ICIP WORKING PAPERS:
2009/6

Bringing actors and violent conflict into forced migration literature. A model of the decision to return

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This text is based on the author's Doctoral dissertation: "Return after violence. Emotions and rationality in the aftermath of violent conflict", to be defended in Spring 2010 at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

Institut Català Internacional per la Pau
Barcelona, desembre 2009

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Editors
Javier Alcalde and Rafael Grasa

Graphic Designer
Cla-se

ISSN
2013.5793 (on line edition)
2013.5785 (paper edition)

DL
B-38.039-2009

ABSTRACT (ENG)

Populations displaced as a result of mass violent conflict have become one of the most pressing humanitarian concerns of the last decades. They have also become one salient political issue as a perceived burden (in economic and security terms) and as an important piece in the shift towards a more interventionist paradigm in the international system, based on both humanitarian and security grounds. The saliency of these aspects has detracted attention from the analysis of the interactions between relocation processes and violent conflict. Violent conflict studies have also largely ignored those interactions as a result of the consideration of these processes as mere reaction movements determined by structural conditions. This article takes the view that individual's agency is retained during such processes, and that it is consequential, calling for the need to introduce a micro perspective. Based on this, a model for the individual's decision of return is presented. The model has the potential to account for the dynamics of return at both the individual and the aggregate level. And it further helps to grasp fundamental interconnections with violent conflict. Some relevant conclusions are derived for the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina and about the implications of the politicization of return.

Keywords: displacement; violent conflict; return; Bosnia-Herzegovina.

ABSTRACT (CAT)

El desplaçament de poblacions a causa de conflictes violents s'ha convertit en una de les principals preocupacions humanitàries de les últimes dècades. També s'ha convertit en un assumpte polític de gran rellevància, que és percebut com un llast (en termes econòmics i de seguretat), però també com a peça important en la transició cap a un intervencionisme més gran en el sistema internacional, tant des d'una base humanitària com de seguretat. La importància d'aquests aspectes ha desviat l'atenció de l'anàlisi de les interaccions entre els processos de desplaçament i els conflictes violents que els provoquen. La literatura sobre els conflictes violents ha obviat aquestes interaccions, degut principalment a que els processos de desplaçament són considerats com meres reaccions definides per condicions estructurals. Aquest article parteix de la premissa que

l'individu reté la seva capacitat decisiva en aquests processos i que es tracta d'una capacitat que té conseqüències. Per tant, és necessari introduir en l'anàlisi una perspectiva a nivell micro. Partint d'aquesta premissa, el text presenta un model de la decisió de retorn a nivell individual i també a nivell agregat. A més, permet identificar interconnexions fonamentals d'aquestes dinàmiques amb els conflictes violents. Finalment, l'article ofereix algunes conclusions rellevants per al cas de Bòsnia-Herzegovina i sobre les implicacions de la polititització del retorn.

Paraulesclau: Desplaçaments; conflictesviolents; retorn; Bòsnia-Herzegovina.

ABSTRACT (CAS)

El desplazamiento de poblaciones a causa de conflictos violentos se ha convertido en una de las mayores preocupaciones humanitarias de las últimas décadas. También se ha convertido en un asunto político de gran relevancia, que es percibido como un lastre (en términos económicos y de seguridad), pero también como pieza importante en la transición hacia un mayor intervencionismo en el sistema internacional, tanto desde una base humanitaria como de seguridad. La importancia de estos aspectos ha desviado la atención del análisis de las interacciones entre los procesos de desplazamiento y los conflictos violentos que los provocan. La literatura sobre los conflictos violentos ha obviado esas interacciones, debido principalmente a que los procesos de desplazamiento son considerados como meras reacciones definidas por condiciones estructurales. Este artículo parte de la premisa de que el individuo retiene su capacidad decisoria en esos procesos y de que dicha capacidad tiene consecuencias, por lo que se hace necesaria la introducción en el análisis de una perspectiva a nivel micro. Partiendo de esta premisa, el texto presenta un modelo de la decisión de retorno. El modelo tiene la capacidad de explicar las dinámicas de retorno a nivel individual y también a nivel agregado. Además, permite identificar interconexiones fundamentales de estas dinámicas con los conflicto violentos. Finalmente, el artículo ofrece algunas conclusiones relevantes para el caso de Bosnia-Herzegovina y sobre las implicaciones de la politización del retorno.

Palabras clave: Desplazamientos; conflictos violentos; retorno; Bosnia-Herzegovina.

CONTENTS:

1. INTRODUCTION

Populations displaced as a result of mass violent conflict have become one of the most pressing humanitarian concerns of the last decades. They have also become one pressing political issue as a perceived economic and security burden on the shoulders of the international system. They have thus emerged as an engine and a vehicle in the shift towards a more interventionist paradigm in the international system. The enormous significance of these implications has put forced migration under the focus of political action, policy design and humanitarian practice, but it has also led to a lack of attention to the critical aspect defining these mass movements: their embeddedness in the original violent conflict producing them. This article argues for the need to understand displacement as a fundamental part of violent conflict, both as a product and as a core component influencing the dynamics of violent conflict.

The second argument presented here is that individuals' agency is retained during such processes despite high restrictions in the available choices; and that such agency is consequential. This contrasts with the more generalized view on forced migration as mere structural reaction movements, and it calls for the introduction of a micro perspective, in opposition to the predominance of aggregate-level analysis in the area until very recently. By helping to understand the specific mechanisms underlying individuals' decisions, the introduction of a micro perspective is of great value also at the level of policy design, with a potential to enhance its efficiency and consistency.

The article is structured in four main sections. The second section provides a background into forced displacement and its salience as a humanitarian and political issue at the international level. The third section introduces the three basic gaps identified in the relevant literature: the lack of attention to displacement as a fundamental component of violent conflict; the specific consideration of displacement as a mere reaction movement; and the lack of consideration of individuals' agency. The fourth section presents a micro-level model of the decision to return in an attempt to make a contribution in filling those gaps. The fifth section derives some implications from the

model for the Bosnian case and it draws some general conclusions about the implications of the politicization of return. Finally, the sixth section presents a conclusion.

2. FORCED MIGRATION: THE PRESSING FRONT COVER

Populations displaced as a result of mass violent conflict are not a new phenomenon at all. Uprooting as a result of violent conflict is indeed as old as violent conflict itself. Actually, the term 'refugee' and the massive scale of the phenomenon are a particularly salient part of European history since the early modern times (Marrus 1985:3-7; Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989:5-16; Skran 1995:13).

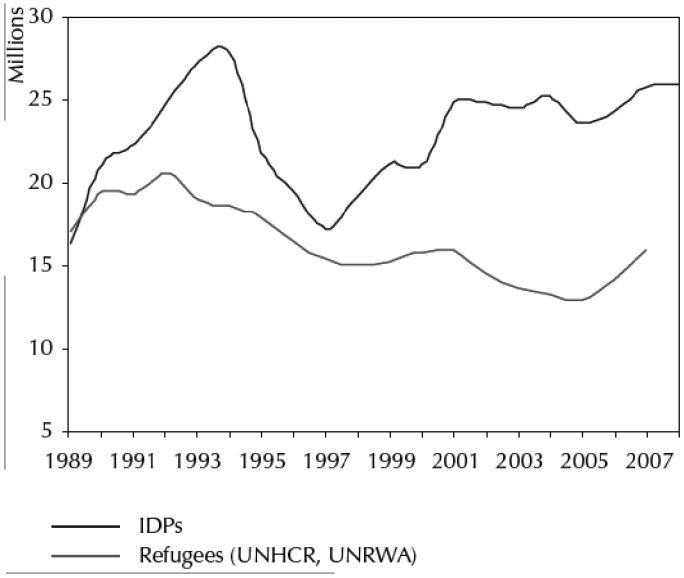
A qualitative jump did occur between the two world wars with the development of destructive military technologies enshrining the concept of total war. Non-combatants were to suffer direct violence and persecution in a measure and manner unknown to that date: numbers went from hundreds of thousands to millions of displaced people (Marrus 1985:10; Skran 1995:53-54). Only in Europe, World War II provoked over 30 million refugees (Weiner 1996a: 6)[1]. In the 1990s, the demise of the communist bloc, the Yugoslavian wars and the crisis of the Great Lakes marked a historical record of 20 million international refugees with an added record of 28 million internally displaced, totalling an estimated 48 million displaced people in the world (see figure 1).

The saliency of the 'refugee crisis' in the last decades as one central humanitarian concern is to a great extent the product of the increased visibility of global events and of the increasing spread of humanitarianism and human rights standards and awareness (Gordenker 1987; Weiner 1996a:5). Actually, the core contemporary bodies of public international law relating to human rights, humanitarian rules in warfare and refugees were all established between 1948 and 1951 in the context of a common effort to

1. Figures from the first half of the century must be put in perspective with the smaller world population at the time (Skran 1995: 54). Also, contemporary displacement produces larger shares of internal displacement than international refugees, which are the ones roughly estimated in early-century figures (Cohen 2009).

prevent the recurrence of atrocities from the recent world war. Furthermore, the three bodies are being brought closer and more coordinated in the last two decades (Fitzpatrick 2000: 3).

Figure 1. Evolution of the number of refugees (under UNHCR/UNRWA mandate) and IDPs



Source: IDMC (2009)

Note: The latest UNHCR estimates place the number of refugees and asylum seekers in the world in 16 million[2] (see UNHCR 2009) and the number of internally displaced people in at least 26 million (see IDMC 2009). Together, they total over 42 million forcibly displaced persons.

In parallel, populations displaced as a result of mass violent conflict have also become one pressing and salient political issue as a perceived burden, in economic and security terms, on the shoulders of the international system and, more specifically, at the doors of a majority of countries in the world (Marrus 1985: 3; Widgren 1990: 749; Weiner 1992: 91-93; 1996a:8; Skran 1995:13; Dowty and Loescher 1996: 44-7).

2. This includes only those cases under the responsibility of UNHCR and UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East) by the end of 2008.

The refugee regime inaugurated by the 1951 UN Convention was extremely limited, but the subsequent decades provided a context favourable to its progressive expansion: the widening of the regime rendered benefits within the geopolitical strategies of the Cold War (Chimni 1998: 350; Tanner and Stedman 2003: 5) and it produced little cost at a time when guest labour immigration policies actively encouraged cross-border migration and free movement (Widgren 1990: 749-50). The economic recession after the 1973 oil crisis, which gave rise to the non-entrée migration regime, and the end of the Cold War radically altered the costs and benefits of the evolved refugee regime.

The design of national policies in order to deal with these inflows has since become a salient issue in many developed and developing countries. The former actually bear a thin proportion of the 'refugee burden', amounting to around one fifth of the total number of refugees in the world (UNHCR 2009: 2), but the saliency of migration policies in the national agendas puts asylum regimes and broader refugee policies in a very salient place, given their perception as a 'privileged' gate to Western countries (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989: 3; Rudolph 2003: 614).

