

**International  
Institute of  
Social Studies**

*Erasmus*

## **Return to Colombia: Experiences of Victims of the Armed Conflict**

A Research Paper presented by:

***Vannia Lorena Palomo Quintero***  
(Colombia)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Human Rights, Gender and Conflict Studies: Social Justice Perspective  
(SJP)**

Specialization:

**Conflict and Peace Studies**

Members of the Examining Committee:

Kees Biekart  
Dubravka Zarkov

The Hague, The Netherlands  
December 2018

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***Inquiries:***

International Institute of Social Studies  
P.O. Box 29776  
2502 LT The Hague  
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460  
e: [info@iss.nl](mailto:info@iss.nl)  
w: [www.iss.nl](http://www.iss.nl)  
fb: <http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl>  
twitter: [@issnl](https://twitter.com/issnl)

***Location:***

Kortenaerkade 12  
2518 AX The Hague  
The Netherlands

*In memoriam of Julio Arévalo, a being of the Sea.*

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## List of Acronyms

CNMH	Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica
CNR	Comisión Nacional de Repatriación
CNRAE	Comisión Nacional para el Retorno de los Argentinos en el Exterior
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FIV	Foro Internacional de Víctimas
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OECD	Organization for Economic and Co-operation Development
RUV	Registro Único de Víctimas
UARIV	Unidad para las Víctimas
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UP	Unión Patriótica

## **Abstract**

The present Research Paper goes through the stories of 10 Colombian victims of the conflict that were forced to migrate abroad. Some of them returned to the country and narrated their experiences. Using specific theories of migration, return, and related concepts, I expose the Colombian case, analysing the conceptualization in contrast with the narrations of the participants. Then, I suggest key points for the attention and reparation of this population, especially now that Colombia is making a historical change to construct the Peace. I appreciate the confidence that all the participants gave to me in this process. I hope I could make visible a hidden reality that deserves recognition and memory so that it never happens again.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Migration is a much studied phenomenon in social sciences, especially after the Second World War. The understanding of human movements around the world has engaged the efforts of scholars, who have linked migration processes to development (Turton 2003). Thus, there are theories that try to explain the migration of people from developing countries, or conflicted ones and the motives that make them return.

This research focuses on the return of forced migrants that experienced a violent situation in Colombia. However, I present alternatives to that theory and show that the context and heterogeneity of migration and return are important when understanding this historical behaviour of the human being. With this research, I hope to enrich the existent theorization around this topic.

## **Keywords**

Return, Forced Migration, Exile, National Identity, Sense of Belonging, Conflict, Reparation.

## **Acknowledgements**

To my family and friends that supported me during the time that it took me to achieve this dream. Thank you for never letting me down.

To the participants in this research, those who gave me the confidence to hear their words and make them visible. To those who helped me to get this final step. Thank you.

To ISS community, my Supervisor, Second Reader, and all the amazing people that let me enjoy this travel in The Hague as the best experience ever. Thank you.



*“The world of exile helps you to be resilient, I define myself as the Cardón Guajiro. I believe that all of us that has the exile as our homeland, take in one or another kind a Cardón Guajiro inside of us, which is that plant that grows up in the Guajira desert, and that the wind and sand shakes, and the brutal rain wet. The Cardón, despite all of that, grows up erect, and has the virtue of ... in the middle of that blazing sun, it springs from its inside a flower called Iguaracha, with a wonderful red crimson, that in the middle of the huge sand and of that sun is the best metaphor of life, because the Cardón is resilient and grows up erect... we are like that... why? Because many of us have had to reinvent us”.*

*(Hugo Paternina 2018, exile in Spain).*

# Introduction

During years of armed conflict in Colombia, thousands of people have left the country. These Colombians migrated to different countries in order to save their lives and their families. The violence experienced in their country of birth or the threats they lived through, made them flee. Some of them were refugees, others stayed in an irregular situation in the host country, but a portion of others decided to return to Colombia. The experience of violence in the country, in addition to the experience of migration and the experience of return, constructed a particular situation that needed to be dealt with.

Law 1448 from 2011 indicates that the reparation process for victims of the conflict that migrated abroad will occur in the national territory. However, the Unidad para las Víctimas (UARIV) had developed a route of attention for this population considering three measures that have been regularly applied for victims abroad. On the other hand, the Peace Agreement that the Colombian government signed with the FARC guerrilla specifies the enforcement of the process of return to the country. Despite this, Colombia does not have a policy for the attendance of human rights violations suffered by the victims that migrated and returned. On the contrary, these Colombians are invisible to the Colombian society; the efforts that State Institutions have done are insufficient to understand and to take care of this population.

The objective of this research is to explore the experiences of migration and return to Colombia of victims of the armed conflict, to understand their complexity and particularities and to relate them with the current legislation of reparation. Through an intersectional perspective, this paper will identify who these people are, what they experienced in the receptor country, what are their return experiences, and how they perceived the above mentioned legislation regarding their reparation process as victims of the armed conflict. Going through theory and contrasting it with practical material, I aim to answer the questions:

## Research Question

What shapes the return experiences of victims of the Colombian armed conflict forced to migrate abroad?

### Sub-questions

How have the experiences of forced migration of Colombians victims of the armed conflict been?

Is their sense of belonging and identity affected by the forced migration and return experiences?

How do they relate to the current legislation about reparation of victims of the armed conflict?

## 1.1. Methodology

I started this research looking for Colombian victims of the armed conflict that were forced to migrate abroad and that returned to the country. My interest was to interview people that still are abroad and to know about their migration experience and their perception of return. I also wanted to get to know returnees that decided to stay in Colombia and to interview people that returned but decided to re-emigrate. I aimed at understanding the whole cycle of migration and return.

My snowballing method was facilitated by my previous work experiences in the psychosocial attention for victims of the armed conflict who lived abroad. First, I got in touch with a member of the Foro Internacional de Víctimas (FIV in Spanish), an organization of Colombians in the Diaspora, living in different countries of the world, mainly in Europe. The FIV works since 2014 to recover the voice that many of them lost with exile and makes the situation visible of the exiled victims of the conflict (Raad 2016). The FIV members helped me to contact Eduardo, a member in Rotterdam, who participated in my research and put me in touch with Hugo in Spain, and Natalia in Bogotá. Finally I was able to interview 4 members of the FIV; all of them were political activists in Colombia before the exile and belonged to political and social movements identified with the left wing. At the same time, I contacted my old colleges at Unidad para las Víctimas in Colombia, after introducing my research objective, they told me about the new project that they were working on, regarding attention to returnees, and allowed me to contact some of the participants. In this way, I was able to get in touch with returnees.

Participants migrated from the year 2000 to 2010, experiencing 7 to 24 years abroad. Only two of them migrated within a process of refugee status in the host country (The Netherlands and Switzerland), the others arrived to the host country with a student visa, as tourists or in an irregular situation. The members of the FIV received university education, most of them have a master degree and one of them has a PhD. they have stable jobs, and labour networks. The participants that are not part of the FIV and that are being assisted by the UARIV belong to peasants families, have low incomes, unstable jobs, and most of them didn't receive basic education. Accordingly, the findings below are about the intersection of class with experiences of migration, return, belonging and perception of reparation.

The participants are very different from each other, but they have in common a history of violence: all of them were victims of the Colombian armed conflict and were forced to migrate after suffering painful experiences. Most of them denounced to the Colombian state the violent facts they suffered, 4 of them are not included in the RUV (Natalia, Rafael, Andrés, and Hugo).

I used semi- structured interviews, but all of them were open conversations where the participants narrated their stories and their experiences among 5 main topics: experiences of migration, experience of return, motivation to return, staying or re-emigrating, sense of belonging and perceptions about their reparation process (Law 1448 of 2011 and Peace Agreement). I used intersectionality to approach the data. Then, I categorized the infor-

mation according to my research questions, which allowed me to get the findings I present and finally analyze them taking into account the theoretical framework (see Appendix 2. Interviews details).

## 2. Conceptual Review

### 2.1. Forced Migration and Exile

The analytical framework of migration in contexts of conflict is very broad and diverse. There is no consensus around topics such as forced migration, exile, and return migration, however, there are certain tendencies in the literature regarding these concepts and their application.

First of all, I found it relevant to distinguish between the terms “exile” and “forced migration”. Scholars such as Luis Roniger (2014), explain the concept of exile in the context of the Latin America politics. Roniger argues that the evolution of the term is associated with a certain kind of political punishment to intellectuals or political opponents to a government. According to Roniger, the term “exile” responds to a political profile since the XIX century, when it started to have a role in Latin-American politics: it became a political strategy as well as a way to make politics from a different position, or from abroad (Roniger 2014).

But quickly it became a broader circumstance that affected people from different social classes and education levels, “when participation and political mobilization expanded and became massive, exile evolved from its selective and elitist physiognomy to become a phenomenon that affected the lives of many individuals, including people from the middle and lower classes” (Roniger 2014 p. 15 *author's translation*). But, exile is always related to a political context, “it is important to understand that the processes of both crystallization and transformation of exile as political practice and an exclusion mechanism, with its own impact in the public spheres of the Ibero-American countries” (Roniger 2014 p. 15 *author's translation*).

Exile also entails an emotional relationship with the country of origin. That who is exiled often questions his belonging; experiments certain kind of pain caused by the possibility or impossibility to return and having had to undertake an unwanted journey (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2018).

In the meanwhile, the term “forced migration”, is commonly distinguished of “migration” considering the context under which the migrant left the country of birth. Frequently, these contexts entail economic difficulties, natural disasters or violent societies. The term *forced* has been discussed and analyzed among scholars: David Turton argues that, despite the conditions around the decision of a person to migrate abroad, it is always a decision. This means that there is certain level of agency in the migration (Turton 2003). In Turton's words: “this brings us back to the dehumanising effect of the language of forced migration, a language that suggests that forced migrants have little or no scope for independent rational decision making; that they are simply passive victims of circumstances, carried along in flows, streams and waves, like identical modules in a liquid” (Turton 2003 p. 10).

This approximation to the understanding of forced migration implies the comprehension of the phenomenon as a process that involves both agency of the migrant and con-

straints. According to Turton (2003), it is problematic to consider the forced migrated population as “a homogeneous mass of needy and passive victims” (Turton 2003 p. 7). Continuing with this idea, the author Marieke van Houte adds that this understanding of forced migration “blurs the conceptual boundaries between voluntary and involuntary mobility” (van Houte 2016 p. 71) and that forced migration “takes place under different structural circumstances, with different capacities and desires, creating different levels of agency” (van Houte 2016 p. 71). By agency she understands “the self-perceived control individuals have over their actions and the choice they have to stay within, to overcome or to reshape structures” (Sewell 1992; Hitlin and Elder 2007; De Haas 2010 in van Houte, 2017).

