

## **The Transnational Migration between Venezuela and Colombia: A Long and Unknow History**

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**Abstract.** This essay examines the historically intense flow and reflow of transnational migrants between Venezuela and Colombia from a quantitative point of view and employs concepts suggested by Thomas Nail in his work *the Figure of the Migrant*. We focus on the regimes of social motion in both countries, the political figures of migrants, and the strategies of expulsion to analyze the social condition of the migrants and their demographic impact. In pursuing the latter goal, we discuss censuses and vital events. We finally discuss, the current migratory flood shaped by decades of Colombian immigration to Venezuela.

**Keywords:** *Colombian diaspora, politics of movement, proletarian, figures of migrants, surplus motion*

### **Introduction**

This work explores some issues of large-scale transnational migration<sup>1</sup> in a south-to-south corridor employing the techniques of social expulsion, the migrant figures, and the regime of social motion proposed by Thomas Nail (2015) in *The Figure of the Migrant*. We complemented it with ethnographic material<sup>2</sup> like interviews and an analysis of migratory statistics and vital events.

For the ethnographic fieldwork, we collected material from twenty-one structured interviews, sixteen of these were Colombians, including nine women, with Venezuelan passports, and we conducted 43 semi-structured interviews with persons selected at random, like street sellers or beggars hanging out in Bogotá. Of these, 79 percent had at least one Colombian-born parent, and 64 percent had spent

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<sup>1</sup> Transnationalism is “a process of movement and settlement across international borders in which individuals maintain or build multiple networks of connection to their country of origin while at the same time settling in a new country (Fouon, Geoge, E. and Schiller, G., Nina 2001), 60

<sup>2</sup> We only use in this article a few notes of the ethnographic material those related with what high- and middle-class Colombians think about migrants and the lower class.

less than a year in Colombia. Finally, I received major help from conversations with dozens of my Colombian students, colleagues, and friends.

When we arrived in Colombia in 2013, there was an affluent Venezuelan community. Most individuals were middle- and upper-class professionals working in oil industry companies founded and owned by Venezuelans or small-scale business proprietors. We saw them leaving in 2014 for new destinies, particularly to the United States.

Nevertheless, a second wave of immigrants came from 2015. This new wave had two characteristics: most were precarious workers and were often descendants of Colombians born in Venezuela. To understand this migratory flow, Colombians who emigrated to Venezuela and their social conditions are essential. Therefore, the focus of this paper is on how Colombian migrants were expelled under different social figures from their country to Venezuela and then expelled again from their destination—Venezuela—after 2015.

The organization of the paper will proceed as follows. In the first section, we discuss the core concepts and methods used. Then, we examine the political regimes of social motion in both countries, and how they influence- historically- the population flow among them, including an exploration of demographic statistics. Next, we suggest looking at the current population movement as predominant reverse immigration of Colombian families and dual citizens hurt by the economic crisis in Venezuela. In this sense, we question the way migratory flows have been portrayed in the literature and the official statistics as a movement of exclusively “Venezuelans,” without considering the mixed character of that movement that includes dual citizens and Colombians returning home. To conclude we discuss the Colombian migrant figures using Nail categories and close the article with some final considerations.

### **Methods and concepts**

This paper takes a mixed-method approach. To analyze the social conditions of migrants, we use concepts develop by Nail, and then the official migration and demographic statistics. We also used a non-parametric Spearman correlation ranking model, a geographically inspired method to measure the flow of migrants among both countries and their national origins.

The flow on that frontier is made up of two large groups. The first consists

of returning Colombians who emigrated to Venezuela and in recent years returned with their offspring born in Venezuela. As a result, the spatial distribution of Colombian emigrants who were in Venezuela must be strongly and positively correlated with the number of Venezuelan immigrants in many Colombian regions<sup>3</sup> from which Colombian emigration to Venezuela was sizable. The second group is Venezuelans outside the counterflows of Colombian emigrants to Venezuela. Thus, the correlation between Colombian emigrants and Venezuelan immigrants will be low in those regions that attract this type of migrant. Therefore, the number of Venezuelan immigrants can vary significantly according to the earlier categorization. If the Venezuelan migrant came with his Colombian parents, he would enjoy dual citizenship and could move between both countries. If there are Colombian departments where Venezuelan immigrants concentrate and they do not come with Colombian return flows, these flows are actual Venezuelan migrants.

The vital statistics and censuses were used to estimate the Colombian demographic contribution in Venezuela and Colombian censuses and vital events for the real figure of Venezuelan migrants and foreigners living in Colombia. We must underline that the statistics of both countries have shortcomings. The Venezuelan census is voluntary, and participation of foreign migrants is historically low, but then tendencies are useful. The Colombian censuses and vital events do not distinguish between actual foreigners and people born abroad of Colombian parents, so they are as a rule very confusing and cumbersome to work with, since descendants of Colombians are registered as foreigners even if the Colombian constitution states in article 96 that children of Colombian parents born in foreign land are Colombians by birth.

The second approach is ethnographic and includes my participatory observation. But it was based on semi-structured and structured interviews with migrants and long conversations with dozens of my Colombian students, colleagues, and friends. From this fieldwork, we got information surrounding migratory phenomena. Finally, the analysis of migration presented here is not one of causal explanation; instead, it offers a social and historical analysis. The object is not to explain the causes of migration.

