic framing task seeks to identify the source of the problem. Since collective action frames seek to solve a problematic situation, this attributional component of diagnostic frames is adopted by focusing blame and at the same time stressing the need for action (Benford and Snow 2000, 616).

The focus on injustice of the situation in La Alta Montaña also becomes apparent in the following frame: "We are struggling so that the government sees that we are really suffering, and so that they realize that the death of our avocado trees is their responsibility."¹⁰⁹ An emphasis on the organisation of a peaceful march to negotiate with the government attends to the prognostic framing task. This task was reinforced by the diagnostic frames that focused blame on the government. As a peasant from Macayepo explained their strategy, "what was lacking was investment in the region and we wanted to start negotiating with the government and hoped that due to the march they would pay attention to us."¹¹⁰

In various interviews and collective action frames the role of identity became apparent. Cultural resources such as identity are emphasized in collective action frames and call upon the shared characteristics of potential adherents that suggest a particular line of action (Benford and Snow 2000, 632). As becomes clear from the following quote La Alta Montaña's inhabitants are both identified as victims and peasants: "We are victims, we aren't *guerrilleros*, we are peasants and the only thing we want is to be able to work our land."¹¹¹ The identity of peasantry was also enforced during the mobilisation of Macayepo to return. However, the identification of La Alta Montana's population as victims was newly

¹⁰⁶ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Based on field research notes taken during community meetings of the leaders of La Alta Montaña; Colombian peasants struggle for transformative holistic reparations, speech woman leader La Alta Montaña. 2013, online video, SembrandoPaz, viewed 25 May 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uednrCn-9Y>.

¹⁰⁸ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014.

¹¹⁰ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹¹¹ Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Maceyepo, May 9, 2014.

introduced. Whereas before the introduction of the Victims' Law they were referred to as displaced persons, the Victims' Law created a victimhood discourse which is widely spread through Colombia nowadays (Summers 2012, 226). I argue that the victimhood discourse can be seen as reinforcing and amplifying existing injustice frames, since the word victim already implies injustice was done. In La Alta Montaña several interviewees referred to their victimhood during the interviews. As one macayepero said: "we left Macayepo as displaced persons, we left the city as returnees, and right now we are still victims."¹¹² During the displacement he identified himself as a displaced person, while right now he sees himself as a victim, which I assume was influenced by the introduction of the victims discourse by the government.

Furthermore, the slogan for the peaceful march also related La Alta Montaña to the Victims' Law. The slogan, 'the Mountain is moving for Integral Reparations,'¹¹³ calls upon the right of the population to reparations as established in the Victims' Law. Moreover, the emphasis on moving or movement implies and reinforces the importance of collective mobilisation. This slogan is adopted regularly by the leaders of La Alta Montaña, for example by emphasizing that the mountain is still moving and will keep on moving even though there are threats to the process.¹¹⁴ The slogan was also used by the inhabitants of La Alta Montaña during the march, which added to the motivational task of this collective action frame. As a female leader during the march asked questions to the audience, the participants responded in a yelling way: "Who is moving?" "The Mountain!" "And why is the mountain moving?" "For integral reparations!"¹¹⁵ This slogan can be seen as a strong collective action frame motivating the people of La Alta Montaña to participate.

While, as mentioned before, the peaceful march of 2013 received more support from the inhabitants of the high part of La Alta Montaña, the victims discourse was present in the majority of the interviews undertaken during my field work in Macayepo. However, a barrier to overcome was the distrust between the two parts of the region, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Frame resonance among the participants in the march is difficult to prove due to the scope of the research, nonetheless both the victims discourse and the strong slogan for the march affected the attitude of people towards the process and their knowledge of its organisation. Both the constraints and opportunities posed by the Victims' Law influenced the mobilizing potency and framing strategies of this opportunity structure.

3.2.3. A constraint unrecognized and a real opportunity

In the case of the Victims' Law the difficult transition and implementation phase led to the closing of an opportunity. However, the leaders of La Alta Montaña never held the Victims'

¹¹² Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Maceyepo, May 9, 2014.

¹¹³ La Alta Montaña means the High Mountain.

¹¹⁴ Based on field research notes taken during community meetings.

¹¹⁵ Formerly displaced peasants in Montes de María, Colombia gather for their rights, speech woman leader La Alta Montaña, 2013, online video, SembrandoPaz, viewed 25 May 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnMQg96r5I>.

Unit responsible for the lack of government attention. This led to, on the one hand, mobilizing the population due to a paralysation of government programmes, and, on the other hand, deploying framing strategies on the opportunity the Victims' Law brought by strengthening their claim to collective reparations and a comprehensive return process.

The lack of implementation and the rough transition in the first two years of the Victims' Law was a constraint unrecognized by the leaders of La Alta Montaña. Although the leaders recognized the absence of government programmes, they blamed this on the general institutions. This also became clear in their reference to the institutions that seemed asleep, in which they did not refer to the Victims' Unit in particular. Nonetheless, the slow implementation and establishment of the Victims' Unit did reinforce the frustration in the region. As was mentioned before, the lack of opportunity, as was the case in La Alta Montaña, might actually have great mobilizing power, which was reflected in the leaders' framing strategies on the necessities in the region. The constraining opportunity actually proved to be an enabling opportunity with regard to the creation and deployment of collective action frames.

