

# Civil Resistance: A Conceptual Approach from the Experience of Social Organizations in Montes de María\*

[English Version]

La resistencia civil: un acercamiento conceptual desde la experiencia de las organizaciones sociales en los Montes de María

Resistência civil: uma abordagem conceitual a partir da experiência das organizações sociais em Montes de Maria

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**Jorge Luis Espitia Solera\*\***

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7590-7542>

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**Colombia**

**Victoria Lugo\*\*\***

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7149-5229>

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**Colombia**

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\*\* Master in Social Justice and Peace Building, Universidad de Caldas. [jespita2207@gmail.com](mailto:jespitia2207@gmail.com)

\*\*\* PhD in social sciences from Tilburg University (The Netherlands). Universidad de Caldas. [victoria.lugo@ucaldas.edu.co](mailto:victoria.lugo@ucaldas.edu.co)

## Abstract

“Civil resistance” is a concept widely disseminated among academia and Colombian social organizations. Its study is of singular importance, given the various conflicts faced by the country, including the armed conflict of the last sixty years. In academia, theoretical and conceptual definitions are varied. In praxis, the concept is polysemic and transcends the scopes or limitations that have been described by theoreticians on the subject, as evidenced by social movements and organizations. **Objective:** The objective of this article is to provide a conceptual approach to civil resistance by reviewing different authors and then examining its relevance in the context of Montes de María, where social organizations have practiced civil resistance in the framework of the armed conflict and as part of the transition toward building territorial peace. **Methodology:** This was qualitative research, through the PAR approach, conducted in the municipality of Ovejas with four social processes. The text will examine the experiences of several social organizations in the historic territory of the Colombian Caribbean, including the *Asociación de campesinos productores del corregimiento de San Rafael*, the *Asociación de Campesinos de la finca la Europa*, the *Asociación de Víctimas de Chengue*, and the *Corporación de mujeres Narrar para Vivir*. These organizations have developed civil resistance practices in the context of the armed conflict. **Results:** The concept of “civil resistance” has evolved over time as different perspectives have enriched it through practical development in history. The article begins by providing several approaches to help readers understand the concept of civil resistance, and then examines how this concept relates to the actions taken by social organizations in Montes de María. It then discusses the different conflicts present in the territory, including the armed conflict. The results of the research suggest that these forms of resistance can be classified based on time as permanent, conjunctural, or emergent, and based on the margin of action as active or passive. **Conclusions:** In the Montes de María region, social organizations have implemented forms of civil resistance that have enabled them to overcome the armed conflict, as well as promote territorial development and make progress in the construction of territorial peace based on their collective and individual experiences of resistance.

**Keywords:** civil resistance; political capabilities; peacebuilding; post-conflict; social organizations.

## Resumen

La ‘resistencia civil’ es un concepto ampliamente difundido entre la academia y las organizaciones sociales colombianas. Su estudio es de singular importancia, dadas las diferentes conflictividades que enfrenta el país; entre estas, el conflicto armado de los últimos sesenta años. En el ámbito académico, las definiciones teóricas y conceptuales son variadas. En la praxis, desde el movimiento social y las organizaciones sociales, es también un concepto polisémico que trasciende los alcances o limitaciones que han expuesto los teóricos en la materia. **Objetivo:** este artículo tiene como objetivo hacer un acercamiento conceptual a la resistencia civil, mediante la revisión de diferentes autores y, posteriormente, ponerla en diálogo con las percepciones y experiencias desarrolladas en los Montes de María por organizaciones sociales; a partir de sus ejercicios de resistencia civil en el marco del conflicto armado, y como parte de la transición hacia la construcción de paz territorial. **Metodología:** esta fue una investigación cualitativa, a través del enfoque de IAP, realizada en el municipio de Ovejas con cuatro procesos sociales: Asociación de campesinos productores del corregimiento de San Rafael, Asociación de Campesinos de la finca la Europa, Asociación de Víctimas de Chengue y Corporación de mujeres Narrar para Vivir; quienes han desarrollados prácticas de resistencia civil en el marco del conflicto armado que ha vivido este histórico territorio del caribe colombiano. **Resultados:** la ‘resistencia civil’ tiene diferentes formas de comprensión que han sido enriquecidas conceptualmente a lo largo del tiempo, atendiendo a su desarrollo práctico en la historia. En el artículo, inicialmente se esbozan algunos enfoques que nos acercan conceptualmente al término para luego ponerlos en dialogo con las manifestaciones implementadas por organizaciones sociales en los Montes de María; y luego sortear las diferentes conflictividades presentes en el territorio, entre ellos el conflicto armado. Estas formas de resistencia, acorde con los resultados de la investigación, se pueden clasificar según el tiempo en permanentes, coyunturales y emergentes y, de acuerdo al margen de acción, en activas o pasivas. **Conclusiones:** en la región de los Montes de maría, las organizaciones sociales han puesto en práctica formas de «resistencia civil», que les han permitido no solo sortear el conflicto armado, sino, agenciar el desarrollo territorial y avanzar en la construcción de la paz territorial a partir de sus propias experiencias de resistencia individual y colectiva.

