

## **Political transnationalism, gender and peace building among Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain.**

Torres, Anastasia Bermudez

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**POLITICAL TRANSNATIONALISM, GENDER AND PEACE-  
BUILDING AMONG COLOMBIAN MIGRANTS IN THE UK AND  
SPAIN**

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## **Signed declaration**

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is the result of my own research.

Signed: Anastasia Bermúdez Torres.

## **Abstract**

The international migration of Colombians has received little attention, either at academic or policy levels. This research explores Colombian migration to Spain and the UK. Its main aim is to study the transnational political activities of Colombian migrants, in the context of the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia, by taking a gendered perspective. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks draw from several research areas, mainly work on diasporas and transnational migration, and studies of armed conflict and peace. Given that these fields of study are rarely combined, this thesis provides an innovative conceptual approach. The current research is based on qualitative fieldwork conducted in the UK and Spain between 2005 and 2007, and comprising almost 100 interviews and participant observation. The main empirical finding is that Colombian migrants are an integral part of the political context in the home country, despite the emphasis by other studies on the polarisation, fragmentation and apolitical nature of the diaspora. Conceptually, this thesis argues for the need to de-construct political transnationalism, to account for: activities emerging from 'above' and 'below', 'individual' and 'collective' participation in formal and informal politics; and the connections between political participation in the countries of origin and settlement. Also, it shows that migrants' transnational politics varies according to gender, as well as other factors, mainly type of migration and social class. More importantly, the transnational political activities of Colombians abroad relate directly/indirectly to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia. Future research and policy-making should take into account the potential of this for civil society peace-building efforts, especially seeking to promote a gendered perspective.

## **Acknowledgements**

The research described in the present thesis was carried out under the supervision of Dr Cathy McIlwaine (Department of Geography, Queen Mary, University of London), and funded by the ESRC (PTA - 030200201565). First of all, I want to thank the ESRC for its generosity, and Cathy for all her encouragement, guidance and practical help. Secondly, this study has benefited from the advice and support of my family and many friends. Without them the whole process would have been much harder. Third, my deepest gratitude goes to the organisations and individuals who participated in the research process and without whom this thesis would not have been possible.

## List of Acronyms

- Aculco** (*Asociación Socio-Cultural y de Cooperación al Desarrollo por Colombia e Iberoamérica* - Socio-Cultural and Cooperation Development Association for Colombia and Latin America)
- AD** (*Alternativa Democrática* - Democratic Alternative)
- Aesco** (*América, España, Solidaridad y Cooperación* - America, Spain, Solidarity and Cooperation)
- Aicode** (*Asociación Iberoamericana para la Cooperación, el Desarrollo y los Derechos Humanos* - Latin American Association for Cooperation, Development and Human Rights)
- AUC** (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* - United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia)
- Carila** (Latin American Welfare Group)
- Coras** (Colombian Refugee Association)
- CSC** (Colombian Solidarity Campaign)
- ELN** (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* - National Liberation Army)
- EPL** (*Ejército Popular de Liberación* - Popular Liberation Army)
- FARC** (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
- Ferine** (*Federación Estatal de Asociaciones de Inmigrantes y Refugiados en España* - State Federation of Immigrant and Refugee Associations in Spain)
- FOSCA** (Friends of Colombia for Social Aid)
- IDPs** (Internally Displaced Persons)
- IRMO** (Indoamerican Refugee Migrant Organisation)
- JFC** (Justice for Colombia)
- LAWA** (Latin American Women's Aid)
- LAWRS** (Latin American Women's Rights Services)
- M-19** (*Movimiento 19 de Abril* - 19 April Movement)
- MIRA** (*Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta* - Independent Movement of Absolute Renovation)
- PDA** (*Polo Democrático Alternativo* - Alternative Democratic Party)
- PDI** (*Polo Democrático Independiente* - Independent Democratic Party)
- PPCCE** (*Programa para la Promoción de las Comunidades Colombianas en el Exterior* - Programme for the Promotion of Colombian Communities Abroad)
- PRT** (*Partido Revolucionario de Los Trabajadores* - Revolutionary Workers' Party)
- UP** (*Unión Patriótica* - Patriotic Union)

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## CHAPTER 1

### **Armed Conflict, International Migration and Gender in Colombia**

This study is the result of my interest in Latin America, and Colombia in particular, as well as the subject of international migration, and the analysis of gender roles and relations. For the last 17 years I have been following events in Colombia, both at the professional and personal levels, and more specifically the armed conflict and peace-building efforts in this country. As many Colombians emphasise, there is more to their country than the negative images spread by the media, based on violence, drugs, corruption and poverty. This has been a common complaint of Colombians for a long time, and efforts to draw attention to other positive elements of the country have multiplied in recent years. I want to state from the outset that I agree with this. I acknowledge that Colombia is a beautiful country full of wonderful people, and that there is more to it than what international stereotypes suggest. However, it is also negligent to deny, or minimise, the problems that Colombia faces, and especially the massive influence that the armed conflict, and associated violence(s), is having on the country and its citizens. More than anything else, this would be a serious affront to all of those who have suffered, and continue to do so, its worst consequences. In addition, I believe this diverts attention from the need to find durable, peaceful solutions to the current situation.

One of the consequences of this has been the increased migration of Colombians abroad. International migration flows are on the rise, and interest in this issue, both in academia and policy-making, is currently at its highest. Some 191 million people, or 3% of the world's population, were living outside their country of origin in 2005.<sup>1</sup> The majority of migrants move in search of better economic and social opportunities, and partly in response to labour demands in the Global North. Refugees fleeing conflict, natural disasters, famine and persecution, on the other hand, account for a small proportion of these flows (estimated at 9.2 million people in 2005) (see Footnote 1). However, in today's complex scenario it is not always possible to distinguish between the different types of migration, with motives closely interrelated. By the end of 2006, the estimated number of asylum seekers, refugees and 'others of concern' to UNHCR was 32.9 million, which represented a significant increase from the previous years.<sup>2</sup> Some 3.6 million of these were Colombians, mostly internally displaced persons (IDPs)<sup>3</sup>

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1 UNFPA (UN Population Fund) [<http://www.unfpa.org/pds/migration.htm>] (07/11/07).

2 UNHCR [<http://www.unhcr.org/basics.html>] (07/11/07); UNHCR (2007b).

3 IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) are defined by the UN as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border" (IOM, 2003a, p.111).

(UNHCR, 2007b). Those fleeing abroad have joined the ranks of the 3-5 million Colombians currently living abroad for a variety of reasons, representing an estimated 10% of the country's total population. This diaspora is now spread throughout the world, with significant communities in at least 20 countries in four different continents (Guarnizo, 2006a).

Recent data on international migration also highlights that women account for around half of these flows, or even up to 70-80% in some specific cases, as the number of female migrants has been rising significantly (see Footnote 1). Although gender disaggregated data for refugee migration is not always available, estimates are that women represent around half of the total overall population of concern to the UNHCR, with great variety depending on refugee situations, regions of asylum and age (UNHCR, 2007b). This so-called feminisation of international migration has been most evident in Latin America and the Caribbean, the first developing region of the world to reach sex parity in its migration flows by 1990 (UNFPA, 2006, p.23). In addition, Latin America and the Caribbean was the second largest source of migrants, after Asia, during 1990-2000.<sup>4</sup> These issues have led to a significant increase in interest in the gendered nature of migration, both in academic research and policy-making. Nevertheless, the case of Colombia has received little attention up until very recently. This is despite the fact that the country has become one of the main sources of migrants from the region, mainly as a result of the effects of the armed conflict and associated violence(s), economic downturn and growing inequality. There is significant research and policy-making attention focused on the situation of IDPs within Colombia. However, little is known about those Colombians who cross international borders in search of personal security and/or economic and social opportunities.

This study seeks to partly address this neglect by looking at the experiences of Colombian men and women in Spain and the UK, two migration flows that have grown in significance but remain under-studied. In contrast to existing work, this research explores the experiences of both refugees and labour migrants, as well as other types of migrants, reflecting the increasing heterogeneity of the Colombian diaspora. Conceptually, the objectives are to explore several issues. First, this thesis analyses the similarities and differences in the experiences of men and women migrants, and the importance of context at origin and destination, as well as type of migration and social class, and how these impact on transnational linkages. Second, it focuses on the interplay between transnational initiatives from 'above' and 'below', and between transnationalism and integration, looking at differences according to national contexts, type of migration, gender and class. Finally, it explores the relevance of migrant involvement in transnational formal and informal politics for the country of origin, and more specifically for

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4 UNFPA [<http://www.unfpa.org/pds/facts.htm>] (07/11/07).

civil society efforts at peace-building and gender equality. The aim is to contribute to the emergent literature on migrants' transnational political connections, and the role of diasporas in civil conflict transformation.

In their pioneering work on Colombians in the US, Guarnizo and Díaz identified "a dense web of economic, political, and socio-cultural transnational relations connecting migrants and their places of origin" (1999, p.397; see also Guarnizo et al., 1999). However, they argued that these relations did not necessarily lead to the formation of a transnational community (Guarnizo and Díaz, 1999). The authors found that Colombians in the US were highly divided along class, regional, and other lines, as well as by the mistrust and fragmentation caused by the violence and criminality experienced in the home country. This, it has been argued, has led Colombian immigrants to prefer individual transnational relations, rather than collective (or organised) forms of transnationalism, and avoid "continuous political engagement with their home nation" (Guarnizo et al., 2003, p.1219; Guarnizo, 2006b). However, my experience of living and doing fieldwork among Colombians in the UK suggested a different, or more nuanced scenario, which is what led me to explore these issues from a different approach.

This thesis is divided into two main parts. The first analyses the theoretical, historical and methodological context of the research. **Chapter 2** lays out the theoretical and conceptual framework used in the study, which is multidisciplinary and draws from several research areas. Taking an innovative approach, it links the work on diasporas and transnational communities, and especially on their politics, with studies of armed conflict and peace-building, from a gendered perspective. The first section of this chapter reviews transnational and diasporic approaches to the study of international migration, and more specifically, their contribution to the understanding of migrants' transnational political practices. The latter has received less attention than other types of transnational connections, although in recent years there has been growing interest in this subject. Thus, as some authors have pointed out, there is a need for more empirical investigation and theorising of transnational political activities, to analyse their real impact at the local, national and global levels. To do that, research needs to move beyond the current focus on quantifying such practices, towards a better understanding of the "how" and the "then what" (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003b, p.779-80).

Most of the research available has tended to focus on the experiences of particular groups of US-based migrants, while little is known about the transnational practices of other migrant populations in the US or in other contexts of settlement, such as Europe. This is important to consider, because of the influence that contexts of exit and arrival (as well as other factors) have on "the production of distinct repertoires of immigrant political practices" (Landolt and

Goldring, 2006, p.26). In addition, the studies looking at Colombian migrants mentioned above have been mostly quantitative and/or focused on a limited range of formal and informal political practices. The work available has tended to ignore the transnational political activities of mostly (but not exclusively) Colombian political exiles fighting for human rights and peace in Colombia.<sup>5</sup> These activities, although quantitatively marginal, need to be analysed in the context of diasporic and transnational spaces for civil society involvement in peace building. Thus, the second part of this chapter, analyses the literature on armed conflict and peace, with an emphasis on the role of civil society. More specifically, the focus is on recent research on how diasporas and transnational communities can contribute to positive civil conflict transformation in their countries of origin. This is a very new area of research, and as such many issues remain understudied. This chapter also considers the extent to which gender aspects have been incorporated into these research areas. Thus, although there is a large amount of research on gender and migration on the one hand, and gender, armed conflict and peace on the other, there is little cross-fertilisation between these two fields. There is still an important need for incorporating the views and needs of women migrants, especially in contexts of armed conflict and peace, as well as a wider consideration of gender issues.

**Chapter 3** includes background information on the armed conflict, migration and gender in Colombia. First, it examines the current socio-economic and political situation in the country, focusing on the conflict and peace efforts, the illegal drugs trade, and the state of the economy. This sets the context for the explosion in Colombian migration and forced displacement of the last decades. Second, it details the situation of the internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the emergent wider Colombian diaspora and the migrant communities in Spain and the UK. Colombian migration abroad was traditionally directed towards neighbouring countries and the US, but more recently there has been an expansion in destinations. Spain and the UK are the two European countries with the largest Colombian populations. The origins of the community in London date back to the 1970s, but grew most rapidly during the 1980s until the mid-1990s, when immigration restrictions were imposed. By contrast, Colombian migration to Spain in large numbers is very recent, mostly from the late 1990s. However, in this short period of time Spain has become the third largest destination (after the US and Venezuela). Third, this chapter explores recent changes in gender roles and relations in Colombia, to be able to contextualise the discussions on gender and migration.

Finally, **Chapter 4** explains the methodological approach to this research. This is a qualitative study, based on almost 100 semi-structured interviews, as well as participant observation, and content analysis of websites and other documentary material. It is also a comparative study of

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5 Exceptions to this include Landolt and Goldring (2006).

two different migrant communities. This comparison allows for an exploration of the importance of issues, such as historical development of the migrant group, language, immigration policy, and others, in the experiences of migrants. As well as exploring the methodological issues behind this type of research and detailing the fieldwork carried out in Spain and the UK, Chapter 4 looks at ethical considerations and other aspects of relevance.

The second part of this thesis is devoted to the findings of the fieldwork in Spain (Madrid and Barcelona) and the UK (London), and how these relate to existing research. This part starts with an analytical summary of the contents of the subsequent three chapters. **Chapter 5** examines the migration experiences of Colombians in the UK and Spain, their reasons for migrating, choice of migrant destination and integration in the host society. It identifies similarities and differences in the experiences of migrants, depending on type of migration, country of settlement, gender, class and other factors. Such experiences have an impact on the type of transnational connections that migrants maintain with the home country. This chapter focuses on the linkages operating at the individual level between migrants and the home country, as well as between different migrant communities. These are manifested mainly through family and social contacts, and via the sending of remittances. However, they form part of an emergent transnational field of action that also includes collective and political transnational practices.

Using a qualitative approach, and a wide definition of transnational politics that includes both formal (electoral and party-related) and informal (related to wider civil society) politics, Chapters 6 and 7 show that Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain are involved in a wide array of transnational activities at the collective and political levels. **Chapter 6** analyses the general field of collective transnational engagement by looking at initiatives emerging both from 'above' and 'below' (see Chapter 2). On the one hand, it explores attempts by the Colombian government and private interests to strengthen and redirect the transnational linkages of migrants, through initiatives based mainly on the use of modern communication technologies (internet). These have focused mostly on promoting diaspora philanthropy and issues of national identity, and they have had a limited and differential impact among migrants. On the other hand, it looks at a broad range of collective transnational activities emanating from migrant civil society, which include examples of 'immigrant', philanthropic and other types of transnational political activities, as well as the role played by the ethnic media. Emphasis is placed on how these have developed differently in each host country, and the role that gender plays in collective transnational activities, in contrast to the evidence available from US studies. These activities can be understood as broadly political, since they ultimately relate to the context of conflict and socio-economic inequalities present in Colombia.

**Chapter 7** focuses on the more explicitly political transnational activities of Colombians in Spain and the UK. The first section analyses participation in formal (electoral and party-related) politics in the country of origin, in the context of the generous political rights enjoyed by Colombian migrants abroad. Although attention has been focused on the low voting rates from abroad and lack of participation in party politics, this is generally a reflection of some aspects of the wider Colombian political culture. In fact, when other, more popular types of formal political activity, such as following the news and talking about politics, are considered, Colombian migrants appear less apolitical than other studies suggest. This section also looks briefly at migrant political participation in the host country, arguing that political transnationalism often goes hand in hand with integration. The second part of Chapter 7 concentrates on 'diaspora' politics or the transnational political work of migrant (or diasporic) civil society more directly related to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia. This aspect of Colombian transnational politics has been generally ignored by other studies, mainly because their emphasis has been on labour migration rather than refugee flows. This work is analysed in the context of the divisions and polarisation affecting Colombian society in general, but also in relation to national and international efforts for peace, in order to understand better its potential and limitations. Chapter 7 also seeks to explore how these processes are gendered.

Finally, **Chapter 8** offers a summary of the findings and conclusions of this study, and how these relate to the original aims and objectives. Throughout this, the conceptual and empirical contributions of the research will be highlighted. Finally, some questions and suggestions for further research are raised, as well as policy recommendations.



## **PART I: Theory, Context and Methodology**

### **CHAPTER 2**

#### **Researching Transnational Migration and Gender in the Context of Armed Conflict and Peace**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

The theoretical and conceptual framework used in this study is multidisciplinary and draws from several research areas. This chapter starts with a review of transnational and diasporic approaches to research on international migration, and their relevance to understand current migration flows. It then explores how the study of migration and politics have been combined, especially reviewing current work on diaspora politics and migrants' transnational political practices. This section also considers how gender issues have been incorporated (or not) into this line of work. The second section attempts to link the theories and concepts analysed above with studies of armed conflict and peace by looking at the relationship between diasporas or transnational communities and conflict in the countries of origin. This is especially relevant in the context of debates on the role of civil society in peace-building. This is a new area of research, and little attempt has been made, for instance, to link the work of civil society in favour of peace in Colombia with the transnational political activities of the diaspora. In addition, despite the rich body of work that has emerged on the relationship between war, peace and gender, this has hardly been taken into account in studies of the role of diasporas and transnational communities in conflict and peace-building in the home country.

##### **STUDYING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, GENDER AND POLITICS**

###### **Transnational migration and diasporas**

###### Transnationalism and international migration

The growing salience that international migration has acquired since the end of World War II has led to a resurgence of scholarship in this field (Fouron, 2004). Traditional theories of migration have proved increasingly unable to explain satisfactorily the complexities of modern international migration flows, giving way to the emergence of new approaches (see Brettell and Hollifield, 2000; Kofman et al., 2000; Massey et al., 2005, 1998, 1996; Richmond, 1996). Transnationalism, defined basically as "a set of sustained long-distance, border crossing

connections", started affecting migration studies in the late 1980s (Vertovec, 2004, pp.1-2). The transnational approach to migration was developed to move beyond the traditional emphasis "on the process of migration *from* and migration *to* particular nation states"<sup>6</sup> to focus on how migrants "have complex relations to different locales and form new and different communities ... involving social, symbolic and material ties between homelands, destinations and relations between destinations" (Anthias, 2000, p.21-22; see also Mahler, 1999, 1998). This new way of looking at international migration did not emerge strongly until the second half of the 1990s, mainly in the context of Latin American and Caribbean labour migration to the US (Al-Ali et al., 2001; see also Basch et al., 1994; Boyle, 2002; Glick-Schiller and Fouron, 2001; Guarnizo et al., 1999; Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004; Pessar, 2001). Work later expanded to cover other labour migrations to the US, and only more recently has considered other types of migration, such as refugee flows (see Al-Ali et al., 2001; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002; Van Hear, 2002). The transnational focus on migration in the European context is also more recent (see Grillo, 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Rogers, 2000).

Since then, numerous studies have emerged examining the conformation of 'transnational communities' and the emergence of 'transnational fields of action' or 'transnational social fields' (see Basch et al., 1994; Guarnizo and Díaz, 1999). The concept of transnational communities first emerged in US-based research looking at the economic ventures of migrants as a response from 'below' to globalisation imposed from 'above' (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998).<sup>7</sup> According to Portes these communities are "characterized by dense networks across space and by an increasing number of people who lead dual lives" (1997, p.16).<sup>8</sup> The transnational social field is defined, on the other hand, as "a field of social interactions and exchanges that transcend political and geographical boundaries" (Itzigsohn et al., 1999, p.317). Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen (2004) argue that this concept is useful because it links migrants with those who stay behind, and goes beyond the binary opposition between migrant incorporation and transnationalism. However, as work on transnational migration has increased and expanded to include all sorts of "social, economic and political practices ... of migrants across different continents", criticisms have also multiplied (Al-Ali et al., 2001, p.579). This is partly because transnationalism is a relatively recent field of study, and as such it still lacks in theorisation

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6 Italics from the original.

7 Critics of this distinction have argued that transnationalism from below is not necessarily something oppositional or resistant (Anderson, 2001; Jackson et al., 2004; Mahler, 1998). However, I use it here mainly to distinguish between efforts to create and enhance transnational relations that come from outside the migrant communities, and those that emerge or are sustained by migrants.

8 In these communities, "[m]embers are at least bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political, and cultural interests that require a simultaneous presence in both" (Portes, 1997, p.16). However, the concept of transnational community has since been used in a wider sense to refer to migrant populations sustaining transnational connections with their homeland.

(Kennedy and Roudometof, 2002a; see also Yeoh et al., 2003). Portes (2001), on the other hand, thinks that some of the criticisms are based on methodological problems.

Two of the most common critiques refer to the danger of viewing transnationalism as something new, and assuming that all migrants and their practices are transnational (see Boyle, 2002; Vertovec, 2004). With regards to the first, most authors now agree that although transnationalism in itself is not new, the scale and intensity of transnational practices, especially linked to international migration, is something novel (see Boyle, 2002; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 2004, 1999). Portes (2001) adds that even if transnational migrant activities were less significant numerically than estimated, they are still important because of their potential growth and the impact on both receiving and sending communities. Some studies have sought to resolve these issues by differentiating between 'narrow' and 'broad', or 'core' and 'expanded', transnationalism (see Itzigsohn et al., 1999). Other criticisms question the false opposition between transnationalism and integration (or assimilation)<sup>9</sup> (Vertovec, 2004; see also Nagel, 2002). Some authors have also debated how much transnationalism is just a function of modern technological developments, or a phenomenon linked mostly to first generation migrants (Vertovec, 2004). There have also been calls for seeing transnationalism as a dynamic process, and the importance of disaggregating communities to see their internal tensions and pluralities (see Al-Ali et al., 2001; Mahler, 1998; Riccio, 2001). Finally, critics have pointed out the conceptual confusion present when using terms like transnationalism or diasporas (Vertovec, 2004).

#### Expanding the notion of diasporas

Recently, there has also been a resurgence of interest in the social sciences and cultural studies in the concept and study of diaspora (Blunt, 2007; Carter, 2005; see also Sökefeld, 2006). Shuval (2000) argues that this is linked to a reappraisal of ethnicity within migration studies, as well as the current theoretical discussions around transnationalism and globalisation. The origins of the notion of 'diaspora' are in the classic world and the Bible, where it was used with the idea of some kind of "forcible dispersion" (Cohen, 1996a, p.507; see also Cohen, 1997). The term was traditionally associated with a negative sense of victimhood, based mostly on the Jewish experience of dispersal, and it was subsequently applied to other groups, such as Black Africans, the Armenians, the Irish, and more recently the Palestinians (Cohen, 1996a; see also Evans Braziel and Mannur, 2003a). However, more recently the concept of diaspora has been

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9 Migrant integration is a controversial term – UNESCO's Glossary on Migration equates it with 'acculturation'. However, I use it here as defined by the IOM: "[s]uccessful integration is a two-way social, economic, cultural and political adaptation process" [<http://www.iom.int/jahia/page708.html>] [<http://www.unesco.org/shs/migration/glossary>] (30/05/07).

used to refer to a variety of new contexts that include different categories of people, including "expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities", thus in the process losing some of its negative connotations (Cohen, 1996a, p.514).

As Evans Braziel and Mannur argue, diasporas now generally refer to "displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile ... [to] one or more nation-states, territories, or countries" (2003a, p.1; see also Ponzanesi, 2002). This wider use of the concept has been criticised by 'purists', but has proved useful and popular because of the complexities of current international migration (Cohen, 1996a; see also Castles and Miller, 2003; Evans Braziel and Mannur, 2003a; Reis, 2004; Richmond, 2002; Van Hear, 1998). As a way to resolve this conflict, scholars have begun to differentiate between 'classical', 'new' and 'incipient' diasporas (Van Hear, 1998; see also Sheffer, 2003). For Van Hear, (1998) new diasporas include: populations who have been dispersed from a homeland to two or more new territories; whose presence abroad is enduring, although not necessarily permanent; and where there is some kind of exchange between or among the populations forming the diaspora. It is in this sense that I refer throughout this thesis to the Colombian diaspora. The concept of diaspora is also useful in this context because it includes different types of migrants, including political refugees, economic migrants and others (see Shuval, 2000). This is relevant because of the increased difficulty in differentiating between different types of migration, especially in the case of Colombia (see Bertrand, 1998; Black, 2003; IOM, 2005, 2003a; Nicholson, 2002; Richmond, 2002, 1996).

However, some authors have criticised these new ways of thinking about diasporas, arguing that the concept is becoming almost indistinguishable from others, such as transnationalism or globalisation. This is partly related to the divisions between different academics and disciplines. Kennedy and Roudometof (2002a) suggest that while the transnational approach to migration has been used mainly by researchers working on post-1945 migration to the US, other (mainly British) studies have preferred the term diaspora. From a disciplinary standpoint, work on diasporas has been addressed to a large extent within the fields of history and cultural or literary studies, linked to debates around identity or belonging (see Clifford, 1994; Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996; Ponzanesi, 2002). Transnationalism, on the other hand, has been looked at more from the perspective of migration studies, politics or economics. But there are also some important differences between the terms. For Evans Braziel and Mannur, while "diaspora refers specifically to the movement – forced or voluntary – of people from one or more nation-states to another", transnationalism is a larger phenomenon, linked to globalisation, which also refers to "the movements of information through cybernetics, as well as the traffic in goods, products, and capital across geopolitical terrains" (2003a, p.8; see also Shuval, 2000). Thus, the term

transnational migration, or transnational (migrant) communities. has been used in a wider sense than traditional meanings of diaspora (see Kennedy and Roudometof, 2002a; Van Hear, 1998). For Van Hear, transnational community "is a more inclusive notion, which embraces diaspora, but also populations that are contiguous rather than scattered and may straddle just one border" (1998, p.6: see also Dahlman, 2004; Lie, 1995). In this study, I use the term transnational to refer to the multiple connections between the Colombian migrant communities studied and the homeland (and within the larger diaspora), especially at the political level.

## **The political practices of diasporas and transnational communities**

### Diasporas and the politics of the homeland

Since the 1970s, there has been increased recognition of the failure of assimilationist models and the importance of ethnic identities for migrants (Shuval, 2000). Even before the advent of transnational studies, diaspora theory had focused attention on the relationships between migrant groups, homelands and host societies. The emphasis had been on cultural and social interactions, but more recently there has been "a strong trend towards politicization of the relationships" (*ibid*, p.46). Although it has long been recognised that immigrants, ethnic minorities, alien residents and other people living outside their homeland retain political allegiances with the latter, this has become of key interest lately given recent global security threats (see Artola, 2005; Chishti, 2002; IOM, 2003a; Nadig, 2003; Sheffer, 2003, 1986).

Recent work on diaspora politics has looked at how the links between displaced populations and their original homelands are challenging traditional concepts of the nation-state, citizenship and borders, as well as the impact of this on international politics. Some studies have focused on identity issues among diasporas, both at the political and cultural levels (see Carter, 2005; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1996a; Evans Braziel and Mannur, 2003; Lavie and Swedengurg, 1996; Nuhoglu Soysal, 2000; Ponzanesi, 2002). This debate is partly linked to the concept of 'long-distance nationalism' as developed by Anderson (1998; see also Zlatko, 1999). A lot of work has also emerged on the influence that well-established and organised diasporas can have on the foreign policy of their host countries, especially focused on those settled in Western countries (mainly the US) (see Moore, 2002 and Saideman, 2002 for a general discussion; Ambrosio, 2002 and Shain, 1999, 1994-95 on the US; Ögelman et al., 2002 for a US-European comparison).<sup>10</sup> Some of the US studies have considered this issue with respect to the Latino population, and especially Cuban-Americans (see Jones-Correa, 2002; Molyneux, 1999;

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<sup>10</sup> Less work has been done on the European case. Some exceptions are Nuhoglu Soysal (2000) and Smith (1999).

Ögelman et al., 2002; Reis, 2004).<sup>11</sup> More recently, in common with studies of transnational migration, there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of diasporas in the politics of the homeland, especially at times of conflict, and more widely on development issues.

### The transnational political practices of migrants

As studies of immigrant communities have also moved away from traditional theories of incorporation and acculturation towards the recognition that migrants "do not delink themselves from their home country; instead, they keep and nourish their linkages to their place of origin", there has been increasing work considering this (Itzigsohn et al., 1999, p.317). Initially, the focus was mainly on economic and individual social exchanges (see, for instance, Guarnizo, 2003b; Itzigsohn et al., 1999; Landolt, 2001; Landolt et al., 1999; Portes et al., 2002). In particular, economic remittances have attracted most attention, especially with regard to their impact on development in the societies of origin, and the recent debate on 'co-development' (see Carling, 2005; Datta et al., 2007; de Haas, 2006; Escrivá and Ribas, 2004; Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004; Maimbo and Ratha, 2005; World Bank, 2006).<sup>12</sup> This is very relevant for Latin America and the Caribbean, since the region received the second-largest amount of migrant remittances in 2006 (\$68 billion), after Asia (\$114 billion).<sup>13</sup> Although discussions have revolved mainly around the economic value of these, some authors have expanded the debate to include other types of remittances and their wider impacts (see Goldring, 2004). Levitt (1998) developed the concept of 'social remittances' to refer to the diffusion of ideas, values, and social practices in general to migrant-sending countries. Goldring also includes technical or technological remittances, which refer to the "knowledge, skills and technology" that returning migrants bring with them; and political remittances, which she associates with "changes in political identities, demands and practices associated with migration" (2004, p.805). Remittances in general can have not only economic and social effects, but also political since they play a key role not only in sustaining families but also local and national economies.<sup>14</sup>

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11 Shain defines Cuban-Americans as one of the diaspora groups "most effective at advocating their priorities in the U.S. political system", along with Armenian-Americans and Jewish-Americans (2002a, p.116).

12 The concept of co-development emerged in Europe, first to link development in the North with that in the South, and later associated with international migration: "Co-development is based on the key idea that people who migrate from the least developed countries to the most prosperous ones can contribute actively to the development of both their communities of origin and their societies of settlement, at the economic, social, and cultural levels. Co-development believes then that migration can be an opportunity for development, and more specifically, for a shared development, as the term itself suggests" [<http://www.codesarrollo-cideal.org/codesarrollo.php>] (15/06/07).

13 Figures taken from a recent report quoted in the web site of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) [<http://www.iadb.org/NEWS/articledetail.cfm?Language=En&parid=2&artType=PR&artid=4077>] (23/10/07). See the IDB website for other reports on remittances to Latin America.

14 For more on this, see Goldring's (2004) sophisticated typology of remittances. She also highlights that remittances are "multi-directional" and "multi-polar" (ibid, p.805; see also Goldring, 2003).

Therefore, as research on transnational migration has expanded, there has been growing recognition that transnational social fields encompass not only economic exchanges, but also political and symbolic links (Itzigshohn et al., 1999). As a result, more attention has been focused lately on the transnational political activities of migrants (see Smith, 2003). Currently, the issue of migrants' political participation in host societies (mainly in the Global North) has received renewed attention, partly linked to the debate on migration and security, and also related to issues of citizenship and voting rights.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, some studies have moved beyond the focus on the political integration of migrants in the host society, to also examine their political participation in the societies of origin and the impact this is having on both origin and settlement (and at the international level). This has been done from both the individual and state levels, and less so from the meso-level (institutionalised or collective), considering immigrant organisations (in this study I consider the three levels) (Landolt and Goldring, 2006). Thus, some research has analysed the formal political participation of migrants in their home countries, and how this is contributing to a redefinition of the concepts of nation-state, nationalism and citizenship. The latter has received special attention in recent debates, often around the issues of the 'deterritorialisation' of citizenship or the concept of 'denizens' (see Al-Ali et al., 2001; Bauböck, 2003; Boyle, 2002; Faist, 2000a; Folke Frederiksen and Nyberg Sørensen, 2002; Kemp et al., 2000; Mohan, 2006; Parra, 2006; Smith, 2003; Vertovec, 1999, 2004; Yeoh and Willis, 2004; and special issue of *Environment and Planning A*, 2006).

Researchers have grown increasingly interested in the political rights that nations are affording their nationals abroad, especially around the issue of voting (see Calderón Chelius, 2003 for a comparative exercise involving 17 countries, mostly from Latin America). Quite a lot of the research on the transnational political activities of migrants has focused on the experiences of Latin Americans in the US, looking at involvement in home country politics at the national, regional and local levels. Guarnizo et al. (2003), for instance, carried out a comparative study of transnational political action among Dominicans, Colombians and Salvadorans, in which they concluded that political transnationalism<sup>16</sup> was less significant than previously thought and warned against generalising examples of migrant transnational politics to every community. In the case of Colombian migrants, they were seen as having very little transnational political participation, which was blamed on the divisions affecting migrant communities, as well as the

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15 This has been discussed mainly within the framework of the 'political opportunity structure' developed for the study of social movements, and later applied to ethnic migrants' mobilisation (see Peró, 2007; and special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(3), 2004).

16 Bauböck points out that political transnationalism covers a wider range of phenomena than the activities of migrants oriented towards the home countries, "it also affects collective identities and conceptions of citizenship among the native populations in both receiving and sending societies" (2003, p.700).

apolitical nature of Colombians in general, a consequence of the political context in the home country (*ibid*; see also Guarnizo et al., 1999; Guarnizo and Díaz, 1999; Guarnizo, 2003a&b; Guarnizo, 2006b). However, the results of these studies have relied on specific definitions of transnational politics. Being such a new field of study, there is a debate about what constitutes transnational political practices, how prevalent and significant they are, and their impact.

Although the emphasis tends to be on formal, mostly electoral-related politics, migrants' transnational politics can encompass participation in a wide variety of other activities, such as "rallies against injustices in the country of origin or demonstrations to defend it, or engagement in hometown associations"<sup>17</sup> projects in the region of origin" (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003b, p.761; see also Martínez Saldaña, 2003). As well as including formal/conventional and informal/unconventional politics (related to wider civil society activity), Østergaard-Nielsen argues that these activities can refer to "direct cross-border participation in the politics of their country of origin by both migrants and refugees ... as well as their indirect participation via the political institutions of the host country (or international organizations)" (*ibid*, p.762). Further, she distinguishes between five main types of migrant transnational politics (allowing for overlapping): homeland politics, which refers to "activities pertaining to the domestic or foreign policy of the homeland"; diaspora politics, which in its wider sense, is "usually about political disputes over sensitive issues such as national sovereignty and security"; immigrant politics, or "the political activities that migrants or refugees undertake to better their situation in the receiving country"; emigrant politics, when "migrants work towards the institutionalization of their transnational status as residents abroad who are economically, socially and politically engaged in their country of origin"; and translocal politics, or "initiatives from abroad to better the situation in local communities of origin" (*ibid*, p.762-63). She argues that even in the case of immigrant politics, these practices can be considered transnational when they also involve the country of origin (see also Mejía, 2006; Moraes Mena, 2006). In this study, I consider both formal and informal transnational politics, using Østergaard-Nielsen's (2003b) typology.

## **Gender and the politics of diasporas and transnational communities**

### Gender in diaspora and transnational migration studies

Early literature on migration theory and empirical studies of international migration tended to

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17 Itzigsohn et al, in the context of US-based Dominican transnationalism, talk about these as the most common form of civil society transnational organisation, defining them as "associations created by people from a certain town or region that gather to socialize and to help their town or village" (1999, p.331). For other studies of Latin American hometown associations in the US, see Alarcón (2002), Bada (2007), Landolt et al (1999), Orozco (2004), Popkin (1994).



ignore gender (see Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Chant and Radcliffe, 1992).<sup>18</sup> However, increased awareness about the participation of women in international migration, together with growing interest in the social sciences on women and gender, led to the emergence of a focus on gender and migration in the 1980s (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; see also Boyle, 2002; Pessar, 1999; Phizacklea, 1983; Zlotnik, 2003).<sup>19</sup> While the emphasis in earlier work was on making women 'visible', as research expanded studies began to focus on "how gender as a social system contextualises migration processes for all immigrants" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999, p.566; see also Buijs, 1993; Donato et al., 2006; Willis and Yeoh, 2000). The debate has focused mainly on whether migration leads to greater emancipation for women, or increases their vulnerability. Earlier discussions tended to emphasise the gains migrant women made (mainly through greater access to paid work and contact with new cultures), or the increased oppression they sometimes suffered, based on their gender, class and migrant status (see Buijs, 1993; Morokvasic, 1984; Phizacklea, 1983). However, more recent work has argued that "migration simultaneously reinforces and challenges patriarchy in its multiple forms" (Pessar, 1999, p.577; see also Menjivar, 1999; Ponzanesi, 2002). To explain this contradiction, research started to move away from an exclusive focus on gender to consider other, interrelated factors, such as class, race and ethnicity, as well as other aspects of the migration experience (see Menjivar, 1999; Parrado and Flippen, 2005; Pessar, 1999; Tacoli, 1999; Tollefsen Altamirano, 1997; for specific analysis in the context of Europe, see Anthias and Lazardis, 2000 and Kofman et al., 2000).

Despite such advances, Mahler and Pessar argue that most research still does not consider gender "as a key constitutive element of migrations" (2006; see also Donato et al., 2006). This is even truer within research on gender and transnational migration (see Mahler 1999, 1998; Mahler and Pessar, 2006; Pessar, 2001; Pessar and Graham, 2001; Pessar and Mahler, 2003). Mahler and Pessar argue that initially, in the transnational approach to migration "gender was featured much less prominently than other socially stratifying forces such as race, ethnicity, and nation" (2006, p.42; see also Anderson, 2001). However, scholarship in this field has gradually started to see gender as a key area of inquiry, and to investigate "the degree to which participation in transnational activities and in transnational social fields in general is gendered" (Mahler, 1998, p.83). Most of this work has focused on labour migration to the US, especially from Latin America and the Caribbean. However, as research has expanded it has also

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18 Gender is used as opposed to sex "to draw attention to the social roles and interactions between women and men, rather than to their biological differences ... [It] also denotes the social meanings of male and female, and what different societies regard as normal and appropriate behaviour, attitudes, and attributes for women and men" (Pankhurst, 2004, p.26; see also Lammers, 1999). However, there is some debate about whether it is possible to differentiate between sex and gender (see Baden and Goetz, 1997; Blunt and Wills, 2000; McDowell, 1999).

19 The growing feminisation of international labour migration flows to the North has been in large part related to the globalisation of domestic and sexual work (see Anderson, 2000; Castles and Miller, 2003; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Oso Casas and Garson, 2005; Sharpe, 2001).

encompassed other experiences (see, for instance, Huang and Yeoh 1996, Ryan 2002, and Yeoh and Willis 2004, for an Asian perspective; Morokvasic et al., 2003, for recent work on Europe).

The critical question remains whether transnational migration and activities "change gender relations, and, if so, in what direction(s)?" (Mahler and Pessar, 2006, p.42). The general indication seems to be that men are more involved in maintaining transnational linkages with their countries and communities of origin, in an attempt to protect their social status and privileges, often being in charge of transnational initiatives, such as hometown associations. Women, on the other hand, are either seen as participating in such initiatives, but from a marginal position, or more involved in activities oriented towards their new place of settlement (see Jones-Correa, 1998; Goldring, 2001). The exception would be the role played by migrant women in the sending of remittances or the maintenance of family links, especially through 'transnational motherhood' (see Ho 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000). However, these conclusions are based on studies researching a limited range of transnational activities, and have not considered the role of women and gender issues, for instance, in the experiences of highly skilled migrants or elites (see Kofman and Raghuram, 2006; Willis and Yeoh, 2002; Yeoh and Willis, 2005). More recently, there has also been research on how masculinities are affected by transnational migration (see Charsley, 2005). A similar evolution and debate has been seen within research on gender and forced migration and diaspora studies, which often criss-crosses with studies of transnational migration, given the connections between them (see Menjívar, 1999; Mahler and Pessar, 2006; Pessar, 2001).<sup>20</sup>

### Gender, politics and migration

Analyses of gender are even rarer within work on the politics of diaspora groups and transnational communities. This could be due to two main factors: the recent emergence of such a field of study, and the traditional exclusion of women and gender from the study of politics more generally. Traditionally, women and politics were defined "as mutually exclusive" (Randall, 1987, p.ix). Since then, the study of gender and politics has come a long way, both in feminist literature and mainstream political science. However, as some authors have pointed out, feminism has been less successful in challenging male-dominated politics, both at the theory and practical levels, than in other areas (Craske, 2003, see also Elshtain, 1993; Hawkesworth, 2005; Phillips, 1998, 1991; Randall and Waylen, 1998). This is especially so in the realm of formal (electoral and party-related) politics. Nevertheless, the greater involvement and visibility of women in social movements and civil society initiatives has helped to widen

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<sup>20</sup> For more specific work on diaspora and gender, see Clifford (1994), Evans Braziel and Mannur (2003), Virinder et al. (2005). For a review of research on gender and forced migration, see Bermúdez Torres (2003a, 2002).

traditional definitions of politics and favour "the inclusion of women and gender as basic analytical categories" (Sotltz Chinchilla, 1993, p.38). This has been especially so in the case of Latin America, where this type of politics acquired new prominence during the 1970s-1990s, with women playing a key role, as a result of economic crises, military dictatorships, human rights abuses and general political exclusion (see Abbassi and Lutjens, 2002a; Alvarez et al., 1998; Chant with Craske, 2003; Craske, 1999; Eckstein, 1989; Fisher, 1993; Jelin, 1994; Lavrin, 1993). More recently, there has also been increased interest and scholarship on gender analyses of formal politics, focusing, for example, on issues of nation-building and nationalism, sex-ratios in political participation and representation, or the general relationship between the state and gender (see for instance, Randall and Waylen, 1998, and the range of articles published by *Politics and Gender* during 2005-2007).

Nevertheless, in their cross-disciplinary review of scholarship on gender and migration, Donato et al. (2006) single out Political Science (and Psychology) as one of the disciplines most deficient in this respect. Piper argues that there has been research on some political aspects of "gendered migration processes", but there is still a lot to be explored (2006, p.134). It was not until relatively recent that work started to look at the political incorporation of new migrant groups (especially in the US), mainly examining rates of naturalisation and voter registration and turn out, with gender increasingly becoming part of the analysis (*ibid*). As studies have expanded to consider non-electoral political participation among migrants, mostly from a qualitative point of view (thus, moving away from the general emphasis on quantitative research in Political Science), the focus on gender has increased. Thus, for example, studies of Latino politics in the US brought to the fore the politicisation of Latina women, and the different ways in which women engage in politics, both at the formal and informal levels (*ibid*; see also García Bedoya, 2005; Hardy-Fanta, 1993; and special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(3), 2004, for research on the European context).

