

Salla Kurppa-Silva

INCLUSIVITY OF THE COLOMBIAN PEACE PROCESS DISPUTED

Experiences of Leaders of Persecuted Christian Groups

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ABSTRACT

Salla Kurppa-Silva: Inclusivity of the Colombian Peace Process Disputed: Experiences of Leaders of Persecuted Christian Groups

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Colombia has been in an internal multifaceted interstate conflict of multiple actors since 1964. Several efforts for peace have been made over the years. In 2016, after a four-year peace process, a Peace Agreement was signed between the government and the largest guerrilla group FARC. The goal of the agreement is to end the armed conflict and to build sustainable peace including the whole society. The peace process that led to the agreement has been talked about as one of the most inclusive in history, because of the width of inclusion of social groups.

This study focuses on one of the Colombian social groups, protestant Christian groups that experience conflict-bound persecution. The aim of this pro gradu -thesis is to study the inclusivity of the process through the experiences of persecuted Christian groups to find out whether they have been meaningfully included in the peace process, whether the Peace Agreement has changed the suffering they face and what the level of inclusion of persecuted Christian groups indicates about the quality of the peace process.

The theoretical background of this study is in legitimacy-focused peacebuilding, focusing especially on meaningful inclusivity and the role of religion in peacebuilding. The research was implemented through seven in-depth responsive qualitative interviews to leaders of persecuted Christian groups in Colombia. The interview material was analyzed through data analysis.

The findings of this research, based on the experiences of the interviewees, indicate that the persecuted Christian groups have not been meaningfully included in the peace process and that the conflict-bound suffering that they face has not relevantly changed. The evaluative conclusion is that the lack of inclusion of this social group indicates deficiency in the quality of the peace process and can further explain results of peace development in Colombia.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, peace process, inclusivity, religion, religious persecution

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Salla Kurppa-Silva: Kolumbian rauhanprosessin osallistavuus haastettuna: vainottujen kristillisten ryhmien johtajien kokemuksia.

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Kolumbiassa on vallinnut moniulotteinen ja monitahoinen valtion sisäisen konfliktin tila vuodesta 1964. Vuosien aikana on tehty monia yrityksiä rauhan rakentamiseksi. Rauhansopimus allekirjoitettiin neljän vuoden rauhanprosessin tuloksena hallituksen ja suurimman sissijärjestön, FARCIN, välillä vuonna 2016. Sopimuksen tavoite on päättää aseellinen konflikti ja rakentaa kestävä rauha koko yhteiskuntaan. Rauhansopimukseen johtaneella prosessilla on historian osallistavimman rauhanprosessiin maine.

Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee Kolumbian rauhanprosessin osallistavuutta konfliktisidonnaista vainoa kokevien protestanttisten kristillisten ryhmien näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää, ovatko vainotut kristilliset ryhmät merkittävästi osallistettu rauhanprosessiin, onko rauhansopimus muuttanut heidän kokemaansa kärsimystä ja mitä vainottujen kristillisten ryhmien osallistamisen taso indikoi rauhanprosessin laadusta.

Tutkimuksen teoria jäsennetään oikeutetun rauhanrakentamisen käsitteen kautta, tarkastellen erityisesti merkittävää osallistamista ja uskonnon roolia rauhanrakentamisessa. Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin seitsemän responsiivisen syvähaastattelun kautta. Aineiston analyysissa hyödynnettiin data-analyysia.

Tutkimustulosten mukaan Kolumbian vainotuttuja kristillisiä ryhmiä ei ole merkittävästi osallistettu rauhanprosessiin eikä heidän kokemansa konfliktisidonnainen vaino ole juurikaan muuttunut rauhansopimuksen myötä. Tulosten perusteella päätellään, että tutkimuksen kohteena olevan yhteiskunnallisen ryhmän osallistamisen heikkous kyseenalaistaa rauhanprosessin laadukkuuden ja voi osaltaan auttaa ymmärtämään Kolumbian rauhanrakennuksen haasteita.

Avainsanat: Rauhanrakennus, rauhanprosessi, osallistavuus, uskonto, uskonnollinen vaino

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1. INTRODUCTION

This pro gradu-thesis seeks to understand the agency of religious groups as members of civil society within the context of conflict resolution. I evaluate the inclusion of religious groups in the Colombian peace process during 2012-2016 and the consequent effects on the quality of the peace process. Moreover, I study the effectiveness of the Peace Agreement by investigating the continued conflict-bound violence, specifically the persecution experienced by Protestant Christian groups. The research questions are as follows: Have the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia been meaningfully included in the peace process? Has the Peace Agreement changed the suffering they face? What does the level of inclusion of persecuted Christian groups indicate about the quality of the peace process? I answer these questions by studying the subjective experiences of seven representatives of persecuted Christian groups. The theoretical frame of this thesis is inclusivity and religion in legitimacy-focused peacebuilding (Call 2012). In International Relations, it can be placed in the field of peace and conflict studies as a critical work of liberal peace based on the secularization paradigm (Bruce 2009; *ibid.* 2011). I argue that the inclusion of religious groups in the peace process matters, because religion in international relations and peace processes matters. In peace processes, it can positively contribute to the quality and results. Bringing religion into the discussion poses a challenge to the Western focus in the field of International Relations.

The Colombian Peace Agreement was signed in 2016 to end a civil war that had lasted for 52 years. Sergio Jarabillo (2019), who served as the High Commissioner of Peace in the peace process, in his recent speech commented: “peacebuilding may take generations”. Now, over three years later, Colombia is still in the beginning of the third phase of the peace process, which indicates that there is a long road ahead for the implementation of the stipulations of the Peace Agreement. This study intends to gain new understanding of the inclusivity of the Colombian peace process obtained through interviews of a social group whose participation in the peace process has not been studied before. The study was conducted through semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews of seven leaders of persecuted Christian groups in Colombia.

My own interest in the topic arose during the first year after the Peace Agreement had been signed, when I personally met a Colombian Christian who had experienced conflict-related persecution because of his religious affiliation. In our conversation, I asked what he thought about the agreement and whether it would have any effect on their situation. Confidently, he answered that it would not make any difference for them and that their (referring to himself, his family and the group he represented) lives would still be in danger. I was left pondering if this answer was given because of a very painful, but nevertheless limited subjective experience, or was it the voice of a larger societal group. Additionally, I wondered whether the answer was based on a wider reflection and understanding of the peace process beyond the subjective experience, or was it purely based on personal opinion and experience. These questions set me on a journey to explore the topic and to research the inclusivity of the Colombian peace process, in particular, focusing on persecuted Christians. During the months that I worked on this thesis, international media organizations also started writing more about the global persecution of Christians. Pew Research Center, hereinafter Pew (2019), published statistics showing how religious persecution had risen worldwide and how Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world. I hence consider this work a relevant source that speaks to the current conversation about religious persecution and assists to help better understand of the dynamics of societal inclusion, the inclusion of religious groups in peacebuilding and the connection between conflict and religious persecution.

There were a number of concerns that I had to overcome when setting out to study this topic. At the forefront of these issues was that of security. As a white, western female researcher, to try and dive into the realities of the violent, conflict, male and guerrilla dominated rural communities in Colombia, physically, would be most unwise. In fact, physical visits and interviews in the conflict areas during the research period were ruled out as an option for security reasons. I am grateful for the cooperation of Open Doors¹, an organization that made virtual interviews possible. This resulted in an effective and safer method of representation rather than going on-site and only conducting interviews with persons in restricted safe areas. Although familiarity with the Colombian culture could have been an issue, my background of living and working in Latin America for 17 years,

¹ Open Doors, in Colombia *Misión Puertas Abiertas*, is an international organization that focuses on persecuted Christians around the world. It is not affiliated to any church or denomination. Open doors develops and implements projects among persecuted Christians and provide information about their situation in the countries and regions where they work. (Puertas Abiertas, 2019.)

speaking fluent Spanish and being familiar with the cultural context and the daily life of rural and religious communities in Latin America gave me both the interest and the courage to undertake this research.

The first part of the thesis comprises of the theoretical framework that outlines the concepts of inclusivity, religion and peace under Charles Call's (2012) theory of legitimacy-focused peacebuilding. Inclusivity is further studied through definitions used by the United Nations (2012; 2015) and Thania Paffenholz's (2015a) concept of meaningful inclusion. The topic of religion and peace is firstly approached by discussing the role of religion in International Relations through the secularization paradigm, post-secularism and the concept of multiple modernities. Secondly, the role of religion in peace processes is explored. In the third chapter, the focus turns to the context of the study: to the conflict and peace process in Colombia. The fourth chapter gives the necessary background of the religious landscape of Colombia, religious persecution and especially conflict-bound religious persecution in Colombia. The fifth chapter introduces the research method and the interview material, explaining how the actual research and analysis was conducted. The findings are presented in chapter six, followed by discussion about the findings and their implications. Finally, a conclusion provides closure and reflects on themes for future research on the topic of inclusion and religious agency in peace and conflict studies.

2. THEORY: LEGITIMACY-FOCUSED PEACEBUILDING

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of legitimacy-focused peacebuilding² with focus on inclusivity and religion. Inclusive peacebuilding is highlighted as a key factor of

² In this thesis I use the terms peacebuilding and peace processes. *Peacebuilding* refers to "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict" (UN 1992), "the work of peacemaking and peacekeeping by addressing structural issues and the long-term relationships between conflictants" (Ramsbotham et al. 2011, 32) and overcoming the contradictions at the root of the conflict (Galtung 1996, 112). Peacebuilding also refers to building structural and cultural peace; structurally it means identifying exploitation, repression and marginalization and too close or distant corporate relationships for cooperative interaction. The level of cultural peace is more challenging, because cultural violence is in the collective subconscious, which is difficult to recognize and access. (Ibid., 270-271.) Peacebuilding also refers to activity that does not only reduce and eliminate violence, but also constructs a society that sustainably stabilizes peace, including various aspects of development such as demilitarization, local community, human rights, economy and public policy (Katano 2009, 355). In the context of Colombia, peacebuilding in this study refers to peacemaking and peacekeeping actions described here, taken both before and after the signing of the peace

legitimacy in a peace process. The second approach to legitimacy-focused peacebuilding is religion, defending its role and importance in peace processes. In this section, the theoretical approach is positioned in relation to previous research and literature. This theoretical framework serves as a foundation for the thesis, in which through interviews and analysis, I study inclusivity and religion in relation to the legitimacy-focus of the Colombian peace process. This specific peace process is said to be the most inclusive peace process in world history (Väyrynen et al. 2018, 26).

Legitimacy-focused peacebuilding is a theoretical approach presented by Charles Call (2012) as an alternative model to liberal peacebuilding. Topics such as inclusivity and religion in peacebuilding present a critical view to the concept and the predominance of liberal peacebuilding which excludes inclusionary approaches (Call 2012, 219). The concept of liberal peace refers to the Western post-Cold War project of conflict resolution through the construction of the liberal state, which lays on the concepts of democratization, the rule of law, human rights, free and globalized markets and neoliberal development (Richmond & Franks 2009, 4-6). The liberal peace approach is criticized by the defendants of the local turn, indigenous and inclusive frameworks, arguing that the main actors and promoters of liberal peace are the leading Western states, international organizations such as the UN and international financial institutions like the World Bank, whose parameters are based in the international system rather than in the local actors and practices (Mac Ginty 2008, 143, 158).

Call's alternative model, legitimacy-focused peacebuilding, "sees the consolidation of peace as dependent foremost on a state whose main social groups see the state as offering them acceptable levels of representation and participation" (2012, 226). The state's relationship to society is more important than the state and its institutions. This relationship means "acting in a way that will not exclude, repress, or silence minority (or majority) ethnic, religious, or class-based groups, especially those involved in the prior armed conflict" (ibid.). Call's model resembles the concept of postliberal democracy presented by Thomas Scott (2005, 216-217), making "use of the deep pluralism that exists among different cultures and faith communities in world politics and recognizes the role of

agreement in 2016. *Peace process* refers to transforming "actually or potentially violent conflict into peaceful (non-violent) processes of social and political change" (Ramsbotham et al. 2011, 32). In this study the Colombian peace process refers especially to the time period from 2012 until present when the preparation and implementation of the peace agreement has happened, but there are references also to the previous unsuccessful peace processes.

religious non-state actors in world politics”. The term legitimacy is defined as: “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995, 574). In this thesis, Call’s legitimacy-focused peacebuilding is used as a foundation, but unlike Call, it is not used to post-conflict political participation and representation. Instead, the focus is on the peace process during conflict. The focus of the study is the relationship of the state to society during the government-lead process, and whether the process has offered acceptable levels of participation and representation, reflecting meaningful inclusive patterns as described in Call’s theory.

2.1. Inclusivity in peace processes

Inclusivity has increased its significance as a key element in peace processes in the past ten years. This tendency supports Call’s (2012, 214) argument, that inclusion and exclusion are determinative factors when studying war recurrence, which in turn gives the topic more relevance. Inclusivity is linked closely to the theoretical discussion known as the local turn in peace processes, which is a critical approach to peace and conflict studies, especially affronting the liberal peacebuilding project (Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Paffenholz 2015b) and affirms the idea that “sustained peace depends upon the inclusion of former enemies and the social groups associated with them” (Call 2012, 231). The definition of inclusivity used in the United Nations (2012, 11) is: “the extent and manner in which the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated into the process and outcome of a mediation effort”. Further, an inclusive process is described as:

“... more likely to identify and address the root causes of conflict and ensure that the needs of the affected sectors of the population are addressed. Inclusivity also increases the legitimacy and national ownership of the peace agreement and its implementation. In addition, it reduces the likelihood of excluded actors undermining the process. An inclusive process does not imply that all stakeholders participate directly in the formal negotiations but facilitates interaction between the conflict parties and other stakeholders and creates mechanisms to include all perspectives in the process.” (Ibid.)

The High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations report; *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnerships and People* (UN 2015) emphasizes the demand for an increase in inclusive peace processes and indicates to what it means in practice. The report presents “a stronger, more inclusive peace and security partnership” (ibid., 10) as one of four essential shifts needed for peace operations to become more effective. Here, a link between inclusivity with effectiveness can be identified. The

following is an overview in which the different meanings and practical content given to inclusivity throughout the UN document are collected:

- Inclusive political arrangements, a fair sharing of resources and just accommodation of ethnic and religious diversity.
- Working closely with local communities.
- Navigating the regional dimensions of conflict and collaboration with regional partners.
- Providing a safe space of inclusive dialogue, bringing civil society, women and religious leaders to the forefront in the processes.
- Addressing social cohesion, inequalities and marginalization.
- Overcoming challenges to access dispersed population, to identify representatives who genuinely speak on behalf of the local population.
- Avoiding the engagement with only a small network of people, making national consultative processes truly national and consultative.
- Relationships with civil society organizations are carried out with transparency.
- Not only consulting the local population, but actively include it in the work of peace operations, including civil society actors, having access to the requisite local, cultural, linguistic and country expertise including women, youth, religious and other leaders.
- Local engagement and feedback used in formal and informal decision-making.

(Ibid., 19, 25, 29, 49-50, 77-78.)

Cedric de Coning et al. (2015) argue that a traditional peacebuilding approach of focusing on building strong institutions is not enough, but these institutions must be understood together with the society that it is meant to serve. An inclusive process strengthens state-society relations and therefore reduces the risk of a relapse into conflict. Good state-society relations mean that the inequalities, exclusions and center-periphery tensions that are root issues of conflicts are addressed. (Ibid.)

Inclusivity highlights the importance of local societal voices and aims to weaken the possibility of externally designed, implemented and controlled peacebuilding interventions without the consultation and participation of the locals. In practice it is a resistant factor to a Western, neo-liberal state-centric approach to peacebuilding, where the interests of the external actors or the dominant segments of the society are the leading force, or where

peace equals to processes aimed at strengthening characteristics of the liberal-democratic state. (de Conig et al., 2015; Richmond 2004).

2.1.1. Meaningful inclusion

Thania Paffenholz (2015a) emphasizes the importance of inclusivity pointing out that one of the main reasons for violence is that people contest their exclusion from matters that affect them. However, she does present criticism to seeing inclusivity as always and only positive and effective, stating that according to empirical proof, broad inclusion does not automatically increase the quality and sustainability of peace processes. What matters is the quality of the contributions of the actors included. The quality, in turn, depends for example on the selection criteria, mandates, power relations and support for inclusion by major national, regional and international actors. As a result, Paffenholz presents the concept of *meaningful inclusion* describing a process where the included actors can make meaningful contributions to political agreements and their implementation. In national contexts inclusion is a sensitive political issue and in practice the powerful actors either push against inclusion or see the achievements of the included actors as a threat to established power structures and therefore resist them. (Ibid.)

In the discussion of meaningful inclusivity, an important question to address in peace operations is, who is included – and consequently, who is excluded. An answer represents a conscious choice, leading to another interesting question: who chooses whom are included and whom are excluded? Therefore, only the mention of inclusivity in peace processes is not enough, but it is valid to discuss how inclusive the process is in the sense of who is included and who is excluded. Call (2012, 214-215) argues that inclusion and exclusion should be the first factors to focus on when studying the possibility of reversal of internal armed conflict. He also states that the substantive significance of exclusionary and inclusionary behavior is greater than poverty, resource dependency or state capacity (ibid.).

Who then should be included for a peace process to be inclusive or what should be the width of the local representation? According to UN *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnerships and People* (2015), inclusivity means the participation of regional representatives, women, religious leaders, “representatives who genuinely speak on behalf of the population”, youth and other leaders. According to de Conig et al. (2015), local representatives are a mixed group of those who have official social positions such as traditional leaders, militia or self-defense groups, religious leaders, youth leaders, self-

help groups to individuals who have influence in the societies such as ex-combatants and businessmen. Paffenholz (2014, 70) describes civil society representation as “organizations that take voluntary collective action around shared interests, purposes and values and that are distinct from those of the state, family and the market”, listing trade unions, professional associations, human rights groups, faith-based organizations, research institutions, social movements, NGOs, traditional groups and community groups. Paffenholz (2014) has qualitatively studied how and under what conditions the inclusion of local civil society groups within conflict contexts can work. The research was conducted using semi-structured group discussions and semi-structured interviews with 105 participants. The outcome was nine models for civil society inclusion in track one³ peace negotiations, the first one representing the most direct form of participation and the last one representing the least direct, without them being mutually exclusive. The nine models are: 1) direct representation of civil society groups at the negotiation table, 2) observer status, 3) official consultative forums that run parallel to official negotiations, 4) less formal consultations, 5) inclusive post-agreement mechanisms, 6) high-level civil society initiatives, 7) public participation (involving the broader population via public hearings, opinion polls, “town hall” meetings, or signature campaigns, 8) public decision making (via referenda or other electoral forms) and 9) mass action. (Ibid., 71, 76-88.)

I use the term inclusivity according to Paffenholz’s (2014, 2015a) concept of meaningful inclusivity and Call’s (2012) legitimacy-focused peacebuilding, understanding it as the intended and organized participation of all relevant local social groups or actors in the peace process with the goal to end armed conflict and violence, to achieve durable political settlements, to protect civilians and to sustain peace. As the study addresses the inclusion of the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia, I evaluate their possibility to make meaningful contributions to the peace process and the possibilities for their achievements to be politically and socially as recognized and successful as the achievements of the elite, other social groups or more powerful actors. Paffenholz’s (2014) nine models are used in chapter 3.5, to evaluate the level of inclusion of the different social groups in Colombia, using the models as a scale from 1 to 9.

