

# Collective actions in Catatumbo as a means for occupational reconfiguration of the agricultural sector

*Las acciones colectivas en el Catatumbo como medio de reconfiguración ocupacional del sector agrícola*

*Ações coletivas em Catatumbo como forma de reconfiguração ocupacional do setor agrícola*

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**Received:** May 23<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**Accepted:** March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Available:** May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**How to cite this article:**

Vargas Prieto, A. y Figueroa Córdoba, D. P. (2020). Collective actions in Catatumbo as a means for occupational reconfiguration of the agricultural sector. *Cooperativismo & Desarrollo*, 28(117), 1-22.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.16925/2382-4220.2020.02.05>

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Artículo de investigación. <https://doi.org/10.16925/2382-4220.2020.02.05>

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## Abstract

The armed conflict in Colombia has generated economic and social consequences that affect the understanding of local and regional development, bringing with them problems of land control in territories that have geostrategic advantages; such is the case of Catatumbo. Armed groups have entrenched themselves within this region, generating cultural rupture and limiting the occupational projects and hopes of its residents. This has resulted in a Territorial Vulnerability Index that reveals high rates of unemployment, violations of human rights and restrictions on processes of social participation. For this reason, this chapter analyzes the forms of collective resistance and their relationship with the changes in the productive and occupational practices of campesinos<sup>1</sup> in the Catatumbo region. For this, it is important to analyze what is understood by collective action, occupational forms and the occupational expectations of a group of farmers, under a methodological framework of action research with three techniques of information collection: interviews, observation and workshops. The results made it possible to identify associativity, daily solidarity and strategic alliances as forms of resistance in the territory; collective actions that have determined the roles, personal history and occupational projections of its inhabitants based on individual and collective understandings, helping to reconfigure the territory and their occupations in search of alternatives for territorial development.

**Keywords:** collective action, occupational reconfiguration, territoriality, territorialization, territorial development.

## Resumen

El conflicto armado en Colombia ha generado consecuencias económicas y sociales que inciden en la comprensión del desarrollo local y regional, y que además traen consigo problemáticas de dominio de la tierra en territorios que cuentan con ventajas geoestratégicas como es el caso del Catatumbo. Esta región ha sufrido el asentamiento de grupos armados que generan rupturas culturales, y que además limitan los proyectos y expectativas ocupacionales de sus pobladores, lo cual se traduce en un Índice de Vulnerabilidad Territorial que devela altos índices de desempleo, vulneración de derechos humanos y coartación de procesos de participación social. Es por esta razón que el presente capítulo analiza las formas de resistencia colectiva y la relación de estas con las transformaciones de las prácticas productivas y ocupacionales de los campesinos en la región del Catatumbo. Para ello, es importante analizar lo que se entiende por acción colectiva, comprender las formas de ocupación y las expectativas ocupacionales de un grupo de campesinos, bajo un marco metodológico de investigación-acción con tres técnicas de recolección de la información: entrevistas; observación y talleres. Los resultados permitieron identificar en la asociatividad, las solidaridades cotidianas y en las alianzas estratégicas formas de resistencia en el territorio; acciones colectivas que han determinado los roles, la historia personal y las proyecciones ocupacionales de sus habitantes a partir de las comprensiones individuales como colectivas, que, finalmente reconfiguran el territorio y la ocupación en busca de alternativas para el desarrollo territorial.

**Palabras clave:** Acciones colectivas, reconfiguración ocupacional, territorialidad, territorialización, desarrollo territorial.

## Resumo

*O conflito armado na Colômbia gerou consequências econômicas e sociais que afetam a compreensão do desenvolvimento local e regional e também trazem consigo problemas de controle da terra em territórios com*

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1 The term "campesino", in the Colombian context, can be roughly translated as "peasant proprietor".

*vantagens geoestratégica como é o caso de Catatumbo. Essa região sofreu o assentamento de grupos armados que geram rupturas culturais e que também limitam os projetos e expectativas ocupacionais de seus habitantes, o que se traduz em um Índice de Vulnerabilidade territorial que revela altos índices de desemprego, violação de direitos humanos e restrição de processos de participação social. É por esse motivo que este capítulo analisa as formas de resistência coletiva e sua relação com as mudanças nas práticas produtivas e ocupacionais dos camponeses na região de Catatumbo. Para isso, é importante analisar o que se entende por ação coletiva, entender as formas de ocupação e as expectativas ocupacionais de um grupo de camponeses, sob um quadro metodológico de pesquisa-ação com três técnicas de coleta de informações: entrevistas; observação e oficinas. Os resultados permitiram identificar formas de resistência no território em associatividades, solidariedade cotidiana e alianças estratégicas; Ações coletivas que determinam os papéis, a história pessoal e as projeções ocupacionais de seus habitantes com base em entendimentos individuais e coletivos, que finalmente reconfiguram o território e a ocupação em busca de alternativas para o desenvolvimento territorial.*

**Palavras-chave:** Ações coletivas, reconfiguração ocupacional, territorialidade, territorialização, desenvolvimento territorial.