Nail says that the history of the migrant is the history of social motion. Societies are constantly moving people, objects, and trying to increase their

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<sup>3</sup> Colombia is divided in thirty-two departments; a department is the equivalent of a state in Venezuela or the United States.

territorial, political, juridical, and economic power through different practices of expansion and expulsion. In such a way, the theory of social motion radicalizes and expands Marx's classic concept of primitive accumulation. Nail describes three diverse ways in which expansion by extensive expulsion takes place: penal transportation, as those conducted in the 18th century from Great Britain to her colonies; The emigration of the relative surplus population and the denationalization of returned migrants. Nail theory underlines how social regimes of accumulation since ancient times bring into play four combined strategies of social expulsion: territorial, political, juridical, and economic. Each strategy is associated to a mode of circulation or what he calls kinopower (centripetal, centrifugal, tensional, and elastic forces). The combinations of social expulsion strategies and mode of circulation produces four historical categories of migrants: nomad, barbarian, vagabond, and proletarian. The nomad is the migrant expelled from the territory, the barbarian is expelled from political status and citizenship (denationalization), the vagabond from the juridical order, and the proletariat from the economic process. These figures are denied their social status (expulsion) to develop new forms of social motion (expansion) and they continue to coexist in the contemporary migratory processes. So, from Nail work, we used three constructs, the political figures, the strategies of expulsion, and the regime of social motion.

### **The regimes of social motion in both countries and the migration movement in the long run**

The migration flow between Colombia and Venezuela can be explained by the differences in the techniques of population governance and of capital accumulation.

Colombia has been, during a great part of the twentieth century, a booty capitalist economy. Weber described booty capitalism as a way of accumulating wealth from war, plunder, and speculative adventures (Parkin 1982). Many characteristics of this type of capitalism are present in the Colombian economy, like in the large concentrations, through war and displacement, of land and in the cocaine production that gave rise to an influential *narcobourgeoisie* integrated into the legal economy (Richani 2013) and that, in the words of Arias Felipe (2019) is a macroeconomic "stabilizer."

The Andean country has been involved in a ruthless war over control and property of land and has been governed indirectly as a European colonial empire

(Robinson 2013). This form of internal colonialism has produced a highly stratified regional and social system. The national political elite, living in the capital Bogotá, have left vast geographical spaces in exchange for its power in the hands of local elites associated with non-state armed groups (paramilitaries and drug-trafficking bands). Peripheral regions live in a permanent low-intensity conflict to control resources (Hristov 2014). This conflict has a demographic logic. The depopulated regions (population decreased via the extermination of social groups that object to booty capitalism or displacement) are occupied with capital intensive activities like mining, large scale cattle raising and coca leaf plantations. Indeed, 70 per cent of the Colombian migrants in Venezuela come from peripheral regions like the Caribbean coast and the Oriental frontier where state and non-state (paramilitary and guerrillas) violence and appropriation of land is intense. Many of them settled in two Venezuelan border states. In the oil-producing state of Zulia lived 801,465 Colombo-Venezuelans out of a population of 3,704,404. In the agricultural state of Táchira lived 543,533 Colombo-Venezuelans out of 1,168,908 inhabitants<sup>4</sup>

Colombian capitalism relies heavily on non-capitalist methods of violence. Its political order displays a tendency to expel the surplus population<sup>5</sup> to preserve the status quo, shelter the power elites from the populace's unrest, and encourage capital accumulation by dispossession. The Colombian power elite is obsessed over domestic instability and the threat of class war. Indeed, the permanent civil war has given Colombia's elites an alibi to crush progressive popular movements and attempts at social reforms. Social expulsion (displacement and emigration) is the basic condition for capitalist accumulation, expansion of private property and economic growth in Colombia.

During the era known as *La Violencia* (1948–1961), forced migration reached the astounding number of 2 million people out of a population of 11 million. As a result, the production frontier of cash crops grew by decreasing the domain of subsistence peasant agriculture. The development of a neoliberal predatory extractive economy (expansion) in the last two decades, such as oil, coal mining and

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<sup>4</sup> Projections for 2011 were estimated from Acnur et al. (2008), INE-Anuarios Estadísticos de Venezuela, and the census of 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Venezuela has been forced to absorb the Colombian demographic surplus. More than 650,000 children born to clandestine Colombian migrants were granted Venezuelan citizenship between 1991 and 1998 because the Colombian government refused to recognize them as Colombian citizens, even if the Colombian political constitution in its article 96 establishes the right of the foreign-born children of Colombians to that citizenship.

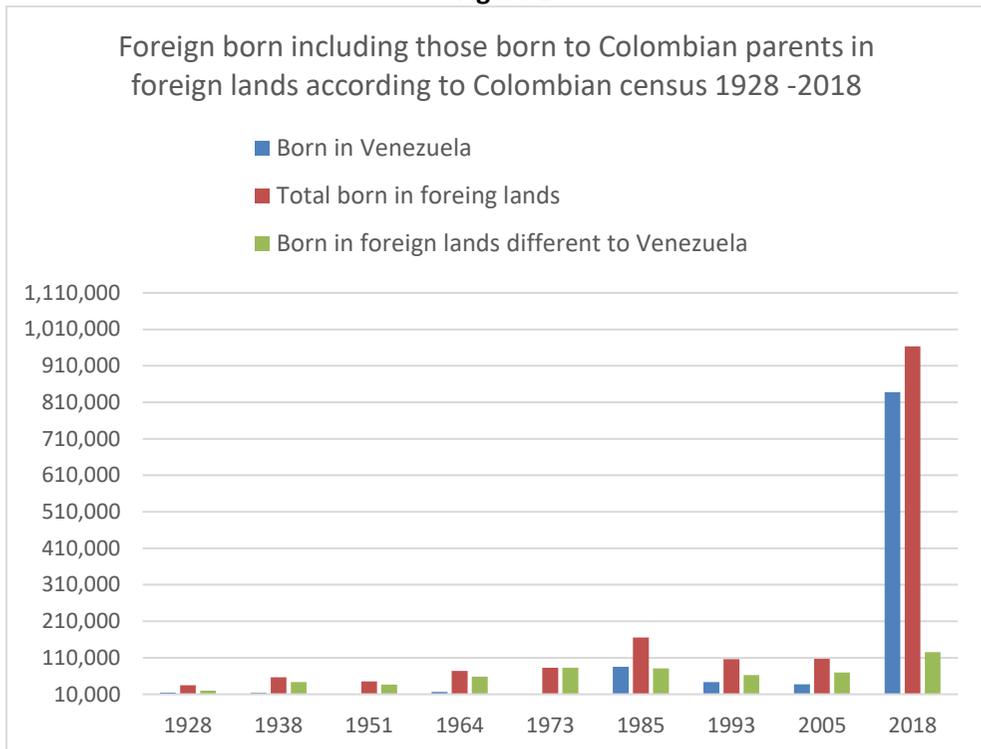
biofuels, has led to a new intense cycle of dispossession and forced displacement with the expropriation of lands of peasant communities, natives, and Afro-descendant populations (Ruiz and Santana Riva 2016; Hough 2007). All these communities lost their social status (expulsion). This surplus population either moved to urban centers, swelling the informal economy, or emigrated.