³ Track One Diplomacy is usually considered to be the primary peacemaking tool of a state’s foreign policy. It is carried out by diplomats, high-ranking government officials, and heads of states and is aimed at influencing the structures of political power. (Mapendere, 2000).

2.2. Religion in peace processes

This section focuses on the second theoretical approach to legitimacy-focused peacebuilding in this pro gradu -thesis: the role of religion in peace processes, specifically the significance of meaningful inclusion and experiences of religious actors in a peace process. Because of the theme of this thesis, it is relevant to address why religion is important – or whether it even is important at all in this respect. I begin by addressing the role of religion in International Relations and social sciences in general. Secondly, I review the role of religion in war and peace.

2.2.1. Religion in International Relations

A well-known Marxist argument says that “religion is the opiate of the masses” (Marx 1976). It has been rather easy to ignore the role of religion by joining Marx in arguing that it is irrational, unscientific nonsense. But when more than eight-in-ten people of the world population self-identifies with a religious group (Pew Research Center, 2012), it can by no means be a rational social scientific response. Several scholars agree that for many years, religion has been the neglected component in the discipline of International Relations (Durward & Marsden 2009, 1; Hatzopoulos & Petito 2003, 1,3; Thomas 2005; Laustsen & Wæver, 2000). In International Relations, the most popular approach to religion has been through formal structures of organization or societal groups, sacred sites and religious leaders, yet not as religion itself (Haynes 1998; in Gutkowski 2013, 128). According to Stacey Gutkowski (2013, 128), social sciences and International Relations scholars do recognize religion “as a form of communal and/or individual identity, as a series of practices or rituals, as an informal or formal set of doctrines, as an articulated discourse or set of symbols, and as a world view and/or ethical and political system”. In this thesis religion is considered as “a multifaceted phenomenon which interacts with politics, society and the economy in multiple ways” (Fox 2009, 277).

Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler study the importance of religion in international relations by focusing on what religion does and what its influence is. They recognize that religion is sometimes a tool used by forces to push ideologies, fundamentalism or terrorism, but it also has a significant independent influence. It influences worldviews and consequently human thinking and behavior. It is a source of identity for many and affects those humans and similarly minded people who they feel affinity with. Religion is also a source of legitimacy which legitimizes or delegitimizes actions, including state actions.

Additionally, religion is associated with formal institutions that play a role in politics and political mobilization. (Fox & Sandler 2004, 2, 176-178.)

These definitions reveal religion as an element that is at the very core of the identity, desires and behavior of social groups. It therefore influences their interaction with others and their decision-making processes, which are at the core of international relations. Nevertheless, religion has traditionally not been a topic in international relations theory. Fox (2009, 275-276) claims that despite religion always having been a constant influence on International Relations, the Western centrism of the discipline and the adaptation of the narrow Western idea that religion is in decline, has led it to take the irrelevance of religion as granted. The result has been a more profound rejection of religion than in the other social sciences, even a blind spot (ibid.). Fox and Sandler (2004:1-2) argue that the various manifestations of religion and their influence on the range of social and political phenomena must be included in the understanding and study of International Relations, the “microcosm of the Western social sciences, which for most of the twentieth century ignored religion”. The focus on religion challenges the Western focus in the field of International Relations.

Religion was a key ideology prior to the eighteenth century and the subsequent formation and development of the modern state system (Haynes 2009, 1). The peace of Westphalia in 1648 is considered to be the end of the era where religion played a role in international relations and wars (Laustsen & Wæver 2000, 706). The secularization paradigm is a set of theories explaining how religion has been displaced from a central place of human life as a result of modernization (Bruce 2011, 1). The features or modernization’s influence include structural and social differentiation, individualism, life becoming increasingly enmeshed and organized societally instead of locally, social and cultural diversity, compartmentalization and privatization, the secular state, rationality and relativism (Bruce 2009, 145-157). The secularization paradigm argument states that the declining power of religion results also in the decline in the number of religious people and the level of religiousness (Bruce 2011, 3). Because the original setting of the secularization paradigm is in Europe and the explanation of how modernization caused secularization is connected to the so called “First World”, it cannot explain well what is occurring in the rest of the world and it can only be used to make estimations, not predictions. (Bruce 2009, 157; 2001,177, 194.)

Scott Thomas (2005, 10) argues that a global resurgence of religion is taking place throughout the world. This resurgence challenges the interpretation of the modernity and

understandings of how culture and religion influence international relations (ibid. 11; Katano 2009, 355). Many scholars (e.g. Habermas 2006, Buruma 2010; Gorski et al. 2012, 3; Haynes 2009,1) agree that the post-Cold War era and events such as the Iranian revolution, the Moral Majority, the political revitalization of religion in the United States, the Pentecostal explosion, the post-socialist Buddhist revival, faith-based initiatives, communal violence, the politics of the veil, the inconclusive “Arab spring” challenge the Europe-centered secularization paradigm, have shown that religion is a major global political force and is not going away. After the events of September 11, 2001, Jürgen Habermas (2001, 2) challenged the secularization paradigm in his reflection on the tensions between secular society and religion arguing that the tensions became evident both through the religious convictions of the terrorists and the religious response of the West. He points out the “imbalance between culture and society in the wake of an accelerated and radical modernization” (ibid.).

As it has become more apparent that empirical data contradicts the secularization theory, a large portion of scholars have changed their minds, and are now studying the role of religion in forming the post-secular paradigm (Berger 2014, x; Gorski et al. 2012, 3). In 2006, Habermas (1) stated: “religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new, hitherto unexpected political importance since the epoch-making change of 1989-90”. Post-secularization challenges the view that reason would replace religion and that reason is opposed to religion (Gorski et al. 2012, 7).

Post-secularity has been given the following meaning:

“a renewed interest in the spiritual life; a relaxation of the secular suspicion toward spiritual questions; a recognition that secular rights and freedoms of expression are a prerequisite to the renewal of spiritual enquiry; a spiritual and intellectual pluralism; a cherishing of the best in all spiritual traditions, East and West, while recognizing the repression sometimes inflicted on individuals or societies in the name of ‘religion’ ” (The Centre for Postsecular Studies at London Metropolitan University).

This definition is criticized to be Western-focused (Pessi & Jeldtoft 2012, 159-160), but Habermas (2008, 17) argues that post-secularity can only be applied to Europe and other Western societies where religious ties have lapsed in the post-World War II period. Post-secularity overcomes the antagonism of secular and religious and assumes their compatibility by recognizing “the limitations of a secularized society and gives way to religion as a social source/force without denying the potential of secularism and autonomous rationality” (Ziebertz & Riegel 2010; in Pessi & Jeldtoft 2012,158).

Peter Berger (1999) is one of the scholars that used to be a fervent believer in the secularization theory but changed his mind. Berger argues that “the world is just as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever” (1999, 2) and presents a paradigm of multiple modernities, pointing out that there are other versions of modernity outside of Western secularity, where religion plays a central role. Berger’s modern religious person doesn’t consider faith and secularity as mutually contradictory but attend reality through both modes. Berger does not deny the existence of a significant secular discourse. Instead, he recognizes that the secular discourse takes place in a contemporary world full of religion. (Berger 2014, xi, 53, 57.)

Despite the development of secular and post-secular paradigms and the happenings in the international arena that speak for the importance of religion in international relations, it continues to be a marginalized topic within the discipline. The themes examined in this thesis are relevant and needed, for the enrichment of academic discussions in International Relations and peace and conflict studies. The standpoint I take in this thesis represents Berger’s (2014, 53-57) post-secular approach of multiple modernities. It considers religion as a significant element in the Colombian society and religious groups as recognizable and influential actors in the civil society. The religious context and social influence in Colombia cannot be neglected in the context of the conflict, the implications of the conflict and the peace process as a whole. Equally, Colombia is viewed as a modern society that is developing and increasingly benefiting from the use of reason, modern science and technology. In this thesis, according to the multiple modernities -standpoint, these two aspects are not seen as contradictory to each other, but as two constantly present truths about today’s Colombia.

The anti-Western argument of this theory also makes this relevant for International Relations. Can Western-based and European-centered understanding that stands on the secularization paradigm constructively solve or support non-Western peace processes where religion plays a major role? This work reveals some of the dynamics that religion brings into play in the conflict resolution in Colombia and potentially globally in other places as well. The insights gained through this study are useful for Europeans and Westerners involved in non-Western peace processes through theory or practice. The next section looks closer into the role of religion in peace processes.

2.2.2. Religion in war and peace

Legitimacy-focused peacebuilding gives religion and religious actors a recognized role based on the understanding that especially in non-Western settings, religion has an important role in individuals' lives and in societies. In the aftermath of 11 September 2001 and considering the Cold War and post–Cold War conflicts like the Balkans, and regional conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and Asia⁴, the realization has been that religion is indeed a familiar, and underestimated, feature of conflict (Durward & Marsden 2009, 1, 3) and “religious factors intersect with and inform competition, bloodshed, reconciliation and peace” (Patterson 2013, 115). By the end of the 20th century, social scientists agreed that faith was not only practiced around the world, but ethnicity, nationalism, culture and religion were also basis for political mobilization (Hoover & Johnston 2012; in Patterson 2013, 115). Religion was described as a possible “part of the solution as well as the problem of international conflict”, claiming that religious actors produce peace and political stability (Thomas 2005, 193). In 2000, The United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders produced a document called *Commitment to Global Peace* (UN 2000). In this document, 2000 religious leaders condemn all violence in the name of religion and commit to collaborate with each other and with the UN to promote peace, tolerance, justice and non-violent conflict management and resolution. It would take further discussion to estimate how effective this document has been in practice, but in the light of this thesis, the document has one significant statement: “religions have contributed to the peace of the world but have also been used to create division and fuel hostilities”. (Millennium World Peace Summit, 2000). To summarize, religion has a double role: it can be used and useful for war as well as for peace.

Commonly the more known aspect of religion and conflict is that it causes conflict and is used for inducing violence. Eric Patterson (2013, 117-119) however argues that religion has not been considered enough as a factor to foster or exacerbate conflict. The common assumption is that reasons for war are material and much of international relations theory on war focus on Western, secular and material explanations such as economic and resource competition or the security dilemma. Religious variables have been neglected,

⁴ Examples of conflicts with religious features: the Balkans 1991-2001, Sri Lanka 1983-2009 between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Northern Ireland 1968-1998 known as “the Troubles”, Kashmir since 1947 between India and Pakistan, Rwanda 1990-1994, Afghanistan since 1978, Sudan 1983-2005.

because they are not material. Patterson presents four ways in which religious factors can induce violence: religious texts or revelations mandating violence, religious leaders telling followers to engage in violence, individuals justifying violence by religion and violence is used to protect sacred things or places. Religion can also indirectly inflame conflict when multiple religious groups compete in formation of communal identity and in the manipulation of religious symbols. (Ibid.)

The other role, perhaps not as well acknowledged, is the role of religion in peace. Patterson (2013, 121) states that its peace-facilitating potential might be superficially recognized but underestimated by scholars and policymakers. Jamie Price and Andrea Bartoli (2013, 160) however assert that in the 21st century, the positive contributions of religion have been increasingly acknowledged in the field of conflict resolution. Religious actors have been involved in resolving conflicts long before conflict prevention and peacebuilding became popular terms by Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace* (UN 1992). Religious traditions such as Buddhists, Quakers and Mennonites have meaningfully influenced international relations in the fields of peace studies and conflict resolution (Thomas 2005, 173). The concepts of peacebuilding and sustainable peace come from the holistic meaning of peace in many of the main world religions⁵, including the addressing of the root issues of the conflict, such as structural issues, long term social relationships and cultural contradictions to help restore broken individual and communal relationships. (Ibid., 191-193). Patterson (2013, 121-122) identifies five ways in which religion can contribute to peace: renouncing to violence based on a religious text, encounter or revelation, individual or group engagement in faith-inspired peacemaking, the use of spiritual authority by religious leaders to act as agents of peace, redefinition of social identities by religiously inspired claims to promote reconciliation and faith inspired forgiveness. Religious approach to peacebuilding aims at “the restoration of broken relationships through constructive conflict transformation” (Katano 2009, 354). The role of religious actors in facilitating peace is contextualized through the concepts of religious peacebuilding and faith-based diplomacy.

Religious peacebuilding is defined as:

“the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building

⁵ The Arabic word *salaam* means “an enduring and peaceful relationship based on mutual respect and well-being. In the Hebrew or Jewish concept of *shalom* “well-being is almost synonymous with economic prosperity” (Thomas 2005, 192).

social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence” (Little & Appleby 2004, 5).

Religious peacebuilding has been identified as one of the most important and growing forms of multitrack diplomacy⁶, in the face of the reality that track-one or official diplomacy struggles to stop modern conflicts that are changing in nature, in an environment of global interdependence and in the political and legal constraints built into the United Nations (Thomas 2005, 176-178).

Faith-based diplomacy is defined as:

“Incorporating religious concerns into the practice of international politics. Even more simply put, it means making religion part of the solution in some of the intractable, identity-based conflicts that exceed the grasp of traditional diplomacy” (Johnston 2006).

It draws upon secular expertise, science and experience, seeks to integrate faith into the existing frameworks of diplomatic and political institutions and social reality, but is not entrenched in secularism (Thomas 2005, 182-184; Cox & Philpott 2003, 32). Faith-based diplomacy involves religious groups and organizations such as religious NGOs as a key part of civil society and has as its objective a holistic approach, including conflict resolution, the restoration of the political order and the reconciliation of individuals and social groups (Scott 2005, 184, 196). In the Colombian context, as presented later, characteristics of religious peacebuilding can be identified in the agency of the Christians in Colombia. This study also shows that the Colombian peace process could benefit from faith-based diplomacy and how it has been lacking in the 2012-2016 peace process.

It is increasingly recognized that religious leaders and institutions are civil society actors that are important players in peacebuilding. Examples of this are peace processes in South Africa, Chile, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Chile and Argentina (Cox & Philpott 2003, 40). The effectiveness of religious actors is due to their good knowledge of the local situations and their close and extensive contacts in the communities and with their grass roots movements. They are often well situated for acting as mediators, because their reputation is apolitical, but they are still supportive of constructive social change and reconciliation. The religious participants usually represent respected values in the

⁶ Scott Thomas defines multitrack diplomacy as “the informal, nongovernmental contacts that take place at the individual, state, and society levels of analysis below the level of analysis of the international system. It includes private citizens, social groups, religious groups and a wide range of non-state actors.” (2005, 176).

community. Religious actors and leaders are often trusted and respected, they represent a deep spiritual or a transcendent authority and therefore they have a unique influence to bring conflicting groups together, to reconcile relationships and to mobilize support for peace process at local, national and international levels. (Thomas 2005, 185-186, 196, Cox & Philpott 2003, 39-40.)

Legitimacy-focused peacebuilding calls for representation and participation of social actors. Based on the research and literature presented in this chapter, it can be argued that religious groups are significant actors in a conflict society and should not be ignored as a social group. Religion as a defining and group-forming concept should be understood and included in the understanding of the society and the conflict. In Colombia, religious groups are also a unique group of victims and actors in the conflict, whose direct participation in the peace process would add to its legitimacy. In this thesis, I recognize the role and agency of religious leaders by interviewing them and studying their experiences in relation to the peace process and inclusion. In chapter 4 I explore the role of religion in the Colombian society and conflict in more detail.

2.3. Theory conclusions

Charles Call's (2012) legitimacy-focused peacebuilding approach is a bottom-up stance, in which inclusivity and a holistic understanding of the conflict society are prerequisites. Local-turn in peacebuilding supports a bottom-up approach for reaching lasting conflict solutions, where the citizens and local leaders are recognized as experts in the peace process (Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Paffenholz 2015b; Call 2012, 231). Call's (2012) legitimacy-focused peacebuilding calls for the inclusion of religious groups (not exclusively) as meaningful members of the civil society and recognizes their participation and voice as a strength and potential for sustainable peace. Inclusion of local actors legitimates a peace process.

It is necessary to point out that Call's theory does not focus on religious actors only, it does not exclude the importance and inclusion of other societal groups (e.g. youth, women, ethnic groups). All social groups are significant in the Colombian context. However, I have limited the focus of this study to the representation and participation of religious groups and specifically the persecuted Christian groups. The other societal groups are mentioned in this study only in a general and superficial manner because of the delimitation - not to undermine their importance and role.

In the next two chapters I develop the context of the thesis. In Chapter 3 I explore the background, the actors and the development of the civil war in Colombia. I outline the previous peace efforts and the developments of the 2012-2016 peace process. I also include an evaluation of societal inclusion of the peace process. In chapter 4 I discuss the Colombian religious landscape and the conflict-related persecution of Christian groups.

3. CONTEXT: THE CONFLICT AND THE PEACE PROCESS IN COLOMBIA

Before presenting the research methods and analysis, this and the following chapter investigates the context of this study. Firstly, the context consists of the Colombian civil war and its peace processes. Secondly, the context consists of conflict-related persecution of Christian groups in Colombia. The understanding of these contextual topics is necessary before focusing on finding answers to the research questions of whether the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia have been included in the peace process, whether the Peace Agreement has decreased the persecution they experience and how has the level of inclusion affected the quality of the peace process.

The Colombian civil war was a complex armed conflict that lasted 52 years between the Colombian government, paramilitary groups, drug cartels and guerrilla groups from 1964 to 2016. The termination of the conflict to the Peace Agreement in 2016 is disputed. According to official numbers, which are lower than the real numbers, over 200,000 people have died in the conflict and it has caused one of the largest internally displaced people groups in the world – over 5 million civilians have had to leave their homes (Kroc 2017b). Colombia is the Latin American country with the highest rate of human rights violations. Gonzalo Sánchez and William Avilés (2001, 7) describe the conflict as one where “democracy, liberalization and stability in economic management have been combined with inequality, repression and widespread corruption”. The Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the most significant guerrilla group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC-EP (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo*, hereinafter FARC) was signed on the 24th of November 2016. Since then, there has been an unsuccessful effort to reach an agreement with the National Liberation Army, ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*), a smaller, but active guerrilla group.

3.1. Historical overview of the conflict

The colonial period in Colombia left a heritage of striking and permanent social inequality between a rich landowning elite and the rest of the population. The weakness of the government and the lack of national unity have been Colombia's burden since colonialization, and they can be traced as root causes for the civil war. The central government has never been able to govern the whole national territory, which has created a survival strategy permitting different regions to be governed by local armies, guerrillas, criminals, armed peasants and landowners. During the 19th century several bloody civil wars divided the nation and established a culture of violence and hatred. In the beginning of the new century, through coffee cultivation and the privatization of public territory, the rich landowners gained even more land and the poorer peasants had to leave from the central regions and move towards the lowlands in the south. Agriculture and the conflicts connected to land ownership and cultivation expanded to areas where there was no government representation. (Livingstone 2003, 35-41.)

The frustration broke out in a ten-year period called *La Violencia* from 1948 to 1958. The laborers fought for their rights, the poor against the rich, the liberals and the conservatives against each other. 200,000 people lost their lives in torture, murders, village burnings and rapes. An ostensible peace was reached, even though the conflict continued in the rural areas. (Livingstone 2003, 35-43; Valtonen 2001, 362-364.) *La Violencia* ended with a power-sharing agreement between the Liberal and Conservative parties, called the National Front.

After an unsuccessful land reform in the 1960s many of the poor and landless moved to the remote lowlands in the south, out of the reach of the government's authority and infrastructure. Little by little independent armed peasant movements and leftist guerrilla groups started forming. The four most important guerrilla groups were born in the National Front period that lasted until 1970. (Livingstone 2003, 46-50; Valtonen 2001, 364-365.) The beginning of the civil war is dated to fall within this decade.