## Introduction

The armed conflict in Colombia has been demarcated by historical periods ranging from the colonization of the territories (1948-1953), to the persecution of campesino organizations (1957-1964). These events, according to Preciado (2006), resulted in the emergence of violence and the formation of armed groups due to pressure from governments of a civil and military order. This conflict has intensified over the last fifty years, resulting in the formation of highly structured groups as a confrontational shock force against the State, generating decentralization and the constitution of regional movements that promote local and regional seizures of power, understood as a process of expansion of territorial control by guerrillas and paramilitaries (Gutiérrez and Sánchez, 2005).

For Wieland (2008), this internal conflict in Colombia has generated consequences of an economic, political and social nature that are anything other than a frame of reference to explain the specific conditions that frame Colombian development, within which lies the close relationship between the conflict and the "criminal economy"; described by Gutiérrez and Sánchez (2005) as a form of political economy that establishes alliances with drug trafficking, mediated by illicit activities, within which are the expansion of production and distribution of drug cartels. According to Avellaneda (2011), the "criminal economy" requires territorial control, which generates land problems and which is at the same time the cause and consequence of violence, given the characteristics of rural territories. This idea is developed by Osorio (2006) who considers that the territories offer conditions of strategic military importance,

becoming places of passage, supply, refuge and establishment. "In the same way, they also have an important real and potential economic value, whether due to natural or mining resources, or because they are points of infrastructural influence that add value to land" (Osorio, 2006, p.57).

The land problem and the insurgent military deployment, according to Ortega (2011), have significantly affected strategic municipalities in the departments of Cesar, Bolívar, Antioquia, Norte de Santander, Valle del Cauca, Orinoquía, Putumayo and Meta. According to Hernández (2006), the establishment of armed groups has influenced settlement processes, labor relations, and the formation of political and social actors, given the political coercion used in various regions of the country; in addition to causing ruptures in the cultural environment, loss of assets and family disintegration. In the same way, this type of coercive action limits the occupational projects and life expectancies of the campesino populations, the victims of forced displacement, causing abrupt changes in lifestyle and occupation, especially in work and free-time activities (Gómez, Torres and Rodríguez, 2000).

The analysis of the aforementioned problems allows for an approach to the situation of Catatumbo, a region that, according to the "Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social" or National Council for Economic and Social Policy (Conpes 3739, 2013), is established as a strategic rearguard zone for illegal groups due to its economic and geostrategic conditions, including: its location on the border with Venezuela, the passage of the Caño-Limón pipeline, the mining of gold and marble, in addition to the existence of road corridors that communicate the east with the north of the country (DHI, 2005). Since the 1970s, Catatumbo has been a meeting point for insurgent groups such as the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL) and the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), groups with strong political presence in the municipalities, where insurgent actions have generated displacement and problems of a social nature. This is why the Catatumbo area is vitally important in terms of analyzing various problems that affect the campesino population (Serrano, 2009). For its part, the characterization carried out by Conpes 3739 (2013) in the Catatumbo region, reported 51,995 people registered as victims of the armed conflict, a figure that represents 10.3% of the victims in North Santander and 0.24% of the country's total. In this order of ideas, the Territorial Vulnerability Index (TVI), that measures indicators in relation to forced displacement, homicide, kidnapping, theft, coverage of coca crops, among others, shows a level of vulnerability above that of the department or country; the most affected municipalities being Tarra, Teorama, San Calixto and Tibú. In addition, there is evidence of growth in the unemployment rate,

which for 2008 reported 9.9%, reaching 12.2% in 2011. Conpes 3739 (2013), based on the data obtained by the general census (2005), also states that Catatumbo shows a low index regarding the economically active population (EAP), ranging between 33% and 46.5%; a situation that impacts on the poverty rates of the region's households. Most of the employment opportunities are in the agricultural sector, followed by the commercial sector. Agricultural activity shows high yield levels; however, the state of the road infrastructure hinders commercialization and accessibility (Conpes 3739, 2013). Another factor that affects the productivity of Catatumbo is the strong predominance of coca crops. This leads to territory control actions by insurgent groups in order to expand cultivation of the illicit crop, exerting significant pressure on small farmers who work in the area, who must either abandon their crops or join the illegal cultivation chain. Repercussions of these disputes in Catatumbo include economic and food blockades in the area, resulting in displacement or in the transformation of productive activity in the region; particularly for large numbers of campesinos, settlers and indigenous people (DHI, 2005). In terms of poverty, and giving continuity to the report of Conpes 3739 (2013), according to Census data (2005), Catatumbo exceeds departmental figures, with a multidimensional poverty index of 73% when compared to the 58.2% reported for North Santander, showing that the multidimensional poverty index of the municipalities is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Serrano (2009) describes other problems of a social nature related to the disintegration of campesino associations and organizations, generating "restrictions in the processes of political debate and in the rights of people and organizations" (p.142); in addition "the failures in the management of the territory by the State as a protective entity, have increased the differential in productivity and development of the municipalities of Catatumbo with respect to the country as a whole" (p.132).