The extractive economy prospered, and an alliance of non-state armed groups, local and national elites, and transnational capital seized and accumulated millions of hectares of superior quality land. The political economy adopted by these social actors in seizing and accumulating land—violently—was argued with contemporary wit by Marx in a letter to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt, when Marx wrote: “in reducing the Irish population by eviction and forcible emigration, to such a small number that English capital (capital invested in land leased for farming) can function there with security” (Marx and Engels 1975). In Colombia, as in the case examined by Marx, expelling and reducing the *relative surplus population* is a key factor for capitalist accumulation.

Colombia is the country in South America with the scarcest migration because of few economic opportunities, intense internal violence, and an anti-migration public policy, justified on the basis that foreigners would endanger the socio-political order (Smitmans, Hernández and Iregui 2010). As an example, in the late 1930's, Colombia locked its doors to a well-educated Jewish migration coming from Europe. Colombian politicians, businesses and even common people perceived Jewish migrants as a threat to their way of life. This period is even associated with the emergence of a local version of anti-Semitism (Leal Villamizar 2011).

According to the Colombian census of 2018, there were 963,492 foreign born people (2 percent of the Colombian population) but many are dual citizens since they were born to Colombian parents in foreign countries. Different reports of Registraduría Nacional (National Civil Registry), reveal, for example, that 568,825 Venezuelan born of Colombian parents got Colombian citizenship between 2015 and 2019 while living in Colombian territory, thanks to article 96 of the Colombian constitution that states “are Colombian nationals by birth ... the children of a Colombian father or mother born abroad who have later established their domicile in the Colombian territory or registered in a consular office of the Republic”.

Figure 1



Source: Colombian censuses

As can be seen in Figure 1 the number of foreigners born stayed stable around 100,000 for decades, increasing rapidly only after 2016 due to the economic crisis in Venezuela. But if we subtract the people born to Colombian parents in foreign countries, including in Venezuela, the real number of immigrants is about 250,000. This is a small fraction of the total population of Colombia, which is 50 million people.

On the other hand, aliens who asked for and obtained a Colombian naturalization card were a meager 1,911 or 0.004 percent of the Colombian population (Extranjeros en Colombia 2016). The vital events show that of 15,216,578 live births, between 1998 to 2019, merely 20,659 or 0.13 percent were born to foreign mothers and this last figure may include some daughters of Colombians born in foreign lands but without the Colombian citizenship certificate. In fact, we can conclude that Colombia is a country with very few immigrants. Even Venezuelans migrants are a mixed group, since most of them are dual citizens because their parents are Colombians.

Apart from the numbers, Colombia is a country deeply influenced by Malthusian ideology and aporophobic<sup>6</sup>, as we inferred from our lengthy conversations with local informants and interviews. The urban and rural lower social classes are perceived as dangerous. In our dialogue with high social stratum Colombians and middle-class students, there is always a fear of a poor surplus population producing unemployment and class warfare. Returnees and migrants, according to our Colombian informants, are a dangerous group. They are a recruitment source for drug trafficking criminal bands, Marxist guerrillas, rise unemployment and are a drain on financial resources. But also, in our conversations with local people, we found a surprising and excluding notion of citizenship. It is intensely associated with the soil. As one of our informants told me emphatically, “to be a Colombian you must be born in Colombia and live in Colombia.” Thus, people born to Colombian parents in foreign land are rejected. Most people I spoke with share this narrow view of nationality, even my otherwise liberal and open-minded postgraduate students.

In contrast to restrictive Colombian immigration policies and anti-immigration *mentalité*, Venezuela has had a liberal policy. Immigration policies responded to labor market needs and demographic goals. Intellectuals and politicians were concerned after independence about the chronic shortage of labor and firmly endorsed immigration to solve it. In their view, Venezuela needed to populate its vast frontiers. Later, since the 1890s, under the influence of Spencerian positivism and European racist theories, the nation’s elites advocated both large-scale immigration and the whitening of the population by encouraging European migration (Wright 1993). Venezuelan elites associate modernity and rapid economic growth with liberal immigration policies and the population as a fundamental resource for capitalist accumulation. However, efforts to attract immigrants failed due to limited economic incentives until oil was discovered.

In the twentieth century, immigration policies succeeded; Venezuela became a state capitalist oil rentier economy, as illustrated in the works of Baptista (1997). During the high rise of oil-investment-driven capital accumulation, from 1920 to 1958, 1.3 million migrants (Sánchez Albornoz 2014) came to Venezuela. The country was, in 1960 the second world oil producer and the first exporter. In 1920,

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<sup>6</sup> From the Spanish aporofobia, and this from the Ancient Greek ἄπορος (á-porous), without wealth, poor or indigent and φόβος (phobos), fear. The Spanish philosopher Adela Cortina coined that term.



Caracas had a population of 100,000 inhabitants and 3,000 aliens, and by 1960 the city had reached 1.2 million inhabitants, including 300,000 foreign migrants, mostly Europeans. The population of Venezuela was 7 million in 1960 and the immigrants were 800,000.

Caracas became a mixture of European culture and the American way of life brought by the petroleum companies. A second and a third torrent of people arrived during the first oil boom (1974–1982), and the second one (2004–2011); people were attracted by the prospects of wealth from rising oil prices. These second and third waves were mostly undocumented Latin Americans (mostly Colombians) and Caribbeans. Even if the Venezuelan census is not a reliable source to know the absolute numbers of foreigners, it is helpful for grasping the tendencies. Most Colombian migrants arrived between 1970–1979 (22%) and 2001–2011 (32%), according to the census of 2011.