In the 1960s and 1970s economic and social transformations took place in the country. A massive migration flow from the countryside to the cities started and has continued into the present. Agriculture became more commercial and expanded toward virgin areas of Colombia (Narváez 2009, 48). In the 1970s, public strikes, mass protests and civic activism were harshly quenched; labor union representatives, workers and activists were arrested and tortured by the government of president Turbay (Livingstone 2003, 51-55).

This strengthened the conviction of the left that fighting with arms was the only way to attain social justice, resulting in the strengthening of the guerrilla movements during the 1980s (ibid.). In the 1980s the corruption within all levels of the government became evident and violence that was connected both to the drug trafficking cartels and to political violence became overwhelmingly disastrous; the decade ended with intense violence (Valtonen 2001, 368-369).

A new constitution in 1991 was a significant step, even though it was not able to stop the violence, it opened the door for smaller political parties and increased local democracy. However, the guerrilla movement and the substantial power and political nexus of the drug cartels continued. The violence flourished with over 25 000 murders in 1995. (Valtonen 2001, 369-370.) Even with the long history of uprisings and violence, the bloodshed in the 1990s and the beginning of the millennium was unprecedented (Glenny 2008, 344).

In 2004 the under-Secretary-General for Human Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland, after a mission in Colombia, reported Colombia to be by far the biggest humanitarian catastrophe and the biggest conflict in the Western hemisphere with a worsening humanitarian situation and largely becoming a forgotten humanitarian crisis. Even after the peak in kidnappings, displacements and killings between 1999 and 2002, the number of internally displaced and the use of landmines was increasing. The Colombian society continued being deeply affected by the consequences of the drug-fueled war such as the threat of extinction of indigenous communities, great ecological and environmental effects, child soldier use, the continuation of the multibillion-dollar drug industry and economic inequality. (UN 2004.)

3.2. Conflict actors and societal influences

The first meaningful actor in the conflict is the Colombian state, which has remained weak and fragmented. Instead of being capable to exercise coercion and negotiate with armed groups, it has been dependent on security functions provided by these same informal groups. The weak state, its institutions and representatives are not trusted. “The ‘law of the jungle’ and ‘revolutionary justice’” have substituted state power in much of the country. (Sánchez & Avilés 2001, 7.) The Colombian army is guilty of some of the highest numbers of human rights violations in the world (Glenny 2008, 342).

The second group of actors in the Colombian conflict are the guerrilla groups, FARC being the most important one. The communists and liberal guerrillas joined forces to form FARC in 1964, as a result of poverty, the rigidity of the National Front political arrangement and

government attacks on peasant communities in the south (Valtonen 2001, 365, Livingstone 2003, 47-48). FARC has been mostly formed of peasants who have organized themselves in the face of illegitimate land appropriations by large landowners and multinational fruit companies, the main goal being to defend and to improve the conditions of the immediate surroundings (Rodríguez 2011, 7; Livingstone 2003, 47-48). The FARC is generally believed to be leftist, but the original peasant grassroots organizations were formed years before leftist ideologies even entered Latin America and most of its members have not had a global or even a national political vision (ibid.). The FARC has been welcomed as a protector and developer to bring law and order in areas where the government presence has been weak or non-existent (Livingstone 2003, 47-48). The FARC has, among other things, offered the local populations education, health care opportunities and local courts (ibid.). Traditionally the FARC was not involved or interested in the drug business, but eventually the taxation of the drug produce in exchange for protection became an easy source of income (Glenny 2008, 359-361). In 2008 the FARC was estimated to have 15 000 – 20 000 armed men, women and children (ibid.). As of October 2019, there are 13 057 ex-members of the FARC registered in the civil life reintegration program as part of the peace process (UN 2019).

Other guerrilla groups were formed around the same time as the FARC, also as activist solutions to poverty, to the unequal distribution of resources and power. Ideologically the stronger ELN group was founded among the students and intellectuals with political and financial connections to Cuba; other noteworthy guerrilla groups are the Maoist EPL (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*), *Quintín Lame* that represented the indigenous population, ADO (*Autodefensa de Obreros*), PRT (*Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores*) and M-19 that was especially known for kidnappings, public robberies, takeovers of public buildings and distributing the robbed money in poor neighborhoods. (Valtonen 2001, 365-366.) Most of the guerrilla movements have demobilized over the years (Livingstone 2003, 188-193). Even though these groups have not been as influential and long-standing actors in the conflict as the FARC and the ELN, they have all contributed to the complexity and violence of the conflict. The peace process of this study has been between the government and the FARC, whereas the government attempts to negotiate with the ELN have been unsuccessful. It is estimated that presently the ELN has little over 3 000 members (PARES 2019).

The third group of actors are the paramilitary forces, born from the 1968 authorization for the military to mobilize and arm civilians to defend public order (Livingstone 2003, 194).

The term paramilitaries is used for “various types of illegal rightwing armed groups which work alongside the armed forces. They include private militia funded by landowners and businesses; drug traffickers’ hit squads and ‘social cleansing’ death squads.” (ibid.). The largest paramilitary group has been the AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*). In the 1990s these death squads with personal and ideological connections to the elite eliminated political threats as well as unwanted social groups such as street children, prostitutes and homosexuals (Valtonen 2001, 368-370; Glenny 2008, 363-367). The paramilitaries have been seen as a force guarding the law, protecting the population and fighting the terrorists both with the government and drug cartels’ support, consequently operating without control with increasing violence, cleansing whole communities and cities to acquire land for their own drug business (ibid.). In 2005, the strength of the paramilitary was estimated to be 30,000 (Glenny 2008, 341-367). President Uribe promoted the Justice and Peace Law, which led to the disarmament of many paramilitary soldiers, but like a decade earlier, they reactivated the paramilitary edict (ibid.). In 2009, despite the Colombian government affirming that the AUC no longer existed, the AUC and the criminal groups it had birthed was estimated to have 12,000 members (Kirk 2009, 24; The Mackenzie Institute, 2015). The AUC is no longer mentioned as an actor in the 2012-2016 peace process, but the role of the new criminal groups and the legacy of the AUC are still significant today. During the interviews, “the paramilitary” was mentioned several times as a current and active actor.

The fourth group of actors in the conflict are the drug traffickers. Drug cultivation became a popular activity in the remote lands among the almost starving peasants in the 1970s. For the first time, it gave them enough income to buy cattle and to fix their farms - activities that the cultivation of vegetables and roots did not provide for. The drug business started first with marijuana in the 1970s and expanded to cocaine, resulting in the concentration of drug trafficking in the hands of drug cartels. As the power and reputation of the drug trafficking grew, the cartels started fighting their own war against the guerrilla. Traffickers have infiltrated the whole society, including public and private institutions and all the South and Central American banks. They run a massive black market, money laundering business and have built worldwide criminal and drug networks. (Valtonen 2001, 367, 389; Glenny 2008, 345-353; Livingstone 2003, 52.)

The fifth group of actors in the complex and multilevel conflict are the civilians. The effects of the war are lived and suffered in the grassroot level of the local communities. Communities “experience war’s impact as a constant shifting in the shape of their

everyday lives” (Rodríguez 2011, 5). The control of the armed groups reaches every area of the daily life of citizens. The Guerrilla organizations have acted as a parallel state in the civilian communities, mediating conflicts and land tenure disputes, taxing legal and illegal economic activity (Rodriguez 2011, 16). The paramilitary has rooted its power in collective fear and intimidation, imposing conservative Catholic values in the communities (ibid.). The impact of over 200,000 lost lives and over five million displaced persons has been felt and suffered among the people through missing family members, families and homes. Ruthless bloodshed has taken place among the civilians. In this thesis I examine the Colombian conflict and peace process from the standpoint of persecuted Christian groups. As a civil group and conflict actor, they fall in the category of civilians, but distinguished from the general civilian population by the fact that they are also an intentional military target.

The civilians who have tried to make a difference and have been active in trying to improve the conditions in their communities, have paid a price. Hundreds of local and sectoral organizations like peace communities, trade unions, church groups, women’s groups, student networks, indigenous communities and groups of the displaced work to promote peace, human rights and social justice (Livingstone 2003, 206). Civil activism has been a threat to the other conflict parties, especially to the guerrilla and the paramilitary. Being a member in a local committee that tries to take care of the functioning of minimal services in the cities and villages where there is no other authority can lead to being identified as a potential FARC member and getting killed by the paramilitary. Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world for trade union activity. (Glenny 2008, 359, 365.) Paramilitaries have targeted the leaders of grassroots organizations to weaken social movements and unarmed dissent (Romero in Rodríguez 2011, 15). The persecuted Christian groups are organizations working for peace and thus have an increased risk of being targeted by the armed violence.

Given the above, Rodríguez describes the Colombian conflict as a “saturation of local and regional social, political, economic and cultural processes with the logic of war, the normalization of violence and weapons, and authoritarian ideologies” (2011, 4). Colombia is said to be “one of the most unequal countries on the most unequal continent in the world” (García Villegas & de Sousa dos Santos in Rodríguez 2011, 10). The conflict has been the nation’s way of survival when the state has been unable to protect, govern and function (Narvárez 2009, 47). Leonel Narvárez states that the

“rebel violence is an expression of the rebels’ oft expressed feelings of impotence because their needs for self-esteem, identity, and recognition have been denied. Colombia’s history is marked by this void. The accumulated anger, hate and urge for retaliation are important though hidden motivators in the Colombian tragedy.” (ibid.)

The gross and uncontrolled economic and social inequalities have birthed a complex network of social division that is not an easy task to untangle. The events and actors described in this section help to understand the complexity of the conflict in Colombia that is penetrated in every layer and sphere of the society. The conflict has a long history and the root causes go back to the colonial era, it has various actors with various motives and strategies. The geographical and social limits are unclear. It can be concluded that dismantling and resolving the conflict is not a simple task. The following section studies the efforts of Colombian peacemaking to end the conflict.

3.3. The peace processes

Over the decades of the Colombian conflict, several unsuccessful efforts have been made to resolve it. While the hard peacemaking work has resulted in the demobilization of illegal armed groups and reintegration of guerrillas into civilian life, at the same time more Colombians join the illegal groups and thousands face exile or death by the paramilitaries or the guerrilla (Kirk 2009, 24).

In this section I introduce an overview of four different peace processes that have taken place during the conflict, followed by a review of the 2012-2016 peace process, which is the focus of this thesis. The understanding of the previous processes reveals both the impossibility and the necessity of the 2012-2016 process.

3.3.1. The unsuccessful but important peace negotiation era

The years from 1982 to 2004 have been called the peace-negotiation era and include four different intents to negotiate peace (Narváez 2009, 47). Narvaéz's (2009, 68) assessment is that the peace efforts have suffered “from universal lack of willingness to include civil society in the peace-negotiation process” and a well-designed model of peace negotiation.

The first peace process in the Colombian conflict was led by the conservative president Belisario Betancur in the 1980s, proposing “peace without retaliation”, intending to address the objective and subjective causes of war. Despite the opposition of the elite and the Catholic Church, a cease-fire was negotiated with the FARC, M-19 and EPL in 1983-1984. The resistance of the political and military elites as well as the paramilitary groups continued until the project fell apart. By 1986 the guerrilla war was back to a full-scale

conflict. During the negotiation president Betancur acknowledged the guerrilla organizations as political movements and representatives of the society, interested in the welfare of the country. Key aspects of the first negotiations were amnesty, cease-fire, pursue of institutional change, the creation of a peace commission and recognition of the guerrillas as an insurgent movement. (Valtonen 2001, 368; Narváez 2009,49-51.)

The second intent for peace was made during three presidential terms, Virgilio Barco (1986-90), Cesar Gaviria (1990-94) and Ernesto Samper (1994-98). These governments were convinced that peace would be achieved through a strong state and an institutionalized peace process under governmental monopoly of negotiations. Barco's peace project focused on an insurgent demobilization program. Gaviria on the other hand, achieved the satisfactory disarmament of M-19, PRT, ELP and the Quintín Lame. Samper focused on the eradication in illicit drug cultivation and the institutionalization of self-defense groups. However, during this whole period, the war against the FARC continued and the government was unable to meet the FARC at the negotiation table. Some of the reforms in the new Constitution adopted in 1991 were direct results of the dialogue with the insurgents, but they were not enough to offer protection from the bloodshed. (Narváez 2009, 52-55.)

President Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) was determined to negotiate peace and as part of the third peace process, he personally held conversations with the leadership of the FARC even before his term started. As a result, confrontations between the army and the FARC temporarily decreased. However, the United States funded program called *Plan Colombia* became an impediment to the peace negotiations and the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 had negative repercussions when the United States declared the FARC a terrorist group. The peace process was terminated by the president himself in 2002. This had been the first time when the international community became directly involved in the search of solutions and civil-society leaders were empowered, although still without results. (Valtonen 2001, 58-64, 370.)

The fourth peace process was led by the president Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) under a promise to restore order and authority. He practiced a hard hand and a total war approach to deal with the insurgency. Economic and military assistance was received from the United States. By February 2004, there were significant advancements such as decreasing violence, the insurgency retreating to the jungle and a revived economy. At the same time, social and political reforms worsened the conditions for the lower class.

Uribe did not make compromises, resulting in FARC's refusal to negotiate. Human rights violations and the conflict continued. (Ibid., 65-67.)

In this thesis I focus on the most recent peace process, that took place from 2012 to 2016 between the Colombian government and the FARC. It will be assessed in more detail in the next section. The four early peace processes presented above may have failed, but they have also been a necessary learning journey preparing the conflict parties and society for the process that started in 2012 and led to the 2016 Peace Agreement. Kristian Herbolzheimer (2016, 2-3) highlights four triggers that helped the FARC to enter the peace process in 2012: the strong military approach towards the FARC in the 2000s, FARC's understanding that its original final goal of an armed overthrow of the government would never happen, the death of the FARC leader Manuel Marulanda and the consequent generational change of leadership. Moreover, Herbolzheimer (ibid.) highlights four triggers of the Colombian government: 1) the impossibility of a total military victory, 2) the risk of the inability of FARC to participate in a constructive peace process produced by the murders of the FARC leaders, 3) the improving relations with Venezuela and Ecuador, 4) the moral pressure to stop the bloodshed and human rights violations.

3.3.2. The 2012-2016 peace process

The peace process that culminated in the signature of the Peace Agreement in November 2016 is divided in three phases. The first phase consisted of secret negotiations between the government and the FARC in 2012, finalized with the signing of General Agreement (Acuerdo General para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera) encompassing the end goal of the peace process - the ending of the armed conflict. The agreement also incorporated the conditions and the rules of the forthcoming process. (Alto Comisionado Para la Paz, hereinafter ALPLP 2014; Väyrynen et al. 2018, 22.) It is noteworthy, that the agreed end goal was not peace, but the ending of armed conflict. The end of armed violence can create the conditions for peace, but peacebuilding that addresses and solves the root issues is a longer process. This mindset differentiates the 2012-2016 peace process from the previous ones. It also validates the continuing peacebuilding effort, keeps it alive in the face of arguments and evidence stating that there is still no peace in Colombia.

The opening session of the second phase of the process was held in Oslo in October 2012, after which it continued in Havana, Cuba. Cuba and Norway were invited to join the process as "guarantors", Venezuela and Chile as "accompanying countries". The detailed

content of the Peace Agreement was created in the negotiations that lasted four years. The FARC delegation was led by its number two figure, Iván Márquez, accompanied by different commanders on each negotiation round, ensuring a wide ownership and the leadership's commitment to the process. The Colombian government was represented by a retired army commander, a retired police commander, a representative of the business sector, the main negotiator Humberto de la Calle and Colombia's High Peace Commissioner for Peace, Sergio Jaramillo. The government and the FARC representatives listened to five groups of victims face-to-face in Havana. (Herbolzheimer 2016; ACPLP 2014.) Each delegation of victims consisted of 12 victims selected by the Catholic Church, the National University and the UN (Jarabillo 2019).

The second phase of the peace process finished with the signing of the Peace Agreement on November 24th, 2016, which in turn gave start to the third and final phase. The final phase will continue until the goal of ending the armed conflict and building sustainable peace including the whole society is reached, signaling the full implementation of the peace agreement (ACPLP 2014). The following chapter explores the content of final phase of the peace process and the implementation of the agreement.

3.4. The Peace Agreement and the status of implementation

The first version of the Colombia Peace Agreement (*El Acuerdo de Paz*) was rejected in a referendum on the 26th September 2016, with the participation of only 37% of voters. 50,2% of the votes were given to no-side, preventing the direct approval of the agreement. Some of the large groups represented in the no-voters headed by the ex-president Álvaro Uribe, leader of the Center Democratic Party, were the evangelical Christians and the Catholics. The main reasons for the no-votes were due to the demands that the guerrilla fighters that have committed crimes be condemned to prison, opposition to the way the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (*JEP, Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz*)⁷ was formed, opposition to the political participation of the FARC, resistance to the rural reform, and the concern that gender ideology had influenced the content of the agreement (Cosoy 2016a; 2016b). In two months, President Juan Manuel Santos renegotiated the agreement

⁷ JEP is "the justice component of the Integrated System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (ISTJRNR) created in *the Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace*, signed between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP on November 24, 2016. [It] [...] is tasked with investigating, clarifying, prosecuting and punishing the most serious crimes committed over the more than 50 years of armed conflict in Colombia, before December 1, 2016." (JEP).

meeting with the no-side representatives, including meetings with religious representatives (ACPLPb). The updated version was signed on the 24th November 2016 and unanimously approved by the Congress (ACPLPa).

Table 1. Summary of the Colombian peace agreement (ACPLP 2016).

Main point	Content
1. Comprehensive rural reform	Land access and use by the rural population. National plans to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality. Right to food. Development programs with territorial-based approach.
2. Political participation	Political pluralism and wide political participation.
3. End of the conflict	Ceasefire, cessation of hostilities and laying down of arms. The reintegration of the guerrilla members into civil life. Guaranteeing security and protection to all citizens.
4. Solution to illicit drugs	Substitution of crops used of illicit purposes. Attention and rehabilitation to illicit drug use/users. The elimination of the drug production and commercialization chain.
5. The victims of the conflict	Bringing up the truth about the past. Implementing justice to the crimes committed during the conflict. Reparations to the victims. Guaranteeing that the same crimes will not be repeated.
6. Implementation and verification mechanisms	The Colombians will accept the peace agreement by a referendum. The agreement will be implemented. The implementation will be monitored by a commission including international actors.