As it has been seen, some of the problems derived from the armed conflict within the Catatumbo region have been approached from economic and social perspectives. However, from the perspective of occupations as an action of resistance, there are not many indications, except those reported from productivity and economic activities. From the analysis of the global situation, it can be thought that, among the problems associated with the area, are those that are closely related to the forced change of productive activities or changes in habits and routines due to displacement and other actions of violence against a civilian population. However, the analysis of situations that impact occupations in the territory must be considered in greater depth. All these reasons generate the motivation to approach the subject, given that it is considered a relevant factor for personal development and that it transcends and impacts social and human development in the territory. Indeed, understanding the

ways in which occupations of the population of Catatumbo have been reconfigured following the territorial ruptures caused by the armed conflict, leads to the posing of the following question: What collective actions favor the occupational reconfiguration of the campesinos of the Catatumbo?

To answer the question, three specific objectives are proposed: the first seeks to identify existing collective actions in the Catatumbo region, the second categorizes the current occupations and occupational expectations of the region's farmers, and the third involves the analysis of the relationship between the described collective actions and the occupational reconfiguration. The chosen methodology was Participatory Action Research - PAR, which "is a continuous spiral process by which the facts are analyzed, the problems are conceptualized, pertinent actions are planned and executed, passing onto a period of conceptualization" (Bautista, 2011, p.106). For its development, it requires the identification of the leaders and a way of exercising leadership, since the problematization requires real and concrete community interest.

Three (3) information collection techniques were determined: interviews, observation and workshops, from which the categories and points of convergence were analyzed using data triangulation.

What follows is the presentation of three (3) relevant actions that have been developed in the territory as individual and collective daily expressions; in this sense, the findings of the collective actions, described by the group of Catatumbo farmers who participated in the field work, are presented.

## 1. Actions for demanding respect

One of the mechanisms used by the campesinos for demanding respect from the armed groups and as a representation of the group before the State, is associativity, which has also become an opportunity to remain in the territory, as evidenced in the following narrative:

Well, in the region, there has also been an abandonment by the government, a disregard of the campesinos, in the midst of the violence, since human rights have also been violated ..., then, since 2005, the campesinos had to organize or we had to organize ourselves as campesinos to demand our rights ... to demand from the government that we need to live in our region because elsewhere we have nothing to live with ... we demand respect for the campesino sector and (a state of) permanence in the region. (Interview 4, 2017).

Other findings regarding associativity in this region suggest some type of direct or indirect intervention by the FARC, transforming the way in which campesinos think over the last 13 years, characterized by solidarity speeches and forms of collective conflict resolution through a Political-administrative organization, that is, through community action boards; until the intervention of ASCAMCAT, also allowing them to stay and modify their personal and collective expectations in Catatumbo. Therefore, associating is a strategy that aims to modify the forms of power; this in coherence with the definition of Osorio (2006). This political affiliation can be recognized in several narratives, for example:

Of course, from the time the comrades of the FARC entered into discussions with the government, it became an important change for the civilian population ... (Interview 5, 2017).

The narratives of the campesinos also denote a symbolic link with Association and with community boards, which support a historical identity that arises as a consequence of the armed conflict in the area. It could be thought that the birth of Association marks a historical milestone of collective organization that is recognized by the farmers of the region. It is important to mention that empowerment is more visible in the discourse of the interviewees who currently exercise roles within associations, as it allows them to recognize the organizational structure in each of the areas and municipalities, in addition to making use of a more elaborate and conceptually enriched discourse, as seen in the next paragraph:

In 2005, I was 14 years old. I took part in MOJUCA, which was a youth movement in Catatumbo; later it became a REBEL YOUTH. Once a rebel youth, I isolated myself; became part of the support team of the middle zone. My colleagues changed and now I am part of the village support because in each village we have a support committee and so we have been working with the association. (Interview 1, 2017).

In the Catatumbo region, associativity is a collective action that allows for resistance in the territory and has also generated a construction of symbolism that surrounds concepts such as solidarity behavior and the common good. This reaffirms the positions of Melucci (1985) and Osorio (2006), who consider that for a social movement to be considered "collective action" it must be characterized by solidarity behavior, as its ultimate goal is to modify norms through mechanisms that validate

demands and clarify the confrontation between power structures. Therefore, solidarity is clearly defined as another collective action in Catatumbo, which is described in more detail below.

## 1.1. Solidarity and daily resistance

An analysis of Solidarity is based on two principles: the first is a social cohesion that defines solidarity mediated by affective ties and collective consciousness, and the second principle corresponds to instrumental objectives and affective satisfaction, that is, those solidarity actions that seek to supply economic needs, according to what was stated by Durkheim (1987). Thus, in the reports of the campesinos, it is evident that the understanding of the principle of solidarity focuses on collaboration and mutual aid in various situations, especially when solving social needs and economically supporting neighbors and families, as well as for conflict resolution where organizations such as community action boards and ASCAMCAT support solidarity actions for the optimization of work and the common good:

Over there, there are no roads, over there, there is no one to fix the roads. Those that have mules help to bring the shopping to the house as not everyone has the means to borrow them. (Interview 1, 2017).