The result has been a generalized shift from the original exilic bias of the 1951 regime to a new 'containment' paradigm, built around the idea of prevention and containment of refugee flows within their countries and regions of origin (Thorburn 1996: 120; Chimni 1998: 355-7)[3]. This shift adds to the existing tension between liberal and social-democratic ideals on the one hand, and restrictive migration policies on the other, a still deeper dimension of friction with human rights standards, thus fuelling political and academic debate.

The political salience of refugee flows runs even deeper, beginning with the fact that the very phenomenon is a disturbing reality hard to accommodate within the state-based international order, since refugees are individuals who are unable to avail themselves of the protection of their states (Skran 1995: 3). Furthermore, the new containment paradigm, with its focus on prevention and containment within the country —or region— of origin

3. The number of refugees has actually maintained a sustained decrease after the 1990s peak, in stark opposition with the number of IDPs, which has dramatically increased since the end of that decade (see figure 1). IDPs have been officially counted only since 1982, shortly before they surpassed the number of international refugees for the first time (Polzer and Hammond 2008: 420; Cohen 2009).

renders some obvious challenges when confronting the principle of state sovereignty (Cohen 2009).

The last part of the twentieth century has actually seen a progressive shift in international politics towards a more interventionist paradigm which has increased the grounds for international intervention and cooperation. This has occurred mostly through the appealing to humanitarian, as well as security, reasons. Refugees and IDPs have a large bearing on both rationales (Skran 1995:2,6; Dowty and Loescher 1996: 43; Thorburn 1996: 120-1; Martin 2000: 8-9), and cooperation and interventionist policies derived from the new containment paradigm have been facilitated by, but have also crucially contributed to, that progressive shift (Helton 2000).

The shift has been toped, as for now, with the landmark concept of 'responsibility to protect', which comes to defy from inside the principle of state sovereignty.[4] The foundational drive of such principle lays in the appeal to protect internally displaced persons (Cohen 2009). These developments place forcibly displaced populations at the heart of the tensions and concerns defining the contemporary international order: global interdependences, global interventionism vis-à-vis cross-border protectionism, and widespread appeals to humanitarianism and human rights protection (Skran 1995: 292-293).

4. See the Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, The Responsibility to Protect (2001) and the United Nations 2005 World Summit Outcome document (para. 139).

3. FORCED MIGRATION: BACK COVER, OR WHAT THE WORLD TENDS NOT TO SEE

3.1. THE MISSING LINK: FORCED MIGRATION AS A FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENT OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

The two sources of empirical relevance just outlined have put forced migration under the focus of political action, policy design and humanitarian practice. And they have accordingly given rise to a growing body of academic research. However, the enormous importance of such prima facie implications has largely clouded the aspect critically defining them: their embeddedness in the original violent conflict producing them. The lack of attention to the relationship between violent conflict and displacement can be sensed through the rare crossing of the invisible wall between the emergent forced migration literature and conflict literature.

The forced migration literature emerging from the 1980s has been largely shaped by the humanitarian and policy dimensions dominating the perception of the phenomenon. The result is an almost exclusive focus in what comes immediately after the initial movement of displacement.[5] Efforts are then dedicated mostly to the evaluation and design of humanitarian interventions (e.g. Posen 1996; Dowty and Loescher 1996; Cohen and Deng 1998; Cohen 2009; Lischer 2005), to the analysis of factors intervening in the flight, its scope and its final destination (e.g. Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989; Schmeidl 1995, 1997; Weiner 1996a; Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004, 2006, 2007; Howard 2004), and to the analysis of the implications of different asylum and migration regimes, both for the

5. From now on, I will be using the term 'relocation process' to refer to the whole phenomenon encompassing the initial displacement move and all subsequent ones. 'Displacement' will designate the initial uprooting move and the very fact that the individual got displaced. 'Return' will stand for the move back to the home origin. 'Relocation' (without the 'process' tail) will designate any move after displacement which is not return, or the very fact that the individual has not returned (and has no medium-term prospects of returning). The term 'relocation process' is the one encompassing them all.

affected populations and for the receiving communities and countries (e.g. Weiner 1992, 1996b; Rudolph 2003; Lischer 2005; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; Salehyan 2008; Czaika 2009).

The analysis of the causes and conditioning of the flight has brought forced migration literature somewhat closer to violent conflict literature, firstly through the concept of 'root causes' (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989: 258-68) and, more recently, through analyses of the way particular types of violence affect the setting in motion and the intensity of displacement flows (e.g. Schmeidl 1995, 1997; Schmeidl and Jenkins 1998; Moore and Gurr 1998; Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004; Edwards 2007). Nevertheless, the relationship has been largely limited to the borrowing of some key concepts, with no actual analytical convergence or interaction. The only instance of actual convergence has been the study of the risks of conflict spreading and regional destabilization posed by mass displacements (e.g. Weiner 1996a; Lischer 2005; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; Salehyan 2008), which falls short of going to the heart of the relationship between displacement and the original conflict in which it is embedded.

On the other hand, the literature on conflict and conflict resolution literature, dealing with the causes, dynamics and consequences of violent conflict, has largely ignored the issue of displaced populations. Displacement moves are generally taken as given at the aggregate level, without further questioning about the relocation process itself, its conditionings or its consequences (Lubkemann 2008a: 5; Lindley 2009: 5). No empirical or analytical efforts have been undertaken, for instance, to establish the empirical prominence of different initiating scenarios where displacement can amount to a side-product of violence, a strategic component, or a goal in itself. Neither have there been attempts to analyze the mechanisms nor the intervening factors linking goals, strategies and outcomes in each of these scenarios.

This lack of attention to the way violence produces and conditions displacement and return movements is hard to reconcile with the actual recognition of these as a key part of the consequences and results of violent conflict. Either as a side-product, as a purposeful strategy or as a pursued goal, the patterns

of relocation and return are a radical source of socio-demographic change, which amounts to a crucial part of the results of violence. This is especially so, but not exclusively, for conflicts whose cleavages are —or can be— articulated along demographic lines, such as ethnic conflicts.

3.2. RELOCATION WITHIN AND AFTER VIOLENCE: MORE THAN AN APPENDIX TO CONFLICT

One of the reasons why displacement has been overlooked in violent conflict analyses is the widely dominant view that considers relocation processes as a mere reaction movements determined by macro-structural factors at the political, economic and social level (Lindley 2009: 6). This generalized view of relocation processes misses, however, one important part of the story. Relocation processes also influence the dynamics of violent conflict itself. Practitioners in the terrain are painfully aware of the interactions established on the ground between displacement and return movements, the way they are dealt with, and the dynamics of violence (see e.g. Crisp 2000; Wessells 2008; Mooney 2008). Intervention and even documentation of the realities of relocation pose enormous ethical and practical challenges as a result of the interconnections with the ongoing conflict and violence and given the practical and political relevance of those populations in the move for both the conflict and the unfolding of violence.

To begin with, the displacement of populations alters the capacities of the sides in conflict to extract resources or strategic advantages from those populations (Tanner and Stedman 2003). This depends on the degree of access and control that each side has to those populations, as well as to the vulnerabilities entailed by the displacement process, or by the immobility or inexistence of the displacement exit option (see for instance Justino 2008; Lindley 2009). For instance, state forces are argued to have forcibly expelled population in Eastern Burma in order to weaken the support networks of the insurgent armed groups in the area (Shukla 2008: 7). A most conspicuous example is also that of refugee camps being instrumentalized by warring

factions in order to find shelter and resources, which was a particularly salient phenomenon in the refugee crisis of the Great Lakes (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989: 275-8; Tanner and Stedman 2003: 1-3).

Displacement also alters the distribution of resources in the conflict scenario since displaced people frequently leave behind possessions and livelihoods, and the control of natural and location-specific resources frequently change hands as a result of population shifts (Deininger, Ibáñez, and Querubin 2004: 4; Justino 2008: 6). Furthermore, it has the obvious potential of altering the geographical distribution of political allegiances. Actually, the process of displacement itself engenders new grievances and necessities in the population, and it thus alters the parameters under which conflict is being fought (Kalyvas 2006, 2008). Similarly, it also provides new opportunities, for instance by attracting humanitarian assistance and, sometimes, international attention (Tanner and Stedman 2003: 3; Wessells 2008: 9). Indeed, the numbers and the nature of the population flows frequently bear a most relevant political leverage, and their documentation is thus typically obstructed, controlled or manipulated (Crisp 2000).

Finally, mass displacement flows frequently pose important demographic, economic and environmental challenges to receiving areas, which tend to be within the geographical and geopolitical range of ongoing violence and conflict (Cohen and Deng 1998: 29). Even when this is not the case, as it has been already documented in the literature, mass displacement flows still bear the risk of extending the geographical limits of the conflict, for instance by altering a given ethnic balance in the receiving area, by provoking certain economic grievances with the receiving population, or by producing a confrontation with the originating country (Weiner 1992, 1996a; Tanner and Stedman 2003; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; Salehyan 2008).

In forced migration literature there is a notable visibility of such instances in which relocation processes have a clear role in the dynamics of violence (see for instance Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989; Weiner 1992, 1996a; Tanner and Stedman 2003; Lischer 2005; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; Salehyan 2008; Wessells 2008). However, as already noted, there is no specific focus, and there has been no systematic research, on the way that

violent conflict and displacement actually interact, the analysis being limited to the way various types —or levels— of violence set in motion —or not— smaller or larger population flows, or the risk of violent conflict spreading its geographical limits.

From the other extreme of the dyadic relation, in the conflict literature, relocation processes do frequently surface and emerge from the analysis as a relevant empirical component of violent conflict, but since no systematic or a priori consideration is given to them, at best they remain as an ad hoc or as marginal components in these analyses (see for instance Justino 2008). In very few cases they have been paid specific attention within this part of the literature (see for instance Newland 1993). The result is that the relationship between relocation processes and violent conflicts remains seriously under-researched.

3.3. RELOCATION DURING AND AFTER VIOLENCE: AGENCY RETAINED

The consideration of relocation processes as mere reaction movements determined by macro-structural factors has had the natural consequence of producing an overwhelming dominance of structural (aggregate-level) analyses in the study of these processes. As already noted, these movements tend to be taken as given at the aggregate level in the conflict literature. Similarly, structural and aggregate level analyses tend to dominate in the forced migration literature.

During the 'refugee crisis' of the 1980s and the turn towards the new containment paradigm, the 'root causes' approach dominated the field of forced migration for both policy makers and scholars focusing on the underlying structural factors which were deemed to set the ground for displacement moves. This approach was inaugurated by a 1981 report for ECOSOC on mass exoduses by the former High Commissioner for Refugees, Aga Khan (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989: 258) which underscored economic stringencies as the most important among those structural causes (ibid.: 259; see Aga Khan 1981). The approach was flawed in the same basic way as its twin in violent

conflict literature. Analytically, the structural factors identified are too wide to actually account for violence/displacement variations. At the more practical level, intervention in and transformation of root causes, even if necessary and most convenient, present daunting challenges and defy even long-term time horizons (Thorburn 1996: 123, 127).