Some of the work on transnational migrant political organising and participation has also begun to include some gender analysis. Jones-Correa's (1998) study of Latino migrants in New York and their involvement in the politics of both the countries of origin and residence argued that women tended to focus on the latter, while men, due to their greater loss of social position and status through migration, dominated the former. This claim has been backed up by other research, with the general conclusion being that "[m]en appear to be more committed to the maintenance of public and institutionalized transnational ties than are women, while women appear more committed to participating in the life of the receiving country" (Itzigshohn and Giourguli-Saucedo, 2005, p.896). Goldring, in her research on migration between Zacatecas and California, also argued "that men find a privileged arena of action in transmigrant

organizations and Mexican state-mediated transnational social spaces, which become spaces for practicing forms of citizenship that enhance their social and gender status", while "[w]omen are excluded from active citizenship in this arena, but often practice substantive social citizenship in the United States" (2001, p.501; see also Mahler, 1999; Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Willis and Yeoh, 2002). However, Gammage (2004), in a study of transnational migration from Haiti, argued that migrant women have contributed significantly to the economy and politics of the country of origin, at the same time benefiting women and women's organisations there.

As some authors point out, there is a need for more empirical investigation and theorising of transnational political activities, and especially so with regard to gender analysis. Piper (2006) argues that despite some advancements, most studies of transnational communities and diasporas have treated these as monolithic phenomena, not properly accounting for their heterogeneity along class, ethnic or gender lines. She claims that there is a need for a better understanding of the different roles that men and women play in diasporic initiatives and migrant's associations. Although research on Latin American hometown associations in the US have argued that these tend to be male-dominated, there have been few studies looking at these differences in the context of other types of transnational migrant organisations, such as professional or philanthropic ones, where women may play a more prominent role (*ibid*). By contrast, Piper points out that gender has received greater attention in more general studies of transnational political activism, for instance, in the context of labour and women workers. This point links up with recent literature on 'trans/national' feminism (in the context of Latin America, see Abbassi and Lutjens, 2002 [introduction to part III]; Molyneux, 2001). Nevertheless, more work remains to be done in this area, for instance, exploring the relationship between refugee migrations, conflict and war, and gender, from an interdisciplinary point of view (Donato et al., 2006). This is especially relevant, given the increased academic and policy interest on the role of diasporas and transnational communities in conflict transformation.

## **DIASPORAS, TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: A GENDERED ANALYSIS**

### **Linking studies of armed conflict, peace and migration**

#### Contemporary armed conflict and peace studies

The nature of wars has changed significantly since the end of the World War II, and especially in the post-Cold War period, coinciding with the rise in international migration flows. Scholars in war and conflict studies have documented a large shift from inter-state wars to internal armed

conflicts (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999). Only three out of 82 conflicts between 1989-1992 were inter-state, while in 2002 out of 21 major armed conflicts only one was inter-state (*ibid*; SIPRI, 2003). Some authors have begun to refer to these conflicts as 'new wars' or 'complex political emergencies' (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999; see also Fisas, 2004). However, Pankhurst (2004) argues that the substitution of the word 'war' for 'conflict' to encompass the complexity of today's violent world has led to some conceptual confusion. She makes the point that research often fails to distinguish between "a *conflict of interest*" and "the *violent expression of conflict*" (*ibid*, p.10).<sup>21</sup> The former is part of normal social interactions, and can have a positive dimension (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999). However, when conflict is not or cannot be peacefully resolved, it can lead to violence and armed conflict or warfare (Moser and Clark, 2001a). Fisas (2004, p.14) defines armed conflicts as "any confrontation by groups, including regular and irregular military forces, opposition armed groups, paramilitary groups, and ethnic or religious groups, which through the use of arms or any other destructive means cause more than a hundred victims a year through intentional activities".<sup>22</sup> He distinguishes between these and 'situations of tension' or non-resolved conflicts, which can ultimately escalate into armed conflicts.<sup>23</sup> It is in this sense that I refer throughout this thesis to the armed conflict in Colombia, acknowledging that this is a highly contested definition (people variously describe the situation in Colombia as a war, a conflict, or a problem of terrorism).

Many of these internal conflicts have been raging for a long time, have complex causes, use low-tech weaponry, occur in the Global South and disproportionately affect civilians, both as direct victims and through forced displacement (see tables in Fisas, 2004, pp. 20 and 27-28; Goodhand and Hulme, 1999; Jacobson et al., 2000; Pankhurst, 2004). Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that such "national/civil conflicts are not only internal but transnational in nature, insofar as they take place within a particular international context", and the same can be said of their solution (El Jack, 2003, p.9; see also Fisas, 2004; Kaldor and Luckham, 2001). As war and conflicts have become more complex, so the search for negotiated solutions and peaceful outcomes has developed. Fisas (2004) dates the origins of the study of conflict resolution<sup>24</sup> and peace back to the 1930s. By the 1950s, following the end of the two world wars and the increasing concern about nuclear weapons and the beginnings of the Cold War, peace

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21 Italics in the original.

22 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

23 The Canadian Red Cross (n.d.) distinguishes between international and non-international (within a single country) armed conflicts, both of which are considered wars in international law. SIPRI classifies them under three main categories: inter-state conflicts, internal conflicts and state formation conflicts (2003; see also Unwin 2002). Other authors classify them according to whether they are seen as ethnic, social or civil struggles (Pankhurst, 2004). However, the complexity of today's wars makes such typologies sometimes hard to sustain on the ground.

24 Conflict resolution is a field of study within peace research, as well as being a generic term defined variously but developed mainly as a further step from conflict management and settlement in international relations (Fetherston, 2000).

studies began to consolidate as an academic discipline. As the discipline continued to evolve, different theories, perspectives, paradigms and methodologies developed with emphasis on different ways of treating a conflict (see Fisas, 2004). According to Incore (International Conflict Research), throughout the 1990s "peace processes have become the orthodox way in which low intensity, seemingly intractable, ethnic conflicts reached an accommodation...[with a] clear trend towards internally agreed initiatives, rather than externally imposed settlements".<sup>25</sup> A study examining the decade from 1989 to 1999 determined that out of 75 armed conflicts, 22 ended in a victory/defeat, 21 in a peace agreement and 32 in other situations, such as a ceasefire, new negotiations or another type of stalemate (Fisas, 2004). Using more recent data, the *Escola de Cultura de Pau*, followed 42 peace negotiation processes in 2006 (including the ones with the ELN and the FARC in Colombia - Ecp, 2007). Despite the trend towards domestic solutions, international participation in peace processes continues to be important. According to SIPRI, there were 52 multilateral peace missions in operation in 2003.

#### The role of civil society: from the local to the transnational scale

Within peace and conflict resolution studies, there is also a growing emphasis on the role of *diplomacia ciudadana* (citizen diplomacy) in such processes. This is a relatively recent term and refers basically to the role that civil society can play in situations of armed conflict (Herbolzheimer Flamtermesky, 2004). The concept of civil society is a contested one, with definitions ranging from the most encompassing to other more limited ones. In general, it tends to refer to all of the voluntary organisations that are distinct from the state, family and market, but have some form of social power, such as registered charities, NGOs, trade unions, social movements, religious organisations and community groups (see Alvarez et al, 1998; McIlwaine, 2007b; UNDP, 2003). However, sometimes political parties, the mass media or private business are included in this definition, since "the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated".<sup>26</sup> Some authors also distinguish between formal civil society, which includes mainly NGOs, and the informal side, which would refer to social movements, community and other grassroot organisations (McIlwaine, 2007b). Kaldor (2003) points out that although its origins can be traced back to Aristotle, civil society is a modern concept, and one that was rediscovered or revived in the context of the transitions to democracy in Latin America and Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. The concept gained prominence again in the 1990s, as part of the implementation of the neoliberal agenda and opposition to it (see Alvarez et al., 1998; McIlwaine, 2007b). In the case of Colombia, the role of civil society has been analysed mainly in the context of the armed conflict and peace-building

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25 See [<http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/services/cds/agreements/>] (14/01/06).

26 London School of Economics' Centre for Civil Society  
[[http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what\\_is\\_civil\\_society.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm)] (10/11/06).

efforts (see Archila et al., 2002; Herbolzheimer Flamtermesky, 2004; UNDP, 2003; special edition of *ReVista*, 2(3), 2003).

More recently, conceptualisations of civil society have also evolved from locally and nationally bounded notions, to incorporate new spatial scales, such as the global or transnational, as well as the concept of 'diasporic civil society' (McIlwaine, 2007b; see also Kaldor, 2003). The concept of global society emerged in response to the growing internationalisation of social movements, networks and NGOs, and their struggles against poverty and inequality and in favour of human rights, the environment or gender equality (see Grewal, 2005; Burgerman, 1998). Despite the initial euphoria about its spread and potential, this concept has been criticised, partly in a similar line to the notion of civil society, and also because of its conceptualisation of the global, with some authors preferring the term 'transnational civil society' to reflect the wide range of "international and transnational movements that vary according to function, scale and political purpose" (McIlwaine, 2007b, p.15). Thus, Vertovec (1999, p.454) talks about the emergence of "a transnational framework – a global public space or forum", where with the help of technology politics is undertaken at the transnational level, with the potential that this could have for civil society. However, little work has considered how migrant and 'diasporic' civil society is part of this.<sup>27</sup> The interest here has been mainly in the potential of migrant communities for development in the home country, with research focusing mostly on the role of hometown associations, especially among Latin American migrants in the US (see above). Although some studies have begun to look at the role of global or transnational society in the context of war and peace, few have considered how diasporas contribute to this (see Kaldor, 2006, 1999).

#### Diasporas, transnational communities and conflict transformation

There is a long history of migrant economic and political involvement in civil wars and nation-building conflicts in the home country. This has been analysed mostly within scholarship in diaspora politics, and only more recently from the point of view of migrant political transnationalism. Traditionally, work on diaspora politics has looked, for instance, at the role of 'governments in exile' (see Shain, 1991). There has also been a long debate over whether cross-border political ties and activism play a positive or negative role. However, this has intensified lately in response to an increasing recognition of the political importance of diasporas (see Vertovec, 2006b). In line with recent work on transnational politics, this has focused mostly on the political role that diasporas play in homeland conflicts (directly, or through influencing the

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27 The term diasporic civil society was coined to reflect the growth of migrant associations that are "locally rooted, yet transnational in reach" (McIlwaine, 2007b, p.16).

foreign policy of host states, and at the international level), and on the potential of diasporas for development in their countries of origin (see also above).<sup>28</sup> This is linked partly to the fact that some authors have begun to move beyond the identification of transnational migration mainly with labour migrants, to incorporate "how refugee groups are also developing transnational linkages" (Al-Ali et al., 2001, p.579; see also Koser, 2002; Van Hear, 2002; Wahlbeck, 1998).<sup>29</sup>

In their study of Bosnian and Eritrean refugees in Europe, Al-Ali et al. saw evidence of transnational political, economic, social and cultural activities, and also 'capabilities', "which encompass the willingness and ability of migrant groups to engage in activities that transcend national borders", both at the individual and institutional levels (2001, p.581). These can be directly focused on the country of origin, or more indirectly, on work done in the country of settlement or at the international level. However, their conclusion was that these two groups did not "provide clear examples of 'transnational communities', but rather of incipient or emerging transnationalism" (Al-Ali et al., 2001, p.594; see also Black et al, 1998-2000). Differences were found between the two groups and within each, due to different historical contexts, including conditions in origin and settlement countries, and to the fact that "emerging transnational activities and social fields are dynamic and fluid" (*ibid*; see also Wahlbeck, 1998, on the transnational networks of Kurdish refugees in Finland and Britain; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003a&b, in her analysis of transnational political practices, includes both migrants and refugees). Van Hear has also highlighted the fact that refugee communities send remittances home, although the data on these is scant (2003; see also Koser and Van Hear, 2003). Such remittances can have both beneficial and negative impacts, especially in the case of societies in conflict (Van Hear, 2003). Horst (2002a), in her research among Somali refugees in Kenyan camps, pointed out the importance that remittances had for the survival of some of the refugees, but also mentioned the problem of dependency. Van Hear (2003) also discusses the unevenness in the distribution of such remittances, or how they can provide funding for warring parties.<sup>30</sup>

Recent research has begun to focus more specifically on the political and economic impact that refugees, and wider transnational communities and diaspora populations, can have on societies experiencing armed conflict or recovering from it (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Greenhill, 2002; Koser and Van Hear, 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003a&b; Shain, 2002a&b; Zunzer, 2004). The work by Al-Ali et al. (2001), for instance, is part of a wider research project on the contribution of

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28 There has been increasing interest on the issue of diaspora contributions to development, both at academic and policy levels, not only on economic remittances, but more generally around the debate on turning the "brain drain" into "brain gain" (see Asian Development Bank/UN Population Division, 2004; de Haas, 2006; Mohan and Zack-Williams, 2002; Poirine, 2006; Van Hear and Vertovec, 2004).

29 Wahlbeck (1998) has criticised how refugee studies have hardly engaged with scholarship on diasporas and transnational migration, despite the benefits of linking both fields.

30 Diasporas can fuel conflict at home in other ways as well (see Hockenos, 2003; Shain, 2002a).



transnational exile communities to post-conflict reconstruction (see Black et al, 1998-2000). This is a very new area of research, and the results of the few empirical studies carried out offer only tentative conclusions. The case of the Eritrean diaspora has been used as a key example, given its active role in the achievement of Eritrean independence and the development of this country (see Al-Ali et al., 2001; Bernal, 2006; Black et al., 1998-2000; Koser, 2003). By contrast, the contribution of Bosnian refugees to peace and reconstruction in the home country has been found to be less clear, although still important (Al-Ali et al., 2001). Faist (2000b), looking at the Kurds in Germany, also saw clear signs of political transnational activity among activists and supporters of the different political organisations, linking them not only to their homeland but also to other Kurdish communities throughout Europe. He also draws attention to the differences and tensions present in such transnational work, and within the larger Kurdish minority in Germany. Such tensions had to do both with the political project of such groups vis-à-vis the homeland, but also with their position regarding adaptation to the host country (*ibid*).

Despite these differences, Zunzer (2004), in his comparative study of diaspora communities from Sri Lanka, Cyprus, Somalia and Afghanistan in Western Europe, highlights the positive potential role of these in conflict transformation in their homelands. This, he argues, is due to: their more neutral position gained by being removed from the conflict; the expertise and experiences gained living in another society; and their potential for lobbying the international community, as well as to offer support to those working for the same ends in the home country. I would also add the fact that many of those who leave the society in conflict are highly educated and held important positions in government or the private sector, and therefore have high levels of human capital. Other authors have even advocated such a role as "a distinct third level between interstate and domestic peacemaking" (Shain, 2002a, p.115; see also Shain, 2002b).

However, the case of Colombia has not received much attention, partly because this is a very new diaspora, and also because of the complexity of its internal conflict. This is despite the many international ramifications of the armed conflict and search for peace in this country. These include the role played by the US, the diplomatic work of the guerrillas, and the involvement of different European countries in peace efforts, as well as the migration of many Colombians and the activities of exiles in favour of human rights and peace.<sup>31</sup>

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31 There has been some research on this from the point of view of other Latin American countries. See Popkin's (1999) study of Guatemalans in the US; Landolt and Goldring (2006) on Chileans and Colombians in Canada.

## Gender in contexts of armed conflict and peace-building

### Gender, armed conflict and peace

As feminist ideas began to penetrate disciplines such as politics, and as the movement for the recognition of women's rights as human rights and awareness of the effects of wars on women grew, interest on the subject of gender, armed conflict and peace expanded. This is also related to changes in the nature of war and conflict (see above). With the emergence of the so-called new wars, there has been a growing blurring of categories such as 'home' and 'front', 'conflict' and 'safe' zones or combatants and civilians (El Jack, 2003; Kaldor and Luckham, 2001). Nowadays civilians account for 75%-90% of war casualties, compared with 90% military casualties at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and many of them are women (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999; Panos Institute, 1995; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002; Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001). Moreover, as Skjelsbaek and Smith point out, civilian victims are no longer just part of 'collateral damage', but in many cases are deliberate targets of violence (2001a; see also Mertus, 2000). Despite this, until relatively recently gender was rarely considered as a significant factor in studies of war and armed conflict (Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001, p.1; see also Goodhand and Hulme, 1999).<sup>32</sup>

Although feminist scholarship on war has a long tradition, it did not began to grow significantly until the late 1980s (see for instance, Bell and Narayanaswamy, 2003; El Jack, 2003, Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). As with much of the work on gender within the social sciences, initially this work focused mostly on making women visible in contexts of armed conflict and peace building (see for instance, Gardam and Jarvis, 2001). Traditionally, studies of armed conflict and war relegated women "to the status of environmental factors affecting - or not affecting - conflicts among men" (Tétrault, 1994a, p.11; see also Moser and Clark, 2001a ). When women were considered at all, they were seen as victims, 'Spartan mothers' (women who send their husbands and/or sons to war eagerly) or the 'Ferocious Few' (female fighters) (see Elshtain, 1995). The earlier work looking at women and armed conflict tended to replicate such traditional dichotomies by seeing men as the perpetrators of violence and women as the victims.<sup>33</sup> For instance, most of the policy-based literature on this topic that has emerged since the 1980s has focused on detailing the effects of war on women and girls, which they criticised were previously overlooked.<sup>34</sup> Despite the contributions of this type of work, this approach has also

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32 Goldstein (2001), in a review of scholarship on this found that most studies ignored or hardly touched on issues of gender, and when they talked about gender they referred to women almost exclusively.

33 This is associated to the argument that "the use of violence – inter-personal, state-sanctioned and insurgent – remains a primarily masculine preserve" (Kelly, 2000, p.46).

34 Effects can range from their deliberate killing, exposure to gender-based violence, forced displacement, widowhood and the disappearance of relatives to their vulnerability vis-à-vis health

been criticised for not taking into account women's different roles in armed conflict, not only as 'victims', but also as 'perpetrators' and 'actors' (Moser and Clark, 2001). Later research has focused on this, as well as moving beyond the woman-only approach to consider all the relationships between gender, war and peace (see Jacobson, 1999).<sup>35</sup> Some studies, for instance, have argued that conflict and refugee situations can also offer opportunities for changes in gender roles and relations that can benefit women (similar to what has happened in migration and gender) (see El-Bushra, 2004, 2000a&b; Cockburn, 2001). Men, on the other hand, can suffer more the direct effects of violence, and can often find it difficult to regain their position and status in situations of armed conflict (see Brun, 2000; El-Bushra, 2000b; Hague, 1997; Turner, 2000, 1999; Turshen, 2001; Zarkov, 2001). However, other studies have cautioned about such generalisations, arguing that these effects can vary in different contexts (see Bermúdez Torres, 2002; El-Bushra, 2004; Jacobson, 1999).

Feminism has played a greater role in peace studies, given traditional associations of women with peace (Goldstein, 2001; see also Hammond Callaghan, 2002; Kelly, 2000). Several explanations have been put forward to justify this association. The most influential has been the maternalist/essentialist position, which believes that women's common experiences as mothers or their different socialization gives them certain characteristics conducive to being peacemakers. Women are seen as more 'relational', caring and cooperative, while men are seen as more autonomous, competitive and aggressive (Salla, 2001; see also Goldstein, 2001; Roach Pierson, 1987; Skjelsbaek, 2001; Smith, 2001). Although not all feminists agree with this, some argue that at least "the ideals of femininity and motherhood can be rehabilitated to serve peace, and that women's peace movements today do so better than in the past" (Goldstein, 2001, pp.48-49). It is undeniable that there is a long history of women's peace activism (see Beckwith, 2002; Kätzel, 2001; Notz, 2001; Sharoni, 2001). Women, and women's groups are often a key element of civil society efforts for peace. Despite this, their effectiveness and influence, or their participation in formal peace settings, has been limited. In the last few decades there has been increasing interest in involving women officially in peace processes as well as studying their gender implications (see Muna and Watson, 2001; UN, 2002). Some work has examined how women are vulnerable to gender-based violence during peace processes and in post-conflict settings, or how they can be discriminated in return and resettlement policies (see Cohen, 2000; and on the reintegration of female soldiers, Barth 2002; Ibañez 2001). As a result, there is

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needs (see Bermúdez Torres, 2002; Cockburn, 2001; El Jack, 2003; *Forced Migration Review*, 2004; Gardam and Jarvis, 2001; Goldstein, 2001; ICRC, 2001; Kelly, 2000; Kumar, 2001; McIlwaine, 2002; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2003; Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001; Stiglmayer, 1994; Turshen, 2001; UN, 2002; Ward, 2002).

35 For Goldstein "Causality runs both ways between war and gender. Gender roles adapt individuals for war roles, and war roles provide the context within which individuals are socialized into gender roles" (2001, p.6; see also Kampwirth, 2002; Moser and Clark, 2001; Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001).

increasing emphasis on the need to empower women through peace processes. However, these attempts have been very uneven, and gender considerations in general continue to be sidelined in peace-making and peace-building (see Carey 2001; Pankhurst, 2004; and special issue of ACCORD's magazine on *Conflict Trends*, 2003). So far, the evidence seems to show that even in those situations where women are actively involved in conflict and post-conflict settings, the final impact on gender conditions and inequalities is quite limited (see Hammond Callaghan, 2002; Luciak, 2001). This has serious implications for the maintenance of peace, and the creation of more democratic societies.

### Gender and diasporic involvement in armed conflict and peace

Looking more specifically at the contributions of diasporas/exiled groups to politics and peace-building in their countries of origin, Koser and Van Hear (2003) argue that gender equality within the diasporic population is an important factor in increasing capabilities to participate in reconstruction (see also Al-Ali et al, 2001). Nevertheless, they do not explain the implications of this in detail. In general, there has been little consideration of the role played by gender in these contexts. This is despite the fact that notions of gender have been shown to play a crucial role in processes of nation-building and nationalism, especially where these are associated with conflict (see Nagel, 1998; and de Alwis 2002, on Sri Lanka). Exceptions to this would be some studies that have looked at the differential impact of exile on men's and women's political commitments.<sup>36</sup> For instance, some of the scholarship on the Latin American exile movement of the 1960s-1980s has focused on the experiences of women, and more widely on gender issues. Zabaleta (2003), a Chilean exile herself, has reflected on how during her stay first in Argentina and later in the UK, she was treated differently from her husband by solidarity groups and other organisations, and how she lost her professional identity and status to be reduced to just being a 'wife' (see also Kay, 1989). Lammers points out that some studies have also shown "how gender roles were not transformed in exile, but rather exacerbated with an increasing disadvantage for women as compared to men" (1999, p.38). By contrast, de Britto (2002) argues that exile in Europe contributed to the development of a positive feminist identity among Brazilian women (see also Ormes Quizar, 1998 on Salvadoran refugee women in Costa Rica). In her study of Chilean refugees in Scotland, Kay (1989) also saw differences in the way that exile had impacted on women, depending on class position and whether they had been 'public-private' or 'private' women (see also Eastmond, 1993, on Chileans in the US; and Al-Ali et al.,

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36 Traditionally, the figure of the political refugee seeking asylum in the West tended to be equated with men, with women seen as dependents (or more broadly as part of the civilian population displaced by war). For more on women refugees and gender analysis of forced migration, see (Afkhami, 1998; Agger, 1992; Camino and Krufeld, 1994; Forbes Martin, 2004; Indra, 1999; Kay, 1989; López Zarzoza, 1998; RWRP, 2003; Spijkerboer, 2000; Wright and Oñate, 1998).

2001, Matsuoka and Sorenson, 1999 on exiled Eritreans). But beyond this, no studies have analysed men and women's participation in diasporic involvement in armed conflict and peace at home, and the wider gendered nature of this.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This chapter focused first on recent approaches to the study of international migration, including research on transnational migration and diasporas. This served as the framework to analyse the emergence of a Colombian diaspora and its transnational connections. Research on the relatively new field of transnational migration has focused mostly on the economic or social links that migrants retain with their origins, with politics receiving less attention until quite recently. This type of work has now incorporated a gender perspective, but this approach is still developing. Meanwhile, diaspora studies have analysed the political and cultural activities of diasporic groups in connection with their homeland, but looking mainly at traditional cases of governments in exile or ethnic groups without a homeland, and have hardly taken gender into consideration. On the other hand, within the growing academic and policy-based interest in societies involved in violent conflict, emphasis has been placed on the role that different groups can play in the search and achievement of lasting peace, with a special interest lately on how these processes are gendered. However, rarely have these different strands of literature come together in a piece of research. This is what this thesis aims to do in order to understand better the relationship between the situation of armed conflict and peace-building in Colombia, the recent mass migration of Colombians abroad, the role that Colombian exiles could play in transforming the conflict in Colombia, and the gendered nature and implications of this.

## CHAPTER 3

### ARMED CONFLICT, MIGRATION AND GENDER IN COLOMBIA<sup>37</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

Colombia has been involved in a guerrilla struggle for more than 40 years, and currently has one of the highest levels of violence in the world. In addition, although previously seen as a model of economic stability in the region, the economic situation has been deteriorating since the 1990s. As a result, the country has very high rates of internal and external migration and forced displacement. While internal displacement has been studied in more detail, there has been less research on Colombian migration abroad. The main aim of this chapter is to offer background information on the emergence of a Colombian diaspora, to set the context for the analysis in the next section of the experiences of Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain and their gendered political transnational relations. The chapter starts with a short history of the current socio-economic and political conditions in Colombia, placing emphasis on the situation of armed conflict and search for peace. Secondly, it explores the migration and forced displacement of Colombians, focusing on the two migrant communities studied. Finally, the chapter outlines the relationship between gender and politics in Colombia, since understanding gender relations in the country of origin is key for analysing changes through migration (Mahler, 1999).

#### THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

##### The origins of guerrilla warfare

Colombia has one of the longest histories of civilian democratic rule and stable economic growth in Latin America. At the same time, the country is associated with high levels of political and other types of violence. The 20<sup>th</sup> century in Colombia came in the middle of the War of the Thousand Days (1899-1902), the last of the 19<sup>th</sup> century civil wars between the two main political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives. This was followed by a period of relative peace and stability, which was broken by the eruption of *La Violencia* (The Violence). This refers to the period from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, when inter-party warfare and conflicts over land left 80,000-300,000 people dead (Coatsworth, 2003; Palacios, 1995). It was as a result of this violence that the military took power briefly in Colombia for the first and only time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under General Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957). Although partisan fighting

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37 This section draws on previous research, updated and adapted for the purposes of this thesis (Bermúdez Torres, 2003a).

declined dramatically with the establishment of the National Front (1958-1978), a political pact that divided power between Liberals and Conservatives, by the mid-1970s violence began to escalate again.<sup>38</sup>

### Box 3.1: Main left-wing guerrilla groups in Colombia

FARC - Formally born in 1964, it is the oldest and largest of the rebel groups. It started as a defensive organisation, mainly operating in rural frontier areas. After a failed peace process in the mid-1980s, the FARC continued to gain in strength. By the end of the 1990s, it had established itself as a strong military force throughout most of Colombia, and had some 15,000 combatants. Its funds come mainly from kidnappings, a 'war tax' and the drugs trade. The FARC went back to full fighting mode following the collapse of new peace talks in 2002.

ELN – It first appeared in 1965 in the department of Santander, although its origins date back to *La Violencia* and the Cuban revolution. Having being almost wiped out by the army in 1973, the ELN is now the second largest guerrilla group in Colombia. It has around 8,000 combatants operating in the Middle Magdalena, Bolívar, Nariño, Cauca, Valle, and the border with Venezuela. The ELN is currently in exploratory peace talks with the government.

EPL - The EPL is a Maoist group that appeared in 1967 in Córdoba department. Most members accepted an amnesty in 1991 and formed a political party (*Esperanza, Paz y Libertad* - Hope, Peace and Liberty). However, a small faction still operates in some areas of the country.

M-19 – As part of the so-called second generation guerrilla movements, the M-19 was founded in 1973 following what was widely perceived as the fraudulent victory of the National Front candidate in the 1970 presidential elections. It became the first guerrilla group in Colombia with a mainly urban base. Although the M-19 enjoyed quite a lot of popular support at the beginning, its fortunes declined following the disastrous 1985 attack on the Palace of Justice. It demobilised in 1990 to form a political party (*AD-19*).

Other smaller guerrilla groups that have now disappeared include the Quintín Lame, of indigenous extraction, and the PRT (Revolutionary Workers' Party - *Partido Revolucionario de Los Trabajadores*).

Source: Bermúdez Torres (2003a), Pearce (1990) (see also Moser and McIlwaine, 2004, pp.206-207).<sup>39</sup>

The 1960s-1970s saw the birth of several left-wing guerrillas, influenced by the Cuban revolution, *La Violencia* and the student movement (Villarraga and Plazas, 1995) – the most significant being the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the ELN (National Liberation Army), the EPL (Popular Liberation Army) and the M-19 (19 April Movement) (see Box 3.1). These groups fought against a closed political system and socio-economic inequalities, especially in rural areas where control over land was one of the major conflicts fuelling social unrest.<sup>40</sup> Initially, the official response was mainly one of repression and human rights abuses, although by the early 1980s the elite began to favour a peaceful solution

38 For more on the history of Colombia and the origins of political violence see: Bergquist et al. (1992), Bushnell (1993), Deas and Gaitán Daza (1995), Fals Borda (1969), Guzmán Campos et al. (1977), Oquist (1980), Palacios (1995), Pécaut (2001), Sánchez and Peñaranda (1986).

39 For a deeper insight into some of these groups and the peace efforts that led to demobilisation, see Behar (1985).

40 See *El Tiempo* (13/09/03) on land conflicts in Colombia; Archila et al. (2002) on social unrest.

(Bushnell, 1993; Chernick, 1988-89; Deas, 1986; Palacios, 1995; Pearce, 1990). However, the emergence of the illegal drugs trade as a powerful and violent force in the 1980s, together with the spread of right-wing paramilitary groups, further complicated the scene. As the war between guerrillas, the drug cartels, paramilitary groups and the state deteriorated, killings, kidnappings, disappearances, forced displacement and other human rights abuses escalated.<sup>41</sup>

### **The drugs trade, paramilitary violence and economic deterioration**

Colombia has a strong tradition of an underground economy based on illegal activities, including the smuggling of diverse items. Some of these, such as the illicit trade in gold and emeralds, have also long been associated with violence, and are connected with the emergence later of the drugs mafia (Pearce, 1990). The origins of the illegal drugs industry in Colombia go back to the 1970s and the so-called marijuana boom. As eradication efforts intensified and the export of marijuana became less lucrative, the industry began to switch towards cocaine (*ibid*). Soon, Colombia became the world's largest supplier of cocaine. At the beginning, the country was only responsible for processing and exporting, mainly to the US and Europe. However, by the 1990s, Colombia surpassed Bolivia and Peru as the largest grower of coca (Loughna, 2002). By 2000, some 126,000 hectares were grown in the country, and around 900 tonnes of cocaine were exported to the US, which brought back an estimated 1.5 billion dollars in earnings (Valencia, 2002, p.203). The growth of this illegal industry has permeated the economic, political and social life in Colombia, contributing to increased violence and corruption. Attempts to extradite drug criminals to the US led to the drug cartels declaring war against the state by the mid-1980s and the killing of hundreds of state employees, politicians and others. In addition, the drugs trade has become one of the main sources of funding for both the guerrillas and paramilitaries, thus contributing to the intensification of the conflict (see Valencia, 2002).

Throughout the 1980s, right-wing paramilitary groups began to spread throughout the most conflictive areas of the country, and soon became the main arm of the drug barons, landowners and the security forces against the left-wing guerrillas, peasants, trade unions, community leaders and other political activists. Although their roots date back to the *autodefensas campesinas* (peasant self-defence groups) of *La Violencia*, the origins of the current paramilitary phenomenon go back to the 1980s and the infamous Castaño brothers. By 1987, the government recognised the existence of some 140 paramilitary groups operating nationally or regionally. Their links with the security forces and drug traffickers became evident during investigations of massacres, extrajudicial killings and disappearances. In 1997, some

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<sup>41</sup> For an overview of human rights abuses during this period see: Avilés (2001); Bergquist et al (2001); Shifter (1999). See also reports of national and international human rights organisations.



paramilitary groups came together under the AUC (United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia - *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*), led by the Castaño brothers, which inflicted some serious defeats against the guerrillas in certain areas of the country (Loughna, 2002). Paramilitary groups are considered responsible for most of the human rights abuses in Colombia. Despite its alleged links with the security forces, the AUC has evolved into a more autonomous group with its own political aspirations, as evidenced in the recent peace process.<sup>42</sup>

The 1990s also saw an upsurge of urban 'social cleansing' campaigns by death squads, paid *sicarios* and popular militias, against the *desechables* (the disposable), which included street children, prostitutes, drug addicts and others. As a result of all this, as well as the rise in other types of criminal activities, Colombia became engulfed by multiple, interconnected violences (see McIlwaine, 1999; Moser, 2001; Moser and McIlwaine, 2004; Pécaut, 1999). The homicide rate grew from 57 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 95 in 1993 (Coatsworth, 2003, p.6). Although rates have fallen since, Colombia remains one of the most violent countries in the world.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the economy, for long an example of stability and growth, fell into recession by the end of the 1990s, mainly as a result of neoliberal reforms and the worsening conflict.<sup>44</sup> The effects have included increased unemployment and a deteriorating social situation (see Table 3.1). Although the economic crisis served to rally support for a peaceful end to the armed conflict, social conditions contributed to further violence and complicated the prospects for peace (Valencia, 2002; see also Bergquist et al., 2001; Garay, 2003; Latin American Program Special Report, 2004; Ocampo and Parra, 2003).<sup>45</sup>

**Table 3.1: Annual GDP growth rates and urban unemployment in Colombia (%)**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
GDP	5.2	2.1	3.4	0.6	-4.2	2.9	1.4	1.6	3.7	4.0	4.5
Un-employment	8.8	11.2	12.4	15.3	19.4	17.2	18.2	17.6	16.7	15.4	13.9

Source: GDP figures are from the IDB database

[[http://www.iadb.org/countries/indicators.cfm?language=English&id\\_country=CO&pLanguage=ENGLISH&pCountry=CO&parid=8#](http://www.iadb.org/countries/indicators.cfm?language=English&id_country=CO&pLanguage=ENGLISH&pCountry=CO&parid=8#)] except for 2005, which is an estimate from *Semana* magazine (Reina, 2005) [<http://semana.terra.com.co/opencms/opencms/Semana/articulo.html?id=91931>]. Data on unemployment reflects the average annual urban unemployment (the figure for 2005 is an estimate) as reported by CEPAL [<http://websie.eclac.cl/sisgen/Consulta.asp>] (10/01/06).

42 For further information on paramilitaries see Medina Gallego (1990), Medina Gallego and Tellez Ardilla (1994), Valencia (2002).

43 The total number of homicides in Colombia fell from a peak of 28,534 in 2002 to 17,331 in 2005, but the homicide rate remains one of the highest in the world (UNODC, n.d.).

44 A study by a former minister argues that the human costs of the violence represented around 5% of GNP, while the material costs were estimated at 6.4% of GNP (Valencia, 2002, p.149).

45 As measured by the Gini coefficient, Colombia is the third, most unequal country in Latin America, after Brazil and Paraguay (Hernández, 2006).

## A history of failed peace processes

The history of political violence in Colombia is also a story about failed peace processes, with some successes.<sup>46</sup> Following on from some timid efforts by the previous administration, president Betancur (1982-1986) initiated an ambitious programme of socio-economic and political reforms that included negotiations with the guerrillas. By 1984, a cease-fire agreement was reached with the main guerrilla groups, and the following year the FARC launched its own political party (Patriotic Union/*Unión Patriótica*, UP).<sup>47</sup> However, amidst continuing violence, and declining confidence in the negotiations, hopes for an end to the armed conflict evaporated by the end of 1985 following the M-19 attack on the Palace of Justice (see Carrigan, 1993). During the next administration of president Barco (1986-1990), the government confronted a growing crisis of legitimacy and an unprecedented outburst of violence(s). By the end of the decade, the situation had deteriorated so much that many thought the country was heading towards a military coup or civil war. However, 1989-1990 saw the demobilisation of the M-19 and the reincorporation into civilian politics of the guerrillas under a new political party (AD-19). They were later joined by part of the EPL. In the early 1990s, the Gaviria administration (1990-1994) launched a broad agenda of political and legal reforms that culminated in the 1991 Constitution. This was designed to open up the political system and implement other socio-economic reforms that would lead to peace. However, although piecemeal negotiations with the guerrillas continued, only sectors of the EPL and ELN, and smaller groups, abandoned the armed struggle. By the mid-1990s, the FARC reached its peak in military successes, to become a more credible threat to the political survival of the country (Valencia, 2002, p.113). As a result of this, clamours for peace rose again.

The mobilisation of Colombian civil society in favour of peace started in the early 1990s and reached its peak in 1997, when 10 million people voted in favour of a negotiated solution to the conflict (Cockburn, 2005; Valencia, 2002; see also CIP-FUHEM, 2003; Fernández et al., 2004; Informe Trocaire, n.d.; McDonald, 1997; *ReVista*, II(3); Valenzuela, 2001). At the time, the Samper administration (1994-1998) was too weak to make use of this clamour for peace. However, in 1999, the Pastrana government (1998-2002) initiated peace talks with the FARC in a 'demilitarised zone' in the south of the country (see Loughna, 2002; Valencia 2002). Initially, the peace process had widespread support from parties, civil society, business and even sectors of the military, as well as the international community. However, once again talks began to

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46 For a history of peace accords in Colombia see Medina and Sánchez (2003), Archila Neira (2002).

47 Thousands of UP members, leaders and supporters, including two presidential candidates, have been killed, disappeared or forced into exile, in what some describe as political genocide (Cepeda Castro and Girón Ortiz, 2005; Dudley, 2004. See also the website [<http://www.desaparecidos.org/colombia/fmcepeda/genocidio-up>] (15/12/05).

unravel in the midst of suspicions, misunderstandings and other problems, and support for the process dwindled. The negotiations with the FARC ended in February 2002, while attempts to start separate talks with the ELN also failed. This provided a boost to those who argued for the military defeat of the guerrillas, or at least their weakening vis-à-vis the state, which led to the first electoral victory of President Uribe (2002-2006) (see Valencia, 2002). Under Uribe, the emphasis has been on strengthening the military and combating the guerrillas to improve security. His supporters claim that this has produced some successes, while his detractors have criticised the 'democratic security policy' as undermining constitutional guarantees and human rights, and as an obstacle to peace. There has also been increasing concern about growing US involvement in the conflict. Under 'Plan Colombia', the country is now one of the largest recipients of US aid. Although most of this aid is earmarked for the fight against drugs, critics point out that the blurring of boundaries makes it almost impossible to separate this from the anti-insurgency efforts. In addition, the post-September 11 climate has hardened Washington's view of the armed conflict in Colombia (Valencia, 2002).<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, the Uribe administration's peace deal with the paramilitaries has polarised national and international opinion even further.<sup>49</sup> In 2005, the government approved the *Ley de Justicia y Paz* (law of justice and peace), which regulates the demobilisation of paramilitaries and reparation for the victims of their crimes. Although this has been heralded as a government success, two main issues remain heavily contested. One is the right of former paramilitaries to participate directly in politics, and the other is that the current process is seen as offering little to the victims, "since it does not guarantee either truth, justice or reparation", while some argue that it will not end the paramilitary phenomenon (see *Amnistía Internacional*, 12/09/05; Calderón, 2005; *Fundación Ideas para la Paz*, 2005; *Semana* No.1236, 2005). At the same time, there is the fact that many paramilitaries remain active through criminal gangs. Meanwhile, in 2006, the government became involved in preliminary peace talks with the ELN, at the same time that is trying to negotiate a humanitarian agreement with the FARC for the release of hostages retained by the rebels (see Romero, 2004). These efforts have continued after the re-election of Uribe for a second presidential term (2006-2010).

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48 For information on US policy towards Colombia, and especially on the drugs issue, see: Bland (2002), Fajardo (2003), Loughna (2002), Mondragón (2001), Tokatlian (2001). See also: [<http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/colombia/doc/plan>] (23/07/07).

49 For more on this see The Latin America Working Group Education Fund (2003), ICG (2003, 2004), and recent reports by human rights organizations.

## COLOMBIAN MIGRATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

### IDPs, asylum-seekers and refugees

Colombia has one of the highest rates of forced migration in the world, mainly as the result of the armed conflict. Forced displacement is not new to Colombia – an estimated 2 million people were uprooted by *La Violencia* (Loughna, 2002). However, this problem has been increasing rapidly since the mid-1990s (IOM, 2003a).<sup>50</sup> Currently, those displaced by the conflict in Colombia "make up the largest single population of concern to UNHCR anywhere in the world" and represent "the Western Hemisphere's biggest humanitarian tragedy".<sup>51</sup> Most of those forced to flee become IDPs, although the number of refugees crossing borders is also growing. The UNHCR states that Colombia now accounts for the single largest internally displaced population for which it shares responsibility, followed by Sudan, Irak and Uganda (UNHCR, 2007a, p.14). The estimated total number of IDPs varies depending on the source, but there could be 2-3 million people (*ibid*; see also IDMC, 2007; UNHCR, 2006).<sup>52</sup>

The causes of internal displacement today are numerous, complex and often interrelated, but they usually involve violations in human rights and international humanitarian law by the armed actors in the conflict. Although in the 1980s most IDPs were fleeing fighting between guerrillas and the army, subsequently the paramilitaries have played a larger role in forced displacement (IOM 2003a). Prior to 1996, most IDPs fled as individuals or families, but there has been a marked increase in the displacement of entire villages or towns. The vast majority end up settling in the shanty towns of medium-sized and large cities (Loughna, 2002; IOM, 2003a). A large proportion of the IDP population are women and children - 73% women and children, and 49-58% women (up to 80% in urban areas).<sup>53</sup> Ethnic minorities have also suffered disproportionately; they represent between 24% and 40% of the displaced depending on sources (IOM, 2003a).<sup>54</sup> The problems generated by internal displacement are arguably contributing to the volatile social situation in the country and to the "fragmentation of Colombian society" (Ruíz, 2002, p.1).<sup>55</sup>

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50 See CODHES: [[http://www.codhes.org/cifra/GraficoTendencias1985\\_2005.jpg](http://www.codhes.org/cifra/GraficoTendencias1985_2005.jpg)] (11/01/06).

51 See: [<http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS:4590e1674.html>] (18/09/07).

52 The IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Norwegian Refugee Council) in its latest report actually puts this figure at 1,853,000-3,833,000 (2007, p.6).

53 See: [[http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/\(httpEnvelopes\)/608D29667CAD745C802570B8005A708E?OpenDocument](http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/(httpEnvelopes)/608D29667CAD745C802570B8005A708E?OpenDocument)] (11/01/06).