The Peace Agreement is a 310-page document, available online on the Colombia High Commissioner for Peace website (ACPLP 2016). The content follows six main points stated in the General Agreement (Acuerdo General para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera) of first phase (table 1). Based on international evaluations, the Peace Agreement is looked at positively and it has been considered comprehensive and innovative. The University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, hereinafter Kroc,⁸ describes the Colombian Peace Agreement as comprehensive and innovative, covering in a broad and balanced way the necessary themes related to ending armed conflict while responding to other central themes such as security guarantees, human rights, development issues, the fight against illicit drugs, processing the past and attention to victims (Kroc 2017a,1). In a Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center report Herbolzheimer (2016) describes the 2012-2016 peace process as innovative and useful for internationally offering new ingredients also to other peace processes. The innovative aspects highlighted are the differentiation between conflict termination and transformation, placing the victims at the center of the talks, addressing rural development and drugs trafficking, the creation of a gender sub commission, the preparation for implementation before completing the negotiations, addressing the rural development and drug trafficking, the inclusion of women and sexual minorities and peace implementation planning and preparation before reaching an agreement (ibid.). To form an understanding of the implementation of the peace agreement, Kroc Institute's *Executive Summary State of Implementation of the Colombian Final Accord December 2016 - April 2019* (Kroc 2019) and *the Trimestral Report of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia* from October 2019 (UN 2019) are used. The Kroc report and monitoring are based on a qualitative study of 578 stipulations, of which each one is a "measurable and observable commitment by one or several of the parties mentioned in the accord" (Kroc 2018, 5). The 2019 report shows that approximately 23% of the stipulations have been fully implemented, 13% have an intermediate and 34% have a minimal implementation level. 30% of the stipulations had

⁸ The Kroc Institute is a leading center for the study of the causes of violent conflict and strategies for sustainable peace. The institute has been given the primary responsibility for technical verification and monitoring of implementation of the peace accord. (Kroc 2017a,1.)

not been initiated as of April 2019.⁹ The completed stipulations are mostly initial short-term measures such as containment, disarmaments, verification and monitoring. The process is now entering the more difficult phase where the goals set for rural reform, economic development, citizen participation, reincorporation, substitution of crops of illicit use, attention to victims and mechanisms for transitional justice will require structural transformations and institutional reform. Three main areas of concern for implementation are the advancement and protection of the transitional justice mechanisms, the lack of adequate security guarantees for ex-combatants, their families, social leaders and human rights defenders and the need to focus on structural programs that improve the quality of life and guarantee the rights of the citizens in the communities. (Kroc 2019; Kroc 2018.) The report states: “The implementation process of the Colombian Final Accord is one of the most carefully planned and managed peace processes to date” (Kroc 2019, 3). It also discusses the challenge to “promote the accord programs as national public goods and sustain the implementation process by insulating it from the divisiveness of everyday politics” and highlights the normalcy of the presence of residual violence that is not a hindrance to the implementation and the achievement of peace (ibid.).

The United Nations Verification Mission report from October 2019 presents a more detailed qualitative report with 106 points about the advances of the implementation and the overall situation of the country. It reports the advances in the processes of transitional justice such as the numbers of recorded cases of victims and their hearings. In the area of substitution of crops used for illicit purposes it reports the specific numbers of landowners in the program and their advances. A large part of the report is dedicated to the detailed reports and advances reintegration of ex-guerrilla members into the society. In all these areas there have been significant advances, but there is still much left to do. Special sections and observations are dedicated to gender, ethnic, children’s and youth issues. The report expresses serious concerns for the attacks against social leaders, human rights defenders and ex-members of the FARC, especially for the repercussions of the attacks on the social structures of the communities. Concerns were also expressed about the lack of government presence in the communities. The role and efficiency of the government and its institutions is emphasized as the solution to solving the issues and bringing lasting peace to the communities affected by the conflict. The most noteworthy

⁹ Implementation status in May 2018: 21% fully implemented, 9% intermediate, 31% minimum, 39% not initiated (Kroc 2018).

negative event highlighted in the report is the return of guerrilla leader Iván Márquez and other FARC commanders to the arms, calling for the continuity of armed battle because the government had not followed through with the Peace Agreement. Equally, the government has declared that the FARC has not fulfilled its commitments to the Agreement. The positive highlights in the report are the increased government presence around the reintegration areas and the upcoming local elections, where many ex-guerrilleros are running as candidates despite the increased security threats. (UN 2019.)

It can be concluded that the Colombian Peace Agreement is a broad, detailed and promising document. It lays a foundation for identifying and dealing with the root issues of the conflict. The achievement of a signed agreement after half a decade of conflict and failed peace processes is a noteworthy accomplishment. Yet, as the agreement clearly states, the most challenging road to achieve lasting peace has only begun with the acceptance of the document. The achievement of lasting peace depends on the long-term commitment and implementation of the agreement. In that process the citizens, social leaders, government officials, political leaders and the international community all have a responsibility to carry. According to the evaluations of the first three years since the Agreement, some positive advances have taken place and some serious challenges remain. The armed conflict has not been ended yet, but neither can the process be judged to have failed. The findings of this study (see chapter 6) present a different kind of evaluation of the peace process and the Peace Agreement – the experiences of one specific group of citizens closely related to the conflict. In the understanding of a peace process intending to resolve a complex and multifaceted conflict, it is valuable and necessary to analyze several evaluations.

3.5. Evaluating the inclusivity of the peace process

In this section I briefly evaluate the peace process from the viewpoint of the theoretical foundation discussed in chapter 2. I first discuss the inclusion of social groups in general and then address the inclusion of religious groups based on the official documentation of the peace process. The following chapter focuses on religion and gives a wider perspective of the religious landscape and the persecution of religious groups in Colombia.

As described in chapter 2, based on the legitimacy-focused peacebuilding approach, inclusivity is understood as the intended and organized participation of all relevant local social groups or actors. The process can be described legitimately inclusive if it offers

acceptable levels of representation and participation of social groups, and does “not exclude, repress, or silence [...] ethnic, religious, or class-based groups, especially those involved in the [...] armed conflict” (Call 2012, 226). In the Colombian peace process, the participation of the society was designed and included in the rules and mechanisms of the General Agreement in 2012 (see section 3.3.2.). The sixth point of the sixth section of the agreement guarantees as wide participation as possible, through citizen and organizational proposal mechanism for electronical and physical proposals, direct consultations and participation spaces organized by a third party (ACPLPc). The government has additionally stated their view of participation as following:

The vision of the National Government about the participation has been based on the principle to guarantee the broadest possible participation within the established mechanisms, with a commitment not only to the civil society, but also to the national and territorial institutionalism. (My translation.)¹⁰

In the final Peace Agreement different societal groups are mentioned several times, but as discussed in chapter 2.1.1., a written mention is not enough for meaningful inclusion. To gain a more complete understanding of the planned and implemented mechanisms of participation and levels of inclusion, 11 government publications containing the detailed documentation of the complete peace process until 31st May 2018 (ACPLPd) have been studied. The following evaluation has been made by searching for all the mentions of inclusion of social groups such as meetings, conversations, forum participations etc. The material used and the respective evaluation represent the official, government produced and internationally used record of the peace process. This study produces a different and contrasting record, which is based on the experiences of the interviewed leaders of persecuted Christian groups.

To evaluate the levels of inclusion, participation of different social groups have been classified using Paffenholz’s nine models (see chapter 2.1.1.) as following: 1) direct representation of civil society groups at the negotiation table, 2) observer status, 3) official consultative forums that run parallel to official negotiations, 4) less formal consultations, 5) inclusive post-agreement mechanisms, 6) high-level civil society initiatives, 7) public participation (involving the broader population via public hearings, opinion polls, “town

¹⁰ La visión del Gobierno Nacional sobre la participación partía del principio de garantizar la más amplia participación posible en el marco de los mecanismos establecidos, comprometiendo no solo a la sociedad civil, sino también a la institucionalidad nacional y territorial. (ACPLPc, 214.)

hall” meetings, or signature campaigns, 8) public decision making (via referenda or other electoral forms) and 9) mass action.

According to the understanding of social groups presented in chapter 2.1.1. and how they were named and categorized in the in the publications, 14 different categories of social groups were found, of which four were reasonable to divide into subgroups. The overview of the mentions of participation and the levels of their participation is presented in table 2. The full listing of the findings can be seen in appendix 1.

This brief evaluation suggests that according to the government publications, social inclusivity has been broad.¹¹ The implementation of five national forums on the topics of each main point of the agreement have provided for the broadest societal inclusion. During the process there were systems put in place for the submission of input from the public in general and the hearings of different groups of victims. It is apparent that after the referendum there was a period of “rushed inclusion”, participating new groups with the goal of getting the agreement approved despite of the winning of the no-votes.

Based on the evaluation presented in this chapter, the conclusion can be drawn that religious groups, especially the Catholic church, have been included. According to the documentation the level of inclusion could perhaps even be considered sufficient, taking place mostly through the five national forums. Additionally, there were meetings and hearings of religious groups during the rushed participation period; the president met with the representatives of the Catholic church, evangelical pastors, representatives of various evangelical churches. The Minister of the Interior met with the leaders of evangelical churches that voted for “no” and the Minister and vice Minister of the Interior held a meeting with 80 representatives of churches. Religious representatives were included in all the national forums under a general category *church* without specifying which church was represented and under which basis. As seen in the following chapter, the distinction between the Catholic and the Protestant, or evangelical, church is significant and therefore a better study of the inclusion of religious groups in the peace process demands an understanding and an examination of what is behind the term *church*. The Catholic Church is unrepresentative of all the Christians in Colombia. Thus, the inclusion of the Catholic Church cannot be assumed as meaningful inclusion of religious groups. Additionally, the

11 The documentation shows a broad participation of other groups that are not represented as separate categories in this analysis, such as the most important ethnic groups in Colombia: indigenous groups, afrodescendants, Raizales and Palenqueros.

national forums have in general been criticized to be more symbolic than truly participatory and inclusive, unable to include those who had not previously been active or groups opposing the peace process (Segura & Mechoulam 2017,31). In this thesis I study meaningful inclusion and analyze the inclusion of specifically the persecuted Christian groups in depth, drawing a different conclusion, confirming that the mention of *church* in forum participations does not equal to or guarantee meaningful participation.

Table 2. The representation and participation of the main social groups in the Colombian peace process.

Category	Subgroup	Level of inclusivity (1-9)
Traditional leaders	Government/national	1
	Regional	3
	Local / communal	3
Women		3
Religious leaders / faith-based organizations	Catholic	4
	Protestant	4
	General	3
	Faith-based organizations	7
Youth		3
Militia		1
Self-defense groups / ex-combatants	ELN	3
	FARC	1
Businessmen		3
Trade unions		3
Professional associations		3
Human Rights groups		3
Research institutions		2
Social movements		3
NGOs		3
Case-specific social groups	Internally displaced persons	8
	Persons affected by the illicit drugs	8
	Victims of the conflict	3

The unexpected rejection of the first draft of the Peace Agreement in the referendum is largely explained by masses of evangelical Christians voting against the proposed Agreement. The reason for this was because of a wide-spread and misleading belief that

the agreement text included gender ideological points guaranteeing new rights to the gay population and promoting a liberal sexual education program in the education system – risking the traditional family values. After the vote, the attention was turned to the churches and several hearings and meetings took place resulting in changes in the final draft of the agreement. (Semana 10.9.2016, Segura & Mechoulan 2017, 33.) Through meaningful participation in the process, the evangelical Christian churches could have had a better understanding of the content and the goals of the agreement and their concerns could have been included already in the first draft. Here, the lack of inclusion can be identified to have affected the quality of the peace process and even risking the achievement of a peace agreement.

The inclusivity of the process has become a well-known characteristic of the Colombian peace process. Both international and national experts suspect that it has been one of the most inclusive peace processes in the history and there would not have been a way of making it more inclusive (Segura & Mechoulan 2017, 30). Given the background presented in this chapter, inclusivity cannot be denied. However, faults and questions about meaningful inclusivity can be identified, which can lead to question the effectiveness of the reached agreement and to learn lessons for even more sustainable inclusivity and legitimacy in other and future processes. For Colombia, it can be agreed, that the reaching of the Peace Agreement was a significant achievement and it gives hope for a non-violent future and national reconciliation. However, this hope is fragile and raises the question whether it is sustainable, whether it exists only on paper or is the nation able to sustain it despite the continuing pain and resentment between fractured groups. The next chapter explores the specific standpoint of this study and one view into the realities of the conflict society: conflict related religious persecution. It helps to explain why the hope is fragile and why the implications of the agreement are criticized. It also offers a fit case for studying meaningful inclusivity of the peace process.

4. CASE: CONFLICT-RELATED RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN COLOMBIA

This chapter further discusses the context of this thesis by addressing religion and religious persecution in Colombia. The target group of the study is persecuted Christian groups in Colombia. This chapter defines what I mean by the concept of persecuted Christian groups and why they are a relevant group to study when seeking to understand

the Colombian conflict and peace process. In the first two sections of this chapter I address the role of religion and religious communities in Colombia. In the third sector I focus on religious persecution.

4.1. The religious landscape of Colombia

Colombia is a religious country, but not religiously as homogeneous as it would seem. Over 90% of the population of 50 million inhabitants identifies themselves as being Catholic, Protestant or Pentecostal Christians (Pew 2019a). The Colombian society is an example of a post-secular society, as referred to in chapter 2.2.1., where religion has an active role in politics, society and the economy. This suggests that the peace process cannot be approached from a purely Western and secular mindset. Religious actors are influential and active in the civil society and are to be considered. With modernization, religion in the Colombian society has not declined; the Colombian religious scene is plural and revitalized. Religion seeks to fill the voids that modernity cannot fill (Hervieu-Léger & Champion 1986; in Beltrán 2013; Beltrán 2012).

The main religious division line in Colombia is between the Catholics and the Protestants. Catholicism came to Colombia with colonization from Spain and has been the predominant religion, tightly connected to the state and especially to the conservative representation of political power. It is estimated that 38 million, or over 70% of Colombians belong to the Catholic Church today. When Protestant Christianity came to Colombia in the middle of the 19th century, it was considered a threat by the Catholic Church and it has had to fight for its existence. Protestants are often called evangelicals, including Christians who belong to Pentecostal churches and historical Protestant churches. The number of evangelical Christians in Colombia is estimated to be around 10 million or 20% of the total population. The Pentecostal movement is the fastest growing religious movement in Colombia, and it has been rapidly growing in the rural areas that are affected by the armed conflict (Pew 2014; Pew 2016; Beltrán & Cuervo 2016, 139; Cosoy 2016a).

William Beltrán (2013) argues that the flourishing of religion in Colombia is directly connected to the weakness of the state, the suffering from the un- and underemployment and the struggle to have basic needs met. Beltrán (ibid.) highlights, as the most notable characteristics of Colombian religious field, the fast decline of the Catholic Church, the loss of the relative influence of the Catholic Church in the society, the expansion of the Pentecostal movement and the growth of the importance of charismatic religious leadership instead of institutional religious authority.

The religious experience in the rural and jungle regions is different from the urban areas. Most of the persecution of religious groups happens in the rural areas. For decades, the rural communities of Colombia have lived through violence and injustice caused by colonization, the expansion of illicit cultivations, mining exploitation and conflicts with different armed and criminal groups. These have resulted in killings and forced displacement. The low density of population and the dependence on natural resources are also characteristics of the rural zones. Concurrently the non-Catholic and especially the Pentecostal churches have spread and flourished in these communities. Supernatural explanations of the reality and religious experiences help to explain and survive the acts of evil, injustice and violence under divine protection. (Sanabria 2016, 36-40.)

The Colombian constitution from 1991 (Consejo Superior de la Judicatura 2016, § 1.19.) recognizes religious diversity, guarantees freedom of religion and the right to practice and confess religious beliefs individually and collectively. Discrimination based on religion is prohibited in the law. The country does not have an official state church or religion. The constitution states that all religions and churches are equal before the law.

4.2. Religious communities as places of refuge and ways to survive

For the understanding of religious groups as organized civil society actors, it is important to understand the role and meaning of religious communities in the lives of their members. Church membership is not theoretical or based on paperwork, but a community of relationships and a physical place to meet and share. Churches are places of refuge, where members of communities socialize, receive options and hope. Already earlier in the 20th century, Protestant Christianity had become a way for the indigenous communities to face the abandonment by the state and the Catholic Church. (Sanabria 2016, 33-41.)

In the zones of armed conflict in Colombia, religious groups manifest as pacifists, condemning the use of force, sharing a message of harmony, forgiveness and reconciliation. They discourage revenge and help to inactivate mechanisms that reproduce violence. Religious communities are places of creation of social capital through their message of dedication to work, honesty, responsibility and discipline together with practices that strengthen leadership and teamwork skills. The evangelical religious movements in Colombia have become a way for the displaced, unemployed and informally employed to face the uprooting and the exclusion. Religious groups also implement social

projects and help their members in a way that improves the quality of life of the members and their communities. (Beltrán 2012; Beltrán 2013.)

According to a study conducted by William Beltrán and Ivón Cuervo (2016) among the Pentecostal movement, religious communities can facilitate productive entrepreneurship and political organization at grassroots level and especially in non-violent resistance processes. In marginalized and armed conflict zones, religious groups become first order actors of social organization aiming to meet basic needs (such as health, education, security and employment) and fill the voids produced by the absence of government presence in these regions, promoting work, material development, honesty, healthy lifestyle, trust and solidarity (ibid.). Due to the spiritual experience and growth, the lives of the members of religious communities change; the family relationships improve, the ability to produce a better income increases, the macho-stereotypes brake resulting in a decrease of alcohol and substance abuse, promiscuity and family violence. Furthermore the emotional wellbeing increases and the status of the women in the families and in the community improves (Sanabria 2016, 43).

Many leaders of Christian groups hold charismatic authority, they have gained the trust of their followers by results and ethical coherency, which also gives them legitimacy for leading political causes (Beltrán & Cuervo 2016, 164-165). Beltrán and Cuervo (ibid., 150-161) support their argument about the religious leaders' agency and activism by presenting a case of a pastor protecting a whole community from slaughter and leading families in diminishing the impacts of the violence, helping in food production and developing micro business opportunities for the youth. Church leaders care for the unprotected and those in need, also seeking to actively participate in the peace process wherever possible (World Watch Research hereinafter WWR 2019). The World Watch Research Report (2019) summarizes: "The Christian community recognizes it [the community] has a political role to play in the country and hopes that the new government will see that too and allow the churches to be fully involved in the long-awaited peace process in the country."

4.3. Conflict-bound religious persecution in Colombia

Freedom of religion is stated as a basic human right stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948) and in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (UN 1966). Nevertheless, religious freedom has been and is restricted in many countries and regions worldwide. Religious persecution is defined as a form of social conflict

resulting in “physical abuse or physical displacement due to one's religious practices, profession, or affiliation” (Grim & Finke, 2007). Open Doors defines Christian persecution as “any hostility experienced as a result of identification to Jesus Christ” (Open Doors 2019). Persecution can take place because of authoritarian governments who view Christianity as a threat to power, suspicion of anything outside the majority cultural faith, extremist groups who want to destroy Christians, official and cultural domination of a single religion (ibid.). Persecution can be government originated or carried out culturally and socially without official government backing. Social hostilities include “acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations or groups in society” (Pew 2019b). Colombia is a country where Christian groups experience persecution, even though freedom of religion is stated in the constitution. According to Pew Research Center (2016) the restrictions on religion in Colombia in 2016 were higher than the median for all countries, both in social hostilities and government restrictions. In 2019 Colombia was ranked number 47 in the World Watch List, which yearly lists and examines the 50 countries in the world where Christians suffer most persecution. The ranking was 49 the year before, meaning that the persecution has increased (WWR 2019).

Religious persecution targeted at Christians is as an old phenomena as Christianity itself, starting in the Roman Empire, when Christians were considered as enemies of humankind and brutally killed. Just as religion has not ceased to exist in the postmodern time, religious and Christian persecution continues being a global issue. Christians are the largest (2.2 billion) and the most harassed religious group in the world (Pew 2019b). In one year, from 2017 to 2018, one in nine Christians, meaning over 245 million, experience high levels of persecution and 4,305 Christians were killed for their faith (Open Doors, 2019).