**Palabras clave:** resistencia civil; capacidades políticas; construcción de paz; posconflicto; organizaciones sociales.

## Resumo

A “resistência civil” é um conceito amplamente difundido entre acadêmicos e organizações sociais na Colômbia. Seu estudo é de singular importância, dados os diferentes conflitos enfrentados pelo país, incluindo o conflito armado dos últimos sessenta anos. No âmbito acadêmico, as definições teóricas e conceituais são variadas. Na prática, do ponto de vista do movimento social e das organizações sociais, é também um conceito polissêmico que transcende o escopo ou as limitações que os teóricos sobre o assunto têm apresentado. **Objetivo:** o objetivo deste artigo é fazer uma abordagem conceitual da resistência civil, através da revisão de diferentes autores e, posteriormente, colocá-la em diálogo com as percepções e experiências desenvolvidas em Montes de Maria pelas organizações sociais, com base em seus exercícios de resistência civil no contexto do conflito armado, e como parte da transição para a construção da paz territorial. **Metodologia:** esta foi uma pesquisa qualitativa, através da abordagem PRA, realizada no município de Ovejas com quatro processos sociais: Associação de produtores camponeses da aldeia de San Rafael, Associação de Camponeses da fazenda La Europa, Associação de Vítimas de Chengue e Corporação de Mulheres Narradoras para Viver; que desenvolveram práticas de resistência civil no contexto do conflito armado que viveu este território histórico do Caribe colombiano. **Resultados:** a “resistência civil” tem diferentes formas de compreensão que foram conceitualmente enriquecidas ao longo do tempo, de acordo com seu desenvolvimento prático na história. No artigo, inicialmente delineamos algumas abordagens que nos aproximam conceitualmente do termo e depois as colocamos em diálogo com as manifestações implementadas pelas organizações sociais nos Montes de Maria; e depois lidamos com os diferentes conflitos presentes no território, entre eles o conflito armado. Estas formas de resistência, de acordo com os resultados da pesquisa, podem ser classificadas segundo o tempo como permanentes, temporárias e emergentes, e segundo a margem de ação, como ativas ou passivas. **Conclusões:** Na região de Montes de Maria, as organizações sociais colocaram em prática formas de “resistência civil” que lhes permitiram não só superar o conflito armado, mas também promover o desenvolvimento territorial e avançar na construção da paz territorial com base em suas próprias experiências de resistência individual e coletiva.

**Palavras chave:** resistência civil; capacidades políticas; construção da paz; pós-conflito; organizações sociais.

## Introduction

The achievement of peace, after decades of political, social, and armed conflict, is one of the great goals of the Colombian people. In 2016, the most significant peace agreement in recent history was signed in Colombia, marking a turning point in the armed conflict by removing the oldest guerrilla group on the continent from the scene: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, People's Army (FARC-EP). This peace agreement includes several elements that differentiate it from others signed in the past, particularly the possibility of advancing in peacebuilding with a territorial approach that makes communities the protagonists. When constructing public peace policies, taking into account the knowledge, experiences, and desires of communities to overcome the cultural and structural causes that gave rise to the armed conflict is essential. This conflict has been reconfiguring and intensifying since the 1940s, with the participation of numerous actors.

In light of this approach to territorial peacebuilding, and recognizing the vital role of civil society organizations in achieving this goal, gaining insight into their experiences with peacebuilding over the years in areas most affected by the conflict is essential. Hence, the study was conducted with social organizations comprising farmers, women, victims, and producers situated in the municipality of Ovejas in the Montes de María sub-region.

The general objective of this research was to understand the role of social organizations in the construction of territorial peace, based on the political capacities developed from civil resistance exercised during the armed conflict. The specific objectives were to identify the processes or forms of civil resistance exercised by social organizations in terms of survival, defense, and permanence in the territory within the framework of the armed conflict. In a second stage, and based on the findings of the previous objective, the authors sought to describe the process of gestation and strengthening of political capacities based on the experience of civil resistance in these social organizations to finally recognize the contributions of the social organizations of the municipality of Ovejas, in the department of Sucre, to the construction of territorial peace.

However, one of the central categories of analysis in this research process was "civil resistance." Understanding this concept is the starting point for explaining all the findings. Precisely, during the fieldwork, it was observed that this concept is sometimes unknown, sometimes misrepresented, and above all, stigmatized. Therefore, this article seeks to achieve a theoretical and conceptual approach to this term, as well as articulate it with the experiences of civil

resistance exercised by social organizations in Ovejas. The goal is to overcome the armed conflict and advance in peacebuilding.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of “civil resistance”, it is necessary to approach it from different authors, disciplines, and perspectives. A first approach alludes to “resistance” from the standpoint of civil disobedience (Thoreau, 2008). This notion is often confused with the term “civil resistance.” It is important to clarify that civil disobedience is a subset of civil resistance (Quiñones, 2008).

A second approach assumes civil resistance from the practice of nonviolence, as a mechanism of struggle against oppression or abuses of power (Valenzuela, 2001). It should be noted that many acts of civil disobedience are also used as part of peaceful resistance. However, the latter notion is considered a variation of the former approach.