For decades, Venezuela has assimilated social motion surplus (immigrants) to regulate the imbalances produced by the economic cycles of oil income. Colombia became a source of cheap and abundant labor to be exploited by Venezuelan rentier capitalism. But unlike other oil countries, Venezuela encourages the settlement of immigrants. Sassen highlights the complexity of migration to Venezuela compared with other oil-producing countries in the Middle East when she says.

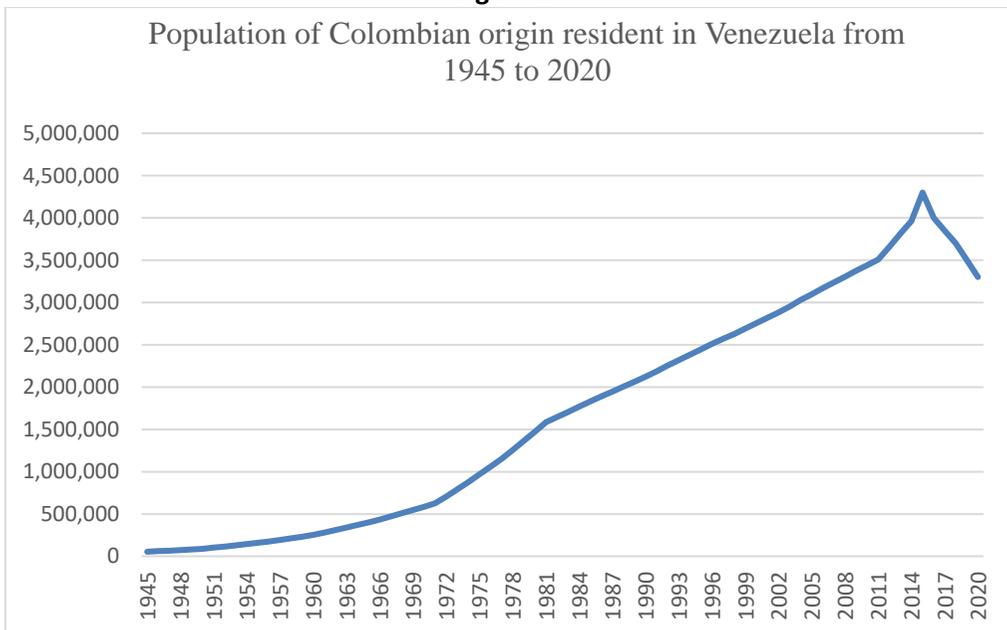
In contrast to nations as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the recruitment of immigrant labor has a long history in Venezuela and occurs in a cultural context that historically has accepted and encouraged the long-term settlement (Sassen words cited by Massey et al. 1998, 211).

Indeed, there are 700,000 Colombian born naturalized Venezuelan and all second and third generations Colombians are Venezuelan citizens. During the Chavez government, 1,3 million undocumented immigrants were granted Venezuelan citizenship and residence. They were integrated into a social program (Missions Identidad) intended to issue identity documents to the population.

Thus, in the twentieth century, Venezuela became a society with many foreign-minority communities that played a significant role in shaping the culture and institutions. According to González (1991), 42 per cent of Venezuelans were foreign born and second- and third-generation migrants. Particularly, the European communities, consisting primarily of storekeepers, artisans, and professionals, have enjoyed economic wealth and a privileged social status. The European community in Venezuela consists of about 1.8 million people, most of them of Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and German background.

The Colombian community is the largest foreign community in Venezuela, but it is difficult to measure the real numbers because of the clandestine nature of these migrations. But most expert sources agree that there are several million people of different generations. The Venezuelan Immigration Service (SAIME) and Ministerio del Interior (Ministry of Internal Affairs) estimated in 2015 the Colombian community to be 5,135,346 (33 percent foreign born). The Colombian embassy in Caracas estimated the number to be 4,000,000 in 2014. Acov (Association of Colombians in Venezuela) at about 5 million. Our estimation, based on census growth rates and vital statistics, is about 4,330,273 inhabitants (38 percent foreign born). Colombians are 14 percent of the population of Venezuela and 9 percent of the population of their old country, figure 2 illustrates the quantitative importance of the Colombian community. However, since 2015, the Colombian community in Venezuela began to shrink, as they returned to the old country because of the economic crisis fueled by United States sanctions.

**Figure 2**



Sources: Venezuelan censuses and projections from 1945 to 2020 and vital events from 1944 to 2012. INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas) and Anuarios Estadísticos

Colombian migrant movement to Venezuela has been correlated with diverse factors: family networks, unemployment, geographic proximity, political



violence, oil revenues, and the welfare state. Indeed, the decision that leads to emigrate is multidimensional. But as Gall says