The history of religious persecution in Colombia begun by the Catholics persecuting the Protestants as a heresy and spiritual threat when its arrival to the country challenged the hegemonic position of the Catholic Church. The Catholics have traditionally connected the Protestants politically with the liberals and therefore targeted them also as a political threat to the country. Another historical reason for the persecution of Protestants is that during the 1960s and 1970s the Protestant missionaries were seen as capitalist ambassadors of North America and as a threat to the socialist revolution. This is when and how the persecution of Christians became intertwined with the multi actor armed conflict. Since the 1980s there is documentation of hundreds of murders of pastors, some murders of priests and bishops, threats to religious leaders, kidnappings, attacks to churches, forced closures and destruction of churches and seminaries, prohibitions of religious activities,

collection of “war taxes” by the FARC, ELN, the paramilitary, the drug cartels and at least one act by the government. During the civil war, the guerrilla forces have persecuted both Protestants and Catholics, even though there have been less persecution directed at the Catholics. (Arboleda 2002, 54-68.)

Another explanation for Christians to be targeted by the guerrilla, is the nature of their faith. Because of their pacifist and progressive character, the presence of Christian groups have been an obstacle to the guerrilla revolutionary project, producing the persecution of pastors, Protestant religious leaders and Catholic priests in conflict zones. The religious groups condemn the use of arms as a solution to social problems and revenge, instead encouraging harmony, forgiveness and reconciliation. Religious groups work to inactivate mechanisms of violence reproduction in the grassroots level. The FARC have declared Protestant groups as a disturbance and many leaders of religious movements as military objectives. The ELN does not trust those who promote peace, non-violence and loyalty to the central government. (Arboleda 2002, 69; Beltrán & Cuervo 2016, 141; Beltrán 2012, 73-74.)

When the guerrillas and criminal groups take possession of towns or communities for drug trafficking or plantation use, they look for allies and silence those who oppose them. Religious leaders are social leaders and because of their position and nature, they are the first ones to oppose the presence of criminal groups and blocking their profits, hence become targets for assassination, victims of murder, abduction, robbery, death-threats, extortion and damaged property. (WWR 2019.) Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHE 2018) reports that within only the first eight months of 2018, 140 community leaders were killed and 320 assaulted in Colombia.

The principal reason for religious persecution in Colombia is conflict-related persecution. The main agents against the Christian groups are the organized criminal groups and guerrillas that still control entire regions. The corruption and impunity among the local authorities, government officials and political parties combined with the negligence of the government allow the groups to act against Christians. Attacks have occurred especially where Christians have expressed socio-political views against the interests of these groups. The post-peace agreement situation has caused lack of structure and clear strategy among the FARC dissidents, members of the ELN and other guerrilla groups – causing even greater uncertainty and fear among the civil population than before under the FARC. Church leaders and groups suffer harassment, arrest, abduction, extortion and murder. The second reason for religious persecution in Colombia is the increasing

religious intolerance by political parties, ordinary citizens and ideological pressure groups. This has led to threats against Christians and church leaders who express opinions based on their beliefs. The third reason for the persecution is ethnic antagonism due to religious conversion within indigenous communities where the persecution is driven by local or municipal authorities, ethnic group leaders and non-Christian religious leaders. (WWR 2019.)

The World Watch List 2019 reports the following activities committed against Christians for faith-related reasons in Colombia during the previous¹² year: 7 Christians killed; 169 Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats); 17 Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment; 26 churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated and 7 Christian-owned houses and shops attacked. The numbers from the previous reporting period¹³ were: 5 killed, 274 attacked, 6 arrested, 32 churches attacked, and 13 houses and shops attacked. These numbers are based only on reported cases and should be taken as minimum figures. (World Watch List, 2019.)

I explore the inclusivity of the 2012-2016 peace process in Colombia through the experiences of persecuted Christian groups. The theoretical frame and the context for the study have been presented in the previous chapters. In chapter two, I laid out the theoretical foundation of legitimacy-focused peace building through meaningful inclusion and the role of religion in peace processes. In chapter three, I discussed the context of the conflict and the peace processes in Colombia, including a brief evaluation of the inclusivity of the 2012-2016 peace process based on government documentation. In this chapter I have discussed the topic of religious persecution and presented the current state of Christian persecution in Colombia, also stating the connection between the armed conflict and the persecution. In the next chapter I present the research method and design, followed by the findings in chapter 6.

¹² Reporting period 01 November 2017 – 31 October 2018

¹³ 01 November 2016 – 31 October 2017

5. METHOD, DESIGN AND PRACTICE: RESPONSIVE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING

In this thesis I investigate how the representatives of persecuted Christian groups understand and experience inclusion, the peace process and their agency as a social group. The research questions are: Have the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia been meaningfully included in the peace process? Has the Peace Agreement changed the suffering they face? What does the level of inclusion of persecuted Christian groups indicate about the quality of the peace process? To answer the research questions gathering understanding of the experienced reality of the peace process from the standpoint of a specific social group, I have chosen to gather data through in-depth qualitative interviewing. A qualitative method is beneficial for studying complex topics in the social world. Benefits of qualitative interviews include the ability to develop detailed and holistic descriptions, to integrate multiple perspectives, to describe processes or how events are interpreted and to bridge intersubjectivities (Weiss 1994, 9-10).

Ontologically qualitative interviewing is based on an interpretive constructionist theory, placing importance on how events are viewed by people and what is the meaning that they give to the events. Same events can have multiple and even conflictive versions. In an interpretivist approach the goal is to attain an understanding of the research topic that is constructed from a synthesis of different individual's accounts of an event or cultural issue. The researcher seeks to understand the events through the cultural lenses of the interviewees, measuring and using different versions to offer a single explanation. (Rubin & Rubin 2005, 27-30.) Studying the Colombian peace process and its inclusivity through qualitative interviewing is an opportunity to understand the reality of the peace process through voices different from the media, the official government narrative or textbooks.

In this chapter I outline the use of responsive interviewing method in theory and give an overview of how it was used in this study. Further, in this chapter I discuss the challenges of using the qualitative interview method. This thesis focuses on researching people's experiences, which is different from researching solely facts or events. In section 5.3. I assess the issue of studying experiences.

5.1. Responsive interview model in practice

The interviews of this study were conducted according to Herbert and Irene Rubin's (2005) *responsive interviewing approach*, which is based on interpretive constructionist philosophy. The approach uses in-depth interviews with open-ended questions and emphasizes a meaningful two-way relationship and influence between the interviewer and the interviewee, where both are recognized as individuals with feelings, personality, interests and experiences. These characteristics can and should influence the process. Another characteristic of responsive interviewing is the goal of a solid and deep information and understanding of the object of study, which is possible through a research design and questioning that remain flexible throughout the project. The continuous accommodation of new information, adaptation and adjustments produce further questions to deepen the understanding. This process implies an ongoing analysis carried out after each individual interview instead of one analysis implemented after all the interviews are conducted. The responsive interview material is analyzed through data analysis. The result of the final analysis discovers and presents the relationship between the different concepts and themes emerged in the interviews, guiding to a solid and detailed understanding of the topic. (Rubin & Rubin 2005, 30-37, 56, 209.)

The responsive interview method can be divided in four different processes: 1) making the research and interview design, 2) choosing concepts and themes, 3) conducting interviews and 4) continuous and final analysis. Because the method is based on the idea of flexible design and ongoing analysis, in practice these processes are interleaved and don't happen strictly in the order that they are presented here. In the following sections I describe each process first through the methodology literature and then as I have applied them in this pro gradu -work, showing how the process was carried out in practice.

5.1.1. Making the research and interview design

The research design links the research problem to the interview questions and to the selection of the interviewees. The process starts from defining a topic of interest and formulating a research question or research questions. The interview site and interviewees are chosen anticipating what information will be needed for the final analysis and for getting the results necessary to answer the research question. The initial interview design is made by deciding what questions to begin with. (Rubin & Rubin 2005, 37-55.)

To answer the research questions about the inclusion of the persecuted Christian groups in the peace process, I planned to conduct interviews to leaders of persecuted Christian groups in Colombia. Based on the background study, I concluded that the most representative interviewees for the study would be Catholic priests, Protestant pastors or leaders of Christian organizations that represented persecuted Christian groups. My assumption was that they would be in the rural areas. During the initial stages of the study, I established a connection with an organization called Open Doors that offered to make the contacts and facilitate the interviews. This connection marked out the focus group for the thesis, as the work of Open Doors in Colombia focuses on non-Catholic Christian groups and on cases that are predominantly located in the rural regions of the nation. Consequently, this thesis focuses on the rural evangelical, non-Catholic, Christian groups represented by the interviewees. This defining has been made for practical reasons and it does not depreciate the experiences of the Catholic Christians or assume them being unrepresentative for the study. For these reasons, in the following chapters where the term persecuted Christian groups in Colombia (also: Christians, persecuted Christians or persecuted church) is mentioned, it refers to non-Catholic Christians as defined by Open Doors unless otherwise specified.¹⁴

In the preparation of the initial interview questions, I kept in mind that the goal was to understand the peace process in depth as experienced by the persecuted Christian groups and what it means. It would be attained by listening to people's experiences, learning what they think about their experiences and what the peace process looks like from their perspective. According to Rubin & Rubin (2005, 37), the interviewees become co-producers of the knowledge that the research produces through sharing how they understand what they have seen, heard or experienced. The main questions provide for a thorough examination of the research problem and ensure that all the important parts of the topic are covered (ibid., 135). My design of the initial main questions was drawn from the theory basis of legitimate-focused peace building, with specific themes of inclusivity and religion, as well as on the background of the conflict history, peace processes and religious persecution in Colombia. I eventually formulated six main questions that focused

¹⁴ Protestants (churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation: Anglicans, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals), independents (do not identify with the major Christian traditions) and denominations linked to evangelical alliances (the evangelical movement) (WWR 2019).

on the experience and personal understanding of the interviewee, which helped to advance the interviews in the right direction:

1. What have been your experiences during and about the peace process, since 2012?
2. Do you feel that you and your group have been included in some way?
3. How has your/your group's experience and participation in the peace process been different from others?
4. What do you think about the peace agreement?
5. What has changed for you/your group after the peace agreement was signed?
6. How do you see the future for you/your group?

The initial interview script and the questions can be found in Appendix 1. Recognizing that the follow-up questions are usually spontaneous and specific to the answers, I designed initial follow-up questions – while I gave myself the freedom to ignore or change them during the interviews. With the evolving nature of the chosen method, both the main questions and follow-up questions changed from one interview to another.

5.1.2. Choosing concepts and themes

My analysis is based on the main concepts and themes that I formulated from previous research and through the interviews. Concepts are taken here as core ideas identified that pertain to the research problem while themes are “statements that explain why something happened or what something means” (Rubin & Rubin, 57). I use concepts to build themes by asking questions about their meaning and use, gradually linking them together. In the ongoing analysis the concepts and themes are picked that are the most relevant for the kind of theory and report that the researcher is aiming to produce. The emerging knowledge of how and why things happen is formed by combining and further exploring the themes. The identification and modification of concepts and themes happens during the whole process, through ongoing analysis. (Ibid., 55-57; 209-216.)

The initial main concepts for this study were drawn strictly from the theoretical framework and the research questions. The first interview was started with the concepts of *experience*, *inclusion*, *participation*, *exclusion* and *persecution*. Some examples of themes that started to form from the concepts throughout the analysis are: *the way in which the process was led, delegitimized it and polarized the society; the church that participated was the church in the cities – not the persecuted church; and the church would have a lot*

to offer in themes such as justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. More concepts were added and implemented in the questions as the interviews proceeded and were analyzed. Consequently, more exact information was gathered through the reformulated questions and the answers given. In the end there were 23 main concepts used. The detailed list of concepts used can be seen in appendix 3.

5.1.3. Conducting the interviews

Finding the right people and setting up the appointments was the first task for conducting interviews. From the very beginning it was clear that it would not be safe for me to travel to the places where the relevant interviewees lived - to the most rural, most conflict-bound and most violent communities where the persecution was taking place. In Bogota, the capital, it could have been possible to arrange interviews through churches and organizations, but based on the background study and inquiries, I knew it would not be the most effective route to find the most representative interviewees for the purposes of this study. As described in section 5.1.1., after looking into different options, a contact was established with Open Doors and their country team in Colombia. They are already networked with the persecuted Christians in the nation and they agreed to find the most adequate interviewees and to set up the contacts for virtual interviews. After initial discussions, the regional leadership and researchers of the organization approved the interview questions and five months later virtual interviews were conducted within the span of two months.

In the interview situation it is important to help the interviewees understand the purpose of the research, motivating them to participate willingly and meaningfully. A responsive interview can be best described as an extended conversation, where the researcher leads the interviewee through a conversation about the topic and presents follow-up questions depending on the answers given. The goal is to find meaningful answers to the research question by learning how the interviewee understands what he or she has seen, heard or experienced. Responsive interviews are logical and continuous flows of questions and answers, clarifications of misunderstandings, processes of drawing out examples, narratives, histories, stories and explanations. (Rubin & Rubin 2005, 12-14; 37; 93; 108-114; 134-146.)

I conducted seven interviews of leaders of persecuted Christian groups. Each one lasted 1 – 1.5 hours. The virtual connection was established through a WhatsApp video

connection. I typed the interview script simultaneously during the interviews. In the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself and explained the theme and the goal of the pro gradu -thesis. I let them know that the participation was voluntary and why they had been invited to participate. I explained that the interview material would be kept confidential and anonymous. Permissions were asked for direct quotes and for saving the material for possible further use for scientific research. I made sure they had my contact information and asked if they had any questions before proceeding to the interview questions.

Before presenting the main questions, a few warm-up questions were used, asking them to tell a little bit about themselves, their background and the group that they represent. After this I proceeded to the prepared main questions. Follow-up questions were used to clarify and deepen the meanings of themes, concepts and ideas. At the end of each interview I asked if they had anything else that they would like to add or if they had questions. Usually there were no questions, but always something to add. One final comment of an interviewee said with tearful voice describes the intimacy and depth of the interview moments: *“This interview has helped me more than it has helped you. Here, we cannot talk; you never know with whom you are talking. This has been a relief, to be able to share what we go through and see”*. The last comments of the interviews also often reflected the fact that they truly are living on the edge, not knowing how many hours or days they will live. Some examples of their last words were: *“we will remain faithful even if it costs us our lives”*, and *“our situation is very difficult, please pray for us”*. Several of the interviewees shared very personal stories of having been close to death in the hands of the armed groups. At the end of each interview, I reconfirmed that I had their permission to use everything they had said during the interview for the thesis and the report.

Because of the difficulty to set up the interviews, being dependent on the national Open Doors office for the contacts and the challenges presented by the 9-hour time difference, I did not conduct any follow-up interviews. It was perhaps a limitation, but the ongoing analysis allowed me to fill the missing spots in the following interviews. I was prepared to conduct up to 10 interviews if needed, but after seven it seemed like the saturation point was reached; the information was starting to repeat itself and I had enough information to answer the research questions and to produce a detailed report.

5.1.4. Continuous and final analysis

The analysis of in-depth qualitative interviews follows a systematic method of data analysis. It does not lean on intuition, memory or the researcher's own initial ideas. The continuous analysis method means that the individual interviews are transcribed and analyzed through systematic coding and information extracting of data analysis. Each analysis is carried out before proceeding to the following interview. In this process the research is redesigned repeatedly, for example by modifying the main questions and identifying new concepts and themes that rise from the information. When all the interviews have been systematically coded, the meaning of the information is formed in the final analysis by searching for patterns and linkages and concluding in broader implications. (Rubin & Rubin 2005, 62-63, 201-245.) The method is logical and thorough, helping to systematically draw out information from qualitative texts. In practice, in this pro gradu -thesis of seven interviews, it meant working with 41 different computer files, containing the interview texts, marked texts, coded texts, lists and tables of concepts, themes and codes.

In the continuous analysis phase, I first completed and spell checked each interview script immediately after conducting the interview. Secondly, I looked for and marked the concepts, themes, events and topical markers in each script. I clarified and refined the identified concepts and themes, and combined events. I listed the emerging concepts and themes to include them in the following interviews. Thirdly, I coded the concepts and themes. Each coded concept or theme became a data unit. As the final step of the analysis of the individual interviews, I created a coded data unit file from each interview, a list with all the codes and then all the data units under each code. All these steps were done after each interview. I used the elaborated concepts and themes to shape and develop the questions of the following interviews. Throughout the continuous analysis, I used news articles and government reports to check and confirm the evidence of the events, names and dates that were mentioned in the interviews.

After I had conducted all seven interviews, I combined the data units from all of them by listing them under each code. In this step the data lost its direct connection to the specific interview it originally came from and the material became specific information under each code. In the end I used 58 codes. In the continuous and final analysis not all the codes proved to be as useful and central for the research topic, so I left few out in the process. The last phase of the final analysis was to conduct an overall evaluation of the content of

each key code and their interrelations, forming an overall understanding of the topic. The findings are presented in chapter 6.

5.2. The challenges of the in-depth interview process

The interview method has several strengths that have been discussed earlier, but it is by no means simple or unambiguous. According to John M. Johnson (2002, 105), the researcher and interviewer in in-depth research is an active sense maker and interpreter of the information instead of being an objective and passive information gatherer. Therefore, it was necessary to examine what I as a researcher and interviewer was bringing into the interview situations and the research, for example through my gender, ethnicity, social class and personality. It was also necessary to consider the limitations and challenges of virtual interviews, the ethical responsibility and the cultural context.

I am a female researcher and all the interviewees turned out to be male. This was unplanned, but taking the cultural considerations into account, it was not surprising. Most leaders and pastors in the rural Christian churches in Latin America are male. For Colombians, I am also a foreigner. As I anticipated, these facts did influence the interview situation and the starting point for the relationship. To minimize the effect, in the beginning of each interview, I gave a rather lengthy introduction of myself and my background, aiming to present many links and connecting points that would draw us together rather than emphasize the differences. During the introductions they also had the opportunity to hear that I spoke fluent Spanish and had some cultural and contextual understanding. These were expected concerns for them. As the relationships unfolded, I was treated with high respect as a woman and as a foreigner by the interviewees. I acknowledge that the interview situations would have been different if the interviewer had been male or another Latin American native. According to my experience, the language and expressions used among men and among Latin American natives are different than those used with women or foreigners. Foreign professional women are to be treated nicely and respectfully always, no matter who they are or what they represent. These factors are important to recognize and consider, but according to my judgment, they did not significantly influence the results of the study. During each interview I felt that we overcame the etiquette, found a connection through the topics discussed and gained trust.

The personal relationship that is formed during the process of in-depth interviewing produces an ethical responsibility to protect the individuals who participated in the study, especially in this context where the interviewed persons belong to a persecuted and a

vulnerable social group. I have carried this responsibility by maintaining respect and confidentiality, offering anonymity and storing the interview material only in a password-protected computer. A commitment to telling the truth formed the foundation for the responsibility and the relationship (Johnson 2002, 116). As much as it was possible to evaluate based on the virtual contact, I sensed a relationship of trust and respect with each interviewee. Each one of them opened themselves up rather profoundly, sharing personal and even painful experiences. I have striven to maintain the same level of responsibility and respect in the analysis and in the elaboration of the research report.

Another consideration in this thesis and interview design is cross-culturality. Some of the challenges faced in cross-cultural settings according to Anne Ryen (2002, 335-337) are the “difficulties of transporting experiential data across cultures”, understanding local cultural nuances, communicative challenges and the insider-outsider role dilemma of the researcher. I did not have a problem understanding the language, but prior to the interviews, it was necessary to process my possible biases and cultural interpretation. I am not a native, but I have lived in Latin America for almost two decades. This background is a door to know and understand the people and the culture better than a complete foreigner. However, this is not necessarily the ideal premise for a researcher, who should not presuppose anything. My previous knowledge and experience do not necessarily offer useful or correct understanding for this specific study, topic or target group. It could even be argued that this study could be better done by someone who is a complete outsider. But on the other hand, I would not have had interest in the topic or started this project without my previous knowledge of the culture and language in question. Therefore, I chose to embark on the journey confident that I was a sufficiently eligible person for it. During the process, I have made a conscious effort to keep an open mind and to leave my previous intuitions and ideas behind, concentrating on the background information and data collected during the study.