In another line of thought, there are two additional approaches to civil resistance: one considers it as an action of opposition to an imposed order or to a future order intended to be imposed on some part of society (Quiñones, 2008); and the other regards resistance as a power game (Molina, 2014). The four approaches to civil resistance presented in this article are not in dispute or contradictory, but rather complementary for a comprehensive understanding of the concept. The first two approaches focus on the methods and principles of civil resistance, while the latter two focus on the goals and motivations behind it.

Following is the methodology used in this study, followed by an explanation of the content, implications, and relationships of each approach to the conceptualization of the term “civil resistance.” Next, the article presents a discussion of armed violence as a form of resistance and its role in the struggle for recognition. This discussion complements the four approaches to civil resistance mentioned earlier.

The article concludes by presenting the considerations that communities and territories in Colombia have regarding civil resistance in the context of the social and armed conflict. Some are explicit and recognized by themselves through their organizational expressions or individual social leadership. Others can be derived from the analysis of their practices in the territory, of their work to overcome difficulties, preserve life, guarantee permanence in the territory and advance in peacebuilding with a territorial approach.

## Methodology

This article relies on a literature review of the concept of “civil resistance” and incorporates findings from the research project titled “Construcción de paz territorial en Colombia: experiencias de Organizaciones sociales en el municipio de Ovejas, departamento de Sucre, Colombia.” The research was conducted as part of the program “Reconstrucción del tejido social en zonas de posconflicto en Colombia” and the project “Hilando capacidades políticas para las transiciones en los territorios.” The research followed the paradigm of social constructionism and employed a qualitative methodology based on the Participatory Research approach. The use of participatory techniques and strategies for information gathering was crucial. The techniques used included participant observation, social mapping, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, intergenerational dialogues of knowledge, and memories. With these techniques, the authors addressed the organizational and territorial past, as well as explored the future vision of the four organizations participating in the research unit. Asociación de Campesinos productores de San Rafael, Asociación de Campesinos de la Finca la Europa, Asociación de Víctimas de Chengue and la Corporación de Mujeres «Narrar para Vivir» were all voluntary participants in the research process between 2019 and 2022. They are present in the municipality of Ovejas in the Montes de María region.

In addition to these strategies, other virtual communication methods were used in the framework of the Covid-19 pandemic, which facilitated the construction of information. This was compiled, ordered, compared, and grouped using tables and grids for later analysis using the triangulation method, which makes relating the voice of the communities, the voices of expert authors on the subject, and the voice of the researcher through his reflection and writing of field journals possible. Finally, a more comprehensive moment took place where the researcher was able to interpret all the information related in the matrices and through a hermeneutic exercise, provide meaning and answers to his research question. These findings were shared and discussed with the participants; their feedback was essential for the writing of the final report.

## Results

As previously indicated, distinguishing between the concepts of “resistance” and “civil disobedience” is important, given that, in the first case, the category is much broader since it is related to activist practices in the territories against violence or with the different forms of oppression that may arise. In the second case, according to Quiñones (2008), the term is taken as a manifestation or strategy within the framework of resistance. In this way, analysis starts from these postulates to build the different assertions of the category of resistance, taking into account both the notions already established, as those constituted within the community.

### Approach to Civil Disobedience as a Form of Civil Resistance

The concept of “civil disobedience” possibly has its first theoretical exercises in the conceptions of Henry Thoreau, although its practical origins had already appeared on the scene from religious conceptions such as Hinduism or Buddhism, and even in the European revolts of an agrarian nature against the feudal policies of the 16th and 17th centuries (Alcoberro, 2017).

According to Marcone (2009), the commonly accepted definition of “civil disobedience” was constructed by Bedau in 1961 and taken up again by Rawls ten years later, and by Habermas in 1985. These authors agree in maintaining that “civil disobedience” corresponds to a collective, morally-based, public, illegal, conscious, and peaceful protest action that, violating specific legal norms, seeks to produce a partial change in laws, in the policies or in the guidelines of a government (p. 4).

Marcone (2009), in reference, considers that “civil disobedience” is a strategy that can be used as a form of protest, awareness-raising and political action that should be used “when there are no more tools left” (p. 4). That is, when the closure of a government, or of whoever holds control of power, makes public and democratic debate impossible. Along the same lines, Thoreau (2008) argues that: “The best government is the one that governs as little as possible; the one who does not rule at all” (p. 14).

The former position is often confused with anarchism, however, the latter, according to Sandoval (2015), is associated with ignorance of the authority that forces dispensing with autonomy for decision-making. In this sense, this ideology



does not recognize legitimacy in the figure of the State since it uses its power to restrict the will and freedom to decide freely.

Contrary to former positions, civil disobedience starts from recognizing the existence of an authority or source of coercive power – most of the times represented in a State – with whose actions, in a general or partial way, there is disagreement. For this reason, they one may resist or protest, seeking to generate changes in this way of exercising power, or for it to pass to another actor who is assigned greater legitimacy to make use of it.

According to Alcoberro (2017), this constitutes “a challenge to established an unfair power, which acquires a high symbolic content and can even be admired by people who would never dare to exercise it” (p. 1). In other words, these types of actions generate a chain reaction that tends to multiply in various social sectors, which, with different interests, are affected by this authoritarian imposition of the “dominant power.”