This account suggests that situations for which greater solidarity is made evident, are those related to the achievement of instrumental objectives for the improvement of the quality of life of the population; that is, groups organizing to repair roads in poor condition, to construct houses, fixing schools, coming together in cases of serious illnesses that require financial support to be able to make up for the inefficiency of the health system, in situations of conflict between neighbors in which the community action boards and armed groups intervene, with the latter intervening when the problem exceeds the political-administrative tools of the Community Action Board. On the other hand, there are expressions of solidarity and social cohesion for the satisfaction of affective needs, which are largely mediated by family ties and friendly relations. One of the factors that affects solidarity actions within the village is the time spent in the territory. These links are strengthened through participation in "combites" or meetings between acquaintances of the village, as well as by collaboration between members of the family in case of illness, or the taking over of roles related to cultivation:

... we all know each other because I have lived my whole life there ... any situation that befalls a friend, an illness or something, we enter into solidarity with that friend; anything they need and we can get, there we are. (Interview 3, 2017).

The evidence found in the accounts of the rural population of Catatumbo is related to what Osorio (2006) proposes; solidarity facilitates the resolution of problems of daily life and contributes to the survival of families, their social sense and the community. It is also expressed through participation in social events, generating some "breaks" from everyday life, such as the patron saint festivities, "combites", local and sporting events that are considered forms of recreation that alleviate the "difficult situation" of living in the middle of the armed conflict:

I also like to sing and sometimes at night I invite friends to listen to me sing things related to the land, to the area; they know me for that ability. (Interview 4, 2017).

These narratives affirm that the principles of solidarity focus on collaboration and mutual help in various situations to solve needs; in addition, there is a strong recognition of individual and collective need. This was also made evident when farmers prioritized goals in the research workshop, where it was shown that within the projections of the territory, the considered actions seek the common good and the reciprocity of solidarity of its inhabitants. Therefore, solidarity accomplishes instrumental objectives, favors social cohesion and also fulfills objectives of affective satisfaction. The generation of solidarity networks has also generated the formation of other alliances, which are described below as another collective action.

## 1.2. Temporary or Definitive Alliances

The interviews show that the forms of campesino participation, such as associations and rural community action boards, are permeated by a discourse very close to that of the FARC, although this link is not mentioned explicitly by the campesinos; phrases such as "the FARC comrades" and "the peace process with the FARC" suggest alliances by ideological affinity:

...because we know well that the FARC fought for a better Colombia, one with a possibility of social justice and rights. (Interview 5, 2017).

As described by Osorio (2006), these types of affinity alliances have been established as a result of the feeling of "abandonment" referred to by the campesinos when they mention state intervention in the area; belonging to associations and community action boards generates possibilities for political recognition and survival in the territory. In addition, the farmers of the Catatumbo region have also recognized strategic alliances as a means to guarantee productive projection and maintain their agricultural activities in the hope of improving the marketing of their products and their quality of life:

the government has not fulfilled its part yet, there has been no will ... the peace agreements that were made and signed in Havana favor us a lot because the first point is comprehensive rural reform, which is land, which is the use of land and hence the development plan, to be able to cultivate, to be able to have roads in good condition to get our produce to market, to have trade, to have cooperatives, where we can get hold of good produce to supply what we need. (Interview 4, 2017).

This type of survival alliance allows the Catatumbo campesinos to coexist with other armed groups in a "relatively" secure environment, which is evidenced in the following paragraph:

At least for now, with the peace process that exists with the FARC, no more conflict has been seen ... we have to live together there in the middle of that confrontation and we are opposed. It seems that we are working on the farm because, alone, we cannot say to them "look you cannot be living with us because it will make it difficult for us". (Interview 1, 2017).

These findings corroborate what was described by Osorio (2006). The Catatumbo campesinos have developed an affinity with the political and social positions of the FARC, generating a certain degree of "legitimization" of the relationship with the armed groups; it is striking that the campesinos prioritize those actions where collective well-being prevails in and for the territory. For this reason, the peace process leads to a possibility of change and the implementation of their demands before the State, through the campesino reserve areas.

The results show that actions to demand respect from the State and armed groups are relevant in Catatumbo; expressions of solidarity in daily life and temporary alliances as collective actions that allow them to resist conflict in the region.

The analysis of these campesino positions requires an analysis of their social and productive projections, so it is necessary to consider the occupational component of the campesinos; an aspect that allows us to answer the question posed for this monograph and which continues its development in the next section.