54 In Colombia there are some 80 different indigenous groups, accounting for 1-2 % of the total population. In addition, Afro-Colombians represents around 26% of the total population. For more on this see "Etnias de Colombia" ([<http://www.etniasdecolombia.org/>] (05/07/04); see also Wade, 2002, 1993a).

55 For recent work on IDPs in Colombia see Fagen et al. (2003), Osorio Pérez (1997), Pécaut (2000),

As well as internal displacement, in recent years there have been heavy refugee flows within the region (mainly to neighbouring countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama), as well as to the US, Canada, Australia and Europe (see Table 3.2). Although most Colombians are assumed to migrate abroad for economic reasons, in a recent survey of Colombians in the US, a majority (76%) said they had migrated because of the violence, while only 24% cited economic motives (IOM, 2003a, p.193).<sup>56</sup> The UNHCR (2007a) estimates that there are some 500,000 Colombians in need of international protection residing in neighbouring countries. The U.S. Committee for Refugees (2007), on the other hand, rates Colombia as the 6<sup>th</sup> principal source country of 'refugees', with 453,000 at the end of 2006. However, only a small proportion of Colombians abroad request asylum, and even fewer are recognised as Convention-refugees (Gottwald, 2003). The number of asylum applications made by Colombians in industrialised countries almost doubled between 2000 (7,434) and 2001 (12,852), and remained stable into 2002 (12,444) to decline markedly until 2005 (5,368), only to increase again in 2006 (6,142) (Bermúdez Torres, 2003b; UNHCR, 2005a p.10; UNHCR, 2007c, p.12).

**Table 3.2: Main countries receiving applications for asylum by Colombians (2004)**

Country	Number of applications
Ecuador	7,626
Canada	3,664
US	3,215
Venezuela	2,242
Costa Rica	1,171
Spain	760
Panama	328
Chile	182
Netherlands	170
UK	140
Peru	120
France	103

Source: UNHCR (2005b, p48).

### **The broader Colombian diaspora**

Colombia is now a major country of emigration in the region (IOM, 2003a). This is manifested in the growing importance of remittances, which are now the second largest earner of foreign exchange (see González Muñoz, 2003; IDB, 2004; IOM, 2006a). In 2006, the country received an estimated 4.6 billion dollars in remittances (accounting for 3.25% of GDP and 17.22% of

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Segura Escobar (2000). There is also a large grey literature on the subject, most of it available on the internet (see, for instance, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 1999).

56 Pellegrino (2004, p.42): "Colombia is a good illustration of the effects of social and political violence on emigration. Whether in terms of internal displacement or migration across borders, violence is one of the explanatory elements that cannot be ignored when attempting to understand the preponderant place that Colombia occupies as a country of emigration in Latin America".

total exports), the third main recipient in Latin America (after Mexico and Brazil).<sup>57</sup> Although migration (both internal and external) has long been a feature of Colombia, what is new about the current phenomenon is "its very fast development, the diversity of the regional origin and social background of the migrants, and the plurality of migration routes and destination countries in the last few years" (Guarnizo, 2003a, pp.29-30; see also López-López, 2003).<sup>58</sup> Colombian emigration was traditionally directed towards Venezuela (since the 1930s) and the US (since the 1950s) (Pearce, 1990). However, rates have been increasing since the 1960s and 1970s, while destinations now include other neighbouring countries, as well as within the region, Western Europe and Canada. According to Pearce (1990), those Colombians who left the country mainly for economic reasons did so to escape unemployment or to improve social mobility. She suggests that some 5 million Colombians emigrated between the early 1970s and 1990. A further 1.2 million Colombians are estimated to have emigrated in the five years to 2002 (Ruíz, 2002). Rates of emigration accelerated massively from the mid-1990s into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Data from the country's main airports indicate that around 500,000 Colombians emigrated between 1996 and 2000 (mostly to the US [353,055] and Europe [114,292]). According to the results of the May 2005-May 2006 census, 3.3 million Colombians currently live abroad (out of a total population of around 45 million).<sup>59</sup> However, other estimates put this figure at 4-5 million (or one in ten of the national population) (*Semana*, 30/11/03; see also *Conexión Colombia/Colombia en Cifras/Migraciones*).<sup>60</sup>

An article by *Semana* in 2003 (30/11) divided Colombian migration abroad in three stages. First, at the beginning of the 1960s, as part of the US immigration quotas, there was an inflow of highly educated and professional migrants to the US. At the same time, Colombians were migrating en masse to Venezuela due to labour demand caused by the oil boom. During the 1960s-1980s, Europe was only a destination for the elite, as well as political refugees, intellectuals, artists and students. In the 1970s, as the UK government authorised the arrival of non-skilled migrants to work in services, between 4,000-10,000 Colombians, most of them women, arrived as temporary workers. Finally, from the end of the 1980s-beginning of the 1990s, as the economic and political situation in Colombia deteriorated, a third wave of emigration starts to the US, Canada, Europe and Central America. Since there is a longer history of Colombian migration to the US than Europe, the scant literature available tends to refer to the former rather than the latter (see Castro Caycedo, 1989; Collier, 2004; Collier and Gamarra, 2001; Guarnizo et al., 1999; Pérez-Brennan, 2003; Pineda, 2003). Nevertheless, a

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57 See IDB:

[<http://www.iadb.org/NEWS/articledetail.cfm?Language=En&parid=2&artType=PR&artid=3692>] and Remittances.eu [<http://www.remittances.eu/content/view/42/133/>] (24/09/07).

58 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

59 See: [<http://www.dane.gov.co/censo/>] (24/09/07).

60 Some experts believe this figure could be as high as 8 million (personal discussions, Barcelona, 2005).

recent study highlights the long history of population movements between Latin America and Europe (Pellegrino, 2004). Up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the movement of people tended to be from Europe (especially southern Europe) to Latin America, but by the 1980s and 1990s these flows were more than reversed (*ibid*). The presence of Latin Americans in Europe dates back to the Independence era, and has been growing rapidly since the mid-1960s, and especially following the political and economic circumstances in Latin America from the 1970s (*ibid*). Murillo Perdomo (1989) estimated the number of Latin Americans in Europe at the end of the 1980s at over 1 million. However, data for this population group is scarce, and comparisons among countries are sometimes difficult (Pellegrino, 2004). Despite this, it is clear that in the last two decades Western Europe has become a major destination for Latin Americans, including Colombians. Spain and the UK account for the largest Colombian communities in Europe, with significant numbers also in Italy, France, Germany and Belgium.<sup>61</sup>

### The Colombian community in the UK

Information about Latin Americans in the UK is scarce, partly because of the lack of strong historical links<sup>62</sup>, and also because this migration flow is relatively new and small. Moreover, the study of migration in Britain has often been approached from an ethnic relations point of view, focusing on the Asian and black communities, although recently there has been growing emphasis on 'new migrant communities' (see IPPR, 2007; Vertovec, 2006a). Nevertheless, the Latin American presence in the UK goes back to the pre-Independence years, and has grown ever since (see Decho and Diamond, 1998). According to Pizarro (1983), in the wake of the arrival of political refugees from Chile and Argentina to the UK in the mid-1970s, a larger number of Latin American migrants began to arrive in search of employment or escaping the political situation in their countries. Many came through the work permit system, usually to work in domestic service and the catering industry. Later, as visa programmes and refugee policies became increasingly strict, there was growing 'irregular' migration.<sup>63</sup> Holligan (1991) estimated the number of Latin Americans in London at the beginning of the 1990s at 80,000, with most being Colombian. However, more recently Brazilians have become the largest group,

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61 According to official data, 96% of Colombians living abroad are distributed among 10 countries, with Venezuela top of the list, followed by the US, Spain, the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Panama, Mexico and Brazil. In addition, 90% of migrant remittances come from four countries (around two-thirds from the US, 10% from Spain, 6.5% from the UK and 4.5% from Italy) (Guarnizo, 2006c, p.98-99).

62 Although there are no colonial ties between Latin America and the UK, historically there have been some links at the financial, political or intellectual level (see Bulmer-Thomas, 1989).

63 The terms 'irregular', 'illegal', 'undocumented' and 'unauthorised' migration are often used interchangeably, although they all have their shortcomings and criticisms. 'Irregular' migration is singled out as a better choice in a recent IPPR report because it includes all "people who are liable to be deported for issues related to immigration status" but avoids the association with criminality that terms like 'illegal' have (2006, pp.5-6). The term 'undocumented' can also be useful when referring to the lack of specific legal documents (an entry visa, or work permit). I only use the label 'illegal' when used directly by the migrants themselves.

followed by Colombians, and with growing numbers of migrants also coming from Peru and Ecuador.<sup>64</sup> At the beginning, they were a highly invisible community, and mainly unorganised because of its dispersion, the large numbers of irregular migrants and the type of jobs they performed (Hirst, 1988). Recent studies suggest that Latin Americans are currently one of the fastest-growing migrant communities in the UK, but despite gaining in visibility they remain largely marginal (see Buchuck, 2006; Carlisle, 2006; McIlwaine, 2007a; Peró, 2007).

Guarnizo (2006b) argues that England, and London in particular, have always occupied a special place for the Colombian upper classes, attracting political leaders, young professionals and students. These linkages were later widened to include all sectors of the Colombian population, especially from the 1970s. Today, estimates of the total number of Colombians in the UK range from 50,000-200,000, and a large number could be in an irregular migrant situation (see Guarnizo, 2006b; Lagnado, 2004; McIlwaine, 2005, 2007a).<sup>65</sup> According to Open Channels (2000), there are roughly three stages in the migration of Colombians to the UK: 1975-1979, when many came under the work permit system to work in low-skilled positions; 1980-1986, during which an increasing number of Colombians came to the UK despite the end of the work permit system as migration networks became established (many overstayed their visas); and 1986-1997, which saw an upsurge in the number of asylum-seekers. Although the arrival of Colombian refugees in the UK dates back to the 1970s, numbers increased significantly during the 1980s and 1990s as the armed conflict intensified (Open Channels, 2000; Pearce, 1990). The number of Colombian asylum seekers entering the UK peaked in 1997 and subsequently declined following the introduction of new visa requirements, only to increase again at the end of the 1990s as the human rights situation in Colombia deteriorated further, only to fall again from 2000 (see Table 3.3).<sup>66</sup> In addition to these three large groups, there is also a significant number of Colombian students and professionals in the UK.

**Table 3.3: Asylum applications in the UK by Colombians (excluding dependents)**

	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06
Applications	380	405	525	1,005	1,330	425	1,000	505	360	440	220	120	70	60

Source: Home Office [<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html>] (16/09/07).

64 Data from the 2001 census suggests there were over 76,000 people from South America in Britain (BBC Born Abroad Project). However, other estimates are of 700,000-1 million (Buchuck, 2006).

65 A recent study estimated that the Colombian population in the UK was 30,000-50,000 (Open Channels, 2000). However, according to the former Colombian consul in London, there could be over 100,000 Colombians living in the UK, while McIlwaine (2005) mentions that other estimates are of up to 200,000. Guarnizo (2006b) believes the real number would be between 50,000-70,000.

66 The rate of acceptance of asylum applications from Colombians in the UK is quite small, although asylum-seekers can sometimes spend years in the UK until their status is finally resolved (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003b; McIlwaine, 2005; The Refugee Council, 1997).



Most Colombians, and Latin Americans in general, have settled in or around London, although following the introduction of new rules for asylum-seekers increasing numbers have been dispersed throughout the country (Bermúdez Torres, 2003b). Within London, they tend to concentrate in the boroughs of Lambeth, Islington, Southwark and Camden (Open Channels, 2000). As the Colombian community in London has increased in size, it has also grown in heterogeneity.<sup>67</sup> The majority of migrants have an urban, working- or middle-class background, coming from Bogotá and other large and medium-size cities in the Valle del Cauca, Eje Cafetero and Antioquia, although some have rural origins. There is also a significant proportion of upper-middle class professionals and students, who do not mix much with the wider community. Most migrants have relatively high levels of formal education. Despite this, a large majority work in low-skilled activities, such as domestic and industrial cleaning, and in catering or retail (see Lagnado, 2004; McIlwaine, 2005). A high percentage are also self-employed, while a small number work in skilled professions. Suggestions are that there are more women than men, with the female ratio being 53.5%-58.7% depending on the source. This, according to Guarnizo (2006b), coincides with the male-female ratio of Colombian migrants in the US, and contrasts with the higher feminisation of flows to other European countries, such as Spain and Italy.<sup>68</sup> Regarding the age structure of this population, the majority of Colombians in London are between the ages of 20 and 50, with most being 30-40 years old, and thus in the productive age bracket. The studies available suggest that most Colombians migrate to the UK for socio-economic reasons, with a small minority escaping political violence. However, other research has highlighted the interrelationships between the two types of migration, and the relevance of violence and insecurity as explanatory factors (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a; McIlwaine, 2005).

### Colombian migration to Spain

In terms of its migration history, Spain occupies a very different place in Europe compared with the UK. Long seen as a "reservoir of migrant labour", since approximately the mid-1970s Southern Europe has gradually changed to become a region of immigration (Montanari and Cortese, 1993, p.275).<sup>69</sup> In the case of Spain, migration flows turned positive from around the mid-1980s, a situation that accelerated during the 1990s and the beginnings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to both pull and push factors (Esteban, 2004; see also Blanco Fernández de Valderrama, 1993; Corkill, 2001; Mediterráneo Económico, 2002). Thus, the number of foreign residents in

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67 The information that follows is taken mainly from Guarnizo (2006b) and Open Channels (2000).

68 There is a growing literature on the feminisation of South-to-North migration flows, mainly emphasising the gender effects of neo-liberal and development policies in the South, and the demand for domestic and unskilled workers in the North.

69 There is ample literature on this subject. See, for instance: Collinson (1994), King (1993b).

Spain grew from 165,289 in 1975 to 407,647 in 1990 and 1,647,011 in 2003 (Esteban, 2004). The composition of migration flows has also changed significantly. While at the beginning of the 1980s most migrants into Spain came from other Western European countries, today a majority come from Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

In recent years Spain has become the main migration destination for Latin Americans in Europe (Pellegrino, 2004). At the beginning of the 1990s, most Latin Americans migrating to Spain came from Argentina, followed by Peru, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic (Esteban, 2004). However, since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these flows have been dominated by migrants from Ecuador and Colombia (*ibid*). Throughout the 1990s, the number of Colombians entering Spain grew very slowly, but since 2000 the community doubled in size almost every year and by 2003 Colombians were the third-largest migrant group in Spain, after Moroccans and Ecuadorians (Pellegrino, 2004; IOM/UN, 2003). This means that it is a very recent migrant community. The total number of Colombians living in Spain is hard to estimate, since a large proportion of this population could be 'undocumented' (IOM/UN, 2003). The latest data from the *Padrón Municipal*<sup>70</sup> (as of January 2007) put the number of Colombians resident in Spain at 288,753 (164,730 women and 124,023 men), but unofficial figures suggest the real size of the community could be around 500,000 since many Colombians failed to benefit from the latest 'regularisation' process.<sup>71</sup>

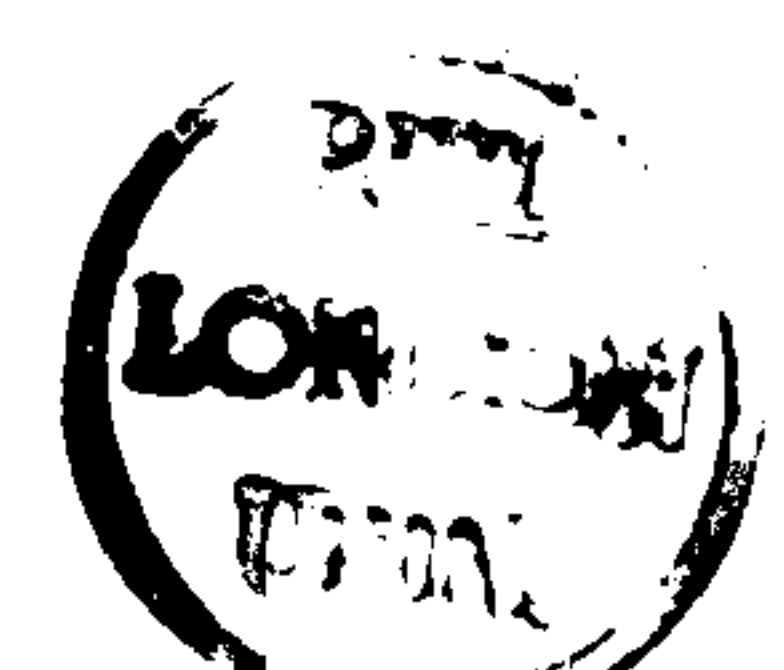
The only available in-depth study of Colombians in Spain suggests that this is mainly composed by labour migrants who came to improve their socio-economic status, although violence and security were also important reasons for migrating (IOM/UN, 2003). The number of Colombians claiming asylum has been increasing in recent years. According to official data, between 1988-1999 2,264 Colombians applied for asylum in Spain, representing 2.45% of total claims. However, numbers increased rapidly between 2000-2002, coinciding with the decline in Colombian asylum applications in the UK (see Tables 3.3 and 3.4). Although applications fell after 2002 following the introduction of new visa regulations for Colombians, they started to climb up again in 2004 and by 2006 Colombians were the first nationality claiming asylum in Spain (accounting for 42% of all applications) (CEAR, 2007, p.227). However, the real number of refugees could be much higher, since not all Colombians fleeing violence apply for asylum, and even fewer are granted refuge (see Chapter 5). In addition, there is also a significant number of Colombian students, and professionals, residing in Spain.<sup>72</sup>

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70 This is a list of people registered in each municipality, and in theory should include both legal residents and irregular migrants.

71 For an overview of the policy of regularisation of irregular migrants in Spain and other European countries, see Levinson (2005).

72 For information on European, and UK and Spanish, asylum law and process, and migration policy in general see: Agrela and Dietz (2005), Baldaccini (2003), Bendel (2006), CEAR (2005), Gilbert and



**Table 3.4: Asylum applications in Spain by Colombians**

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06
Applications	252	67	57	98	164	601	1,361	2,532	1,105	577	760	1,656	2,239

Source: CEAR (2007, 2005)

Most Latin American migration to Spain has been highly ‘feminised’, mainly as a result of the demand for women to work in domestic service. However, the data available for 2004 suggests that the feminisation rate for Colombians (58%) is not as high as that of other nationalities (69% Brazil, 69% Dominican Republic, 66% Honduras, 64% El Salvador, 64% Paraguay and 60% Mexico - Pellegrino, 2004, p.30).<sup>73</sup> This could be due to the fact that there has been an increase in the number of men migrating, mainly as a result of family reunification and the community becoming more established, but also due to labour demand in agriculture, construction and services (*ibid*).<sup>74</sup> With regard to age structure, most Colombians in Spain are among the population groups economically active (19-44 years old), although the proportion of under 16s is growing. On the whole, it seems to be a younger community than the one in the UK (IOM/UN, 2003). This reflects its more recent establishment, and the fact that there is still ample room for growth through family reunification (Aicode, n.d.). Also, as in the UK, the data available for Spain suggests that Colombian migrants have relatively high levels of education, but tend to work mainly in domestic service, followed by hotels and restaurants, construction and retail, with a small percentage being self-employed (IOM/UN, 2003).

Similar to the UK, the IOM/UN (2003) study on Colombians in Spain found that although migrants come from all parts of the country, a majority originate from Valle del Cauca, followed by Cundinamarca, Antioquia, Santander and Caldas. Within this area, a large proportion of migrants came from two of the main cities, Bogotá and Cali. However, in contrast with the UK, the Colombian population in Spain is more geographically spread. Nevertheless, the largest number by far live in the Madrid region, with a similar amount equally distributed between Cataluña (mainly Barcelona) and Valencia (see Table 3.5). The IOM/UN study (2003) also found a close relationship between area of origin within Colombia and specific destinations in Spain, which it argued reflected "the existence and great importance of the migratory networks,

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Koser (2006), Small and Solomos (2006), Zapata-Barrero (2003).

73 For more on this see special issue of *Papers. Revista de Sociología*, 2000; Checa and Olmos (2005), Gil Araújo (2004).

74 Also important in the case of Spain has been the role played by migrant trafficking in the recruiting of women for domestic and sex work, a significant factor in the case of Colombia and Ecuador (see Bonelli Jáudenes and Ulloa Jiménez, 2001). This issue is also important in the case of the UK, although it not has generally been analysed in the context of Latin American migration, but in reference mainly to Asian migration (see Anderson, 2006).

based on links related to family, community and friendships"<sup>75</sup> (*ibid.* p.176). These networks and social capital are key in the decision to migrate, the organisation of the trip, the support received upon arrival and the settlement of migrants (*ibid.*)<sup>76</sup> They are also reflected in the links maintained with the country/area of departure, not only at the personal and economic level (through remittances), but also at the political level as the following chapters will argue. These transnational links are not only sustained with the country of origin, but there is also growing evidence of "increased mobility and interaction between Colombians resident in the US and Europe, and also between those in different European countries" (Guarnizo, 2006a, p.88).<sup>77</sup>

**Table 3.5: Distribution of the Colombian population within Spain in 2006 (by region)**

	<b>Total</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>265,141</b>
Madrid	65,887
Cataluña (Barcelona)	43,228 (34,687)
Comunidad Valenciana	41,401
Andalucía	19,707
Canarias	19,284
País Vasco	11,086
Castilla y León	9,946
Castilla-La Mancha	9,651
Balears (Illes)	8,504
Galicia	8,063
Murcia	6,432
Aragón	5,980
Navarra	4,988
Cantabria	3,577
Rioja	3,199
Asturias	2,727
Extremadura	1,454
Ceuta	19
Melilla	8

Source: *Padrón Municipal* (1st January 2006 - INE).

## **GENDER AND POLITICS IN COLOMBIA**

In the last few decades there have been important improvements in gender equality and women's rights throughout Latin America, as evidenced by increased feminist activism, as well as policy and institutional changes (Chant with Craske, 2003). Four interrelated trends have been identified behind these improvements: a general decline in fertility, increasing levels of participation by women in education and employment, a weakening of patriarchy within the

75 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

76 Social capital is a variously defined and contested concept, but in general it refers to levels of trust and organisation within communities (see Moser and McIlwaine, 2001; Moser, 2001).

77 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

family, and the so-called crisis of masculinity (*ibid*). These trends, together with developments in feminist research and thinking, have helped move portrayals of Latin American women and men, and of gender relations in the region, away from fixed stereotypes, although as Chant acknowledges some of these stereotypes "have some grounding in practice" (*ibid*, p.16). Nevertheless, these general trends have to be considered in the context of regional diversity, as well as variations within countries depending on rural-urban differences, race, ethnicity, class, age and other factors. According to the UNDP, Colombia is in the medium human development group of countries, with a Gender-related Development Index (GDI) of 59 (out of a total of 144 countries), below Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela in the region; and a Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) of 48 (out of 78 countries), below Costa Rica, Argentina, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Peru and Uruguay (2004, pp. 220, 224).

### **Colombian women and men: progress in the middle of conflict**

Women in Colombia won the right to vote and be elected in 1956, one of the last countries in Latin America to do so. Since then, Colombian women have seen major improvements in their socio-economic and political situation, especially at the institutional (or formal) level. However, real progress has been slow, not least in the last couple of decades because of the escalating violence(s) and economic crisis. Although the 1991 Constitution prohibits discrimination against women and provides some protective legislation, women in Colombia still suffer from high levels of gender-related violence and are disadvantaged in the socio-economic and political fields compared to men (see Atherton, 2001; Bonilla, 1991; Castellanos, 2001; Laverde Toscano and Sánchez Gómez, 1986; Londoño, 2001). For instance, the female share of the labour force increased from 25% in 1980 to 38% in 1999 (among the highest in the region) (Chant with Craske, 2003, p.205). By 2004, it was 49% (compared to 74% globally - *Observatorio de Asuntos de Género*, September-October 2005, p.5). Despite this, a report in 2000 highlighted that women earned 28% less than men for the same work, while average earnings for rural women were only 58% those of men (Refugee Women's Resource Project, 2002). In addition, women have become disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment and poverty as the economic situation in the country has deteriorated, with variations according to the urban-rural divide and social class (see *Observatorio de Asuntos de Género*, September-October 2005, and May-August 2004; UNIFEM, 2005).<sup>78</sup> Also, although data on domestic violence against women varies, different studies agree that the problem is quite extensive and that real levels are much higher than official figures indicate (see Atherton, 2001; CLADEM/UNIFEM, 2005; IDB *América*, n.d.; *Observatorio de Asuntos de Género*, September-December 2004). As research reflects, this is partly connected with the wider

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78 For more on the 'feminisation of poverty' in Latin America, see Chant with Craske (2003).

situation of violence in the country (Amnesty International, 2004; *Corporación Sisma Mujer*, 2005; Profamilia, 2005; Tovar Rojas, 2003b; UNIFEM, 2005; WCRWC, 1999).

As Tovar Rojas, points out:

"Contemporary Colombian society offers an interesting context to explore the themes of marriage, family and gender relations ... given the current historical moment the country is going through, marked by violence, political changes and economic instability, which is questioning what are the appropriate roles for men and women" (2003a, p.13; see also Lamus Canavate, 1999).<sup>79</sup>

Viveros Vigoya's (2001) study of men from two generations in two different regions is one of the few studies in Colombia to address gender and masculinities (see also Viveros Vigoya, 2003; Wade, 1993b). This study agrees that gender relations in Colombia have changed significantly due to several factors, mainly the increased participation of women in employment, improved access to education for women, the granting of similar political rights to men and women, and the fall in the birth rate through the use of modern contraception. This, it argues, has "contributed to a relative democratisation in relations between men and women, and to the questioning of prevailing discourses on masculinities" (Viveros Vigoya, 2001, pp.38-39).<sup>80</sup> Some authors believe that these changes have begun to undermine the traditional model of the patriarchal family (see Gutiérrez de Pineda, 2003). However, the practical effects of these trends in altering traditional gender relations have been limited. On the one hand, men have seen their role as the main breadwinner eroded, and their associated authority and position, while on the other hand, this has not necessarily produced significant changes in men's 'real' behaviour and in the building of new models of masculinity (*ibid*). For instance, in her study of two generations of middle-class men in the cities of Quibdó and Armenia, Viveros Vigoya (2001) concluded that despite some changes among the newer generations, the association of men with productive work and of women with reproductive tasks was still quite strong.

### **Gender, Armed Conflict and Peace-building in Colombia**

As the quotation above indicates, women's and men's lives in Colombia have become increasingly affected by the growing levels of political and other types of violence. Despite this, little research has been done on political violence and peace in Colombia from a gender point of view. However, gender has played an important role in the armed conflict in Colombia,

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<sup>79</sup> Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

<sup>80</sup> This and subsequent quotations from this study are translated by the author from the original in Spanish..

from its origins in the rural conflicts of the 1950s and 1960s to the most recent (and more complex) context (some exceptions are Meertens, 2001a,b&c, 1995; Meertens and Segura Escobar, 1996; Moser and McIlwaine, 2004). Meertens, for instance, discusses three aspects of gender present in the current conflict in Colombia and a consequence of past episodes of political violence: (1) the symbolic representations of masculinity and femininity in political violence, which varies according to contexts and was very different during *La Violencia* and in the current conflict; (2) the different presence of, and roles that men and women play as victims of violence; and (3) the different situation of men and women as refugees (2001c, pp.151-152).

Although growing attention has been given to the third point, given the disproportionate effect that internal displacement has had on women, work on the other areas (or on gender issues among refugees more widely) has been quite limited.<sup>81</sup> However, more recently there have been some studies focusing on the situation of widows as victims of the war (Casas Castaño and Melo Rodríguez, 1995; Vásquez Perdomo, 2003; *Semana* 27/07/05). Although this tends to situate women in traditional victim roles outside the conflict, some research has also highlighted how women's more visible public position has made them the direct target of political violence (see Atherton, 2001; Amnesty International, 1995; Bermúdez Torres, 1996; Castellanos et.al., 2001; McDonald, 1997; Meertens, 2001c; Moser and Clark, 2001b; Moser and McIlwaine, 2001; Tuft, 2001). Also, more recently, attention has focused on the role played by women in rebel groups and issues associated with demobilisation from a gendered point of view (see Arango, 1984; Bermúdez, 2001; Grabe, 2000; Páez, 2001; Vásquez Perdomo, 2000). However, most of these studies are quite unique and do not consider the wider picture connecting gender, armed conflict and peace-building in Colombia. Nevertheless, as part of the increasing research interest in the subject of gender and peace, there have been some recent attempts to highlight the role that women's groups are playing in the struggle for peace in Colombia and some analyses focusing on gender in the context of a potential resolution of the armed conflict (see Cockburn, 2005; Moser and Clark, 2002, 2001b&c; Moser et al., 2006, 2000; Quintero et al., 2003; Rojas and Caro, 2002; Tuft, 2001; Women Waging Peace, 2004).<sup>82</sup>

### **Women and political participation**

Atherton (2001) points out that despite the gender effects of the armed conflict and the

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81 For a gender perspective on IDPs see: Bermúdez Torres (2002), Bello et al. (2000), Meertens (2001a,b&c), Meertens and Segura-Escobar (1996). For more on the relationship between women and armed conflict in Colombia, see the annual reports of the *Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado*, a project created involving women's and human rights' organisations, social movements and others working at the national and international level [http://www.mujeryconflictoarmado.org/palma.html] (23/09/07).

82 The role of women within the drugs trade in Colombia and its associated violence has been even less explored (see Segura Escobar, n.d.).

economic situation, or more as a result of it, in recent years women's social movements fighting against poverty, violence and discrimination have grown (see Castellanos 2001; Luna and Villareal 1994; Villareal Méndez 1994). The women and feminist movements in Colombia, together with international influences, have contributed significantly not only to the increased gender awareness of the population but also to growing interest on the part of the state about gender issues (see Peláez Mejía and Rodas Rojas, 2002). This has been translated, especially since the 1980s, into improved gender policies and programmes (see Peláez Mejía and Rodas Rojas, 2002). Also, in line with regional changes, women in Colombia have won greater access to political power. Buvinic and Roza (2004) argue that "(o)ver the last decade, Latin America has witnessed unprecedented gains of more than 50 percent in the number of women in power" as a result of a 'feminisation' of politics and the resurgence of democracy. Although at the regional level Colombia does not come up as one of the most progressive countries in this sense, it is of significance for instance that in 2000 a minimum quota of 30% was defined for women's representation in the Colombian executive (*ibid*).

Despite this, women's participation in formal politics in Colombia, as in the rest of Latin America (and most of the world) is still limited, both quantitatively and qualitatively. A comparison between the 1999 and 2002 elections showed that although female participation in the executive branch went up from 25% to 46%, representation in the legislative branch remained equally low (11%-15%), while figures at the regional and local levels were not much better (Arango and Guacaneme, 2005; see also Bernal Olarte, n.d.; Córdoba, 2002; *Observatorio de Asuntos de Género*, May-August, 2004; *Observatorio Mujeres y Participación Política*, 2004; UNIFEM, 2005). In addition, as Craske (2003) points out, women engaged in representational politics in Latin America tend to be part of the elite. On the other hand, women have played a more prominent role in social movements and informal politics in the region (*ibid*). In Colombia, this role has not only revolved around economic survival and community issues, but also, as mentioned above, in the search for peace. Delgado (2004) argues that the social mobilisation for peace that took off in the 1990s was led by sectors traditionally excluded from political and economic life, such as indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, peasants and women. Colombian women, because of the ways they have been affected by the conflict, have assumed a prominent role in this sort of mobilisation, both within mixed organisations and mainly through specific women's groups for peace. Despite this, their significance has been somehow obscured by traditional male dominance of politics and civil society, as well as by their marginalisation from formal peace negotiations (see Cockburn, 2005).<sup>83</sup>

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83 It is remarkable that, for instance, in a recent study on social movements and struggles in Colombia 1975-2000, the role of women's organisations and demands only merit a small section within the chapter on 'social struggles of other, less visible actors' (Archila et al., 2002).



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **A Qualitative Approach to the Study of Migration, Politics and Gender**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The study of migration, political transnationalism and gender involves several academic disciplines and is a very recent subject of research. As such, there are both opportunities and difficulties inherent in the methodological approach. This chapter offers a discussion of the primary research undertaken, focusing on methodological issues and the methods chosen, as well as the practicalities of the fieldwork. The first section deals with theoretical aspects. This includes an exploration of the methodological concerns behind the study of migration and political transnationalism, as well as feminist approaches to research on gender. Although feminist social research uses multiple methods, this research employs a comparative, qualitative approach to understand better the interplay between migration, politics and gender in the context of armed conflict and search for peace. The second section analyses the research methods chosen. These methods will be discussed from both a theoretical and practical point of view. This section also explores the specific methodological framework used, laying down the aims and objectives of the research and details of the fieldwork conducted and composition of the sample group studied. Finally, the chapter ends with a section exploring issues to do with data analysis, ethical and other considerations, picking up on some limitations and difficulties encountered and how I tried to resolve them.

#### **THE METHODOLOGICAL DEBATE IN A NEW FIELD OF ENQUIRY**

##### **Researching migration and transnational political practices**

Migration research has been described as "the archetype of a multidisciplinary topic", which has advantages and disadvantages, since concepts, theories and methodologies have to be borrowed and combined from different disciplines (Agozino, 2000, p.xv). In addition, within migration studies, the focus on transnational communities is relatively recent and thus still highly debatable. As such, the work produced so far has been fairly experimental. This has allowed for new ways of doing research, for instance, through 'transnational dialogues', making use of "the same technological developments that have facilitated the formation of transnational communities" (Horst, 2002b, p.2; see also Madge and O'Connor, 2004 on the use of modern

technologies for research). However, it has also attracted criticisms for its alleged failures in theorisation and methodology (see Chapter 2, as well as: Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Levitt and Schiller, 2004).

One of the criticisms has been that empirical findings have relied mainly on small case studies focusing on those migrants who take part in the transnational activities of interest rather than those who do not participate, which can exaggerate the extent of the phenomenon (Guarnizo et al., 2003; Vertovec, 2004). Some research has sought to overcome this by conducting larger comparative, quantitative studies to measure and classify the types and levels of transnational political practices of different migrant groups (see for instance, Guarnizo et al., 2003). However, this type of research can be limited by the type of indicators chosen, and the comparative element can be biased towards certain 'cases' taken as the norm (see Chapters 2, 5 and 6). In addition, other authors have criticised the "methodological nationalism" present in some studies, based on "the assumption that the nation-state is the natural, logical category for organizing social life" (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007, p.29). While acknowledging these concerns, since the issues I aim to explore in this research are varied and complex, and in some cases of a sensitive nature, I have opted for a qualitative approach, based on a small, comparative case study, but spread over three different geographical locations. Although issues of integration in the host society, and links across different transnational communities (or sites) are also considered, the main focus will be on transnational political linkages maintained with the country of origin. Østergaard-Nielsen (2003a) argues that this type of research is still useful, since it helps to shift the focus of attention in research on migration and politics towards the role played by sending countries. This can be even more important in the case of sending countries in conflict, such as Colombia.<sup>84</sup>

### **Feminist approaches to the study of gender**

Behind the choosing of particular research methods there are political, theoretical and philosophical implications (Seale, 1998a; see also Lazar, 1998; Smith, 2000). McDowell (1997) blames methodology for the long exclusion of women from social science research. It was not until the 1960s-1970s, at the height of 'second wave' feminism, that feminist approaches to research began to develop (Webb, 2000). Within geography, this coincided with the emergence of so-called dissident geographies based on "a political commitment to over-turning prevailing

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<sup>84</sup> Østergaard-Nielsen (2003a) argues that there is a lack of consensus in terminology to refer to the place of origin of migrants. She describes these places into three main types (allowing for overlaps): labour exporting countries, often referred to as sending countries (although this term can be misleading, since most countries do not actively send migrants abroad); post-colonial countries with significant out-migration before independence, often referred as homelands; and sending countries 'in conflict' (*ibid*, pp.7-9). I use the latter most, as well as country of origin and homeland to avoid repetition.

relations of power and oppression" (Blunt and Wills, 2000, p.x). However, feminist approaches to research did not take off until the 1980s-1990s, with the aim of contributing to eliminate gender inequalities. The focus of early feminist geographers was on bringing women to the centre of research and within academia. Thus, work first focused on "the study of the lives, experiences and behaviour of women", and how these varied from those of men (McDowell, 1993a, p.161). However, as feminist thought in general, and debates in the social sciences in particular, have become more complex, feminist geography has also widened its focus.<sup>85</sup> Today, feminism(s) in the social sciences represents different theoretical, methodological and political concerns (Blunt and Wills, 2000; see also Brunskell, 1998; Moss, 2002).

However, there are certain themes common to feminist social research that are of particular interest in this type of research. For Webb, feminist approaches to research are "about the need to place the diverse experiences of women at the centre rather than the margins of social investigation, and to deconstruct research that has neglected women's experiences or assumed that male experiences are universal" (2000, p.35). Feminist research questions the impact of power relations on knowledge creation, and the multiple and shifting identities of all parties involved in the research process. It also considers how to incorporate multiple voices into the research process, how to represent and empower the marginalised and how to judge the validity and utility of research (Hanson, 1997; McDowell, 1997). In addition, it challenges the conventional notions of objective and value neutral research, highlighting the partiality of knowledge and the importance of critical self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher (see below for more on this). More recently, feminist postmodernist scholarship has also played a key role in questioning labels and traditional binary categories, such as women/men, sex/gender and public/private, and in describing gender roles, identities and relations as fluid and context-specific rather than static and universal (see Mountz, 2002).<sup>86</sup>

Research on gender and migration has incorporated some of these concerns and assumptions, although Boyle (2002) argues that the influence of feminist and poststructural approaches in migration studies has been relatively weak. For instance, the most recent work has emphasised that gender is not just about women, but also about men and relations between and among them. There has also been recognition that the impact of gender is often mediated by other factors,

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85 McDowell (1993a&b) distinguishes three, not strictly chronological, stages: feminist empiricism/rational feminism, with its emphasis on gendered social relations; standpoint/antirationalist feminism, which shifted the focus of attention to gender symbolism and gendered identities; and post-rationalist feminism, which in line with postmodernists, place more emphasis on individual gendered identities.

86 These changes are reflected in the theoretical debates and the work of feminist geographers over the last two decades (see Longhurst, 2001; McDowell, 1993; Smith, S.J., 2001; Women and Geography Study Group, 2001).

such as class, race, age, ethnicity, religion or nationality. Despite this, the elaboration of these debates within research on transnational migration is still in its infancy (see Chapter 2). Levitt and Jaworsky argue that work on this area continues to ignore "what gender, race and class actually mean when they are constructed transnationally" (2007, p.31). These feminist debates have also been replicated in the context of studies on conflict and peace, contributing to the deconstruction of other labels such as 'woman victim' or 'male aggressor' (see Chapter 2). In this context, El-Bushra, for instance, has argued in favour of methods that are appropriate for understanding the experiences of men and women in such sensitive situations, and methodologies that work out a balance between the need to 'extract' information with the desire to afford dignity and 'ownership' to informants (2004, p.153). Such arguments can also be applied to doing research with migrants, especially in the case of forced and irregular migrants. Indra, for instance, has highlighted the relevance of feminist debates for research on gender and refugees, since this often involves the study of people who are disempowered and marginalised (1999; see also Black, 2001; Greatbatch, 1989; Indra, 1993, 1989).

### **A qualitative approach to research**

Hanson (1997) argues for the need to design methods and methodologies that allow us to see unexpected things, not just confirm what we already believe. They should also represent human diversity, involve multiple voices and viewpoints and open up research to a broader audience (*ibid*). Since knowledge is partial, only by using multiple methods and incorporating multiple voices from multiple locations we can aspire to understand more than a fragment at a time (Hanson, 1997; see also McDowell, 1997; Webb, 2000). Studies of gender and migration have used a variety of approaches and methods, but the emphasis has been on qualitative, small scale research (although some authors defend the need to use quantitative methods too - see Spijkerboer, 2000; Zlotnik 2003, 1995). Different researchers have argued what are the advantages, and limitations, of qualitative studies vis-à-vis quantitative work. Silverman argues that qualitative research offers "an apparently deeper picture" and includes "sensitivity to participants' definitions" (1993, p.15). For Ahearn (2000a, p.15), qualitative methods "endeavour to look at and interpret a slice of life...[and] are not concerned primarily with proof of verification, but rather with the discovery of meaning through observation, description, decoding, and translation...[which] depends upon the reflexive, thoughtful interpretation of people, their places, and their activities". Thus, as Stroh points out, the aim of qualitative research is to explore "people's 'life-worlds', trying to understand situations from the perspective of those being researched" (2000, p.202). This type of research does not produce laws or generalisations, but rather "common sense or logical" inferences (*ibid*, p.203).

In this respect, some authors argue, for instance, that qualitative methodology "is not as useful a predictive tool as a standardized survey can be" (Jones-Correa, 1998, p.203). Rhus et al. (2006) also suggest that research, in order to have a policy impact, often requires quantitative methods, since these tend to carry more weight with policy-makers. However, both authors point out that qualitative methods are useful for other reasons. They allow for better consideration of "personal experiences, aspirations, feelings and responses" (Rhus et al., 2006, p.4), and for the construction of theory "through respondents' own-self interpretations" (Jones-Correa, 1998). Jones-Correa also highlights the flexibility inherent in qualitative approaches, which allows us to break "out of inherited categories" (*ibid*, p.204). This is important in the current study, since as argued above and in the following chapters, quantitative studies on Colombian political transnationalism can offer only a limited picture. Since the aim of this research is to investigate the transnational (formal and informal) political practices of Colombians abroad more in depth, within the context of armed conflict and peace in Colombia, and taking into account the gendered dimensions of this, I have opted for a qualitative approach. I agree with Murthy (1999) that when researching complex and delicate topics, although quantitative methods can be useful at an exploratory stage, a qualitative approach is more suited.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS STUDY**

### **Objectives of the research project and approach taken**

The methodology and methods employed in this study respond to the theoretical and practical aims and objectives pursued, as detailed in Chapter 1. Conceptually, the objective of this study is to analyse the transnational connections that migrants maintain with the home country, especially at the political level and in the context of a conflict situation, from a gendered perspective. Empirically, the research proposes to examine these issues by looking at the experiences of Colombian men and women migrants and asking the following questions:

- Why did they leave Colombia and why did they come to the UK or Spain? What transnational linkages do they maintain at the individual level, with the country of origin and other Colombian migrant communities?
- What level of collective involvement in transnational practices from above and below do the Colombian communities studied sustain? What role does gender, migration status and class play in these communities and their collective transnational practices?
- How do Colombians in these migrant communities participate (or not) in transnational formal and informal political practices? What is their relationship to

the political situation in the country of origin? What role do they play, or think they should play, in the context of armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia? Are gender issues in this context relevant?