It is necessary to bear in mind that, for Thoreau, civil resistance has a series of premises and ends under which it must develop. These are specified by Alcoberro (2017), as: resistance to power, individual, but with a vocation of masses, mobilizing, exemplary, pedagogical, and with the symbolic value of public denunciation, fundamentally non-violent, focused on areas where power does not expect to be challenged, and oriented to specific purposes, sustainable throughout time indefinitely, politically coordinated, and referred to a higher ethic.

These qualities that Thoreau points out for civil disobedience are similar to those proposed by Hernández (2009), who highlights the following characteristics of civil resistance: it is a process that consolidates in a perfectible way over time; it is a collective action, and, due to this very condition, it has transforming scope, finds its origin in the social base, although in its development it manages to gain, as is desirable, the sympathy of other sectors (p. 8). It does not admit the use of violence, without necessarily having to enroll in a pacifist ethic; it goes hand in hand with organization and planning; and it has an element of moral force that is what convenes, unites, and energizes its operation. It is at the same time a mechanism for struggle, defense, and a proposal for transformation for peace; its processes represent peacebuilding scenarios, strengthen democracies and promote pacifist capacities and powers. In short, the qualities represent pacifist empowerment in contexts where various conflicts are expressed, often in crossfire, and, finally, generate a culture of peace in the groups in which they find their origin.

Therefore, it is necessary to highlight that the concept of “civil disobedience” and possibly the dissemination of Thoreau's ideas, echoed the approach of peaceful resistance as a form of civil resistance, which is discussed next.

## Approach to Peaceful Resistance as an Exercise of Civil Resistance

From this perspective, the central aspect is the denial of violence as a mechanism of struggle against actions that cause harm to the collective or human group. Violence is not responded to with violence, but actions considered pacifist are used. For example, refusing to pay taxes, boycotting the purchase of certain products, or not going to certain places. In other words, it is about influencing everything that is supposed to affect the oppressor and, consequently, encourages the act of resistance against those whose actions it is expected to weaken. Mohandas Gandhi is considered the father of these ideas of pacifism as a form of civil resistance, who, in response to this exercise, according to López-Martínez (2016), pointed out that:

It is a rebellion, without any violence. He who is fully committed to civil resistance is not content simply to dispense with the authority of the State; he becomes an outlaw, who arrogates the right to pass over all State law contrary to morality. (p. 4).

He adds that there are multiple examples, such as daring to enter the barracks if you have something to say to the soldiers, despite not having the permission to do so. You can also disobey the anti-strike picket rules and decide to demonstrate where it is not allowed. In all these examples, force is never used, nor is it resisted (Gandhi cited by Allen-Perkins, 2011, p.7).

Allen-Perkins (2011) complements the above by pointing out that “civil resistance” is conceived as the best tool to use to rise up against injustice, without intending to harm the opponent or even defeat him; rather the conversion of this is proposed. The “civil resistance” for Gandhi is, in this sense, an appeal to the opponent's reason to convince him and convert his conscience in favor of the demanded cause (p. 7). In accordance with this, the thought and action proposed by Gandhi, within the framework of civil resistance through disobedience exercises, appeals to deeper elements of the human being, such as morality and ethics. It is, therefore, a resistance that can be developed even by the individual himself, without affecting the events of others.

Alternatively, Valenzuela (2001) points out some criticisms of the concept of “non-violence.” For example, that it does not provide a total solution to the problems of violence or security that a country may face, or that it is about avoiding the conflict by accepting the injustices that take place in it, to avoid other forms of violence. In this way it can be said from this approach, that “civil resistance” can be understood as an effective way of surviving in the midst of

conflict conditions. It is essentially a technique or strategy to participate or live in the midst of it, and not necessarily to solve it. In other words, the “supreme good” is not the resolution of differences, but rather the achievement of specific social objectives within the framework of that context, such as, for example, the preservation of the territory of protecting life in the midst of violent circumstances.

The following characteristics stand out in this approach: violence is distorted as a method of action within the framework of civil resistance exercises. The action of civil disobedience implies a recognition of the dominant power, against which disagreements arise. The exercise of civil disobedience does not focus its actions as a direct impact on the social group where they take place, but rather they are much more deeply rooted in the individual, particularly from their moral precepts.

### **Opposition Action as an Objective of Civil Resistance**

This approach, in which opposition action is prioritized, has been conceived as an objective of civil resistance by authors such as Quiñones (2008), who, analyzing the framework of the social and political conflict in Colombia, points out that the “civil resistance” notion, alludes to this exercise. That is, it alludes to a refusal to give in to the expressions of domination, regardless of the characteristics that the latter have (p. 3). In this sense, all resistance implies a component of disobedience, without this meaning, as has already been said, “civil resistance” and “civil disobedience” configure the same concept. It is important to bear in mind that the resistance exercise is proposed against the violent actions of illegal armed groups, and not so much against repressive state policies as in the first approach, defended by Thoreau.