In the 1990s, the obvious limitations of the approach led to a move towards the analysis of the proximate and immediate causes producing displacement, bringing to the forefront the study of the impact of different types —and, more recently, levels— of violence on the production and size of displacement moves (e.g. Schmeidl 1995, 1997; Schmeidl and Jenkins 1998; Moore and Gurr 1998; Moore and Shellman 2004; Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Howard 2004; Edwards 2007). However, these latter approaches take a similar view on displacement as the aggregate outcome of aggregate contextual causes.

The consideration of relocation processes as mere reaction movements has to do, probably, with the representation of relocation processes as 'forceful' migration movements in a literal sense: the absolute absence of choice. Nevertheless, such representation oversimplifies the realities of displacement, which can be rather characterized as extremely restricted choice environments, summed up in the idea that the individual would not have departed —or not in the moment and manner in which she did— had not an extreme coercive violence –or simply an extreme degree of violence– been an imminent threat to his or her survival.

The image of a displaced person being physically driven out by force is not far from reality in some cases, but it is not the most widespread situation of displacement. The closest case in terms of 'forcefulness' of departure (i.e. restriction of choice) is that of individuals being pushed out by a sudden and immediate threat of radical violence —either at the personal or at the local level. In many cases, though, the threat does not arrive suddenly and unexpectedly. The individual usually has the opportunity to foresee its occurrence, or the threat may just go in crescendo, so the individual may have some room for deciding the time and modus of departure, taking decisions and making arrangements in advance (Lindley 2009: 41-42). At the end of the day, the individual has the option to decide to stay and to face

the consequences of the threat, which is not an extremely rare occurrence in some contexts (Steel 2009). The well-known 'fight and flight' repertoire of answers to fear is perfectly applicable to the displacement decision.

However, the assumption of powerlessness and radical determination tends to be made extensive to the full range of movements and decisions involved in relocation processes. Undoubtedly, the violent environment, the fierce politics being played 'by other means' (taking Clausewitz's classical definition of war in a self-convenient manner) and the tight international system and refugee regime, all of them highly condition and restrict the choices available to the individual, after the initial displacement move as well (Lindley 2009: 10-1; Turton 2003: 11).

Freedom of movement is usually hampered for most refugees and displaced persons, either in a formalized way or in an effective way, subject to different asylum regimes, refugee camps regulations, rampant insecurity or a stark lack of resources and livelihood alternatives as a result of war and displacement.[6] In addition, their life choices continue to be conditioned throughout the process of conflict settlement and conflict resolution. Their available options are shaped by the peacemaking and peace-building strategies and interventions, the available humanitarian assistance and local socio-demographic and political transformations in the place of origin. In some cases, they may not be recognized the right to stay or the right to return by the local authorities or even by international agencies considering return 'not safe'.

The representation of relocation processes as reactions absent of choice has favoured the structural perspective needing little consideration of the individual's decisions and actions, and taking displaced people as mere victims, rather than actors. The claim here is that, despite the undeniable and obvious relevance of macro-structural factors, relocation processes are not fully determined by them. Structural factors highly restrict the alternatives available to the individual, but there is still room left for individuals' decisions based on factors beyond macro conditionings (Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003: 31; Turton 2003: 10-1; Lubkemann 2008a: 5; Wood 2008:

6. In the year 2008 there were 8.45 million refugees who had been already warehoused for five years or more. Data available at http://www.refugees.org/FTP/WRS09PDFS/WarehousingMap.pdf (accessed October 13, 2009).

540). This includes, for instance, the escape routes or the final destinations, i.e. where and how displaced people may end up, either temporarily or in a more permanent basis, and the more definite resolution of their situation, including negotiations for return and conflict settlement (Turton 2003: 10; Koser 2008: 73; Lindley 2009: 41-49)[7].

There is a need then to draw attention to the way displaced people are not only affected by these developments, but also react and cope with their situation. In doing so, they become relevant actors—and they should be considered so— determining some of their life options and, most importantly here, some of the dynamics and outcomes characterizing the violent conflict that made them flee. An empirical implication of this –and a puzzle to be accounted for by the structural approaches to forced migration— is the fact that variation can be found in the patterns of return and relocation which cannot be accounted for by such macro factors. For instance, it is hard to explain in these terms the variable rates and patterns of return between locations most similar in their background and structural features, as well as in the types and degrees of violence undergone, and which are even very proximate and similar in geographical terms.

In conclusion, it is relevant, and not only from a humanitarian point of view, to interrogate ourselves about the impact that violence —and the threat of violence— will have on individuals and groups, and, more specifically, to interrogate ourselves about how individuals and groups react and cope with it. A micro-level understanding of individuals' constraints and incentives in relocation processes is necessary in order to understand the actual determinants of such processes and their role in violent conflict.

Such micro-level approach has been conspicuously missing in forced migration literature until very recently (see for instance Edwards 2007; Lindley 2009; Steel 2009). This approach has had, however, important pioneers in conflict studies with scholars such as Timur Kuran (1987a, 1987b, 1989, 1997), Roger Petersen (2001, 2002) or Stathis Kalyvas (2006), who have opened the door to a systematic and serious consideration of micro-foundations in order to

7. Only individuals who are deprived of freedom at some point in an absolute manner (i.e. who are retained or driven by force) can be assumed not to be making any choices.

sustain and entrench theoretical models and empirical evidence on violent conflict.

4. A MICRO LEVEL APPROACH TO RELOCATION ISSUES. THE DECISION TO RETURN.

In this section, we present a model for the individual's decision to return. Among the various decisions and instances within relocation processes, return has become central at the policy level since the 1980s, as a result of the shift in the international refugee regime from the exilic bias favouring resettlement to the containment paradigm strongly favouring –and pushing for– 'voluntary repatriation' (Chimni 1998: 363; Crisp 2004: 4; Haider 2009). Since that decade, governments and UN agencies have promoted voluntary repatriation as the desirable and ultimate solution ('durable solution') to refugees [8], although this political encouragement to return is not matched with systematic and empirical research on its dynamics, conditionings and implications (Takahashi 1997: 593; Chimni 1998: 364; Ghanem 2003: 13).[9]

Besides its policy salience, return is most relevant for the outcomes —and dynamics— of violent conflict, given that it determines whether the unintended, instrumentalized or targeted displacement moves taking place as a result of violence are reversed or not, thus reshaping the initial demographic distribution drawn by violent conflict. This initial distribution, determined by displacement, and the corrected one, determined by return and relocation patterns, interact in producing, among others, a new —or

8. There are three durable solutions usually considered: return to the home or country of origin, local integration in the location or country of displacement, and resettlement to a third location or country.
9. This is not to say that important research and documentation on voluntary repatriation and return issues has not taken place. To name a few, some major contributions are, for instance, the edited volumes by Allen and Morsink (1994), Black and Koser (1999) and Long and Oxfeld (2004). Special volumes have been dedicated also in various specialized journals, such as *Forced Migration Review* (Issue 21, September 2004; Issue 11, October 2001; Issue 7, April 2000) or *Refuge* (vol. 19, no 3, 2001).

not— geography of loyalties; they also shape a new —or not— distribution of resource control; and, most generally, they condition deep socio-demographic changes in the socio-economic maps of the affected territories.[10]

But, what determines return? What are the structural conditions and individual considerations that play a role? What are its implications? The model presented here takes a micro-perspective with the potential to account for the dynamics of return at both the individual and the aggregate level. It is based on a rational choice framework, and two types of components define it: enabling factors and motivating factors. The former are given by security conditions, necessary to make the decision to return 'rationally tolerable', the latter, by the usual calculations of costs and benefits, but with the important peculiarity of introducing considerations beyond mere economic calculations. The next three sub-sections describe these components and thus the fundamental micro-foundations underpinning the model, which is put together and presented in the final sub-section (4.4.).

The analysis of the micro-foundations of return underscores the interconnections between relocation processes and the dynamics of violent conflict and conflict in general. The micro-level approach also offers one added important advantage: it provides a handle not only of quantitative variations but also of the nature of the actual reasons for returning or for staying in displacement, which may have crucial implications for policy design. In this sense, the model proposed here improves existing push-pull models by considering both types of factors in both directions.

4.1. THE KNOWN MOTIVATIONS OF RETURN: ECONOMIC CALCULUS, ROOTS ATTACHMENT, AND RESTORATION

There is a pervasive tendency to assume the return to the place of origin, from which people were forced to leave, as a natural move (Coles 1985, 1989). This tendency has been further enhanced under the paradigm shift in

10. These changes add up to those produced by public health issues derived from both violence and displacement (e.g. deaths, incapacities, diseases).

the international refugee regime (Ghanem 2003: 3) but it actually resonates deeply with the documented experiences of many displaced people across the world and across an array of cultures and backgrounds: "Return to the place one has been violently uprooted from is an overriding preoccupation, bordering obsession, of most refugee populations" concludes Kibreab about displaced populations in Africa, although pointing out that "this is not only true in Africa" (Kibreab 1999: 405). There are three big sources of motivation for returning which consistently appear at the forefront —or at the background— of the existing literature and of such testimonies.

1. The ***drive for 'home' or the attachment to the roots*** (Long and Oxfeld 2004: 1-2). Although some individual and cultural variance can be allowed, it is widely accepted that human beings have the need and the unavoidable tendency to feel uniquely and intimately related to a place that they consider 'home' (Fullilove 1996). In the case of violently displaced people, it is assumed that they considered —and keep considering— 'home' the place they were forced to leave (Black and Koser 1999: 6). Thus, refugees "often dream of someday returning, in part because, despite the events that may have precipitated their flight, feeling 'at home' is viewed as a comfort that only their homeland can provide" (Eidelson and Horn 2008: 15).

2. ***Economic sustainability.*** When fleeing, in most cases the individual leaves behind assets, investments and livelihoods in which his or her welfare was sustained, including house, land and businesses (Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003: 28; Justino 2008: 5-6). Both violence and uprooting often entail material and human transformations of the household which affect its members' ability to sustain themselves. They also entail transformations of the environment in which they are embedded and their connections with it. These are what Justino calls 'direct effects' and 'indirect effects' impinging upon households' economic status: "Direct effects [...] include changes in household composition due to killings, injuries and recruitment of fighters, changes in the household economic status due to the destruction of assets and livelihoods and [to] forced displacement and migration. [...] Local indirect effects include changes in households' access to and relationship with local exchange, employment, credit and insurance markets, social

relations and networks and political institutions" (Justino 2008:5).