Since the Victims' Law was not recognized as a constraining factor, the leaders of La Alta Montaña actually framed their rights under the Victims' Law in a positive sense and adopted the government's victims discourse. When the establishment of the Victims' Unit was finally accomplished, the Victims' Law prove to be a true opportunity for La Alta Montaña. Not only was the region prioritized under the law, they also received extensive support from the Victims' Unit in their aim to negotiate with government entities. As a Victims' Unit official told me:

“we as the Unit felt we needed to support their process, because we are on the same track, just like us they wanted to reach integral reparations by marching peacefully. Moreover, they are in a positive process of reconciliation, we want to support such a process.”¹¹⁶

The Victims' Law was an opportunity both in a constraining and enabling way for change in the region, but the framing of both sides affected the perception of the inhabitants of La Alta Montaña. Although the implementation of the 91 agreements has not been fully met, the peaceful march led to a positive outcome.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Victim's Unit official in charge of the collective reparations and return process in La Alta Montaña, in Cartagena, May 22, 2014.

4. Changing Social Relations: From Pragmatic Alliances to Unity and Reconciliation

This chapter exposes the shifting relationship from division, caused by mutual allegations of collaboration with illegal groups, to unity and reconciliation in La Alta Montaña. The conflict situation around 2004 made neutral action impossible and forced the population to involve in pragmatic alliances with illegal armed groups. The changing conflict dynamics from 2010 onwards enabled instead the reestablishment of peaceful relations in the region, allowing social action through a local alliance with more equal power relations.

In the case of pragmatic alliances, McAdam (1996, 27) would argue, collective mobilization depends on elite allies in the form of informal relations between illegal armed groups and those wanting to return collectively. However, as Gamson and Meyer (1996, 282) stress, “changes in the scope of conflict involve new definitions about who is or should be involved as well as changing the alliance possibilities and the resources involved.” This concept of alliance points to a more nuanced explanation of elite allies. The prior existence of pragmatic alliances affected the return process of Macayepo in a contested manner, whilst the defeat of the illegal armed groups in the region led to the disappearance of these pragmatic alliances, opening the space for new forms of collective action based on purely local alliances.

4.1. The armed forces and the paramilitaries as elite allies for the return of Macayepo

The definition of alliances of Stathis Kalyvas (2006, 383) give a more refined explanation of the logic behind what I call pragmatic alliances. Kalyvas defines alliance, as those “processes of convergence of interest between supralocal and local actors, whereby the former supply the latter with external muscle, thus allowing them to win decisive local advantage; in exchange the former rely on local conflicts to recruit and motivate supporters and obtain local control, resources and information – even when their ideological agenda is opposed to localism”. In some cases the local needs to rely on the supralocal, in order to reach their own objectives, in this case the collective return of Macayepo. The existing alliance between the armed forces, the paramilitaries and some macayeperos, led to a contested opportunity for return. On the one hand, those wanting the return claimed the neutrality of their collective action, while on the other hand, part of the macayeperos felt threatened by the alliance between the armed forces and the paramilitaries.

4.1.1. Childhood friendships as an opportunity for return

The division in La Alta Montaña, between the high part that was dominated by guerrilla presence, and Macayepo and its veredas where the paramilitary group Bloque Héroes de los Montes de María had influence, affected the return process of Macayepo. The paramilitary

presence in Macayepo and the connections between the paramilitaries and the armed forces had an influence on the opportunity to return to Macayepo. A more positive view of the paramilitaries among a part of Macayepo's community and some links between them affected their decision to return and their perception of security. However, as was mentioned before, this alliance was a contested opportunity, which was not recognized as an opportunity by Macayepo's community as a whole.

As evidenced in various judicial sentences, there was a relationship between the paramilitary group Bloque Héroes de los Montes de María and the Marine Corps in Montes de María. Mainly due to neglect, but also due to lack of orders to fight the paramilitaries and even supporting them with uniforms, many high ranking military officers from the Marine Corps have been evicted (PODEC 2011, 35). Currently, the commanding officer during the massacre in Macayepo, Hernando Alfonso Jama Arjona, is being investigated for his role in the massacre based on the allegation of purposefully redirecting his troops away from the scene of the crime. Overall, the attitude of the armed forces was characterized by letting the paramilitary groups determine their own plan without standing in their way. Due to this existing association between the armed forces and the paramilitaries, there was a negative perception of the armed forces among part of Macayepo's community. The wide range of human rights abuses committed by the Marine Corps also added to distrust towards the armed forces. However, a part of Macayepo had a more positive view of the paramilitaries and saw the armed forces as a legal institution that was capable of accompanying the return process.

This positive view on the paramilitaries can partly be attributed to the fact that the commander of Bloque Héroes de los Montes de María, Rodrigo Mercado Pelufo alias 'Cadena', was a macayepero himself (El Heraldo 2011). As one interviewee explained, in Macayepo everyone is family, and thus Cadena was also a family member of many macayeperos.¹¹⁷ As a child Cadena was member of the Adventist church, just as many of the leaders of ASOPRAM who were childhood friends of Cadena.¹¹⁸ Besides, neutrality towards the different armed groups was almost impossible during the conflict. As one leader of ASOPRAM explained, "it was the conflict situation and, due to being part of a region dominated by the paramilitaries, we were more on their side."¹¹⁹ This positive view on and informal relationship with the Bloque Héroes de los Montes de María affected the perception of the acts of this groups as more positive than those of the guerrilla groups.

During the organization of the return process, the leaders of ASOPRAM contacted both the FARC commanders and the paramilitary commander Cadena, to express their willingness to return. The FARC commanders stated they agreed with the return of Macayepo, however without the accompaniment of the Marine Corps. As a leader of ASOPRAM stated, "that was

¹¹⁷ Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

¹¹⁸ Interview with director of local NGO accompanying the return of communities in Montes de María, in Sincelejo, May 13, 2014.