Based on the previous discussion, it is critical to bear in mind that numerous political and social entities have exerted oppositional action and have confronted the approach to democracy applied to the country. Moreover, this opposition extends to the policies that the State itself seeks to implement in the territories and that have been rejected by the population due to being deemed contrary to local development, human rights, or subject to the interests of the ruling elites.

In this line of reasoning, Nieto (2011) says that the history of social resistance in Colombia has been molded by the need to confront the war's objectives and social and economic policies that have resulted from the turn-of-the-century neoliberal model's adoption by the ruling governments (p. 2). This means that as

a goal of civil resistance, this aspect of opposition finds its best representatives in the territorial organizations that have recently gained strength and gauged the pulse of the state's development proposals. While they haven't succeeded in making their proposals prevail, at least some of the ones that institutions are trying to impose have been prevented from being implemented.

Cases that are very specific can be found in the national policy to eradicate illicit drug cultivation in different areas of the country. Because this policy is not supported by local producers, it leads to conflict and prevents it from being implemented. It is important to note that this struggle occasionally receives support from political parties and movements, some of which have seats in the House of Representatives, who are referred to as the political opposition and who echo the voices of the people who are not heard outside of their home countries.

According to Bobbio (1988), this idea of political opposition can be understood as the search for “objectives opposed to those that defend those who hold governmental power,” according to Sierra, “as an attitude of criticism of the government's actions, exercised by groups, parties or individuals outside governmental power” (p. 2).

Finally, it is important to note that the exercise of political opposition is a right guaranteed by Article 112 of the Colombian Constitution since 1991, but it was only codified by Law 1909 of July 2018 in accordance with the terms of the 2016 peace agreement signed between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP.

## **Civil resistance as a Game of Access to Power**

According to Molina (2014), “civil resistance” might be seen as a “game for power” or a way to exert control over the actions that the collective is resisting (p. 4). This idea is controversial because “civil resistance” is a way for a group of people to struggle against a group or hegemonic power that exercises oppression, whether through constitutionally-based means like “expedition of laws, decrees, or regulations against the interests of social sectors, etc.” or through the power of weapons that can also be of legal order like “the force of the state,” or illegal means like “armed groups.” The contentious claim is that those who have experienced the effects of oppression intend to use a similar oppressive dynamic if they ever gain power or control. In this regard, Molina (2014) states that it is preferable for the group exercising resistance to value

their actions over time to avoid replicating the dominance or violent principles to which they are opposed.

It is important to emphasize that the struggle for power or control through civil resistance tactics does not delegitimize the process. Many organized civil society expressions – particularly in Colombia – view gaining power as the most practical way to end the scenes of submission and disproportionate state power or the actions of oppressive groups.

An example of this last point is the outcome of the regional elections held on October 27, 2019, in the city of Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca, Colombia), where a social leader who had previously led a civic protest was elected as the city's mayor. This experience is noteworthy in the context of this approach because it demonstrates how resistance activities organized around popular demands and in opposition to power-seeking behaviors that they view as oppressive and responsible for a variety of territorial issues can become viable options for contesting and exercising territorial authority and for trying to change those behaviors.

### **The Use of Weapons as a Tool of Civil Resistance**

This is a reflection on the current debate in Latin America on the use of weapons as a form of civil resistance rather than just a focus that allows for closer examination of the term “civil resistance.” In the case of Colombia, illegally armed groups such as communist insurgents and paramilitary groups aligned with the country's political left have attempted to justify their actions as acts of civil resistance against rival groups, and even the state itself, through action or omission.

This notion or assertion is rejected by organized civil society processes, which hold these groups accountable for numerous negative consequences that have compelled the civil populace to resist because their actions have jeopardized fundamental rights and violated the liberties of communities that have come under their control. In this regard, Quiñones (2008) asserts that, in a general sense, resistance does not preclude the use of violence; but, when the term “civil resistance” is used, it refers to the practice of a non-military or, more broadly, non-violent opposition (p.3). As a result, armed expressions will have no place in the civic resistance scenario.

Reaching a consensus in the discussion over armed action as a form of civil resistance is difficult, especially when considering the contexts in which they arose, who incorporated them, and the support they received, both directly and indirectly, from the general public. However, according to a study conducted

by the National Center of Historical Memory (NCHM) that surveyed victims and non-victims on illegal armed groups and the legitimacy of their struggle based on the principles under which they have justified their actions, 84% of victims and 81% of non-victims believe that “guerrillas” are “simply criminals” (NCHM et al., 2012, p. 25). To put it another way, the civilian population does not recognize or legitimize this armed group, despite the fact that they self-identify as civil resistance to state-sanctioned oppression, inequality, and social injustice.

The picture is repeated in relation to paramilitary groups, who justify their actions as “necessary for combating Colombian guerrillas”; according to the same poll, 74% of victims and 71% of non-victims disagree with this justification (NCHM et al., 2012, p. 27). Within this concept, and in light of public perception, it is possible to conclude that the actions of illegally armed groups lack legitimacy as civil resistance expressions.

## **Resistance as a Recognition Exercise**

Another point worth discussing in this exercise in conceptualizing civil resistance is the role of such resistance as a search for recognition, particularly by minority groups, who are marginalized and discriminated against in countries like Colombia.