This occurs against a background of violence usually accompanied by high levels of material destruction and economic shrinking, so the scenario of displacement is often a scenario of impoverishment and helplessness, especially when whatever the individual has left (e.g., his or her skills) is poorly suited to his or her new environment. For many, the repossession of assets and investments or the return to a more favourable local environment (e.g. one better suiting their skills or where they are better connected) may remain crucial and in many cases repossession makes no economic sense if not moving back. [11]

3. The ***drive for restoration*** (García del Soto 2008: 5). The suffering and the displacement of civilians during armed conflict and violent clashes are universally accepted as a humanitarian tragedy. However, human agency behind the violence producing it adds one dimension of responsibility to that humanitarian tragedy. Indeed, displacement flows are most frequently provoked —and accompanied— by gross violations of human rights, breakups of humanitarian laws and other fundamental injustices and illegitimate acts, such as unlawful expropriations. Losses and damages reach well beyond the purely economic or pecuniary dimension, actually encompassing anything that the individual might have had in his or her life until that moment, from material possessions to employment, social position, family life or the mere assumption of physical safety.

Restorative justice is based on the principle of repairing –as much as possible– the damage and harm caused by the offence (Wright 1996: 59), justice attained by "removing or redressing to the greatest possible extent the consequences of the wrongful acts" (van Boven 1993: para. 137). The moral basis for reparation lies in the fact that the wrongdoer has infringed the rights of the victim, "thereby creating both a moral imbalance between them and a moral claim to redress. Although it may not be possible, the aim is to restore equality between the parties" (Cullinan 2001: 11-12). Return is perceived as a natural way of restoring the situation, i.e. what was provoked

11. For instance, due to difficulties to sell the property or to get an appropriate revenue from it.

by/with displacement is to be undone by/with return and (Ghanem 2003: 3); in that sense, return is perceived as a matter of justice.

Reparation is not only one important motivation for return, as contemplated in the literature and in many testimonies by displaced people. It is also the motivation conferring a fundamental socio-political interpretation to return, as long as it is based on the consideration of the wrongful nature of the circumstances leading to displacement, and, even more fundamentally, as long as it is based on the demand to address and undo the outcomes of such circumstances. Thus, although restoration as an individual drive has to do fundamentally with a moral satisfaction (i.e. psychological well-being), it requires intervention and involves interaction at various external levels –economic, social and political–, thus establishing a necessary interplay with material well-being.

For instance, restoration of economic assets is restorative insofar as it meets the moral claim behind it, but it also facilitates economic adaptation at the same time; conversely, economic discrimination deepens injustices, as well as hindering economic sustainability. In the same way, although socio-political restoration involving apologies and sanctions to perpetrators of war crimes is a way of addressing the imbalance created by the offence, from either an individual or a collective point of view, it is also crucial in improving the prospects of safety upon return (I deal with these in the next subsection).

4.2. THE LARGELY RECKONED CAUSES OF NO-RETURN: VIOLENCE

If return is perceived to be the 'natural' solution to displacement, the threat of violence which made individuals flee is perceived to be the 'natural' barrier blocking such option. Once such barrier is removed, the 'natural' solution of return is expected to occur. However, this expectation overlooks some basic issues. Take the following quote from Davenport et al.'s (2003) which offers a stylized account of the decision to flee as a result of mass violent conflict:

> "We begin with the assumption that people make a choice about whether to remain in their homes, in (varying degrees of) possession of their land

> and material wealth, or to abandon these in favour of an uncertain life elsewhere. [...] Assume also that people value their physical security (i.e., their lives, health, and physical safety), and *will [flee] if they feel their security is substantially threatened*. Finally, assume that people maintain beliefs about the future course of events and, for the purpose of our study, maintain specific beliefs about their personal safety. Given these assumptions, our task is to specify the information that people will monitor in order to sustain or revise their beliefs." (Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003: 31, emphasis added).

This concise exposition nicely conveys the fact that it is difficult to question the rationality of the decision to flee in order to secure one's survival and physical integrity (Edwards 2007). Now, the very same account is applicable to the decision to return, just by shifting some directions and substituting some elements, although with a much distinct result:

> "We begin with the assumption that people make a choice about whether to remain in their *locations of displacement*, in (varying degrees of) possession of their land and material wealth, or to abandon these in favour of a somewhat uncertain life *back in the place from which they flew*. [...] Assume also that people value their physical security (i.e., their lives, health, and physical safety), and *will not return* if they feel their security is substantially threatened *in the place of return*. Finally, assume that people maintain beliefs about the future course of events and, for the purpose of our study, maintain specific beliefs about their personal safety *in the place of return*. Given these assumptions, our task is to specify the information that people will monitor in order to sustain or revise their beliefs." (Changes and additions to Davenport et al.'s quote emphasized).

The decision problem and the scenario of displacement are substantially different from those of return. They have two main elements in common though: the threat of violence and the fact that the individual values his or her physical security. The smooth rationality of displacement lies in the fact that the movement is directed to *avoid* violence, running away from it. The puzzling nature of return lies in the fact that the movement rather *confronts*

violence. In many instances this is literally the case, when displaced people return in the midst of conflict. But also when violence seems to have ceased or to have radically diminished, the uncertainties surrounding such assessment make it a risky decision.

Even when peace may look stable, for instance after the signing of a peace agreement, after the deployment of peacekeeping troops or after the occurrence of a disarmament process, still, there are chances in most scenarios that instability may regain momentum and violence may recur. This is precisely one of the major focuses of post-conflict literature (e.g. Licklider 1995; Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Stedman, Rothchild, and Cousens 2002; Walter 2002; Collier 2003; Long and Brecke 2003), but in general, even for experts, it is hard to assess and assert the end of violence in a definite way. Despite substantial improvements in the understanding of war outset and war escalation, prediction capacities are still conspicuously precarious with plenty of unforeseen violent outbreaks, and a myriad of cases in which the line between stability and instability is shaky, with a pervasive inability to foresee when it will fall to one side or the other. [12]

Such elusiveness is particularly relevant from the point of view of the individual who actually faces the risk of encountering violence.[13] Even when violent conflict may have come to an end, violent outbreaks can be a very immediate threat, for instance, in the form of reprisals, personal revenge, or vandalism (Eidelson and Horn 2008; Boyle 2006). These concerns are compounded by uncertainties about the surge and upsurge of violence: "The fundamental political puzzle [...] concerns its timing. How do we explain the often sudden eruption of ethnic violence, especially when it follows a long period of peace? [...] Violence erupts so suddenly, often in full force in a very short period." (De Figueiredo and Weingast 1999: 262-263). As well as by relevant considerations when facing such uncertainties: "The UN has proven itself unable to anticipate conflict and provide the credible security

12. Policy makers –and intelligence services– or area experts struggle with such uncertainties, together with the huge literature on conflict and conflict resolution literature, an array of early warning endeavours and think tanks scanning conflict areas.

13. Furthermore, displaced individuals have already proved with their feet their aversion to the threat of violence, by fleeing. And it is also reasonable to expect that the individual's experience of violence may have altered his or her beliefs regarding peace as a dominant state of the world or non-violence as other actors' preferred strategy.

guarantees [...]. Once there is politically salient trouble in an area, the UN may try to intervene [...]. However, the conditions under which peacekeeping is attempted are favourable to the party that has had the most military success. As a general rule, the UN does not make peace: it negotiates cease-fires." (Posen 1993: 33). That is, the individual faces a risk hard to monitor until its very materialisation, when he or she is left to face the sudden and immediate consequences of a violent outbreak.

One important difference with the displacement decision ensues: finding a substantial threat to personal security determines a positive decision to flee in the case of displacement, whereas in the case of return, relatively less substantial threats may determine a decision not to return. Furthermore, under the assumption of safety in displacement, even in the most favourable case (i.e. if the threat has been completely removed in the place of origin) there is no benefit to be expected, in terms of security, from returning. That means that security concerns act as a barrier to return and by removing it, security reassurances open the door to return but do not provide a push to cross it. That is, the decrease or cessation of the threat is not a motive to return per se. The difference with the displacement decision is then qualitative, since the latter is fully or centrally motivated by the avoidance of violence, while the return decision is only conditioned by it. [14]

Despite such basic difference, the monitoring of the threat is a crucial component in both the decisions of displacement and to return. Consequently, a better understanding of the individual's monitoring of the threat will help advance our understanding of the decisions of displacement and to return. Defined from a rational point of view, such monitoring will be based on the individual's estimation of the probability of being reached by violence. Such probability varies with the individual's position within the context and dynamics of violence: his or her local position in the geography of violent conflict (Kalyvas 2006; Justino 2008), the extent to which he or she is targeted following the conflict dynamics and his or her degree of vulnerability and

14. The motives of displacement as a result of mass violent conflict revolve centrally around the avoidance of violence. However, the actual configuration of motives, determinants and conditionings of displacement is far more complex than is usually appreciated, as it involves an interaction of livelihood and survival strategies, all of them heavily conditioned by violence (Lindley 2009).

attractiveness for attacks (Lindley 2009: 30-41). This introduces a source of variation which escapes aggregate level analyses (see for instance Schmeidl 1997; Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004).

4.3. THE LARGELY IGNORED MOTIVATIONS OF NO-RETURN: ECONOMIC CALCULUS, ROOTS ATTACHMENT, AND RESTORATION.

One important point, which is frequently overlooked when discussing return —unlike displacement— is the fact that violence is an independent variable that changes things. And so it is with displacement. Once they occur, they open up a completely new decision-making scenario. Those disruptions, simply, cannot be 'undone', except by turning time —and circumstances— back to their original state with a time machine. Timing is a most illustrative example of this. Displacement lasts in most cases years and decades. In the meantime, elders die, adults get older, youngsters grow up and marry, and kids get born and go to school. Even without further disruption than that, nothing is the same when the moment to return arrives.

Leaving aside the security concerns involved in the decision to return, such decision after a violent conflict is much more complex than suggested by the outlining of possible motivations made in subsection 3.1., which underpin the tendency to assume return as a 'natural' solution to displacement. Not only in the obvious sense that not all individuals share the same motivations, and that there are constraints –structural and individual– interfering with their realization. Also, the very same sources of motivations outlined in that subsection can rather point to the opposite direction of returning: to stay in displacement. Their role as core motivations following both violence and uprooting is thus out of doubt; whether they will act as motivations to return or rather the opposite is a matter that needs much more refinement and analysis.

1. Although the **drive for home** is an anthropological feature that most would accept as a pervasive one, we cannot assume that such link will

exclusively point, or that it will point at all, to the place of return. Firstly, the existence of the drive does not guarantee the actual presence of such a link, especially not a necessarily or particularly strong one, with the place of origin, neither with any other place (Rogge 1994; Kibreab 1999, 2000; Malkki 2003). The link may have been originally weak or non-existent, or, more saliently, it may have been severed by the experience of violence and ensuing transformations of the place, which may have estranged it from the individual (Ghanem 2003: 4).