Another aspect present in the literature about forced migration is the link to a relationship between North and South countries and globalization. Following Turton’s argument, “this phenomenon is a product of wider processes of social and economic change, processes that are normally referred to as ‘globalisation’ and which appear to be creating an ever increasing North-South divide in living standards, human security, and access to justice and human rights protection” (Turton 2003 p. 7). Thus, forced migrants are usually people from Southern countries that, after experiencing some security or economical threaten, take the decision to migrate to a Northern Country and that this is possible due to globalization.

Accordingly, Stephen Castles supports the idea around the link between forced migration, globalization and development. His argument, understood from a sociological perspective, points out that forced migration is an essential part of North- South relationships more than a respond to certain emergencies. In this sense, its understanding should be connected with economic migrations and global inequalities (Castles 2003 P. 5). In his words, “forced migration is thus a factor which deepens underdevelopment, weakens social bonds, and reduces the capacity of communities and societies to achieve positive change” (Castles 2003 p. 6). In conclusion, “forced migration needs to be analysed as a social process in which human agency and social networks play a major part” (Castles 2003 p. 1).

In sum, exile and forced migration have different meanings in the literature. The first one responds to a political phenomenon at least in Latin- America; the second one is related with the globalized world and the North South relationship between countries, as well as with a certain level of agency of the migrant. However, both exile and forced migration are hard situations that compel a person to be away of their country of birth and that carries with it a series of challenges and suffering

## **2.2. Return Migration**

After the II World War, the term “return migration” started to be acknowledged in Europe and the USA in relation with nation- states’ economic policies. During the Cold War order the developed countries were the ones that sent people abroad. In 1970s and 1980s Europe and the USA started to be host countries, especially for the labour market (Campillo 2009 p. 7). It was since 1978 that “return migration” started to be a topic of research; the OECD took it as the closing step of a migration cycle (Campillo 2009). In this sense, “return migration” started to be analyzed from a development perspective.

One of the most recognized researchers on return migration is Jean –Pierre Cassarino, whose statement points out that “return refers to a preparation process that can be optimally invested in development if it takes place autonomously and if the migration experience is long enough to foster resource mobilisation” (Cassarino 2004 p. 276). According to him, the returnee is a potential actor in the development of his country of birth if he is prepared for the return, to be prepared means “a voluntary act that must be supported by the gathering of sufficient resources and information about post-return conditions at home” (Cassarino 2004 p. 271). These ideas of return migration will be questioned ahead, mainly taking into account that in the Colombian case, the forced migrants went also to developing countries.

Beyond its relationship with development, the term “return” is problematic when it is assumed as a linear process of moving from country A to country B and then go back to A, meaning the end of a migration cycle. According to Campillo (2009), it is not possible to fix a human being in a starter natural point called “home” and a second unnatural point called “abroad”. Hence, the notion of “return migration” is embedded in a “definitive or at least long lasting movement, back to the country of origin” (Campillo 2009 p. 12). Interestingly, Campillo distinguishes between the most common notions involved in return migration as follows: “the words *homeland* or *country* [...] represent the line separating migrants’ belonging to a place; *abroad* refers the borderline that migrants have unnaturally crossed to reach the immigration place; and *back home* entails returning to the place of fit, this is, recovering an assumed natural condition-place of being” (Campillo 2009 p.11). For her, the notion of return migration should include a series of complex processes that are being isolated in the literature, for example, the sense of belonging or the attachment to places, in order words, what forced migrated people call “home”, which would imply the problematization of “return”.

In the context of conflict situations, return has particularities. For Marieke van Houte, the return may not be the best option after a conflict. Beyond being the end of the migration cycle, return entails recognition of the sense of belonging, the meaning of home, it carries identity questions for the returnee, and the sense of security is of course an important factor as well as the cultural, political and social issues in the country of birth (van Houte 2016). Hence, return is not only going back; it is not necessary the same than going home, it goes beyond finishing a period of movements, or an undesired trip.

Commonly, returning is not the best experience for a returnee. In many cases, people prefer to go back to the host country or look for opportunities in a third country. Scholars have called this situation “return of failure”, which is due to contextual factors in the country of birth regarding the expectations of the returnee: access to jobs, economic stability, or more personal impacts on identity and cultural shock. “Returnees’ readjustment is a function of social conditions, but also of expectations. Frequent senses of deprivation, at least in the short run, derive from unrealistic expectations of home, associated to cognitive characteristics of human memory and the positive contact experiences during absence” (Campillo 2009 p. 16). Others enter into a situation in which they are constantly moving between the country of birth and the host country, living in both places, this is called by de Haas and Fokkema (2010) *pendulum migration*, this can be understood as an economic strategy, or can occur in cases when the families are divided into both countries, or due to security issues in the country of origin. Therefore, *pendulum migration* is a practice among migrants

that do not situate them as returnees nor as failed returnees but it is a (little studied) variation in the phenomenon of forced migration (de Haas and Fokkema 2010).

On the other hand, the theoretical framework around return migration in contexts of violent conflicts need to look at the policies that host and birth countries have developed to face this global phenomenon and provide assistance to the migrants. Accordingly, Marieke van Houte indicates that there is a paradox between return migration and development policies; because they are based on the idea that return means to go back to an improved situation of the conflict in the country of origin or a “normal” situation and that going back is a contribution with the development of the country (van Houte 2016 p. 159).

The understanding of the phenomenon of return migration is the base for the design of policies, which needs a depth contextual comprehension. In order to generate more accurate policies, migration should be taken as a “dynamic social process linked to broader patterns of social transformation” (Castles 2003 p. 26).

In short, return migration has been difficult to define among scholars because it is a very mutable social phenomenon that can be interpreted differently according to the context. It is important to recognize the sense of belonging identity of migrants as well as the economic, social and politic aspects in the country of origin and in the host country. Conceptualization on the diversity of types or experiences of return still is being researched. Likewise, the policies around the topic are problematic and need to be better analyzed.

### **2.3. Places, National Identity and Sense of Belonging**

With the migration and return, forced migrants experiment changes on their identity and sense of belonging. Scholars have researched how the sense of belonging is transformed with migration, how living in different countries (places) affects their identity with their nation of origin. Particularly, I am going to focus on the construction of national identity and sense of belonging and its relation to the concept of “places” for forced migrants and returnees.

For Christou (2006), to understand the meaning of a place, it is needed to analyse it within its context (Christou 2006), because the space that we occupy is not only a place delimited geographically, but also a social construction. In this sense, according to the author, in space we perform our identity, and space itself is performed, “it is not simply a geographical notion of a fixed and bounded piece of territory mapped by a set of coordinates. Such fixedness has been challenged so that now human geographers maintain that places are fluid and contested spaces” (Christou 2006 p. 34), places are the spaces which contain social actions and where processes such as the construction of identity and sense of belonging occur.

If places can be constructed, they can also be deconstructed. Christou (2006) argues that places are constructed with many layers of society, such as culture, ethnicity, race, gender, religion or class. The process of deconstructing places, according to her, “directs us to an awareness of place identity. People locate and reshape themselves in correlation to place as much as place contains a nation’s social history. Place has a definition, a history, a mean-



ing: a container both of facts and of symbolisms, defined often as a region, it exists in its own being but it is also constructed, represented and narrated” (Christou 2006 p. 34).

Regarding the above, identity is constructed at the same time with place. Casey (2001) notes that there is a relationship between place and identity in which they are co-ingredience, meaning that there is no place without identity and no identity without place (Casey 2001). This assertion implies that place and identity cannot be separated. But, what does identity exactly means for returnees? For the purposes of this research, I will focus on national identity and sense of belonging.

Condor (1996) suggests that national identity is better studied if it is intersected with aspects like gender, class or ethnicity, and taking into account the complexity of the context. “A full analysis of national self-identity would have to take account of the various ways in which identity may be symbolized (visually as well as verbally), and the possibility that, for the individual subject, national self-identification may exist at varying levels of consciousness” (Condor 1996 p. 43 in Christou 2006). This is strongly related with the sense of belonging and attachment to places.

Scholars’ researches speak about sense of belonging as an emotional process of feeling at home or missing home. Kunuroglu, Yagmur, Van De Vijve, and Kroon (2018) indicate that “belonging is related to emotional attachment, feeling at home and feeling safe” (Filiz Kunuroglu et al. 2018 p. 426). Similarly, Hedetoft (2002) thinks that belonging has to do with a notion of “home”, understood as the territory and culture of our *own*, the place where the community, the family, friends, the roots are, “most importantly, ‘home’ and ‘belonging’, thus conceived, carry affective rather than cognitive meaning [...] home *is* where we *feel* we belong” (Hedetoft 2002 p. 5 italics in the original). Hence, the sense of belonging is attached to the place where people usually return to.

I highlighted the word *own* because belonging is related with being part of; to pertain to the “we” group instead of the “others”. In this sense, belonging answers to the idea of ownership that comes from modernity, “to belong in this way is to protect exclusive, and therefore excluding, identities against those who are seen as “aliens” and “foreigners” (Christou 2006 p. 123 quotations in the original). Indeed, under this idea of sense of belonging and home, policies for the assistance to refugees and returnees have been constructed around the world. About this, Ghanem (2003) explains the way the UNHCR promote repatriation of refugees since the 1980s until nowadays: Assuming that return is to go back home, to go to the place where refugees belong, and making this assumption the solution for the problem of refugees in developed countries. Therefore, the literature and politics around repatriation or return talks about legal, logistical and political implication, ignoring the experiences of returnees once they are back in their country of birth (Ghanem 2003 p. 13). The above reflects the Colombian case, which will be discussed in a coming chapter.