In this regard, it is important to consider the organized protests of rural groups, women, urban groups, ethnic communities, LGTB groups, and young people, among others, who have recently erupted on the public stage through various strategies, not in a struggle for power, as Molina (2014) asserts, or simply in opposition to the state and violent groups, as Quiones (2008) proposes, but as an act of resistance.

It is important to emphasize that this struggle for recognition does not seek a type of “social acceptance” from society, but rather spaces of tolerance and respect for their existence, as do the rest of the civic groups. This is in line with Honneth's proposal for recognition forms, according to which there is a “[...] need for the I to be recognized and confirmed as a free and active subject” (Honneth cited by Arrese, 2009, p.3). In this sense, the practice of civil resistance by these groups known as “minorities” or “marginalized” is in sync with the need to be recognized as a collective, but also as individuals with rights who can and must be part of society.

As a result, acting collectively from civil resistance entails recognizing those who share the same desire for recognition, to demand the same from other

social groups from a group and organizational level. To that aim, it is necessary to continue the debate about which practices are being addressed in the search for recognition of rights and the creation of others, both from civil society and through resistance. This is with the goal of creating more equitable spaces that allow for better coexistence and complete living, as Amartya Sen has described.

### **Civil Resistance as a Strategy for Peacebuilding**

This concept was popularized by Hernández (2009), who asserts, based on his research on organizational processes in rural and ethnic communities during Colombia's armed conflict, that “Colombian civil resistance promotes an integral and perfectible peace” (p. 15). The author allows to understand the overview of organizational expressions generated from the territories, crossed by historical claims from economic, social, cultural and environmental issues to different population groups. These are civil resistance actions, that move towards peacebuilding.

Hernández (2009) states that the concept of ‘integral peace’ exposed here “[...] includes personal, social, and ecological expectations and needs; it proposes the transformation of realities related to structural violence such as poverty, misery, and exclusion; and also, the generation of scenarios of peaceful coexistence and culture of peace” (p. 15).

Finally, in accordance with the author, the civil resistance developed in these contexts of violence in Colombia is aimed at building peace because “[...] they build on day-to-day imperfect or unfinished peace, it has significant reaches, they are related to peaceful coexistence, non-violent management and resolution of conflicts” (Hernández, 2009, p. 15) This is ultimately led to the generation of several forms of well-being of collectives or organizations that generate and move them so that they can be extended to the whole national population.

### **Civil Resistance within the Context of Territories in Social and Armed Conflict. The Experience of Four Organizations in Montes de María**

It is important to take these approaches into account, and the perspectives stated to approach the concept of “civil resistance,” to have a clear concept of the place, context, and historical time they’re placed in. Some approaches refer

to how resistance actions are conducted, and the others focus on the manner of reaching the goal.

According to this, despite the connotations of civil resistance and the objectives that can be achieved, undertaking these kinds of actions in a country like Colombia, where violence has been constant, implies that these civil strategies become exposed, risky, and sometimes untenable, especially in those territories where people are continuously shown violence and victimization for carrying out this kind of activities, that in most cases attack the right to live of those who promote them.

These conditions limit social mobilization and, especially, civilian resistance to these conflicts. Despite this difficulty, in the territories some communities' firmness to face violence by peaceful practices has allowed their defense and an opportunity to build territories of peace. The resistance determines their life, because they struggle for the transformation of their realities and demand their right to live in peace, according to their collective life imaginaries and historical roots, as has happened in Montes de María, El Catatumbo or indigenous communities of the Cauca.

Taking into account this situation, one of the common factors among the four participating social organizations of the *Ovejas* municipality is to conceive the organizational processes as a strategy of civil resistance, for the arrangement of the violent and non-violent conflicts in the territory. In this case, the most representative is the armed conflict, which has behaved like a kind of excuse that limits seeing and recognizing the whole view (CNMH, 2018).

Based on the idea that the social organization is a strategy of civil resistance by itself, it is located within permanent strategies, since it is ahead and precedes scenarios of armed conflict. It is the last parameter to establishing temporary context of civilian resistance strategies in the territory in this research. This coincides with Villareal (2016), who recalls the Aristotle view that man is an animal that needs relationship with other individuals to satisfy their own needs, but it also mitigates conflicts.

It is worth noting that the creation of social organizations as a form of peaceful civil resistance varies depending on the nature of conflict. As a result, it became a strategy for dealing with several issues that arose in the territory and determined the best approach to organizing or addressing them (Vivas et al., 2015).

According to the participating organizations, the resistance has allowed them to fight for recognition and fulfillment of their rights. Likewise, the organization constitutes a collective identity to peacefully resolving and sorting out challenges and risks imposed to the community by armed groups. The concept of "the organization" as a mechanism of action and social coordination to common goals



addresses the dynamics of armed conflict, and points to the resolution of other types of structural or cultural violence. Consequently, the organization as a figure of civil resistance is associated with a desire to work collectively and to have a center of action (Luhmann, 1998).

According to Ibarra (2000), “social organization” is a form of collective action, and it implies, in advance, a conflict, a tension that tries to resolve or manage, that makes it visible and gives dimension to that collective activity (p. 9).