¹¹⁹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

a condition in which we did not want to return.”¹²⁰ Cadena, on the contrary, responded positively towards the plans of ASOPRAM to return. He said: “You don’t have to worry, because I don’t have a problem with you, my problem is with the guerrilla.”¹²¹ Cadena even offered to support the return process with food and money, which, according to a leader of ASOPRAM, they refused because they preferred the accompaniment of the armed forces.¹²² The response of Cadena already implies that the relationship between the community and the paramilitaries enabled their return at least to some extent.

As was introduced before, the triangular relationship between the military, the paramilitaries and the community of Macayepo can be seen as an opportunity within the dimension of elite allies, or the better fitting term, alliances (McAdam 1996, 24, Kalyvas 2006, 383). This opportunity enforced a more positive perception of security and reduced the threat posed against the returnees upon return. The opportunity of alliances is strongly related to the opportunity of conflict dynamics as discussed in chapter two. As was the case with the opportunity of the PDS, the existing pragmatic alliance was also a contested opportunity. What was recognized by the leaders as an enabling factor for the return process, was not recognized as an opportunity by those who felt threatened by the paramilitaries and the armed forces. This makes one wonder, who returned and who stayed behind, and what actually happened to the families whose family members were killed during the massacre committed by the paramilitaries? Unfortunately, this question is beyond the scope of my research, since my research mainly focussed on the returnees. Only a broader research involving the displaced macayeperos in Sincelejo would enable an answer to this question.

In the perception of the Evangelist leader who did not return to Macayepo, the return process was infiltrated by the paramilitaries.¹²³ He told me that he returned with the men to clean Macayepo in September 2004 and after two months noted the infiltration of the paramilitaries. They would bring food and livestock to Macayepo which they had stolen elsewhere, after the discovery of which the Evangelist leader returned to Sincelejo. As he stated:

“ASOPRAM betrayed me, because they chose the side of the paramilitaries, but we never planned this. And the Marine Corps had an alliance with the paramilitaries and even provided them with arms.”¹²⁴

The director of a local NGO was more nuanced about this alliance, he said some of the ASOPRAM leaders were informants of the Marine Corps and their childhood friendship with

¹²⁰ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹²¹ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

¹²² Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹²³ Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

¹²⁴ Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

Cadena influenced the return process.¹²⁵ However, the leaders of ASOPRAM deny any infiltration from the paramilitaries.¹²⁶ An important remark in this respect is that neutrality within collective action during the conflict was hardly possible. This does not necessarily mean that communities wanted to work together with illegal groups, but that they were dependent on them for the outcome of any social action. As a leader from La Alta Montaña told me:

“I dare say that those persons that lived in La Montaña between 2003 and 2010 and that say they never collaborated with the guerrilla or the paramilitaries are liars, and they didn’t collaborate because they wanted to, but because they had to.”¹²⁷

Whatever the exact story regarding the relationship between the paramilitaries and the leaders of ASOPRAM, a clear link between the community and the paramilitaries could be established during the research which certainly influenced the possibility to return, at least for part of the community of Macayepo. It is crucial in this regard to highlight the uniqueness of the return process of Macayepo, which is not comparable with other returns in Colombia. The influence of the Marine Corps and potential influence of the paramilitaries caused a partial return, in which a large part of the community did not participate. As was emphasized before, only 21 families returned during the process in 2004, while others decided not to return mainly influenced by the security situation and the perception of the alliance between the armed forces and the paramilitaries. The leaders of ASOPRAM that returned were aware of this contested opportunity and mainly focussed their framing strategies on neutrality and the legal status of the Marine Corps to convince the macayeperos of the possibility to return.

4.1.2. Framing neutrality

The existing links between the macayeperos, the paramilitaries and the Marine Corps were not framed as an opportunity by the leaders of ASOPRAM. However, deliberative or not, it was an opportunity structure seized by the leaders. Although, Benford and Snow (2000, 624) argue that frame are deliberative and goal-directed, I argue that they can also be partially deliberate. As was explained in the introduction, structures shape social action, and might not always be based on a conscious or deliberate decision. The leaders of Macayepo were aware of the relationship between the paramilitaries and the Marine Corps, but framed the return with the accompaniment of the armed forces as the only neutral and legal option available. By creating collective action frames based on the legality of the state and its entities, the leaders tried to convince the macayeperos of the neutrality of their return process. However, this attempt was met by a lot of criticism from other macayeperos, which can be seen as counter-framing. This counter-framing affected the frame resonance of the collective action frames which I assume can partly explain the low turnout during the return process.

¹²⁵ Interview with director of local NGO accompanying the return of communities in Montes de María, in Sincelejo, May 13, 2014.

¹²⁶ Interviews 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 with peasants, leaders and participants in the return of Macayepo, May 2014.

¹²⁷ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

The collective action frames regarding the legality of the armed forces attended to all three framing tasks, basing the frames on the only neutral strategy available and the legal status of the Marine Corps to convince the macayeperos of the possibility to return. As one leader repeated the way they tried to convince the macayeperos and government entities of the return process:

“What fault do we have that the government has a link with the guerrilla and the guerrilla with the paramilitaries, we are peasants and the only thing we want is to work. We talked about returning to Macayepo with the government, because the government is the only one that is legal and they have the right and the obligation to look after us. That is why we returned with the government. All the leaders were positive about it, we were all positive to encourage others to return.”¹²⁸

First, the identity of the community as peasants is stressed, as already became clear in other chapters, which reinforces the feeling of necessity to return. Calling upon cultural resources within a frame contributes to its salience (Snow and Benford 2005, 209). Second, the neutrality of the community in the conflict is emphasized to justify their decision to return with the government and motivate others to return with them, although the government is linked to other illegal groups. Finally, the legal status of the government is highlighted to reinforce the neutral decision of the leaders to return with the Marine Corps.