## 2.4. Intersectionality and Class

I used an intersectionality approach to analyze the interviews but also to comprehend power relationships that intersect with the experience of return of victims of the armed conflict. Intersectionality is understood as a “system of interactions between inequality-

creating social structures (i.e. of power relations), symbolic representations and identity constructions that are context-specific, topic-orientated and inextricably linked to social praxis” (Winker and Degele 2011 p. 54). This theoretical perspective analyses the interrelation of different power structures in social groups and how they constitute each other. At the same time, intersectionality is an analytical tool for understanding particular aspects of different populations in the design of social interventions (Winker, G., Degele, N., 2011). As a theoretical perspective, intersectionality is important when understanding gender relations of power or other power relations such as race, ethnicity, age, culture, social roles, class, and other aspects that put social groups into inequity conditions. Winger and Degele (2011) explain that intersectionality is the “interaction of dimensions of inequality” (p.p. 51), and that this interaction of different categories of analysis “can mutually strengthen or weaken each other” (Crenshaw, 1989 in Winker, G., Degele, N., 2011).

Here, I want to focus on class and its relevance in the analysis of forced migration and return experiences of victims of the Colombian armed conflict, because class is an important aspect of the structure of inequalities, intersecting in complex ways with all inequalities (Hills et al, 2010 in Walby, Armstrong, Strid p. 232). Class should be systematically included in the discussions on the intersection of gender and other inequalities. However, it is also important that its significance should not be over-stated and to retain the distinction between different forms of inequality (Walby, Armstrong, Strid p. 232).

By class, I mean “the social origin of a person, the cultural resource of education and profession as well as the resource of social networks and relationships” (Winker and Degele 2011 p. 55). These three aspects are addressed by Pierre Bourdieu, who explains different forms of capital that, together, situate a person in a privileged social class and a position of power.

The first form of capital according to Bourdieu (1986) is the Economic Capital, which refers to the possession of money and properties; secondly, the Cultural Capital, which alludes to the educational qualifications and can be divided into three parts: *embodied state*, *objectified state* and *institutionalized state*.

The *embodied state* requires a “long- lasting disposition of the mind and body” (Bourdieu 1986 p. 243). It implies dedication of time by the person, it cannot be acquired by someone else because it refers to “an external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into an habitus, it cannot be transmitted instantaneously” (Bourdieu 1986 p. 245). Bourdieu’s concept of *embodied state* talks about the acquisition and accumulation of cultural capital in a certain period, social class and society. “It is unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimated competence” (Bourdieu 1986 p. 245). On the other hand, the *objectified state* means the stuff that the person can accumulate such as writings, paintings, books, monuments or instruments. Finally, the *institutionalized state* alludes to the legitimacy of the embodied state by the institutions; it is the certification of cultural competence which guarantees the possession of value and accumulation of an embodied capital through academic qualifications.

The third form of capital is the Social Capital. With it, Bourdieu (1986) states the connections, the social networks of the person, and their membership to a group: The “possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual ac-

quaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1986 p. 248). He argues that the higher the accumulation of cultural and economic capital.

the more social capital will be possessed by the person. In other words, the network of connections and their quality allow the person to amass social capital. Like this, Bourdieu thinks that the practices and assets are the monopoly of the dominant class (Bourdieu p. 242). I will discuss this applied to the Colombian returnees’ case.

### 3. Context of forced migration, return and the actions of the Colombian state

#### 3.1. Conflict and Forced Migration in Colombia

Colombia has been the field of a historical, political, and social battle between its own citizens. There are some common points that seem to elucidate the main factors that put the country into constant violence during more than 50 years. According to Pizarro (2015), the historical bipartisanship and the inequality in the distribution of land and agrarian rights prepared the path to an incessant violence between liberals and conservatives during the 1930s and 1940s. As the liberal party was mistakenly associated with communism due to social reforms and development plans set up by its president: Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo (1942-1945), a conservative Catholic Church fomented the opposition (Fernán González in Pizarro 2015). The resulting tension met its outburst with the murder of liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, this was the decisive point for violence to spread all over the country until nowadays.

During the next decade, with the emergence of guerrilla groups, Liberals and Conservatives agreed to a political strategy to pacify the country, so in 1959 the National Front was installed. This meant that power would be shifted between parties, impeding a broad participation of the citizens, limiting political and social liberties,, and blocking democracy (Raad 2016 p. 10). Meanwhile, armed groups belonging to the left and the right kept increasing their numbers and forces.

In the 1980s the drug trafficking cartels contributed their part to the creation of a complex social and political situation that quickly took the country into a terrible war (Pizarro 2015). By the 1990s Colombia was the most violent country in Latin America and one of the most violent in the world (Giraldo 2015 in Pizarro 2105).

In this context, thousands of Colombians had to leave the country in order to save their lives and their families. According to UNHCR during the late 1990s the number of Colombian refugees and asylum seekers started to increase and between 2000 and 2011 the majority of people that migrated from Colombia were looking for protection<sup>1</sup>. This coincided with the presidential period of Alvaro Uribe: his Policy of Democratic Security resulted in an increasing number of families displaced from rural areas due to the constant combats between the Colombian Army, the paramilitaries and the guerrilla groups (Borda 2012). A UNHCR report on displacement and refugees indicated that the highest wave of migration from Colombia occurred between 2006 and 2013, it became the 5<sup>th</sup> country of origin of refugees in 2007 and 2008. In 2014 it was the first country in Latin America in terms of number of refugees (357.900 people) (ACNUR 2015).

However, the forced migration of Colombian victims of the conflict goes beyond the number. Many of the victims of the conflict obliged to move out of Colombia never asked for asylum or a refugee status in the host country. This occurred because of the characteristics of the forced migration: Some people travelled abroad with a student visa, others

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<sup>1</sup> [http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/persons\\_of\\_concern](http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/persons_of_concern)

crossed the border and stayed in Ecuador, Panamá and Venezuela or other Latin American countries. Others found a relative in any country around the world and stayed there in an irregular way, others acquired the nationality of a host country after years of exile. This situation causes some people to identify themselves as refugees, exiled, survivors, or as forced migrants. The National Center for Historical Memory (CNMH in Spanish) defines exiled as those people that had to leave the country due to the violence of the conflict and do not want to be part of the reparation process offered by the Colombian state under the category of “victims abroad” (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017). However, they do identify as part of the victims, according to the definition of victim by the Law 1448.<sup>2</sup>

But not every victimized migrant identified themselves as exiled. In this paper I will use the concept of Forced Migrant to refer to the persons that suffered human right violations in the context of the Colombian conflict and were pushed to migrate with or without a refugee status. They identified themselves as exiled or not, applying the definition of Forced Migration of the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM), as “a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes (e.g. movements of refugees and internally displaced persons as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects)” (International Organization for Migration 2011p. 39).

### **3.2. Law of Victims and the Peace Agreement with FARC**

After Uribe’s presidency ended, in 2011 the new Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, approved the Law 1448 or Law of Victims, which recognises the existence of an armed conflict, finally recognizing the rights of the victims. With the implementation of this law the Unit for the Victims Assistance and Reparation (UARIV in Spanish) was opened. After this public institution was established, it started to register the number of victims of the conflict in the “Unique Register of Victims” (RUV in Spanish) after their declarations of the crimes were assessed and admitted. When a person is registered in the RUV they have the right to receive the five reparation measures that the law offers: Compensation, rehabilitation, no repetition guarantee, symbolic reparation and restitution.

The last report<sup>3</sup> indicates that there are 23.790 people abroad included in the RUV, 40% of them are in Ecuador, Venezuela, Canada, United States and Spain. This is the distribution of victims in the 10 main receptor countries:

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<sup>2</sup> Law 1448, Article 3 indicates that “They are considered victims, for the purposes of this law, those persons who individually or collectively have suffered damage by events that occurred since January 1 1985, as a consequence of infractions of the International Humanitarian Law or serious and manifest violations of the International Human Rights standards, which occurred during the internal armed conflict (Congreso de la República de Colombia 2011. p. 19).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/atencion-asistencia-y-reparacion-integral/connacionales-victimas-en-el-exterior/8942>

**Table 0.1**  
Number of Colombian victims in the main host countries

Host country	Number of victims registered in the RUV	Total Latin- American countries
Ecuador	3.921	7.276
Venezuela	2.028	
Panama	508	
Costa Rica	436	
Chile	273	
Brazil	110	
		Total Europe and North American countries
Canada	1.283	3.670
United States	1.172	
Spain	1.086	
Sweden	129	

(UARIV 2018)

The violent acts that these people suffered were mainly forced displacement (50%), threat (32%) and homicide of relatives (9%). The rest experienced other violent incidents such as sexual violence, forced disappearance of relatives, forced recruitment, land grabbing, and personal injuries. Nevertheless, the RUV does not reflect the reality of the forced migration, it only contains the information of those Colombians who have reported their cases to the UARIV, but the total number of these people could broadly exceed the existing register.

In terms of the reparation process, the victims abroad have faced a particular situation. First of all, the law 1448 of 2011 only states that they have the right to the five reparation measures without the obligation to return to Colombia. But the law does not mention anything about the reparation process while they are in the host countries (Congreso de la República de Colombia 2011).

Second, for the cases abroad the UARIV needs to work very closely with the Ministry of Foreign Relations and the consulates in each city are responsible of understanding the law and its reparation measures. They must inform and attend the process of the victims abroad and give the information to the UARIV. Taking this into account, it is important to mention that from the five reparation measures established, only three have been partially guaranteed to forced migrants, these are: symbolic reparation, restitution and compensation. The rehab measure, which includes psychosocial attention and health care, has not been implemented due to the complexity of health services offering in other countries. The 'no repetition' guaranty measure has no program for the victims out of Colombia, and the roles of the consulates, in many cases have been minimal.

In spite of the possibility to implement these three measures, its guarantee is not systematic, it is not continuous and it depends a lot on the relationship between the Colombian State and the host countries.

On the other hand, the Peace Agreement between the government and the FARC, which is based mainly on the needs of the victims, includes a small paragraph about the

victims abroad. During the process of implementation of the agreements the return of the victims abroad is going to be reinforced, the victims will have the opportunity to be accompanied and assisted during their return process (Government of Colombia & FARC-EP 2016). Nevertheless, the final document does not provide the detail of how it is going to happen, when or by whom, making it a very vague instrument for the attendance of this population by the Colombian state.

Hence, the improvements on the attention and reparation of the victims that the Peace Agreement contemplates have their implementation in the national territory. Neither Law 1448 nor the Peace Agreement includes access to the reparation measures for the victims that remain abroad. Their reparation is based on their return to Colombia, and once there, they will be able to access to all the rights contemplated in this two documents, but neither of these legal documents explicitly mentions the process of return or the participation of the state.