Furthermore, during displacement, as time passes by, the individual may have developed a connection with his or her new environment that he or she might feel as 'home' (Smit 2006). The drive for home does not necessarily exclude the existence of multiple ones, and it does not say anything about the way they would relate to each other. The weakness, non-existence or multiplicity of home ties is actually not excessively rare or exotic. Individuals may have unclear roots or multiple ones, for instance, because of changing places during childhood and/or adulthood. Such weakness, non-existence or multiplicity of homes can also amount to a cultural or collective issue, as in nomad and semi-nomad societies and communities, or among those collectivities enduring frequent displacement and uprooting for decades or centuries, such as those in the Horn of Africa (see for instance research evidence quoted in Ghanem 2003: 15-6; see also for instance Al-Rasheed 1999).

The existence, configuration and strength of 'home' in return and 'home' in displacement must then be taken into account. Moreover, consideration should be paid to the way they become strained, reinforced or changed by the experience of violence.

2. **Economic calculations** are another undeniably powerful and widespread human motivation, but even more clearly than in the case of home, it cannot be taken for granted that they will point in the direction of return. Assets, investments and general endowments may have been negligible before the uprooting, or they may have been liquidated before leaving; they may no longer exist, either destroyed by the violence or taken away during the conflict; or there may be obstacles in the way to

repossession, of either legal or practical nature (e.g. Mooney 2008: 3-4). In some cases, economic advantages may be provided by the promise of substantial return and reconstruction assistance, but very often, such assistance is unavailable, non-accessible for the individual or insufficient to offer a comparative advantage.

Furthermore, return in itself usually involves considerable initial investments, which detracts from its economic attractiveness. Indeed, such investments may exceed the household's budgetary constraints. As an illustration, during fieldwork in Bosnia, some core expenses observed as unavoidable in the return process were: costs of transportation, administrative fees, expenses associated to cleaning and rebuilding tasks, reconnection to basic services fees, start-up investments for economic activities, such as tools and materials for agricultural activities and livestock for farm production, and bribes. The role of return and reconstruction assistance is in great part to fill up the gap between individual's budgetary constraints and these necessary disbursements. However, as just mentioned, this kind of assistance is not always available or the individual may not be able to access it, or it may simply not be enough.

In parallel, the individual may have developed opportunities, obtained assets or realised investments while in displacement, which furthermore might be non-movable, specific to the location or difficult to sell —at a reasonable price. These include, for instance, newly developed skills, which may be particularly well suited to the displacement scenario –and ill suited to the return scenario. Furthermore, not only individual endowments but also the very structure of opportunities and context-embedded resources in the scenario of displacement may be far more advantageous than those in the return scenario. They may offer better economic opportunities and improved material well-being. For instance, by offering a wider and more accessible network of services, such as health care or education, and consumption goods, as well as more adequate infrastructures (Mooney 2008: 4). This case is not uncommon since the majority of displaced populations around the world fled rural habitats and many end up in urban ones (UNHCR 2009: 2).

3. The **drive for restoration** and justice is another fundamental and widespread human motivation. However, it registers wider variation across individuals and cultures[15], which means that it is probably the motivation that can be taken the least for granted. Some individuals do not seek restoration or do not even think of it (Cullinan 2001: 10)[16], and for some the drive for restoration is overrun or substituted by a wish to avoid contact or reminders of the past experience. But even if there is a drive for restoration, it cannot be taken for granted that restoration itself is to be attained upon return.

In many cases the mere move back, i.e. undoing the physical displacement, may be felt as restorative, both from an individual and from a collective point of view ('political return'). This is saliently the case when there has been a forceful expulsion rather than a mere escape of violence. In those cases, restoring the imbalance of forceful expulsion is often a central motive, either in individual or collective terms, with the physical move of return conveying the message that "here (we are) I am, back , despite efforts to the contrary". Referring to reparation after torture, a survivor put it in these words: "We need to prove that they did *not succeed* [...]" (quoted in Cullinan 2001: np; emphasis added).[17]

But in many cases much more than the simple move back may be needed. As already stated, restoration aims at "removing or redressing to the greatest possible extent the consequences of the wrongful acts" (van Boven 1993: para. 137), which involves not only a moral claim but also a necessary interplay with economic, social and political dimensions. Any restorative move is by definition meant to undo some outcomes derived from the violent conflict. This will most frequently clash with sensitive socio-economic and political issues by altering the distribution of resources and power relations newly emerged in the area as a result of both violence and mass flight. As

15. Not the least due to the fact that it is a much fuzzier and elusive motivation, since it is mediated by various mental processes: the perception of injustice, the attribution of responsibilities, and perceptions about the adequacy and efficiency of different means to attain it.

16. In the words of a torture survivor, and referring specifically to torture, "torture survivors who have chosen to follow the path of reparation face many obstacles; from the beginning, our families, friends, doctors, lawyers and politicians encouraged us to let 'bygones be bygones' and get on with our lives. Many torture victims only want to do this" (ibid.; emphasis added)

17. The complete quote is: "We need to prove that they did not succeed in destroying us as human beings", referring to the devastating psychological effects which seem to be one of the objectives (and frequent outcomes) of torture.

a consequence, it is likely that such moves will find strong resistance as a result of efforts to protect and upkeep those outcomes.[18]

Such resistance indeed may not arise exclusively from the confronting sides. It is not infrequent that resistance may be found also within each particular side, i.e. from individuals and institutions on the same side of the conflict which see their interests somehow threatened by return or other restorative claims.[19] This may arise from conflicting political views or from conflicting individual interests (see for instance Cohen and Deng 1998: 28). But in the cases where displacement is more than a by-product of violence, i.e. where it was an end in itself, or a means to an end, such as the control of certain resources, return and restorative claims actually go to the very heart of violent conflict. They then threat not simply a given statu quo, but the outcomes attained by one of the sides in conflict. The likelihood of resistance increases then.

Secondary occupation (i.e. the non-legal occupation of a living unit for whom there is another legally-entitled occupier) is a clear example of the way return may threaten individual and political interests vested in the statu quo established by displacement. Cases of secondary occupation arise when the houses and the land left behind by displaced people are occupied by old neighbours, new settlers or other displaced people. This was the massive solution for most internally displaced people during the Bosnian war, given the switching nature of the population flows from one side of the frontline to the other. It was also a policy encouraged and sustained by political authorities in order to reaffirm territorial gains and demographic re-ordering. But many cases of secondary occupation occurred also among members of the same ethnic group (Mooney 2008: 2).

Resistance to return and restorative measures usually entail much more though than the mere non-fulfilment of these. They usually entail, either implicitly or explicitly, the non-recognition of the moral claim upholding

18. It must be noted that this is not necessarily always the case. Return can also be a source of potential benefits and resources by attracting or bringing about international aid assistance (see for instance Hovey 2000) or by helping refloat consumption, services and general economic exchange.
19. And not only from pure interest: it is not uncommon that returnees (and most especially repatriates) encounter certain hostility upon return from those who had stayed behind ('remainees') based on certain feelings of resentment and grievance (Ghanem 2003: 46-9).

restorative demands, i.e. that the individual has suffered an illegitimate harm for which there is a responsibility to compensate and restore. The rejection of this premise entails at the minimum that some degree of harm is recognized but no responsibilities are considered to be derived from it. This stands on the way of restoration by paving the way to the non-fulfilment of some specific demands; but it stands most especially against the fundamental political dimension of restoration involving the need for sanctions to offenders. This dimension is fundamental for the restoration of the moral balance (van Boven 1993, 1997; Cullinan 2001) but it is also crucial for security concerns.[20]

The rejection of the moral claim sustaining restoration frequently goes deeper by rejecting the ultimate claim about the wrongfulness of the circumstances of displacement, rather assuming their rightfulness or justified nature, i.e. that they were just or justifiable in some way. This does not only stand on the way of restoration, but rather works on the opposite direction by wholeheartedly endorsing the circumstances and outcomes of displacement. Thus, return is not only deprived of social and political rehabilitation, but rather encounters social and political rejection. This is most likely to translate into outright mistreatment at the individual level[21] and further grievances at the collective level, including in many cases a recurrence of violence. In these cases, not only there will be a lack of restoration but rather there will be a new round of harm and grievance.

A clear case in order in many internal and ethnic conflicts, especially if involving ethnic cleavages, is that of education. Education is expected to be biased toward the hegemonic political positions –and/or culture– of the receiving side. Parents may be concerned not only about the actual content of the textbooks that their children are going to be taught, but also about the interactions with classmates and teachers, or in the way to school, but grievances, mistreatment and general rejection may take much subtler

20. This is especially important, and proportionally difficult to attain, when such figures enjoy popular support or detent political or enforcing power. For instance, when they occupy public positions or hold prominent places in the public sphere, most saliently in the police forces (UNHCR 2007d: 5).

21. Remarks such as "this is not your home", "this does not belong to you anymore" or "it is a shame that someone missed the opportunity with you" were not uncommon, for instance, in the early return scenario in Bosnia (fieldwork interviews 2006-2007).

forms. For instance, adding to the likely resistance to economic restitution and compensation, returnees may find increased and otherwise unjustified costs imposed upon return, such as raised fees for the reconnection of basic services such as water or electricity; or complex requirements and bureaucratic procedures involving a large investment of time and resources.[22]

If a new round of harm and grievance is expected upon return, then it is possible that the restoration drive will point right in the opposite direction of return, that is, restoration becomes a motivation not to return. This will be especially so if the individual is likely to encounter some level of restoration in displacement: some measure of compensation through assistance or benefits, social recognition and rehabilitation, politically favourable positions in the search and allocation of responsibilities, or in the educational curriculum, for instance.

Summing up, the assumption that what was provoked by/with displacement can be straightforwardly undone by/with return is obviously an oversimplifying one. As it has already been pointed out, both violence and uprooting are independent variables which change things. With restoration, this case is probably the clearest. The reversal of the wrong done may not be undoable –and frequently it is not– by simply 'moving back'.

4.4. ADDRESSING THE PUZZLE OF RETURN: A PROPOSED MODEL.

The cornerstone assumption of the model proposed here is that individuals always have a choice (e.g. fight or flight, avoid a radical threat or confront it), except in cases where they are straightforwardly driven out by force. It is also assumed, however, that people value their physical security and that the context of mass violent conflict imposes unbearably high costs to certain

22. These imposed costs can be read, from the lens of those considering displacement rightful or justified, as a kind of compensation measure for a move (return) that undoes an outcome deemed legitimate or even just. It also amounts to a deterrence measure, making return less attractive and less affordable.

decisions, thus restricting the 'rational' choices available to the individual. Building on this, we propose two components to give shape to the decision to return: enabling factors on the one hand, and motivating factors on the other.

1. Motivating factors

Economic calculations, the drive for home, and the drive for restoration may all tie to the place of origin —to a greater or lesser extent—, and they may also tie to the location of displacement. The consideration of non-economic calculations, such as the drive for home and the drive for restoration, pose both a challenge and a potential advantage to the study of return within a rational choice framework. But such decision is derived from the careful consideration of the individual's point of view and the likely micro-foundations underlying the process. A serious attempt to understand the conditionings of return must confront such a challenge, given the obvious saliency of those issues in the existing literature and documentation on relocation processes.