This focus on the framing of neutrality became clear in several interviews during my research. As a macayepero told me, “we didn’t affiliate ourselves with the guerrilla or the paramilitaries. We said: ‘No we won’t affiliate with them, because the day we will they will make us disappear. No, we will get support from what is legal’.”¹²⁹ Furthermore, one of the leaders of ASOPRAM also referred to the Marine Corps accompaniment as the only possibility:

“we couldn’t ask the guerrilla for help with the return. Neither to the paramilitaries, because, despite that many were from Macayepo, the guerrilla would attack us if we would. So we decided to talk to the Marine Corps, that was our only option.”¹³⁰

As becomes clear in the quotes above the possibilities of getting support from the different illegal groups was considered by the macayeperos. Nonetheless, the believe existed that accompaniment of the marines was the most neutral option available.

It is important to note that during the interviews the leaders expressed their perception of the past, which actually leads to second-degree framing. It is hard to establish how frames were proffered in the past and how these frames are transmitted now towards me as the researcher. Interestingly, a discrepancy was visible between those interviewees that are Macayepo’s

¹²⁸ Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹²⁹ Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014.

¹³⁰ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

present leaders and those interviewees that either participated in the return or were leaders only during the return process. It was clear that the returnees spoke more openly about the more positive attitude towards the paramilitaries in comparison to the guerrilla than the current leaders of ASOPRAM. On the one hand, the current leaders were more neutral, they did talk about the stigmatization of Macayepo as being a paramilitary village but less about their opinion on the different groups. As one leader of ASOPRAM said:

“We always walked around with the armed forces and the armed forces in Colombia had links with the paramilitary groups and that’s why the idea surged that we also were paramilitaries and in the whole region people talked about the paramilitaries from Macayepo.”¹³¹

On the other hand, two participants in the return explained the difference between Macayepo and other communities of La Alta Montaña in obtaining accompaniment for the return emphasizing the existing presence of the paramilitary as an advantage for returning with the armed forces, while the guerrilla presence in the other communities was seen as an obstacle for a return process with the armed forces. Although it is impossible to determine if this discrepancy already existed in 2004, this difference seems to imply a certain extent of consciousness from the present leaders to talk openly about the illegal groups, may it be only right now or also in the past.

The return of Macayepo with the Marine Corps was met by criticism from some macayeperos, which was based on the lack of neutrality of the armed forces with regard to both their link with the paramilitary groups and the human rights abuses committed by the forces. This form of counter-framing is strongly related to the counter frames proffered in light of the framing of security as elaborated on in chapter two, in which macayeperos discouraged the return of the community with the Marine Corps based on fear for their security. This frame was reinforced by emphasizing a negative image of the armed forces. As one leader explained:

“The fact that we wanted to enter the region with the armed forces created a negative impact among the people, they preferred a return without the armed forces, they distrusted the armed forces and stigmatized us as being paramilitaries.”¹³²

Although it impossible to determine the exact impact of this counter-framing, I argue that it did affect the frame resonance among the macayeperos.

Two important factors influencing frame resonance are the credibility of the frame articulators and the salience of the frames. The fact that both Evangelist and Adventist leaders were founders of ASOPRAM gave them an extent of credibility among their church

¹³¹ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

¹³² Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

congregations. Religion affects the salience of collective action frames drawing on the value of beliefs within the community, which came forward in several frames proffered by the leaders. As a macayepero told me, “people connect more to God in times of crisis.”¹³³ However, the main Evangelist leader backed out of the return process due to alleged paramilitary infiltration, and this affected the resonance among the Evangelist macayeperos. As he told me:

“I gained the respect of the community, because when they found out ASOPRAM betrayed us, everybody stayed in Sincelejo, we preferred to suffer here than to follow the perpetrators.”¹³⁴

I assume this had an important effect on the resonance of the collective action frames, because it became clear during the research that the majority of the returnees were members of the Adventist church. In that sense it seems the collective action frames proffered by the leaders were rather fragile and not capable of convincing the community as a whole.

4.1.3. The reproduction of existing structures and impossible neutrality

After outlining the existence of a pragmatic alliance between the armed forces, the paramilitaries, and part of Macayepo’s community as a contested opportunity for the return process of Macayepo and elaborating on the framing tactics deployed by ASOPRAM’s leaders in emphasizing neutrality, I would like to move to the existing dynamic relationship between the pragmatic alliance as an opportunity and the framing of neutrality by ASOPRAM.

In the case of the pragmatic alliance in Macayepo, the opportunity influenced the framing strategies. Structures, Sewell (1992, 19 in Gamson and Meyer 1996, 282) argues, are “sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action.” Derived from this definition the assumption arises that actors do not always have the power to generate change and with their action might reproduce existing power relations. Structures, in this case the alliance between the armed forces, the paramilitaries and part of the leaders of Macayepo, influence the extent to which deliberative collective action is possible. The existence of the alliance forced the leaders of Macayepo to plan their collective action within this structure, but at the same time enabled the actual return process. Framing strategies might in this context also be partially deliberate. Although the leaders of ASOPRAM were aware of the links between the armed forces and had a more positive view of the paramilitaries, they might not have realized to what extent it influenced their return process. As a leader of Caño Berruguita explained the links with paramilitaries in Macayepo:

¹³³ Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014.

¹³⁴ Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

“Maybe the people did not realize it and when they did they were already torn into the conflict. As I said, Cadena was a macayepero, so maybe the macayeperos accepted him more without realizing the influence this acceptance had.”¹³⁵

On the other hand, framing the neutrality of the return process and the legality of the armed forces might point to what Gamson and Meyer (1996, 286) call a systematic optimistic bias. As they explain, frame articulators systematically overestimate political opportunity, which is built into the needs of the articulators to sustain a collective action frame. In the case of Macayepo the leaders might have truly believed in the possibility of neutrality in their return process. By emphasizing neutrality, just as was the case with security, they might have created their own possibility to return. Because, partly due to their return, efforts in the region increased to defeat the illegal armed groups present.