### **3.3. Current political and social situation for victims migrated and returnees**

Colombian return legislation is centred in Law 1565 of 2012, which encourages Colombians living abroad to return to the country. It contemplates four types of return: based on solidarity, humanitarian, productive and labour. The last three types are managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The return based on solidarity is the one applicable to the victims of the armed conflict and lies under the responsibility of the UARIV. At the same time, the Law 1448 of 2011 guides the solidarity return. Thus, both legislations get interrelated, but it is under the law 1448 that the Colombian state receives the victims of the conflict returnees and should guarantee their rights (Congreso de la República de Colombia 2012).

It can be argued that the number of returnees compared to the number of victims abroad is minimal. Since 2012 until 2018 the UARIV has registered around 900 cases of return (personal communication UARIV Staff 2018). In 2018 there have been 125 reports of people interested in returning, however only 60 did go back to Colombia during the first months of the year (personal communication UARIV Staff 2018). Nevertheless, it exists an under register of the real number of forced migrants who have returned. On the other hand, some of them have returned but left again. The UARIV does not have a register of these cases.

The process of return under Law 1448 consists in a voluntary decision of the person, the UARIV verifies the conditions of dignity and security of the area where the person wants to return, and the allocation of an amount of money for mobilizing personal belongings to the area<sup>4</sup>. Once in the country, they can have access to their reparation process in exactly the same conditions a victim who never migrated has. It is important to clarify that this route is applicable only for victims of intern forced displacement, not for victims of other crimes. Thus, the accompaniment from the UARIV for the return of forced migrants applies only in those cases where the person was forcefully displaced within the national

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/sites/default/files/documentosbiblioteca/orientaciones-generales-victimas-en-el-exterior.pdf>

territory, which represents the 50% of the cases currently registered in the RUV, the other half cannot benefit of this accompaniment, much more less those who are not registered.

Therefore, legislation in Colombia is ignoring the particularities of the victims of the conflict forced to migrate abroad in respect with their rights as Colombian citizens. The National Centre of Historic Memory (CNMH in Spanish) indicates that “these measures do not take into account a normative frame that contemplates a differentiated approach that recognizes the magnitude and the impact of exile as a victimizing fact in the context of the Colombian armed conflict and the Colombian politics” (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017 p. 28). Besides, the migration of Colombians out of the country due to the armed conflict is an invisible reality, in accordance with the CNMH the recognition of these thousands of people should be the base of a norm to make them visible, repair them and receive them back in their country when they decide to do so (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017).

In addition, both, Law 1448 of 2011 and the Peace Agreement, were initiatives driven by the government of Juan Manuel Santos, but his presidential period has ended. In June 2018 his opponent Iván Duque was elected. Duque belongs to the political party Democratic Center, whose leader is the former president Alvaro Uribe Velez. As I mentioned before, Uribe did not recognize the existence of an armed conflict in Colombia and its victims, as focused on the terrorist threat FARC represented, without taking into account the victims of paramilitaries and the Colombian State.. It was until Santos won the elections in 2010 that all of the victims of the conflict had the possibility to be recognized by the Colombian State.

On the other hand, during the five years of the Peace Process with FARC, Uribe opposed and summoned the citizens to disagree with what was agreed. In October 2016 Colombia went to elections to approve the final Peace Agreement by means of a referendum. Surprisingly, 50% of the voters rejected it, 49% agreed and 62% of the voter population abstained (Revista Semana. 2016). In November 2016 President Santos endorsed the Peace Agreement with the Colombian Congress and it was approved after some changes suggested by the opposition.

Despite the changes made to the Peace Agreement, the Democratic Center Party continued to be against the agreement. Having its candidate elected during the 2018 presidential run, most of the victims of the conflict are afraid to lose the benefits that Law 1448 the agreement with FARC gave them. Particularly the forced migrants, who have been historical ignored by the Colombian State, feel there is a bigger risk of moving back in their process of recognition, reparation and return to Colombia. In this sense, victims, academy researchers and institutions interested guaranteeing the rights of the forced migrants are expectant of the decisions of the new government.

As I have shown, in Colombia there is no specific institution, not even a legislation to attend victims of the conflict that were forced to migrate, nor for those who returned to the country. In contrast with other cases of exile and return in Latin America, Colombia lacks the legislation capable of covering their needs, understanding their particularities and supporting their return processes. Society is not even aware of the dimension of the phenomenon of forced migration caused by the violence; in a lesser proportion the experiences of returnees are understood.



Taking into account the above, it is clear that the voices of the victims that migrated and returned are silenced. Who are these persons? What did they experience in the host country? How have their experiences of return been? What does the return mean for them? And how are those meanings connected with the government's offer of reparation and return? The objective of this research is to solve these questions and to understand the experience of forced migration in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia and the meanings of the return to the country in contrast with the State response.

## 4. Return: voices of victims of the Colombian armed conflict

### 4.1. Experiences of Forced Migration

According to the stories of the participants in this research, the main motives to migrate abroad were the violent events they experienced in the Colombian territory due to the armed conflict. But the experience of forced migration can be very different depending on diverse factors, such as: The status under which they enter the host country, the policies for migrants in each country and the social contexts, the age of the person in the moment of migration, the time spent in the host country, whether there were third countries of migration, the language spoken in the host country and an enormous variation of situations that can make the experience of being a migrant and a person that suffered violence, broadly different. This chapter will deal with these issues.

It draw my attention that, despite the similarities and differences among the experiences of all the interviewees, all of them agreed that the experience of forced migration implies a complete movement of their lives in a family, social and personal ways. However, there are two main intersections that make a difference among the experiences of the migrants: class and political activism before leaving Colombia.

In terms of class, I found that the group of interviewees could be divided into two: those with a certain level of education, income, and politically active in Colombia. These are the characteristics of the 4 members of the FIV. All of them migrated to Europe, where they had the possibility to study in recognized universities, they have stable jobs, learned the local language, had children, made friends, and developed a social life. They could identify themselves with the host country in a certain way, but each of them experienced different struggle. All of them identify themselves with the term “exiled”, but during the years of exile and during the process of return (in the cases of returnees) they experienced pain and frustration:

For example, those participants who decided to ask for asylum in Europe experienced not only a cultural and language shock, but also a feeling of re-victimization. They express that this condition is similar to a “jail”.

*"I thought that migration was a hoping situation after experiencing the armed conflict in Colombia. In my imaginary it was a way to protect the life and to begin a new period of life as a family, but with time I realised that it is a re-victimization situation because, first, there is a cultural shock in the host country, second, you need to adapt and integrate to the new society, and third, you need to be a productive person in that new society [...] When I say that we are re-victimized is because the migration personnel in the host country investigate you, [...] they take your documents and you lose all your rights. I had a different idea about the international protection [...] when you ask for the refugee status you feel like you are in jail, because you feel*

*like you lose your rights, and you cannot make your own decisions. [...] These are not interviews, these are interrogations, as if you were a criminal”<sup>5</sup> (Eduardo Osorio, refugee in The Netherlands).*

Similarly, a refugee in Switzerland indicates that the situation of being a refugee is so sad and hard to describe, that he had the necessity to put his feeling down in a drawing. Despite that his process of arriving was guided by organizations such as Caritas, and the Red Cross, the experience of exile itself was similar to being in a prison.

*“I was welcomed in that society... Then they help you to learn French, to study, to have a job. After learning French I started to study a masters degree, but there are things that you cannot say with words, so you need to find another way to represent them, represent the unrepresentable” (Andrés Pérez, in pendulum situation).*

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<sup>5</sup> All the interviews were made in Spanish and were translated by me.

**Figure 0.1**  
Memory of Uraba- Colombia



(Pérez 2007)

For Andrés Pérez, in spite being with his family in Switzerland, he had the opportunity to do a Master Degree at the University of Geneva, to get a job and economic stability. Yet he felt a prisoner, away from home.

Hugo Paternina expresses: *“The exile truncates your collective and social project [...] when you face situations like this, you are not you. It involves many people [...] this is something that involves you but your family too. Here I am safe but my family can be in danger”* (Hugo Paternina, exiled in Spain).

As he mentions, one of the issues that worried him the most during the exile was the security of his family, the access to justice due to the human rights violations that he and his family lived and his struggle as one of the leaders of the FIV for being visible, participate and have justice as exiles. However, this is the situation of most of the members of the FIV, as there are also other kinds of concerns. For example, Natalia experienced a migration under different conditions. She left Colombia at the age of 21; she says:

*“For me it was freedom, it was a struggle for myself. I could be a young person there, because here in Colombia I started the militancy in the political left too young. For me it was to leave my family, my friends. It was like being betraying my political party, but at the same time it was freedom for me, more quiet, it was a bit for myself”* (Natalia, returnee from Spain).

Looking at the other group of interviewees: those who had not engaged in political participation before migrating and that belong to a different social class, have low incomes and low levels of education, I found that they had no access to formal education in the host country, some of them got stable jobs but with low incomes, however they express that it was enough to cover their basic needs. For example, Ángela travelled to Guatemala as a tourist, and decided to stay, but a couple of months later, she had nowhere to stay; she had to sleep in a park, experiencing extremely difficult situations. After some time, she had the opportunity to get a job, not as the engineer she is, but at least she could buy some food for herself. Then she could create her own recycling company, she got married and had a child. Unfortunately, Guatemala became another violent country in Latin America, and her relationship with her husband went bad, so she returned 18 years later, now to protect her little child. Once she was back in Colombia, she received the Guatemalan nationality, which she rejected.

Particularly the four participants who migrated to Venezuela have different narrations of their experiences in contrast with the others, they tell a more positive story:

*“In Venezuela my daughter grew up... There I could do what in Colombia I couldn't during 40 years, I got a job and a house, I don't know why here it is impossible, but there it was easy with my own effort”* (Diego Biafra, returnee from Venezuela).

*“There, when we arrived, Chavez was the president and they (her children) could have the nationality easily, we never had a refugee status [...] It was not difficult because I had relatives there, then one starts to know more people, friends, then one gets a job... in that time the Venezuelans liked to hire Colombians because we are hard workers, because they know that we needed a job”* (Yadira Martelo, returnee from Venezuela).

*“When they killed my uncle I had to go... Thank God I had relatives there and they helped me when I arrived, my mother was there already... but I had to start from scratch”* (Rafael Medina, returnee from Venezuela).

In the case of one participant who was forced to migrate when she was 17, the impact of the migration was harder. However, with time, she adapted to the Venezuelan context:

*"It was a little traumatic because all my life I lived in Colombia. It was not easy, I couldn't adapt easily, despite being there with my mother and my brother it was not the same... I missed other relatives a lot and my family in El Carmen"* (Ana Tulia Arias, returnee from Venezuela).