To achieve this, the study uses a qualitative methodology based mainly on one-to-one, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. In addition, a comparative approach is taken, by choosing two different national contexts (apart from the country of origin), the UK and Spain (and two different local contexts within the latter: Madrid and Barcelona) (see below). The focus on Europe also provides a contrast with the dominant US-based studies (see Chapter 2). Finally, the research also involved content analysis of websites and other documentary data. This is important, since one of the factors behind the emergence of transnational social fields has been the spread of modern communication technologies.

#### Choosing a comparative approach

The comparative element of this research is particularly important, since as Guarnizo (2006c) points out, there is a need for more studies that explore the experiences of migrants from the same country over different destinations (or different migrant groups in one country of settlement) to understand better the importance of context. The decision to focus on Colombian migration to Europe, rather than the US, was taken because despite the increasing relevance of these new migration flows, little is known about them (see Chapter 3). The UK and Spain were chosen because they are estimated to be home to the two largest Colombian migrant populations in Europe. In addition, both countries offer two different contexts in terms of the historical development of the migrant communities studied, ties between the countries of origin and settlement, types of immigration regimes, labour market conditions for migrants, language and other issues. These differences allow for an exploration of the significance of these factors in the experiences of migrants and their transnational activities. Also, there were practical reasons for choosing these two locations, since being Spanish myself and having lived in the UK for many years facilitated the fieldwork.

#### The use of one-to-one, semi-structured interviews

Arksey and Knight (1999, p.2) suggest that interviewing, more than a method of research, is a "family of research approaches that have only one thing in common – conversation between people in which one person has the role of researcher". Interviews are one of the most popular methods in social science research (*ibid*). This is partly because, as some authors argue,

qualitative interviewing is more economical than observational methods and can produce more in-depth knowledge (Seale, 1998b). There are many types of qualitative interviews. Seale (1998b), for instance, distinguishes between interviews approached from a realist or an idealist point of view, although both approaches can be combined. They can also be divided into structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, or whether they are one-to-one or in groups. Most of the interviews I conducted were one-to-one and semi-structured, based on Valentine's concept of "a conversational, fluid form, each interview varying according to the interests, experiences and views of the interviewees ... a dialogue rather than an interrogation" (1997, p.111). The advantage of this approach is that it offers more flexibility to explore complex subjects. However, as Valentine (1997) argues, this does not mean a totally 'hands off' or casual approach (see also Stroh, 2000). Setting up this type of interview requires preparing a schedule with a set of fixed questions that represents the main themes, as well as sub-themes and prompts, but where follow-up issues can be improvised to allow for further exploration of meanings and incorporation of new interests (Arksey and Knight, 1999). In addition, the questions need to be open-ended to allow for in-depth exploration of experiences, opinions, ideas and perceptions. However, within this flexibility, there must be some common threads to allow for some degree of comparability (*ibid*).

The interview guide in this study included two main sections: one containing personal questions (to be applied only to those Colombian migrants who agreed to share their personal experience), and a general section. The first included four main themes to be explored: reasons for leaving Colombia, factors influencing migrant destination, brief summary of life since arriving in their place of settlement, and individual and collective linkages maintained with Colombia. If transnational linkages were maintained, especially at the community and/or political level, these were explored in more detail through a subset of questions and using improvisation. The second part focused on the general knowledge of the interviewee, based on their personal experience and/or expertise, about the following themes: the recent mass migration of Colombians abroad, and more specifically the Colombian migrant communities studied; the current political situation in Colombia, and more specifically the context of armed conflict and search for peace; the actual or potential role of the Colombian diaspora in this context. The schedule then ends with some finishing questions to allow for closure.

Throughout the schedule, special consideration is given to gender, not only by noticing the similarities and differences in responses of men and women, but also by asking interviewees about their own perceptions of the role that gender plays in the themes explored (see Appendix 1). Taking advantage of the flexibility inherent in this approach, the interview schedule was expanded, shortened, altered or used more or less rigidly as the interviewing process developed, but always trying to maintain the core questions to allow for comparability.

### Participant observation during fieldwork

Participant observation is also a frequently used method in qualitative research, generally associated with the ethnographic approach.<sup>87</sup> It is often used in combination with interviews and analysis of documents, as in the present case (Janesick, 2000; Fontana and Frey, 2000). It involves different degrees of participation and/or observation, but the main aim is to observe "the social lives of subjects by participating in that life" (Johnston et al., 1986). Participant observation can be a very time consuming approach if taken as the main method of research or if used in a completely unknown setting. However, in this case it only involved limited, overt participation and observation through my involvement in different events and on-going communication with some research participants. Thus, although I could not claim to have become totally immersed in the migrant communities studied, attending some migrant and non-migrant related events, the time spent at diverse migrants' organisations and other relevant sites, as well as the personal contacts maintained allowed me to gain a richer picture both of the communities studied and their transnational political linkages. This picture was recorded through extensive notes taken in my fieldwork diaries, that were later analysed in conjunction with the interview material, thus allowing for some triangulation (see below). In addition, participant observation helped access potential interviewees. The participant observation method raises some specific ethical (and other) concerns, which will be explored below.

### Content analysis of websites and other documentary material

In addition to the qualitative methods analysed above, this research also included use of content analysis, mainly of websites but also of other documentary materials (see Aitken, 1997; Burton, 2000). As mentioned above, Horst (2002b), has advocated the advantages of using new technologies in researching diasporic (or transnational) communities, especially when trying to cover several geographical sites of interest for the community studied. One of the main factors explaining the emergence and spread of transnational migrant linkages and practices is the use of internet and other modern technologies for communication (see Chapter 1 and Part II of this thesis). Thus, this study involved finding out about, researching and analysing several websites of interest for the Colombian diaspora in general, or the communities studied. In addition, the internet was used to access regularly other sources of information, such as newspapers and other media, to identify news or data of interest. Some of the data and information obtained through this method, as well as leaflets, publicity material and other documentation distributed through

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87 There is an ample body of literature on this topic. For some general references, see for instance: Adler and Adler (2000), Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000), Cook (1997), Spradley (1997), Tedlock (2000), Vidich and Lyman (2000).



the community or provided by organisations, institutions and groups, was later analysed in detail. This analysis, in particular, provided for further exploration of concrete examples of transnational practices (from above and below), and the gender or class assumptions behind these. In addition, I accumulated via e-mail assorted communications and materials to do with the activities of some of the groups contacted throughout an extended period of time, which helped me understand their significance better.

### **Details of the fieldwork across different geographical locations**

The fieldwork was conducted between April 2005-March 2007 and was divided roughly equally between Spain (Madrid/Barcelona) and the UK (London). This involved:

1. An exploration of groups and organisations involved with the Colombian communities studied (see Appendix 3 and below). This involved contacting them to: explain the research project, obtain information about the issues being researched and recruit participants through gatekeepers and snowballing.
2. Organising 96 interviews (49 in Spain and 47 in the UK), mainly with Colombian men and women migrants (see Appendix 2 and below). However, the interviewees also included Colombian officials and experts as well as non-Colombians working with the communities studied or involved with the political situation in Colombia. Most of the interviews were on a one-to-one basis, with a few being in small groups of two to four people. A majority were recorded, but in some cases only notes were taken, as requested by the interviewee or for practical reasons (a noisy place, technical problems or it did not seem appropriate).<sup>88</sup> Since the aim was not to find a representative sample (as in a questionnaire) but "to select an illustrative sample" (Valentine, 1997, p.112; see also Stroh, 2000), the selection of participants was driven by the characteristics of the research, snowballing and practical considerations. In general, the sample is biased towards those Colombian migrants actively involved in transnational political practices, although the degree and type of involvement varies and there are also some cases of non-involvement. I agree with Østergaard-Nielsen (2003b) that although this methodological approach may not offer an accurate picture of the true level of involvement within a community, it is relevant for understanding the impact that such politics can have. This means that Colombian 'refugees' are overrepresented within the sample, since they tended to be a majority of those actively involved. However, the sample group also included 'economic/labour' migrants<sup>89</sup>, as well as 'students' and people who migrated for other reasons. These labels do not

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88 In a few cases, I lost the recording for technical reasons and had to reconstruct the conversation from the notes I took and what I could remember.

89 The terms economic and labour migration tend to be used interchangeably. The IOM (2004) defines

necessarily reflect the legal migrant status of those interviewed, but represent the main reason respondents gave for leaving Colombia (whether as 'independent' or 'dependent' migrants).<sup>90</sup> There is also an overrepresentation of women in the sample, but this is not necessarily a bias since the data available suggests a degree of feminisation within these migration flows (see Chapter 3). With respect to other factors, such as age, social class, or length of stay, the sample group is quite varied and broadly representative in terms of what is known about these migrant communities. Although Colombian society is racially varied, race was not a focus of the research and therefore racial issues are only discussed when they emerged as an important consideration. In general, the racial outlook of the sample group represents the majority 'mixed-race' and 'white' population (both at national level and within the communities studied).<sup>91</sup>

3. Participant observation during some political and cultural events, at migrants' organisations and groups, as well as collection of data through the internet and other documentation.

### Fieldwork in Spain

The fieldwork in Spain required more time and preparation than the one in the UK, since I had few previous contacts. The 49 interviews were conducted between June 2005 and November 2006, but the initial contacts with organisations started in May 2005. Initially, the fieldwork was going to be conducted in Madrid, home to the largest Colombian population in Spain. Several organisations and groups of interest were identified in this city through web searches, personal information and the literature review, and they were contacted via internet and phone. However, initial interest in providing information and participating in the research project was very poor. This could be partly explained by 'research fatigue', since as I learned later there had recently been several research projects exploring this particular community. To remedy this, and after identifying other interesting options, I decided to extend the fieldwork to Barcelona, home to the second-largest Colombian community in Spain. Thus, the fieldwork was distributed between the two cities, although more interviews were finally conducted in Madrid (once snowballing started to produce results). Although this was unplanned, dividing the fieldwork in Spain between these two different cities also allowed for an exploration of the local (and not only national) context in explaining the transnational practices of migrants.

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labour migration as "Movements of persons from their home State to another State for the purpose of employment"; and economic migrant as "A person living his/her habitual place of residence to settle outside his/her country of origin in order to improve his/her quality of life" (see also IOM, 2007).

<sup>90</sup> However, some cases were difficult to categorise, given the interrelationships between the different types of migration and this is acknowledged throughout the research (see Chapters 2 and 4).

<sup>91</sup> No interviewee described him/herself as being indigenous, and only one talked about himself as being Afro-Colombian. The interview schedule did not include any questions related to this.

In total, I conducted 16 interviews in Barcelona and 33 in Madrid. Five of the interviewees were non-Colombians (Spaniards) involved with the community and/or in supporting peace work in Colombia. The rest included interviews to 23 women, 17 men, two couples (as in husband and wife interviewed together) and two groups of four women. The date of arrival of the Colombians interviewed ranged from 1986-2003, with the great majority having arrived in 1999-2001 (refugees being among the earliest arrivals). This coincides with the limited information available on Colombian migration to Spain (see Chapter 3).

### *Madrid*

The fieldwork in Madrid started by contacting some organisations and groups identified via internet, and through some personal contacts. The list of contacts and potential interviewees later grew larger mainly through snowballing. The fieldwork involved:

- Three interviews with non-Colombians experts. They included: a legal advisor working for a Spanish organisation assisting refugees (CEAR)<sup>92</sup>, a man doing voluntary work for a Latin American migrant organisation in Madrid (Aculco - see Chapter 5), and another man working in an academic project to do with peace work in Colombia (*Europa y Colombia: Diplomacia y Sociedad Civil*/Europe and Colombia: Diplomacy and Civil Society - CIP FUHEM).<sup>93</sup> These were designed to obtain information about the characteristics of the Colombian migrant community, as well as the transnational political work done in relation to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia.

- 28 one-to-one interviews with Colombians (14 women and 14 men). Seven of these did not follow the schedule, but took the form of more or less formal conversations around the main issues of interest in the research (and sometimes personal experiences too). Apart from a member of the Colombian embassy in Madrid responsible for migration issues, people in this group included:

- 17 (eight women and nine men) refugees. They included people involved in political, community or human rights work, as well as journalists and lawyers who had to leave Colombia because their lives (or that of their families) were in danger. There were also two women escaping left-wing guerrilla threats, an indication of the complexity of the Colombian conflict (see Chapter 3). Both women had applied for asylum with their husbands (with the children coming with them or later). Another young woman in this

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92 See: [<http://www.cear.es>].

93 See: [[http://www.fuhem.es/portal/areas/paz\\_p\\_europaycolombia.asp](http://www.fuhem.es/portal/areas/paz_p_europaycolombia.asp)].

group had joined her mother and sisters in Spain while studying in Europe after the whole family had to go into exile. The rest included two women who came on their own, one woman who came with her children, another woman who arrived with her husband and children, four men whose partners (and children) had come with them or joined them later, a man who came alone with one of his children, and four men who came on their own (and one woman who did not say). Not everyone in this group had official refugee status, or had claimed asylum in the first place. Some had entered Spain as tourists or students and had later regularised their migrant status through the normal channels, while others were still waiting to hear about their applications or had received some other kind of legal status.

- Three (two women and a man) labour migrants. One of the women arrived in Spain with her son to join her husband, who had already migrated for work. The other woman had lost her job and savings in Colombia and had migrated on her own leaving her children behind. The man had also migrated on his own, partly due to economic reasons, leaving his family behind. None claimed to be 'irregular' migrants.
- Seven (four women and three men) students or former students. Among the men there was a PhD student, a former postgraduate student who now worked for a migrant organisation and a political activist who was temporarily in Spain doing a PhD. The women included a PhD student living temporarily in Spain with her son, a woman who came as a student but now worked for a migrant organisation, and two women studying at post-graduate level.

- One couple interviewed together, and a small group interview. The couple were refugees who had migrated to Spain because of the threats suffered as a result of his political work. She had migrated first, with her husband and children following later. The group interview involved four women (two of the women were later interviewed on their own) working for *Conexión Colombia* (see Chapter 5). Of the four, two were students, and the other two had emigrated to Spain because of their husbands' professional activities. The group discussion revolved around what *Conexión Colombia* was and why they had become involved.

The fieldwork in Madrid also involved participant observation during: pre-election campaign meetings and acts, seminars on the work of migrant organisations in Madrid and on the relationship between gender and peace issues, and internal discussions within a group of supporters of a Colombian political party. Through the interviews and participant observation, information was collected about some nine organisations or institutions working with the

Colombian community in Madrid and/or involved in transnational political work. These included two migrant organisations with a heavy emphasis on Colombia, a human rights organisation formed by Colombian refugees, the Colombian embassy in Madrid, a transnational initiative being promoted by the government and private business in Colombia, two groups involved in Colombian party politics, and a Spanish refugee organisation and a research centre.

### *Barcelona*

The fieldwork in Barcelona was conducted during three trips, as well as communication by phone and e-mail and some follow up meetings. Although Barcelona hosts the second largest Colombian population in Spain, initially I was surprised to find so many activities in this city related with Colombia. This could be because the Colombian (and wider Latin American) population in Barcelona seems to have less public visibility, and also due to my lack of knowledge about the city.<sup>94</sup> The initial contacts were made with organisations identified through internet searches. These later led, through snowballing and further research, to other contacts in the city and in Madrid, since the the two communities have many links. In total, this involved:

- Two interviews with non-Colombian experts: a man in charge of a Colombian project within a university school for peace studies (*Escola de Cultura de Pau*, UAB), and a woman working for the *Taula Catalana per la Pau i els Drets Humans a Colòmbia* (Catalonian Association for Peace and Human Rights in Colombia). These served to explore the work done from abroad in relation to the armed conflict and peace in Colombia, and the links between this work and the Colombian migrant communities, as well as to identify politically involved Colombians as potential interviewees.

- 12 one-to-one interviews with Colombians (9 women and 3 men). One of the women interviewed was in Spain temporarily, as part of an initiative to bring over members of peace groups in Colombia to study for a year at the school of peace studies. Her interview revolved around the work of her organisation, the *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* (Women's Peace Route), a Colombian feminist group working for a negotiated solution to the armed conflict and to visibilise the specific effects of the war on women.<sup>95</sup> The rest included:

- Seven refugees (four women and three men). They were a former guerrilla member currently involved in political work and his wife, who was also politically involved; a woman historian who had worked on human rights issues and entered Spain as a

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94 Pujadas and Massal (2002) talk about the 'invisibility' of Latin American migrants in Catalunya vis-a-vis other, more visible and rejected collectives, such as North-Africans.

95 See: [[http://www.rutapacific.org.co/nuevo\\_sitio/qs.htm](http://www.rutapacific.org.co/nuevo_sitio/qs.htm)] (19/12/05).

student; two male former guerrilla members currently involved in political work; a woman human rights expert; and a woman with a family history of involvement with a guerrilla group. All of them had left Colombia because of security threats. Their legal situation varied, but most had not obtained (or sought) refugee status. A majority had come to Spain under a special temporary programme designed to protect human rights activists. The men came with, or were later joined by, their wives (and in one case their children). One of the women came with her husband, two migrated on their own and a third did not specify.

- Two women labour migrants. One came to Spain to join her sister because of the perceived lack of opportunities in her professional field in Colombia. The other had to leave Israel, where she had worked for several years, and decided to join her sister in Barcelona rather than return to Colombia. Both migrated alone and one of them had left her son in Colombia. The later was residing and working 'undocumented' at the time of the interview.
- Two women students. One had studied previously in the UK, and decided to continue her studies in Barcelona. The other worked for an NGO in Colombia and came to Barcelona to study and look for financing for her organisation. Both women came on their own.

- One couple and a small group interview. The couple were refugees who had left Colombia because of the threats suffered as a result of his political work. The group involved four women (one of whom had been previously interviewed on a one-to-one basis) employed mainly in domestic work and part of a local migrant women's organisation. All of the women had migrated on their own. The group interview discussed issues such as the recent mass migration of Colombians to Spain, gender relations in Colombia and changes through migration, political linkages with Colombia, and the situation of armed conflict and search for peace in their country.

In addition, participant observation involved attending a three-day meeting of supporters and sympathizers of a new Colombian political party, which brought together Colombians from all over Europe. This event was an excellent example of transnational political work done by the diaspora, and provided very rich material in the form of notes taken as well as interviews with some participants. Contacts with some within this group continued throughout the research process, via e-mail, phone and in person. A small questionnaire was sent electronically to those who attended the meeting, but the response rate was extremely poor. In total, seven

organisations or groups were contacted: a Colombian women's peace organisation and a political party, an association of immigrant women with a strong Colombian presence, three organisations working for human rights and peace in Colombia (two Catalan-based and the other one Colombian-Catalan), and a Colombian NGO with links to a Catalan arts project also working with Latin America (including Colombia).

### Fieldwork in the UK

The fieldwork in the UK was carried out in London, since this is where the large majority of the Colombian population in Britain concentrates (see Chapter 3). The initial process of contacting organisations and finding potential interviewees was easier here, since I had previous experience of doing research among the Colombian community there (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a&b, 1995). The 47 interviews and participant observation were conducted between February 2006 and March 2007. In a couple of cases, I went back to some of the organisations and contacts I already knew, but in general new contacts were made and different groups and organisations researched to gain a better knowledge of the community. Most of the new contacts were made by finding out about other groups or organisations, and through snowballing (some of the contacts came from the fieldwork in Spain, an indication of the transnational linkages between the two communities). People and groups were first approached via e-mail or over the phone, or sometimes in person, prior to being interviewed. In total, I interviewed five non-Colombian experts, 22 Colombian women and 17 men, as well as two groups of two women each and two men interviewed together. The date of arrival of the Colombian interviewees in London varied more than in the case of Spain, ranging from 1973 to 2006, with about half having arrived from 2000 onwards. Among the earliest arrivals there are both labour migrants (mostly women) and refugees, while the most recently arrived included all types of migrants. This coincides with the different stages of Colombian migration to the UK described in Chapter 3. In total, the fieldwork involved:

- Five interviews with non-Colombians, including a man involved in a new Latin American trade union project; a staff member of the IOM at their London offices; a member of Amnesty International working on Colombia; the director of a British-based organisation working for human rights in Colombia; and an academic expert on Colombia. These interviews or informal chats served to explore issues related to their expertise on Colombian migration to the UK, and the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia.
- 39 one-to-one interviews with Colombians (22 women and 17 men). Of these, seven men and four women were approached as experts, and their interviews did not follow the schedule but

instead concentrated on their knowledge of the issues under study (although some talked about their personal experiences too). They were either academic experts, staff at the Colombian consulate in London or people with experience of working with the community. Another Colombian refugee woman was in London for an specific event, but actually resided in Geneva. The rest included:

- Eight (six men and two women) refugees. All except one of the men, who migrated with his mother as a young child, had sought asylum in the UK on their own right to escape threats to their lives. They were political and/or community activists, human rights lawyers and journalists. One of the women had been involved in community and political work in Colombia, and the other had been a member of a guerrilla group. One arrived in the UK with her husband and child, and the other came on her own. Three of the men arrived with their partners and children, and the other two on their own. Most had applied for and received refugee status, or had obtained residency on humanitarian grounds. One of the men had entered the country with another type of visa and later obtained residency through marriage.
- Six (five women and one man) labour migrants. They included a woman who migrated on her own, and another one who came with her English husband, to help support their families back in Colombia; a young woman on her own who entered the UK as a student but was motivated to migrate primarily by her family's worsening finances; two women who migrated with their husbands and children in search of better economic and job opportunities; and a man who was offered a contract to come and work in the UK with his family. None of them were in an irregular migrant situation, although some in the past had overstayed their original visas or worked undocumented.
- Seven (six women and one man) students or former students. One of the women was temporarily in the UK to finish her postgraduate studies; another six women had originally traveled to the UK to study English but had ended up staying for economic, work or relationship reasons; and another woman had moved to the UK with her husband and young daughter to pursue postgraduate studies. The only man in this group had joined her mother, who was already living in the UK, in his late teens to continue with his studies.
- Five women and two men who had migrated primarily for other reasons (or did not say). A young woman had joined her mother in the UK as a child, another woman had always wanted to live in Europe, two women and a man had migrated for relationship



reasons, one man for traveling/adventure reasons, and a woman did not say.

- Three interviews conducted in couples. They included: two sisters, one who came to the UK to study and later married an English man, and another one who migrated to the UK with her British husband; two woman friends, one who came to the UK to study English and the other to join her boyfriend; and two male journalists working for a London-based Latin American newspaper. The interviews with the two couples of women more or less followed the interview schedule, and the one with the two men journalists focused on the role of the ethnic media, the political situation in Colombia and the Colombian migrant community in London.

The fieldwork in the UK also involved participant observation, which included visits to the Colombian consulate in London, where I had the opportunity to speak to staff members and Colombian migrants, as well as attending the *Carnaval del Pueblo* (Latin American Festival), a cultural event celebrating Latin American music and traditions in London, and spending time around two popular Colombian markets in London (Elephant and Castle and Seven Sisters) talking to people. In addition, during visits to migrant and community organisations, I talked to other Colombians working in, or visiting, these places in an informal manner. While attending a seminar on labour and human rights issues in Latin America, I also came into contact with other Colombians and found out more about some organisations of interest. In total, the fieldwork in London put me in touch with some 23 different organisations, groups, institutions and initiatives working with the Colombian community and/or contributing to the strengthening of transnational linkages. They included two Latin American community organisations, a new political Latin American initiative and a Latin American trade union, a community initiative led by the metropolitan police, a Latin American youth project and another project for Latin American prisoners, a Latin American radio station and two community newspapers, two web-based community/information initiatives addressing Latin Americans in London, the Colombian consulate and three transnational initiatives coming from above addressing migrants, a Colombian political party, a Colombian university society, two British-based organisations doing work on Colombia (one a charity group and the other involved in human rights work), two British-based projects working with the local and/or migrant communities in London (including Colombians) and an international organisation working with migrants.

The range of activities and organisations researched in each location is sometimes a reflection of those most prominent in each place (and in that case this is discussed throughout the analysis), but also sometimes the consequence of bias in the sample. For instance, the research did not investigate other examples of migrant transnationalism present in the communities studied, such as the role played by the church or ethnic businesses. The latter is not considered an example of

political transnationalism. In the case of the church, although this has been highlighted by recent studies as an important aspect of transnational migrant communities, is only addressed in this study through its most political manifestations (in the case of a political party in Colombia associated with a Christian church - see Chapters 6 and 7). In other cases, for example when examining the role that ethnic media plays within migrant communities and transnational political activities, only the case of London is considered. This was because I had better knowledge of the role of the media in this community and lacked the initial contacts and enough time to explore in detail the context in Spain. However, as Chapter 6 shows the ethnic media in the UK sometimes is closely connected to that in Spain (where the explosion in Latin American media outlets has happened later due to the community here being more recent, although the range of media available is probably larger in the latter now because of numbers).

## **INTERPRETING THE DATA, ETHICAL AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Issues of Validity, Reliability and Positionality**

There are many ways to interpret qualitative results – some 43 approaches have been identified (Crang, 1997). First, the data obtained needs to be organised and managed in a way that ensures "rigour and reliability" (Stroh, 2000, p.210). In this case, most of the interviews were recorded, and later transcribed and categorised, according to geographical location and whether the interviewees were Colombian or non-Colombian, and depending on type of migration and gender. The process of transcription was done simultaneously with the fieldwork, to allow for ongoing analysis of results, and identification of issues and problems (see Crang, 1997). For those interviews which were not recorded, notes were taken and later expanded and filed with the rest. For each interview, notes were taken during the fieldwork to complement the data obtained. The same was done for the few group or two-people interviews undertaken. Although these were generally treated and dealt with like one-to-one interviews, I was also aware of the interactions between those interviewed together and what these contributed to the research (for instance, taking notice of gender issues) (see Wilkinson, 1998).

The data was interpreted mainly through theoretically informed thematic analysis. This involves interpreting interview material through the ideas and theories driving the research, as well as the words and issues emerging from the participants. This is basically done through coding, which is useful not only to organise the data, but also to expand ideas and raise new issues and questions. This allows the researcher to identify relationships within the data, find new ways of looking at social phenomena and offer a very personal interpretation of the findings. This methodological approach has some limitations. Qualitative research is often

criticised for not being 'objective' or not as useful a predictive tool as quantitative surveys (see Jones-Correa, 1998). Valentine, for instance, acknowledges that research using conversational-style interviews cannot be replicated, "only corroborated by similar studies or complementary techniques" (1997, p.111; see also Baxter and Eyles, 1997). However, she also argues that "all research work is explicitly or implicitly informed by the experiences, aims and interpretations of the researcher" (*ibid*, p.112). Feminist researches in particular have criticised the notion of the interviewer remaining detached from the interview process so as not to influence the conversation and produce objective data. Instead, they consider interviewing as a process that promotes "collaboration, egalitarianism and commitment" (Arksey and Knight, 1999, pp.12-13; see also section above on feminist methodologies).

Nevertheless, qualitative research can also aim for validity, rigour and reliability (see Baxter and Eyles, 1997). A common approach is triangulation, which involves the use of multiple methods. In this case, the data obtained through the interviews was interwoven with the results of the participant observation, as well as the secondary sources available. But even more important than triangulation is self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). Stroh, for instance, argues that in conversational-style interviews there needs to be acknowledgment "that bias and subjectivity will play a part" and awareness of the effects of this (2000, pp.203-4). Sin also raises the issue of the importance of locality, both in relation to questions of power and in the sense of "the concrete 'place' in which an interview takes place" (2003, pp.305-6). These issues, together with explorations of power relationships between interviewer and interviewee, are of key importance for feminist researchers in particular (although not exclusive to them) (see Arksey and Knight, 1999; Ribbens and Edwards, 2000). For example, whether the researcher is an 'outsider' or an 'insider' has an impact on the research, with both positions having advantages and disadvantages (see Bernard, 2000; Mohammad, 2001; Mullings, 1999). More recently, there have been attempts to tackle this "spatial binarism" through concepts such as "spaces of betweenness" (Sin, 2003, p. 306).

Throughout the research, I considered these issues, seeking to be aware of my own positionality and how this affected interactions with others, as well as how the people interviewed affected the information and perspective obtained (see Valentine, 1997). This is more complex than appears, since as Mullings recognised during her research, positionalities are "dynamic and cross cutting" (1999, p.348). For instance, the fact that I am Spanish and not Colombian played different roles depending on each context. Being an outsider means that it can be harder to access the field and recruit participants. This was partly the case in Spain, but not in the UK, where I had previous experience of working with the community. Also, it means that in some instances I could miss cultural or other nuances, although this was partly compensated by the

fact that I speak Spanish and have ample knowledge of Colombia and some of the communities studied. It also made me stand out while milling around some of the field sites, and on some occasions I felt that being of European origin and appearance made people reluctant to talk about delicate issues, such as immigration status (although this was not always the case). However, in many other instances, being an outsider was actually an advantage, especially when talking about sensitive issues, such as the armed conflict and political climate in Colombia (and in some instances immigration status), given divisions and distrust within the community (see Part II of the thesis). Being a woman with children also helped establish connections sometimes, especially with other women in a similar situation (but also with some men).

### **Ethical considerations**

As Crow (2000, p.69) points out, "research has a lot to do with power", and as a result there are many ethical issues involved in a research process. Kent (2000a) lists four rules that are very important in research: veracity, privacy, confidentiality and fidelity. Although he argues that these are not absolute principles, rather more like guiding rules, there must be a good reason for overriding them. Another two key issues to consider from an ethical point of view are fraud and accountability (Crow, 2000; Kent, 2000a). All of these ethical issues were dealt with throughout the research in several ways.<sup>96</sup> First, informed consent was verbally obtained from all of those who participated in the research.<sup>97</sup> This is the process whereby "people who agree to take part in a research programme know what they are agreeing to and authorize you to collect information from them without any form of coercion or manipulation" (Kent, 2000b, p.81; see also Celnick, 2000). However, this sometimes involved a very fine balance between providing enough, honest information for participants to be able to make an informed choice, without giving them so much as to bias their answers. Second, anonymity and confidentiality was assured to all participants, and how the information obtained would be used was thoroughly explained to them. This involved not asking for real names and using pseudonyms, except for those who were interviewed as experts. Although many migrants did not have a problem with me using their real names, given the ideological and personal divisions and sources of distrust within the community, I explained to them that only pseudonyms would be used.

Also important to consider from an ethical point of view is how much information about the research or about one's own positionality to disclose without affecting the need "to create spaces that foster trust and co-operation" between the researcher and the researched (Mullings, 1999, p.

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96 This research was approved by Queen Mary's Ethics Committee.

97 Written consent was not sought because of the general mistrust some migrants, especially those with traumatic experiences of forced migration or those in an irregular migrant situation, feel towards signing documents (see, for instance, Omidian's research with Afghan refugees, 2000).

349). For instance, while in some cases I felt I could share with participants my feminist convictions or my sympathies for the democratic left opposition in Colombia, in other cases I believed doing this could have hindered the flow of information and thus sought to remain more 'neutral'. Issues like these and others are very important when researching sensitive topics dealt with in this thesis, such as experiences of forced migration and situations of armed conflict. Some of the people interviewed had undergone very traumatic experiences, and in these cases I left it up to them how much they wanted to talk about some aspects of their personal histories. Some people preferred not to, out of what Omidian (2000, p.56) calls "reality-based paranoia", or because of emotional distress. Others felt, on the other hand, that talking about their experiences, although distressing, helped them (some even felt grateful for the opportunity). Some of the interviewed, although not being forced migrants, made it clear from the beginning of the conversation that they did not want to talk about their personal experiences, but rather about the more general questions being researched, and this was respected too. Another sensitive aspect of this research was how to raise gender issues from a feminist point of view with men, or women who did not identify with Western feminism, without alienating them (see Fortier, 1998; Guijt and Shah, 1999a; and Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). In general, many of these ethical issues can be dealt with by treating research participants "as people, not objects to be exploited or mined for information" (Valentine 1997, p.112).

### **Difficulties experienced and how these affected the research**

I want to end this chapter by mentioning some of the difficulties encountered during the research and how some of these altered the final outcome. My initial intention had been to focus much more on the situation of armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia, from a gendered approach. For this reason, I left open the possibility of conducting some fieldwork in Colombia, mainly interviewing men and women, experts and activists, involved in conflict and peace-building initiatives. This trip depended mainly on the security situation and other practical considerations. However, at the end it was not possible, partly because despite improvements in security traveling to Colombia still entails certain risks, and also because of personal circumstances. In addition, as the research proceeded, I started to focus more broadly on all aspects of transnational political action by Colombian migrants. I also acknowledge that the exploration of the political role of the Colombian diaspora could have benefited from considering the role of other Colombian migrant communities, especially in the US. However, as Horst argues, in transnational research "there is always a trade-off between dispersion and intensity" (2002b, p.2). One way she deals with this is by engaging in transnational dialogues through the use of the internet and e-mail, with those communities where ethnographic work is not possible. However, although I considered this possibility, such an approach also requires

significant time and effort to produce worthwhile results, and by and large it was not possible.

As mentioned above, once the initial contacts were built up and the interviewing process started, the fieldwork proceeded quite smoothly. Most of the people I encountered were quite generous with their time and assistance. Also, in general they seemed keen to contribute to this research project, which they found interesting and of value. A few thanked me, whether for listening to their personal story, for trying to make the Colombian diaspora a more visible phenomenon, or for attempting to contribute to the debate on finding a peaceful solution to the conflict in Colombia. However, the original research project had considered organising focus groups, and with the exception of the two few group discussions I conducted this proved impossible. The easiest way would have been to organise these through groups or organisations in contact with this community. However, those I contacted were either not interested or too busy, or lacked the time and resources to help. In the case of Spain, as noted above, there was also the problem of 'research fatigue'. Seeking to organise focus groups outside these groups or organisations also proved hard, because of the difficulties involved in finding a place and time where several people could meet. Many migrants work very long hours, sometimes at unsociable times, and have family responsibilities too. Mistrust was also a consideration, since some of the issues to be discussed were of a sensitive and divisive nature, as explained above.

The focus on gender was also altered throughout the research process. Generally, the most difficult issue to explore during the conversations with participants was gender, since only those with an academic or practical background on this subject seemed open or interested in exploring differences between men and women or aspects of gender relationships. Particularly difficult was to discuss gender issues in the context of the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia. Thus, the focus of the research shifted slightly to cover a general analysis of gender differences in the levels and types of transnational activities, as well as the gender ideologies behind some of these activities. In addition, through some of the questions and discussions, and by analysing the interview transcripts and field notes it was possible to infer some conclusions about the issue of gender, conflict and peace.

## **PART II: The gendered political transnational activities of Colombians in the UK and Spain**

This section analyses the research conducted in Spain and the UK, in the context of the theoretical, methodological and historical material summarised in Chapters 2-4. **Chapter 5** examines the migration experiences of Colombians in the UK and Spain, including their reasons for migrating and choice of migrant destination, and integration in the host society. It explores the experiences of refugees and labour migrants, as well as other types of migration in the context of Colombia, acknowledging the difficulties inherent in disentangling political, economic and other factors that explain this migration (see Chapters 3 and 4). It also explores the role of gender in these processes by looking at the similarities and differences in the experiences of men and women, and analysing the relationship between gender and migration more broadly. The chapter concludes by identifying some of the transnational linkages operating at the individual level between Colombian migrants in Spain and the UK and the home country, as well as with other Colombian migrant communities. These are manifested mainly through family and social contacts, and economically via the sending of remittances, and are not unidirectional, but 'multi-directional' and 'multi-polar' (see Chapter 2). Such connections form part of emergent 'transnational fields' of action that include political practices.

The few studies available, mainly based on Colombian migrant communities in the US, argue that the political, and wider collective or organised, transnational activities of these are very weak, or almost non-existent. This is attributed to the class, regional and race divisions affecting these communities, as well as the fragmentation and distrust caused by the situation of armed conflict and the drugs trade in Colombia. This is seen as preventing the emergence of 'transnational communities', similar to those of other Latin American migrant groups in the US (see Chapter 2). However, using a qualitative approach, and a wider definition of transnational politics that includes both formal (electoral and party-related) and informal (related to wider civil society) politics, shows that Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain are involved in a wide array of transnational activities at the collective and political levels (see Chapters 2 and 4). **Chapter 6** analyses the general field of collective transnational engagement by considering initiatives emerging both from 'above' and 'below' (see Chapter 2). On the one hand, it explores attempts by the Colombian government and private interests to strengthen and redirect the transnational linkages of migrants. These rely heavily on the use of modern communication technologies, and have had a differential impact on the ground, depending mainly on type of migration, gender and class. On the other hand, it looks at a broad range of collective transnational activities emanating from migrant civil society, which include examples of

'immigrant' and other types of transnational political activities. Emphasis is made on how these have developed differently in each host country, depending on national (and local) contexts, and the role that gender plays in collective transnational activities, in contrast to the evidence available from US studies.

**Chapter 7** focuses on the more overtly political transnational activities of the migrant communities studied. First, it analyses participation in electoral and party-related politics in the country of origin, given the ample formal political rights enjoyed by Colombian migrants abroad. Although the evidence available highlights that this is low, this section puts the existing data into context by comparing it with national electoral participation rates and that of other migrant collectives. When other, more popular types of formal political activity are analysed, Colombian migrants appear much less apolitical than other studies suggest. In addition, this section explores how political transnational activities often go hand in hand with political participation in the host society. Secondly, Chapter 7 considers the significance of 'diaspora' politics or the transnational political work of migrant civil society directly related to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia (see Chapters 2 and 3). Colombian refugees play a key role in this context, given their high levels of human capital and experience of activism. However, this aspect of Colombian transnational politics has been sidelined by other studies, mainly because the emphasis has been on labour migration rather than refugee flows. Chapter 7 ends with an exploration of the potential and limitations of transnational migrant political activities in the two communities studied, by looking at levels of participation, organisation and divisions, as well as the importance of the particular contexts in the sending and receiving societies and internationally. The chapter also analyses how these processes are gendered, especially in relation to civil society efforts for securing peace in Colombia.



## CHAPTER 5

### **Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain: their migration experiences and transnational links**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the migration experiences of Colombians in the UK (London) and Spain (Madrid, Barcelona). It focuses first, on the reasons that explain the migration of these Colombian men and women, seeking to distinguish between the political, economic and other factors behind their move, while highlighting the interrelations between them. Second, it analyses why these migrants 'chose' Spain or the UK, and their experiences of settling in a new country. Although the process of integration is not the main focus of the thesis, this section explores issues such as immigration status, access to employment, discrimination and psychological and other problems, since they can have a strong impact on how migrants adapt and the relationships they maintain with the homeland. Finally, it provides an overview of the transnational connections that Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain maintain with Colombia, and with other Colombian communities abroad, at the individual level. The gender dimensions of these processes, as well as the similarities and differences between the communities studied, will be considered throughout the chapter. The main aim of this chapter is to set the context for the subsequent two chapters, where the transnational collective and political practices of Colombian migrants and their significance in the context of armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia will be analysed.

#### **Reasons for the migration of Colombian men and women to Spain and the UK**

##### The experiences of refugees and asylum-seekers

In statistical terms, the number of recognised Colombian refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK and Spain is very small when compared with the total size of these communities. However, numbers can be deceptive, since it is not always easy to disentangle political from economic or other factors explaining the migration of Colombians abroad.<sup>98</sup> A significant proportion of the Colombian respondents in the current research were 'refugees': 12 men, 12 women and two couples in Spain; and six men and two women in the UK (see Chapter 4). Not all were

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<sup>98</sup> The legal status of migrants is also influenced by immigration policies in the host country, with different types of migration increasing or declining as barriers are imposed (see below).

recognised refugees or asylum-seekers, or indeed, described themselves as such, but they shared stories of deaths, attempts on their lives, threats and/or persecution because of their political, professional and/or personal work, or that of their families.

As Joly (2004a) argues, it is not always easy to differentiate between the experiences of refugees and that of other migrants, and there is no definite agreement on this. However, for her there are two issues that definitely apply to the former: "when all the variables have been examined, what remains is that refugees had to leave as a result of factors which in the last analysis were not primarily economic and they did not make a decision with primarily positive connotations" (*ibid*, p.143; see also Joly, 2002). Generally, refugees are forced to leave their homes, jobs, friends, family and country, often with little time to prepare for exile and few choices about where to go.<sup>99</sup> This was best expressed by Elena, a Colombian refugee woman interviewed in Madrid:

"I left behind my books, my music, the pyjamas I was wearing the night before ... One morning as I was going to work they tried to get me into a van, but I resisted ... that night I did not go back home ... my friends went to my house to take things and pack my suitcase, and I stayed in a different place each day, and until the day I went to the airport I did not see my mother ... and I arrived here in September ... I was not prepared for this trip, I never thought I would have to do it. I did not want to do it"

Thus, although they share experiences with other types of migrants, refugees' personal histories of migration are also different, and this affects their integration in the host society, as well as the transnational linkages maintained with the home country. This does not mean that the Colombian refugees interviewed were a homogenous group, since their experiences can vary significantly, depending on personal characteristics and the contexts of both exit and arrival (see Box 5.1). This heterogeneity contrasts with the experiences of other major refugee flows from Latin America, such as those from the Southern Cone or Central America (see Landolt and Goldring, 2006, for a comparison of Chilean and Colombian refugees in Canada).<sup>100</sup>

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99 McIlwaine argues that migration from Colombia, given the political and socio-economic situation in the country, is "invariably an enforced decision" (2005, p.16). However, this does not mean that refugees (or migrants in general) are just passive victims, since forced migration is also "a social process in which human agency and social networks play a major part" (Castles, 2003, p.13; see also Camino and Krulfeld, 1994).

100 This is because Colombian refugees are not escaping from a repressive military regime, or a straight forward civil war, but from a more complex context that includes civilian democratic government and a mixture of political and other types of violence, as well as economic problems (see Chapter 3).

### Box 5.1: Two different stories of Colombian refugees

**Alberto** arrived in London in 1992 to apply for political asylum. He had militated in the Communist Party and the left-wing *Unión Patriótica* (Patriotic Union) party set up by demobilised guerrillas. His family was also heavily involved in politics, and one of his brothers-in-law had become a guerrilla leader. This brought the family many problems: "they were always watching us, looking for us". And on several occasions, his family suffered displacement. Alberto was used to this, until it all became too much. At the time he was working for the education ministry, in a project with indigenous communities. After a change in the leadership of the project, he publicly denounced its politicization, and as a result received death threats. By then, Alberto had tired of Colombia, of seeing his friends and others die: "I just couldn't stand it any more, I couldn't. A lot of people left the country in those years". One of his brothers had migrated to the UK, and he knew other people in London. With their help, and the support of some international organisations, he went into exile too.