4.2. From division to unity in La Alta Montaña

The exit of the illegal armed groups from La Alta Montaña led to the disappearance of previously existing alliances in the region, which enabled the formation of a new local alliance based on unity and reconciliation. Whereas in the past neutral action was perceived as impossible, the improved security decreased the local's dependence on the supralocal for reaching their own objectives. As stated by Gamson and Meyer (1996, 283) opportunity structures also have a strong cultural component. The new local alliance illustrates that increased social cohesions and a change in social mood affects collective action. The new local alliance enabled the pursuit of a united process in the aim of La Alta Montana's leaders to claim collective reparations and a comprehensive return process.

4.2.1. Reconciliation as an opportunity for social organisation

With the demobilisation of the AUC in 2005 and the defeat of the FARC in 2008 the presence of illegal armed groups largely decreased in La Alta Montaña. However, around 2007 there were many rumours about paramilitary and guerrilla informants infiltrating in the armed forces.¹³⁶ By 2010 the illegal armed groups were gone from La Alta Montaña in the perception of its leaders, which led to the true disappearance of the alliance between the paramilitaries, the Marine Corps and the macayeperos. Furthermore, the guerrilla always had a strong influence in the Juntas de Acción Comunal in the high part of La Alta Montaña, an alliance which also dissolved after 2008.¹³⁷ As was stated before, neutral community action was hardly possible in the context of conflict in Colombia. The disappearance of those

¹³⁵ Interview 1 with male peasant and former leader of Caño Berruguita a community part of Macayepo, in Caño Berruguita, May 2, 2014.

¹³⁶ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

¹³⁷ Based on field research notes on informal conversations with leaders of La Alta Montaña; Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014.

alliances created a renewed possibility for neutral action for La Alta Montaña's inhabitants who did not have to take into account or depend on illegal armed groups any longer.

From 2008 onwards the civil-military relations improved in La Alta Montaña. First of all, due to international pressure the government started an attempt to reduce human right violations by the armed forces.¹³⁸ The foundation of the CCRMM in 2008, which was elaborated on in chapter two, had a larger focus on development and the empowerment of the inhabitants of La Alta Montaña. Second, General Rafael Alfredo Colón of the Marine Corps, who founded the CCRMM, was committed to improving the relationship of the Marine Corps with the population of Montes de María. As a gesture of good intent he asked forgiveness to the people of Montes de María for the neglect of the Marine Corps during various massacres committed in Montes de María, including the massacre in Macayepo (PODEC 2011, 67, La Semana 2005).¹³⁹ The civil-military relations have improved and the communities of La Alta Montaña try to work together with the Marine Corps, nonetheless there are still some visible tensions. For example, during the monthly assembly of the leaders in the vereda Saltones de Mesa five marines were present who were invited by the leaders. During the meeting photos were made of all persons attending the meeting which seems to point at intelligence efforts and a continuing lack of trust in community organizing.¹⁴⁰

Despite the fact that the process still faced some challenges, the improvements in the region's situation and the disappearance of former alliances opened the way to renewed social relationships. Due to a process of reconciliation in La Alta Montaña, those new social relationships were formed and attempts to reunite the region were undertaken. Efforts from various community leaders drawing on family ties, organizing sports events and community meetings brought together La Alta Montaña's leaders in a process of reconciliation.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, several NGO's, such as Sembrandopaz, focussed on the capacity building of the leaders and the strengthening the movement's peaceful approach, which created the space and capacity of the leaders to structure this process.¹⁴² This new form of alliance at the local level, creating an opportunity to organize the peaceful march and mobilize potential participants in La Alta Montaña as a whole. This process of reconciliation should not be underestimated. As a leader from Macayepo said, "the process of reconciliation is still ongoing, it's not a project you can do from one day to another."¹⁴³ However, the first steps the leaders took created the opportunity for them to work together and pursue a common goal.

¹³⁸ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

¹³⁹ Interview with former Defensoría del Pueblo Bolívar and UNHCR Barranquilla official, March 15, 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Based on experience during field research.

¹⁴¹ Interviews 3, 4, 5 and 9 with male peasants from Macayepo and the wider Alta Montaña May, 2014.

¹⁴² Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014; Interview with director of local NGO accompanying the return of communities in Montes de María, in Sincelejo, May 13, 2014.

¹⁴³ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

Although the alliances of the communities with illegal armed groups seemingly disappeared after 2010, the movement of La Alta Montaña and specifically its leaders received threats based on allegations of being guerrilla collaborators and infiltration of the guerrilla in the march. Furthermore, the main leader of the movement, Jorge Montes, is currently imprisoned in a high security jail based on those same allegations. It is impossible to give a certain answer on the question to what extent these allegations are true. However, the inexistence of evidence from the authorities to prove these claims and opinions from several NGO's about the movement, led me to believe these allegations are false and an attempt to obstruct the organization's process.¹⁴⁴ Fortunately, the collective organization of La Alta Montaña is still in place, and its leaders all share the idea that "we are working all for one, and one for all, and we will keep the process alive".¹⁴⁵

The reconciliation process of La Alta Montana's leaders led to renewed social relationships, which was perceived as an opportunity to work together and unite in their efforts to gain government attention. Within their framing strategies the leaders focussed on convincing it's population of the possibility of reconciliation and unity.