The last case shows that despite going to Spain, her experience in getting a job and adapting to the Spanish society was not successful. She felt discriminated for being Latin American:

*"It was a cultural shock [...] People treat you with racism... They tell you, what are you doing here?... I didn't like that... so we decided to come here (Colombia) [...] For example when you go to a shop... people think I was going to rob them... maybe because I am a little brunette... they are very racists"* (Francina Irene Fierro, returnee from Spain).

These narrations show that the experience of forced migration is not better in one country or in the other, and it does not depend on the legal status, or on the gender of the migrant. For the victims of the Colombian armed conflict, forced migration is a hard experience that is connected to many different variables, where no generalities can be applied, as Natalia said, *"Each person has a different journey, everyone lives it differently"*. Nevertheless, political activism and class mark a difference among the interviewees in terms of their experiences of migration. This difference is notable in their experience of return, sense of belonging and perception of their reparation process,

## **4.2. Experiences of Return: the relevance of class**

Despite taking into account gender, ethnicity, and age, I found that class was the most relevant intersection. Even though it does not seem to be a relevant issue in the experience of forced migration it can strongly influence the experience of return to the country. I identified the class of the forced migrants and returnees as a very important factor in the intersection with the experiences of return. Accordingly, despite some members of the FIV come from peasant families or low income families, it can be said that they belong to a different class compared to those who are not members.

All four members of the FIV are not returnees, but have visited Colombia during their years of exile. Their perceptions, feeling, and experiences have to do with identity issues, cultural shocks, and sense of belonging, security guarantees, and family relations.

Hugo Paternina explains his experience once he had the possibility to visit Colombia like this:

*"No subject can claim cultural immunity... when you go abroad and return, depending on the time, it makes a dent. Although you wish to return, when you are there you will miss your host country. It produces a kind of double absence. They say, how long have you been here Hugo? Oh, you are almost from here.... Philosophically, what does "almost" mean? What is what I am missing to be from here? When you return you feel the double absence [...] When I went to Colombia, I felt that I was not welcome in my homeland.*

[...] *To those there you are from here, but from people here you are an "almost". There is a problem, why? Because your loyalties, after a time, are divided".* (Hugo Paternina, Exiled in Spain).

Using a metaphor, he could explain the impact of visiting Colombia during his exile:

*"In the world of the exile, people construct the time as photography, the photography has the virtue and the misfortune of fixing the images, when do you understand that in the exile what works is not the photography but the video? When you meet with your past, when you walk through the streets that saw you be born, grow up, love for the first time, or when you walk through the places that have been emblematic in your life. When I wanted to visit those places in the Castillo neighbourhood, to La Candelaria I realized that those are gone places, or when I face that my friends were taken off from the kingdom of life when they didn't want to leave... In those situations I see the video, and the video takes me to movement, and with the movement I know how much I have changed and how much the contexts and relationships have changed.*

*When you return, even if it is only for a few days... I remembered the telephone numbers of my friends because I couldn't take the numbers with me, because if they found me they could torture me, so I memorized them, I tried to call my friends but it was not their number anymore. Fortunately now there is Facebook, so you start to build up the puzzle of your past, you start to reconstruct your life taking pieces, and when you put the pieces together and you say: I am here!, and you wait for that desired moment, you see how time has bruised you [...] Time, as gravity, leaves its traces. When you go to your house, and you say hello to your neighbour, and he says... excuse me, who are you? And you say... I am Hugo, the son of... I mean, you are not the reference anymore, to be recognised you need to appeal to your genealogy... I am the son of... the brother of... These are very painful situations, they are dramatic, why? Because the conventional forms of time in the world of exile are not counted in seconds, minutes, hours, weeks, months, years... No... those are not the conventional forms to measure the time... the conventional forms are measured in homesickness, suffering, pain, absence... it produces what we call in Anthropology, a sprain" (Hugo Paternina, exiled in Spain).*

His narration talks about identity changes and challenges, memories, participation in society, feelings of homesickness, nostalgia, sense of belonging. After all, Hugo has decided not to return, *"If I would go to Colombia, for example to work, I would do it with a kind of sadness".* When he was asked about his feeling of belonging, he said: *"In some aspects I feel I belong here (Spain), I can tell you, if something at all the exile has given me, it is this living materiality of feeling multiple spaces, and that, more than ballast, I see it as a possibility, as a wealth".*

The experience of return is linked with the motivation of return. In the case of Natalia, Eduardo and Andrés, their return has a political component. Accordingly, their political participation before the forced migration, and their motivations of return are embedded in the same context. At the same time, it implies family decisions; guarantee of security, and of course, the current political and social Colombian context, as we will see below:

*"It feels very strange because you have to adapt again to your country. There are a lot of expectations, about your family, your thinking, your food [...] There are different stages in the return... at first you are very excited... but you also have to leave all that is yours in the host country... is to leave something of you behind to go to another thing that is also yours.*

*For me, a very important motivation was my family. I wanted to return before the death of my grandmother... I wanted them to meet my daughter. Another important thing was the Peace Agreement. It changes*

*completely the history of Colombia... I wanted to come to support and participate... I had doubts, but I am a political human being, Politics are my passion, so I wanted to do it again in my country... In Catalonia I did it, but I wanted to do to again in my country.*

*I want to live here... Right now I don't want to be anywhere else. I have had moments of doubt... That is another stage; when you feel fear during the adaptation to your country.... but there is always the idea that it can be another migration... but I wouldn't like to leave again. In this moment of my life my intention is to stay because there are a lot of things to do here and to contribute. I have had the conditions to stay. The most important thing is to have family support in the return” (Natalia, returnee from Spain).*

As politicians, the members of the FIV feel that their return is linked to their politic activity. For Andrés Pérez, the Peace Agreement was a decisive historical fact to consider the possibility of return, however, since he went back to Colombia for the first time his security has been a problem. For these reason he is currently facing a situation of instability, he lives in Colombia and in his host country, moving from one country to another in a kind of *pendulum* situation:

*“I never thought to return until the Peace Process... it was the greatest gift life gave me. But with the NO my hopes drowned again... but then I saw the young people protesting and I got hope again [...] the hope also grew because they gave the legal status to the Patriotic Union again in 2014 or 2015. Then I considered to return, but not any return, but an institutional one.*

*If you don't have a security guarantee the return is madness... for many people I am crazy, but extra crazy because I returned to Chigorodó (Urabá)<sup>6</sup>. You return to a place like Chigorodó and you think... where I am going to live?... if they (paramilitaries) are all around... people told me that they were saying that the guerrillero came again, the guy from FARC, in each corner they commented that they would kill me. And in the other hand, there were an environment of love from people [...] each time that I come to Colombia, when I say goodbye to my family, it is a goodbye as if like I will die... That is known by my family. It has changed.... but it was like that, it was impossible to talk about the UP, it was impossible to take a UP flag out. We opened an office and we took out the flag of the UP.*

*I was a political refugee, so I need to return with a politic guarantee, I cannot come to Colombia just to say hello to my family and buy a car ... I respect that, but I return based on a project” (Andrés Pérez, in pendulum situation).*

In Eduardo's case, which is still living in The Netherlands, the return to Colombia seems like a dream, like a mission that all exiles need to someday achieve. His sense of belonging to Colombia and his political activism are incentives to consider it, nevertheless, family relations are his main motive to be patient:

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<sup>6</sup> Historically, Urabá has been an area of conflict since it is a strategic point for drug trafficking. It is a jungle area located at the north- west of Colombia. Mostly Afrocolombian and indigenous people inhabit this region. The territories around this area are disputed between guerrillas and paramilitaries, provoking innumerable crimes against the local population, illegal armed groups dissidents from the paramilitaries have an alarming presence and still commit crimes against the population, especially communal leaders, land claimants and left wings actors.



*"I wish to return to my country. Those who were silenced and exiled, need to decide to return in certain moment, and it is a challenge to us [...] we need to begin a new citizenship, and a process of political participation collectively and individually. [...] I wish to return to reintegrate myself with my ancestors and the Colombian and Latinamerican culture.*

*"To return implies a family challenge because my wife and my daughter don't want to return, they have a life here. I think I can travel to Colombia and come back to The Netherlands for a few months, and then go again to Colombia... but it could generate a crisis in my family... it will be a crisis"* (Eduardo Osorio, exiled in The Netherlands).

Eduardo and Andrés also show that the exile and the return have family implications that are decisive in their experiences.

On the other hand, the narration of experience of return of the participants that do not belong to the FIV and that have a different class position is not focused on the same aspects. The most important thing for them is the economic condition, possibilities of job stability, living place, and help from the state.

*"For me, so far, the return has been difficult. We don't have anything here; we don't even have clothes, all of that is in Venezuela. Here we are struggling alone [...]we are struggling for everything... for a house, we are struggling for having stability, know we are here, but tomorrow we need to move to Jamundí, to Cali... we don't have anything assured. There isn't any person who tell you "look" you can have this, or you can do that... I have to beg and it is what I don't like"* (Diego Biáfara, returnee from Venezuela).

*"Here I don't have the possibility to have a pension for retirement, to have something for old age"* (Francia Irene Fierro, returnee from Spain).

*"I looked for a job, but I had almost 10 years without experience in my fieldwork [...], after a time without a job I started my own recycling company"* (Ángela, returnee from Guatemala).

*"I returned voluntarily because the situation there (Venezuela) was critical, more and more every day. It is a shame it changed, but there it was very easy to have a job, to live good, there I was never without money. Here... I don't think it is more difficult, but my situation of a returnee makes it difficult, because now I can't hire someone to help me with my job (sewing)"* (Yadira Martelo, returnee from Venezuela).

*"I don't have a stable job... I work here and collect some money, and then I go to Venezuela to stay with my wife and my daughter... I stay there one or two months, then I come back to Colombia again"* (Rafael medina, in pendulum situation between Venezuela and Colombia).

Their economic situation and instability is so complex that once they met each other in a meeting organized in Bogotá by the UARIV and the NRC, they created an organization of returnees aimed to help each other around entrepreneurship projects. They named themselves "33 Without Borders". 33 is the number of the members of the organization:

*"When they (UARIV and NRC) made that meeting in Bogotá with other 32 returnees, I started to form an organization, we organized all together to be conscious about the limitation of the State to assist us and*

to know other people who also suffered the exile and support each other” (Ángela, returnee from Guatemala).