**Gladys** is a 39-year old woman living with her husband and three children in Madrid. Although originally from Cúcuta, she was living near Pereira before moving to Spain. In Colombia, they owned a small family business, and life was generally good. However, like other people with businesses in the area, they had to pay a *vacuna* (war tax) to the guerrillas. When they stopped paying, her husband was kidnapped. Although he was released by the police, after that they had to move cities and departments several times in fear of their lives. Still feeling unsafe, they decided to leave the country. Gladys and her family arrived in Spain in 2001 and applied for political asylum. Their claim was accepted and they were offered temporary accommodation. Soon both her and her husband found work and they moved into a flat. However, two years later their asylum claim was rejected. As a result, they became undocumented and lost their jobs. During the 2005 regularisation process Gladys, her husband and two youngest sons obtained a residence permit, but their oldest daughter remains undocumented.

Source: In-depth interviews.

The majority of the refugees interviewed shared with Alberto a personal and/or family history of involvement with the political Left in Colombia, through political activism (including participation in a guerrilla movement), trade union activities, human rights work, participation in the student movement or community work.<sup>101</sup> Of these, all the men, except Mariano, who came to London with his mother when he was 13, had been involved in such activities themselves, leading to their exile. Fernando, a refugee from Cali, had been a member of a Leftist party and was involved in community work, and as a result suffered from imprisonment and persecution before arriving in London in 1993. Mateo, who came from an area in Colombia heavily affected by the armed conflict also had a family history of involvement in Leftist

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101 They were what Landolt and Goldring call refugee 'activists', differentiated from the 'security' ("people leaving because of the generalized violence and insecurity") and 'accidental' ("people who are unwittingly drawn into politics and become targets of political violence") refugees, to better reflect the heterogeneity within the Colombian refugee population in Canada (2006, pp.16&23). I find useful the differentiation between 'activist' and 'security' refugees, but find the third concept less clear. Colombian refugees also often differentiate between 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' refugees, depending on whether people are escaping paramilitary/state violence or the guerrillas (or generalised insecurity); or between 'real' and 'false' refugees (the latter referring to those who claim asylum but are considered labour migrants) (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a).

politics. Before arriving in Madrid in 2000, he had suffered from threats, persecution, an assassination attempt and previous experiences of both internal and external exile.

The stories of some of the women refugees interviewed were not that different. Traditionally, the figure of the political refugee seeking asylum in the Global North tended to be equated with men only, with women seen as dependents (or more broadly as part of the civilian population affected by war) (see Chapter 2). However, women in Colombia have also been active in left-wing politics and armed struggles, as well as in community and human rights work, and as such have been equally affected by political violence (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a.1996; Meertens, 2001c; Restrepo Vélez, 2006). Of the women refugees interviewed, at least seven had left Colombia because their work had put their lives, and/or that of their families, at risk. Nelly, one of the earliest arrivals among the refugees interviewed in London, was one of them:

"I came in 1988, as a refugee, because ... in the 1980s was when the civil war started again in Colombia. I was working with a left-wing group, and when the genocide and the massacres started, many like me left the country, and those who stayed behind, died".

Anita, who arrived in the UK in 1994, also had a history of involvement in Leftist politics, and suffered from persecution, torture and the disappearance of two brothers. Three other women interviewed in Madrid, two who left Colombia in the mid-to-late 1980s and a recent arrival, had similar stories to tell. The rest of the women refugees interviewed in Spain had a variety of other reasons for leaving Colombia. Three had been involved to some degree on human rights issues, one had been working in local development projects, Gladys and another woman had escaped guerrilla threats against their families, and another two (plus the two interviewed with their partners) had followed their husbands or parents into exile. Thus, as a whole, and as pointed out by other studies, more women than men tended to diverge from the traditional definition of a political refugee, or were considered dependents, which can have consequences for legal status and integration in general (see below; see also Bermúdez Torres, 2003a). However, the greater variety in the motivation of the women refugees for leaving Colombia also reflects the increase in the levels, and complexity, of violence(s) in Colombia through the 1980s and 1990s (although this affected the men too - see Chapter 3).<sup>102</sup>

Among the male refugees in London, the latest arrivals included two journalists and a human rights lawyer (with prior experience of exile in the UK). Pedro had been working as a journalist

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102 As Meertens argues: "Terror in Colombia is not monopolized by the state, as it was during the dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, or the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala ... It is directed neither exclusively to ethnic cleansing nor to the systematic extermination of political opponents ... It is today a decentralized, deinstitutionalized strategy for destroying the social fabric and taking over community control" (2001b, p.136).

before he arrived in London in 2000, and although he did not receive threats himself, several of his colleagues had been assassinated, which led to his decision to leave:

"I wanted to change my lifestyle, because of the stress we were under, working under threats, and the pressures received from the different armed groups, including the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and also the drugs trade and the state itself. It was too much stress, to say the least, and we received little in exchange for it ... the pay was not sufficient to risk your life".

The heterogeneity in the motivations for migration of the male refugees was greater in the case of Spain, and more particularly Madrid (given the larger size of the sample there), since the date of arrival of refugees in this country was generally later than that of refugees in the UK.<sup>103</sup> Two of the men interviewed in Madrid who were among the latest arrivals were also journalists. As one of them, Andrew, a young man from Medellín, explained, journalists in Colombia were "threatened for any reason ... it does not have to be anything special". Among the other refugee males in Spain, all but one had been involved in human rights work (as lawyers, academic researchers or public functionaries). Human rights workers in Colombia are also among the groups worst affected by the conflict, and many of the respondents in this group interviewed in Spain had received special status for temporary protection (see below). A different case was that of Ricardo, a man from the coffee-belt area living in Madrid with his wife and two children, who in Colombia had been involved in community work and local politics. In the case of Barcelona, most of the refugees interviewed were of the activist type, which could be the result of the importance of migration networks (see below). In general, although refugees might account for a small proportion of the Colombian diaspora, they often represent those with the highest levels of human and social capital, and as a result tend to assume prominent positions in their communities, as the following chapters will show.<sup>104</sup>

### Labour migration from Colombia to the UK and Spain

"Labour migration, or the cross-border movement of people for employment, is an increasingly important feature of the globalizing world" (IOM, 2003b, p.1; see also IOM, 2007). The IOM (2007) recently estimated that there were 81 million labour migrants in the world, which represented the largest part of contemporary migration flows. For the IOM, the key determining factors behind this type of migration are: "the "pull" of changing demographics and labour

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103 All but two of the Colombian refugees in Spain had arrived from the late 1990s onwards, compared with only three refugees in the UK arriving in this same period. This reflects the older nature of the Colombian refugee community in the UK (see Chapter 3).

104 The vast majority of those displaced by the conflict in Colombia end up as IDPs or escape to neighbouring countries (see Chapter 3). As Van Hear argues, 'class', understood as "endowments of different sorts of capital", is key for understanding where refugees flee (2006, p.125).

market needs in many industrialized countries; the "push" of population, unemployment and crisis pressures in less-developed countries, and established inter-country networks based on family, culture and history".<sup>105</sup> Colombia has a long history of labour migration, mainly to the US and Venezuela, with people migrating in search of better employment and professional opportunities, and/or higher income. However, rates of migration have been increasing since the 1960s and 1970s, and destinations have diversified to include European countries, such as the UK and Spain (see Chapter 3). At least five of the Colombian women and one man interviewed in London, and four women and another man (plus five of the women in the group interviews) in Spain, said they had migrated primarily for economic or labour reasons (on their own or following their families - see Chapter 4).

The Colombian community in the UK traces back its origins to a first wave of migrants who arrived in the 1970s under the work-permit system. Many were women who came to work in domestic service, like Julieta, Rosa and Alejandra. Julieta came as an au-pair 29 years ago, not so much for economic reasons, since she was happy living and working in Bogotá, but because she fell in love with a man, an artist who wanted to live in Europe. However, the majority of these women (and there were men too), migrated for economic reasons, to do with their wellbeing or that of their families. For these women, as many other from the South, migration became a survival strategy. They form part of the growing feminisation of international labour migration flows to the North, in large part related to the globalisation of domestic (and sexual) work (see Chapter 2). These were the cases of Alejandra and Rosa. The first had emigrated with her husband and children with the intention of earning enough money to buy a house in Colombia, while the latter did so to help her mother and siblings economically:

"I have six brothers and sisters. My father worked, but he had two problems, drinking and gambling ... Being the eldest sibling meant they all depended on me, and it was very difficult. Our financial situation was very bad, so that is why I decided to do it [to migrate]."

However, further into the interview, Rosa also suggested other, more subtle, factors that could have influenced her decision to leave:

"Definitely, your life changes [after migration] ... because you gain much greater freedom. This was my case. My life changed a lot from what it used to be. In Colombia, it was much more structured, around the church and the family, and you had to do what the family said and that was it. But when you leave Colombia, then you can be yourself, and you can take your own decisions ... In my case, my family, my mother, was extremely, 100% Catholic ... For me, [going away] personally helped a lot, it helped me grow up, to become what I wanted to be".

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105 See: [<http://www.iom.int/jahia/page706.html>] (06/08/07).

In earlier research on migrant women in London, family and social oppression based on gender identity also emerged as an important push factor for respondents (see Bermúdez Torres, 1995). However, this was hardly acknowledged by interviewees in this study, with most arguing that men and women migrated for similar reasons. This could be partly due to improvements in women's conditions in Colombia (see Chapter 3). In the case of the UK, the main factors maintaining the flows of labour migration have been the socio-economic deterioration in Colombia, the pull effect of migration chains and the continuing demand for unskilled labour. But looking at the motivations of the other three women and the man in this group who came to London in the 1980s and later, it is possible to identify some differences. Yamid, the only man, had moved to the UK in 2001 with his family contracted by a transport company, with a five-year work permit and all expenses paid. By contrast, the three women, like Rosa and Alejandra, had migrated because of the economic situation of their families, although two were also motivated by other factors, such as the desire to travel or to study (see Box 5.2).

**Box 5.2: Experiences of Colombian women labour migrants in the UK and Spain**

**Jane** was born in Medellín but lived in Valle del Cauca. She liked travelling and had previous experience of living and working in Brussels. When her husband started having problems at work in Colombia, they decided to migrate with their young son to Europe. After a brief spell in Belgium, where they did not manage to find employment, they arrived in London in 1996.

**Floralba** lived in a poor neighbourhood in Medellín with her family and daughter until she met her English husband-to-be. She had worked in a shop and after being laid off she had survived cleaning houses. However, she did not earn much money. She moved with her husband to England in 2000 to find better work and keep helping her family in Colombia.

**Marta**, despite coming from a more middle-class background, also said she was prompted to migrate by the economic situation of her family. She came from Bogotá, where both her parents were self-employed professionals. The economic crisis of the 1990s affected their finances badly. The fall in family income and living standards, together with her desire to continue her studies, led her to migrate to London in 2000.

**Marisol** arrived in Madrid in 2006. She had worked in local government in Pereira until restructuring left her unemployed. She then invested all her savings on setting up a business. When the business failed the only alternative left was to migrate to Madrid, where she had friends and relatives, to work in domestic service. She left behind her three children.

**Ingrid** is a young woman living in Barcelona who migrated to Spain not so much to improve her economic situation, but as a result of perceived professional opportunities. She studied arts in Colombia, but said that without the right contacts it was difficult to pursue her career over there. Since her sister was already living in Spain, she took the opportunity to go there.

Source: In-depth interviews.

According to Marisol, a woman interviewed in Spain, this is because:

"women risk more ... they have a huge responsibility, because of the economic problems in Colombia ... although men are also affected ... us women are more ready to sacrifice all for our family ... how am I going to stay in Colombia, if the needs around me are so great? ... We came because of the great love we have for our families, for our children".

More recently, and especially from the mid-1990s, Spain has also become a main destination for Colombian migrants (see Chapter 3). A recent study of Colombians in Spain suggests that this migration is mostly economic, although the growing levels of violence and insecurity in Colombia have also had an influence (IOM/UN, 2003). As in the case of the UK, all but one of the labour migrants interviewed in Spain were women (two were living in Madrid and two in Barcelona), a reflection of the highly feminised migration to this country from Latin America (see Chapter 3). Most of the women in this group, all of whom were working in domestic service (see below), in contrast with those in the UK, had migrated on their own, some because they were single and had no dependents, and others because it was easier to migrate that way (because of immigration regulations, or to be able to work harder). There was also a greater diversity of specific reasons for the migration of women in this group in Spain. Although most had migrated because they lost their jobs or to find better employment or earn more money, at least one woman had moved to progress in her career (see Box 5.2). In addition, three other women in Spain had followed their husbands, two of whom were professionals who had been relocated by their companies to Madrid and another one who had migrated to Spain to find better job opportunities.<sup>106</sup> The only man in this group, Victor, who lived in Madrid and was of Afro-Caribbean origin, said that he left Colombia because of his economic circumstances, but also because of general dissatisfaction with his life:

"I came to Spain because, personally, I was bored ... things didn't make much sense, and sometimes I think I should have left the country much earlier. I think I migrated with the desire to have the opportunity to start a new life, because in Colombia I had too many problems ... I was working in environmental issues ... had finished my university degree with great difficulty, and I still had that sense of instability. I was also experiencing very hard times in my family life, because I earned just enough to pay for the utilities ... all of this led me to leave the country".

#### Colombian students and other types of migration

Although international students are not usually considered migrants, Vertovec (2002, p.13) argues that "the movement of students should be seen as an integral part of transnational

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106 The role of women in high-skilled individual or family migration has been sidelined or treated mostly within the 'main migrant/dependent' dichotomy. Few studies have looked at women who migrate on their own for professional reasons or in dual-career households (see Yeoh and Willis, 2005).



migration systems", especially in the context of skilled labour migration.<sup>107</sup> At least six Colombian women and three men in Spain (all except two living in Madrid),<sup>108</sup> and six women and one man in the UK, were students at the time of the interviews or had originally migrated to study and ended up staying for a variety of reasons.<sup>109</sup> Some of the Colombians in the other two categories of migrants also entered the UK and Spain as students, even if they had other motivations for migrating. Two of the refugees (a man and a woman) interviewed in Spain, for instance, had entered the country with student visas. Cristina had worked on human rights issues and after the disappearance of a colleague and receiving threats herself opted to leave Colombia for Spain. However, at the time she had been too scared to tell her real story to anyone, and decided instead to look for a course to do in Spain. Mateo, on the other hand, had thought it would be easier to enter Spain with a student visa to do a PhD, which he obtained with the help of some contacts, rather than applying for asylum. Economic migrants, like Marta in London, also often apply for student visas as an easier way of gaining entry into a country. These stories reflect how as barriers to political and economic migration increase in the North, people have to explore other channels for migrating. The IOM (2006b), for instance, has reported that foreign student migration from the South is on the increase in Europe.

There is a significant Colombian student population both in Spain and the UK, although new regulations and barriers are also beginning to restrict this type of migration. Cristina, who had experience of working with other migrants, said that students and professionals were a large proportion of the total Colombian population in Spain, although they were not usually included in the statistics as immigrants: "Only recently, following the latest regularisation process, the state is beginning to recognise that this is also a form of immigration". Sometimes, as Cristina explained, students do not consider themselves migrants either, although many end up staying in the country longer than thought for different reasons:

"I went through this stage of not considering myself an immigrant ... I failed to apply for regularisation two years ago. People told me to send in my documents and get legal residence, but I was doing a postgraduate course and kept thinking, I'm not a migrant, I'm a student."

Cristina later married and settled in Spain, where she had been living for over five years. Four

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107 The IOM has highlighted that "student migration from developing countries can become a back door for permanent migration and, therefore, also a potential source of "brain drain"" (2006b, p.9).

108 The larger number of students living in Madrid than Barcelona, apart from being a reflection of the larger sample in the former, could be due to the language factor in the latter (the use of Catalan in academic circles). This was brought up by a refugee woman working at a university in Barcelona. The two women current or former students interviewed in Barcelona had chosen to come because of specific courses they found at universities there.

109 Women could be a majority of the Colombian student population in the UK, since according to Guarnizo's study more than 50% of the women in his sample group had university or post-graduate education, compared with less than 35% of men (2006b, p.23).

other women interviewed in London had also come originally to study English, but later married and stayed. These included Jessica, a middle-class language teacher from Cali who arrived in the UK in 1985, and Edelmira, a musician from a more humble family in Pereira, who came to London in 2001. Both had overstayed their planned visit to London initially because of opportunities for further study or work, and in the process settled into a relationship and ended up staying (although one had plans to move with her family to her husband's country of origin). Vanesa, on the other hand, had arrived in the UK in 1992 as an au-pair to study English and later decided to stay to help her family back in Colombia financially. Becoming an irregular migrant later pushed her to marry her boyfriend and although they had since separated she had decided to stay. By contrast, none of the men in this group had similar experiences. The only man in this group in London, Mauro, joined his mother when he was 16 to continue his studies. In the case of Spain, out of the three men, two were still students and another one had migrated in the early 1990s to continue his higher education and ended up staying.

All of the Colombians in this group interviewed in Spain had migrated to study at graduate or postgraduate level, while only three of the women in this group in London had done so (the rest went to study English). For some Colombians with economic means, Europe has always been an attractive destination to further their studies or specialise. Some of these respondents had firm plans to return to Colombia, and indeed one of them, Pilar, did so soon after the interview. Her reasons for going back included mainly her desire to continue her academic and political career there (she had been a university teacher, and involved in formal politics in Colombia). Luisa, who was in Spain with her teenage son, was thinking of returning soon and finishing her PhD from Colombia, since she had a commitment to go back to her academic post. Others, like Carmen and her husband, who had moved to the UK to complete their higher education, had more vague plans to return. However, some were staying (or thinking about it), at least for a longer period than originally thought, for professional or other reasons. Camilo, a young man studying for a PhD in Madrid said he was planning to stay for the time being because after being so long away from Colombia it would be difficult for him to find work in his field, while in Spain he knew of some opportunities. Cecilia also felt she was not ready to go back and had decided to stay after the end of her course to further her studies and gain some work experience. She argued that if she returned, it would be probably impossible to go abroad again, given the increasing travel and migrant restrictions imposed on Colombians. Only one woman, Nubia, who was doing a PhD in Madrid, said that she would like to return but was staying because she was in a relationship, even if this was damaging her career opportunities:

"At an emotional level, there is no doubt I want to go back to Colombia, but when I think rationally about it, there are other issues. My boyfriend is here, in Spain.

because of me, and I don't think he would consider moving to Colombia ... But on the other hand, because of my professional situation it worries me to stay here in Spain ... I want to work as a psychologist, but I have realized that it is very difficult for a Colombian to work as a psychologist here ... I don't think there is much room to work in my field here".

Some of the current or former students in Spain and the UK also gave other motivations for their migration. Mauro, for instance, said that his dream had always been to go to London, and at the same time he had grown tired of the political situation and conflict in Colombia.

Manuela, on the other hand, went to Barcelona to raise funds for her NGO, but also to do a course. For two years she had been traveling backwards and forwards between Colombia and Spain, but after marrying a Colombian man resident in Barcelona and becoming pregnant was thinking of settling more permanently in this city. Pilar, for her part, explained that she had both 'official' and 'unofficial' reasons for leaving Colombia:

"The official reason is that I want to be a teacher ... I am very ambitious in my career, and I always wanted to reach the top ... so it was always my dream to come and study in London ... The unofficial reason is that I left home when I was very young, only 17, and I never went back because of personal reasons ... my boyfriend was also in Europe, and that was also part of it".

Finally, at least five women and two men interviewed in London, had other reasons for their migration, mostly to do with personal relationships. These were the cases of Julieta, mentioned above, another young Colombian woman who had been living in the US before joining her boyfriend in London, and another woman who had married an English man she met in Colombia. Paula, a Colombian journalist, also said that she had not migrated for economic or political reasons, but because she had wanted to change her life after "a personal disappointment". In the case of the men, one had moved to London from Madrid, where he was studying, because his girlfriend lived there, while the other had traveled to Spain first to join his family and then moved to the UK following his relatives. Whatever the more specific reasons behind their migration, the Colombians in this group, as those in the other two groups, participated actively in their communities and maintained transnational linkages.

## **The process of settling in the UK and Spain**

### 'Choosing' a migrant destination

The decision process behind 'choosing' a migration destination can involve a lot of thought, or be the result of more *ad hoc* factors. It can also be more or less voluntary, depending on the type of migration, although there always seems to be a degree of choice (see Castree et al, 2004;

Richmond, 1996). When analysing the reasons why Colombians in this study migrated to Spain or the UK, what emerged as key was the role of migration networks and social capital. As Joly argues, "networks rank among the most important explanatory factors of migration ... [they] have a multiplier effect, which is implicit in the formerly fashionable expression 'chain migration'" (2004a, p.28 ; see also Castles and Miller, 2003; Massey et al, 2005). The IOM/UN (2003) study found that the most relevant reason for Colombians to choose Spain as their migrant destination was the existence of social networks, since these played a key role as a source of support and resources for recent arrivals. Among the migrants interviewed in Spain in this study, at least 19 men and women and two couples said they had relatives, friends or some other connections in the country prior to their migration. Some, like Marisol and Jairo, had visited the country previously. In the case of the UK, this factor is also important. Guarnizo, in his study of Colombians in London, points out that a large proportion (44%) of those interviewed included having family or friends there as the main reason for choosing their destination (2006b, p.47). In this sample, at least 27 of the Colombian respondents in London had relatives, friends or professional contacts in, or had previously visited, the UK.

However, migration networks are not always the main or only factor explaining choice of destination. Other issues, like language, culture, perceived opportunities and aspirations are also significant. In the case of Spain, the historical links with Colombia, the common language, and perceived cultural similarities, were important factors for many respondents (even if some of the similarities were not as strong as first thought). As Jairo, a Colombian refugee living in Madrid, explained: "Spain is the closest to my homeland". For Gladys, another refugee woman in Madrid, language was key, although the so-called demonstration effect also played a role:

"We didn't know anyone, but we came because it was easier due to the language, the Spanish language. We had thought about going to the US, but because of the language we decided it would be better for the children to continue their studies in Spanish. Also, you always hear about people coming to Spain".

By contrast, for the migrants in London, the English language was both a positive and a negative factor (see below). As already mentioned, many Colombians go to the UK to learn or improve their English. Despite the perceived lack of cultural and historical ties between Colombia and the UK, Guarnizo (2006b) explains that for the Colombian elite, Britain, and London in particular, has always occupied a special place (see Chapter 3). Thus, although the US is geographically closer and home to a large Colombian community, some respondents who had come to study to the UK argued that Europe had been more attractive to them, whether for cultural, political or other reasons. This was the case of Diana, who arrived in London in 2002:

"I never liked the US. What interested me most was London. I don't know why, but may be because of its history, since in school we learned a lot about Europe and I never had much interest in the US. In Latin America in general there is quite a lot of anti-Americanism ... I always wanted to come here, and when I came it was a shock, because it was not as I imagined".

In some cases, going to the UK or Spain was also seen as an alternative to the US because visa regulations in the latter were seen as more stringent, as pointed out by other studies (see Cabrera Serrano, 2004; Guarnizo, 2006b; IOM/UN, 2003; McIlwaine, 2007a). At least two women interviewed in London said they had tried going to the US to study English first, but their visa applications were rejected, while another woman explained that her husband had previously been in the US and they could not go back. However, another student said that she had preferred the UK to the US because in the former a student visa allowed you to work some hours per week to sustain yourself. For other students, their migrant destination had been based on funding opportunities or perceived costs. This was especially in the case of Spain, where academic fees and the cost of living were seen as cheaper than in other places (like the UK or the US), and there were some funding opportunities for Latin Americans. For other respondents, going to the UK or Spain had been the result of some chance occurrence. Victor, a labour migrant interviewed in Madrid, said that his first choice had been Canada, where he had some contacts via e-mail with organisations working on his field, but one day he received a technical magazine from Spain and realised the opportunities he could have there. Since his sister was already in Spain, he decided to join her.

Country-specific visa regulations can also have an effect on migration destination for refugees. For instance, increased restrictions for Colombian asylum seekers entering the UK from the mid-1990s onwards coincided with numbers going up in Spain, at least until 2001 when new visa requirements were introduced in the latter (see Chapter 3).<sup>110</sup> In addition, for many refugees there is limited choice of destination. As a refugee woman in Madrid said: "now that I think about it ... I realise that it wasn't a decision, I had no option. The decision was imposed on me". At least, four men, two women and a couple refugees interviewed in Spain had migrated through a specific programme designed to offer temporary protection to human rights workers from Colombia. Fernando, a refugee who arrived in the UK in the early 1990s, also ended up in London with the help of an international organisation that assisted in his escape from Colombia. In the case of Anita and her family, although they had applied for asylum in several countries, the UK was the first one to accept them. For others, there was a degree of choice, and the decision of where to go was generally based on the same factors as the other migrants. Andrew, a journalist interviewed in Madrid, said that for him Europe, rather than the US, had been the

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<sup>110</sup> As the doors to Colombians in Spain close too, other destinations, like Canada, Australia or the Middle East, are gaining importance.

logical choice because it offered "a more humanist vision" than the "consumerism" imposed by the US in Latin America. Nelly, on the other hand, chose to go to London because she had family and friends there, while Elena said that the cultural similarities with Spain had also played a role in her decision.

Thus, migration networks and social capital are as important for refugees as for other migrants (see Crisp, 1999; Koser, 2002; Koser and Pinkerton, 2002). To a certain extent, they can be even more crucial for refugees, who often arrive in their new countries of settlement with hardly any possessions. Although asylum seekers and refugees have sometimes recourse to official help, depending on the country or period of time they arrive, or their knowledge of the system, this can be minimal or even non-existent. The perception that it would be easier for them in one place or another to continue with their professional and/or political work was also a key consideration for those refugees with a certain degree of choice. John, a journalist from Medellín, said that although he did not have any contacts in Spain he thought it would be easier for him to continue his career over there because of the common language:

"they told me there was the possibility of applying for political asylum, but I could not apply there [in Colombia], I had to go to a country first, and they suggested Sweden. But then I thought, Sweden, what am I going to do there if I work in communications and my English is so [bad]? If I go there, I'm finished, completely finished. So in the five days I had to think about it I asked myself: where can I go? And I don't know why, but I thought of Spain".

In terms of being able to continue with their political work, both the UK and Spain were perceived by some of the refugees as having advantages, at the same time as the US was discarded for ideological reasons.<sup>111</sup> For example, the presence of networks and groups of other refugees, or non-migrant social activist organisations, working on the same issues was seen as important. Some were also attracted to London because the UK was seen as carrying special international weight, and as a country with a strong tradition of defending democratic and human rights. In addition, the UK was identified as a generous country for refugees, at least before migration laws became stricter and social welfare benefits were cut down. In the case of Spain, the common language was an advantage, but also important was the role that Spain plays within the EU vis-a-vis relations with Latin America.<sup>112</sup> Personal factors also played a role for refugees when choosing a destination. Meli, a refugee woman in her 50s interviewed in

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111 Although the US is one of the main countries receiving asylum applications from Colombians (see Chapter 3), for left-wing activists it is generally not seen as a good destination, given Washington's historical involvement in Latin America and its current participation in the conflict in Colombia (see Eastmond, 1993 on Chileans in the US).

112 Bloch (2002) argues that the most important predictor of country of settlement for asylum seekers tend to be colonial ties, which apply for Colombians in the case of Spain but not the UK.

Madrid, said that she had preferred exile in Spain instead of France, where her daughters lived, because at her age, and with no French, she did not want to interfere with her daughters' independence and become a burden to them.

### Immigration status and the role of immigration policy

As suggested above, for migrants in general, immigration status in the country of residence is obviously the most important factor in settlement, and the one that conditions almost everything else, including access to employment, entitlement to social, economic and political rights and benefits, and levels of cultural integration. It is also important when considering transnational linkages, since it can affect the ability to travel back to the country of origin, to apply for family reunification, to register at a consulate, or to engage in any activity beyond daily survival. During participant observation fieldwork in Madrid, a Colombian woman asylum-seeker I spoke to wondered how she could worry about participating in the politics of her country when she was still waiting for her legal status to be resolved and surviving as a domestic worker. Without any doubt, irregular migrants tend to be the most vulnerable of all, and research suggests that a large proportion of the Colombian communities in both the UK and Spain could be in this situation (see Chapter 3).

Not all respondents in this study offered information on their past or current immigration status, since this is a very delicate issue. However, at least two women in Spain, and another woman in the UK, admitted to having been 'illegal' migrants (see Box 5.3). Ruth, a Colombian community worker in London, also highlighted the problem of irregular migration among Colombians, and Latin Americans in general.

"we are working to help solve the problem of illegal immigration<sup>113</sup>. Over here there is a lot of people in an illegal situation, and many of them have children. For example, in some cases the mother might have British citizenship, but her daughter not, and as a result she could be deported. Or, for instance, one grandson could be British, but another one not, and the family has to separate. This is a huge socio-political problem that needs to be resolved".

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113 Despite using the term 'illegal', she explained beforehand that: "for me, in theory, no human being is illegal, it is the system that is illegal".

### Box 5.3: Experiences of Colombian irregular migrants in the UK and Spain

**Gladys** and her family applied for asylum when they arrived in Madrid in 2001. Their application was accepted and they were sent to a hostel, where they stayed for a month. After that they went to a reception centre, where they could stay for six months to a year. However, conditions in these centres are not always easy, and soon after finding work the family rented a flat. Living conditions were gradually improving, but after two years of living in Madrid their application for refuge was denied. As a result, they became undocumented, had to leave their jobs and move somewhere else. The family, except for the eldest daughter, obtained residence permits in the 2005 regularisation process.

**Vanesa** arrived in the UK in 1992 with an au-pair visa, initially to stay for six-months and study English. However, relations with her employer were difficult and soon she left her job, becoming an irregular migrant. She explained that although being undocumented in those early years was not as bad as now, she found it hard to continue with her studies or to find work, and became very worried about her future. When she met an Italian man and they established a relationship, they were advised to get married to regularise her situation. Despite his reservations, they finally got married. A few years later they broke up. It was eight years until Vanesa was able to go back to Colombia to see her family.

**Aurora** lived in Israel for eleven years before arriving in Spain only nine months before the interview. In Israel, where she worked in domestic service, she was happy until the application to renew her visa was turned down. Immigration regulations in Israel are very strict, and to live as an irregular migrant in that country was too hard, so she had to leave. Rather than going back to Colombia, she went to Spain, where her sister lived, with a tourist visa that has now expired. As a result, it was difficult for her to find regular work, and she was scared to go out much in case she was detained by the police and deported.

Source: In-depth interviews.

Even in Spain, despite recent regularisation processes, irregular migration remains a problem within the Colombian community. Gladys' oldest daughter, for instance, had failed to benefit from regularisation, since she was just over 18 and had to apply on her own. Her mother explained that she had failed to present all the required documentation on time, and as a result was now thinking of marrying her Spanish boyfriend to obtain legal residence, something both Gladys and her husband disapproved of given how young both were. However, irregular migrants are not the only ones with problems. In the UK, students are finding it increasingly difficult to renew their visa permits, given the rising costs involved and the stricter regulations. Marta, a young Colombian woman who had tried to continue her media studies in London said that she had to stop two years into her degree at a London university because of the cost: "as an international student I had to pay £10,000 per year". She complained that fees for renewing a student visa had gone up too, from almost no cost when she first arrived. Respondents in Spain also mentioned how it was getting increasingly difficult for Colombians to obtain a student visa to this country, as the authorities clamped down on student migration.

The situation of refugees is also complex. All of the refugees interviewed in London except one



had legal refugee status or some other form of permanent residency, mainly because most had arrived in the UK before entry restrictions for Colombians were tightened by the mid-1990s. However, Colombian asylum seekers in the UK often face years waiting for their applications to be processed, during which time they have restrictions on their ability to work and or claim benefits (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a&b; Mcilwaine, 2005, 2007a). In the case of Spain, there was more variety in the immigration status of the refugees interviewed, mainly due to differences in immigration legislation, and the fact that most were later arrivals.<sup>114</sup> Some, like Andrew, the journalist from Medellín living in Madrid since 1999, obtained refugee status relatively quickly, but he admitted his case was unusual. John, also a journalist, arrived in Madrid only two years later, but had to wait four years for the highest court to finally grant him refugee status, and in the meantime survived with his savings and doing odd jobs. In total, two men and two women, plus two couples interviewed together, had been granted a special permit to stay rather than full refugee status. In some cases this permit lasted only for a year, and after that they had to find any type of work to survive and be allowed to claim residency. This left them in a more vulnerable situation.<sup>115</sup> Apart from the practical consequences, not being able to obtain refugee status can also have psychological and emotional effects, as noted in previous research (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a). Although a refugee woman in Madrid said that she had opted not to apply for asylum because of the stigma attached to it, for other refugees being recognised as such (and not thrown in together with economic migrants) was important. Ivan, had arrived in Spain in 2001 fleeing persecution, just before new visa regulations for Colombians were introduced, and applied for asylum. His application was later denied, and although he had obtained residency by other means, he had appealed in a higher court:

"What will you do if it is rejected again?"

I am a resident already. I applied through the regularisation process and obtained my residency.

Well, at least you can stay here that way.

For the time being, yes. But the Spanish government can think whatever it wants, that we foreigners come here to improve our quality of life and all of that, but that is not my case. I am different. I am not here because the food is better, or because the cinemas are bigger, or because there are more shopping centres. I am not here for any of those reasons, my story is a different one, and my plans are different."

Although these problems in principle affect men and women migrants equally, as most

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114 The percentage of Colombian asylum-seekers who obtain refugee status in Spain is extremely low, although in some cases applicants instead receive a special permit to stay on humanitarian grounds (Clavijo Guevara y Perdomo Blanco, 1999; see also CEAR, 2005).

115 Studies in the UK have also highlighted the difference between being awarded refugee status or 'Exceptional Leave to Remain', which offers temporary residence status on humanitarian grounds, since the latter have fewer rights (see Bloch, 2002; Home Office, 1995; Sales and Gregory, 1998).

interviewees agreed, the data suggests some subtle but important gender differences. There were some suggestions that for women it might be easier to achieve legal immigration status through marriage. At least ten of the women interviewed in London, and only one man, had obtained residency in the UK in this way. However, these situations can lead to increased vulnerability for the women. Herminia, who works for a Latin American migrant organisation in Madrid, said that the incidence of domestic violence in cases of mixed marriages (as well as in migrant couples) was high. The director of another migrant association in Madrid also commented on this, citing the case of a Colombian woman who had lost her children when she divorced from her Spanish husband. This problem was also reported by community workers in London (see also Bermúdez Torres, 2003a). Women refugees can also be in a more vulnerable situation. Although some respondents believed that women asylum seekers were more successful in their applications than men, other studies suggest that often they face greater discrimination (see Crawley, 2000; RWRP, 2002; Skipjerboer, 2000). In addition, the migrant status of women often depends on that of their husbands or partners, rather than the other way around (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a). Beatriz, a woman in her 40s from Cali, arrived in Madrid in 2001 escaping guerrilla threats against her family. Five months later her husband joined her and applied for asylum, and after a while they brought in their three children. However, Beatriz had since separated from her husband on domestic violence grounds and did not know how this would affect her immigration status, since their application had not been resolved yet. At least three other women refugees interviewed in Spain were dependent on their husband's migrant status. None of the refugee men in the study were in a similar situation, but Jesus, a refugee man in Madrid, said that he knew of some cases where it was the woman who had applied for asylum on her own right, and in some of those cases the men who came with them found themselves "relegated" or "in the shadows".

### Access to employment

Since one of the main reasons for many Colombians migrating is to improve their economic and professional opportunities, or that of their families, access to employment is a key concern. "Economic and labour market assimilation" is also considered to be "the starting point of integration" (Papademetriou, 2003, p.2). If that is the case, the evidence available for the Colombian communities studied is not promising. In the case of the UK, despite the fact that the country, and London in particular, is seen as a source of job and income opportunities, these tend to be very limited for Colombian migrants. Guarnizo's (2006b) study of Colombians in London highlights the significant fall in both social and employment status experienced by most migrants, although there is also evidence of a certain degree of upward mobility for those with a longer period of residency. Independently of their educational level and/or employment

experience, as McIlwaine points out "the majority of migrants end up working in the cleaning sector at some point in their employment trajectories" (2005, p.33; see also Guarnizo, 2006b; Lagnado, 2004; McIlwaine, 2007a). This is because of the high labour demand in this sector (both in office and house cleaning), which tends to be filled by those workers in the most disadvantaged social sectors, mostly migrants and poor women (see Anderson, 2006, on migrant women in domestic and sex work in the UK). Lack of English and/or work permits, the fact that their qualifications and/or employment experience are not recognised in the UK, and the influence of social networks are the main reasons for Colombian migrants to enter the cleaning/domestic sectors. As Alvaro, a refugee journalist in London explained, soon after arrival "when you get up in the morning, you already have a mop and a sweeper in your hands to go and clean some offices, because that is what you have to do". For him and his wife, the social and economic downward mobility this implied had been traumatic:

"I was with my wife at 5 am in the morning cleaning some offices, and one day I saw her, it was like on the third day of being there, I was mopping the stairs and she was cleaning something, and suddenly we looked at each other and started crying ... What happened to us? Why did this have to happen to us? I had a mop in my hands, and before I used to wear a suit and tie all the time, I had my own secretary ... I had people working for me ... it was a huge shock".

At least seven women and three men interviewed in London had worked or were still working in the cleaning and/or domestic sectors. The rest of the sample group in London was very diverse, and included people working in retail, catering, office administration, journalism, banking and academia, as well as in community and international organisations. Many were also involved, or had been in the past, in running their own business and/or had done voluntary work. Self-employment has been highlighted by other studies as a popular choice of employment for Colombian migrants (see Open Channels, 2000; Guarnizo, 2006b). Doing voluntary work is also an option for many migrants, especially those with experience of community work or those who want to enter specific job areas or escape the cleaning niche (see McIlwaine, 2005). In general, the UK was perceived by the migrants as offering good work and economic opportunities (despite some complaints of discrimination - see below), especially when compared with other destinations. Four of the Colombian migrants in London had previous experience of working in other European countries. Jane had lived in Brussels first with her family, but when she could find no job there moved to London, where she thought there would be more opportunities. After entering the UK as a tourist, she and her husband found work within days looking after a disabled child. Rosa had also lived in Spain and France before moving to the UK, where she had heard there was plenty of work. She arrived in London in the early 1970s, and as she explained, in those years this was true, although life was hard:

"Here, in England, at the beginning it was very hard, there was the problem of the language, and I had not contacts. In those years we had to work very hard, physically hard, but there was a lot of work available, so I focused on working as hard as I could. I worked from 5am to 10pm ... but it was good because I progressed economically, which was my objective ... I did some cleaning, worked in factories ... for me it was easy because I had no children, husband or boyfriend, my only objective was to work and help my family in Colombia, and that is what I did".

Spain, on the other hand, was chosen by many migrants as a destination because of the perception that the similarities in language and culture would allow them to progress faster. However, the reality proved somewhat different. The studies available suggest that the range of jobs open to Colombian migrants in Spain is wider than in the UK (see Lagnado, 2004; IOM/UN, 2003). At the same time, there seems to be greater gender differentiation in the economic sectors in which migrants work, with men mainly concentrated in construction (followed by catering) and women primarily in domestic service (followed by catering and commerce) (IOM/UN, 2003). However, the evidence from this study showed that although male migrants in Spain had access to a wider range of jobs than in the UK, women were heavily concentrated in domestic labour. In addition, among the Colombian migrants interviewed in Madrid and Barcelona there was greater economic precariousness compared to those in London, a reflection of differences in labour market conditions and social policy between the two countries, as well as the Colombian community in Spain being more recent. The labour experience of refugees in Spain was particularly hard, both for earlier and later arrivals. Prior to her exile, Catalina had studied philosophy in Colombia, where she worked mainly in research, policy-making and human rights issues. She arrived in Madrid with her children in 1997, and since then had survived economically by doing some freelance research and domestic work, and with the help of family and friends. Meli, a woman refugee in her 50s who had been in Madrid for two years, had also found it difficult to enter the job market in Spain:

"Since I arrived, I have been looking for something to do. It hasn't been easy ... I looked after some children first, a job I found through some friends. Later, another friend of them employed me to look after her son. And this is all I have done ... When you start looking for work, and this has happened to other people I know with a certain level of education and qualifications, you realise that there is no suitable employment for you ... apart from looking after the elderly or in domestic service ... during an interview with an employment agency ... I asked whether they thought that when I came to Spain my hard disk had been erased ... I'm nearly 60, and have 45 years of working experience ... She told me that because I had no way to demonstrate this experience it didn't really exist ... I came out of there crying".

Even for those refugees who had managed to continue working in their professions, this had not been easy. Roberto, a human rights lawyer, arrived in Spain in 1998 escaping threats to his life. Like many refugees, initially he thought exile would only be temporary, until conditions for his return improved. He chose Spain because he thought the common language would make it

easier. First, he survived doing odd jobs, but when he realised his stay in Madrid was going to be longer than thought, he decided to validate his professional qualifications to be able to practice in Spain. It took him three years to achieve this, and though he was now working in his own office as a lawyer, he still has to struggle with discrimination. Elena had two degrees, one in social work and another one in history. However, she also had to do all sorts of work, including painting, cleaning and waitressing, before finding employment as a social worker in Madrid: "it is like a quota you have to pay, isn't it?". Like Roberto, Elena has found on many occasions that her qualifications and/or experience were brought into question merely on the basis that she was not Spanish but Colombian.

Despite this, many of the respondents in the UK and Spain thought that access to employment was easier for women than men, mainly because of the great demand for domestic and cleaning workers. As Mauro, a 34-year old man with experience of working with the Colombian community in London explained:

"I think that in terms of employment is ... a bit easier for women, because in the service sector, and the 'black' market, there are possibilities for them to work as a nanny, looking after the elderly, and doing other jobs that they can do because they are women. If you are a mother, for instance, you would prefer a woman au-pair to look after your children rather than a man ... for men, finding employment is a bit more difficult".

However, some women, like Rosa and Marisol, thought that this was also the case because women were more open to work in whatever they could find, and work as hard as they had to, in order to sustain their families. Rosa, for example, compared her experience working in the UK with that of his brother, who joined her later:

"I brought my brother here some 15 years ago, and he thought it was too difficult to work, to do manual work, such as cleaning offices, because they have a more structured mentality and think that men should not clean, that is not a way to earn your living, because in Colombia even poor people sometimes have someone else to clean for them ... you have to be a certain type of person, be flexible and adaptable, and not many men, and some women too, can do it. My brother, for example, refused to clean, but he still wanted to live here, and he wanted to live well".