4.2.2. Framing reconciliation and unity

As mentioned before, the deliberative nature of collective action frames points to the importance of questions such as who deploys a frame, when the frame is deployed, and where and why it is deployed. The leaders of La Alta Montaña already started the reconciliation process and their framing strategies were mainly focussed on convincing the region's inhabitants to join their process and overcome the existing distrust among the two parts of La Alta Montaña. From 2012 onwards, the leaders started amplifying their reconciliation process towards the whole population of La Alta Montaña. Within community spaces and during collective gatherings the population was made aware of the process.¹⁴⁶

As part of their strategy, La Alta Montaña leaders organize a monthly assembly, which is held in a different community every month. In May 2014, during my time in the field I went along with the leaders to the monthly assembly held in the vereda Saltones de Mesa, a community that can only be reached by foot, mule, horse or by boat, which took us about five hours to reach. Thirty-five leaders managed to come to Saltones de Mesa. Importantly, the monthly assemblies are actually not about what is being discussed in the day-long meeting, but rather focussed on coming together, getting to know one's communities and mostly

¹⁴⁴ Second interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 7, 2014; Interview with director of local NGO accompanying the return of communities in Montes de María, in Sincelejo, May 13, 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

¹⁴⁶ Colombian peasants struggle for transformative holistic reparations, speech woman leader La Alta Montaña. 2013, online video, SembrandoPaz, viewed 25 May 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uednrCn-9Y>.

involving the inhabitants from the different communities in the process, showing them what the unity among the communities actually means.¹⁴⁷

The following two quotes clarify the strategy of the leaders further. First, as a leader from La Alta Montaña explained the strategy:

“Some people have doubts about the process, but the idea is to win the trust of those persons and tell them the truth, that we are trying to create a transparent, straight-forward and clean process, and that we can also forgive those persons that had something to do with the conflict and show them how we are integrating and trying to improve, because not everyone is perfect.”¹⁴⁸

As shown by this quote, it seems reconciliation and forgiveness are the most important aspects in trying to convince the communities of the possibility to unite and organize the peaceful march. This is also reflected by the second quote of a leader from Macayepo:

“What we have tried to change are the thoughts of those persons who felt hatred. And how much is it worth when people change? How much is it worth when a person can set aside his hatred? How much is it worth that an enemy sits down with the other. That’s worth a lot.”¹⁴⁹

Both quotes clearly show the intent of the leaders to shift the former alliances towards a local alliance of coexistence and joined efforts.

The difficult situation of the region as whole was used as a call for action and attended to both diagnostic and motivational framing task, which becomes clear in the following quote:

“We accomplished to unite, and we met and had to recognize our own mistakes, our own errors and our own weaknesses, and we understood that this situation we are in is an issue for all of us.”¹⁵⁰

By referring to the issues of the whole region the problem was identified. While the emphasis on unity and reconciliation attends to the motivational task. Furthermore, the motivational framing task was attended to by emphasizing the possibility of reconciliation. In the following quote the perception of prior existing alliances were framed as a misperception, in order to emphasize this possibility:

“We tried to regain trust and other communities started to join our process. Nowadays I realize all of it was a big lie [involvement of communities in the conflict] and a mistake that we didn’t start this process before.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Field research notes and participatory observation during several community meetings in May 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

¹⁴⁹ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹⁵⁰ Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.

As a Victims' Unit official emphasized during our interview, La Alta Montaña's leaders created a strong discourse of unity she had not seen before in other communities.¹⁵² This unity also became clear in the several community meetings I visited. The emphasis on unity is often related to the reconciliation process. As a leader told me:

“The one person admitted that he was at the extreme right, and the other that he was a guerrilla ideologist. But since we are in a process of reconciliation, there are no winners of losers and we all walk together.”¹⁵³

Furthermore, this unity is emphasized by some as a fact. As a macayepero explained: “The communities have associated, and nowadays there are so many communities that La Montaña was born out of it, La Montaña is united.”¹⁵⁴

As was also the case in other instances of framing, the leaders used a process of frame amplification to extend the reach of their frames. Frame amplification, “involves the idealization, embellishment, clarification, or invigoration of existing values or beliefs” (Benford and Snow 2000, 624). This process becomes clear within the following quote:

“We are all human beings right? We are sons of God and we recognize that we are human and we make mistakes and commit errors, and we are willing to set things right. And in this peaceful march we are with everyone and all are willing to set things right.”¹⁵⁵

Ideology, Snow and Benford (2005, 209) explain, is one of the cultural resources frame articulators can draw on to amplify their frame. In the collective action frame highlighted this frame amplification is clearly visible: the role of God and the equality of all his sons reinforces the call for reconciliation.

Regarding frame resonance, it is clear in that in the case of La Alta Montaña not all inhabitants have joined forces and participated in the peaceful march and in the reconciliation process. Some difficulties in convincing the macayeperos have been highlighted by one of its leaders:

“First, ASOPRAM became leader of the community of Macayepo, but when we started the process of reconciliation we became leaders of the whole region. So a

¹⁵¹ Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

¹⁵² Interview with Victim's Unit official in charge of the collective reparations and return process in La Alta Montaña, in Cartagena, May 22, 2014.

¹⁵³ Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

¹⁵⁴ Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.

lot of times the macayeperos comment and talk about this and it became clear not all of them have this peaceful mind set.”¹⁵⁶

As he further explained, “you can’t force forgiveness, that is something that should happen spontaneously.”¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, some other leaders of La Alta Montaña also pointed to the challenge of convincing their communities.¹⁵⁸ However, with the participation of 1,500 persons in the peaceful march of 2013, some extent of frame resonance may be assumed. Furthermore, the organization of the monthly assemblies still adds to this process.

4.2.3. Optimism and true reconciliation?

With regard to the dynamic relationship between opportunities and framing two aspects should be highlighted. First, La Alta Montaña’s leaders were extremely positive about the reconciliation process as an opportunity for unifying the region and claiming their collective rights. Does this point to a systematic optimistic bias or did the changed context truly lead to an opportunity for collective action? Second, the emphasis on reconciliation makes one wonder what reconciliation actually entails and if a true reconciliation process has taken place or if it is merely a discourse set in motion by the start of the process.