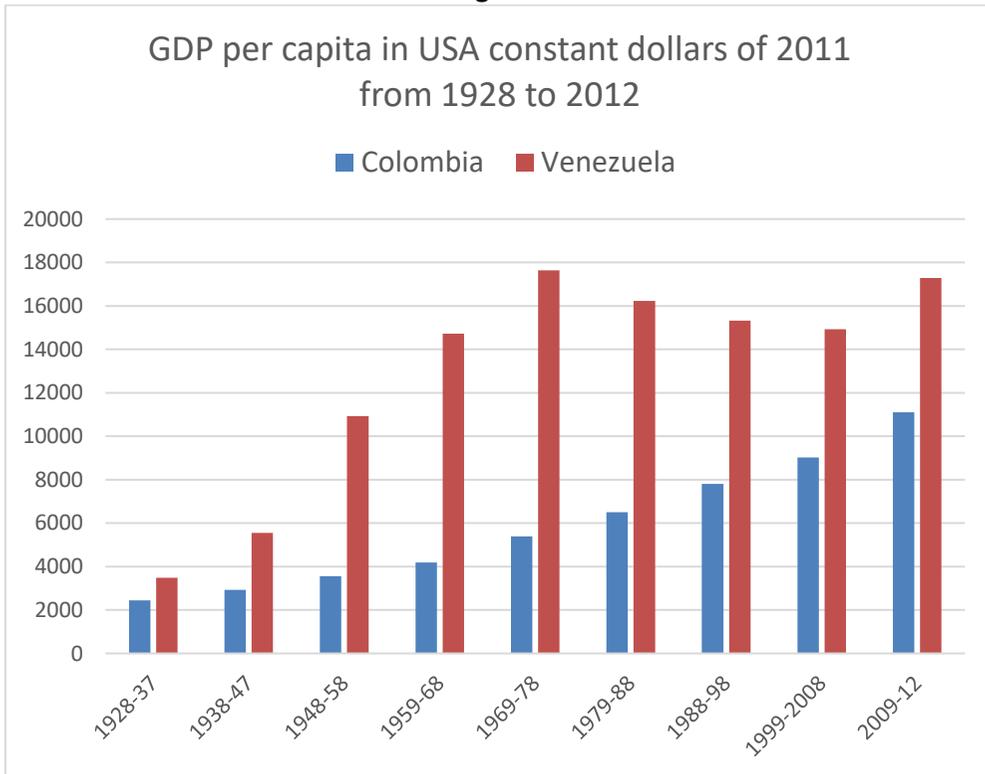
It is largely because of Venezuela's easy and unearned oil prosperity that the Colombian undocumented have found their uneasy, illegal, but desperately sought place in the hemisphere's richest underdeveloped society, in a society that has become hyperurbanized and an economy ... on continued high per capita oil income ... Economically speaking, the Colombian undocumented is just one more cheap imported commodity sucked in by the Venezuelan economy's extraordinary capacity to buy foreign goods (Gall 1972).

The oil-income cycles (expansion and contraction) interlinked with the political violence in Colombia is a key factor of gravitation. The internal unrest in Colombia and oil price oscillations could explain most Colombian movement from and to Venezuela. Colombian immigration increased during *la Violencia*, a ten-year civil war that began after the assassination (1948) of radical politician Jorge Eliecer Gaitan. Arrivals of migrants increased yet again during the first oil boom between 1974–1981. Thereafter, there was a decline in immigration that was associated with a drop in oil revenue. The last wave of Colombian immigration, many refugees, intersects with the severe social and political violence in Colombia from 1991 to 2013, and the uphill oil price cycle. A reverse migratory movement started to take place in 2015 with the signing of the peace agreement with the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and the crisis in Venezuela.

Yet recent research (AVN 2015) shows that the movement of Colombians to Venezuela is the outcome of a continuous production of a surplus population in Colombia (77% of migrants move for employment). The second motive for emigration (18% of the migrants) is the result of dense social and family networks, developed over decades with the transition from low to mass emigration. Finally, the large income gap, during most of the XX century (figure 3) between the Colombian-based agricultural economy and the Venezuelan oil economy together with a high demand for low skill labor were key factors attracting Colombian migrants.

The Colombian migrant workforce has clustered in jobs like domestic servants, janitors, masons, day laborers, agricultural workers, and street vendors. Colombian families anchored at the lower end of the social scale. They fulfill low-paying occupations demanded by wealthy urban middle and upper classes, most of them Creoles and white European expatriates and their descendants. The added demand came from small businesses and *haciendas* that needed cheap and unskilled workers.

**Figure 3**



Source: Banco Central de Venezuela and Departamento Nacional de Planeación Colombia

### The current migration crisis

The information on the state of migratory flows along the Colombian-Venezuelan border is confusing. Most statistics comes from four Latin American (Ecuador, Chile, Peru, and Colombia) governments allied with the United States in the conflict with Venezuela. This circumstance should produce hesitation about the data's accuracy. As Scheel and Ustek-Spilda say and applies to the politics of numbers in the Colombo-Venezuelan corridor,

“Politics concerns how institutional interests and agendas of the actors of particular policy fields shape decisions about how migrants are counted and what kind of numbers are ultimately disseminated in the public sphere.” (Scheel and Ustek-Spilda 2018)

In an article, Hanson (2018) questioned the Venezuelan emigration wave, citing the fact that 641,353 Venezuelans entered Ecuador from January to August

2018, but the vast majority—524,857—left.

Since statistics on Venezuelan emigration are often inaccurate to varying degrees and highly politicized<sup>7</sup>, we may suggest one estimate based on demographic methods. There is a correlation between vital events and the size and structure (age and sex) of the population that produces them. As Van Hook (2019) says, “populations leave ‘footprints’ of their presence in the form of deaths and births” or, as Bogue states, “The number of births and deaths which occur each year among a population is roughly proportional to the size of that population” (1950).

**Table 1. Mortality and estimated Venezuelan population in Colombia 2020.**

Age group	Colombian Population	Colombian Death	Colombian Mortality/ rate per-1000	Venezuelan Death	Venezuela Population
1 or less	1,559,800	6,944	4.45	55	12,354
2 - 4	2,367,456	649	0.27	14	51,070
5 - 9	3,936,569	745	0.19	1	5,284
10 - 14	3,975,771	1,112	0.28	3	10,726
15 - 19	4,136,556	3,416	0.83	13	15,742
20 - 24	4,327,019	5,750	1.33	41	30,854
25 - 29	4,224,837	6,166	1.46	31	21,241
30 -34	3,866,655	5,985	1.55	36	23,258
35 -39	3,604,026	6,553	1.82	26	14,300
40 - 44	3,221,169	7,238	2.25	22	9,791
45 - 49	2,909,035	8,688	2.99	19	6,362
50 - 54	2,834,927	12,347	4.36	22	5,051
55 - 59	2,599,963	17,169	6.60	26	3,937
60 - 64	2,146,355	22,830	10.64	29	2,726
65 - 69	1,648,967	27,258	16.53	25	1,512
70 - 74	1,199,084	30,959	25.82	27	1,046
75 - 79	804,743	33,448	41.56	18	433
80 - 84	494,772	37,646	76.09	27	355
85 +	514,720	65,708	127.66	0	0
Total	50,372,424	300,611	5.97	435	216,042