Family responsibilities do not only weigh heavily on the type of work women undertake, but also in the hours worked and earnings received, often to their disadvantage. Beatriz, a refugee woman in Madrid, worked as an accountant in Colombia and had found it difficult to adjust to the lowering of her professional status. Less than a month after arriving in Madrid, she found work washing dishes in a restaurant, which she said "it was horrible ... and I earned peanuts". Her husband, on the other hand, took six months to find some work, but it was a better job, with

a proper contract and earning more money. Since separating, Beatriz had found it difficult to make ends meet, since their three children live with her:

"I have had to be very careful with the hours I work, since I have to look after my children, haven't I? He has a good job, from about 7am or 8am to 6pm or 7pm. Of course, he can work all day, but I can't ... I used to work in a house looking after a little girl, but it was hard because the parents weren't home all day ... and then they moved away. I started looking for another job, and I found work in a *locutorio*<sup>116</sup>, but it was very badly paid. The hours were good, I liked it because it was 10am to 5pm, and I could spend time with my children and keep an eye on them, but I couldn't survive on that money".

Despite this, for Colombian male migrants, their employment situation can have a more traumatic effect, given existing gender roles (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a). This was, for instance, observed by Viveros Vigoya during a study of masculinities in certain regions of Colombia. She explained that paid work outside the home was central for the construction of the masculine identity for different reasons: to achieve autonomy and independence, as a source of social recognition and prestige, to assert their roles as providers and protectors of the family, as a space for personal achievement and development, and as a simple means of subsistence (2001, p.97 - see also Chapter 2).

#### Discrimination, psychological and other problems

As some of the employment stories above show, discrimination, whether work-related or otherwise, was a common complaint of Colombian migrants both in Spain and the UK (see also Guarnizo, 2006b; McIlwaine, 2005, 2007a). In the UK, most complaints about discrimination referred to employment issues. Some mentioned how it was difficult for Colombians to seek work outside low-paid service jobs (mainly cleaning, catering and retail). This was partly associated to the language barrier, since lack of English skills was identified as one of the biggest problems for the community. However, other respondents said that even when migrants spoke English, or were second generation, they found it difficult to access better paid and professional work. Marta, a young Colombian woman in London who was doing voluntary work for a Latin American trade union project also mentioned how even middle-class students working in retail and other jobs suffered from "discrimination and psychological abuse" because of their lack of knowledge of labour legislation in the UK. This had happened to her and some other friends. Nevertheless, there are signs that things could be changing slowly, with several respondents proudly mentioning that there were now Colombians working in the City, for large news corporations or in academia.

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<sup>116</sup> *Locutorios* are small businesses offering services to other migrants, generally cheap phone calls and internet access.

For some, like Javier, a self-employed man in London, discrimination was also the result of migrants not fully integrating into English society and culture. This was especially highlighted by those migrants who had lived longer in London. They argued that there was a general lack of interest on the part of most migrants in learning the language and participating fully in British society, beyond earning money. This was partly blamed on migrants' need to work hard to maintain themselves and send remittances, but also on the exclusive focus on material and economic progress. Nelly, who had long worked with Latin Americans in London, said that with the growth of the community and the services available within it, there was the danger of creating a ghetto. Rosa, who had been living in the UK for over 30 years, agreed with this:

"I think that the Colombian community should try to integrate more into this society. Personally, I think that a large number of Colombians here never go to a museum, or never take their children to an art gallery, they don't go out of their Colombian environment. I don't criticise them, but I think that if we are here, first we should learn English, so we don't have to depend on an interpreter ... But my impression is that very few of us have done this ... very few are interested in going with the children to see something British, something that can offer us a little bit of the British culture too, not just Colombian ... I think the Colombian community should try to integrate more, and take advantage of this society not only economically, but also culturally".

However, complaints of discrimination seemed to be more abundant in the case of the Colombians interviewed in Spain, and they related to a wider variety of issues. Some, already mentioned above, referred to employment issues. Nubia, for instance, a psychologist living in Madrid, was studying and doing voluntary work at the time of the interview. She said that initially she tried finding work in her field, but was told that being Colombian it would almost be impossible. Others complained about the generally negative stereotypes they had had to face because of the media images associated with Colombia, generally related to violence, drugs and prostitution. Although this issue came up in discussions with respondents in the UK, it was much more prominent in the case of the fieldwork in Spain (see IOM/UN, 2003; Guarnizo, 2006b; Retis, 2006). Sometimes, these had consequences for the migrants' daily lives. Elena, a refugee woman in Madrid, talked about a very traumatic experience she had when looking for a place to rent with her partner and baby daughter:

"Here, Colombians have a bad reputation. When we went to rent our flat, the owner, a man, told us how he hoped there was not going to be any problems, since he was giving us a great vote of confidence, because the neighbours had asked him not to rent it to Colombians ... when my partner heard that, although he is a hard man, I could see he was on the brink of crying".

By contrast, there was hardly any references to discrimination on the basis of race. Victor, the

only interviewee who identified himself as Afro-Caribbean in the study, commented on this in the case of Spain:

"I thought Spain was a racist country, and it might be so to a certain degree, but I appreciate the fact that I can sit down freely in a bar, and people will serve me, and I can go anywhere, because I have lived in Colombia and I know what it is to be black, to be treated badly in a sneaky way, so I can compare, and that is part of the reason why I don't feel like going back to Colombia".

Migrants in both the UK and Spain also identified emotional and psychological issues, such as loneliness, mental health and questions of identity, as widespread concerns within their communities. This was more common in the case of refugees, although it was not exclusive to them (see Guinsberg, 2005). As Camino and Krulfeld point out, "the refugee experience is a complex process involving loss and regeneration" in many areas, due to the unplanned nature of the experience and the need for rapid adjustment to a new reality (1994, p.XIX; see also Ahearn, 2000a). As Elena, a refugee in Madrid, explained:

"It has been a very painful process, and very long, during which I had sometimes to convince myself, because really there are times when you start having doubts, about whether you should have come or not."

This is why Roberto, another refugee living in Madrid, believed that people in his situation find it difficult to adapt to their new conditions, and that there is a great need for psychological assistance within this community. This has been recognised by other studies of Colombian refugees in Spain: "one of the more serious problems that interviewees go through and admit to are the psychological crises they suffer, as a result of the lack of socio-cultural adaptation, the emotional needs and the uncertainty of daily life, among other motives" (Clavijo Guevara and Perdomo Blanco, 1999, p.59; see also Eslava González, 2004; Murillo Perdomo, 1989).<sup>117</sup> Restrepo Vèlez, in her study of Colombian women in Madrid, also highlights "the loneliness, nostalgia, uprooting and the sense of exile", as the feelings most common in the life histories of these women (2006, p.89; see note 18). These issues were less prominent in the narratives of the refugees, and other migrants, in the UK, which could be due to the more recent nature of migration flows to Spain. They also came up more often in the interviews with women.

It is now widely acknowledged that migration can affect men and women differently, given the differences in their gender roles and identities, although other factors, such as class, race or nationality are also important. It was a common perception among many respondents, although not all, that integration was easier for women than men. This perception was generally based on gender stereotypes. Interviewees in London believed not only that it was easier for women to

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<sup>117</sup> Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.



find work, but also that they learned English sooner and were better at integrating into British society (see also McIlwaine, 2005). According to Ruth, a community leader in London: "Latin American men in this country take longer than us to learn English, and they integrate less in the local community, so we women have to do everything". However, there were some contradictory views on this. While some argued that women integrated faster because they were the ones who had to take the children to school or the doctor, and therefore had to learn to communicate and mix in their new society, others believed that women were more isolated because their caring responsibilities kept them at home. In Spain, most interviewees also believed that integration was easier for women, because of their greater access to employment. Among refugees, however, a few mentioned that the experience had been harder for women. Gustavo, a refugee man in Barcelona, explained that although he had been able to continue with his political activities and had found work at a university, for his wife it had been different: "she's an economist ... but it has been difficult for her to get organised workwise here".<sup>118</sup> Jesús, another refugee in Madrid, also thought that in the case of the women he knew who had applied for asylum in their own right, and not as dependents, it had been really hard "to be in situations where they have to go and clean houses, or look after the elderly. It is a very conflictive situation, after they were used to being in leadership positions and having done so many things" (see also Bermúdez Torres, 2003a).

All these issues can have a strong impact on gender and family relations. Migration in itself tends to lead to the breakdown of families, whether among the nuclear and/or the extended structures. Guarnizo found that one of the things migrants most missed about Colombia was "their people" - i.e. their relatives, friends and closer contacts (2006b, p.55; see also Arsenault, 2006). This was also the case for many Colombian respondents in this study, especially the women. Blanca said that what depressed her most about life in Madrid was not having any relatives around, while Ricardo mentioned the stress he suffered the first year in Spain thinking about his elderly father in Colombia: "the anxiety of not being able to see my father was awful ... I used to wonder all the time, is my father ok? Please God don't let him die". Such stress can be worse when the nuclear family breaks down because one of the parents or both migrate first and have to wait until their legal and economic situation is stable to bring the rest of the family over, a process that can take years or even never be completed. This was the case for some refugees interviewed in Spain. Even when couples and/or families came together, or were reunited later, in some cases the migratory experience had put so much strain on the family, and/or the relationship, that this led to their breakdown. In the case of refugees, this was blamed on "the socio-economic difficulties, the psychological crises, the deterioration in the

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<sup>118</sup> For more on the experiences of women accompanying their husbands into exile, and the effect of this on gender relations, see, for instance Al-Rasheed's (1993) study of Iraqi women in London.

quality of life, and the constant uncertainty" they faced (Clavijo Guevara and Perdomo Blanco, 1989, p.63). But in other cases, these problems were associated with changes in gender roles, with men sometimes seen as losing their dominant position and status, while women gained in independence and confidence, through the migratory process (see Arsenault, 2006; Bermúdez Torres, 2003a; Eslava González, 2004). There was also a lot of concern within the Colombian communities studied about the effects of all this on children and youth, and how this impacted on their integration (see Echeverri Buriticá, 2005). However, the breakdown of families is not always a consequence of migration, but also a factor leading to it (see McIlwaine, 2007a). Many respondents in this study came from broken families, and at least in three cases separation had led to the mother migrating abroad and the children following after.

### **The Colombian diaspora and its transnational connections**

#### The growth and spread of the Colombian diaspora

Guarnizo points out that the current dispersal of Colombians throughout the world, with significant concentrations of migrants in at least 20 countries in four different continents, gives Colombian migration a truly "global character" (2006b, p.5). Migration is not new to Colombia, whether internal or external (see Chapter 3). The studies available suggest that many Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain had previous experience of internal and/or external migration (*ibid*; IOM/UN, 2003). Thus, for instance, although most of these migrants have an urban origin, in many cases they or their families had gone through a previous process of internal migration. At least 16 men and women interviewed in this study related personal experiences of rural-to-urban or urban-to-urban migration. There were cases such as that of Jesús and Alejandra, who were born in a village but grew up in the city, and Elena and Mateo, who were born in one city, but grew up in another, as their families moved to find better employment or educational opportunities. Other respondents had migrated internally as adults, to continue their studies, or for economic or professional reasons. In some cases, there was also a family history of internal migration linked to the country's history of political violence, more specifically during the times of *La Violencia* (see Chapter 3):

"My grandfather had a big *finca* [farm] ... with cattle and lots of other things, but during *La Violencia* he had to leave, because he was a Conservative ... and with the little bit they took with them they started again in a different village ... but they also had to escape from there, and little by little, every time they moved, their capital shrank ... so when they arrived in Valle del Cauca ... we had nothing left, no land, nothing" (Mariano, London).

"during *La Violencia* in Colombia, in 1948, my grandfather was displaced by 'political conflicts' between sectarian people, so if you were from a political party

and I belonged to another one, it meant a fight to death ... there was a migratory process inside Colombia, which affected my family, and they became victims, they lost all their possessions, their land, and all of this meant that my father had to start from zero practically" (Mauro, London).

Many of those interviewed also had previous experience of international migration, or at least travelling, mainly within Latin America, Europe or the US. This was the case of at least 12 respondents in Spain. These included two young women in Barcelona and Madrid who had studied in London first, but had moved to Spain, one to do a specific course and the other to join her family, who in the meantime had fled Colombia for security reasons. Another young woman from an upper-middle class background who had studied in the UK and France before joining her sister in Madrid to continue her higher education, while another woman had previously lived in Israel, and a young woman student in Madrid had been born in Colombia but grew up in Venezuela, where part of her family still lived. In London, some 15 Colombian men and women had similar experiences of previous international migration, mainly to the US or some other European countries, including Spain, Belgium, or France.

Previous experiences of migration, both internal and external, were more common among refugees. Many of the refugees interviewed had been displaced within their own country prior to going abroad (for those with the human, social and/or capital resources to do so) (see Chapter 3). As Mateo, a refugee man in Madrid, explained: "many of us, before becoming refugees abroad had to go through the experience of internal exile". Gladys and her family had moved cities, and even departments, within Colombia first, before they decided to flee abroad because they did not feel safe in Colombia. Others, like Mateo, had previous experience of internal and international exile. His family had been displaced internally first, because of his father's trade union activities, and later he moved to Bogota to escape threats to his own life, which led to a brief stay in Switzerland after a failed attempt on his life and a visit to Cuba before he returned to Colombia, only to be exiled once again, this time to Spain. Anita, a refugee woman living in London, had also sought refuge in Ecuador, Brazil and France before arriving in the UK. For many of these migrants, previous experiences of international migration have served to multiply their transnational linkages.

### The transnational relations of Colombians in Spain and the UK

The most recent studies on Colombian migration have highlighted the growing transnational linkages between migrants and their homeland, as well as between the different migrant communities abroad (Guarnizo, 2003a). According to Guarnizo, this is expressed in several ways: first, the extensive rights that the state has granted Colombians abroad, and the

emergence of initiatives aimed at connecting migrants with their home country; second, the growing dependence of the country on migrant remittances; and third, the density of the social, cultural, political and economic relationships that those abroad maintain with their families and communities of origin in Colombia (*ibid*, pp.25-26). Existing research on Colombian migration to the UK and Spain, or indeed the US, has shown evidence of the transnational linkages between migrants and the home country, especially within the realm of personal and economic relations (IOM/UN, 2003; Guarnizo, 2006b; Guarnizo and Díaz, 1999; Guarnizo et al, 1999; Guarnizo et al, 2003). The majority of respondents in this study said that they maintained strong links with Colombia, whether at the family level or in terms of economic, cultural, social or political relations. Maintaining such links had been made easier through the development of modern communication technologies, and more specifically the lowering cost of phone calls and air travel, and the growing use of the internet:

"[my contacts are] permanent ... when I wake up at 8am I switch on the computer and read the Colombian news on the internet. It is like a daily routine. Also now, with Skype and all of that I can talk with my friends and my parents all the time" (Nubia, Madrid).

"[my contacts are] full, very active. I mean, with the communication means and high technology available now, such as internet and Skipe, messenger and all of that, they happen I would say daily, with my family, almost daily with my family" (Jessica, London).

Both Jessica and Nubia also travelled to Colombia frequently, at least once a year, which was not the norm for most migrants. Their main transnational relations were with family and friends, like with most other migrants. In some cases, these personal relations can prove even more important or satisfactory than the ones established (or not) in their new local context:

"All my connections are with Colombia, yes. All, because, all my friends are over there, and I haven't been able to make many friends here. Instead, my social life happens over the phone, with my friends over there ... I phone them quite a lot, more or less two or three times a week" (Floralba, London).

However, these transnational relations can be harder to nurture for some migrants, mainly refugees and those who are undocumented, since for them it is more difficult, or impossible, to travel to the country of origin, and they tend to be in a more vulnerable socio-economic situation. For example, Gladys and her family had had to wait more than four years to obtain residency in Spain after their application for asylum was rejected, and thus had not been able to travel to Colombia yet to see their relatives. For some refugees, like Alvaro, who had been living in London since 1999, going back to Colombia was out of the question for security reasons, except in very special circumstances, like when he had to go for a brief period during a

family emergency. However, for other refugees, this is not possible even in the most extreme conditions, as in the case of Mateo, who had two brothers killed in Colombia soon after he arrived in Spain:

"I could not even be present at the burial of my brothers ... I do not believe in the cult to the dead, but I could not even be there accompanying my relatives ... I have also missed my nephews growing up, and my other brother has had to keep a relationship with his son, as close as possible, through virtual means".

Others, like Vanesa, a migrant woman living in London, had to wait eight years until obtaining legal documents in the UK and thus been able to travel to Colombia. Some studies have also pointed out that the ability to communicate transnationally using modern technologies, such as the internet, can vary a lot, not only depending on the type of migration, but mainly across gender, generational and class lines (see Benítez, 2006; Panagakos and Horst, 2006; Wilding, 2006). Although the use of such technologies was discussed in detail during the interviews, many respondents mentioned they used internet for a mixture of personal, professional, political and business reasons, especially in the case of the UK (19 in London, compared with 13 in Spain). These included young students, but also older professionals and refugees, and only two labour migrants, and both men and women. The geographical disparity could be the result of the composition of the sample group, or just that the issue came up in some conversations more than others, but it could also be due to migrants in Spain having less access to modern technologies for a variety of reasons (for instance, being a more recent community in still precarious conditions). The IOM/UN (2003) study found that the main way Colombian migrants in Spain kept in touch with their families and others in Colombia was through phone calls (92%), with email and internet mentioned in second and third places respectively (see Chapter 6 for more on this).

Irregular migrants and refugees can also be at a disadvantage in the field of transnational economic relations, since their economic situation tends to be more precarious. Some research has already recognised the growing importance of migrant remittances to Colombia, both at the macro and micro levels (see Garay Salamanca and Rodriguez Castillo, 2005; IOM, 2005). In his study of Colombians in London, Guarnizo (2006b) states that nine out of ten Colombians interviewed sent remittances to their families in Colombia, while the IOM/UN (2003) report on Colombians in Spain found that at least two thirds of its sample group sent remittances regularly. A majority of the respondents in this study also sent money regularly to family members, although the frequency and amount varied depending on the economic conditions of both the migrant and their family back in Colombia.<sup>119</sup> Those migrants who had left children

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<sup>119</sup>There is a lot of work on this issue in other migrant contexts (see, for instance, Goldring, 2004, 2003).

behind, like Floralba in London, Jesús in Madrid or Aurora in Barcelona, sent money quite regularly to pay for their children's expenses, and often to help the rest of the family. Others, like Marta, a young Colombian woman in London, said that she sent money but less regularly now than when she first came, since economic conditions for her family had improved and she was working less intensively at the moment: "Yes, I send money to my mother, or at least during a time I was quite constant, sending every month, but lately I only do it every six months". Sending money to their mother was one of the most popular answers among the interviewees, a reflection of the central figure that mothers play in Latin American culture.<sup>120</sup>

"My mother is separated, and I send them money every month ... around 400 pounds, and that helps ... I am the one in charge of sustaining my mother ... we help, we know that we will always have to help my mother, it is our responsibility" (Diana, London).

"Together with my husband, we sustain my mother there in Colombia, and my sister and niece. We send every month between 600 and 700 Euro. It is a lot for us, but well, it is the least we can do" (Cristina, Barcelona).

Even those who can barely survive economically, like Mariano, a refugee in London, admitted to sending at least some small amounts of money now and then. However, for others this proved impossible:

"No, I can't. How? I used to send money when the children were there, I used to send all I earned for my children. But not now. I have debts there, I left some debts behind when I came, and I have not been able to pay them yet. At the moment, I am barely surviving here, so how can I send money there?" (Beatriz, Madrid).

However, these economic transnational relationships are not exempt from problems. Rosa, for instance, paid for the house where her parents and siblings were living in Colombia with the remittances she sent from the UK. But now that her parents are both dead, the issue of who owns the house has created lots of problems between her and her siblings. Alvaro, a refugee man living in London with his wife and children, also said that at the beginning both he and his wife helped their families back in Colombia with whatever they could send, even if their economic conditions in the UK were not very buoyant. However, during a trip to Colombia during a family emergency they realised that some of the relatives they were helping lived better than themselves, and that changed things (see also Datta et al, 2007).

In addition, economic remittances do not flow only one way, they are 'multi-directional' and

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Although some studies suggest that remittances, for instance, decline with migrants' length of stay, this was not evident from the information collected in this study.

<sup>120</sup>Many respondents mentioned that their parents had separated. In most of these cases, the children had gone to live with the mother, and a few had lost all contact with their fathers, or hardly saw them.

'multi-polar' (Goldring, 2004). Some respondents currently, or had in the past, received money from their relatives in Colombia (see also Datta et al, 2007; McIlwaine, 2005). This was especially the case for young middle-upper class students supported by their families, but not exclusively. Pedro, although not a student, also said that when he first arrived in the UK it was his family who would send him money, to help him settle down. Some of the refugees interviewed in Spain also admitted that initially they had survived with their own savings, and/or with the help of family and friends. Finally, apart from the remittances, economic transnational relations were also maintained through other means, such as business enterprises (see Chapter 2). At least three respondents in London mentioned that they were involved in a business venture with Colombia. Gabriel had his own business in Colombia, an internet-based shop selling presents, which he had continued running first from Madrid and now from London. Mauro, a young Colombian man working for a City bank in London, was also involved in some business projects in Colombia, while Vanesa, another woman living in London, had started a small business with a friend selling t-shirts hand painted by artists in Colombia. None of the respondents in Spain were involved in this type of transnational economic connections, which could be partly the result of the sample chosen (more refugees than other types of migrants) but also the more recent establishment of this community.

In many instances, transnational connections were not only maintained with the homeland, but also with other countries where migrants have settled. Many Colombian families are now spread globally, with members in different countries and continents, which is creating a real sense of a diaspora. Linkages between the Colombian communities in Spain and the UK are constantly growing. Many respondents in London said they had family or friends living in Spain, with whom they kept in close touch and visited now and then. Others travelled between the two countries for professional reasons. In some cases, relatives had migrated to Spain, rather than the UK, because in the former immigration rules were less strict, but once they achieved EU residency they moved to the UK. This is why some studies argue that "Spain comes up as the most important anteroom to Colombian migration to London" (Guarnizo, 2006b, p.37). However, there is also evidence of migration flows in the other direction. For those Colombians who have been living in England for a long time, and have achieved a stable financial situation, Spain is becoming not only an attractive holiday destination, but also a potential country of residence prior to or after retirement. Freddy, a refugee in London, said that he was thinking of relocating to Spain because it would be easier for him to practise as a lawyer there. Mauro, on the other hand, said that he had bought a second home in the eastern coast of Spain to go on holidays with his family. He also thought that if they ever got tired of life in England but did not feel ready to go back to Colombia, they could move there. Julieta, who has been living in London for nearly 30 years, was thinking along similar lines:

"I have many friends throughout Spain, in Madrid, Barcelona, Majorca or Seville. I love Spain. It would be my second preferred country to live in ... If I don't go back to Colombia, I'd go to Spain, I have many friends there ... and it is closer to my culture".

## **Conclusions**

This chapter shows that Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain left Colombia for a variety of interrelated political, economic and personal reasons, choosing (or not) their destination based on perceived advantages, as well as the existence of migration networks and social capital. Despite the emphasis on other studies on the economic nature of Colombian migration in general, refugees, whether recognised or not, and students, also account for a significant proportion of the migrant population. The experiences of these migrants differ, depending on the reasons for migration, the country and time of arrival, as well as gender, class and race. The UK offered a more welcoming reception to start, especially for those migrants who came in the 1970s and 1980s. However, this changed as immigration legislation became stricter throughout the 1990s. At the same time, migration flows to Spain began to rise, since Spain initially offered relatively easy entry to Colombian migrants (these also became progressively stricter later). For refugees though, Spain seems to have offered fewer advantages, given the difficulty in obtaining full refugee status and the few social benefits available to them. Migrants in Spain in general were also more prone to complain about discrimination, not only at work but in their daily lives. This was generally related to the negative stereotypes associated with Colombia.

Despite this, both the UK, and especially Spain, have become important alternative destinations to the US for Colombian migrants. Migration flows to Europe are also highly 'feminised'. As other studies point out, there are differences in the experiences of men and women migrants. Colombian women labour migrants have greater access to employment, but they are limited mainly to unskilled and lower paid jobs, and especially domestic work in the case of Spain. In addition, family responsibilities often prevent them from working more hours. Women refugees in particular can find it harder to continue with their professional and political activities from exile, as other studies have suggested. Differences in the experiences of men and women are also seen as contributing in some cases to changes in gender relations and family disintegration. All of this can have a strong influence on the type of, and the ability to maintain, transnational connections with the homeland. Although at the individual level most migrants maintain strong personal, social and economic connections with Colombia and other migrant communities abroad, the ability to do this vary mostly depending on length of stay and immigration status. Nevertheless, such connections are contributing to the emergence of a transnational social field.



that at least indirectly connects these migrants with the political situation and context of armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia (not least in the case of the role played by remittances). The following two chapters will focus on the collective and more direct political manifestations of this field.

## CHAPTER 6

### **The Colombian migrant communities in Spain and the UK: collective transnationalism from 'above' and from 'below'**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter showed how the Colombian migrant populations in the UK and Spain have grown to significant proportions over the past few decades and, in the process have become more heterogeneous. It also explored transnational connections at the individual level, mainly in the context of personal and economic relations. These relations are contributing to the emergence of a Colombian transnational social field, which according to Guarnizo:

"means that the multiple types of power (political, economic, social) structuring society, as well as the production, reproduction and transformation of the culture shaping national identity, transcend the national territory to happen in a transnational space ... this affects both civil society and the exercise of power by the State, which manifests itself in several ways" (2006a, p.81).<sup>121</sup>

This chapter analyses first the efforts from above (mainly the Colombian government and some private interests) to enhance and shape this transnational social field for political, economic, cultural or social ends. Making use of modern technological developments, several initiatives have been launched recently reaching up to the diaspora, as part of a wider version of what some authors describe as turning 'brain drain' into 'brain gain' (Meyer et al., 1997; see also Gamlen, 2006). Second, it brings to attention transnational collective engagement from below in the context of the Colombian communities in Spain and the UK. Differences and similarities between migrant civil society in the two national settings (and in contrast to the US) are explored throughout. The gender aspects of this transnational social field are analysed in the third part of the chapter. This section explores the participation of migrant men and women in the different forms of collective transnationalism, and the implications of this for gender relations and equality. The more overt transnational political practices of Colombians in the UK and Spain, and the gendered nature of such practices, will be explored further in Chapter 7 in the context of electoral politics and the political work directly related to the armed conflict and efforts for peace in Colombia.

#### **Efforts from above to shape the transnational social field in the context of Colombia**

Gamlen points out that until relatively recently, the dominant concern in global migration

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121 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

debates was on immigration rather than emigration management, ignoring that the latter "is also a fact of daily life for many states" (2006, p.3; see also Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003a). The latter, according to Portes et al., is understandable, given "the growing volume of remittances; expatriates' investments in housing, land and businesses in their country of origin; and the civic and philanthropic activities that cross borders" (2006, p.13).<sup>122</sup> Thus, for Hazán (2001), transnationalism is leading to a reconfiguration of the nation-state, and related concepts of citizenship and sovereignty, rather than their demise, as other studies suggest (*ibid*; see also references in Chapter 2; and Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003, for a Latin America comparative study). Based on her study of the Mexican and Colombian cases, Hazán (2001) suggests that the interest on the part of nation-states in their citizens abroad represents a relatively new trend, more the result of internal politics than the pressure exercised by migrants themselves. In the case of Colombia, Guarnizo (2006a) agrees that up until relatively recently, the state had shown little interest in its migrant population abroad, with the exception of the programmes emerging in the 1970s to reverse the effects of the so-called brain drain. However, more recently there has been a movement from the 'brain drain' approach to the 'diaspora option', which: "does not aim at the physical repatriation of the nationals living and working abroad. Its purpose is the remote mobilization of the diaspora's resources and their association to the country of origin's programmes" (Meyer et al., 1997, p.3).<sup>123</sup>

According to Díaz (2006), by the 1980s researchers in Colombia started to challenge this lack of interest, which they saw as an indication that the authorities considered the migration of Colombians abroad as "a mattress cushioning the social and labour problems in Colombia".<sup>124</sup> However, the situation began to change by the mid-1990s, as the migration of Colombians abroad started to grow exponentially (Guarnizo, 2006a). Díaz (2006) traces the beginnings of this change to the impact that the UN conference on population in Cairo in 1993 had in Colombia and on research on international migration. Thus, in 1996 the Colombian government created the *Programa Colombia para Todos* (Colombia for All Programme), which included a specific initiative for Colombians abroad (*Programa para la Promoción de las Comunidades Colombianas en el Exterior*, PPCCE – Programme for the Promotion of Colombian Communities Abroad). Its purpose was to support Colombians abroad, mainly through improved services at the consulates, and contribute to challenging the negative image of Colombian migrants and of the country (see below) (Guarnizo, 2006a; see also Hazán, 2001).

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122 (Translated by the author from the original in Spanish). The nation-states where migrants settle can also have an interest in facilitating or impeding the transnational links between migrants and their home countries. This is evident, for instance, in the current debates on the linkages between migration and development, and migration and security issues (see Chapter 2).

123 See also Vertovec, 2002, on transnational networks in the context of skilled labour migration.

124 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish. This has been similarly argued for other cases, such as that of Ecuador (see, for instance, Acosta et al, 2004).

Since then, government efforts at enhancing the linkages between the diaspora and the home country have intensified. Similar private initiatives, whether promoted by business or civil society, have also emerged recently, making use of new technologies in communication. However, little is known about these, especially the latter. The following section explores some of these initiatives and how they function at the local level, in the context of the Colombian communities in the UK and Spain.<sup>125</sup>

#### Government-led efforts to connect with the diaspora: *Colombia Nos Une*

In 2002, the Colombian government launched *Colombia Nos Une* (Colombia Unites Us), as part of the Uribe administration's national development plans. The objectives of this programme are "to strengthen the links with Colombian communities abroad, to recognise them as part of the nation, and to address them through public policy initiatives".<sup>126</sup> To achieve such goals, nine thematic areas were created (see Box 6.1). Although this initiative is relatively new, there has already been progress in some of these areas. For instance, in the area of transnational networks, "which aims to establish channels of communication, participation and interaction between Colombians abroad, with their families, their regions of origin, and more generally Colombia"<sup>127</sup>, there are three projects currently under way. These are: a network for students and professionals abroad; a business network linking businesses in Colombia with Colombians abroad; and *RedEsColombia*, "a system of social networks for Colombians with the aim of creating positive links between the country and its population ... to promote and facilitate the participation of all Colombians, regardless of their geographical location, to develop processes of transnational citizenship, participative culture, trust, solidarity and a better use of the Colombian social capital" (see Footnote 127).<sup>128</sup> In the area of economic participation, the Colombian state has been less active in seeking and channelling the remittances of its nationals abroad, compared with other countries. However, in cooperation with other similar private initiatives (see below), it recently launched a *Guía de Donaciones en Especie* (Guide for Donations in Kind) to facilitate non-monetary donations from Colombians (and non-

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125 There is little research on the diverse forms that nation-state efforts at linking with their diasporas have taken, beyond the issue of remittances or the voting rights of migrants, and these include mostly studies of Mexican or Central American migrants in the US (see Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003; on the issue of collective remittances and migrant philanthropy, see Goldring, 2004, 2003; Merz, 2005; Popkin, 2003).

126 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish. See:

[[http://www.minrelext.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/cmd/cs/.ce/7\\_0\\_A/s/7\\_0\\_CV\\_th/J\\_0\\_69\\_s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_CR/me/7\\_0\\_CI-7\\_0\\_A/s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_CV](http://www.minrelext.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/cmd/cs/.ce/7_0_A/s/7_0_CV_th/J_0_69_s.7_0_A/7_0_CR/me/7_0_CI-7_0_A/s.7_0_A/7_0_CV)] (05/06/07).

127 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish. See:

[[http://www.minrelext.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/cmd/cs/.ce/7\\_0\\_A/s/7\\_0\\_DC\\_th/J\\_0\\_69\\_s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_CR/me/7\\_0\\_CI-7\\_0\\_A/s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_DC](http://www.minrelext.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/cmd/cs/.ce/7_0_A/s/7_0_DC_th/J_0_69_s.7_0_A/7_0_CR/me/7_0_CI-7_0_A/s.7_0_A/7_0_DC)] (05/06/07).

128 See: [<http://es.groups.yahoo.com/group/redestudiantescolombianos/>]

[<http://www.colombianosnegocian.com/VBeContentHome.asp>] (09/06/07).

Colombians) abroad to social projects in Colombia.<sup>129</sup> There have also been improvements in consular services and attempts to increase migrants' political engagement (mainly by boosting electoral participation – see Chapter 7), as well as efforts to examine better the conditions of nationals abroad and some cultural initiatives (mainly in connection with other programmes seeking to improve the image of Colombia abroad, and enhance national identity – see below).

**Box 6.1: Thematic areas of *Colombia Nos Une***

- Economic participation: to facilitate the sending of remittances and their channelling towards savings and investment.
- Transnational networks: to establish communication channels with Colombians abroad around issues of interest for them and the country.
- Population issues: to design strategies and programmes to help identify the characteristics of the Colombian population abroad.
- Social protection: to contribute to public policies aimed at diminishing the vulnerability of Colombians abroad in areas such as work, pensions and health.
- Education: to open up spaces for research and discussion of Colombia migration abroad.
- Political participation: to strengthen the political participation of Colombians abroad around issues of national interest.
- Culture: to facilitate discussion of the role of culture in the reaffirmation of national identity.
- Consulate issues: to improve the services offered by consulates abroad.
- Portfolio of projects: to create and coordinate projects that could be supported and financed by Colombians abroad.

Source: *Colombia Nos Une*

[[http://www.minrelext.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/cmd/cs/.ce/7\\_0\\_A/s/7\\_0\\_KD5/th/J\\_0\\_69/s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_D9/me/7\\_0\\_CI-7\\_0\\_A/s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_KD5](http://www.minrelext.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/cmd/cs/.ce/7_0_A/s/7_0_KD5/th/J_0_69/s.7_0_A/7_0_D9/me/7_0_CI-7_0_A/s.7_0_A/7_0_KD5)] (05/06/07).

Through its website, *Colombia Nos Une* offers up-to-date information on the activities of the nine thematic areas, as well as news and events in Colombia and abroad that concern the diaspora, a list of consular services and other related data, and opportunities for participation by web users. In addition, there is a monthly electronic bulletin to inform "the Colombian community abroad, the diplomatic missions and the public in general about the activities carried out ... [and to serve as] a window to disseminate some of the numerous and important initiatives led by the organisations of Colombians in different parts of the world".<sup>130</sup> The last

<sup>129</sup>According to official sources, the country received some 6 billion Colombian *pesos* worth of donations in kind in 2005 (see below for more on diaspora philanthropy). See: [<http://www.presidencia.gov.co/sne/2006/enero/24/03242006.htm>] (05/06/07).

<sup>130</sup>Translated by the author from the original in Spanish. See:

bulletin for 2006 offered a summary of activities for the year, which included: the creation of new sections in the network for students and professionals; the promotion of housing 'fairs' abroad; the organisation of a second seminar on Colombian international migration and transnational communities; the organisation of civic leadership workshops with Colombian communities in the US; the opening up of state-financed courses in Colombia to Colombians abroad through internet; and other work aimed at improving the image of Colombia abroad and promoting its culture (*Colombia Nos Une*, No.20, November 2006).

Looking in detail at the content of the electronic bulletins of *Colombia Nos Une* since they were first published in April 2005, most of the activities listed have been of a general nature, or based in the US. Nevertheless, events in other parts of the world, including countries in Latin America, Europe, Asia and Oceania, are also mentioned, a reflection of the spread of the Colombian diaspora. Spain and the UK are mentioned eleven and eight times respectively throughout the 24 published issues of the bulletin (compared with 30 for the US). In the case of the UK, the few activities listed were mainly of a business, charity or cultural nature; while in Spain, they included mainly the celebration of housing fairs, migration conferences, and practical information for migrants (and they were based mostly in Madrid) (see Box 6.2). The differences in activities between the two communities probably reflects the composition of each, and the protagonism or priority afforded to different sectors within (i.e. the prominence of middle- and upper-class migrants in the case of the smaller London community, and the larger and more diverse Colombian population in Spain).

Nevertheless, by and large, the presence of *Colombia Nos Une* within the migrant communities studied seemed to be limited. The initiative was not formally presented to these communities until January 2007 (see Box 6.2). Thus, it is no surprise that many of the Colombians interviewed in this study did not know about it. Those who did, tended to be professionals, involved in academic work, or linked to a Colombian migrant organisation. This is also a reflection of the mostly middle-class orientation of the programme, as the activities mentioned suggest. In addition, *Colombia Nos Une* is mainly a web-based initiative, and knowledge of it depends heavily on internet access (see Chapter 5).

However, one of the main priorities of the new Colombian consul in London was to introduce the programme to the wider Colombian community in the UK (*Express News*, No.347, 2006, p.24).<sup>131</sup> To that effect, the consulate had organised a *Consejo Colombiano* (Colombian

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[[http://www.minrelex.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/.cmd/cs/.ce/7\\_0\\_A/.s/7\\_0\\_DH\\_thJ\\_0\\_69/.s.7\\_0\\_A\\_7\\_0\\_KDC/me.7\\_0\\_CI-7\\_0\\_A/.s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_DH](http://www.minrelex.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/.cmd/cs/.ce/7_0_A/.s/7_0_DH_thJ_0_69/.s.7_0_A_7_0_KDC/me.7_0_CI-7_0_A/.s.7_0_A/7_0_DH)] (05/06/07).

131 See also *Colombia Nos Une*, Boletín Electrónico (January 2007 and March 2007):

[[http://www.minrelex.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/.cmd/cs/.ce/7\\_0\\_A/.s/7\\_0\\_DH\\_thJ\\_0\\_69/.s.7\\_0\\_A\\_7\\_0\\_KDC/me.7\\_0\\_CI-7\\_0\\_A/.s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_DH](http://www.minrelex.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/.cmd/cs/.ce/7_0_A/.s/7_0_DH_thJ_0_69/.s.7_0_A_7_0_KDC/me.7_0_CI-7_0_A/.s.7_0_A/7_0_DH)]

Council) of community leaders, which was formally established in March 2007. Its main objectives are to work together with migrants and the consulate to identify community problems and possible solutions, as well as to disseminate the work of *Colombia Nos Une* among the migrants. Its main areas of work will be education, culture and integration, 'regularisation' and the promotion of businesses (see Footnote 132).

Despite this, *Colombia Nos Une* may face other barriers when seeking to reach migrants in the UK and Spain. The fact that it is a government initiative makes some migrants highly critical and suspicious of what its real objectives are, as some respondents expressed:

"this is part of a strategy, a political strategy ... is political marketing, isn't it? To try and create a sense of, not of belonging, but nationalistic, of populist nationalism among Colombians ... what they show are images of those Colombians who are doing well, and these are very few, and they are doing well because they always did, there are very few Colombians who really are doing well because there are the right policies or conditions for them, or because they had emigrated and are working abroad" (Jairo, political activist, Madrid).

Such criticism was generally extended to the activities of the representatives of the Colombian government abroad, namely the consulates and other diplomatic offices, and what was perceived as a lack of interest on the part of the Colombian authorities in Bogotá regarding the well-being of Colombians abroad. For instance, the Colombian director of a migrant organisation in Madrid explained that although they had initially collaborated with *Colombia Nos Une*, they were disappointed with the results, since support for the migrant community from its diplomatic representatives was minimal. According to him, the programme had turned into little more than a website, a mechanism to collect data on Colombians abroad, and a publicity exercise for the Colombian government. Nevertheless, some migrants thought that consular services, both in London and Madrid, and relations between the migrant community and the authorities in Bogotá, had improved in the last few years, although the resources available were still scarce.

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0\_162T/me/7\_0\_CI-7\_0\_A/s.7\_0\_A.7\_0\_DH] (06/06/07). Interview with Colombian consul in London (December, 2006).

**Box 6.2: Events publicised by *Colombia Nos Une* in Spain and the UK**

<u>UK</u>	<u>SPAIN</u>
<p><i>March 2007:</i> Colombian consulate in London formally establishes the <i>Consejo Colombiano</i>.</p> <p><i>February 2007:</i> Colombian consulate in London meets with community leaders to promote the work of <i>Colombia Nos Une</i>, identify the needs of the community, and organise a <i>Consejo Colombiano</i>.</p> <p><i>January 2007:</i> Representatives of <i>Colombia Nos Une</i> accompany the Colombian foreign minister in her tour of Portugal, Spain and the UK to introduce this programme to the Colombian communities. The consulate in London presents the conclusions of a recent study on Colombians in London. Two Colombian dancers are chosen to represent Latin and Caribbean music in a set of new UK stamps.</p> <p><i>October 2006:</i> Special dinner celebrated to announce the winners of the 'British and Colombian Business and Social Awards', to reward companies working between Britain and Colombia.</p> <p><i>April 2006:</i> Colombian health professionals meet at the London consulate to create an association.</p> <p><i>March 2006:</i> Friends of Colombia for Social Aid, a charity organisation created in the UK to help children and hospitals in Colombia, organises its annual Spring Ball.</p> <p><i>April 2005:</i> the British-Colombian Chamber of Commerce announces its 'British &amp; Colombian Business and Social Awards'.</p>	<p><i>April 2007:</i> Madrid hosts the third edition of the housing fair 'Invest in your House', addressed to Colombian migrants, and supported by <i>Colombia Nos Une</i> as part of efforts to promote the channeling of remittances towards savings and investment.</p> <p><i>March 2007:</i> Announcement of the housing fair to be celebrated in Madrid.</p> <p><i>January 2007:</i> Representatives of <i>Colombia Nos Une</i> accompany the Colombian foreign minister in her tour of Portugal, Spain and the UK to introduce this programme to the Colombian communities. Colombian organisations in Spain attend a meeting.</p> <p><i>October 2006:</i> A forum on migration policy is organised in Madrid (after the ones celebrated in Colombia in 2004 and 2005), with the participation of international, national and local organisations, as well as NGOs, academics and migrant groups.</p> <p><i>August 2006:</i> Madrid hosts a Latin American conference on migration and development, with the participation of <i>Colombia Nos Une</i>.</p> <p><i>July 2006:</i> Second edition of the housing fair 'Invest in your House' is organised in Madrid.</p> <p><i>October 2005:</i> The migrant organisation Aesco launches a housing project in Risaralda (Colombia) to benefit migrants' families in that area.</p> <p><i>September 2005:</i> Colombia and Spain sign a social security agreement that would benefit migrants.</p> <p><i>May 2005:</i> Presentation of study on the labour conditions of Colombian migrants in Madrid.</p> <p><i>April 2005:</i> First housing fair hosted in Madrid and Miami, with the presence of <i>Colombia Nos Une</i>.</p>

Source: *Colombia Nos Une* Colombia Nos Une/Centro de Documentación/Documentos Colombia Nos Une: Boletín Electrónico (January 2007)

[[http://www.minrelext.gov.co/wps/portal!ut/p/cmd/cs:ce7\\_0\\_A:s7\\_0\\_DH/thJ\\_0\\_69/s7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_162T/me/7\\_0\\_CI-7\\_0\\_A/s7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_DH](http://www.minrelext.gov.co/wps/portal!ut/p/cmd/cs:ce7_0_A:s7_0_DH/thJ_0_69/s7_0_A/7_0_162T/me/7_0_CI-7_0_A/s7_0_A/7_0_DH)] (06/06/07).