As Gamson and Meyer (1996, 286) state, “activists appeal to a vision of better policies, greater justice, and more human social life as alternatives which their action can help bring about.” The optimism of La Alta Montaña’s leaders pointed in this direction, they emphasized the process of reconciliation as a vision of more human social life which could lead to greater justice in the whole region. This positive attitude was necessary to convince potential adherents of the process, since the difficult situation during the conflict had caused a lot of distrust among the two parts of La Alta Montaña. Furthermore, this optimism, although it is hard to establish if this was based on a bias, led to greater support of the Victims’ Unit for their collective process. The discourse of unity was noted and seen as something to reinforce by providing support. The participation of 1,500 people in the peaceful march points to a generally positive mood within the movement. However, the difficulties in finding support among the macayeperos should not be forgotten.

A second important aspect is the question what reconciliation actually is. Is it just a discourse or did a reconciliation process and true forgiveness actually take place?¹⁵⁹ As was elaborated on before, a leader from Macayepo told me, “for me, it’s a process of reconciliation that’s still starting, because it’s a hard and tough job, it’s not a job you can do from one day to another.” Based on this quote, it seems reasonable to argue that a true reconciliation process is a long-term process. Furthermore, the reconciliation process was framed by the leaders,

¹⁵⁶ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, May 9, 2014.

¹⁵⁸ Based on field research notes on community meetings.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with academic of the Universidad La Javeriana specialized in the displaced population, land inequality and gender, in Amsterdam, June 12, 2014.

while a clear picture of the inhabitants' attitude could not be established during the research. Since the leaders started this process, they probably already are one step further in the process of reconciliation. However, creating collective action frames based on a discourse of reconciliation, might make the leaders "agents of their own history" (Gamson and Meyer 1996, 286) setting in action a true process of reconciliation. By positively emphasizing the reconciliation process more people might join, which on the long-term would lead to true reconciliation.

Conclusion

This research has examined how changing opportunity structures and framing strategies have affected the return process of Macayepo and La Alta Montaña as a whole. An attempt was made to create an in-depth understanding of how framing strategies interact with and respond to the changes in the opportunity structures security, policy and alliances in a dynamic way influencing the mobilization process of the two waves of collective action that took place in the region.

In this research these two waves of collective action, the return of Macayepo in 2004 and the peaceful march in La Alta Montaña in 2013, were approached as part of the same integrated return process. As defined before and as indicated by La Alta Montaña's leaders a return process is about the psychological and physical re-establishment of one's life. From the perspective of the macayeperos, they had only received a partial return process from the state without guarantees for the condition of dignity. In La Alta Montaña most families returned individually without accompaniment, they had never received any form of arranged return process and got minimum government support. In that sense the peaceful march and the agreements with the government should be seen as an enhancement of the existing return processes in an integrated way. Moreover, the role of ASOPRAM in both waves of collective action shows both the return of Macayepo and the peaceful march were largely based on the same organisational structure. As was demonstrated in this thesis, changing opportunities and framing strategies had an influence on the different forms of collective action. Whereas under the circumstances present in 2004, only Macayepo was able and willing to organize collectively to return, be it in small numbers, the changed circumstances in 2013 led to the possibility of amplifying the collective organisation in La Alta Montaña as a whole and organizing the peaceful march to demand an integral return process.

During the return process of Macayepo three opportunity structures influenced the attempt to organize collectively: the security policy, the right to return, and an existing pragmatic alliance between the armed forces, the paramilitaries and part of Macayepo's community. Both the PDS and the pragmatic alliance were contested opportunities. Whereas for Macayepo's leaders these opportunities and the accompaniment of the Marine Corps enforced a more positive perception of security and reduced the threat posed against the returnees upon return, a large part of the macayeperos saw the controversial relationship of the armed forces with the paramilitaries and the fragile security situation as a constraining factor. The leaders mainly focussed their framing on the positive security situation enabled by the accompaniment of the Marine Corps and the neutrality of their return. By creating collective action frames based on the legality of the state and its entities, the leaders tried to convince the macayeperos of the neutrality of their return process. Furthermore, the right to return under Law 387 of 1997, with conditions of safety, wilfulness, and dignity can be seen as a framing opportunity seized by the leaders of Macayepo. Although the leaders were positive about the right to return in their frames, they mainly focussed their framing strategies on the government entities, due to a general lack of confidence in the government's

willingness to comply with their obligation. Calling upon the government's responsibility to comply with the law reinforced their claim in front of the government entities.

Within their framing strategies Macayepo's leaders focussed on the displacement as a problematic situation in need of action. By emphasizing the identity of the macayeperos as peasants, they strengthened a feeling of the need to return. Two main factors enhanced their attempt to organize the collective return. First, there was some extent of frame resonance among the returnees, who also regarded the PDS and accompaniment of the Marine Corps as providing an opportunity to return. Second, the collective action frames of the leaders were reinforced by the explicit willingness of the Marine Corps to accompany the return. An important aspect of the return is the pragmatic alliance: on the one hand, it enabled the return, but on the other hand, it caused counter-framing and made the return a controversial one. Based on fear and allegations of paramilitary infiltration, some macayeperos discouraged others to participate in the return, which might explain the low turnout on the day of the return. To conclude, I assume the proffered frames and the opportunities did affect the perception and willingness of those 21 families that returned. However, the contested opportunities led to rather fragile collective action frames and a limited collective return.