I conducted the interviews through WhatsApp video calls. They fall in the category of virtual communication, offering better a connection and possibilities for interaction than phone interview or other computer-mediated communication, such as e-mail or internet interviews. At the same time, despite the visual contact, the physical space was not shared, so all the aspects of non-verbal communication are not transmitted, and these interviews cannot be considered to fully substitute face-to-face interviews. Another challenge was that I was not able to control where the interviewee was at the time of the interview and hence not able to secure a peaceful place where they could fully focus on

the interview. I tried to minimize this challenge in advance by soliciting the organizers to ensure enough time for the interviews and a quiet place without interruptions and where the interviewees could have the freedom to talk even about confidential and personal things.

One of the biggest challenges of choosing the in-depth interview method was that it is very time-consuming and hard work. I knew this beforehand, so it was a conscious choice that I believe has been rewarded in the depth and quality of the result. The biggest challenge was to set up and obtain the interviews. For security and technological reasons, I could not call the interviewees directly. The interviewees were mostly leaders from the rural conflict areas, where they had no access to internet, or it was not safe for them to be interviewed in their own surroundings. Each interview was organized by the organization in a safe place and through a secure connection. The whole process of soliciting, arranging and conducting the interviews took seven months and required a lot of patience.

5.3. About studying experiences

In the context of this research method it is necessary to discuss the philosophy of science of studying experiences. The ontological assumption of this method is that experiences exist, and they are real. Kaisa Koivisto et al. (2014, 14) describe experience as “the closest, immediately present subjective reality” (my translation).¹⁵ Being always and only subjective, a subjective reality cannot have a shared existence. The strict subjectivity leads to asking whether studying subjective experiences is a valid source of reliable social scientific knowledge. The epistemological question is whether there are real ways of studying experiences. Koivisto et al. (2014, 7) argue that experience is an object of human sciences research, because it is an immediate part of everyday human life and its practices. Sally Thorne (2000) describes most qualitative research being concerned with what takes place in “subjective experience, in social context, and in historical time”, recognizing human experience as the relevant reality.

Studying experiences falls into the category of subjective sciences. In subjective psychological science the dilemma of how a subject can be an object of research is solved through the understanding that the object of research is the social reality as the subject experiences it (Holzkamp 1991, 12-13; 1988, 315 in Suorsa 2011, 203). In psychology,

¹⁵ läheisin, välittömästi läsnä oleva subjektiivinen realiteetti (Koivisto et al. 2014, 14)

Barbara Fried (2002, 131 in Suorsa 2011, 199) explains how analysis progresses from the problems of individual action and experiences towards understanding the transmittedness of societal action and experiences. This understanding forms through the central meanings and the conditions that construct the world and for understanding these, a social theoretical viewpoint is needed. Teemu Suorsa (2011, 199-200) also suggests that studying the experiences of individuals is a way to reveal social circumstances or conditions that have not been previously studied in social sciences. Suorsa argues that it is the job of the social scientists to recognize, criticize and develop the topics and challenges that subjective experience research discovers as central in human experiences and functioning (2011, 223).

These arguments lead to the conclusion that experiences are valid and even central sources of knowledge in social sciences and they can be studied through several of the commonly used research methods of the discipline. This discussion also validates the use of experiences as the object of this study. The experiences of the interviewed cannot be directly taken as factual information about the peace process, but when the object of the research is the Colombian social reality as it has been experienced by the citizens, it opens the door for recognizing, criticizing and developing the central social topics of this reality in what comes to the peace process. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the approach of this study is interpretivist. Experiences are used and interpreted to attain in depth understanding of the central issues constructing the reality of meaningful social inclusion in the Colombian peace process.

5.4. Evaluative research

As a final aspect about this study, it is necessary to point out that it is evaluative in its nature. I have observed and collected evidence to make evaluative conclusions about the level of inclusion and the quality of the peace process in Colombia. Saville Kushner (2016, 4) describes evaluative research “distinguished by the emphasis on *judgment*” and as “a process for arriving at judgments about public value, in such a way that it reveals the nature of the public” (ibid., 8). Kushner emphasizes that evaluative research is to focus on people in and around the public action or program studied, as well as the action itself, therefore the attention being in “*the way the program is seen and experienced*” (ibid., 7). This thesis focuses on the experiences of the interviewees and provides therefore a valid base for evaluation of the peace process as public action.

By providing knowledge for decision-making, the aim of public action and program evaluation is action for development and improvement (Chen 2005, 3; Kushner 2016, 4). Evaluation is future-directed and produces necessary insights and feedback on the adequacy of inputs, appropriateness of intervention implementation, reach of target groups, quality of services, attainment of goals and meeting of expectations (Chen 2005, 5-6). The goal of evaluation is *“to produce useful information that can enhance the knowledge and technology we employ to solve social problems and improve the quality of our lives”* (ibid., 7). This study aims to provide information to improve understanding and implementation of peacebuilding in Colombia and accordingly to improve the quality of the lives of the Colombians affected by the conflict.

The evaluative conclusions of this study are drawn from the theories of inclusion and meaningful inclusivity presented in chapter 2. The study describes how the nature of inclusion observed through the analysis corresponds to the criteria of inclusivity presented in the theoretical background. It also produces insights and judgment on the quality of the peace process based on the evaluation of inclusion.

In this chapter I have introduced the research method and described the research process in practice. I have outlined the challenges of the qualitative in-depth interviewing and their implications. I have discussed the validity of the study of experiences as a method in social sciences in general and in this research. In the last part I have presented this study as an evaluative study that evaluates the inclusivity and the quality of the peace process according to the standards of the theoretical background. In the next chapter I present the results of the analysis and the findings of the thesis.

6. FINDINGS: EXPERIENCES OF THE PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

In this chapter I present the findings of this pro gradu -thesis. It seeks to present an overall evaluation of the topic and explain, based on the experiences of the interviewees, how events related to the peace process have happened and why. Under each heading there are quotations from the interviews. Since the interviews are kept confidential, numbers are used to identify which of the seven interviews the quotation is from. The main findings are categorized under three headings: 1) realities that frame the context of the peace process for the persecuted Christians, 2) the persecuted church as a legitimate actor for

meaningful inclusion and 3) the persecuted Christian groups have not been meaningfully included. Each main heading has secondary sections that specify and further define them. The findings presented in this chapter outline an overarching explanation of the topic of this pro gradu -thesis. I present the answers to the research questions coupled with a broad understanding of the peace process as experienced by the focus group.

6.1. Realities that frame the context of the peace process for the persecuted Christians

The interviews exposed and confirmed social and physical realities within which the conflict and the peace process has been experienced and which are especially significant for the context of the experiences of the focus group of this thesis, the persecuted Christian groups in the rural areas. The conflict itself, as well as the peace process have been significantly shaped by these realities. The two realities that the analysis exposed are a governmental void and the meaning of the rural physical space. These findings confirm the information presented in the background literature (see chapter 3). More importantly, they highlight the meaning and impact of these social and physical realities in the life and experiences of the persecuted Christians. This understanding lays the foundation for the discussion about inclusivity and the legitimacy of the peace process.

6.1.1. A governmental void

According to the interviews, the government is not present in a large part of the Colombian territory physically and/or operationally. They make references to the nonexistence, failure and weakness of government institutions, government protection (the police and the military), government social services and government provided opportunities (employment and education). Even if in some region there is a physical representation of the government, it was described as unable of taking care of its basic functions such as providing security and justice, keeping order or to promote the rule of law. Consequently, there is no one to protect the citizens that face conflict related violence and persecution. The experiences governmental void produces uncertainty and insecurity.

“[These] zones are abandoned by the government. There is no drinking water, electricity, phone lines.” (5)

"[... some] groups left FARC and they are [now] fighting against the paramilitary. There are [many] displaced and murdered leaders. This has to do with the governmental void that the [peace] process left behind." (3)

"[There is] a governmental void like never before. It is producing uncertainty, not peace. [There is] uncertainty everywhere." (3)

Furthermore, in addition to shortcomings in its basic functions, the government is accused of flaws in relation to the peace process. The government is expected to be capable to prevent the displacements and murders, but it is not getting involved where it is most needed, typically physical security and economic resources. The government is blamed for the continuity of the conflict. In the conflict zones, the armed groups are more engaged and active than the government. They provide more appealing and credible offers to the ex-fighters and youth. Corruption among the government representatives is common and increases the distrust.

"In [...] there are many drug laboratories and armed groups connected to the government. The corruption flourishes." (5)

"The government is corrupt; everything is managed by the weight of money." (7)

"The government ignored many things where justice was not applied." (4)

"The government promised the guerilla fighters help, incentives and support in the retirement process. [...] there are many pastors who have received these fighters in their churches. They tell that they must return to the mountain, because the government abandoned them, it did not fulfill the promises, there was no work for them. Many have done it, returned to the mountain." (5)

"The government can do something, get into the rural zones and mitigate this. It can do something, but it does very little." (7)

The interviews indicate that the government absence has produced a culture of self-survival, where each person must find a way to survive on their own and if one does not, one dies in the hands of the stronger. The experience of a governmental void has delegitimized the government as an authority and as a credible actor in the peace process. The actions and especially the non-actions of the government are interpreted by interviewees as a false, narrow and elite-interested view of the conflict. The government

is considered incapable of solving the conflict, because it is unable to understand and interpret the conflict in a way that represents the whole nation. There was no reference or distinction made to the change of government in 2018 or to any of the earlier changes of government.

“The government, the state of Colombia, doesn’t know the situation and the realities [...] of the church and other groups. They look at everything from the capital, from their place of comfort. They are mistaken with the context.” (6)

“Our hope is not in the country, or in the government. We don’t have expectations of them [...]” (6)

6.1.2. The rural physical space

The physical and the social context of *el campo* or *la montaña*, referring to the rural areas, the countryside and the jungle, plays a prominent role in distinguishing the experience of the persecuted Christian groups. It is in the rural regions where most of the physical violence of the conflict takes place and where the armed groups have mostly been and still are strongly present. Accordingly, the governmental void is the most evident in the rural areas. The Christian church has a wide presence in the countryside, having spread and is continuing to spread even to the most difficult-access jungle regions. The church has found itself in the very heart of the conflict, collectively becoming an actor and a victim in the rural areas. The rural physical space is the physical and social context to understand the meaning of the experiences of the interviewed.

“[Our region] was first whipped by the EPL guerrilla. Then it was beaten by the Autodefensa. The deaths and the missing are innumerable. We have watched people from our village being assassinated in front of all of us.” (6)

“There is very little [government] presence in the rural areas. The peasants continue being killed.” (7)

“The [armed] groups are not in the cities, they are in the rural areas, in the countryside. The rural church has a lot to do with the conflict. When there is violence, murders, the only one present is the evangelical church. That makes us a military object, because we are there to help, to encourage, to comfort.” (7)

“The persecuted church is indirectly a protagonist of the conflict because of the murdered pastors and leaders, wives, children and recruited children.” (2)

“There are corners [of Colombia] where there is a church in every place, in most places. The Christian churches are historically like a mattress that takes the hits of the war, of the conflict. Most of the people lean on the church to endure.” (3)

The findings suggest a disparity in the experiences and the understanding of the conflict between the rural areas compared to the urban areas. It also suggests a disparity in the experiences of the peace process between the civil population in the rural areas of Colombia and the official description (see chapter 3). The displacements and killings in the rural regions continue. The demobilized ex-fighters let down by the government are joining other armed groups and forming new ones, continuing to have an active presence in the countryside. In the rural areas, a state of anarchy, in which the strongest rules, thrives. At the grassroots level, the conflict remains unresolved. The government is not present, and it is unable to bring peace.

“The rural people, most of this community say that for them there has never been a peace process. [...] The peasants who live in the mountains have not had a [peace] process. In 2018 there were more than 300,000 displaced – [they were] not from the cities.” (3)

“How they see it from Bogota, those who sit at those [negotiation] tables, they have not lived through [what we have], they are not conscious of what we live in the countryside. The reality of where the conflict is lived is completely different.” (6)

The rural population in general is the most vulnerable in the face of violence and most affected by the implications of the continuing conflict. They have to accept the violent realities of the continuing conflict and learn to survive amongst it. This social reality offers a partial explanation to the persecution and victimization of the members or rural Christian churches in comparison to urban Christian groups.

“The lives of the Christians in the countryside, in the conflict zones, are lived amidst fear and threats.” (2)

“The conflict in the city is very different. The government is present there. In the countryside there is often no presence of the government. One has to live with that.” (7)

“The victims are victimized more. Those who recover their land, are being killed.” (7)

The governmental void and the implications of the violence and conflict in the rural areas are physical and social realities that frame the context of the experiences of the interviewed and the peace process. They become lenses that are necessary to put on as the peace process is investigated and the experiences of the victims are analyzed. They are categories that separate the target group of this study from government representatives and from those who have only experienced the conflict from the cities. The government looks at the conflict and handles the process Bogota-centrally, being distant from the situations and the realities, hence considered to be at fault in the context. The Government's efficiency is affected by corruption and it continues to fail in its basic responsibilities - indicating that this root cause of the conflict has not been resolved. Meanwhile it however maintains a national and international narrative of peace and a successful process. The drastic difference between the rural and urban regions is reflected in the views about the conflict, the peace process, in the government presence, the physical, social and economic vulnerability and opportunities of the citizens. The rural population is the most exposed to the conflict, insecurity and dysfunctionalities of society.

6.2. The persecuted church as a legitimate actor for meaningful inclusion

This part presents the results of the analysis that evidence the characteristics of the rural Christian church which help to explain why they are targets of persecution and what the implications of their role in the communities under conflict are. As the Christian church has spread to almost every corner and village in Colombia, it has unintentionally co-existed amidst the armed groups since the beginning of the conflict. It has received the brunt of the war, but it is also a place of refuge that the population leans on. The Christians live in the middle of fear and threats. On one hand the Christians are a civil population suffering from the conflict just like everybody else, but on the other hand they are suffering and targeted more than others, because of their collective characteristics, identity and teachings. The background and the characteristics of the persecuted church indicate that it is a legitimate actor in the society and eligible for meaningful inclusion in the peace process.

The results evidence characteristics of the rural Christian church in Colombia that are meaningful in studying inclusivity and answering the research questions. Firstly, by its core identity and message, the church is a peacebuilder by nature and therefore, acts as such in the conflict areas. Secondly, the persecution continues. The peace process and the agreement have not changed the suffering of this social group. Thirdly, the religious leaders, usually pastors, are authorized representatives of large and organized social groups. This means that they are both potential key players in the peace process and as social leaders they are a threat to the armed groups. The persecuted Christian groups have the characteristics to be eligible for meaningful inclusion in peace processes. Each one of these findings are further explored in the following sections.

6.2.1. The church is a peacebuilder

The core identity and the message of the church characterizes it as a peacebuilder and consequently the Christian groups collectively as peacebuilders. The core message is about peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Loving the enemies and serving them in their needs are central topics that are preached and put into action by the Christian groups. Hope is a key element in the Christian faith. The ultimate source of hope is God and the promise of a future relief of all earthly suffering. The eternal hope reflects in a hopeful attitude towards earthly life and its problems. The findings demonstrate a desire and commitment for peace. The church expresses willingness to forgive the damage, to love the enemy, to pray for them and to serve them.

“Even when persecuted, the church has declared itself a people of peace and reconciliation.” (2)

“We as church are reconciliators. We work for them to leave the arms and we also work on the heart issues.” (6)

“The church can offer much about the topics of justice, about forgiveness. It could have the platform to talk about justice, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness. It could have been part in the whole process.” (4)

“We start [building peace] within our families; we teach the children to respect and love others. What we need is this to spread to the level of the society.” (6)

“We have hope. Every morning we get up with hope. Hope to see the society changed. We never lose it. Our hope is in God.” (6)

“We have faith that things will change as long as the hearts of those men change. The church continues praying and preaching at the cost of its life. We pray that this process that has started, will continue.” (2)

The message and identity of the persecuted Christians are lived out in the everyday realities of the conflict. The members live out the message in the political, social and economic realities in the immediate surroundings of their communities. The response to the violence is perseverance, prayer, service to the community and to the suffering. The church helps, encourages and comforts amidst the violence, also offering practical and physical help to the community members without taking sides. The wide social work of the Christian church is not officially documented.

“The church will always be an intermediary, wanting to bring proposals of justice and reconciliation.” (1)

“The church is like a mattress that takes in the hits of the war. Most of the people lean on the church to survive.” (3)

“The church can offer much about the topics of justice, about forgiveness. It could have the platform to talk about justice, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness. It could have been part in the whole process.” (4)

“The church receives everybody. The church cannot close its doors. It has to continue its task of supporting those who look for refuge.” (6)

“We have cried with those who have lost everything and their loved ones. That is where we have a foundational role. We have worked tirelessly, and we continue doing it. We are healing the wounded hearts.” (6)

“In the church we collect a family basket, we collect clothes, food and we go and give it to the neediest families.” (6)

“When there is violence, assassins, the only one present is the evangelical church. That makes us a military objective, because the church is there to help, to encourage, to comfort. Therefore, we could have a part at the [negotiation] table.” (7)

It is noteworthy that when the church in this chapter is described as a peacebuilder, it does not refer to nation-wide collective and organized action. It refers to individual local

churches and their members being peace builders in their own surroundings. The different churches in different communities don't usually know what others are doing. The uniformity of their pro peace actions and attitudes is explained by the collective Christian identity and teaching based in the same principles. In the findings, a commitment to neutrality and a tendency to avoid political activism is highlighted, which in turn can explain the lack of larger organization and activism in the peace process.

By collective peacebuilding character of the persecuted church positions the church in relation to the other actors of the conflict; firstly, it contrasts the armed groups that are active in the rural communities, who by nature and identity seek to spread violence and insecurity in order to accomplish their goals. Secondly, the persecuted Christian groups are distinguished from the general civil population that is victimized, because they have an active peacebuilding role. Thirdly, by the characteristics presented in these findings, the persecuted Christian groups are placed in the same legitimate position as other meaningful social groups included in the peace process such as women's groups, indigenous groups, the youth or the Catholic church.

6.2.2. The church continues being persecuted

The persecution of the Christian churches continues despite the peace process and the Peace Agreement. The rural Christian churches, their pastors and members are self-organized and self-initiated social actors. Social activeness is a threat to the armed actors who seek to control the communities. In addition to this, the identity, values and teachings of the churches are often contrary to those of the armed groups. For these reasons the churches and Christians are a military object and face persecution in form of threats, damage to property, control of physical mobility, of schedules, assassinations, forced displacements and forced recruitment.

The peace agreement had a momentary positive effect on the amount of experienced persecution in some areas, in many others none and in some areas the persecution is now worse than before. During the months that the interviews were conducted (May to July 2019), there were assassinations and forced displacements of Christians taking place. The atmosphere is described as one of tension and fear. Assassinations of leaders, pastors and their family members persist.