## Conexión Colombia: An example of diaspora philanthropy

*Conexión Colombia* (Connection Colombia), according to its website is a:

"mechanism to capture and channel ... the help and support of Colombians in Colombia, of the Colombian diaspora and of "friends of Colombia" in order to benefit the neediest sectors of society and to keep individuals connected with Colombia ... Colombians anywhere in the world can make donations in cash, in-kind or even contribute with their time and expertise in a particular field ... to high impact, non-profit foundations in Colombia, who work towards creating a positive social change ... it is also an ideal way for all Colombians to connect with their country and to create a network of individuals ready to help each other ... This is an innovative project worldwide which intends to create a network of continuous support for all those Colombians who wish to construct a society full of solidarity and who wish to understand that "being Colombian" is not a matter of being born in a country but a feeling carried within the heart."<sup>132</sup>

This is a truly transnational initiative supported by Colombian private companies and foundations, as well as the Colombian government, the IOM and USAID. It was simultaneously launched in Bogotá and New York in December 2003, and according to the IOM, this civil society initiative "has become a worldwide example for foreign communities and has connected more than seven million Colombians through the web".<sup>133</sup> *Conexión Colombia* functions mainly through its website, which is divided into four sections. One section is dedicated to donations in cash, kind or time, that people can make to social causes in Colombia. Groups of organised donors (*compromisos*) have already been set up in places with a large Colombian migrant population, such as Madrid, Manhattan and Mexico City, as well as within Colombia, with the aim of creating a transnational philanthropic field where Colombians and non-Colombians all over the world can contribute to worthy causes in the country. In that sense, this initiative is an example of 'diaspora philanthropy', a relatively new term used to refer generally to charitable donations from migrants to causes or organisations in their country of origin (Johnson, 2007; see Aysa-Lastra, 2007, for more on this in the Colombian context).<sup>134</sup> *Conexión Colombia* claims to have received more than 3 million dollars in money and other resources from more than 50 countries, which have been used to support the work of 21

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132 See: [<http://www.conexioncolombia.com/conexioncolombia/content/page.jsp?ID=3996>] (12/06/07).

133 IOM: [<http://www.oim.org.co/modulos/contenido/default.asp?idmodulo=177>] (13/07/06).

134 While diaspora giving is not new, it is a concept only recently explored and as such definitions vary (Johnson, 2007; see also Mama Cash, 2006; the Asia Pacific Philanthropy Consortium's special issue on this [<http://www.asianphilanthropy.org/pdfs/post/appcpostissue18.pdf>] (07/06/07); Geithner et al (2005); the Philippine Diaspora Philanthropy web site [<http://www.filipinodiasporagiving.org/>] (07/06/07); and different country reports (including one on Colombia) by the Philanthropic Initiative [[http://www.tpi.org/tpi\\_services/strengthening\\_global\\_philanthropy.aspx](http://www.tpi.org/tpi_services/strengthening_global_philanthropy.aspx)] (31/10/07). Diaspora philanthropy is not just a migrant initiative, but can also be promoted from above (or involve non-migrants) as the case of *Conexión Colombia* shows (see Orozco, 2006). In the case of Latin America, this concept has generally only been explored under the notion of collective remittances and in the context of hometown associations.

foundations and social projects in Colombia working with the internally displaced, health, children, and relief assistance during national disasters.<sup>135</sup> The other three sections of the website are dedicated to the second main objective of the initiative, i.e. to keep Colombians everywhere connected and enhance feelings of national identity. To this effect, it offers news and information on Colombia and the diaspora, as well as Colombian events throughout the world and services of interest; a space for enquiries and information addressed to migrants, or those thinking of migrating; and the possibility to participate in virtual communities, whether geographically or issue based, through blogs, forums and chats.

Although the headquarters of *Conexión Colombia* are in Bogotá, there are representative offices in other countries and cities, including Mexico, New York and Spain. In Spain, the initiative was launched in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia (the three cities with the largest Colombian population) at the end of 2004. During the launch, the Colombian embassy in Madrid highlighted the main objectives of the programme as follows:

"*Conexión Colombia* is the most ambitious and solid strategy of social responsibility to allow Colombians and friends of Colombia living abroad to support the development of the country ... Another one of the aspects for which *Conexión Colombia* has been very successful is its content, which helps strengthen the Colombian spirit, connecting our co-nationals with what is happening in the country, its customs, cultural activities .... it opens a space to nostalgia and the outstanding activities of Colombians inside and outside the country".<sup>136</sup>

The team in Madrid was led by a Colombian woman, Cristina Alvarez Mera, an economist with experience in corporate social responsibility, and had another six Colombian women and a man, most of them students, working on a voluntary basis. During a group discussion held with the director and three of the women volunteers in Madrid, two issues emerged strongly as they explained what the initiative was and how they had become involved. Working for *Conexión Colombia* gave them the opportunity to keep in touch with Colombia, to channel their feelings of nostalgia and patriotism, or even to continue with the same type of activities (or work) they were doing in Colombia. In particular, for those coming from a privileged social background, what motivated them was the desire, or what they considered was an obligation, to give something back to their country, and especially to those who did not have the same opportunities. This was also highlighted by a Colombian woman academic interviewed in the UK, who reflected on the students she had seen come and go, mostly from the middle and upper

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135Conexión Colombia/Donaciones:

[[http://portal.conexioncolombia.com/wf\\_InfoArticuloNormal.aspx?IdArt=92880](http://portal.conexioncolombia.com/wf_InfoArticuloNormal.aspx?IdArt=92880))

([http://portal.conexioncolombia.com/wf\\_InfoSeccion.aspx?IdSec=21](http://portal.conexioncolombia.com/wf_InfoSeccion.aspx?IdSec=21)] (11/08/07).

136Translated by the author from the original in Spanish:

[[http://www.embacol.com/sala\\_de\\_prensa/noticia.shtml%C2%BFnewsid=1099662825,13304,.html](http://www.embacol.com/sala_de_prensa/noticia.shtml%C2%BFnewsid=1099662825,13304,.html)] (02/02/07).

classes, and their remorse for being outside the country and subsequent desire to do something for Colombia. Nubia, one of the volunteers for *Conexión Colombia* in Madrid, explained:

"I am now working and I am very happy in *Conexión Colombia*. I think it is very important that if I have had the opportunity to travel abroad, to see and learn different things, then I also must help other people in my country who have not had that opportunity, don't you think so?"

The need to keep connected with the home country, to contribute something back from abroad, or to promote solidarity with worthy causes in Colombia, somehow runs against the distrust and lack of solidarity that studies of Colombian communities abroad have highlighted as problematic (see Guarnizo, 2006b; Guarnizo et al, 2003; Guarnizo and Díaz, 1999; McIlwaine, 2005). However, initiatives like *Conexión Colombia*, like *Colombia Nos Une*, seemed to have a strong social class component. In the case of the former, this was reflected in the answers of the *Conexión Colombia* members interviewed in Madrid, and also in its emphasis on philanthropy. In addition, knowledge of *Conexión Colombia* among interviewees was once again patchy, with more respondents in Spain than the UK knowing about it, even if they were not directly involved. In an article, the director of *Conexión Colombia* in Spain admitted that one of the barriers they faced was the low levels of internet usage among migrants (only an estimated 16% of the monthly hits the webpage received came from Spain) (Villamil, 2005). Among respondents who knew about it, there were also some criticisms, similar to those levelled against *Colombia Nos Une*. Although *Conexión Colombia* was not a government initiative, it was seen as having official support. In addition, there was distrust of the economic interests behind it. Lourdes, a refugee woman who had attended its launch in Madrid, thought that this was just a business initiative backed by some large Colombian companies and multinationals. Other criticisms included that it was trying to sell an unrealistic image of Colombia:

"it is important that these means of communication exist ... but I still think that there is a lot of manipulation of the information ... *Conexión Colombia* represents everything in a beautiful way ... the love for Colombia and all of that, but we are not talking about this. What Colombia needs is something different. It needs more drastic solutions. We cannot be talking about all the wonderful things in Colombia, when people there are dying ... it is important to feed the emotive feelings towards Colombia, but I think it is also important to say that we cannot go on like this, we cannot sustain this political system, and such violent lifestyle, we have to wake up and admit that people don't live that well in Colombia" (John, refugee journalist, Madrid).

#### Selling a new image of Colombia abroad: transnational initiatives and the role of migrants

As indicated above, Colombia is currently involved in a campaign to portray a more positive image of itself and its citizens, both inside the country and, especially, abroad. This strategy

was already part of the first programmes created for Colombian migrants abroad launched by the Samper government, at a time when the corruption and violence associated with the illegal drugs trade in Colombia was at its peak, and the international image of the country at its lowest (see Díaz, 2006; Guarnizo 2006a; Guarnizo, 2001). Díaz (2006) points out that one of the reasons for the growing interest on the part of Mexico and Colombia in their migrants abroad is the diplomatic and lobbying role that these can play vis-a-vis their countries of settlement, and in the international arena. This role is especially important in the context of Latin American migration to the US, given the size of the Latino population there and Washington's involvement in the region. Thus, as Guarnizo and Díaz point out in the case of Colombian migration: "Migrants are now perceived not only as an important source of hard currency and technological innovation ... but also as potential advocates of 'national' interests before the US government" (1999, p.398).

The efforts to improve the image of Colombia have been continued by the current Uribe administration. Both *Colombia Nos Une* and *Conexión Colombia* participate in these efforts. The former provides a link to a website called *Colombia, Un País Positivo* (Colombia, a Positive Country), run by the office of the president, which offers 'positive' news about the country. The idea is to move away from prevailing negative images, spread by the international media, based around the problems of violence, narcotrafficking, insecurity and corruption. In line with this, the government has also launched a programme called *Imagen País* (Country Image), with its associated trademark, *Colombia es Pasión* (Colombia is Passion).<sup>137</sup> This programme is run by Proexport, a government entity designed to promote Colombian exports, as well as investment and tourism into Colombia:

"For years, our main function was to promote exports, but more than a year ago we started promoting investments too ... In addition, last year, following the dramatic improvements in the situation in the country, we started to promote tourism into the country ... But what happened? We were promoting exports, investment and tourism, but there was a huge obstacle, the image of the country. Colombia was changing, but its bad image continued. What we did then was to start branding the country as *Colombia es Pasión*" (Interview, head of Proexport, London).

The idea of branding a country is not new, and similar initiatives have come out of countries such as Australia, Argentina, and New Zealand.<sup>138</sup> *Colombia es Pasión* was launched in 2005, and despite being coordinated by the government it has private financing. Its main objective, as

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137 See: [<http://www.colombiaespasion.com/VBeContent/home.asp>] (06/06/07).

138 Many commercial websites now offer information on country branding. See:

[[http://www.brandchannel.com/images/papers/Country\\_Branding.pdf](http://www.brandchannel.com/images/papers/Country_Branding.pdf)],

[[http://www.futurebrand.com/03showcase/leadership/cbi.pdf.cbi\\_eng06.pdf](http://www.futurebrand.com/03showcase/leadership/cbi.pdf.cbi_eng06.pdf)],

[<http://www.allaboutbranding.com/index.lasso?article=242>] and [<http://www.nationbrandindex.com/>]

(12/06/07).

the head of Proexport in London explained during an interview, is to improve the image of Colombia abroad by highlighting the successes of the Colombian government in tackling problems of security, corruption or poverty. Its activities include the organising of events abroad to promote Colombian products and a more positive image of the country. Such events are addressed at different types of public, including international businesses, media outlets and tourism operators, as well as Colombians everywhere. The idea is to create a new image of Colombia, in which both Colombians and foreigners believe and propagate, and to "create people who are in love with their country, are optimistic about the country and believe in it" (interview with Proexport head, London).<sup>139</sup> To this end, the website of *Colombia es Pasión* offers 'positive' information about the country and its citizens, highlighting, for instance, the success of a Colombian lawyer in Madrid, an increase in foreign investment, or the number of Colombian films present at the latest Cannes festival.<sup>140</sup> The participation of all Colombians in such a strategy is seen as crucial for its success, and is sold under the premise that the benefits will reach everyone:

"To achieve the objective of changing the bad image of the country ... it is necessary that each and every one of us knows about, understands and propagates the message of the campaign ... this is a campaign that belongs to all of us ... We seek to fill every Colombian with passion, because we want the world to know that Colombia is Passion ... all this effort will translate into an increase in foreign investment, tourism, exports, and much more. If the country does well, we all do better".<sup>141</sup>

This message was reiterated by the head of Proexport in London, who placed emphasis on the key role that Colombians abroad can play: "this cannot be an initiative of the government alone, it has to be an initiative of every Colombian, and in particular those who live abroad". Thus, migrants are appreciated not only because of their economic role (through remittances, and philanthropy), but also as potential 'ambassadors' of the home country. As a result, current plans are to strengthen the international reach of the campaign: "Up until now, the campaign *Colombia es Pasión* has been developed mainly inside Colombia, and only timidly abroad, but the objective of the new president is to strengthen the international side of it to reach priority markets" ([eltiempo.com/economía](http://eltiempo.com/economía), 11/02/07).<sup>142</sup> So far, in London, *Colombia es Pasión* had organised several seminars and presentations to explain the initiative and obtain the support of the Colombian, and wider Latin American community, the head of Proexport reported. The

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139 Such efforts seem to be having an impact within the foreign media already, as a recent article by the British newspaper *The Guardian* show (see *The Guardian*, 02/02/07).

140 See: [<http://www.colombiaespasion.com/VBeContent/home.asp?idcompany=1>] (06/06/07).

141 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish. See:

[[http://www.colombiaespasion.com/VBeContent/newsdetail.asp?id=4196&idcompany=1&ItemMenu=0\\_254](http://www.colombiaespasion.com/VBeContent/newsdetail.asp?id=4196&idcompany=1&ItemMenu=0_254)] (06/06/07).

142 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish. See:

[[http://www.eltiempo.com/economia/2007-02-12/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA\\_INTERIOR-3434937.html](http://www.eltiempo.com/economia/2007-02-12/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA_INTERIOR-3434937.html)] (12/02/07).

quotation above highlights the economic basis of *Colombia es Pasión*, although initiatives like this play on migrants' patriotic feelings and sense of national identity and belonging (as well as on economic reasonings):

"*Colombia es Pasión* aims to unify all efforts that we Colombians are making in different fields to obtain tangible results in areas such as the economy, nation-building, changes in attitudes and enhancing unity ... because passion is the motor behind what Colombians do on a daily basis. It is the fountain that generates our extraordinary intensity, creativity, resourcefulness and tenacity in the face of the most adverse conditions. It is the passion that unites us, what distinguishes us as Colombians. It is not forced, or false, it is natural, a part of our DNA. We are not one of the happiest countries in the world by chance, it is thanks to the passion we feel for life, work, the family, and peace."<sup>143</sup>

Feelings of national identity and belonging, as other authors have pointed out, are no longer tied to the territorial aspect of the nation-state, but reach across borders (see Basch et al, 1994; Glick-Schiller and Fouron, 2001; Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000). Another similar initiative, this time launched by private interests in Colombia in 1999, is *Yo Creo en Colombia* (I Believe in Colombia). According to its website, this is a not-for-profit foundation created to 'empower' Colombians, for instance, through the promotion of community associations, both inside and outside the country. Among its main aims and objectives are to unite the Colombian diaspora, and to create more positive citizens, who could help change the country and improve the image of Colombia abroad:

"The foundation *Yo Creo en Colombia* is a private organisation, leader in Colombia in the promotion of trust and competitiveness in the country. Through its more than 2,000 programmes in 82 cities and 23 countries, the foundation has created a school of thought about a Colombia that exists but many do not see. A Colombia which is able, resourceful, intelligent, hard working, passionate, happy, curious, intelligent and competitive. During 8 years the foundation has been researching and promoting this image of Colombia to the Colombian and foreign public".<sup>144</sup>

The main emphasis again is on showing and promoting a positive image of Colombia, different from the perceived negative stereotypes that predominate:

"We all know about the Colombia that does not work ... the Colombia that is corrupt, a thief, a narcotrafficker, inefficient, sad, ineffective, poor, disconnected, small, egotistic. Now, it is our responsibility to show the Colombia that works ... that is happy, efficient, connected, big, community-driven, effective, honest, progressive,

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143 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish. See:

[[http://www.colombiaespasion.com/VBeContent/newsdetail.asp?id=4173&idcompany=1&ItemMenu=0\\_251](http://www.colombiaespasion.com/VBeContent/newsdetail.asp?id=4173&idcompany=1&ItemMenu=0_251)] (31/01/07).

144 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish. See:

[<http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/fundacion>] (07/06/07).

cultured, curious, intelligent, hardworking and energetic".<sup>145</sup>

The work of *Yo Creo en Colombia* is spread through conferences, seminars and workshops, as well as its website. The foundation was created by a Colombian businessman and although it started operating inside Colombia, its activities have now spread to more than 23 countries. Its website claims that the programme has been reported positively in at least nine international media outlets, including the New York Times and the BBC. It also reports to be actively represented in eleven countries where Colombian migrants live through specific 'chapters', including four in the US, and one in Spain and the UK respectively, with some 670 volunteers collaborating. The chapter in Spain had been operating for two years, and had its own website.<sup>146</sup> The one in the UK was more recent and was led by a young professional man who first lived in Madrid, where he had helped set up the Spanish chapter, before moving to London. He had been involved in the creation of the foundation in Colombia, which he said had been the result of "a search for arguments for Colombians to believe in their own country", when Colombia was going through one of its worst times, at the end of the 1990s. He added that since the main objective was to improve the image that Colombians, and the world, had of the country, it was logical that Colombians abroad became involved:

"for us [Colombians abroad] it is also very important to change the image of Colombia within our local communities. It is no secret that the perception that people have of Colombia is very negative, so it is necessary to offer more tools for judging, so they can see the reality, that is, that not everything is bad, there are some problems, but apart from these we have good things too".

This seemed to be the main motivation behind his personal involvement with this initiative, and a subject that emerged several times during the interview. When I asked him whether his plans were to continue living in London and working for *Yo Creo en Colombia*, he answered:

"Yes, to a greater or lesser degree, I will remain involved. This is something that I always do, as a principle, to speak well of my country, and anything I can do to change its image, it is something that I will always do".

The team of *Yo Creo en Colombia* in London had some six volunteers working for it. They were all Colombian except for one woman, and they were all women except for the coordinator and another man. At the time of the interview, they had organised two main events in London, one addressed to the Colombian community, and the second more tailored to a British or non-Colombian audience. The coordinator in London thought that the initiative had been well received by the migrant population, and that a good representation of all sectors of the

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145 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish. See:

[<http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/fundacion/frentes/>] (07/06/07).

146 See: [[http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/madrid/Boletin\\_1.html](http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/madrid/Boletin_1.html)] (07/06/07).

community had attended these events. He believed that the Colombians who attended their meetings went mainly out of curiosity, and pushed by "some sort of patriotic feeling". This is backed-up by information collected during the fieldwork. Several Colombian respondents in London knew about *Yo Creo in Colombia*, and some had attended their events and liked it. This was especially true of those Colombians who were involved in other organisations or community groups and activities. The reason why such an initiative should prove more popular than others like *Colombia Nos Une* probably has to do with the fact that *Yo Creo en Colombia* is not state-led, but a private programme. In addition, it does not seek to collect money from the diaspora, like *Conexión Colombia*. *Colombia es Pasión*, despite being a government initiative, was also better known and more successful in attracting support, especially among the younger generations or those Colombians involved in other collective transnational activities.

The issue of the 'image' of Colombia has generated a lot of passion and controversy, both at home and abroad. It is linked to a wider debate on national identity and what it means to be 'Colombian'. One of the projects to come out of *Conexión Colombia*, for instance, was a book, based on communications received from Colombians all over the world, on what "*la colombianidad*" (being Colombian) means (Lozano and Arias, 2006). Posada Carbó, a respected Colombian historian based in the UK, also recently published a book on what Colombia, as a nation, represents, with two main aims: "to dispute the well-established stereotype that identifies our nation only with war and violence" and "to vindicate the liberal and democratic traditions of the country".<sup>147</sup> For a country that some describe as a "fragmented land, divided society"<sup>148</sup>, which is often quoted as one of the causes of the country's current problems, questions of national identity and unity have become quite important (see also Chenou, 2006). This has also become a very politicised issue, as the Colombian government and the opposition, and their respective supporters, vie to represent the country in their own terms. These debates have special relevance for Colombians abroad, who, as mentioned above, are often seen as ambassadors for their own country, while at the same time face at first hand the stereotypes associated with their country (see Chapter 5). Many respondents talked about this issue, even though it was not part of the interview schedule. Some wore bracelets with the *Colombia es Pasión* logo, or the Colombian flag. Nubia, who collaborates with *Conexión Colombia* in Madrid, explained how these feelings had spread through the migrant community:

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147 My own translation from the original in Spanish. See articles in *Eskpe/Libros*: [[http://eskpe.eltiempo.terra.com.co/secc\\_eskpe/libr\\_eskpe/otrasnoticias/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA\\_INTERIOR\\_ESKPE-3403832.html](http://eskpe.eltiempo.terra.com.co/secc_eskpe/libr_eskpe/otrasnoticias/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA_INTERIOR_ESKPE-3403832.html)] (13/06/07); and *Arcadia* literary magazine by Cepeda (22/01/07): [[http://www.semana.com/wf\\_InfoArticulo.aspx?IdArt=100596](http://www.semana.com/wf_InfoArticulo.aspx?IdArt=100596)] (29/01/07). See also Posada Carbó (2006).

148 This is the title of Safford and Palacio's (2002) book on Colombian history.



"it is amazing, we have been in events for Colombians, where we distributed a bracelet with the Colombian flag in exchange for a donation of a euro ... and we saw people that looked like they did not have enough money to eat and they would tell us, I live with three euros, but I do this for my country, I would give those three euros today for my country".

As the quotation above suggests, this sort of patriotic sentiment is common across all social classes, although as in the case of the other initiatives discussed above, those more directly involved in *Colombia es Pasión* and *Yo Creo en Colombia* tended to be middle or upper-class students and professionals. Nevertheless, efforts to improve the image of Colombia, especially through initiatives like these, have not been well received by everyone. A well-known Colombian columnist recently complained that it had become "a sin against Colombia to criticise the government abroad", in reference to government efforts to promote a positive view of Colombia and attempts to disqualify any Colombian who talks about the country's problems as "antipatriotic" (Samper Pinzano, 2007). This is a debate that has generated the most comments and counter-opinions in the Colombian press recently. During the interview, the coordinator of *Yo Creo en Colombia* in London mentioned several times how he disagreed with Colombians abroad who in order to criticise the government, ended up damaging the image of the country. A few other respondents in London shared this opinion. However, others, like Marisol, a Colombian woman from Pereira who had recently arrived in Madrid in search of better economic opportunities, was highly critical of the *Colombia es Pasión* campaign:

"It is an official initiative, supported by some industrialists, mainly to promote the consumption of Colombian goods by migrants abroad. This is promoted by big Colombian firms with official aid, and the idea is to try and sell a new face of Colombia. It is like if I invite you to come to my house, and beforehand I get the front painted, make it all look nice, and tidy up the garden, and even plant a rose, and then you come into the living room and it looks fantastic, comfortable and luxurious, but then you go into the bedrooms and people are sleeping on the floor, the chairs are turned over, the fridge is empty. This is what the Colombian campaigns are like".

It is no surprise that Marisol does not think much of *Colombia es Pasión*. It is even unlikely that she would feel represented by such a campaign, given the reasons that led her to migrate and the colour of her skin. One of the publicity tools of *Colombia es Pasión* is a postcard with some smiling Colombian faces on it, but surprisingly none of them looks indigenous, Afro-Caribbean, or even mixed race, a reflection of race and class divisions in Colombia (see Figure 6.1). Apart from its elitist undertones, other respondents were also critical of the patriotism and nationalism behind such programmes, as Diana, a Colombian woman working for an international organisation in London, said: "in Colombia, there is now a nationalism that I think is very dangerous. Everyone goes around saying that Colombia is the best ... but Colombia is not the best, we can still improve a lot". A Colombian academic woman interviewed in the UK

explained that the national obsession with improving the image of the country went back a long way, affecting mainly the middle and upper classes. She remembered, when she was a student in the UK in the late 1990s, how discussions about Colombia were always divided among those who wanted to show the "good" and "bad" Colombia, a sign of the polarisation linked to the armed conflict affecting Colombia (see Chapter 7). For her, there was no doubt that there are good things about Colombia, but she did not think that these made the country exceptional. In common with Diana, she believed that rather than changing the image of Colombia, it was important to solve its problems.

**Figure 6.1: Marketing postcard from *Colombia es Pasión***



Source: collected during fieldwork in London.

#### The limited scope of transnationalism from above

As seen above, in recent years, several initiatives have emerged from above, both by the Colombian government and private interests, to enhance the transnational linkages of the Colombian diaspora with the homeland, at the economic, social, cultural and political levels. This is a sign of the growing interest on the part of sending countries to take advantage of the potential that their migrants abroad represent. However, this interest is limited in its scope. On the one hand, the initiatives analysed seek to promote the contribution of migrants (and non-migrants) to development in the home country, but based on a narrow definition of this in terms of monetary and non-monetary donations to social causes in Colombia. As such, this would represent more a continuation of the traditional philanthropy or charity conducted by the well-off (and often associated with the Church), but on a transnational scale, rather than relating to the current debate on how to use migrant remittances better to benefit both the migrants and their communities back home. Among the activities more oriented towards the latter are

improvements in consular services or schemes aimed at helping migrants invest in housing in Colombia. On the other hand, the second main interest of these transnational initiatives from above seems to have been on turning migrants abroad into "lobbies for national interests and goals" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006, p.132). This revolves mainly around the issue of promoting a more positive international image of Colombia, which in theory would benefit all Colombians, including migrants. Both objectives are inherently political and, especially the second, related to the current situation of armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia, since they aim to contribute in a particular way to the development of the country and to offer a precise image of this abroad. Nevertheless, their appeal and success among migrants have also been limited, partly because they do little to improve their lives (or that of their families), and also because they are seen as elitist or as government propaganda, as the analysis of the migrant communities in the UK and Spain showed.<sup>149</sup> This does not mean that the Colombian state has been totally indifferent to the lives of its nationals abroad, since Colombian migrants enjoy generous formal political rights, and in some cases it has engaged on bilateral negotiations with host countries to improve the conditions of migrants (see Box 6.1 above, and Chapter 7 for more on this). In addition, the initiatives coming from above, and their interaction with those transnational activities and projects initiated by the migrants themselves, help create "a highly dynamic back-and-forth traffic of resources, ideas, and outcomes across national borders" which ultimately contribute to the emergence of a transnational social field (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006, p.132).<sup>150</sup>

### **Transnationalism from below: migrant civil society and its transnational connections**

Not all efforts at linking migrant communities with the home country come from the state or private interests based in the country of origin. The migrants themselves, the organisations they form (migrant civil society), and their transnational activities are also protagonists of this trend. Jones-Correa argues that "[i]mmigration is a disruptive experience" and "[i]n response to this sense of dislocation, organizations form to patch over the rupture left by the immigration process" (1988, p.101).<sup>151</sup> For him, much of the sense of community among migrant groups is built around these organisations, and their promotion of migrants' "homeland identities" (*ibid*, p.102). His conclusions were based on research among Latin American migrants in New York

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149 Portes and Rumbaut (2006), in the context of Salvadoran migration to the US, also concluded that state-led transnational initiatives aimed at the migrants had met with limited success, partly because of class divisions. In the context of Latin America, it has also been argued that government attempts to connect with migrants abroad have been weakened by the lack of a direct contact between the two (Vono de Vilhena, 2006).

150 In the case of Mexico, for instance, Goldring (2002) argues that although transnational migrant activities from below predate state involvement, state initiatives aimed at Mexicans in the US have been key for the institutionalisation of transnational social spaces.

151 This is also expressed by Portes and Rumbaut: "The immigrant world has always been a difficult one, torn between old loyalties and new realities" (2006, p.120).

City, including Colombians. Nevertheless, in their pioneering research on Colombians in the US, Guarnizo and Díaz argued that the dense web of transnational connections between these migrants and their homeland represented "a transnational field of action, but not the formation of a transnational *community*" (1999, p.416).<sup>152</sup> The main obstacles to the emergence of such a community were the "migrant's social and cultural heterogeneity and segmentation", as they were found to be highly divided along class, regional and ethnic lines, as well as by the circumstances of their migration and the mistrust caused by the drugs trade and the armed conflict at home:

"The mistrust entrenched in the drugs stigma, the fear of accidentally becoming involved with people related to the actors involved in the armed conflict, or even with criminals, add to the well-known Colombian classism and regionalism, making almost impossible the formation of Colombian organisations that are inclusive and representative" (Guarnizo, 2006a, p.91).<sup>153</sup>

All of this, Guarnizo and Díaz (1999) argued, resulted in "well-bounded" social networks, a predominance of 'horizontal' group solidarity (class-based) rather than 'vertical' (ethnonationally-based), and high levels of social fragmentation. In later research with Colombians in London, Guarnizo also concluded that their transnational relations were dominated "by individual rather than collective activities, seeking self-benefits, rather than public ones" (2006b, p.88; see also McIlwaine, 2005, 2007a).<sup>154</sup> Such findings have been contrasted with the experience of other Latino migrants in the US organising around 'hometown' associations, which are considered "the main agents connecting immigrants with their places of origin" (Guarnizo et al., 1999, p.391; see also Chapter 2). However, the fact that hometown associations are not a popular form of organising among Colombians in the US could be related to other factors, such as the mostly middle-class, urban background of Colombian migrants, since this type of organisation is generally associated with migrants from small rural locations (*ibid*; see also Alarcón, 2002; Portes et al, 2006).<sup>155</sup> The more recent nature of Colombian mass migration to the US, and the greater dispersal of Colombian migrants within the country, compared to other migrant groups, could also be important factors (see Guarnizo et al, 1999).

Thus, other studies, looking at wider definitions of migrant civil society organising and their transnational collective activities, have found evidence of these among Colombian migrants. Portes et al. (2006), in their study of Latin American transnational migrant organisations in the

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152 Italics in the original.

153 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

154 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

155 Recently, the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* published an article on migration from Montenegro, in Quindío (Colombia) to Morristown (US), as possibly the only example of Colombian collective migration to an specific place and hometown transnationalism (Rey, 2007; see also Portes et al., 2006 for other examples of this).

US East Coast, for instance, showed that these existed among Colombians, but they were mostly middle-class, and often organised around professional associations and catholic-based philanthropy. However, another project currently analysing Colombian transnational organisations around the world has recorded the existence of at least 664 associations, and 13 federations or umbrella organisations: a majority, 78%, in the American continent (60% of this in North America), and 20% in Europe (Mejía, 2006).<sup>156</sup> Most of these had "multiple purposes" (including hometown and student associations), or focused on issues of "solidarity and other help", but in general they were relatively small, and sometimes informal. Their emergence and concentration have to do mainly with the existence of relatively large and growing communities, awareness of the necessities of the group, the presence of a certain type of human capital inside the community that can respond to these needs, having the necessary links with the local authorities, and the availability of resources (*ibid*). In addition, it is obvious that the older the community, the more time it has had to achieve these factors, which would partly explain the predominance of groups in North America. Thus, when it comes to their organisation and transnational activities, the Colombian communities in the UK and Spain, vis-à-vis the US and each other, share possibilities and limitations, as well as showing differences, since the "specific locales of origin and destination provide heterogeneous contexts that need to be taken into account" (Nyberg Sørensen, 2002, p.117).

#### Spain: a growing transnational Colombian community

Mejía's (2006) study argues that Spain, despite being home to the third largest population of Colombians abroad, shows low levels of organising compared with both other destinations, and other groups of migrants in the same country. According to his list, in terms of the number of Colombian organisations, Spain is ranked 6<sup>th</sup>, after the US, Venezuela, France, Canada and Mexico (*ibid*). The early results of another study on immigrant associationism currently taking place at European level also concluded that Colombian organisations represented only 6% of all the immigrant organisations in Madrid, a level of organising similar to that of the Argentine community, but below Ecuadoreans (8%), Dominicans (8%) and Peruvians (14%), although Colombians accounted for 12% of the total immigrant population in Madrid (the second largest after Ecuadoreans) (Morales Diez de Ulzurrun, et al., 2005). Arguably, this could be partly explained by the fact that Colombian migration to Spain in large numbers is a very recent phenomenon, and thus the community has had less time to organise (see Chapters 3 and 5). Also, physical distance with the country of origin is important, which would help explain the higher levels of transnational organising and practices among, for instance, Mexicans and

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<sup>156</sup> *Colombia Nos Une* has found more than 440 associations of Colombians throughout the world, mostly in the main countries of settlement, but also in places such as the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Libano, Thailand and French Guiana.

Central Americans in the US. In addition, with Spain only being a country of recent mass immigration, the space and facilities for the organisation of its migrant population could be more limited than in the case of the US, Canada or France, which have a longer immigrant tradition. Nevertheless, the fieldwork in Madrid and Barcelona show that the level of organisation and activities of the Colombian communities in Spain, and their transnational impact, are significant.

The Morales Diez de Ulzurrun (2005) study found only four Colombian organisations in Madrid. However, the Colombian consulate in Madrid lists seven Colombian NGOs, and another two organisations are included in the website of the *Federación Estatal de Asociaciones de Inmigrantes y Refugiados en España* (Ferine – State Federation of Immigrant and Refugee Associations in Spain), while the Cideal website lists 14.<sup>157</sup> The fieldwork showed that some of these organisations are Latin American-wide but have a strong Colombian component (see also Mejía, 2006). In some cases, they started as Colombian organisations, but later widened their coverage in response to local needs, although their main focus was still on Colombia, and most of their staff was Colombian. Aicode, for instance, is the *Asociación Iberoamericana para la Cooperación, el Desarrollo y los Derechos Humanos* (Latin American Association for Cooperation, Development and Human Rights), but the director is Colombian, and according to its statistics for 2006, most of its members are Colombian (3,300 out of 4,313), and the same can be said of its users (see also below).<sup>158</sup> In other cases, they were specifically Colombian, or Spanish-Colombian groups. The nature of the Colombian migrant organisations found in Madrid was varied. Some of them were multi-purpose, while others were more political or cultural (for more on the former see Chapter 7). None of them were examples of US-based Latin American migrant hometown associations or other cases of collective remittance sending (see above and Chapter 2).<sup>159</sup> However, these organisations were involved in a range of different transnational political activities (see Chapter 2).

### *Aculco*

Aculco was founded in 1992 and is probably one of the oldest migrant organisations serving the Colombian community in Madrid. Its acronym initially stood for *Asociación Cultural*

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157 See the section on *codesarrollo* (co-development) of Cideal (a research centre on cooperation and development) [[http://www.codesarrollo-cideal.org/inmigrantes\\_informacion\\_08.php](http://www.codesarrollo-cideal.org/inmigrantes_informacion_08.php)] (16/06/07); and Ferine [[http://www.fferine.org/consulta\\_p.php](http://www.fferine.org/consulta_p.php)] (13/08/07).

158 See: [[http://www.aicode.org/l\\_4.htm](http://www.aicode.org/l_4.htm)] (16/06/07).

159 Østergaard-Nielsen (2003b) highlights that the phenomenon of hometown associations has hardly been researched in the European context. Since this has been studied mostly among Mexican, Central American and Caribbean migrants in the US, it could be partly related to physical proximity to the homeland. In this case, it is not surprising that this type of transnational engagement is not popular among Colombians in the two communities studied.

*Colombiana* (Colombian Cultural Association), but as the scope and focus of its activities evolved, it now stands for *Asociación Socio-Cultural y de Cooperación al Desarrollo por Colombia e Iberoamérica* (Socio-Cultural and Cooperation Development Association for Colombia and Latin America). Aculco was set up by a group of Colombian students in Madrid seeking to change the negative stereotypes associated with Colombia by promoting its culture. This stereotype, as the director of Aculco said during an interview, was associated with "narcotrafficking, prostitution ... in general [Colombia] had a very bad press". Thus, migrant organisations, initially, do not only represent attempts "to rebuild or replicate networks disrupted by the migration process", as Jones-Correa argues (1998, p.102), but can also be a reaction to feelings of rejection in their new societies, in the case of Colombia based around the country-image issue (see above). To fight this negative image, Aculco started organising exhibitions, film festivals and concerts, and launched its own magazine. Its director explained that when the association was set up, the Colombian population in Madrid was not very large. However, as the community started growing, Aculco gained contact with a wider spectrum of Colombians, including labour migrants and refugees, at the same time that the links with the student population weakened. Thus, gradually the focus shifted towards the social needs of the Colombian migrants, and later the larger Latin American and migrant populations in general. More recently, Aculco's activities have diversified to include issues such as *codesarrollo* (co-development), or the relationship between migration and development.

As well as in Madrid, Aculco now has offices in three other Spanish cities, Valencia, Alicante and Zaragoza, and is planning to open one in Barcelona. In addition, the association is present in the UK, in London, and in Colombia, in Bogotá, reflecting the largely Colombian focus of its activities and its transnational scope. The offices in Spain and the UK offer assistance to migrants, on a social, legal and psychological level, with a heavy emphasis on activities promoting integration and citizen participation at the local level. Aculco in Madrid also organises several cultural events throughout the year aimed at celebrating and promoting Latin American and Colombian culture.<sup>160</sup> Aculco in London also started a political project aimed at raising the profile and improving the situation of the Latin American community in this city (see Chapter 7). The office in Bogotá works with migrants and their families, and those wishing to migrate, as well as running development projects in Colombia organised under the premises of co-development. One of the current projects, for example, involves working with women in marginal situations in the city of Manizales, in the *Eje Cafetero* (coffee-belt area), the region of origin of many Colombian migrants in Spain: "this is a line of work in which the migrant population in Alicante itself is involved, helping in the development of a project that benefits

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<sup>160</sup>See Aculco/Qué Hacemos/Proyectos [<http://www.aculco.org/home.htm>] (08/06/07). Information also obtained from interview with Aculco's director.

others in their country of origin".<sup>161</sup> According to Rosa, a Colombian woman with long experience of community involvement who has been living in Madrid since 1986, the orientation of many migrant organisations in this city has changed with time, from the initial focus on solidarity and migrant assistance, towards new issues, such as co-development.<sup>162</sup>

### *Aesco*<sup>163</sup>

Aesco was also formally established in the early 1990s (in 1991) by a group of Colombian exiles who had arrived in Spain in the 1980s, with Spanish participation as well. Similarly to Aculco, its name changed from the original *Asociación Española de Solidaridad y Cooperación con Colombia* (Spanish Association of Solidarity and Cooperation with Colombia) to the current *América, España, Solidaridad y Cooperación* (America, Spain, Solidarity and Cooperation), as its objectives and activities changed. Its director explained in an interview that initially the people involved "were mainly Colombians, people that had come mostly to claim asylum, as refugees, because of human rights violations". However, she said that as Colombian migration to Spain started to accelerate, the group began to focus more on the local needs of Colombian migrants, and later of the wider Latin American community. In this respect, Aesco, through its offices in Madrid, offers various services to migrants, including information and advice on legal, labour and other issues, training courses and activities for recreation. There are also specific projects, for instance, on voluntary return and domestic violence, a problem that Aesco's director believes is quite high within the migrant community. More recently, the organisation has also become involved in development projects in Colombia. Thus, currently, Aesco describes its mission as:

"To inform, orient, capacitate and advise potential migrants, the migrants themselves and their families, and to identify, formulate and manage cooperation projects that contribute to an improvement in their quality of life, based on the principles of solidarity and human rights".<sup>164</sup>

As part of its new focus, Aesco has also moved into co-development:

"For AESCO co-development implies a positive relationship between migration and development. To acknowledge migration as an opportunity for the country of settlement and the country of origin involves accepting that migration and its

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161 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish [<http://www.aculco.org/collir.htm>] (08/06/07).

162 These are also the cases of Aicode, mentioned above, and Aesco analysed below. For more on co-development initiatives linking Spain and Colombia see: [[http://www.codesarrollocideal.org/ejemplos\\_colombia.php](http://www.codesarrollocideal.org/ejemplos_colombia.php)] (15/06/07).

163 Information obtained from interviews with Aesco's director and some of its workers in Madrid, as well as material received and its website [<http://www.aescoong.org>].

164 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish [<http://www.aescoong.org>] (09/06/07).



protagonists, the immigrants, can be key factors for development in both the countries of origin and settlement; it involves managing migration through the development of the countries involved, a new form of understanding the relationship between rich and poor countries, North and South, sending and receiving countries, together. since both recognise each other and admit the need of the other to develop together ... closely linking ... migration policies and policies for international development cooperation" (see Footnote 164).

Thus, one of their current projects, based in Pereira (Colombia), allows Colombian migrants to buy housing in this city, for them or their families, with credit obtained in Spain under special conditions. If successful, the initiative will be expanded to other locations in Colombia, as well as to Ecuador and Venezuela. Aesco also helps fund social projects in Colombia and Ecuador through its *Euros Sociales* (social euros) project, which provides funding for social projects in these countries. These projects are managed through Aesco offices in Colombia and Ecuador. But the focus on co-development has not diminished the organisation's interest in improving living conditions and the integration of the migrants in their local contexts. Another recent focus of work for Aesco has been the promotion of "associationism and empowerment" among migrants, to encourage a greater and more effective citizen participation in the host society (interview, Aesco worker). This shows how transnational migrant organisations can work simultaneously with a focus on the country of origin and on integration in the receiving country.