The second wave of collective action during the peaceful march in 2013 was influenced by the opportunities of an improved security situation, the introduction of the Victims' Law and a reconciliation process. The improved security situation led to the disappearance of the invisible border between the two parts of La Alta Montaña. By emphasizing the possibilities of a renewed and peaceful future, the improvements in the conflict dynamics in comparison to the past, and regained autonomy, the leaders framed the new situation as an opportunity for collective organisation. The reconciliation process among La Alta Montaña's leaders led to a new local alliance that was perceived as a possibility to work together and unite in their efforts to gain government attention. Within their framing strategies the leaders focussed on convincing the population of the possibility of reconciliation and unity. These opportunities were reinforced by the Victims' Law, which provided a comprehensive framework for the leaders to claim their rights. A constraining factor was its slow implementation, but emphasizing a lack of government attention actually turned out to have a great mobilizing potency. The newly created victims discourse further strengthened the frames through the development of a shared identity.

By emphasizing that La Alta Montaña's population all cope with the same necessities and all are victims of the same conflict, La Alta Montaña's leaders attempted to lift blame from anyone formerly involved in the conflict and tried to reach unity. The disappearance of the pragmatic alliances and the regained possibility to act neutrally reinforced their attempt at unity. The Victims' Law further enabled a reframing of the issues at hand and, as discussed above, proved to be an opportunity in two contested ways. Furthermore, the support from the Victims' Unit reinforced the collective action frames and led to a positive perception of the efficacy of the march. Although some distrust still existed and not everybody participated in the march, most of the opportunities were uncontested and created a possibility to frame them without much interference. Frame resonance is difficult to determine and true reconciliation

is a long-term process. However, the participation of 1,500 persons in the peaceful march was a significant amplification of the collective action in the region, and the discourse of unity and reconciliation seems to point at a certain extent of influence of the proffered collective action frames.

As can be derived from the above conclusions, changing opportunities and different framing strategies have led to different forms of collective action. The arguable results of the security policy, the pragmatic alliance and the right to return were structural factors that enabled Macayepo's community to return, but also affected the willingness of and constrained a large part of the inhabitants of Macayepo and La Alta Montaña as a whole to participate in the return. Changes in those contested opportunities led to more favourable opportunities for the region as a whole which affected and amplified the collective organisation in the region. Regarding the dynamic relationship between opportunity and framing as elaborated on by Gamson and Meyer (1996), a clear difference could be established between the two waves of collective action. During the return in 2004 there was a need to overemphasize opportunities within the proffered collective action frames, which might indicate contested or unconvincing opportunities. In this case, framing often shaped the opportunity or the opportunity was merely sold as one. In La Alta Montaña, the changed and uncontested opportunities actually created the possibility to frame. The perception of the population was rather positive about the opportunities, which enabled the opportunities to shape the collective action frames. Although the collective return and the peaceful march are not comparable forms of collective action, it seems the changes in opportunities have led to greater support in the region for collective organisation, which started out with the relatively small and fragile collective return and grew with the peaceful march.

Finally, I would like to make some remarks about the theoretical applicability of collective action theory on the current case study. The dynamics between opportunities and framing as an explanation for collective action is not meant to create a general explanation concerning the circumstances collective action happens in. Rather it creates a framework which should enable us to better understand the particular complexities and contextual factors underlying collective action. This also implies that every form of collective action has its own complexities and therefore a distinct dynamics between opportunities and framing strategies that affects that collective action. The changing opportunities that influenced the two different forms of collective action confirm the importance of these varying contextual factors and affirm the explanatory value of the theory. Furthermore, the theory and this research contribute to the existing gap within the literature, by focussing on the interaction between the agency of returnees, the contextual factors and the everyday practice of return processes. Since a true sustainable solution has not been reached yet in La Alta Montaña, the collective organization of its inhabitants should be seen as an ongoing and transformative process. Opportunities will keep on changing and might enable or constrain future forms of collective action in La Alta Montaña.

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Appendix I: Interviews list

Peasant interviews

- Interview 1 with male peasant and former leader of Caño Berruguita a community part of Macayepo, in Caño Berruguita, May 2, 2014.
- Interview 2 with male peasant and present leader of Caño Berruguita a community part of Macayepo, in Caño Berruguita, May 2, 2014.
- Interview 3 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 8, 2014.
- Interview 4 with male peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 9, 2014.
- Interview 5 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 9, 2014.
- Interview 6 with female peasant and participant in the return of Macayepo, in Macayepo, May 9, 2014.
- Interview 7 with Evangelist pastor and leader of the displaced community of Macayepo in Sincelejo, in Sincelejo, May 14, 2014.
- Interview 8 with male peasant, present leader and organizer of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 15, 2014.
- Interview 9 with male peasant and present leader of Loma Central a community part of La Alta Montaña, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 20, 2014.

Expert interviews

- Interview with academic of the Universidad La Javeriana specialized in collective action of the displaced population, in Bogota, March 12, 2014.
- Interview with UNHCR Coordinator of the Protection Unit Colombia, in Bogotá, March 12, 2014.
- Interview with former Defensoría del Pueblo Bolívar and UNHCR Barranquilla official, March 15, 2014.
- Interview with academic of the Universidad de Cartagena specialized in Los Montes de María, in Cartagena, March 25, 2014.
- First interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Cartagena, March 25, 2014.
- Second interview with former Acción Social official in charge of the return of Macayepo, in Carmen de Bolívar, May 7, 2014.
- Interview with director of local NGO accompanying the return of communities in Montes de María, in Sincelejo, May 13, 2014.
- Interview with Victims' Unit official in charge of the collective reparations and return process in La Alta Montaña, in Cartagena, May 22, 2014.
- Interview with academic of the Universidad La Javeriana specialized in the displaced population, land inequality and gender, in Amsterdam, June 12, 2014.