## 2. Occupational reconfiguration in the territory

To determine how collective actions favor the occupational reconfiguration of the Catatumbo campesinos, this section is made up of two items; the first describes occupations in the territory, and the second considers the concept for the occupational reconfiguration of the Catatumbo campesinos.

### 2.1. Occupation in the territory

The concept of Occupation considers two perspectives; one linked to its significance, and the other linked to its meaning; according to the theoretical postulates of Pérez, Rojas & Uribe (2011), understanding that "Occupation is a process, since it is based on the development of a set of actions in which people are involved, with personal and sociocultural meaning, based on the permanent interrelation of temporal and topological aspects that promote changes in the life goals of subjects and communities" (p.48). The significance of this work responds to the cultural and personal conceptualizations (history, habits, socially determined daily activities) in which the Catatumbo campesinos are engaged, that is, the stories linked to occupational histories and to the execution of roles and routines, while the meaning considers the expectations and interests that motivate their occupations in the territory.

### 2.2. The Significance of Occupation.

From the interviews of the farmers, it is possible to identify that their work history begins at an early age (between 12 and 14 years old), carrying out agricultural activities as part of a traditionally taught trade, transmitted from generation to generation:

When I started working with agriculture, I learned how to work with my grandfather. He was the one who taught me how we worked, how to plant a bush. From then on, I started working and cultivating too. (Interview 2, 2017).

Other occupational activities are determined by their association to ASCAMCAT, that has an important place in the work history of the interviewed farmers, who had a role within the association from a very young age; between 14 and 27 years. This has been decisive in their job profiles and in their social recognition as leaders within their communities.

Regarding the roles, all participate in responsibilities within traditional family structures. However, the distribution of tasks, especially those of cooking and child-care, continue to be of female prevalence, while men take on housekeeping roles when women are absent from the home for work or illness:

... I have always liked helping her with the house chores, I have liked collaborating with the women to wash the dishes. If she is sick, I cook. She works with a sister and they make meat skewers and sell them in Juan Pablo's farmhouse. There, they leave at five in the afternoon and arrive between midnight and one in the morning. (Interview 2, 2017).

However, a transformation of female roles is also evident in the region. This is a consequence of the work carried out by their husbands in associations or in community action boards, allowing for women to be linked to agricultural tasks, especially when men find themselves occupied in other activities related to ASCAMCAT. Similarly, social and territorial conditions have promoted the visibility of women in the association, which have allowed them to assume political and social roles, in favor of gender recognition:

Some cultivate and others do not. Only the mom's work has anything to do with cooking as a housewife. The women in the organization have other roles, such as the woman responsible for organizing the women. They are interested in being organized. They already understand that we have to be organized... (Interview 3, 2017).

Within the understanding of the meaning of occupation is also the 'organization of time' that, in the case of the men who are part of the support team, is distributed between agricultural tasks and social or administrative activities for the association, which is why leisure time is not a priority for most adults. Leisure activities include playing soccer, drinking beer and participating in fairs and parties:

I have to dedicate free time to the family, as it sometimes goes neglected due to work, as it is our commitment to organize people. My partner already understands my situation and so we have managed to adjust. (Interview 3, 2017).

Regarding the execution of roles and activities related to education and training, it can be mentioned that none of them completed high school studies, and that only one of them has been trained in short courses that are not related to agricultural work in the region; knowledge which he/she has not been able to put into practice:

When I was studying, I did a course at the SENA on fish farming, and I did a dairy course, but I still have not found the opportunity (to use them). I have the diplomas at home. (Interview 1, 2017).

In coherence with what was stated by Pérez, Rojas and Uribe (2011) as "subjective terrain", it is observed that the occupational histories and the current occupational task of the campesinos of the Catatumbo region, seek the achievement of individual goals but also project the achievement of mutual and community goals, where the significance of one's occupation has a direct impact on the appropriation of territory. This is linked to the generational teaching of agricultural activities and the way in which they assume roles according to traditions, but which have also allowed women and young people to assume new roles of political and social participation thanks to the dynamics that are being experienced in the region.

### 2.3. The Meaning of Occupation.

The results, in relation to the occupational projection of the Catatumbo campesinos, show a strong interest in training on topics related to agricultural technification, considering it relevant to make cultivation activities more efficient:

I would like to train myself, maybe become a technician in something, a technician in agriculture. I have always liked the idea of agriculture, being a coffee technician, or working with cocoa. (It would be great if) we could be taught how to cultivate, how to perform agriculture better ... we don't know techniques, we don't know anything. (Interview 1, 2017).

Occupational projections stem from meaningful occupation, that is, when people show a taste for working and living in the countryside, considering it a space that meets their basic needs, enjoying protective factors such as healthy eating and healthy spaces. They also project work in the territory; the quality of life of their families as the central axis of survival and projection of collective actions in the region. In their territory, they project the satisfaction of economic, social and personal needs from the recognition of their work as campesinos, as a significant and dignifying trade; the countryside sustains life for this group of campesinos at the local and regional level:

Yes, I like the countryside ... (elsewhere) everything we consume comes with chemicals, while in the countryside, if you want to eat an orange, you just pick one; a bunch of plantains the same, yucca, milk, all poultry produce, whatever. In that sense I wouldn't want to change the countryside. (Interview 3, 2017).