“I am overcoming the stage of fear [...] Now that we organized with the other returnees we are helping each other” (Yadira Martelo, returnee from Venezuela).

In their narrations about return, I could identify other aspects such as their sense of belonging to Colombia. In the cases of the migrants to Venezuela, they talked about a feeling of gratefulness, love, and shame for the Venezuelans. Particularly, returnees from Venezuela experienced a forced return due to the social, political and economic situation in that country<sup>7</sup>. This made them face a double forced migration.

Diego Biáfara indicated, with a certain kind of shame, that “here everything is impossible, here you cannot have a business because you have to pay a lot of taxes... here you are struggling and struggling all the time, you can't ... you can't, in Venezuela you can be someone, there are not problems for your own growth. I am a builder; there I could get a job... I didn't finish high school, here you need to finish your high school to get a job and you need to show your credentials [...] Here I don't feel I want to stay... I am looking a way to migrate again” (Diego Biáfara, returnee from Venezuela).

Another participant expressed that “the economic situation of Venezuela, perhaps if I would be alone I would stay, I had a life there, I had friends, a job, time, everything. I moved there as any Venezuelan... but becoming a mother changes everything... I don't think the changes are bad, but they are difficult. I would like my children to experience what I experienced with the migration, to have that change of school, environment, to have to adapt to a new place” (Ana Tulia Arias, returnee from Venezuela).

Despite the above, some of the participants mentioned that the experience of return has been even more difficult than the experience of forced migration. It involves certain challenges in terms of identity, social relations, sense of belonging, job, economic life, emotions, security and a relation with the violence they experienced before leaving:

“To return is like to leave again, is another exile, is one more migration” (Natalia, returnee from Spain).

“What is more painful, the exile or the de- exile? For me it has been more painful to de-exile... more humiliating, more fearsome, more excluding... I was crazy...you don't find a space [...] you don't find who to talk with because nobody understands this, you die alone [...] So you need to find a place to live alone, because your presence can put others in danger [...] because any person who was a friend of mine could be killed [...] Oh God!! I couldn't believe it... I couldn't sleep.... So those are the implications of the de- exile” (Andrés Pérez, in pendulum situation between Switzerland and Urabá).

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<sup>7</sup> Due to the political and social situation that Venezuela is facing during Nicolas Maduro's Presidency, the number of Venezuelans migrating to Colombia is increasing every day. According to IOM, the migration flow of Venezuelans to Colombia changed from 48.714 in 2015 to 870.093 in 2018 (International Organization for Migration 2018). This situation involves the Colombians that once migrated to Venezuela and now are returning to the country.

*"Coming back is worse than migrating... because now I have my children, when I went to Venezuela I was young and alone, but now I have to take care of them and look for a job and money for them... It is to start again but now with two extra persons"* (Ana Tulia Arias, returnee from Venezuela to Barranquilla).

The perception about the return has to do with the perception of the reparation process, particularly in the cases of the returnees.

### 4.3. Perception of the reparation process

It can be said that the most interviewees have a negative perception of the effectiveness of Law 1448 of 2011. Among the narrations, there are agreements about its uselessness:

*"There are too many deficiencies in law 1448. To victims abroad it is too limited. It should be changed according to the rights of exiled people and returnees [...] me and my family haven't received any reparation measure contemplated in law 1448 during this 15 years"* (Eduardo Osorio, exiled in The Netherlands).

*"We say (the FIV) that 1448 does not reflect our reality, because the only article that exists as a barrangue... They didn't know somebody remember them* (Hugo Paternina, exiled in Spain).

*"The law is useless... it is useful only to put you up with obstacles... if I have rights and they should expect that I protest in order to be repaired"* (Diego Biáfara, returnee from Venezuela).

*"It is practically the same to be part of the RUV or not, because one doesn't receive nothing"* (Yadira Martelo, returnee from Venezuela).

Nevertheless, there is certain gratefulness for being part of a group of returnees that received economic support to start an entrepreneurial business by the UARIV and the NRC. Some participants perceive it as a good beginning for their reparation:

*"Even though it is not a lot, I could start with the money they gave me"* (Francía Irene Fierro, returnee from Spain).

*"When I received the support from the NRC I bursted into tears... I thought ¡Oh My God... What is this?! They finally looked at me"* (Ángela, returnee from Guatemala).

#### 4.3.1. Meanings of reparation

The meaning of what reparation could be is very different among the narrations. This happens because, in the first place, there is not a consensus of what forced migration

means. There are some people who identify themselves as victims, but others don't feel they are victims but exiled. This may be the first difference in the significance of reparation.

*“In law 1448 there is what I call, "epistemic injustice" that cohabits with a kind of invisibility. In the law we don't even appear as refugees, but as victims abroad [...] I think that the struggle is also semantic. It is to achieve recognition. To me the concept of victim abroad does not mean anything because I have an identity defined, but there is not a complete identity because identity is always in construction... that identity is all but being a victim abroad [...] we should have the opportunities to be asked how we define ourselves... If there is people that identify themselves as victims abroad I respect it, but the concept of victim abroad does not define me because I recognize myself as exiled and as a refugee independently of the legal condition that I have. The exile is a condition that goes beyond a legal frame, and that even goes beyond the frame of the International Human Rights”* (Hugo Paternina, exiled in Spain).

*“I do not consider myself a victim. I don't want the State to solve anything for me. Besides, the political persecution is not considered part of the armed conflict according to the law”* (Natalia, returnee from Spain).

*“I went to Bern to the Colombian Embassy to register myself as a victim of the conflict. It was very difficult for me because it is to recognize the State [...] the members of the UP do not do that... I did an internal process... for me as a person it was hard, but it was a contribution with the reconstruction of the country, it is an extension of democracy and it implies a new attitude”* (Andrés Pérez, in pendulum situation between Switzerland and Urabá).

*“Some of us identify as survivors, but the most of us identify as victims, otherwise we don't have rights of reparation”* (Ángela, returnee from Guatemala).

For those who had a political role before leaving the country, the reparation entails the recovery of their political and social participation. It also implicates to make the forced migration visible, to make the existence of the victims abroad as a national reality that the Colombian society must know and recognize. For example:

*“The State has to compromise with us and our political participation as returnees [...] The Colombian population abroad is a country. We have the responsibility to make us visible to the rest of the country”* (Eduardo Osorio, exiled in The Netherlands).

*“As part of the reparation, we, the political exiled, want to disappear from all the records of the State where we appear as criminals. In the current legislation, you have to go to the Embassy or Consulate to denounce and to be recognized as victims by the Colombian State but it was the same Colombian State which victimized you”* (Hugo Paternina, exiled in Spain).

*“My expectations of reparation are political, and I think it can come with the transformation of the politics in the country [...] Reparation has to do with truth and with the visibility of exile, and that the country knows that many people had to leave to save their lives and freedom, but also to prove that we, the people to had to leave, are a contribution to the country from a present and future perspective. Reparation is also to be recognized that we contribute to the country and we can help to transform the country [...] the victimization was political, so the reparation should be political too”* (Natalia, returnee from Spain).

*“The reparation has to do with the historical memory, the symbolic issues, to prevent the repetition. And the other reparation, which is more individual, is the political reparation, for example, I could not finish my period as mayor of Chigorodó. The voters need to be repaired; the right of electing and being elected should be repaired”* (Andrés Pérez, in pendulum situation between Switzerland and Urabá).

For people that didn't have a political participation and that were forced to migrate due to the dynamic of the Colombian armed conflict, the reparation has to do with the recovery of an economic stability and the possibility to have their own house where to live.

*“I would feel repaired if at least I could have a house where I can live with my family and be stable”* (Diego Biáfara, returnee from Venezuela).

*“The rehab was very important, it helped me [...] I won't have the possibility to retire, if would have had the chance to continue with my job before the migration I would have had a better future, my life would have been very good, I would have had some benefits. What they gave me now is useful to begin, but it does not reconstruct my profession, my family, it does not bring back my father from death, it does not repair the pain I have lived, the abuse that I experienced in Guatemala, it is nor reparable, it marked my life. I won't reconstruct my career, I had won a lot as a female engineer, but to begin from nothing there (in Guatemala), I lost too much, I lost too much of my life... all of that is not covered by the reparation* (Ángela, returnee from Guatemala).

*“For the reparation it is necessary to have your own house”* (Yadira Martelo, returnee from Venezuela).

*“For me the reparation is more about the possibilities to have a job because you come back here with nothing, and starting again is very hard, but I don't say it for me but for my children”* (Ana Tulia Arias, returnee from Venezuela).

In sum, the perception of what reparation means is different among each person, but there is a tendency among the participants with a political role in Colombia to associate the reparation with a symbolical recognition of the phenomenon of exile, and the recovery of their political participation. On the contrary, other returnees think that the state should repair them by helping with housing, jobs and economic compensation.

### **4.3.2. The Peace Agreement**

In general, the Peace Agreement gave the forced migrants a sense of security, however, in few cases it has to do with their motivations to return:

*“Another important thing was the Peace Agreement. It changes completely the history of Colombia... I wanted to come to support and participate”* (Natalia, returnee from Spain).

*“I never thought to return until the Peace Process... it was the greatest gift life gave me”* (Andrés Pérez, in pendulum situation between Switzerland and Urabá).

*“The peace process was important for the country, I think President Santos made a lot... now it is more safe, I considered that in my process of return”* (Rafael Medina, in pendulum situation between Venezuela and Barranquilla).

For the rest, the Peace Agreement is not clear about the assistance to the victims of the conflict that were forced to migrate or it didn't influence their decision to return:

*“The Peace agreement still is too ambiguous, but at least now we have a member in the participation table of victims. It is an advance but it needs to be improved with the participation of the victims abroad”* (Eduardo Osorio, exiled in The Netherlands).

*The Peace Agreement is thought from a national epistemology, for the exile it need to be broader, needs to be more complex”* (Hugo Paternina, exiled in Spain).

*“What they say about peace and the end of the conflict is not true, it is not the reality, we, who live here, see with our own eyes, we can be witness of what is happening here. Being honest, I can't say that I feel safe... I still have distrust, I don't go out, and I try not to go to some places”* (Diego Biáfara, returnee from Venezuela).

*“The peace process had nothing to do with my return, I returned to Barranquilla, I had no fear here, but I won't return to Los Montes de María”* (Yadira Martelo, returnee from Venezuela).