By paying attention to these issues, as well as to the push/pull potential of both the return and the relocation options, the interest of this model does not lay simply on its capacity to explain quantitative patterns of return, but most particularly on its capacity to identify the nature of the actual reasons for returning or for staying in displacement.

'Happy dilemmas' will be the very rare cases in which the pulling factors dominate for both return and relocation. These are people who have found a new promising life in displacement, but still have plenty of reasons –and emotional drive— for longing their home origin. Much more common are, unfortunately, the cases where the pushing factors dominate, that is, where people seem to have no place to stay and no place to go back. These are 'No-Place Dilemmas'.

Elderly people are the ones usually having both arrows pointing to return: they cannot adapt that easily or find a place for themselves in the new reality, and they have a whole life of investments —both material and emotional

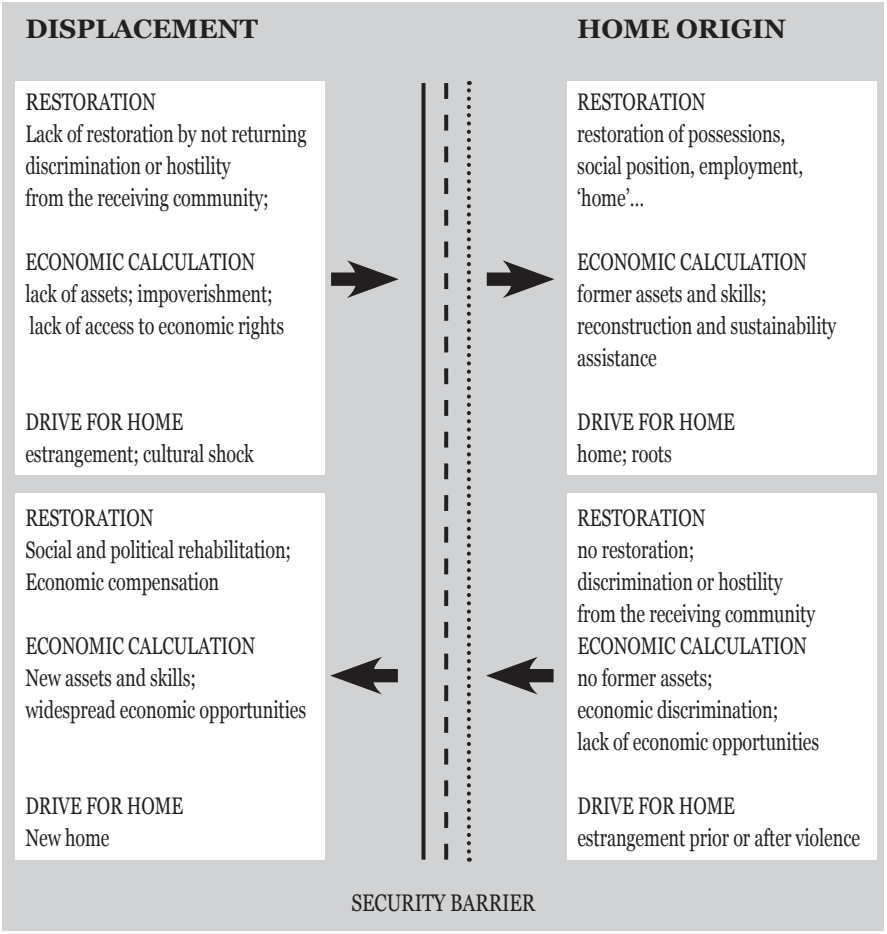
ones— back in their place of origin. These are the 'Return Cases'. Youngsters tend to present just the opposite case, especially when they have moved from a rural to an urban area, exemplifying the 'No-Return Cases'.

2. Enabling factors

Since people value their physical security, the avoidance of violence is expected to be a major conditioning for return. The precedent of displacement is actually considered to be a 'vote with the feet', i.e., the individual has proved that he or she is averse to the threat of violence. Such assertion is nuanced by the consideration of the levels of violence to which the individual has actually proved such aversion, which are usually very radical and extreme —in these cases the rationality of displacement is hardly arguable—. It naturally follows that, once the level and threat of violence radically diminish, return can be rationally considered —available option. If the threat reaches a 'low enough' level, it will then enable the decision to return.

The fact that the monitoring and evaluation of the threat of violence is surrounded by important uncertainties makes it likely to vary across individuals, making it a matter of grade. What level of threat is 'low enough' as to make the consideration of return 'rational' (i.e. 'rationally tolerable') is considered to be a function of the strength of the pulling effect of the home origin, as well as the factors pushing to abandon displacement, and vice versa. In some cases a slight level of security will be enough, while in other cases security will not mean anything, provided that the arrows pointing to displacement are strong enough.

Figure 2. A model of return. Enabling factors and motivating factors.[23]



3. The decision to return or not

Given the saliency of the security concern in contexts of violent mass conflict, it is assumed that the consideration of the motivating factors is conditioned by the break-up of the barrier of insecurity. The individual will return if, once the security barrier is broken, the utility derived from the option of return

23. This model is formally specified and operationalised at the empirical level for the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the forthcoming PhD dissertation on which this article is based.

(y=1) surpasses that derived from staying in the location of displacement (y=0), i.e. if the arrows pointing to return are stronger than those pointing to displacement. In an informal notation:

$$U^i (y^i=1) = SEC (T^i, maxi)*(ECON^i + RESTOR^i + HOME^i)$$

$$U^i (y^i=0) = (ECON^i + RESTOR^i + HOME^i)$$

Where Ti is the individual's assessment of the threat of violence and maxi is the individual's maximum tolerated degree of threat. Whenever Ti > max^i, the security component of the function (SEC), equals 0, thus invalidating all other considerations. In that case, the utility derived from returning is 0 and the individual is expected not to return.

4. The aggregation of the decisions to return or not

Individual decisions and aggregate outcomes are expected to interact in two basic ways. Firstly, the more individuals return, the more positive the evaluation of the threat of violence is likely to be. This is based on the safety in numbers argument, as well as on social learning mechanisms, and more generally on well established threshold models of strategic decision (Schelling 1971, 1978; Granovetter 1978; Granovetter and Roland 1988; Akerlof 1980; Jones 1984; Kuran 1987a, 1987b, 1989, 1997; Macy 1991; Petersen 2001). Secondly, the more individuals return, the less uncertainty is likely to surround the assessment, given the increased information flow provided by those already returned and the signal sent by their successful or unsuccessful return integration.

This interaction between the individual and the aggregate level has the potential to account for variations in the individuals timing of return and for the aggregate dynamics of return at the local level. The distribution of the turning points (max^i) across the population will be crucial in the aggregate outcome of the process of return.

5. THE USEFULNESS OF A MICRO APPROACH: INITIAL INSIGHTS

In this section, some relevant conclusions are derived for the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina and about the implications of the politicization of return, building on the proposed micro-perspective and model.

5.1. THE BOSNIAN CASE

War broke out in Bosnia-Herzegovina in March 1992 along the division between those advocating the continuation of the union within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, together with Serbia and Montenegro, and those advocating independence.[24] The two warring sides along this axis are usually identified, if focusing only on the internal actors to the conflict, with the 'Bosnian Serbs' (or simply 'Serbs') on the one hand, and the 'Bosnian Croats' (or simply 'Croats') and 'Bosniaks' (or simply 'Muslims') on the other hand.
This designation is actually an imperfect reflection of the complexities of the Bosnian conflict, as it occurs in many other conflicts, since the warring sides were not ethnically monolithic, and ethnic lines across the population were also in many cases blurred and intermixed. Nevertheless, this designation is coherent with the political lines of the conflict and it approximates well the degree of ethnic alignment reached, especially or at least, during and after the war (see for instance Malcolm 1994: 234-52; and the notes on the war period by Bringa 1995: xvi, 3-5).
Thus, although the conflict was fought along a political cleavage, it bore an obvious ethnic component, and ethnic labels became —yet not perfectly— an immediate instrument for identifying or marking each individual's arguable side in the conflict. The frontline divided the country accordingly into two

24. Another axis of conflict was added in 1993-1994, dividing the supporters of independence from Yugoslavia, as Bosnian Croats in west and central Bosnia organized themselves to proclaim the independent republic of Herzeg-Bosna, in an attempt to secede from Bosnia and to join the newly independent Croatia. Here, I will be focusing on the main axis of the conflict only for the sake of simplicity in the exposition of the case and the argument.

main areas, deemed to be safer for those holding the corresponding ethnic label(s) and/or defending one or another political view. The population thus got displaced —when remaining within the country borders— following a broadly shifting pattern: Bosniaks and Croats fled from the Serb-controlled part into the Bosniak and Croat-controlled part, and Serbs fled in the opposite direction.[25] People also moved within their own 'safe areas' from places more exposed to violence to others relatively calmer or with a more stable situation.

The frontline which marked the 'safety area' for each group became crystallized in the Dayton General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP), which politically endorsed the two resulting entities: the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (usually referred to as 'the Federation of Muslims and Croats') and the Republic of Srpska (frequently referred to as 'the Serb Republic' or 'RS'). The frontline, with only some minor modifications made under the Accords, became officially recognized as the Inter-Entity Border Line (IEBL).

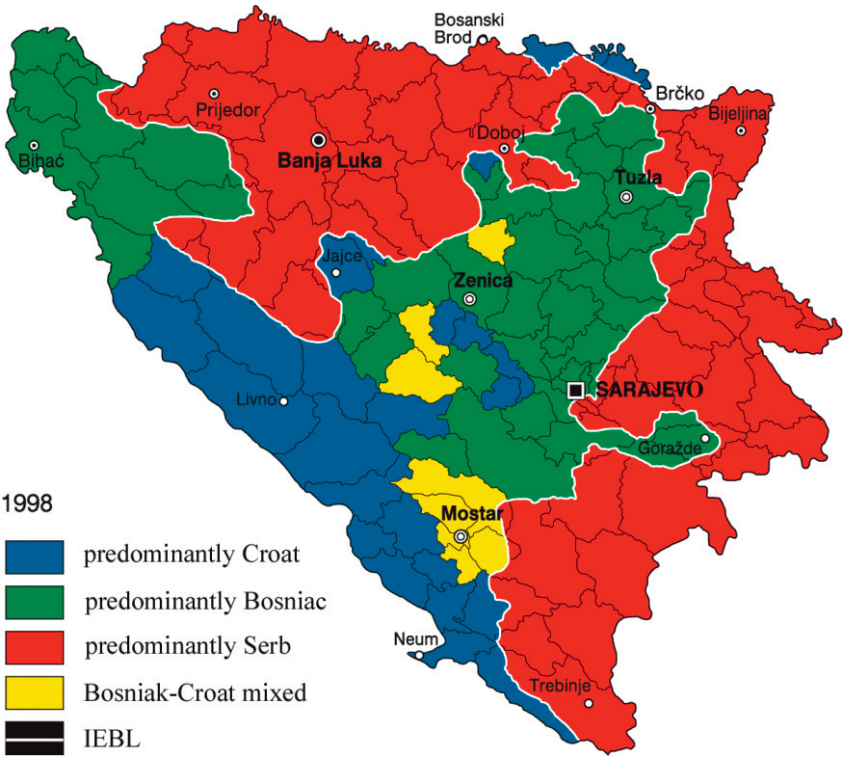
However, while endorsing the division of the war 'safety areas', the Dayton Peace Agreement also devoted one whole annex (Annex VII) to the explicit goal of seeing people return to their former homes. This emphasis on return had one clear rationale: "When the war [in Bosnia-Herzegovina] ended in December 1995, resolving the situation of refugees and displaced persons was a high priority. [...] Driving this aim was *the moral and political imperative to reverse 'ethnic cleansing'"* (Mooney 2008: 2; emphasis added).