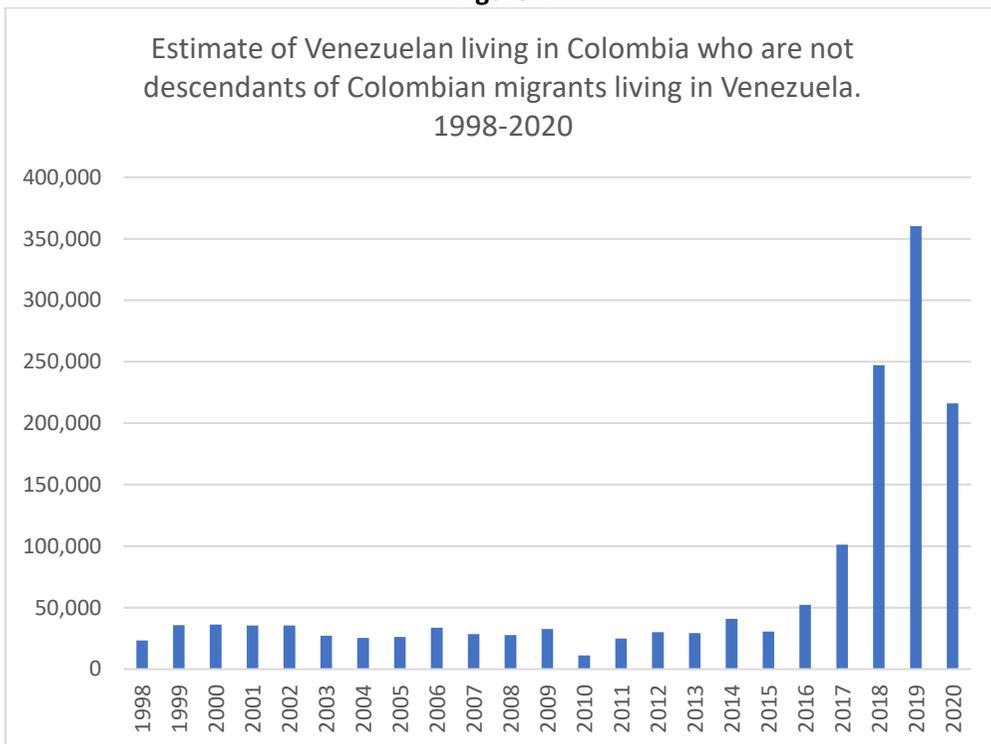
Source: DANE vital statistics 2020, for the method see Borjas, J. George.J, Freeman, B, Friedman, Lang, K. 1991.

<sup>7</sup> According to Argos (2021): Multilaterals “have shown difficulties in establishing a measurement of Venezuelan migratory flows due to the weight of return migration and people with dual nationality” causing differences in the UN agencies statistics of 100% for 2019.

According to Colombian census bureau DANE, 435 Venezuelans of all ages die in Colombia in 2020. Assuming mortality rates are similar for Venezuelans and Colombians<sup>8</sup>. The number of mononational Venezuelans in Colombia is 216,042 (Table 1).

We can offer a historical series of Venezuelans living in Colombia from 1998 to 2020. For that purpose, we used the Colombian official vital events statistics and the method proposed by Borjas, J. George.J, Freeman, B, Friedman, Lang, K. (1991). As can be seen from figure 4, Venezuelans remained steady from 1998 to 2015, oscillating around 40,000 people. From 2016 the number of Venezuelans increases to reach a maximum in 2019, and then began to fall swiftly in 2020, when many Venezuelans began to return home or began their migratory journey to the United States.

**Figure 4**



*Source:* DANE vital statistics and the method taken from Borjas, J. George.J, Freeman, B, Friedman, Lang, K. (1991)

<sup>8</sup> I assumed that all vital events come from mononational Venezuelans, but surely, they include descendants of Colombians without the citizenship certificates

The numbers estimated here are far from the one million or more Venezuelans living in Colombia. Indeed, and this is our claim, there is no correlation whatsoever between vital events and the number of publicized Venezuelans immigrants by the Colombian Government.

To put it plainly, for foreigners living in Colombia, neither the Census bureau nor Migration Colombia use statistical tools that differentiate between Colombians born abroad and returnees and actual immigrants. It is well known in the literature that foreigners settling in Colombia include persons born abroad of Colombian parents, who usually arrive with the return of the latter (Ochoa 2012).

Also, from the RAMV (Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants of 2018), we may infer the national origin of the population moving from Venezuela to Colombia. We used the geographical migration model employed by Santana. He used two variables, the Venezuelan migrants living in each Colombian region, according to the Colombian census of 2005, and Colombian returnees by region of origin with migratory experience in Venezuela.

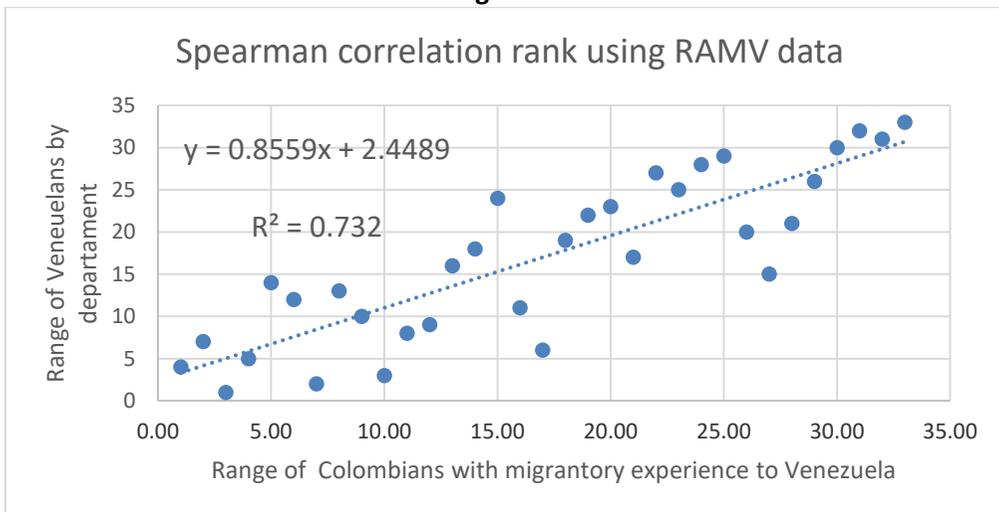
We as Santana used those two variables, Venezuelans living in each Colombian region and those Colombians with migratory experience in Venezuela who returned to their regions, but we employed data from RAMV. The relationship between the ranges of the two variables is remarkably high (0.8559), as can be seen in Figure 5.