## 5. Contrasting theory: learning from the Colombian experiences

In this chapter I aim to analyse the factors that are involved in the experiences of return to Colombia for those victims that were forced to migrate abroad. First of all, I will address how their experiences of migration have been, and how the Colombian case reflects or not the theories of *forced migration* mentioned in the second chapter. Secondly, I will discuss the influence of class as one of the main findings of this research. Third, I will analyse their sense of belonging taking into account the theoretical framework on places and finally, how they relate with the current legislation of reparation of their human rights.

### 5.1. Forced migration of Colombians, a development issue?

Violence in Colombia has overcome the frontiers of the country. In this sense, the phenomenon of forced migration due to the conflict locates the Colombian case in what Turton (2003) calls *forced migration*. Colombian victims of the conflict didn't migrate abroad looking for (personal) development, but for survival. This can be seen looking at the host countries. Looking at the 10 top host countries of victims; it is clear that Latin-American countries (developing/ south countries), hosted twice as many Colombians than the developed/ Northern countries. Colombians fled crossing the border with Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela as much as they could. For example, in the case of people who migrated to Panama, many of them were forced to walk during weeks across the jungle of El Darién until being safe (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2018). The same occurred in the cases of migrants to Ecuador and Venezuela, where violence pushed people to look for ways to enter the neighbouring countries as tourists or in irregular situations.

Migrants to developing countries have different characteristics. They could migrate because they could have a student visa (in the case of educated people, members of a middle class), they got the visa because they got married (as Francia Irene's case), or they asked for asylum and got the refugee status (like Eduardo and Andrés). With this, the definition of *forced migration* that Turton (2003) and Castles (2003) argue, needs rethinking according to the context and particularities of the sending country. In the same sense, the *agency* that von Houte (2016) believes the victims have needs to be analysed in the cases of conflict and violence. Many of my interviewees had two options before migrating: to flee or to die. What kind of agency do you have in this situation? In the Colombian case, this agency is the very imminent decision to survive.

On the other hand, it is important to distinguish between those who define themselves as "exiles" and those who do not. This research shows that among the victims that migrated abroad there are differences depending on their class, their political participation before leaving Colombia, as well as on their experience of migration. These factors can influence their sense of belonging as Colombians, their experiences of return, and how they relate to the current legislation.

## 5.2. Class: a differentiator element

Bourdieu's argument on social and cultural capital is reflected in the victims of the Colombian conflict. According to my findings, class is a central element in the experience of migration, specifically the social and cultural capital. In other words, the education and social network those returnees could have in their migration experience and in their return. But class, is not the only element. I noticed that political participation was also very important. These two factors intersect with returnees' national identity and their perception of the reparation process. I will try to explain this below.

### 5.2.1. Class and the experience of forced migration

According to my interviewees, the experience of forced migration is different depending on many factors such as the host country, the conditions under which they arrive, the moment in their life when they migrate, their age, their family situation, amongst others. But they never mentioned their social class, or their education level. This research showed, however, that the Colombian migrants can be understood as two big groups: those with a lot of what Bourdieu calls social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) and those without. Certainly, the participants that had engaged in political activism in Colombia (in this case members of the FIV), and came from the middle class, migrated to Europe. Even though they had to deal with painful and problematic situations, all of them had the chance to acquire Masters and PhDs degrees, which is framed under the concept of *embodied state* (Bourdieu 1986). At the same time, they could get jobs related to their topic of study and enrich their social capital with networks.

On the contrary, the experiences of forced migration of victims from a lower class were mediated by difficulties of getting stable jobs, xenophobia and any possibility of university education. Except for the migrants to Venezuela, who thanks to the initial economic situation of the country had the possibility to acquire properties and access to more stable jobs.

### 5.2.2. Class and identity

There is a link between class, political participation and identity as exiles. The narrations of the members of the FIV always included the word "exile", because they perceive themselves as victims of a political and unjust system, which pushed them to migrate due to their political activism. Thus, they experience their migration from a position of political exile, not necessarily from a position of "victims of the conflict". This identification as exiles makes a difference to what they think the reparation process should be.

On the other hand, the interviewees that are not part of the FIV, and that have a lower class, never mentioned the word "exile", but often the word "victim". Their perception about their experience of migration and, hence, their experience of return, are mediated by their position as victims of the armed conflict with rights to a certain pack of reparation measures.

Furthermore, class has to do with national identity and sense of belonging in the return process. For example, Natalia mentioned in the interview that "*I acquired a certain level of consciousness about a broader citizenship, not necessarily a citizenship into a Nation-State. I feel I am*



*from here but I also feel I am Catalan, more than Spanish... but I also feel very Colombian, and nowadays I have had more Colombianidad [or Colombianity], but I returned with a different perspective of my country and now I question what it is to be a Colombian, for me it is not the flag, it is not the football games, but it is a beautiful country to know and to fight for ... there are many things that are Colombia and that are about to be discovered. I feel blended with the land, the food, the music, with the dance, with how we are in the middle of our chaos and our miseries"* (Natalia, returnee from Spain).

According to Christou (2006), the places are the containers for the construction of identities. This can be seen in the narration of Andrés when he says *"I feel more from here... the colours, the flavours, the sounds, the people, the nuances [...] People ask me why I left Switzerland... if it is so beautiful, so nice... And it is... it is cool to live there, but my heart is in Colombia, In Switzerland I don't feel that special thing... besides, here something is in standby"* (Andrés Pérez, in pendulum situation). There is a construction of what Colombians understand by Colombia, national identity has been constructed through history and, at the same time, it shapes the sense of belonging of Colombians, like Christou mentions. Where is the sense of belonging of forced migrants from Colombia attached? Here I agree with Hedetoft (2002) about the attachment of the sense of belonging to the place of return, but maybe, this sense of belonging can change when the person returns, it can be part of the imaginary of return, of the idea of Colombia that people had when forced to leave, but it mutates when the return is done. For example, Andrés refers to his place of birth like *"(here) I don't have a space, I feel excluded... I don't even know my family"* (Andrés Pérez, in pendulum situation between Switzerland and Urabá). This can be explained according to Hedetoft's (2002) idea of belonging: belonging is emotional, and it implies the exclusion of the "others". Returnees can be the "others" in a place where the national identity is kept in construction by people who stayed, whereas they were abroad. *"To plot only "places of birth" and degrees of nativeness is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them"* (Malkki 1992 p. 38).

Thus, the construction of identity within places can be analysed through the cases of forced migrants to Venezuela. In these narrations, people explained how they could construct an identity in Venezuela and how, when the place changed, they had to change along with it and return to Colombia. On the contrary, Hugo, Eduardo, Natalia and Andrés expressed to have a feeling of "in betweenness" on the host country and Colombia, showing a kind of "divided identity", as if it could be split, fragmented, or constructed in many places at the same time. This reflects what Casey (2001) argues about identity and places, where they construct each other at the same time, but for forced migrants this can vary: They constructed a national identity in the country of birth, when they migrated that national identity flew with them, but in the return, the national identity suffered alterations, and in some cases it disappeared, like Hugo's case: he considers the exile as his homeland, his identity is that in betweenness.

Condor (1996) defends the idea that national identity intersects with aspects such as class. Regarding this, what called my attention the most is how narrations of identity and sense of belonging issues were present in the stories of the experiences of return of the members of the FIV, but it was absent in the stories of other interviewees.

### 5.2.3. Return to Colombia

When I spoke to the interviewees, I noticed a big difference among those with a middle social class and political activism and those of a lower class and without political activism, especially when they spoke about the experience of return. The members of the FIV focused on their shocking feelings of being foreign, which questioned their sense of belonging and national identity. Their narrations were really emotionally charged and showed how the impact of returning can be from this point of view.

On the other hand, the participants that are not politically active and had a lower class, focused on another kind of impact: the economic one. For them, to return implies to start again, with nothing in their pockets, without any job, social networks, or education. It means an economic struggle. When they were asked about their feeling of belonging and identity, they had simple direct answers such as: *“I feel from here, I never felt Venezuelan”* (Ana Tulia, returnee from Venezuela), but the core of their narration was: *“Coming back is worst than migrating... because now I have my children, when I went to Venezuela I was young and was alone, but now I have to take care of them and look for job and money for them... It is to start again but now with two more people”* (Ana Tulia, returnee from Venezuela). The experience of return of people with a lower class has its biggest impact on economic aspects, it does not mean that they do not experience changes and questions to their belonging and identity. To the contrary, their experiences implied both things. People of a middle class have more chances to check the economic factor out; it is usually not part of their worries when they return. In this sense, class (especially the *embodied state*) in intersection with political participation, can strongly influence the experience of return of the Colombian victims of the conflict.

Besides class, the return experiences are related to the migration experiences insofar the forced migrants understood their situation. For exiles, to be in exile determines the return because it can be a political claim and a way to rebuild their political participation; but for the other victims, the experience of migration was very diverse and represented economic struggles among other difficulties, just like their understanding of the return process.

Like this, the return to Colombia can be understood as a multiple process, made up of different variables that imply the experience in the host country, and the political activism in intersection with the class. “Return migration as a social, cultural, economic and political phenomenon requires an extensive, comprehensive and critical analysis of all actors and trajectories involved and the multiplicity of concepts related to it” (Christou 2006 p. 56).

The above contradicts the assertions of Cassarino about return migration. In the same way that migration of Colombians due to the conflict is not a phenomenon that appears in the pursuit of development, the return process is far to represent a progress opportunity for the country. People that return with serious economic difficulties do not find an improved country in terms of employment, so they start to be part of the unemployment rate. But worse yet, returnees cannot find a country in peace, so the State needs to guarantee the no repetition of their victimization.

Considering the above, it is important to understand the process of return of victims of the conflict to improve the policies for their attendance, taking also into account their perception of the reparation process and how they relate with the legislation.

#### 5.2.4. Squaring the circle: about the reparation process

In 2011 the Law of Victims and Land Restitution in Colombia was implemented. In 2016 the Peace Agreement with FARC reinforced its few articles about the assistance of victims of the conflict abroad and focused on the return as a right but also as a means for reparation. The Coordinator of the Group for Attention to Victims Abroad of the UARIV explains how the law was not made for victims abroad, nor for returnees from other countries: *“the law has a national territoriality and it was never thought to repair the victims abroad, it was not done for that objective... but before the law there was absolutely nothing for those people”* (Z., Laverde, personal communication, 06 August 2018). Besides, *“the return was only linked to the forced displacement, but we know that there are victims recognized in the register (RUV) because of other facts, indeed, many of the people abroad do not identify themselves as forcefully displaced within Colombia [...] If the person is not a victim of forced displacement it is if like he or she doesn't exist”* (Z., Laverde, personal communication, 06 August 2018). Exactly this is what my interviewees perceive. Despite some of them think that the Peace Agreement and the Law 1448 were important steps through their recognition and reparation as victims of the conflict, most of them agree that the Law is useless and does not respond to their particularities and needs.