As has been seen, the organization is a process of civil resistance in itself, it transcends the scenario of armed conflict and enables the arrangement of other conflicts in the territories. Regardless of their particularities, social organizations have learned that isolated work, although it may be functional, is not enough for its purposes. It can range from being heard by the institution to managing better treatment by the armed groups in the territories; likewise, it allows them to have a greater reach from their work in the regions (Montoro, 2000).

Organizational work has played an important role in networks. It joins or creates levels of more complex organizations called “second level,” such as platforms or coordinators of peasant associations, victims, and women, among others that take advantage of leaders’ and organizations’ experiences (Alpuche & Bernal, 2015). In this case, they also benefit from the particular experiences of civil resistance that second-level organizations place in service of a broader collective.

Although, the associative processes and community cooperativism is not extensive to all organizations of the municipality of *Ovejas*, it is applied to organizational processes such as on *La Europa* farm or with the Asociación de productores de San Rafael. They can be seen in productive projects and also in social dynamics aimed at solving common problems. As an alternative to this strategy, it can be understood as a broader association between two or more organizations and their individuals; it is almost always in productivity, the articulation of workforce and commerce, among others. According to Bolos (2003), the political actions of social organizations are conceived by their own actors as a method of interacting with others; (social organizations, non-governmental and civil groups, and networks). They are political actors as they congregate the sense and the pursuit of common goals of a part of society.

Another form of resistance is “survival,” understood as the ability to overcome adversities within direct violence (individual killers, massacres, forced displacement, torture, sexual violence, among others) but also situations such as extreme poverty, territorial and organizational stigmatization, inequality in access to land, patriarchal practices, illiteracy, and denial of fundamental rights, among others. The last can be understood in the violence triangle: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence described by Galtung (1990). Therefore,

this dynamic of “survival” in *territorio Montemariano* maybe allows still dreaming of peace, despite all the pain.

Thus, resilience has been an unconscious internalized behavior by individuals and organizations, and in most cases the only way to care and remain in the territory: “continued life.” In short, to keep discovering the dreams or ideals for the region, with peace and economic development for all in a sustainable way. As Orozco (2015) states, it is the ability of organizations to absorb shocks or strong strikes, and complex situations, without losing the ability to fulfill their mission and leaving aside their vision. “Resilience” is “something” that is perceived not only in the four organizations participating in this process, but also by the general public, and most of the organizations in the region. In any case, resilience is reflected within social organizations, and at the general level of the population, as a practice of resistance, but also as a capacity to lead a life with normality within a context of abnormality (Rutter & Rutter, 1992).

Furthermore, the role of communications as a strategy of permanent resistance should be highlighted. It has been transformed into its forms and means with the goal of keeping the population informed and, especially, to be alert about events, dangers, problems, and needs in the territories. The main changes in the media relate to increased coverage and access, the availability of technological devices and easy use by social organizations. Key civil resistance communication strategies have helped to transmit messages from the armed conflict, call for a meeting, or report other types of problems, as well as served to educate the population during a time when education was a real privilege, and many of the men and women who fought to possess the land and consolidate organizations that were illiterate. During the 1970s and 1980s, radio was used as a means of popular education within the territory from political and organizational perspectives. In San Rafael, the implementation of the “*Radio Sutatenza*” strategy stands as a clear example. This strategy was useful in learning the fundamental educational aspects for the settlers who founded the township and were illiterate when conquering the Mula and Berruecos farms (Acevedo & Yie, 2015).

This historical background, combined with the adoption of new communication strategies, has paved the way for achieving recognition of their proposals and commitments that are in line with the mission and visionary objectives of each organization. Discourse and innovative approaches contribute to the formation of these emerging realities and the society that consumes them (Mejía & Giraldo, 2011). Consequently, the challenge lies in channeling the spirit of struggle and the underlying motivations behind social mobilizations. As stated by the participants, these communication strategies have yielded positive outcomes, both in terms of

message replication and gaining support for the claims or demands being made through public denunciation.

This observation allows asserting that certain civil resistance strategies involve a more decisive action on the part of the organization and the individuals in terms of their methods and objectives. This could entail actions such as questioning, disobeying, confronting, building solutions, or, ultimately, advocating for a different arrangement of the causes they perceive as oppressive. This group of civil resistance has been called “active,” because their goal is action, a movement within the territory as a response against situations affecting the organization’s interests.

When discussing “active civil resistance” acknowledging the existence of “passive resistance” is relevant. Passive resistance refers to approaches that far from opposing the oppressive power, or managing the territorial or sectorial difficulties, seek to combat oppression without opposing it or directly confronting it; and due to the lack of guarantees, they also put life itself at risk, among other consequences. In this regard, resistance manifests itself as a possible condition of submission in which the crucial aspect is to preserve life or permanence within the territory; therefore, guidelines of silence are assumed and adhered to without contradiction. According to Law 1448 of 2011, this may result in the abandonment of the territory, which is a victimizing incident of forced displacement.