So, if a Colombian region presented an historically strong flow of emigrants to Venezuela, we expect to find a strong concentration of Venezuelan immigrants in that region. The former allegation implies that a large part of the Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia have arrived because of a return of Colombians, being the first (“Venezuelan migrants”) children of the second (Colombian returnees).

Following the result of the Spearman correlation rank statistic model and vital events method, we conclude that Colombian transnational migrants in Venezuela are returning to their regions of origin in Colombia with their children born in Venezuela. What the Colombian government registers as “Venezuelan immigrants” are mostly Colombians. Next, there is also an economic dimension to this agenda. By denying the Colombians returnees their national status, the Colombian state passes on the welfare cost of this surplus motion onto the international community donors and governs them as a stateless social surplus. Thus, they are expelled from the political status of Colombian citizenship and become the new figure of the barbarian (a Nail category) in that migratory corridor.

In fact, according to an article by the influential Colombian conservative newspaper *El Tiempo* (2020) the Colombians born in Venezuela (dual citizens) were a political threat to national security. The Registrar’s Office was even contemplating refusing Colombian returnees their right to vote because they could vote for left-wing parties (Alsema 2020). In fact, thousands of Colombians born in Venezuela have recently been disfranchised.

**Figure 5**



Source: Colombian census 2005 and RAMV.

What are the outcomes of this process of denationalization? A direct one is the inflation of the number of Venezuelans. As Hanson (2018) says,

Migration data is often politicized and used to justify policies that themselves violate human rights. For example, migration statistics in the United States have been used to push for draconian legislation, increased border security, and the criminalization of immigrants. In the case of Venezuelan emigration, estimates have been used to justify misguided sanctions and even potential military intervention... (358).

**The figure of the Colombian migrant**

Political figures of migrants are associated with the strategies of social expulsion and the mobile process in each historical milieu. They are important to understand the social background of migrants. Since the 19th century, the proletarian has been the principal figure whose movement is determined by the

economic elastic forces of expansion and contraction that redistribute the population to cover a deficit or remove the surplus. The proletarian family is the predominant figure of the Colombian migrant in Venezuela.

Another social category is what Bauman (2004) calls redundant people, those having no distinct social status and those not needed for economic expansion. They are neither valuable consumers nor producers. These migrants come from the *outcast* segments of Colombian society and need help to reproduce biologically and socially since they cannot produce their own means of subsistence.

In Agamben's (1998) depiction, the outcast is the *homo sacer*, a juridical term of archaic Roman law to describe the person cast out from the community. The life of this subject is devoid of value. In Colombia there is a local word for the *homo sacer*: *desechables* (disposable). There is a lengthy list of "undesirables" in that country, which includes beggars, street children, drug addicts, petty criminals, prostitutes, LGBT people, political activists, human rights defenders, union leaders, idle persons perceived as a drain on the resources of society, and even migrants. Social cleansing groups like paramilitary forces and vigilantes, allied with the state security apparatuses, have undertaken numerous massacres for decades. The war against the lower strata and political dissidents has been a way to enforce social order and discipline with an iron fist (Stannaw 1996, Graham 2016) and Manetto 2019).

Many of these *desechables* moved to Venezuela. In a dialogue with Caracol Radio a consul of Colombia in Caracas and Colombians from local associations acknowledged that more than 70% of Colombians in Caracas lived in slums. They described *ghettos* occupied by a floating population of itinerant workers and single-parent households with their sons outside of the school system and in street gangs. Nevertheless, they could subsist in Venezuela, despite all the difficulties they endured, thanks to subsidies granted by the government (Caracol 2006).

Other categories, such as the barbarian, the nomad, and the vagabond, are ideal types since we should understand those figures in an intersected way. The barbarian is, following Aristotle, the person unable to speak Greek, the language of the political center, and who lacks the *logos* to be part of the social-political body of the city state. He is the product of the centrifugal force, an outward-directed motion from the center to the periphery.

The Colombian "illegal" is the core figure of the barbarian. These migrants were subject to hard-working conditions and lived without the status of a citizen.

Wages were exceptionally low because employers exploited the workers' juridical defenselessness. Once in the power of the oppressing bosses, they would work for lower wages than Venezuelans. The left-wing Chavez government ended this inequality by legalizing 924,118 undocumented Colombians (Ministry of Internal Affairs -Saime -migration services- 2015). The Venezuelan bourgeoisie angrily criticized the naturalization campaign because "those people voted for Hugo Chávez to receive perks." (Schwarz 2014). This bigoted rhetoric underlines the figure of the "illegal Colombian" as deprived of the ability to be a citizen like the ancient barbarian. This xenophobic narrative resumed during the closing of the frontier between August 2015 and August 2016. More than 30,000 Colombians were expelled from Venezuela without due process (The Guardian 2015, Agencia Efe-El Espectador 2015). The government used military forces to round up whole communities in border districts and suspended the juridical order in the frontier regions. The *Barrio la Invasion*, where 1,800 Colombian families lived in the border state of Táchira was a special military target. The Venezuelan government affirmed that a huge paramilitary base functioned there. The Barrio was demolished, and its population expelled.