Other reflections on occupational projection are focused on family interests, considering priorities that have to do with the access of children and young people to education and other priority services such as health, leisure and sports activities. It is for this reason that it is important to invest in improving roads and means of transportation in order to guarantee quality access that implies shorter travel times to health or educational centers in the villages:

as many were denied opportunities here, many young people that studied are working in the fields because there was no other alternative but to help their parents do their things; the issue of opportunities has been very deficient ... it has resulted in a population of very broken young people... (Interview 5, 2017).

The occupational projections of the Catatumbo campesinos corroborate what Palacios (2017) proposed with regards to their collective perspective, since through these projections it is more feasible for them to survive poverty and oppression. Throughout these results, it has been noted that this group of campesinos has similar perceptions regarding their goals and objectives for and in the territory, mediated by solidarity expressions that strengthen territorial roots. It is important to recognize the meaning of occupation in the territory, which considers the countryside as a context with less contamination, that facilitates first-hand access to natural resources and that dignifies the work of the campesinos. For this reason, the proposals for work

and joint construction with the campesinos must consider the ecological impact of occupations as proposed by Méndez (2016), seeking a balance between the quality of life of ecosystems and territorial development in Catatumbo, since practices such as the burning of the "patequillo" are of environmental concern to the region's campesinos. For this reason, the following section considers the results of those territorial reconfigurations that have generated new practices and new understandings around the territory.

### 3. Concept of occupational reconfiguration

To develop the concept of occupational reconfiguration, it is important to return to the concept of territorial reconfiguration proposed by Nates (2006), which highlights changes in territorialization and territoriality in light of new practices, symbolism, affectation and transformation of productive activities, which in part have been contemplated under the scope of collective actions and the concept of occupation as narrated and experienced by the campesinos of the Catatumbo region.

#### 3.1. Symbolisms in the territory.

For approximately 13 years, the forms of campesino association have generated "new practices" in the territory, marking possibilities for social mobilization and also generating new occupational options for men and women in the region.

Participation in these groups has generated a strong sense of regional belonging that is characterized by the pursuit of common goals in search of social well-being, which is why the sense of territory is placed in those territorial projections that they consider priority and very important: urgent actions for the protection of the environment, followed by social justice and crop substitution respectively:

... and the agreement that we signed today for the substitution plan is the way out, ending the issue of crops for illicit use via a transformation with everyone understanding that with coca you can go to jail... (Interview 5, 2017).

The symbolic concept for their territory is determined by the respect of areas for cultivation and for the planting of trees, in addition to the representation of the

"countryside" as a setting for production and subsistence, as well as a place that is linked to their life stories and with the sense of 'know how'. None of the interviewees considers the possibility of going to the city. On the contrary, they project development possibilities in their region based on collective work strategies:

taking care of the environment also keeps everything very favorable because if we do not take care of the environment, everything collapses ... what we always take care of first in the countryside are the water sources, the mountains that have never been touched, one always works where one cultivates. (Interview 2, 2017).

In other words, territorialization is related to permanence, with the meaning of occupation coming from personal and family history, and for this reason, it is the sum of the daily resistance of this group of campesinos in the region. In addition, it considers the territorial projections that focus on the care and sustainability of the environment, so as to guarantee healthy environments for their children and relatives.

### 3.2. Transformation of productive activities.

The most relevant factor that justifies the transformation of productive activities in the region is due to the low price offers for the harvest products that occur in Catatumbo, such as yuca, plantain, coffee, and corn. For this reason, campesinos resort to planting coca. The income generated by this crop makes supporting their family groups possible, therefore, coca has gained strength as a crop over the last 15 years. Although the prevalence of this productive activity is high, the farmers plan to establish cooperatives that improve the offer to buy their products with guarantees of efficient transportation, hoping to modify their cultivation practices again:

We have several agricultural crops on the farm, but the majority is coca. There is yuca, plantain, coffee, corn, that which one sows, but there are no guarantees of support, there are no collection centers, so we have to ... It is almost like the coca governs us because with coca we support our family, with coca our children study. (Interview 2, 2017).

Coca cultivation has raised other concerns among the region's campesinos, as this harvesting activity has brought with it other practices that threaten the environment; one of them being the burning of the "patequillo". This has been prohibited

by the community action boards in some areas - especially in San Calixto - however, some farmers carry it out despite the restrictions.

... I do not know; I think that around here you don't hear people talking much about burning the patequillo. That is when they take the crude oil that runs through the pipeline and they process it outdoors to get fuel to work the coca leaf itself. They take out something similar to the ACPM ... that goes into some pots and those residues that remain are burned in the open air, and that is a contaminant. (Interview 1, 2017).