In the future, these forms of resistance will be transformed into or result in forms of civil resistance aiming at action, that is, active. The negative and painful effects within the framework of the armed conflict are highlighted, such as forced displacements (are victimizing incidents that occur when the forms of passive or active resistance in the territory) are no longer available. In the case of the social organizations under investigation, their leaders have suffered, and they, in exile from their territory, outside or inside the country, have managed to incorporate or develop methodological, pedagogical, and political capacities from a discursive and organizational perspective, among others. These capacities have enhanced active resistance in their respective social processes and also at a regional level. The interesting aspect of these negative situations and resilience itself is how resistances that help manage the conflicts faced by the organizations and the territory are formed.

Another conceptual contribution to civil resistances of this current research in the Montes de María is the temporal framework which allowed for the identification of permanent, conjunctural, and emergent resistances. The first group comprises all resistance actions that have occurred before, been present, and have preceded the existence of the armed conflict, which is the beginning for a temporal analysis. Thus, in Montes de María, organizational

work is the main reference in this type of civil resistance as communities have relied on it to defend their rights or achieve the territorial transformations, they believe necessary. Hence, social organizations have been key actors in the struggle for land and resolution of conflicts, with the slogan that the group is the one that enables a stronger and more decisive collective action (Villareal, 2016). In addition to this group of resistances, there has been an associative production in force since the 1960s as well as cultural initiatives as the creation of local festivals as territorial integration, like the “*Ajonjolí*” or “*Las Gaitas*” in *Ovejas*, among others.

The civilian resistance to economic situations refers to the resistance that is generated or developed at certain moments to respond to situations of maximum pressure resulting from the armed conflict. They tend to disappear once the scenario that led to their emergence has ended, hence their transitory nature, because the aim is individual or collective preservation of life without directly confronting the armed actors. However, it is a form of resistance because the struggle continues from other fronts, and even places.

Finally, there are the emerging civil resistances that include those that have been recently consolidated as an alternative to the resolution of conflicts present in the territory. In some cases, they are reconfigurations of some permanent forms of resistance, which, due to the new context realities, have been transformed while preserving their core without denying the original forms previously described.

The communicative strategies are perhaps the most representative aspect of the emerging forms of civil resistance, not because they did not exist previously, but because of the revived and leading role they have been playing within the organizational commitments. These strategies use communications groups and artistic expressions –such as the “*Colectivo de comunicaciones línea 21*” or the *Museo itinerante de los Montes de María “El Mochuelo”* – to demonstrate nonconformity in the population as well as the dreams and desires of the communities, while denouncing or warning about the existing conflicts within the territories that are not managed by the organizations. Similarly, these strategies influence the community’s memories with the purpose of ensuring that those painful situations that have marked the collective memory of the population and plunged them into fear never happen again (Rodríguez, 2015).

## Conclusions

The historical, theoretical, and conceptual evolution of civil resistance has been subordinated to a notion of confrontation, often directed against the State or power groups exerting pressure on the population. According to the authors cited, the analysis has been oriented toward an approach of struggle for power, with the purpose of resolving the oppressive situation that causes circumstances of resistance in the short or long term.

Furthermore, there is a debate on whether “civil resistance” and “civil disobedience” are synonymous leading one to conclude that the latter is a subset of the former. Similarly, there is a disagreement as to whether or not resistance actions can use violent methods; this resulted in the predominance of pacifism that arose with Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the previous century, and the relevance of the rejection of violence as a means of defeating or intimidating oppressors.

These latter discussions are highly relevant in the Colombian context, which has been immersed in an armed conflict for more than 60 years. The causes are debatable although they can be placed in the Galtian triangle of structural and cultural violence resulting from physical violence.

From this point of view, a struggle is argued, perhaps from recognition, in defining who has truly engaged in genuine civil resistance. On the one hand, the illegal armed groups, that, regardless of their ideological leanings, use the argument of civil resistance as a way to justify taking up weapons against the State or in the war among themselves, and worsening the understanding of this historical context of violence. On the other hand, findings suggest an organized civilian population that rejects the use of weapons and, to a large extent, violence as a means of resistance. This indicates that it is the only social movement that has seriously exercised it, either to protect itself, or to resolve conflicts in its territories.

This current research examines some organizational expressions of Montes de María, particularly in the municipality of Ovejas, where it was identified that “civil resistance” is constituted as a form of life preservation and a struggle for the territorial transformations from the social, economic, political, environmental, and cultural perspectives, among others. Although the armed conflict and their actors have been the primary drivers of organizational civil resistance structural factors –such as extreme poverty, institutional abandonment, male chauvinism, and cultural discrimination, among others– they have also contributed to this type of expressions.

In Montes de María, resistance manifests itself in various ways, including the creation of organizations, the struggle for access to land, the preservation of life through actions such as the abandonment of territory, cultural expressions as a means of gathering or strengthening community ties, and the work in organizational networks. As Kohan (2020) points out, understanding education and training as an act of emancipation and independence establishes a difference with the traditional conceptions of civil resistance.

Finally, as Muñoz (2015) suggests, civil resistances in Montes de María have been used along the difficult path of peacemaking. Regardless of the form and nature of resistance, the civilian population has engaged in resistance with the goal of attaining a stable and enduring peace with social justice, as stated in the 2016 Final Peace Agreement.

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