Since 2013, migrants coming from Colombia has faced a bureaucrat apparatus that ended legalization procedures, sometimes refusing to issue birth certificates for their babies and increasing deportation (Pardo 2015, Infante 2013, and Hernandez 2019).

The next figure of the barbarian is the climate migrant, illustrated here as a historical-social category. As B. Lee Drake (2017) says,

A recent reconstruction of the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) offers insight into a specific potential climatic driver for historical migrations in Europe... specifically in the Western Roman Empire... a key vulnerability of climate change is push factors which contribute to migrations" (2, 4).

The 2010 Colombian heavy rain season associated with flooding and landslides left millions of people homeless. Many, coming from the northern coast, moved to Venezuela. The city of Caracas sheltered 58,299 Colombian climatic refugees (Expansion 2010). The barbarian is also a figure identified with the ancient Germanic and Slavic tribes crossing the Roman Empire *limes* and colonizing imperial lands. Colombians often move in substantial numbers to Venezuela, seizing land and founding small towns and barrios on the frontier. A good example is the town of *El Cruce* (the Crossing) in the Zulia border state, settled by thousands of Colombian families fleeing from political violence (Lares 2005).

The vagabond is the third figure associated with the demise of feudalism. The vagabond is the product of tensional forces and the dissolution of pre-capitalist juridical covenants. In today's world, we could relate the vagabond to guest-worker programs. In the Colombian-Venezuelan case, workers in border areas were subject to an international legal provision, the Tonchala Treaty of 1959. This treaty allowed Colombian and Venezuelan labor forces to cross the border to work. But, above all, it permitted the Venezuelan agrarian capital to hire cheap Colombian seasonal workers. In 1980, of one million agricultural workers in Venezuela, 250,000 were Colombians (Gomez and Diaz 1983).

The last figure is the nomad, whose kinopower is the centripetal force brought about by the hoarding of land for agriculture and mining. The agrarian counter-reform in Colombia and the mining concessions to transnational corporations- in the last two decades- are crucial factors to understand the exclusion of people from the means of production. This was intense in border areas like Guajira and Norte de Santander, thereby producing a floating population which became involved in smuggling Venezuelan products to survive, moving constantly back and forth, and trafficking mostly gas. The archetypal figure is the *pimpinero*, the designation for the Colombian gasoline smuggler named after a small plastic container.

The second group of nomads are peasants evicted from their land and means of production. We know them as persons in need of international protection or refugees. During the period of *La Violencia* (1948–1961) 100,000 Colombians entered Venezuela, fleeing the civil war in their country. A second wave of at least 200,000 refugees arrived during the first decade of the twentieth century as the conflict in Colombia escalated (Acnur et al. 2007; Cruzando las Fronteras Memorias del Exodo haka Venezuela el caso del Rio Arauca 2015).

### **Final considerations**

To sum up, the Colombian emigration to Venezuela has been a social experience where all different modes of circulation, expulsion strategies, and political figures are traceable as discussed in Nail's text. It has proven itself an escape valve for the long and brutal internal conflict in Colombia. Colombian emigration to Venezuela is motivated by the intense violence directed at the population because of the expansion of capitalist accumulation. Since the assassination of the radical popular

leader Gaitan in 1948, 1,000,000 Colombians have died in multiple internal conflicts, 100,000 are missing, 11,000,000, mostly peasants, have been displaced (Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas 2019). This violence is intrinsic to the economic and political institutional arrangements to reproduce the social system which interlocked with oil income cycles and labor demand in Venezuela has pushed Colombian to Venezuela for decades.

The significant levels of Colombian immigration were unnecessary since natural population growth was enough to supply the workers needed by the economy. It served the interest of Venezuelan bourgeoisie that benefitted from a disenfranchised low-wage labor. The losers were the Venezuelan working class in terms of employment. A recent study on employment (Levy and Yang 2014), for the period from 1980 to 2003, concluded that Colombian immigration brought a sizable increase (a one-to-one ratio) in unemployment for Venezuelans.

Venezuela has always needed a qualified foreign workforce to fulfill its development programs, but most immigrants have been unskilled workers hired irregularly, instead of the specialized labor needed, and most migrants (Colombians, Ecuadorians, Peruvians, Haitians, and Trinidadians) have been engaged in the informal sector. These immigrants, in turn, have competed with Venezuelans for limited employment and services (Davila 2001). As well, the environment has been particularly damaged by this immigration and its high birthrate. Since the seventies, Colombians have been important organizers of urban land invasions and have formed a sizable part of the inhabitants of the squatter settlements in occidental cities like Maracaibo (Gall 1972, Campos 2019). Fertile land like in the Colón District in western Venezuela was occupied by Colombian migrants. From these invasions appeared new towns like Tres Bocas and other *caseríos* (small villages). An estimated 50,000 Colombian *conuqueros* (slash-and-burn, nomadic subsistence farmers) removed a substantial portion of the forest land in the states of Barinas and Apure (Gall 1972).

We lack consistent data to make an unbiased assessment of the Venezuelan emigration. But most of the people moving under pressure and voluntarily in the occidental corridor are *Colombian families* that include a substantial number of Venezuelan-born descendants, thus a mixed population. On the other hand, the Colombian official statistics are hardly a reliable source. Even if we do not have consistent numbers of returnees and migrants, a good guesstimate could be from 800,000 to 1,000,000 ethnic Colombians moved in the last four to five years, or 20% of those who lived in Venezuela and 200,000 ethnic Venezuelans moved to Colombia. Nevertheless, the

situation is very fluid. From March 2020, about 1,200 Venezuelans and dual citizens have fled daily, on foot or buses, from Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Chile (Sures 2020).

The politics of the Colombo-Venezuelan migratory corridor shows how migrations have complex repercussions. They are social-political and historical phenomena with many angles, including today's geopolitical drives. Migration is a hybrid experience where political and social forces, different techniques of expulsion, and figures coexist.

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