Thus, Annex VII made a special emphasis on the return of those persons who would return to a 'non-safety' area following the war division.[26] Article 2 states: "The Parties shall ensure that refugees and displaced persons are permitted to return in safety, without risk of harassment, intimidation, persecution, or discrimination, *particularly on account of their ethnic origin, religious belief, or political opinion"* (emphasis added). UNHCR

25. Some of these were internationally designated 'safe areas' within the main territory controlled by the opposing side.
26. I will refer to these as 'minority returns', but it should be noted that the use that UNHCR makes of the term in its statistics is somewhat different, referring to those returning to municipalities (instead of entity) where the group to which they belong is a minority. This is intended to encompass the cases of Bosniaks returning to Croat-dominated areas (and vice versa) within the Federation, which are left out by the entity-level definition.

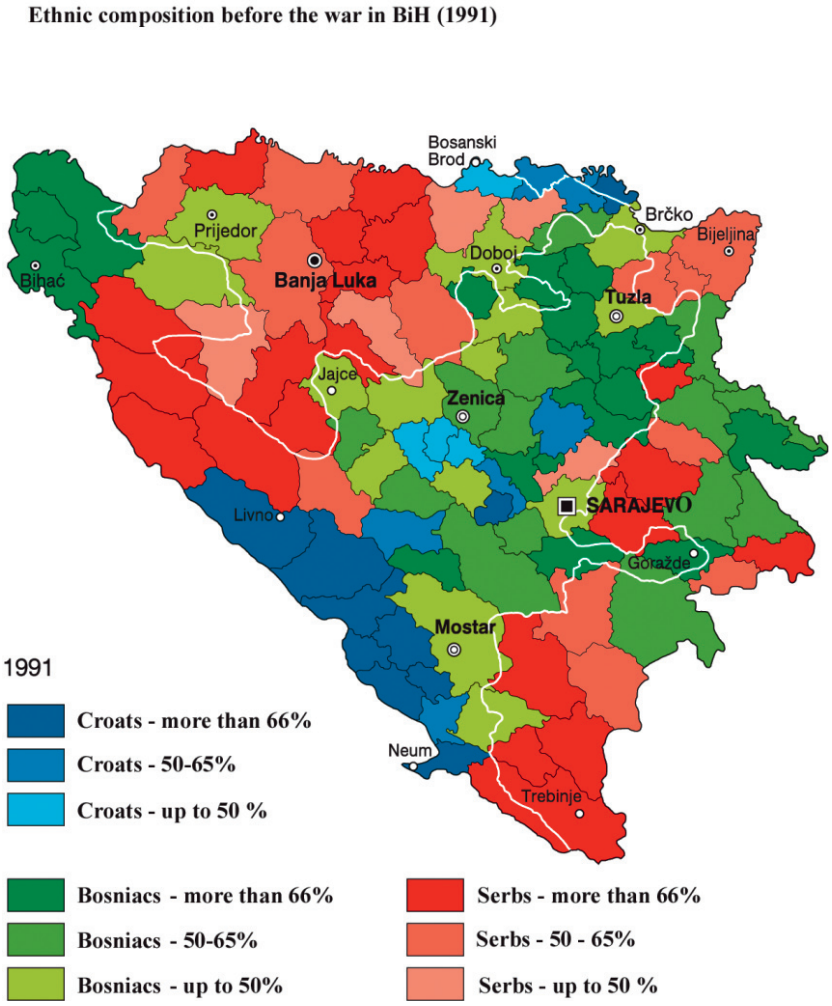
has actually described the success of Annex 7 as directly related to minority returns (UNHCR 2007d: 5).

Map 1. Geographic distribution of the three constituent groups in 1998.



(Available at http://www.ohr.int/ohr-info/maps/, accessed 19 November 2009)

Map 2. Geographic distribution of the three constituent groups in 1991.



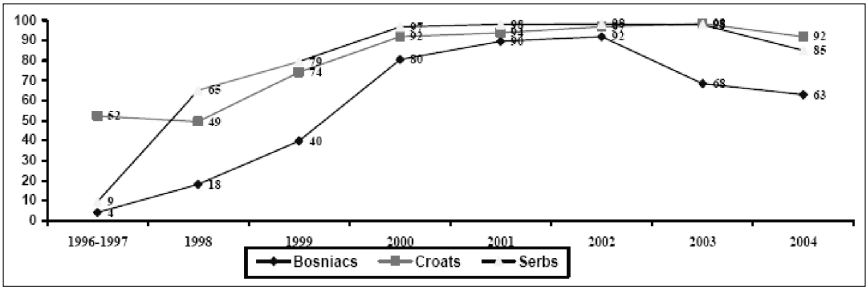
Source: OHR (available at http://www.ohr.int/ohr-info/maps/, accessed 19 November 2009)

At the signing of Dayton, the war had displaced some 2.2 million persons, which amounts to almost half of the population from before the war (UNHCR 2006d). Roughly one million of those remained internally displaced within the country (IDPs), and, of all the people displaced abroad as refugees, half million have subsequently returned to the country (as registered by UNHCR).

This leaves 1.5 million people residing in the country and having to take a decision whether to return to their home origin within the country or not. UNHCR has registered over one million returns to the home origin, but it is ready to admit that these figures are significantly inflated by the registration method (UNHCR 2007d). The overestimation is even larger, given that UNHCR counts as returnees those refugees who repatriate from abroad, for whom there is no effective reason to assume that they return to their homes of origin within the country (Black and Koser 1999: 8; Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia-Herzegovina 2006).[27]

The return of people within –or to– the war-time 'safety areas' established in Dayton took place easily and rapidly following the signing of the GFAP. 'Majority returns' are indeed considered to have been mostly completed in the initial years (see Figure 3). However, the bulk of the displaced population included people who had fled from 'unsafe areas', and the (ethnic/political) designation that made such areas 'unsafe' during the war had been certified by the GFAP. It took four years of continued international efforts to begin to see significant numbers of these people returning, the so-called 'minority returns', and the bulk of remaining IDPs and internal non-returnees —between 700,000 and 1 million— is constituted by them.

Figure 3. Percentage of Minority Returns in Total Return



Source: Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia-Herzegovina (2004)

27. Projecting the percentages of return among IDPs on these repatriated refugees, the total figure lowers down to 800,000 returnees. This amounts to barely more than one third of the displaced population during the war, and it is bound to be much lower in reality, given the overestimation of the official registration methods for IDP return. Following these figures and the estimates of displacement, 700,000 people are considered to remain abroad, and an additional 700,000 would be living somewhere else in the country without returning to their homes origin. This latter figure, through the correction to the repatriated numbers, is likely, in fact, to be much closer to or above one million.

The weak trajectory of minority returns (belated, weak and declining) can be grasped by considering the low percentages of minority returns in the total returns in the early years (see Figure 3) and the yearly distribution of the total number of returns, of which almost 60% were concentrated in the first three years after Dayton (see Table 1). In total, by December 2008, only 467,297 of the 1,026,692 returns registered by UNHCR were minority returns, that is, 45%. As a reminder, total return and minority return numbers are based on UNHCR upwardly biased count, whose biases are likely to affect the most the count of minority returns. Based on this, the issue of minority returns "continues to be emphasised and remains a major political issue repeatedly raised as not being successful" (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2007d: 5).

Table 1. Total returns in Bosnia-Herzegovina (repatriated people + registered returnees)

	Bosniaks	Croats	Serbs	Total
1996	177,787	3,649	71,269	252,705
1997	114,203	43,759	19,588	177,550
1998	94,395	27,512	15,904	137,811
1999	43,347	13,059	17,647	74,053
2000	39,732	11,950	19,476	71,158
2001	48,652	9,605	34,560	92,817
2002	48,762	9,170	39,906	97,838
2003	26,399	4,773	20,883	52,055
2004	13,744	1,422	4,821	19,987
2005	4,345	588	1,491	6,424
2006	4,219	379	984	5,582
2007	4,023	1,958	880	6,861
2008	1,389	35	238	1,662
Total	620,997	127,859	247,647	996,503

Source: UNHCR (2008c). Personal compilation.

5.2. IN-ROADS INTO A REFINED SYSTEMATIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE BOSNIAN RETURN PROCESS

Some basic insights can be derived from the proposed model of the decision to return for the Bosnian case:

1. *The obvious importance of the security barrier*. No security barrier is expected for majority returns, whereas this is expected to seriously block and restrain minority returns. The rapid and easy return of majority returnees and the low numbers of minority returns in the initial years support this, especially if taking into account the rampant levels of insecurity in those early years when crossing the IEBL, and the undertaking of important initiatives radically improving the security levels at the same time that minority returns begun to increase (Mooney 2008: 2).

The gradual return of minority returnees —as opposed to the concentration pattern of majority returns in the initial years— is coherent with the importance given in the model to the elusiveness of the threat assessment and the idea of a disperse distribution of turning points –following rational calculations and individuals' different conditionings and incentives. Thus, although it is obvious that a breakthrough occurred in the year 2000 (see Figure 3), minority returns did also occur earlier in time;[28] and despite such breakthrough, only few people returned immediately, which means that for many others the security barrier took longer to be broken or that the arrows pointing toward return where weaker.

The mechanics of the process do suggest the importance of taking into account the individuals' assessment of the threat of violence, on which informational flows play a most relevant role. Above all, however, they underscore the unrealistic character of the expectations of early and massive return —as contemplated in the Dayton Peace Agreement) in scenarios as divided as the Bosnian one (Mooney 2008: 5).

2. *Some likely indirect effects of the existence of a security barrier*. The fact that most potential majority returns actually returned —in the very

28. An individual and/or local-level analysis is required in order to understand whether this is attributable to returning individuals' characteristics or to specifically favourable conditions in their local environment

first years— means that it was rational (i.e. more advantageous than costly) for them at the time to do so.[29] If assuming the hypothesis that the security barrier was not broken for most potential minority returnees until 2000, it can be expected that by then, four years after the end of the war, IDPs, on the one hand, were more likely to have developed alternative strategies not leading to return, and, on the other , that they were also more likely, by that moment, to have made some investment in their location of displacement, or otherwise to have worsened their economic situation (e.g. by consuming their savings and existing resources). In any case, repossession or reconstruction of their properties in their homes of origin —the main source of official return registrations— was more likely to be an important economic asset (e.g. ready to be sold or facilitating the initiation of agriculture activities) and less likely to straightforwardly lead to return (i.e. to be used merely as an economic strategy). The disconnection between repossession/reconstruction and return has actually become more and more evident with time and in other comparable cases (see e.g. UNHCR 2007b; Smit 2006).