Urgent requests are made by the Catatumbo campesinos to the government regarding technical assistance, agricultural training taking into account regional characteristics, training for environmental conservation, support for cooperatives and the formation of collection centers for fair marketing of their crops and the substitution of crops, since they value the task of sowing as a generational practice that they need to resume and that must receive fair payment.

As already seen, the campesinos justify the cultivation of coca due to the lack of representation by the State. However, it is a topic that for them continues to be a taboo. During the interviews, the word "coca" was mentioned in a low or fast voice and accompanied by justifications. They comment that for this reason they feel watched over and discriminated against. Additionally, their territory has constructions based on social and imaginary representations, where they consider that the campesino population is generalized as an insurgent population, but that on the contrary, they recognize that coca cultivation affects the country socially and economically:

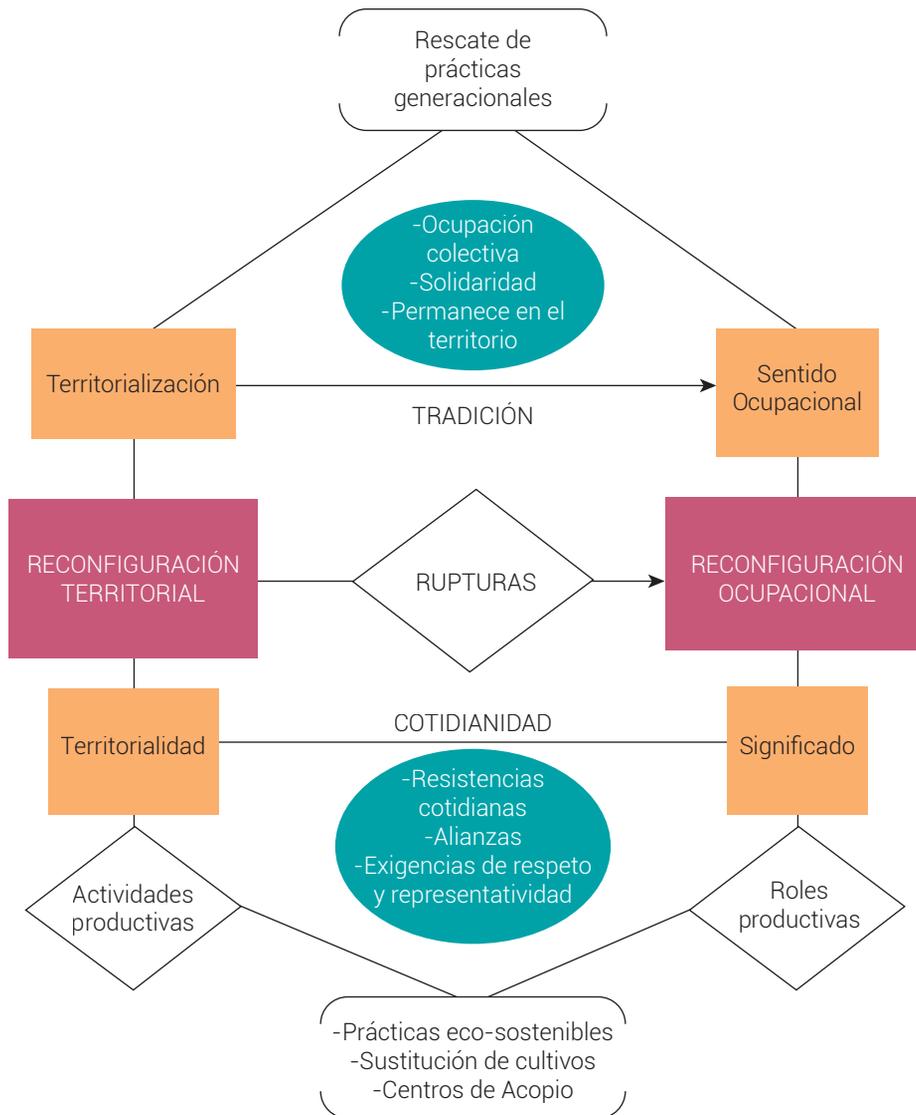
*... so maybe the government will comply with those of us who welcome substitution in the peace talks. That would be a change for everyone because coca is not what everyone says it is; a benefit. You cultivate it and profit monetarily, but that is doing a lot of harm to society.. (Interview 1, 2017).*

These transformations, in productive and non-productive activities, are accompanied by the eagerness of representation of the campesinos before the government. As has already been seen, this is the motivation for the formation of associations and other forms of social participation, with the aim of achieving legal benefits in favor of the land. Therefore, they refer to hope in the peace process and project a future for their territories. They plan to strengthen work in the field and they ask for guarantees

for rural work. The presence of associativity in their daily lives has a strong representation as collective action. Although the discourse shows that these are still ideas in the planning phase, closely linked to the expectation of opening up opportunities in the countryside through the signing of the post-agreement, it is interesting that these farmers project their competitive expectations around the guarantees of rural reform. This makes it clear that the Association has taken pains to project and strengthen compliance with its commercial objectives through the training of the campesinos in topics that surround strategies for rural development.