What the UARIV does is to try to fit the law into the context of victims abroad and returnees, in a certain intention to square the circle, or to convert a law that was made to people in Colombia into a law for forced migrants: *“We (UARIV) work with what the law has left over but it is not enough”* (Z., Laverde, personal communication, 06 August 2018). Evidently, the legislation is not working to repair the human rights of people like my interviewees.

Regarding assistance to returnees, *“in 1985, the Executive Committee acknowledged the need to pay more attention to the after-effects of repatriation and to broaden UNHCR's mandate to meet that requirement”* (Allen and Morsink 1994 p. 5 in Ghanem 2003 p. 14). According to Ghanem, *“terms to be found in the discourse of repatriation include: reintegration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, rebuilding, readjustment, readaptation, reaccluturation, reassimilation, reinsertion, reintroduction, recovery and re-establishment. (...) Among the most problematic terms of the repatriation canon are the very words return and returnee, which imply that by re-entering one's native country a person is necessarily returning to something familiar”* (Hammond 1999 p. 230 in Ghanem 2003 p. 15).

The Colombian State talks about “reparation” to the victims. But it could be differently understood among them as we saw in the findings chapter. The design of policies for returnees based on the assumption that returnees are going back “home” can be a mistake. As Campillo (2016) argues, the notion of return needs to be problematized and must consider the complexity of this process. It is essential to recognize that people that had a political participation before migrating look for a political reparation, a restitution of their rights as political activists, the end of the political persecution, the recognition of their condition of exiles by the rest of the country, and symbolic measures that could guarantee to them the not repetition of the violence. On the contrary, those people without political activism, not educated and with low incomes, ask for an economical compensation, help with jobs, housing, and in general, they want to live a decent life.

Contrasting Ghanem's ideas with returnees' stories, I would add that reparation starts with the recognition of the inefficiency of the current law for this population. Colombia needs to have laws that are accurate for the forced migrants and returnees's context, recognizing that these people are a big number of heterogynous Colombians, with different experiences of migration, different identities and sense of belonging and that all that differences among them are equally valid. For both, political activists/ middle class victims and non political activists and lower class victims, returning is similar to being born again as citizens, it is like to re-appear in a country where they disappeared, to reconstruct their lives as members of the Colombian society. Reparation also has to do with the awareness of society of the existence of this population and their complexity as a social and dynamic process, as Castles (2003) suggests.

## Conclusions

During the many years of armed conflict in Colombia, thousands of people had to migrate abroad in order to survive the period of violence. In 2007 Colombia became one of the main sending countries around the world, according to UNHCR (2015). These Colombians, victims of the armed conflict, fled to different countries around the world as refugee, or as tourist; others left the country walking and crossing the borders towards an irregular situation. They are people from different social classes, different ethnicities, gender, ages, they could have been politically active in Colombia before going abroad or not, but the common characteristic is that they suffered violence in the context of the conflict and needed to leave the country. This forced migration questions the extent to which the Colombian conflict is internal. As we see, its branches have reached far away. Unfortunately, the Colombian society as well as the Colombian state has ignored this situation, and migrants have been isolated from the reality of the country, political participation and human rights reparation.

After living for years outside Colombia, many had decided to return. If the migration of these people has been ignored by the Colombian society, the return has been even more. This research aimed to understand what factors shape the experience of return of the victims forced to migrate abroad, looking at their experiences in the host country, the way how their national identity and sense of belonging were affected, and how they relate with the Colombian current legislation for reparation.

To address my research questions, I interviewed 10 victims of the conflict that were forced to migrate to 5 countries around the world, including Latin American and European countries. The interviewees were a diverse group of adults, 5 of them were women, 5 were men. Some of them were peasants, not educated and with low incomes, others were educated people, had been involved in political left activism before migrating, and belong to the middle class. 6 of my interviewees returned to Colombia, 2 of them are in a 'pendulum situation' (Haas and Fokkema 2010), and 2 still live abroad. I used intersectionality as methodology of analysis.

After contrasting the theory with my findings I could conclude, first of all, that the return could be perceived largely as a more difficult experience than the forced migration itself. It is a complex process that implies different aspects that should be taken into account for theorizing about return migration (Campillo 2016). The returnees to Colombia need to "re-appear" in the Colombian space, they had to face the situation of reconstructing themselves as citizens of the country.

Secondly, the Colombian case of forced migration challenges the existing theory in this topic. I showed how the relationship North- South and the development nexus in forced migration theorization is not necessarily the reality of Colombians victims of the armed conflict. Instead, most of them migrated to Southern countries with the objective to survive. Thus, the agency in forced migration that authors such as Turton (2003) and von Houte (2016) argue is mediated by an imminent necessity of surviving. Likewise, the theory of return migration that relates return to development opportunities in the country of birth (Cassarino 2004) does not reflect the Colombian case. There, the returnees went back to a country that was still in conflict, their motives can vary between family ties, economic diffi-

culties in the host countries, xenophobia, politic participation back in Colombia or a certain group of motives that do not necessarily help Colombia to develop.

In the third place, the intersection of class, understood as cultural capital (education), social capital (networks), and economic capital (Bourdieu 1986), and political activism influences the experiences of forced migration, national identity, sense of belonging, and the perception of the reparation process.

Regarding the forced migration experience, the people that were politically active in Colombia before migrating to Europe had the chance to improve their cultural, social and economic capital with Master studies, PhDs, and a large social network. In the meanwhile, those that were not political activists and that had a lower social class, experienced economic difficulties in the host country, independently which one it was. It is important to distinguish that the participants with political participation understood their migration as an exile, which is politically symbolical. To define themselves as exiles determined their experience in the host country as well as their experience of return. Participants that didn't engage in political activism in Colombia narrated themselves as victims. This distinction also shaped their return.

About identity and sense of belonging, it can be said that all returnees questioned their national identity and sense of belonging to Colombia once they were in the country. It can be modified, questioned, challenged. Their feeling of belonging was towards Colombia, as well as to the host country; their national identity is mutable, constructed and reconstructed through the migration and return process. What is different among the returnees is the place they gave to their national identity and sense of belonging to Colombia in their return. For middle class and political activist participants, this is the main issue during the return, the most difficult thing they have to face, a very important one. But for lower class people, the impact on national identity and sense of belonging moves to another place, their main challenge in the return is the economic factor. Again, they first needed to survive.

Accordingly, the relationship of returnees with Law 1448 of 2011 and the Peace Agreement with FARC is also determined by class and political participation. The exiles demanded a political reparation, whereas the victims demanded an economic compensation, housing and jobs. It is necessary to differentiate between these two ways to perceive the reparation process if the Colombian state wants to design policies according to the social, political and economic context of all forced migrants and returnees. There is no place for generalizations under the terms of "exiles" or "victims abroad" when this population is so heterogeneous. The accuracy with the different contexts and particularities can contribute to the reparation of these historically isolated Colombians, contradicting the current legislation.

It is not possible to understand the return process to Colombia without understanding the factors that caused it, such as class, political participation, experiences of migration, national identity and their sense of belonging.

Finally, future research could try to identify other intersections. For example by contrasting lower class and political participation with middle / upper class and non-

political participation; this could contribute to our understanding of forced migration and the return of victims of armed conflicts in Colombia and beyond.

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# Appendices

**Appendix 1**  
List of interviewees

Name	Gender	Age	Place of Birth	Host Country	PP*	Class/ Level of Education
Eduardo Eliecer Osorio	Male	55	San Carlos, Antioquia	Netherlands	Yes	Upper/ Professional
Hugo Paternina	Male	53	Montería, Córdoba	Spain	Yes	Upper/ PHD
Natalia (Pseudonym)	Female	37	Fusagasugá, Cundinamarca	Spain	Yes	Upper / Professional
Andrés Pérez	Male	57	Arboletes, Urabá	Switzerland	Yes	Upper/ Master
Diego Viáfara	Male	49	Puerto Tejada, Cauca	Venezuela	No	Lower / Not Educated
Francia Irene Fierro Audor	Female	47	Florencia, Caquetá	Spain	No	Lower / Not educated
Ángela (Pseudonym)	Female	52	Cali, Valle del Cauca	Guatemala	Yes	Upper/ Professional
Rafael Medina	Male	47	Carmen de Bolívar, Bolívar	Venezuela	No	Lower/ Not Educated
Yadira Martelo	Female	65	Carmen de Bolívar, Bolívar	Venezuela	No	Lower / Not Educated
Ana Tulia Arias	Female	32	Carmen de Bolívar, Bolívar	Venezuela	No	Lower/ Not Educated

\*Political Participation

## **Appendix 2**

### Interviews details

The research took place in 3 different countries with the participation of 10 people: I interviewed Eduardo in The Netherlands, who still is living there but visits Colombia every year since he has the Dutch nationality; Hugo in Spain, who is established there and has no intentions of return but visited Colombia after several years of exile. In Colombia I interviewed 6 people: I talked with Natalia and Andrés in Bogotá, both members of the FIV. In Barranquilla I met with Yadira, Ana Tulia and Rafael. Additionally, I spoke with Ángela, Francia Irene, and Diego by telephone (they live in Cali, Pitalito and Caloto respectively). Andrés and Rafael are living in both, host country and Colombia. The rest of the interviewees are all returnees whose plans are to stay in Colombia.

The interviewees allowed me to use their real name; they do it as a way to raise their own voices, except two participants, whose names were modified by me: Natalia and Ángela (see Annex 1). The interviews were gender balanced. They were 5 men and 5 women. Their ages vary between 32 to 65 years old. One man identifies himself as Afrocolombian. All of them identify themselves as heterosexuals.

The participants were born in different regions of Colombia, specifically in the departments of: Antioquia, Córdoba, Urabá, Bolívar, Cundinamarca, Valle del Cauca, Cauca, and Caquetá. The host countries where they migrated were The Netherlands, Spain, Venezuela, Switzerland and Guatemala.