3. *Not just economic concerns*. One of the most extended and widely embraced argument about the Bosnian return is that economically poor conditions depress return numbers, especially in rural areas, and affect the characteristics of the returnee population. This argument has, in fact, an overwhelming analytical and empirical leverage, although it still lacks systematic empirical research. However, it is obvious that the argument cannot explain per se the specific failure in minority return vis-à-vis majority returns in the case of Bosnia.

If considering the three possible sources of motivation and their likely pushing/pulling effects (see Figure 2), only *restoration issues* in the home of origin offer a clear differential between majority returns and minority returns, both offering a distinctive motivation to return and to not return when new rounds of harm and grievance are expected. *Attachment to the roots* is somewhat more likely to be weakened in the case of minority returns, but this will be especially so if mediated by restoration issues. Most importantly,

29. It should be noted though that many of them did not simply return but actually repatriated in those years as a result of restrictive asylum policies in their host countries.

economic constraints and incentives are the same for both types of return, except when mediated by restoration issues, i.e. by discrimination (UNHCR 2007d; IDMC 2009; Mooney 2008).

Thus, pension entitlements, for instance, involving also attached health care benefits, were not recognized in Bosnia across the inter-entity division until very recently, thus avoiding the restoration of a right which was disrupted as a result of war. Even more illustratively, benefits attached to war veterans' disability pensions and family pensions of war victims and fallen soldiers, directly derived from the recognition by one side of damages suffered during the violent conflict, are to this day not recognized across the inter-entity line.

The importance of discrimination —either by endorsing minority return rejection or through the indirect effect of positive discrimination among group members— for economic sustainability is obvious, especially in already depressed economic environments, such as the Bosnian one, where discrimination is likely to have the most devastating effects. What the consideration of the model helps to point out is that it remains to be analyzed whether discrimination exerts its effect through its purely economic impact on material well-being and sustainability, or whether the restoration issue has some weight of its own.[30] This would have important policy implications.

4. *The interplay between economic calculations and political calculations: conflict continued*

The importance of socio-political dominance and discrimination is twofold, since its impinging upon economic sustainability does not only affect the individual decision level —and thus the numbers of return. By detracting from the attractiveness of the return option, it also has a significant effect in the selection and characteristics of the returnees (e.g. likely to be the more disadvantaged and the elders). The interplay between economic and discrimination components will thus not only deter return, but also hinder its sustainability in the long term. Indeed, this is the map drawn by many of Bosnian return: low numbers composed of mostly elders who depend upon agriculture, pensions or remittances.

30. Building on that, one more issue to be analyzed is whether, besides existing formulas of exclusion and discrimination, displaced people also apply self-exclusionary (i.e. 'self-exile') views.

The sustainability of return affects the most restoration claims made from a collective point of view ('political return'), since it threatens the medium and long-term permanence of the group in the area. Even more obviously, discrimination is by definition applied following collective boundaries, and thus it is likely to be perceived as a collective grievance —whether purposefully designed and based on negative discrimination or not—. Thus, socio-political dominance and discrimination do not only heavily weight on the individual's decision to return, but they also reproduce the core dynamics of violent conflict in a different scenario, producing a reverse to Clausewitz's idea of 'politics by other means' when referring to war: in Bosnia, returnees, displaced people and many commentators clearly perceive the existence of pervasive discrimination as a continuation of 'ethnic cleansing' after the war and without war (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia-Herzegovina 2006; fieldwork interviews and field notes 2006-2007).

5.3. BRINGING MICRO-FOUNDATIONS INTO POLICY-MAKING

As pointed in the sections above, the shift toward a containment paradigm in the international refugee regime beginning in the 1980s put a focus on voluntary repatriation as the desirable durable solution for refugees. The design of Bosnian post-conflict policy signalled the expansion of the focus to return more generally, including also IDPs. Dayton was the first peace agreement to explicitly endorse the right to return, in a tendency followed later on by other internationally sponsored peace agreements.

However, it did so by linking return to the restoration principle: firstly, insofar as such principle —in the form of property restitution— would allow return to the home of origin, meaning the very location of origin and the physical structure of the house where individuals lived before the war. And secondly, by emphasizing the "moral and political imperative to reverse 'ethnic cleansing'" (Mooney 2008: 2). Note though that this referes to the restoration principle shaped from a collective point of view, based on the

understanding that the war had violated the rights of 2.2 million persons to freely remain in their homes as a result of effectively drawing an ethnically marked geopolitical division in the country's territory.

However, it has just been seen in the previous sections that the relationship between restoration and return is far from perfect. And it is no secret that the scenario of return —and moving back to it— may do little –or even work the opposite way– to the interest of justice and restoration of rights, as detailed above. The international community's strategy in Bosnia has been to put a lot of effort in providing or facilitating the conditions which would soften the situations producing new rounds of harm and grievance, i.e. providing the conditions for safe and sustainable return (Mooney 2008). However, its approach and strategy and their relative success are under considerable criticism.

The core of these criticisms is perfectly summarized in the 2008 report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC): "The lack of adequate support to return and the reluctance of national and international authorities to promote other durable solutions is preventing IDPs and returnees resuming their life in dignity. In view of the obstacles to return faced by many IDPs, and the difficult living conditions of those who remain displaced, the overwhelming focus on return and reconstruction is becoming increasingly questionable" (IDMC 2008:1).

One first criticism embedded in this quote points out to a narrow approach to restoration upon return. Since the assistance given to return has largely focused in housing repossession and reconstruction, it has failed in providing "adequate support to return" and it has thus prevented returnees "resuming their life in dignity". The multiple dimensions of restoration (e.g. social and political rehabilitation, guarantees of non-repetition and non-discrimination) have remained largely out of the focus, with obvious consequences also for sustainability.

Furthermore, the economic component upon which the most effort has been put has also been far from comprehensive, leaving out key economic restoration components such as job positions, business premises or their corresponding compensations —despite being actually contemplated in the

GFAP.[31] Although house repossession is a fundamental precondition and facilitator of return (Leckie 2000: 4; van Boven 1997: para. 137), it is simply not enough and it does not even seem to have a direct connection with return (Smit 2006; UNHCR 2007b). But, as Smit points out, "restitution processes push on as though individuals might actually be able to go home when they receive a positive determination" (2006: 82). Although establishing the adequate levels and the necessary dimensions of restoration is a fuzzy and slippery issue, the need for further and thorough analysis on these issues and for their inclusion in policy considerations is becoming more and more evident.

A second criticism embedded in IDMC's quote concerns the exclusive focus on return as a means of restoration, ignoring other durable solutions —and alternative forms of restoration, such as compensation—, which are in fact contemplated not only in international human rights standards, but also in the GFAP itself (Annex VII). The almost exclusive focus on return limits the available means to attain restoration, leaving out those who, for whoever reason cannot or do not want to return.

UNHCR has recently come to acknowledge some of these serious flaws: "While international as well as local assistance projects have so far mainly focused on facilitating return by reconstructing damaged houses and rehabilitating the infrastructure of main return areas, the needs of those who are not able to return either for protection or humanitarian reasons, including those who have suffered from severe human rights abuses, have remained essentially unaddressed" (UNHCR 2007d).

It is becoming obvious then that an excessive focus on return may clearly go to the detriment of restoration —as well as of humanitarian principles (Williams 2004; Smit 2006). But not only that, it has been shown above that by overlooking the issue of restoration, the goal of return and sustainable

31. Only reconstruction assistance for damaged and destroyed houses was actually linked to return, but return did not actually guarantee its attainment. House and land repossession were almost granted even without return. Any other forms of restitution or compensation were largely out of reach regardless of return. Thus, there was no systematic attempt regarding the restitution of business premises, and almost no chance to recover looted properties such as tools and vehicles (which returnees frequently spotted out in the local market place or in neighbours' properties). Some individual and some concerted legal efforts were put into the restoration of previous jobs, but the labyrinth of the formerly communist regime, economic reforms and uncontrolled privatisations made most attempts hopeless. The same goes for the attempts to recover savings deposited in banks of former ex-Yugoslavian republics.

return itself can be seriously damaged. In order to actually serve the principle of restoration, but also to actually find viable and efficient solutions —including return— a broader, more flexible framework is needed, including all three durable solutions and forms of compensation (Crisp 2004: 7; IDMC 2009: 27).

A deeper criticism underlies the narrow and biased application of the restoration principle. This is the instrumentalization of that principle in order to justify a politically driven goal. Besides the underlying ethical issue concerning the political instrumentalization of moral principles —and of the lives of the people involved—, such approach reveals itself as broadly inefficient and even counterproductive, as suggested by the Bosnian return numbers.

Return under Annex VII, even if anchored in the language of individual human rights, was politically marked as intended to undo the outcomes reached through violence. Besides plainly colliding with the institutional structure designed in the rest of the GFAP, this emphasis on restoration at the collective level has meant in practice that a micro perspective (prioritizing the consideration of people's needs, constraints and incentives) has not been sufficiently taken into account. As a result, a comprehensive approximation to the realities in the terrain from that viewpoint is missed and inefficiencies are likely to arise in the attainment of the aimed goals: "Failure to tailor peace-building processes and peace agreements to target the specific needs of returnees and the communities receiving them risks reinforcing obstacles to sustainable return and reintegration." (Mooney 2008: 5).

At the end of the day, it is up to people to return or not. Being more sensitive to the needs and realities of the people in the field will only help to make post-conflict policies more efficient, as well as more respectful with human rights standards. In the words of Roberta Cohen and Francis Deng: "Effective strategies for dealing with internal displacement must involve a broad range of players, beginning with the displaced populations themselves" (1998: 239). A micro perspective is then necessary also in policy design.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has identified three basic gaps in the existing knowledge and analysis of displacement as a result of mass violent conflict. Firstly, a research agenda dominated by humanitarian and political concerns at the international level which has devoted much less attention to the fundamental connections between relocation processes and the violent conflict originating them. Secondly, a specific lack of consideration of relocation processes as intervening and independent variables in the unfolding of violent conflict dynamics. And thirdly, the lack of consideration of individuals' agency when trying to understand relocation processes.

The proposed theoretical model attempts to make a contribution filling in these gaps. The model itself and its application to the Bosnian case underscore the multiple motivations and mechanisms which may underlie individuals' decision to return and the implications derived from it. These are important implications for policy design, which should be considered in order to enhance the efficiency and the consistency of the approaches endorsed by the international community, and by specific actors.

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