The collective capacity of the Catatumbo campesinos must be considered as a strength for the deliberative work proposed by Fals Borda. In addition, it recognizes the ways in which campesinos use natural resources, understanding the pressing environmental concern and that eco-sustainable approaches should be considered in accordance with those posited by Wilcock. It has been seen that one of the interests of this group of campesinos is to remain on their land, since all their projections point to the improvement of opportunities in the field, enhancing their capacities and their knowledge. Therefore, it is worth thinking about the "occupational reconfiguration" as an emerging category of this work, which considers two relevant elements: The first, is due to the understanding of those conflictive events that generate ruptures in the daily lives of people and communities -which in this case are due to the problems associated with the armed conflict in the Catatumbo area-; and a second element, that considers occupational history individually and collectively, in addition to prioritizing expectations in relation to the life projects of people in their territories, which determine new occupational directions that contribute to the human and territorial development of its inhabitants. Therefore, thinking about development leads us along transdisciplinary paths where the perspective of occupation must be considered as one more element that mobilizes and reconfigures local, territorial and regional expectations.

The territorial reconfiguration proposed by Nates (2006), and the occupational reconfiguration as an emerging category of this study, are characterized by ruptures that lead to the substitution of practices in everyday life and that infallibly modify territoriality and territorialization, bringing about a transformation of roles and meanings in the territory that necessarily summons collectivity as an action of resistance. That is why, talking about occupational reconfiguration must consider what Palacios (2017) conceptualizes as collective occupations. This is necessary in order to rescue the social identity and sense of community that the Catatumbo campesinos have always had. With the cultural, territorial and historical aspects of the region taken into account, Figure 1 shows the relationship of categories that allows for an understanding of the occupational reconfiguration approach.



**Figure 1. Categorical relationship**

Source: own work

The relationships between these categories makes it possible to determine that the actions to demand respect from the armed groups and to make them visible to the State, as well as solidarity and alliances, favor the occupational reconfiguration of the campesinos in Catatumbo since, as has already been seen, occupation is a transverse variable to all the collective actions present in the territory. The reconfiguration of the territory is not possible without the resistance actions of its inhabitants, and at this time, the Catatumbo campesinos have consolidated new ways of occupying

themselves and new projections of work and training, both personal and collective, that constitute occupational reconfiguration as long as the campesinos continue to be active agents in their process of change; and this is visible in the collective actions that are currently being developed and transformed in Catatumbo.

## Conclusions

This investigation allowed us to recognize that the most representative collective actions in the Catatumbo region are those that demand respect from the armed groups and make the group of campesinos visible to the State, making association a means to make demands and achieve social and political participation. It was also possible to verify that the current occupations of the Catatumbo campesinos are related to agricultural activity, which in addition to being a generational legacy are also a reason to continue their struggle as they consider that the cultivation of coca has brought with it social, environmental and economic problems in the region.

In addition, it has been determined that the area is marked by transformations in the occupational roles of women and men thanks to the community's interest in participating in spaces of social mobilization, such as associations and community action boards.

Other findings are based on occupational expectations that are not only individual but also collective, prioritizing goals of territorial projection in favor of improving the quality of life of the inhabitants through agricultural training, preservation of the environment and fair marketing of the products harvested in the region.

The collective actions present in Catatumbo favor occupational reconfiguration, since by linking these categories it was possible to establish that daily resistance actions have modified the occupational expectations of campesinos, and in turn reconfigured the territory, that is, practices are transforming productive and territorial symbolism. For this reason, occupational reconfiguration emerges as a concept that relieves the meaning of collective actions since reconfiguration requires daily breaks that promote resistance in conflict scenarios, and that require an understanding of individual and collective occupations located in specific territories.

The use of the PAR method and its techniques helped identify existing collective actions in the region, the categorization of occupations and the occupational expectations of farmers. It was also possible to relate the collective actions present in the territory. For this, the analysis of the narratives of the interviews was relevant, allowing us to know first-hand the living conditions, the way in which they have transformed their resistance through collective participation, and the significance and meanings of

the territory as viewed by the campesinos. In addition, the triangulation of data allowed the narratives, expectations and projections, thrown into the research workshop, to be articulated and theoretical observations to be made, revealing the participation of the residents in the research process. The results for the recognition of collective actions made it possible to determine that associativity in the region is a form of collectivity that generates social representation, allows campesino permanence in the territory and has modified symbolisms that consolidate solidarity behavior and the common good, which is why campesinos give high value to solidarity actions for solving problems of everyday life.

The perception of abandonment of the territory by the State has generated a type of closeness with the armed groups present in the territory, for which they highlight the peace process as a hopeful option for achieving common goals in favor of territorial development, mitigating the everyday situations and coexistence with armed groups that are considered risky due to the armed conflict, but which must also allow for the reconfiguration of their life projects.

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