"In most FARC-controlled areas the violence and persecution decreased almost totally. But other groups took the space [...] In few months or a year,

they were persecuting the church. The same dynamics. They think we are very harmful to them.” (2)

“A guerrilla group started moving down, an Autodefensa group moving up. Seven churches had to get out of the way. They lost everything.” (7)

“I have visited at least three regions where the conflict is happening, and the people are afraid that within few months the persecution will start again. Those [armed groups] who are in the mountains are organizing meetings where they tell what they will do, threatening the church.” (2)

“If you are a Christian and come to a village where they don’t know you, you are a threat to them.” (4)

“In the last months it [persecution] has started again. The government is not announcing it. We felt a little moment of rest, of reprieve.” (5)

“The church is also persecuted when someone leaves the arms and comes to the church. The groups persecute them. The church receives everybody.” (6)

“We cry, we cry a lot. Watching church members and pastors suffering, dying.” (7)

“Several pastors of our mission have been assassinated these days. This is not told in the media. Seven pastors in the past two months. For the church it has not been good, it has been worse. We were persecuted before, but there were not as many assassinated pastors as now.” (7)

Among the fear and threats, the *law of silence* keeps the members of religious groups from talking openly and reporting their sufferings. Even members of the same church might not know what threats and dangers others are facing. The inability of the government to protect them and the absence of the government in the communities was expressed several times during the interviews. *“The government does not know the realities of the church” (6)*. Silence is deemed the only way to try to survive the persecution.

The church in the cities does not know the realities of the persecution of the rural church either. The interview material suggests that there are significant differences between the countryside church and the church in the cities. The interviewees expressed that the church in the cities have not lived the conflict in its flesh and do not know it. In the

referendum, it was predominantly the evangelical Christians from the cities that voted against the first draft of the Peace Agreement. The interviewees explain this by insufficient understanding and experience of the realities of the conflict, which has also led to the blending of the actual issues related to peace process with the gender ideology discussion. The rural Christians have mainly supported the peace process, because they live the conflict every day and peace would change their lives. Consequently, the persecuted Christian groups cannot be represented by the Christians in the cities.

The results show that life-threatening persecution against rural Christian groups persists. This means the continuation of conflict-bound violence. The peace process is not in a stage where reparations for past war crimes are on the table. The findings reveal a present social problem and a manifestation of a continuing conflict that requires equal addressing and solutions with other manifestations of conflict-bound violence in the society. The reality of the persecuted Christians is unknown to most of the country and even the peace process known to be inclusive has been unable to reach this reality and even less to bring an end to the suffering. The continuing presence and threat of conflict bound violence legitimates the agency of persecuted Christian groups in the peace process through meaningful inclusion.

6.2.3. Religious leaders' agency as social leaders

The leaders of religious groups, usually pastors, are legitimate social leaders and consequently threats to the armed groups. They are official representatives of the Christian groups and the ones who out of a position of recognized authority spread the message and lead the followers. The findings suggest that in the communities where the Christian groups are considered as threats, usually the pastors become the first targets of the armed groups. Pastors are recognized social leaders and persons of influence in their communities also outside of their own groups. Their work and commitment to work out of inner conviction and calling, often without a salary, entering deep into the mountains to preach and serving the communities in general is respected.

The pastors are a threat to those who want to gain power, spread violence and insecurity or do drug business. Their work is a threat to the goals of the armed groups, because they encourage the population to gain an honest income or to lay down the enmities. As a result, they are threatened and pressured to change or soften their message. Many

pastors face personal attacks and threats to their family members. They are often killed or driven out of their communities.

"I was a victim of persecution when I was a pastor. I was threatened by the FARC and the ELN. I was extorted, blackmailed and received death threats." (2)

"The extortions of the pastors affect us, where they must pay 'a vaccination'. Businesses have had to close. The pastors must pay and if they don't, they [the armed groups] threaten and act." (6)

"An armed group took possession of my house. I lost my house." (7)

"I have been in their hands, detained for a day." (7)

"If the government had been a little wiser, it would have listened the representatives of these rural churches, who know the conflict in practice." (3)

The church leaders work independently for peace in areas controlled by armed groups, because it is in line with their message and task. Their work represents self-organized and self-motivated community action for peace. In practice, their peacebuilding work includes active teaching about forgiveness and reconciliation; receiving retired fighters in the churches, supporting them in the process of leaving the arms and starting a new life; talking with the commanders of the armed groups and even verbally confronting them, telling them about the work they do, asking the groups to give up persecution and giving them Bibles. The leaders, through their agency as peacebuilders and targets of the armed groups, are grassroot level experts of the conflict. They are social leaders that can contribute through an inclusive peace process.

One of the reasons for the persecuted church to see itself eligible to have a seat at the negotiation table is that its leaders were invited to have an active participation in the peace process with the paramilitary in 2003-2006. The representation of the evangelical church was even demanded by the other conflict parties. During the process, the church had a meaningful role enabling it to give an input to the process. By contrast, this time for the 2012-2016 peace process, there was no proposal for the Christians pastors and leaders to participate in the process. The expectation for the religious leaders to be recognized and included in the process is based on the previous positive experience.

“CEDECOL¹⁶ directed the [previous] process, it was given a place in the negotiation table as a spiritual guide.” (1)

“The Autodefensas said [in the previous process]: the church that has been in the armed conflict has been the evangelical church, not the Catholic. The same heads, the ‘narcos’, said that who has to have a seat is the evangelical church. [...] In this process with FARC there hasn’t been participation even though the church has been persecuted by FARC, there are many assassins. There is a big difference in this process.” (7)

The findings support the position that the persecuted church is a legitimate actor in the civil society and eligible for meaningful inclusion in a participatory peace process. They live the conflict firsthand and are grassroot level experts in peace. As defined in part 2.1.1., inclusive processes should participate religious leaders, faith-based organizations, “representatives who genuinely speak on behalf of the population” (UN 2015) and “organizations that take voluntary collective action around shared interests, purposes and values” (Paffenholz 2014, 70). The persecuted Christian groups in the rural communities of Colombia meet these requirements. They are inside actors in the conflict and have therefore natural authority to address topics of conflict and peace. In addition, their day-to-day work has a positive impact for peace. The Christian church is an entity that the ordinary people, the victims, the citizens and even the representatives of the armed groups relate to. According to the self-image of the persecuted Christian groups, they have a lot to offer to the peace process, had they been meaningfully included. They would have positively impacted and enriched the process by giving ideas and inputs about justice, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. The findings also show that the characteristics of the persecuted church, the realities of the persecution, the agency of its leaders are largely unknown to the public in general as well as to the government, the planners and the coordinators of the peace process. These findings present and validate the claim for the inclusion of the persecuted church and provide understanding of the consequences of the lack of their inclusion. The findings related to inclusion are presented in the next section.

¹⁶ *La Confederación Evangélica de Colombia*, the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia.

6.3. The persecuted Christian groups have not been meaningfully included

The historical outline of the conflict, the description of the peace process and the peace agreement from the official viewpoint have been presented in chapter 3. The findings presented in this part challenge the official narrative. The results based on the interviews suggest that the peace process was not inclusive as the persecuted Christian groups have not been meaningfully included. Additionally, the peace agreement has not brought change to the conflict realities they experience and that there is a disconnection between the “official” narrative and the experienced reality.

6.3.1. The peace process was not inclusive

The peace process was not inclusive according to the definitions of inclusivity given in chapter 2.1.: “the included actors can make meaningful contributions to political agreements and their implementation” (Paffenholz, 2015a), “the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated in to the process” (UN 2012, 11), “[...] identify and address the root causes of conflict and ensure that the needs of the affected sectors of the population are addressed [...]” (ibid.). The interview data evidences that the peace process was executed to serve the narrow interests of the few instead of serving the whole country and those who have suffered the most. The “few” refer especially to the president, the High Commissioner of Peace, politicians in general and the commanders of the FARC who were present at the negotiation table. No interest to include or to meaningfully hear the representative voice of those who have lived the conflict, like the persecuted church, was experienced. There was no support found for the argument that the Colombian peace process was highly or meaningfully inclusive.

“The civil society, including the church and the persecuted church was totally in the margins.” (2)

“It was not inclusive, it was opportune.” (3)

“The peace agreement does not represent the country [...] it divides it.” (3)

“There was not a proposal for us to participate [...] for the pastors and leaders.” (4)

As explained in chapter 3, the official report of the peace process shows a high and broad level of inclusion. The most inclusive components of the peace process were the forums, the citizen and organizational proposal mechanism, the direct consultations and participation spaces. The general victim participation and the participation of the forums was not representative of the legitimate victims. It was highlighted that those victims that were present in meetings or in the forums, didn't have the freedom to speak openly. The peace process was unable to break the law of silence, meaning that the victims were unprotected by the government and under a death threat if they spoke openly. On the other hand, the victims that did speak and participate, were considered unrepresentative of most victims. Hence many victims feel that they have not been represented.

“Many people participated in the forums. In their moment they could have an input, but one of the biggest criticisms is that [the process] did not represent profoundly the desire of the victims. It represented more the desire to end with the guerrilla. The depth [of the conflict] and the most affected community was not considered. There was some participation in the forums, in some scenes, but it is really not true that they were actively included in the agreement.” (3)

“The victims had a representation, even though in some cases virtual, they were not given much voice, but it was a good initiative and important.” (4)

“There was no participation given that would really represent all the victims. It was very limited.” (4)

“The government looked for victims that were already in the city, who had different rhythm of life, who had been living 10 to 12 years in the city, who were distant to the conflict and had a different lifestyle.” (3)

In the government documentation of the peace process, churches in general are mentioned, especially in the participation of the forums. There was indeed some participation of Catholic and Protestant Christians. However, the results suggest that the participation of the Protestant representatives were not representative of the greater Protestant body, meaningful, deep or addressing the significant matters. The inclusion of religious representatives was experienced to simply be part of the protocol without a genuine interest of inclusion. According to the interviews, the Christian participation in the forums was not representative. Large urban-based churches and their representatives

were invited, who are not connected to the realities of the conflict or the persecuted church in the wider rural areas. At the same time the law of silence kept the victims from speaking.

“The inclusion of the Catholic or the Christian church are only protocols. They are not interested in the church giving solutions. No one is interested in a different approach.” (1)

“As church, we are included on paper, to take the pictures and to give the news, but day to day it is not like that.” (1)

“The church was not seated in Habana. The Catholic church yes, but not in a significant way. In the previous processes it was. In this process, the Christian church was not, it was not talked about, it did not exist. [...] There was not a representation of the persecuted church.” (3)

“The direct participation of the Christian church was never allowed. They only invited the Catholic church to the negotiation table and to the processes. There was never a pastor seated at the table.” (5)

“Until today the Christian church has not been taken into consideration.” (5)

“The government included some groups, the Catholic church and different regional groups, but not the [Protestant] church.” (7)

“To talk about these things in the forums is to sentence yourself to death. The government cannot give guarantees. We see the consequences in the deaths of social leaders. The groups don’t like it. Here we cannot talk openly. The law of silence exists.” (6)

The Protestant church was included more after the peace Agreement was rejected in the referendum. Meetings with a wider spectrum of religious representatives were arranged, but under the apparent pressure to get the peace agreement approved as fast as possible. These meetings also failed to be truly representative; significant inclusion was not sought, and the questions of the actual conflict were not on the table anymore. At that point the discussion took place more around the issue of gender ideology, which had become an issue of division in the nation and an influencer to the referendum results. Equally the evangelical church had polarized into two groups, mostly representing the Christians of the cities and the Christians in the countryside. The urban Christians largely voted for the no, opposing the inclusion of gender ideology in the Agreement – having a significant impact on the result of the referendum. It was highlighted that at this point, the issues in

discussion were no longer related to the conflict and from the viewpoint of conflict issues, the interviewed considered the post-referendum meetings insignificant.

"When the referendum didn't pass, the government started to sit together with several groups from different faiths, they organized a meeting for the leaders. The president of CEDECOL was invited, but I don't think he had an active participation. They gave a place to CEDECOL, the president. But it was not as it had been in the previous process where the church had a seat at the table." (1)

"There was a voice of the church at the [negotiation] table, in topics that were not part of the negotiation. There were topics where the church could have been included, themes about the conflict zones." (7)

"The church that participated was the church from the cities, the well-known pastors [...] they spoke about the gender ideology in the name of the church. They are not part of the persecuted church. The persecuted church did not intervene in any way." (2)

"The church participated only after the referendum." (2)

"The agreement was revised after the referendum. It was good, it helped to take the church into consideration, not much, but they did." (3)

Further, the findings show that the general societal inclusion was minimal. Social groups were not significantly represented, despite the process including an organized participation of the victims. The specific groups of victims that were mentioned in the interviews as not represented were the guerrilla fighters, the rural population and the rural church. The specific groups that were mentioned as represented were women and the peasants. The credit for the initiative of inclusion of both groups was given to the guerrilla that has been critical of the way the government has treated them.

"None of the social groups have been included in a significant way." (6)

"If you talk with the demobilized, they will say: 'we are not included'. They only favor those commandants who sit at the [negotiation] tables. [...] The actors, the fighters, they are armed again, because they felt excluded from the process and from the benefits." (1)

"Social groups were not included. The government perhaps consulted the most important groups but did not really take into consideration the themes

and answers at the negotiation table. It is important that there was a presence of the military and the police. The civil society as such, including the church and the persecuted church was totally in the margins.” (2)

“The victims were not an active part of the negotiations. One of the greatest criticisms is that the process did not represent the depth of the desire of the victims. It represented more the desire to end the guerrilla. [...] The most affected community was not considered. It participated in the forums, in some scenes, [...] but was not included in an active way.” (3)

“Women were given importance; it was an initiative of the guerrilla. The peasants, also because of an initiative of the guerrilla. In some way they criticized the way that the government works with the peasants and the women.” (4)

No experiences of meaningful inclusion were shared in the interviews. Hence, according to the experiences of the interviewed, it can be concluded that the peace process was not inclusive and the groups that the interviewees represent have not been included. The interviews show that the civil society was in the margins. The limited input that was received through the participative aspects of the process, was either not representative or the contributions were not meaningfully taken into consideration and integrated in the process. As presented in the theoretical discussion in chapter 2, inclusion can affect the quality and the results of the peace process and therefore is connected to the continuity of the conflict.

6.3.2. The Peace Agreement has not brought change - the conflict continues

The Peace Agreement has not changed the social reality that the persecuted Christian groups experience. For them, the conflict continues. The realities of the conflict are the same or worse as they were before the agreement. The peace process and the reached agreement have been experienced as a show and a deception by the victims.

“In the world it [the peace process] is seen as an exemplary process, they think that it is a peace process. The war in Colombia continues the same, nothing has changed.” (7)

“It would be incorrect to talk about general peace; the country continues in conflict.” (4)

The agreement has been unable to stop the war and the violence. Instead, in many areas it has increased the violence due to the disintegration of former armed groups and the consequent formation of new groups. The organized drug trafficking has been strengthened during the time of reorganization, also leading to increased violence. Some communities experienced temporary relief from violence and persecution, while others experienced none. The results show a perception that the conflict is now more complicated, greater and more dangerous than it was before. The deaths and uncertainty are an everyday reality in the rural communities.

“Not all of them [FARC] demobilized. They have united more. And they continue acting as if they were in the conflict.” (2)

“There is uncertainty everywhere [...]. We know that there is no peace. What is happening now is more dangerous, there are one to four groups fighting in the same place and the peasant is in the middle. [...] The conflict is getting crazier. I visit different regions and I see it.” (3)

“In the last two or three years after the agreement was signed, the violence decreased considerably, but it did not stop. In many regions a moment of rest was experienced. There was freedom to meet for church service. The threats, killings and attacks in the churches decreased significantly. In the last months it has started again. The government doesn’t announce it. We felt a little rest, a little reprieve.” (5)

“The civil population is silent. You say something and tomorrow you are the next one to die. The Autodefensas are still here, you cannot say anything against them. It is very serious. Not only with the guerrilla, but with the Autodefensa.” (7)

“In the rural areas it has become worse. Mercenary groups stay there and kill a lot of people.” (7)

The civil population of Colombia continues living in an armed conflict. There are no signs of peace or change towards peace in the rural communities and concerning the persecution of Christian groups. The evidence speaks for the continuity of the conflict: violence, deaths, uncertainty, law of silence, threat, increasing armed power of the drug traffickers and corruption. The nature of the conflict is dynamic and changing, depending on the geographical location and the active actors in each region. There is disappointment in the lasting effects of the peace agreement; the peace process could not significantly

address or solve the violence experienced in the society. The continuity of violence and conflict questions the quality and the effectiveness of the peace process.

6.3.3. Disconnection between the official narrative and the experiences

A notable disconnection exists between the official narrative of the peace process and the leaders of the persecuted Christian groups. The official report about the peace process and the implementation of the peace agreement is presented in chapter 3 and is based on government produced documentation. The narrative of the persecuted Christian groups is based on their experiences shared in the interviews. The official narrative recounts a highly inclusive process whereas the results of this thesis generate a contradictory narrative of a non-inclusive process. In addition, there are differences between the perceptions whether the process addressed or solved the causes of violence in the communities, whether the agreement is seen as a success or a failure.

“Santos said many times: ‘finally the peace has arrived’. But it is not like that. At this moment there is no peace in Colombia. That was a lie, a deception.”
(5)

“It has been an agreement on paper. The reality has been different.” (6)

“The process is a failure. The world does not hear this, but we know it internally. It has been a facade to say that we have peace. The world sees the process as an example, thinking that we have had a real peace process. But the war continues the same, nothing has changed.” (7)

The different perceptions and narratives have further damaged and polarized the country. It causes further mistrust in the government and weakens its legitimacy. The disconnection reveals the failure of an inclusive process by exposing the lack of ownership of the process and the intended peace by the interviewed representatives of persecuted Christian groups.

The interview analysis results show that the interviewees and the persecuted Christian groups that they represent were not meaningfully included in the peace process. They do not identify with the high-inclusion public narrative of the process. The general experience is that the peace process was done to serve the purposes of few and not to serve the whole country and those who have suffered the most. This narrow approach and lack of inclusivity have affected the overall results of the process and lack of changes in the

circumstances. The disappointment is targeted at the government for its inability and unwillingness, not as much at the armed groups. The experience is that there was no genuine interest to hear or to include the persecuted church, even though it has lived the conflict firsthand and is an eligible actor. These findings highlight the difference between inclusion and meaningful inclusion, where a meeting or participation can be recorded and therefore counted as inclusion, without stating the content and the level of meaningfulness. This explains how it is possible that there is an official and public, also internationally known, narrative that is very different from the experiences of the interviewed. The consequences are a stronger and continuing experience of exclusion and polarization and a conviction that the quality and the results of the process could have been better through meaningful inclusion.

“If there is someone expert in peace, it is the church. Peace is not a negotiation; true peace is different. This is the input that the church would have given.” (5)

“If the church had been taken into consideration as an active part in the processes, the history would be different.” (6)

“The negotiations favor only those who are sitting around the table, the commanders. Only they benefit. The actors, the fighters, they are armed again because they felt excluded of the process and the benefits.” (1)

“The church had an input to give, but the government did not take it into consideration.” (2)

6.4. Overview of the findings

Firstly, the findings of the study reveal the meaningful realities that frame the context of the peace process for the persecuted Christian groups. The first one is a governmental void in the Colombian territory and the rural physical space. The governmental void has created a self-survival culture, that enables the functioning of the different conflict actors, allows for the continuity of violence and offers no protection for the population. The government is qualified as a delegitimate and impotent peace builder, not interested in the real issues resulting from the conflict and from its absence. The second meaningful reality that frames the context of the peace process for the persecuted groups is the rural physical space where most of the armed conflict is taking place and where the civil population continues being victimized. The findings highlight a difference between the realities of the

cities and the realities of the countryside. These realities form the foundation and the context through which the representatives of the persecuted religious groups experience the conflict and the peace process.

Secondly, the findings reveal characteristics of the persecuted church that present it as a legitimate actor in the society, in the conflict and in peacebuilding. In the highlighted governmental void in the rural communities, the church lives the conflict in its own flesh and knows it in practice. By nature, it is neutral and promotes peace. The church helps, encourages and comforts amid the violence, does social work in the communities and keeps the doors open to everyone, even those who are leaving the arms. The leaders of the churches are recognized community leaders, peace actors and threats to the armed groups. Throughout the whole conflict, the peace process and the implementation phase the Christian church has faced persecution by the armed groups that continues even today. Because of the practical experience, proximity to the conflict and being a significant social actor in the conflict zone as well as a victim, the church sees itself as a legitimate actor for meaningful inclusion in the peace process.

Thirdly, the findings show that based the experiences of the peace process, the peace agreement and the current state of the conflict, the persecuted Christian groups have not been meaningfully included in the peace process. In a more general criteria, the whole process itself was not inclusive, significantly lacking representativeness of victims and social groups. The agreement has not brought change and the conflict continues being experienced similar as before or even worse. Finally, there is a disconnection between the official narrative of the peace process and the experiences of the interviewees. The results of the interviews form a second narrative, told by the voice of representatives of conflict victims, which they experience is still not heard.

I have sought to answer the following questions: Have the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia been meaningfully included in the peace process? Has the Peace Agreement changed the suffering they face? How has the level of inclusion of persecuted Christian groups affected the quality of the peace process? The interview data reveals that the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia have not been meaningfully included in the peace process. The Peace Agreement has not changed the reality that these groups live in; the conflict-bound persecution that they experience has not decreased and they continue to live under life-threatening situations. The lack of meaningful inclusion of the persecuted Christian groups in the peace process has affected the quality and the results of the peace process negatively. The process is experienced as distant and exclusive and

it has increased polarization and distrust in the government. There is no ownership of the process or trust in the success of the ongoing process, because it has not heard the voice of those who are suffering. The lack of inclusivity of the persecuted Christian groups reflects a larger lack of societal inclusion. In the following chapter I discuss the conclusions and implications of these findings.

7. DISCUSSION

The research questions of this study are: Have the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia been meaningfully included in the peace process? Has the Peace Agreement changed the suffering they face? What does the level of inclusion of persecuted Christian groups indicate about the quality of the peace process? According to the theoretical definitions presented in chapter 2 and the criteria for evaluation (see section 5.4.), the inclusion of persecuted Christian groups would mean that their views and needs “are represented and integrated into the process and outcome” (UN 2012, 11). Furthermore, meaningful inclusion would mean that they have made “meaningful contributions to political agreements and their implementation” (Paffenholz 2015a). The results indicate that according to the experiences of the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia, they were not meaningfully included. Additionally, the results indicate that the suffering these groups face has not decreased and the lack of meaningful inclusion delegitimizes the agency of the government in the conflict communities, diminish the credibility of the peace process and weakens the ownership and participation of the civil society in the peacebuilding process. The results challenge the legitimacy of the peace process.

The persecuted Christians were not included in the peace process, because they have not been recognized as key actors. Therefore, they have not been given meaningful participation spaces where they could have given the inputs for justice, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation that they have. In other words, the evaluative results indicate that from the viewpoint of the group studied in this thesis, (which, as indicated in earlier chapters, is a significant social group), that the peace process has been non-inclusive. This study does not evaluate directly nor in detail the inclusion of other social groups in Colombia. According to the criteria referred to above, for an inclusive process the interview results should have indicated recognition and space for the inputs both from the persecuted Christian groups and from rural population in the conflict zones. In an inclusive process these inputs would have been included and carried throughout the process to be reflected

also in the Peace Agreement and its implementation (see section 2.1.1.). Considering the goal to end the armed conflict and to build a sustainable peace including the whole society (see chapter 3.3.2.), the peace process could be argued to be a failed process, because it has not been able to end the armed conflict nor to include the whole of society. The results show that because of the continuous experiences of conflict-related persecution, the persecuted Christians in Colombia have difficulty to believe in the validity of the Peace Agreement and the peace process. Violence is the most concrete evidence of conflict and because it continues, and signs of change and peace are not within their experienced reality, they don't agree with the public narrative of a successful peace process. The results indicate that the lack of meaningful inclusivity has affected the quality of the peace process by delegitimizing the government, while according to the peace process it should strengthen its presence and functions. The exclusion that the persecuted Christian groups in the rural communities continue experiencing, separates them from the peace process and maintains a distant and passive relationship to the process and the concrete implementation steps of the Peace Agreement, despite their role as influential and meaningful social actors that promote peace.

These findings reveal a disconnect between the government narrative and the experiences of the civil society, in this case the persecuted Christian groups, support the criticism of the liberal peace presented by Mac Ginty (2008, 143, 158), where the voice of the local actors and practices is silenced under the voice of governments, international organizations, financial institutions and those whose parameters are based in the international liberal system. While the Colombian peace process has not been totally implemented by external actors and institutions, the case demonstrates the silencing of a grassroots voice in a government-led process where the official representatives maintained a privileged participatory position throughout the whole process. On the other hand, the results indicate that the inclusion of the Colombian peace process is a relevant case for discussing the quality of inclusion, because according to the official narrative, the Colombian process is said to be broadly inclusive. Tanya Paffenholz's (2015a) theory of meaningful inclusion highlights the quality of the contributions affecting the quality and sustainability of peace processes. Call's (2012, 214-215) claim that inclusionary and exclusionary behavior are the first element to focus on when studying the possibility of reversal of internal armed conflict. It becomes clear that Colombian inclusion has not been meaningful inclusion and the theory directs towards the conclusion that meaningless inclusion does not lead to the same results as meaningful inclusion. The results evidence

a large-scale return to arms by many who, according to the peace accords, should have been demobilized and reintegrated into society. The respondents' statements fundamentally contest the inclusivity of the Colombian peace process and accordingly its quality and ability to build a sustainable peace.

As I have indicated in section 5.4., these results can be used to evaluate the success of the peace process in addressing of the root issues of the conflict. The study demonstrates a correlation between the governmental void and the lack of inclusivity. The governmental void has been identified as a root cause of the conflict (section 3.1.). Although an inclusive peace process could address the root causes and the needs of the affected groups (UN 2012, 11), in the Colombian peace process the root issue has conversely resulted in non-inclusivity. Because the government is not present and functioning in all its territory and among all its citizens, it doesn't have a realistic understanding of the conflict realities in the rural areas or about the realities of the agency and the persecution of the Christian churches. This has hindered the inclusion of a relevant social group and as a result affected the quality of the peace process. Reflecting the results on the background of the conflict history (see chapter 3), it could be suggested that another root cause for the conflict and its continuity is unrepresentativeness. The causes that lead to the conflict includes a clear experience that the rural population had no representation or voice in the power apparatus of the nation. The analyzed responses show the same reality among the social group studied in this thesis. The data contributes a clearer understanding of Charles Call's (2012, 231) claim for the inclusion of the social groups that are associated with the conflict parties and reveals a lack of quality in the selection of the social groups and those who have represented the victims in the Colombian peace process. Also, the United Nations (2015) connects inclusivity with identifying "representatives who genuinely speak on behalf of the local population".

While inclusion of the Colombian peace process has been largely discussed, these results demonstrate more specifically the importance of the inclusion of religious groups. The results about the peacebuilding character of religious groups and their leaders, recognized leadership and civil society agency with knowledge of local situations, extensive contacts in the communities and with the conflict parties give validity to the United Nations (2015) guidelines and Cedric De Conig et al. (2015) claim for the inclusion of religious leaders. The theoretical framework of this study positioned it within the post-secular paradigm, arguing that religion has an active role in the modern society, influencing behavior and politics in most of the world. This is the case especially in Colombia, being a highly

religious country. These results fit with Peter Berger's (1999, 2014) theory of multiple modernities. The religious persons interviewed in this study attend the reality of the conflict, the peace process and their own experiences through a combination of their religious identity and practices as well as their participation in secular life and activities such as professional lives, relationships with people from other religious representations, education and so on. According to the collected evidence, religious identity and representation is a significant indicator that should be taken into consideration in the planning and preparation for social inclusion in the peace process. With the background of the theoretical framework and the findings, the exclusion of religious groups such as the persecuted Christians evidences a narrow selection criterion that represents the secular and Western-focused paradigm, becoming a factor that influences the quality of the peace process negatively.

It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze and draw detailed inferences about the specifics of inclusion of all social groups in Colombia. This study is limited to the inclusion of persecuted Christian groups and only includes references from secondary sources about the inclusion of other social groups. This study used in-depth interviews with a rather small sample size, which can limit its generalizability. As discussed in chapter 5, due to the limitations in the process of obtaining the interviews, the focus of this study is narrowed only to Protestant Christian groups in Colombia. A wider range including the Catholic groups would be required for the results to be reliably generalizable to all Christian religious representation in Colombia and further other religious minorities for a generalization of all religious representation in the country. Nonetheless, the results are valid for the purpose of answering the research questions which specifically refer to persecuted Christian groups. Despite the small sample size, the interviewed were from different regions and leaders of the religious groups, representing larger quantities of people within the focus group of the thesis. In the discussion about the limitations of this study, the question about the international generalizability of the results has to be raised. The presence of religion, issues and causes connected to religion, religious civil populations and religious leaders are commonly present in any conflict regardless the nation in question. Hence the theme and the results of this study can be of great importance at a larger scale in the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. These results cannot directly be generalized to other nations and processes, but the suggestions of broader theoretical concerns revealed by this study should be noted and taken into consideration in other cases. Some of these, for instance, are the social agency and

influence of religious groups and their leaders; the distinction of meaningful and non-meaningful social inclusion and their implications to the quality of peace process and the results; and the link between conflict and religious persecution.

8. CONCLUSION

The aim of this pro gradu -thesis is to examine the inclusion of the persecuted Christian groups in the Colombian peace process. By interviewing seven leaders of persecuted Christian groups and analyzing their experiences, the expectation was to answer whether the persecuted groups have been included, has the Peace Agreement changed the suffering they face and what the level of inclusion of persecuted Christian groups indicates about the quality of the peace process. The work is based on a theoretical framework of legitimate peacebuilding, focusing especially on inclusion of religious actors. I have provided an overview of the context of the Colombian conflict, peace process and religious persecution. I have analyzed the interview material, the experiences of leaders of the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia, through data-analysis using concepts rising from the theoretical framework. The methodology used proved to be effective in answering the research questions, providing in-depth understanding not only of the experiences of the persecuted Christian groups in relation to inclusion, but also of the context and the consequences. The results indicate that the persecuted Christian groups in Colombia were not meaningfully included in the 2012-2016 peace process and that the persecution has not decreased since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016. The analyzed responses support the position that lack of societal inclusion challenges the legitimacy and the quality of peace processes. The findings also highlight the importance of meaningful inclusion, where the represented social groups are selected through a meticulous consideration based on understanding of the social realities of the territory and the quality of their participation is enabled in a way that it results in a meaningful contribution to the process. Most notably this study contributes an expanded perspective of inclusion to the Colombian peace process, the inclusion of conflict-affected religious groups - and as a result challenges the assumption of the inclusivity of the process.

This study takes part in the academic discussion on peacebuilding and conflict resolution. To better understand the implications of these results in the Colombian peacebuilding process, future studies could comparatively address the inclusion of all social groups in Colombia and the differences between the inclusion between the Catholic and Protestant

Christian groups. Internationally, further research is needed to determine the relationship between conflicts and conflict reoccurrence with religious persecution. In general, the academic field of conflict resolution and practitioners could benefit from more research on the social agency of religious groups and leaders in conflict societies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The participation of the main social groups in the Colombian peace process.

Category	Group	Description of representation and participation	Participation in national forums ¹					Level of inclusivity (1-9) ¹⁷
			1	2	3	4	5	
Traditional leaders	Government/ national	7/2013 Public Audience of the Juridical Frame for Peace. 11/2014 negotiator group meets with the president. 10/2016 the President meets with ex-General Procurator of the nation. 10/2016 the President met twice with a Government delegation.	x	x	x	x	x	1
	Regional	8/2012- Regional forums in different regions. 12/2012 Political forum of integral agrarian development, 1314 participants from 32 regions of the country. 10/2016 the President met with governors of the country. 11/2013 Caucho region producers and marketers (ASOPROCAUCHO)	x	x	x	x	x	3
	Local / communal	11/2012 direct consultation with 4 local and communal representatives 6/2016 meeting with representatives of indigenous (also Raizales and Palenqueros) black, communities.	x	x	x	x	x	3

¹⁷ The evaluation is based on Tanya Paffenholz's (2014, 71, 76-88) nine models of inclusion: 1) direct representation of civil society groups at the negotiation table, 2) observer status, 3) official consultative forums that run parallel to official negotiations, 4) less formal consultations, 5) inclusive post-agreement mechanisms, 6) high-level civil society initiatives, 7) public participation (involving the broader population via public hearings, opinion polls, "town hall" meetings, or signature campaigns, 8) public decision making (via referenda or other electoral forms) and 9) mass action.

		10/2016 the President met with all the mayoress' of the country.							
	Other political leaders	10/2016 the President met with the no-group and with the ex-presidents Pastrana and Uribe. 10/2016 the President met with the leaders of the 7 "yes"-parties. 10/2016 Minister of Defense met with the political team of the ex-president Pastrana. 10/2016 meeting with the Center Democratic party.	x	x	x	x	x		3
Women/gender		11/2013 women's agriculture organization (ASMAR) <i>Gender sub commission 2014-2016.</i> 10/2014 gender sub commission meets with women's organizations. 12/2014ç3/2015 Visits from 3 groups of representatives of women's and LGBTI organizations 2/2015 women victims', farmers, indigenous, afro-descendant, ex-combatant, LGBTI, human rights leaders meet with the gender sub commission to give proposals. 2/2015 meeting with women's defense groups 3/2015 gender sub commission meets with civil society representatives 5/2016 meeting with female ex-guerrillas 8/2015 Delegation of 10 women from NGOs gives proposals about the victims of sexual violence 10/2016 Minister of the Interior met with the Counselor for Women's Equality and representatives of 9 women's groups. 10/2016 the President met with all the mayoress' of the country. 10/2016 the President meets with Marta Ramirez, a lawyer, ex-senator and politician.	x	x	x	x	x		3

Religious leaders	Catholic	10/2016 the President met with the representatives of the Catholic church.		x			x	4
	Protestant	The President met with evangelical pastors 10/2016. 10/2016 Minister of the Interior met with the leaders of evangelical churches that voted for "no". 10/2016 the President met with representatives of various evangelical churches.					x	4
	General	12/2012 Political forum of integral agrarian development, 1314 participants from 32 regions of the country. 32 places for representatives from churches. 10/2016 Minister and vice Minister of the Interior met with 80 representatives of churches.	x	x	x	x	x	3
	Faith-based organizations						x	7
Youth		10/2016 Minister of the Interior met with student leaders to hear proposals. 10/2016 the President met with student leaders of private and public universities.	x	x	x	x	x	3
Militia								1
Self-defense groups / ex-combatants	ELN						?	3
	FARC	Main participant in the process from the beginning. 5/2015 12 ex-fighters visit the gender sub commission.					x	1
Businessmen		11/2015 the conversation table meets with a group of businessmen.		x	x	x	x	3
Trade unions			x	x	x	x	x	3

Professional associations	11/2013 Business- and agricultural association (CRISTACAÑA) 12/2013 visit from an organization of 107 agricultural families.	x	x		x	x	3
Human Rights groups		x	x	x	x	x	3
Research institutions	National Universities Kroc Institute	x	x	x	x	x	2
Social movements	11/2013 visit from a wide social peace movement VallenPaz.	x	x	x	x	x	3
NGOs	10/2016 meeting with 50 organizations representing the “yes” group	x	x	x	x		3
Case-specific social groups	Internally displaced persons		x				8
	Persons affected by the illicit drugs						8
	Victims of the conflict		x	x	x	x	3

	The "no" group	10/2016 the President met with the "no" group. 10/2016 the Government's Dialogue Commission meets three times with the "no" group. 10/2016 meeting with the "no" group. 11/2016 meeting with the "no" group.							8
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Appendix 2: Interview script

In the beginning:

- The interviewer presents herself and gives an introduction of the research project, it's topic and the goal.
- The interviewer explains the following parameters:
 - The participation in the interview is voluntary.
 - The participant has been asked to be interviewed, because he/she represents a Christian group in Colombia that has experienced persecution.
 - The interview material will be kept confidential and the participant will be kept anonymous in the analysis, results and publications of the research.
 - Parts of the interview may be published in a written format in the thesis paper.
 - The interview documents will be saved in the researcher's personal computer in an anonymous format.
 - Question: Can the anonymous interview file be given to be used in other scientific research projects? (Yes/no > the answer is written on the interview document).
 - The interviewer gives her contact information to the participant.
 - Question: Do you have any questions before we start? You are welcome to ask questions now, during or after the interview.
 - Background: Could you tell me a little bit about you, your background and the group that you represent?

Interview questions:

(The main questions are in **bold letters**, possible follow-up questions (that might change or not be used at all) are in *cursive*.)

1. **Can you tell me what have been your experiences during and about the peace process, since 2012?**
 - a. *What did you know about the negotiations and what was happening with them?*
2. **Do you feel that you and your group have been included in some way?**
 - a. *Why?*
 - b. *How?*
 - c. *How would you like to have been included?*
 - d. *If you could have been included, what would have been different in the process for you? In general?*
 - e. *Who do you feel was included in the process and who not?*
3. **How has your/your group's experience and participation in the peace process been different than others'?**
 - a. *Why?*
4. **What do you think about the peace agreement?**
5. **What has changed for you after the peace agreement was signed?**

- a. *Has the persecution changed? How?*
 - b. *Do you think it will change?*
6. **How do you see the future for you, your group?**
 - a. *For Colombia?*

In the end:

- Would you like to add something?
- Do you have any questions?
- Would you like to comment the interview?
- Do you give permission for everything you have said during this interview to be used as material in the research project?
- (If these have not been told in question #1) What is your position in your group? How long have you been in this position? How old are you? What kind of work/educational background do you have? Do you have family?
- Thank you!

Appendix 3: Key concepts

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Interview 5	Interview 6	Interview 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experience - inclusion - participation - exclusion - persecution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experience - inclusion - participation - exclusion - persecution - threat - church - pastor - victim - law of silence - government absence - violence - polarization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experience - inclusion - participation - exclusion - persecution - threat - church - pastor - victim - law of silence - government absence - violence - polarization - countryside - the persecuted church - the free church - social groups - future - corruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experience - inclusion - participation - exclusion - persecution - threat - church - pastor - victim - law of silence - government absence - violence - polarization - countryside - the persecuted church - the free church - social groups - future - corruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experience - inclusion - participation - exclusion - persecution - threat - church - pastor - victim - law of silence - government absence - violence - polarization - countryside - the persecuted church - the free church - social groups - future - corruption - change - historical memory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experience - inclusion - participation - exclusion - persecution - threat - church - pastor - victim - law of silence - government absence - violence - polarization - countryside - the persecuted church - the free church - social groups - future - corruption - change - historical memory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experience - inclusion - participation - exclusion - persecution - threat - church - pastor - victim - law of silence - government absence - violence - polarization - countryside - the persecuted church - the free church - social groups - future - corruption - change - historical memory