#### *Smaller transnational initiatives*

In addition to the three largest organisations in Madrid mentioned above, there are other smaller Colombian organisations, some of them transnational in nature. Among those researched in the current study, there was the *Fundación Vida-Grupo Ecológico Verde* (Foundation for Life-Environmental Green Group), and others linked to a political party in Colombia or working more directly with the situation of armed conflict and search for peace (see Chapter 7). The *Fundación Vida-Grupo Ecológico Verde* emerged in Colombia in 1990 "as an environmental organisation involved in the integral social development of black communities".<sup>165</sup> In 2000, one of its founders created an international delegation in Madrid, which according to him became the first international delegation of a Latin American foundation established in Spain. He explained that the *Fundación* in Madrid worked at the local, national, international and transnational levels: "always trying to maintain what we learnt in Colombia, while integrating the issues that have emerged here". Following on from the work they did in Colombia, in Madrid they had created several small businesses as a source of self-employment for their members and to generate their own resources as an organisation. As the founder explained,

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165 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish  
[[http://www.cumbreafroeuropa2007.org\\_es/quienes.php](http://www.cumbreafroeuropa2007.org_es/quienes.php)] (16/06/07).

most of their members were Colombian, although there were also migrants from other countries, including Peru, Romania and several African nations. Apart from their environmental activities, mostly related to recycling, and their self-employment initiatives, the Foundation in Madrid has centred its work on changing perceptions of black people, especially challenging negative stereotyped images prevalent in the media. In this respect, they cooperated with other international organisations representing black people from Africa, Europe or Latin America, and in particular Colombia. In addition, the organisation had sought to focus international attention on the situation of the Afro-Colombian population in Colombia, which has been badly affected by the conflict (see Chapter 7 for more on this).

In addition, the Colombian presence in Madrid and Barcelona, as in London (see below), is also significant in the growing Latin American 'ethnic' businesses, cultural festivals and activities, as well as in the spread of a media industry and religious services targetted at migrants. The website *Colombianos en España* (Colombians in Spain), for instance, lists more than 50 Colombian restaurants in the country, some ten Latin American radio stations, as well as several newspapers and magazines, apart from the media sources in the country of origin that migrants have access to.<sup>166</sup> The main difference found in this research is that in Barcelona, Colombian migrant organisations were less prominent, which is partly due to the fact that the community there is smaller, although at the more political level there was quite a lot of activities by left-wing refugees and groups working on human rights issues and the search for peace in Colombia (see Chapter 7).

#### London: the emergence of a strong Latin American community

In terms of the number of existing Colombian organisations, the UK is ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in Mejía's (2006) list, after countries like France, Mexico, Switzerland or Germany, where the Colombian migrant population is smaller but apparently more organised. Compared with Spain, Colombian migration to the UK in significant numbers goes back a long way, but in terms of numbers it is a relatively small community (see Chapter 3). In comparison with other migrant groups in the UK, the Colombian, or wider Latin American, migrant community is also relatively small, and enjoys fewer historical or cultural connections. Thus, although Latin Americans have been recently recognised as one of the fastest growing migrant communities in the UK, their lack of ethnic minority status renders them almost invisible in terms of access to resources and institutional support (Buchuck, 2006; McIlwaine, 2007).<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless, in London, where

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166 See: [<http://www.colombianosenespana.com/>] (14/08/07). This is a website backed by some Colombian media.

167 Georgiou (n.d., p.7) points out that ethnic categorisation in the UK leave out some migrant groups and the effect this can have: "Non-recognition and non-visibility in official statistics is twofold in its

most Latin American migrants concentrate, as the community has grown it has also increased in visibility and official recognition.<sup>168</sup> Today, London is home to several annual Latin American festivals, as well as concerts and other cultural activities, business enterprises and sport leagues (see Figure 6.2). The *Directorio Iberoamericano* (Latin American Directory) contains 1,023 listings in London, which include entries in community services, music groups, churches, media outlets, and different types of businesses.<sup>169</sup> Some 42 of the entries are classified as community associations and services for Latin Americans, with some focusing on specific countries or populations, including refugees, women, and the elderly. In addition, recently, there have been attempts to better organise the community politically through the formation of a Latin American trade union (The Latin American Workers' Association) and a political movement (Latin Front – for more on this see Chapter 7) (see Peró, 2007). Since Colombians account for a significant part of the community, like in Spain, they have played a key role in the development of these activities and organisations.

**Figure 6.2: *Carnaval del Pueblo* (Latin American Festival), London, Summer 2006**



Source: Photos taken by the author during fieldwork.

### *Latin American community organisations*

The Latin American community organisations researched in London shared some similarities, but also some differences, with those in Spain. Many had their origins in the solidarity and support groups set up by the political refugees that arrived in the 1970s and 1980s, mostly from

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consequences – it increases the sense of symbolic exclusion and it decreases social and cultural service provision towards *invisible* groups."

168 See an interview with London town mayor Ken Livingstone

[<http://www.latinoutlook.com/kenlivingstone.html>] (27/10/06); and

[<http://www.untoldlondon.org.uk/news/ART40460.html>] (18/12/06).

169 See: [<http://www.directorio1.com/indice.php?ciudad=LON&TPN=LAT>] (11/06/07).

Chile and Argentina, but later also from Colombia. However, as in the case of Spain, as the Latin American migrant community grew larger and more diverse during the 1980s and 1990s, some of these organisations began to focus more on serving the local needs of the migrants. These were the cases, for instance, of Coras (Colombian Refugee Association), Carila (Latin American Welfare Group) and IRMO (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a; McIlwaine, 2007a):

"IRMO used to be called *Chile Democrático* [Democratic Chile], but following the downfall of Pinochet, a lot of Chileans returned to their country and the Chilean community was reduced to a small minority, so there was no justification for an organisation like *Chile Democrático* ... then, those who were in charge decided to restructure the group, created a new constitution and opened up the organisation ... which they renamed IRMO, which stands for Indoamerican Refugee Migrant Organisation ... for the whole Latin American community. That was eight or nine years ago" (Interview, IRMO representative).

Both Carila and IRMO, as well as Coras, serve the Latin American community and the wider local migrant population, but are led by Colombians, and some of the staff are also Colombian, as it was the case with other community associations.<sup>170</sup> Paula, a Colombian journalist in London, said that Colombians were behind a majority of the community organisations (as well as the businesses). She believed this was because some of the people arriving in the 1970s and 1980s had a political experience that allowed them to see the needs of others and try to help them. In addition, a large number of the users of these organisations are Colombian, as LAWRS (Latin American Women's Rights Services) quotes in its website.<sup>171</sup> Similar to the Latin American migrant groups researched in Spain, these organisations in London offered various services to migrants, such as advice on immigration, labour, health, housing and education, as well as general translation and interpreting services. For many Latin American migrants in London, language is a major obstacle to integration (see Chapter 5). Since Latin Americans are not recognised as an ethnic minority group, very little official information is available in Spanish. With time, some of the organisations have focused their attention on specific migrant groups, such as the elderly, the disabled, youth or women. In London, for instance, there were two groups serving the needs of Latin American women, LAWRS and LAWA (Latin American Women's Aid). While I did not find similar initiatives in Spain, some of the organisations in Madrid had specific projects addressed to women (see below). LAWRS:

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<sup>170</sup> Information obtained during fieldwork and previous research suggests that Colombians are also prominent in a number of other well-known Latin American (or general migrant) organisations, such as LAWRS (see below), the *Casa Latinoamericana* (Latin American House) [<http://laha.wordpress.com/welcome/>], the Latin American Disabled Project [<http://www.ladpp.org.uk/>], the Latin American Elderly Project [<http://www.laeplatin.com/>] and the Migrant Resource Centre [<http://www.migrantsresourcecentre.org.uk/home.php>] (10/06/07).

Colombian trade unionists are also behind the formation of the Latin American Workers' Association.  
<sup>171</sup> See: [[http://www.lawrs.org.uk/eng/whoweare\\_eng.htm](http://www.lawrs.org.uk/eng/whoweare_eng.htm)] (10/06/07).

"was set up in 1983 to address the lack of support services for Latin American women and their dependants. The organization was created in recognition that we, as women, carry a disproportionate burden of the problems of displacement. We are the only Latin American organization whose exclusive aim is to help Latin American women defend and secure their right to lead a fuller and more autonomous life."<sup>172</sup>

According to a member of the staff interviewed, LAWRS was set up by a group of Latin American feminists who worked for other organisations but realised the need to specifically focus on migrant women and their needs. Today, this is one of the largest and better-funded Latin American organisations in London. There are eight people serving on the management committee, nine on the staff, and some 35 more listed as volunteers, all of them women. Their offices are only open to women, and among the services they offer are social advice, counselling, and specific projects for the elderly, disabled and victims of domestic violence.

In general, the community organisations researched in London were largely focused on the local needs of migrants, and their political engagement was more at the local level. In contrast to those found in Spain (mainly Madrid), there was less of a transnational scope to their activities, for instance around issues such as co-development. This could be due to differences in numbers, history and composition of the communities, as well as the different contexts in which they worked, which affected the legal and institutional environment in which they had to operate, access to funding or levels of competition.<sup>173</sup> However, the role played by refugees (including Colombians) in these organisations meant that most still had some residual, or more significant in the case of Coras and *Nueva Generación*, involvement in transnational politics oriented towards Colombia, especially around the issues of the armed conflict and search for peace (see Chapter 7 for more on this). *Nueva Generación* (New Generation) is a project linked to IRMO that works with Latin American youth and arts. As an IRMO representative explained, the project started as an attempt to help the children that arrived with their migrant and refugee parents and the second generation being born in the country, who faced specific problems:

"the girls would arrive here, and very soon they would get pregnant, and did not even go to study ... but not only the girls needed support, the boys too, because they ... they would work all week cleaning, and the weekends they would go out to enjoy themselves ... and they were the second generation being lost, since the first generation had already being lost, what we mean is that they never got out of doing 'dirty' jobs in the services sector, and their children were doing the same because many had left school and were not going to university ... because of a lack of stimuli".

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172 See: [[http://www.lawrs.org.uk/eng/whoweare\\_eng.htm](http://www.lawrs.org.uk/eng/whoweare_eng.htm)] (08/02/07).

173 See Bloemraad (2005) for an example of how states can foster (or presumably impede) the ability of migrants to establish and sustain community organisations (see also other articles in the same special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*).

*Nueva Generación* is probably the only organisation addressing the needs of Latin American youth in London. They work with plastic arts, music, film-making and other similar activities. Although its members come from different nationalities, the majority of them seem to be Colombian. In addition to the arts work they do at the local level, this group recently organised some projects involving other youth organisations in Colombia and Palestine with whom they had contacts. The project with Colombia involved a youth group in Cali that, as a member of *Nueva Generación* explained, was very similar to them: "in their origins, their objectives, and the way in which they work ... with the difference that over there they have no resources, they have to confront the police, and your friend might be disappeared". As part of this cooperation work, the organisation was helping fund a farm project for deprived youth involved in the Cali group. The member of *Nueva Generación* interviewed explained how the progression from working at the local level to a more international focus had happened:

"We had been functioning for nine years, and in that time we had reached high levels in some of our work, in terms of preparation for our shows and all of that, we had made quite a lot of shows, theatre performances ... we had worked a lot with the arts. Then new members were arriving that were more politically aware, and there was a mixture".

As part of their international activities, the group had also been involved in the youth and student movement in Venezuela, a reflection of its mostly Leftist orientation and its connection with IRMO (an organisation that was set up, and it is still led, by left-wing refugees). The member of *Nueva Generación* interviewed comes also from a family of Colombian left-wing refugees, an indication that in some cases at least there is some form of politicisation of the younger generations going on. The group was also planning to do some cooperation work with Bolivia, thus becoming a truly transnational group, and in the process widening its interests from arts to other social issues, as its website describes:

"*Nueva Generacion* (NG) is a Latin American collective working cross-culturally to raise awareness of social issues, stimulating change and promoting our culture. Using the arts as our tool, we are creating a model of participatory action learning, networking on a local and international level. We work closely with the latin-american, london-wide and international community through the arts, including music, drama, dance, video, capoeira, music and percussion, poetry and crafts ... We are based in london, SE1, and at the moment run weekly workshops in drama, dance and capoeira ... We also organise fundraising parties for the different charitable purposes, including funding *Nueva Generacion* and also a palestinian youth group called Aedon in Balata camp, a Bolivian university and La casa de la juventud in Cali- Colombia."<sup>174</sup>

*The Latin American media scene*

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174 See: [<http://www.myspace.com/newgenerationlondon>] (10/06/07).

As in the case of Spain, Colombians in London have also played a dominant role in the business, sports and media activities addressed to the wider Spanish-speaking community. This can be explained by the size and long period of establishment of the Colombian migrant population, as well as by their generally high levels of human capital (see Guarnizo. 2006b). Georgiou (n.d., p.17), in her study of diasporic or ethnic minority media in the UK, highlights the importance of this for "processes of identity construction, community building and participation". The media has also been highlighted (together with the church and social service organisations) "as central to building an institutionally complete ethnic community" (Bloemraad, 2005, p.875).<sup>175</sup> The *Directorio Iberoamericano* lists 13 written media outlets and seven radio stations serving the Spanish-speaking community in London (see Footnote 170). Colombian journalists were in charge, or heavily involved, in many of these, including two of the major community newspapers, *Noticias* and *Express News*, as well as a popular radio programme, *En Contacto*. The Colombian presence in the Latin American media in London is no surprise, given the number of journalists that have had to leave the country because of the conflict in Colombia (see Chapter 5). This diasporic or ethnic community media has helped enhance the transnational social field by keeping migrants informed about what happens, politically and otherwise, both in their local communities and in the homeland, as the cases below show (see Georgiou, n.d.).

**Express News** is a weekly newspaper, available both in print and electronic versions, part of 'Express Media International', a company directed by a Colombian journalist.<sup>176</sup> Its first issue came out in February 2000, and it now distributes some 8,000 copies throughout London. The paper was also launched in Spain<sup>177</sup> (Madrid) in 2005, where it distributes some 20,000 copies weekly, and there are plans to create affiliates in other European countries with a large Latin American community, such as France and Italy, as well as in some countries of origin, including Colombia. The newspaper covers news from Latin America, as well as the countries of settlement and the migrant communities. As a London-based editor, also Colombian, explained, the aim of the paper was to "tell the stories of the people that are part of the Latin American community here" and "to serve as a bridge between the Latin community ... and what is

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175 She adds that in some cases the ethnic media can be "a particularly fertile ground for the formation of community advocates and politicians" (*ibid*, p.879). Indeed in the case of the two communities studied, some media outlets and journalists seemed to have a prominent position (in the case of Spain, the leader of a radio programme was running for the *circunscripción especial* for Colombians abroad - see Chapter 7). However, apart from brief consideration in some studies, this issue remains understudied, at least in the case of research on Latin American migrant groups.

176 See: [<http://www.expressnews.uk.com/>] (11/06/07).

177 Although Spain also has a lively Latin American media scene, in general this is of more recent origins given the more recent establishment of the community there, which would explain why some of the papers are affiliates of the longer-established ones in the UK (see *Express News*).

happening in our countries of origin". This was the only weekly newspaper addressed to the Latin American community in London, and thus it is very popular. It is distributed freely in strategic community areas of the city. According to the editor, the newspaper was widely read because many members of the community could not follow the English news owing to poor language skills. In addition, not all Latin American migrants could follow news about their countries via electronic means, because of lack of access to, or knowledge of, internet. But apart from keeping people informed (including politically) within the community, ethnic or diasporic community media can have more ambitious goals, as an editorial in Express News argued when reflecting on the role of the Latin American media in Europe:

"they are here to serve the community, to alert of any situation which could affect it, positively or negatively ... the Latin American community must know what goes on ... Given the predominance of media specialised in local issues, and those of the 'First World', it is fundamental to offer some information about what is happening to the thousands and thousands of people of Latin American origin ... It also reflects on the importance, the relevance of the community ... We have to keep trying ... to eliminate, gradually, the stereotypes that exist about Latin American migrants ..." (Borda Díaz, J.A., London Edition 367, 6-12 February, 2007).<sup>178</sup>

This point was also highlighted by a Colombian journalist who led the popular radio programme *En Contacto*, when he explained how the initiative began:

"Initially, the idea ... was to contribute with these programmes to the development of the Hispanic community in London ... because in those days it was difficult for people to be aware of what was happening around them, such as festivals, concerts, activities, there were even benefits they did not know about, so we used to offer information on immigration, and help those who did not know what to do when they got sick, maybe because of the language barrier ... we achieved that goal and we kept working, but now using a magazine format".

*En Contacto* had been on the air for four years, and following changes in the composition of the community, two years ago it inaugurated its own website, which according to the journalist interviewed, received some 60,000 hits per day<sup>179</sup>:

"As a result of the brain drain from Latin America, over the last five years the people who have been arriving here have a different life style to the conventional or traditional one that those migrants who arrived a long time ago to this country had ... now the young and those who belong to the brain drain wave, what they use is internet".

In contrast to the newspaper above, the main emphasis of this radio programme was the local

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178 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish [<http://www.expressnews.uk.com/editorial.htm>] (11/06/07).

179 See: [<http://www.encontactolondres.co.uk>] (11/06/07).



Latin American community in London, rather than the news coming from the countries of origin, although Mancini Corp., which was behind the programme, had offices both in London and Bogotá. The journalist interviewed explained that to cover the news coming from Latin America would be too expensive for them, and that migrants now had greater access to radio programmes from their country of origin through internet, so they decided instead to focus on the local coverage. As part of its community activities, *En Contacto* also organised an annual event called *La Noche de los Mejores* (The Night of the Best), to celebrate the best community leaders in different fields, including sports, business and community organisations, as voted by radio listeners throughout the UK, as a way to highlight and reinforce what was positive about the community. This event was also shown through different media in Bogotá (Colombia) and Quito (Ecuador), where most of the participants came from, once again contributing to strengthening the transnational linkages of the community.

The growing importance of the new technologies in the media and communications sector has also allowed for smaller, more individual initiatives to prosper. Some authors have pointed out that owing to the difficulties that the ethnic media has in reaching audiences, "migrants are often on the cutting edge of technology adoption" (Panagakos and Horst, 2006, p.111). Although they also acknowledge that access to and use of the new communication technologies among migrants can vary (see Chapter 5).<sup>180</sup> Two other Colombian interviewees in London had set up their own web-based media service. **Latin Outlook** was established four years earlier by a young professional man, originally to promote "positive news about Colombia" and the Spanish language.<sup>181</sup> Thus, it linked with some of the initiatives discussed earlier. With time, it had also expanded to offer practical information for Latin American migrants in the UK on legal, cultural, labour, family and other issues. Its creator explained that the idea occurred to him after his children were born and he realised that he wanted them to learn Spanish and keep his parents' culture. Both him and his wife (who was also Colombian) were very active in community affairs, especially of a cultural or educational nature (such as through involvement in a Saturday school). According to him, the website had received more than five million hits from all over the world. The other initiative was '[www.comunalatina.com](http://www.comunalatina.com)' (The Latin American People Magazine), an on-line newspaper offering news to the Latin American community in the UK, from their countries of origin and settlement. This was a very recent initiative set up by a Colombian refugee journalist as a personal project to be able to keep working in his field, and also to contribute to the development of the community media services. Both initiatives provide an example of the dynamic growth of the Latin American

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<sup>180</sup> Panagakos and Horst (2006) argue that until recently this issue had received little attention in studies of transnational migration, although research has increased in the last few years (see, for instance, other articles in this same special issue of *Global Networks*, 6(2); Vertovec, 2004).

<sup>181</sup> Interview with the founder of Latin Outlook. See also: [<http://www.latinoutlook.com/>] (11/06/07).

ethnic media in London, and its dominance by Colombian migrants, as well as its transnational nature. This transnationalism had a more cultural and social emphasis in the former, but was more heavily political in the case of the latter.

*Charity groups linking Colombian migrants with their country of origin*

Although other studies available on Colombians in the US and UK suggest that Colombian migrants do not get involved in transnational charity, there is evidence of this type of transnational activity growing, as the figures reported by *Conexión Colombia* above show. A third sector of community transnational activities in which Colombian migrants in the UK were active was diaspora philanthropy promoted from below (i.e. from civil society involving both migrants and the host community). At least eight Colombian respondents in London, seven women and a man, were involved, or had been in the past, with **Children of the Andes**. Although this is a UK-based charity group, its aim is to offer "support to Colombia's most vulnerable children by working in partnership with local NGOs".<sup>182</sup> Thus, this provides an example of the interplay "between two sets of civil society actors": the migrants and host society organisations (or even three, including civil society in the country of origin) (Landolt and Goldring, 2006, p.2).<sup>183</sup> The organisation was set up in 1991 and currently worked in partnership with some 20 projects in Colombia. Although most of its staff and members of the board of trustees were English, the person in charge of fundraising and one of the trustees, as well as many volunteers, were Colombian. They also had a field officer representing the organisation in Cali (Colombia). The involvement of Colombians in the organisation had been key to disseminate its work within the wider Latin American community, as Jessica, a Colombian who worked as a volunteer explained: "the idea was to get the organisation closer to the Latin American community, so that they knew about it, since the organisation works mainly with Colombia". Estefanía, another Colombian volunteer, explained that most of their funds came from British people, partly because migrants in general do not have much money to spare, and also because of cultural reasons. To change this she had organised several community events, with some success: "we organised a walk in May and in total we collected some 8,000 pounds, and 50% of that came from the Colombian community". The fact that this was an organisation working for Colombian children, and that is British based and organised, explained its success, according to other volunteers interviewed.

Another Colombian charity organisation active in London, especially among the better off classes, was **Friends of Colombia for Social Aid (FOSCA)**. According to its website, this

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182 See: [<http://www.childrenoftheandes.org/>] (18/06/07).

183 This has received less attention in studies of transnational migrant activities (see also Chapter 7).

organisation was set up in 1976 by the wife of the then Colombian ambassador to London, who was also part of the formation of the *Damas Voluntarias Colombianas* [Voluntary Colombian Ladies] in Washington and Miami.<sup>184</sup> The website *Colombianos en el Exterior* (Colombians Abroad), includes many more groups of "Colombian ladies" spread throughout the world in their community listing (see below for more on this).<sup>185</sup> Portes et al. describe this type of activities as "alternative transnationalism", which they argue are more middle-class, and better recognised and accepted by the dominant society, in contrast to the transnational organisations formed by those groups of migrants who, for racial reasons or levels of education, face greater discrimination in the receiving context (2006, p.16). According to several respondents, FOSCA was integrated mostly by middle or upper class Colombian women, who had married British men or had ended up living in London. The organisation included both Colombian and British members, and its main objective seemed to be to raise funds for medical equipment for public hospitals in Colombia, especially in relation to children's health. Their most well-known event was a party they organised every year, mainly addressing the most well-off members of the Colombian community and their families and friends in order to collect money. Their work is thus mostly an extension of the traditional charitable work associated with certain social classes (and up to a point, gender - see below) in Colombia at the transnational level (in common with the diaspora philanthropy promoted from above discussed earlier)<sup>186</sup>, as their website proclaims:

"We are very proud to see and sense that **FOSCA** has become without doubt an important part of the life of the Colombian community in the UK, and particularly in London. Our members and friends increase in number by the day. All are proud to be involved in such a noble cause, sustain their roots in the native soil and contribute to the improvement of life in their country".<sup>187</sup>

### **The gendered nature of Colombian transnational activities**

Some recent work has begun to analyse the relationship between gender and the emergence of transnational social fields, looking at differences between men and women in types and levels of transnational participation, as well as the implications of this for gender relations and equality (see Chapter 2). By and large this emerging body of research has pointed out that male migrants

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184 See:

[[http://www.friendsofcolombia.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=2](http://www.friendsofcolombia.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=2)] (18/06/07).

185 See: [<http://www.colombianosenelexterior.com/index.php?idcategoria=261>] (14/8/07).

186 Children of the Andes, on the other hand, seemed to escape somewhat this traditional upper-middle class type of philanthropy. Although some of the Colombian volunteers interviewed were middle class, others came from more humble origins. This could be related to the British-origin of the initiative, and its framing more within development-type work than charity per se.

187 See:

[[http://www.friendsofcolombia.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=2](http://www.friendsofcolombia.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=2)] (18/06/07).

tend to participate more actively in transnational fields, especially within transmigrant organisations such as hometown associations and in state-mediated transnational social spaces (Goldring, 2001; see also Itzigshohn and Giourguli-Saucedo, 2005; Jones-Correa, 1998; Mahler, 1999; Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Willis and Yeoh, 2002). Women are seen as playing at most a secondary role in these spaces, or being more active in public activities oriented towards the host society. Their transnational relations with the home country are said to be more 'private', relating mostly to the sending of remittances to their families and the practices associated with 'transnational motherhood' (see Chapter 2). This means that on the one hand traditional gender roles are largely maintained, while on the other hand women could gain from greater public engagement in the host society. However, as argued in Chapter 2 these conclusions tend to be based on a limited range of transnational activities and case studies, such as that of Mexicans and Central Americans in the US organised around hometown associations (arguably the most popular), and do not include other types of transnational civil society activities involving migrants, or the experiences of other groups. The evidence from other studies point out that the gender implications of transnational migration can vary a lot, depending on other factors, such as the nationality of migrants, age and class differences, type of migration and migrant destination (see Itzigsohn and Giourguli Saucedo, 2005; Goldring, 2001; see also Chapter 2). In the case of this research, men and women were active in the transnational social field in activities oriented both towards the home country and the host society, although there were some differences in types and levels of involvement (see also Chapter 7).

Within the transnational initiatives from above oriented towards the country of origin analysed, women were as actively engaged as men in this sample group. They were a majority of those in the team of *Conexión Colombia* in Madrid, including the leader. Two of the women interviewed in this group believed this was just a coincidence, partly a reflection of the large female ratio of the Colombian migrant community in Spain. Nevertheless, a look at the back pages of one of the bulletins of *Conexión Colombia* shows that the leaders of all the different sections are women.<sup>188</sup> In addition, women were also a majority within the group working for *Yo Creo en Colombia* in London.<sup>189</sup> The key to explain the large participation of women in these two initiatives could be the type of activities in which they focus. *Conexión Colombia*, as discussed earlier, is primarily concerned with promoting diaspora philanthropy. The limited research available suggests that migrant women and their organisations often play a key role in this (see Mama Cash, 2006). A recent report argues that this is because this type of philanthropy refers to

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188 See *Conexión Colombia*, Boletín Institucional No.5 (Marzo 2007)

[[http://portal.conexioncolombia.com/doc/Doc-11132\\_2007524.pdf](http://portal.conexioncolombia.com/doc/Doc-11132_2007524.pdf)] (07/06/07).

189 The activities of *Colombia Nos Une* and *Colombia es Pasión* are carried out mainly by representatives from the Colombian government (the consul, in the case of the former, and the head of Proexport for the latter).

"those contributions from diaspora communities that extend the household and aim to contribute to broader social change" (*ibid*). Given the identification of women with the household and social issues, their involvement in this type of transnational activities is no surprise.<sup>190</sup> Another recent study based in the UK also found out that although most of the womens' organisations researched were focused on the local needs of the migrant or ethnic minority women they represented, some were involved in "a number of 'giving back' activities ranging from more traditional philanthropic activities to a variety of 'non-elite philanthropy' aiming to support the people/women in the home countries" (Esin and Kurt, 2006, p.42). This was not the case of the only UK-based Latin American women's organisation researched in this study (LAWRS), but Colombian women played a key role in the two charity groups analysed, Children of the Andes and FOSCA (see below).<sup>191</sup> Jessica, a woman involved in Children of the Andes, argued that this was because "us women ... naturally we are more prone to solidarity". Thus, this type of transnational participation is equated with traditional gender roles.

In the case of *Yo Creo en Colombia*, the main focus of the group had to do with issues of national identity and image. The leader of the team in London, a man, thought that women were more committed and felt closer to their homeland:

"The initiative motivates everyone equally, but I have the impression that when it comes to committing, women commit more than men. I don't know whether this happens in every field, or only in this case ... I think that may be women end up feeling closer to Colombia when they leave the country, and that may motivate them to do more things for their country. But this is just a hypothesis".

The website of *Yo Creo en Colombia* showed that of the six branches of the organisation listed within the country, only two were coordinated by women, but in seven out of the 15 branches abroad the coordinators were women.<sup>192</sup> This could be partly related to the increasing participation of highly educated Colombian women in international migration, but might also be a reflection of what the leader of *Yo Creo en Colombia* believed.<sup>193</sup> In this sample group, more women respondents than men expressed their love for Colombia, and/or Colombian things, throughout the interviews, although some of the women also had negative feelings towards their country. Glick-Schiller and Fouron, in their account of long-distance nationalism among

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190 This would agree with conclusions that see women as more active at the level of family transnational connections, for instance, sending remittances or in transnational motherhood.

191 All of the staff of Children of the Andes seemed to be female, although there was a greater balance at the level of the patron and board of trustees; while all of the staff, including volunteers, of FOSCA were women, but men predominated among trustees. See: [[http://www.friendsofcolombia.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=27](http://www.friendsofcolombia.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=27)] and [<http://www.childrenoftheandes.org/?id=team>] (18/06/07).

192 See: [<http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/proyectos/iniciativas>] (07/06/07).

193 Guarnizo's (2006b) study of Colombians in London showed a much higher level of education for women than men.

Haitian migrants, also highlight the close identification with Haiti that many women respondents felt, which they argued was both similar and different to that of men, a reflection of "the different historical relationship that men and women have to the Haitian nation-state, as well as their different life experiences" (2001, p.133). In the case of Haiti, they argue, official accounts of the founding of the nation both echoed and helped reinforce traditional gender ideologies "through the tale of a woman who was present at the birth of the nation but as a wife and mother, not as a leader or warrior" (*ibid*).<sup>194</sup> In the case of *Yo Creo en Colombia*, there were also some elements of traditional gender ideologies, for instance, in their specific project called *¿Por Qué Creer en la Mujer Colombiana?* (Why Believe in the Colombian Woman?) (other similar projects were listed on the website, to do with why believe in the Colombian countryside, science, culture, children or tourism). According to its coordinator, this project seeks to highlight the contribution that Colombian women have made to the progress of the country, and to identify new prominent women that can serve as an example to others.<sup>195</sup> However, such an objective is rooted in a vision of women as individuals and based on their traditional gender qualities, rather than on changing gendered power relations:

"[the Colombian woman] has been its own enemy, creating obstacles to her own full development, although she might not be conscious of this. Her gender characteristics, such as being intuitive, a peace-maker, and a carer, represent a potential that can enrich her in her accomplishment of many tasks. They are responsible for shaping the character of the children who will join society" (see Footnote 196).

In general, none of the transnational initiatives emerging from the Colombian government and private interests aiming to link the diaspora with the home country seemed to have a strong gender element. None of the female participants in these initiatives thought about this in terms of advancing their 'practical' or 'strategic' interests as women.<sup>196</sup> Actually, when directly asked, most thought that in Colombia there was general gender equality. However, they were mostly young women from middle- or upper-class backgrounds, who in their home country had been equally involved in the professional or student spheres. Interestingly, the majority were working for these initiatives as volunteers, which at least in the case of one of the young women interviewed led to some dissatisfaction, since she did not see this as furthering her career. All but one of the Colombians interviewed in connection with the two initiatives analysed above participated only part-time on these and had other occupations (as students or professionals).

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194 There is an ample body of literature on gender and concepts of nation- states, nationalism and patriotism (see, for instance, de Alwis 2002, Dore and Molyneux 2000, Nagel 1998, Yuval-Davis 1997).

195 See: [[http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/proyectos/2007\\_mujer.html](http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/proyectos/2007_mujer.html)] (07/06/07).

196 The difference between the 'practical' and 'strategic' needs of women was first theorised by Molyneux (1985).

Looking at the transnational initiatives from below, and more specifically community organisations, LAWRS in London was the only group focusing on the needs and problems of women migrants, although its realm of activities was more local than transnational. Both Aculco and Aesco in Madrid also had specific programmes addressing the local needs of women migrants, but these tended to focus almost exclusively on domestic violence. However, some of the co-development projects they sponsored in Colombia specifically focused on women, a reflection of the recognition of the important role that women play in family survival, development and migration. Thus, they could be seen as working for, or incorporating, women's practical needs. However, some of this work also sought to contribute to women's strategic needs, by seeking to increase consciousness of the gender asymmetries in Colombian society. In terms of levels and types of participation, quite a few of the community organisations researched were directed, and/or staffed, by Colombian women. These were the cases, for instance, of Aesco and Aicode in Madrid, as well as LAWRS, IRMO, Carila and Aculco in London. Although the main focus of these organisations was on immigrant politics, or the needs of migrants in the country of settlement, as argued above these activities can also be transnational (more so in the case of the Spanish organisations than those in the UK). The female and male respondents involved in these community initiatives came from a wide variety of social backgrounds. Quite a few of the community leaders were refugees, and had previous experience of political and civic activism in Colombia.<sup>197</sup> Others, however, had come to the UK or Spain as students or labour migrants. Women respondents were also overrepresented in the activities of Children of the Andes and FOSCA, both of whom are (like *Conexión Colombia*) examples of diaspora or transnational philanthropy. The main difference was that in the case of Children of the Andes, the social class background of the women involved was more varied.

Thus, in general, within the sample group studied, both men and women from an upper or middle class background were more involved in transnational activities from above, but also participated in community initiatives (and in the more 'political' ones explored in the following chapter). However, when active in these, they were more often in leadership positions, especially (but not exclusively) the men. On the other hand, migrants from lower class backgrounds were more involved in community work, as well as church groups and more political activities (see Chapter 7).

## **Conclusions**

This chapter shows that Colombian migrants in Spain and the UK are not only transnationally

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<sup>197</sup> Guarnizo argues in his study of Colombians in London that the "political and civic activists that had emigrated from Colombia" are mostly responsible for collective and public transnational activities in the community (2006b, p.89; see Chapter 7).

involved at the individual and private levels, but also in a collective and public way. However, the type of involvement may vary from those of other Latin American migrant communities in the US prominent in research on transnationalism. This is because of differences based on nationality, gender and class, as well as the different contexts of settlement. The current research in the UK and Spain found, on the one hand, how the state and private interests in Colombia have grown increasingly interested in enhancing and shaping the transnational ties of migrants. These initiatives from above have sought to promote diaspora philanthropy and turn co-nationals abroad into 'ambassadors' for the country. These two transnational fields of action remain understudied in the literature. Diaspora philanthropy has been researched mostly through the action of hometown associations, but the case studies analysed show that this can also be part of transnational efforts from above and other types of initiatives coming from migrant and non-migrant civil society. In addition, Colombian migrants are now seen as an important resource in government and private efforts to improve the image of the country abroad, both for political and economic aims. The evidence from the ground shows that although government and economic initiatives tend to be viewed with suspicion, those linked to concepts of nationalism and patriotism are better received by migrants. However, in Spain and the UK, there were important class and gender differences. Participation in these initiatives from above was mostly by upper- and middle-class migrants, with women heavily represented.

On the other hand, Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain were also active in a number of organised transnational activities from below. The case studies analysed included the role played by migrant organisations, ethnic media and philanthropy work. These show that there were some differences between the UK and Spain (and within it), as well as according to gender and class. In Spain, Colombian migrant organisations played a key role within the wider Latin American migrant community, and were very active not only in immigrant politics, but also in emigrant politics and through co-development projects. Most of these organisations were based in Madrid (although some had branches in other Spanish cities, as well as in Colombia and other countries). This is because Madrid is the capital city and accounts for the largest Colombian community in Spain – with regards to the more political organisations, they had an active presence in both Madrid and Barcelona (see Chapter 7). In the case of London, Colombians also played an important role within the wider Latin American migrant community. This was mainly because they were among the first Latin American groups to settle in this city and are one of the largest groups within the community, as well as due to the high levels of human capital and the role played by refugees. In contrast with Spain, migrant organisations in the UK were less transnational in their reach, focusing instead on the needs of migrants at the local level, with some exceptions. This probably has to do with the different characteristics of each migrant community, as well as the institutional frameworks in which these organisations work.



However, there was also evidence of Colombian participation in transnational charity and media activities. The transnational political role of ethnic media is also an under-researched subject, but the evidence available suggests that it can contribute to the sense of community, as well as to increasing political knowledge. Women were also very active in transnational activities from below, both focusing on the sending and receiving countries, contrary to what the literature suggests. Class seemed to play a lesser role here, with men and women from different backgrounds becoming involved in these activities. These differences will be further explored in the following chapter, which will concentrate on more overtly political activities.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Colombian Transnational Politics in the Context of Armed Conflict and the Search for Peace**

#### **Introduction**

The previous two chapters have shown how Colombians in the UK and Spain have forged numerous transnational linkages, both at the individual and collective levels. Chapter 6 analysed some recent efforts on the part of the Colombian state and private interests to enhance and redirect migrants' transnational connections, as well as community activities and transnational initiatives from below. These provide a contrast to the emphasis by other studies on the divisions, fragmentation and mistrust affecting Colombians abroad, and are evidence of broad-based political transnationalism among the diaspora. This chapter focuses more specifically on the transnational homeland and diaspora politics of the Colombian migrant communities in Spain and the UK. The first part analyses electoral and party-related politics, as well as general interest in formal politics. Adopting a broad definition of transnational political action, this chapter shows that Colombian migrants are involved to a larger or lesser degree in the politics of their home country (and sometimes the host society). The second part examines informal politics, or migrant civil society, but in the context of the work of exiles relating to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia. This aspect of transnational Colombian politics has rarely been taken into account by other studies, but can be conceptualised as part of an emerging 'transnational civil society' seeking peace in the country (see McIlwaine, 2007b). Chapter 7 explores the limitations of this, as well as the particularities of the different communities studied and the gendered nature and implications of these processes.

#### **Transnational participation of the Colombian diaspora in conventional politics**

Research on diaspora and transnational politics has opened up a debate about the current meaning of concepts such as citizenship, sovereignty and the nation-state (see Chapter 2). As argued in the previous chapter, while some authors identified the emergence of transnationalism with the demise of the nation-state, efforts from above to enhance and direct transnational migrant activities have led others to talk about a redefinition of such concepts. As migrants mobilise for their rights in both the sending and receiving countries, new concepts such as 'personhood' and 'de-territorialised citizenship' have emerged to better reflect these experiences (Kemp et al., 2000; McIlwaine, 2007b; Mohan, 2006).<sup>198</sup> This debate is especially pertinent in

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198 The concept of 'denizens' has also been used to denote the double exclusion that migrants with no

the extension of political rights by nation-states to their citizens abroad, crystallised around the issue of 'external voting' (see Calderón Chelius, 2003; IDEA, 2006). Serrano Carrasco argues that Colombia represents "one of the democratic paradigms in the Latin American region in terms of the extension of political rights for those citizens living abroad" (2003, p.115; see also Vono de Vilhena, 2006).<sup>199</sup> Colombian migrants have the right to dual citizenship, to vote from abroad in elections for the presidency and the Senate, and to choose their own representative in the lower chamber of congress.<sup>200</sup> This is further proof of the emergence of a Colombian transnational social field, and of how Colombia has been developing an integrated policy towards its population abroad throughout the 1990s (more so than other Latin American countries with longer migratory traditions – see Hazán, 2001). A recent study shows that, out of 20 Latin American countries, only nine have passed legislation allowing their citizens abroad to vote, and only in six of these had provisions been put into practice (Calderón Chelius, 2003a, p.41-43).<sup>201</sup> Colombia is the earliest example, since the right to vote for the presidency was approved in 1961, just ahead of Brazil (1965) and Peru (1975), with legislation in the other countries dating from the mid-1990s onwards.<sup>202</sup> This is another sign that states are no longer "relatively indifferent" to the lives of their nationals abroad:

"The growth of migrant diasporas, the size of the remittances they send back, and their increasing capacity to support or resist home country authorities mean that the latter must respond actively to the needs and demands of their nationals abroad" (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, pp.131-32).<sup>203</sup>

In the case of Colombia, Serrano Carrasco (2003) argues that the political rights that nationals abroad enjoy have been more the result of attempts from above to strengthen the democratic system by widening and increasing participation in response to different crises, than of demands from below. Law 39 allowing Colombians abroad to vote in presidential elections was part of a group of electoral reforms signed in 1961 in the context of the emergence of the National Front

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political rights in either their home countries or host societies suffer (see Parra, 2006).

199 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

200 This chamber allows for the election of five members as part of the *circunscripciones especiales* (special electoral districts): two for indigenous communities, two for Afro-Colombians, and one for Colombians abroad.

201 The nine countries were: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Dominican Republic and Venezuela (a more recent study also lists Guayana – see IDEA, 2006).

202 In Mexico, with its strong migratory tradition, Congress debated the subject for over a decade, but legislation to allow Mexicans abroad to vote was only passed in 1996. Conditions for the exercise of the external vote were not implemented until 2005 due to bureaucratic and political delays, and migrants voted in national elections for the first time in 2006 (Ballinas and Becerril, 2005; Calderón Chelius and Martínez Cossío, 2003; Hazán, 2001).

203 State interest in migrant remittances is also analysed by Goldring in the case of Mexico (2004). He argues that apart from the economic value of these for development, remittances also have social and political repercussions (see Chapter 2). However, this thesis does not engage fully with the political role of remittances in Colombia (see Chapter 5).

(see Chapter 3).<sup>204</sup> The second group of rights, which included the granting of dual citizenship, and provisions for Colombians abroad to vote in, and be voted for, congressional elections, was established by articles 96, 171 and 176 of the 1991 constitution (Serrano Carrasco, 2003). This new constitution, she argues, was once again the result of efforts by the political class to legitimise and strengthen the political system after the violence and corruption of the 1980s. Despite this, migrants voted in the 1990 plebiscite for constitutional reform, and the Colombian communities in the US (especially in New York) organised to demand the approval of dual nationality and the creation of the special electoral district for Colombians abroad (Serrano Carrasco, 2003; Jones-Correa, 1998). Nevertheless, research on the transnational political practices of migrants has argued that "Colombians want little to do with their country's politics, having escaped a situation of profound instability, official corruption, and widespread violence" and that the "overall trend is for Colombian transnationalism to be not only exceptional but also more weakly determined" (Guarnizo et al., 2003, p.1233).<sup>205</sup> However, a detailed, qualitative, look at the activities of Colombians in the UK and Spain shows a more complex picture.

#### The transnational voting patterns of Colombians in Spain and the UK

To date, Colombians abroad have participated in 12 consecutive presidential elections, have voted three times in senatorial elections, and twice they have chosen their representative to the lower chamber. However, the emphasis has been on the low participation rates of external voters.<sup>206</sup> In the 2006 presidential elections, Colombians voted from 52 different countries, but the total participation rate from abroad was less than 38% (see Table 7.1). Nevertheless, these results have to be contextualised. First, rates of external electoral participation from nationals abroad tend to be low. For instance, in Spain, where the vote from abroad has been possible since 1978, less than 23% of the potential external electorate participated in the 2000 general elections (Calderón Chelius, 2003, p.582).<sup>207</sup> Second, electoral participation in Colombia in general has been historically low, when compared with other countries in the region, with an

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204 The National Front emerged out of the political pacts signed in Spain (Benidorm and Sitges) by the leaders of the two main political parties, some of whom had to go into exile during *La Violencia* and the Rojas regime. Thus, the granting of the vote to Colombians abroad "was originally designed as a political weapon for elite refugees", to prevent their exclusion if they ever had to go into exile again, although it later benefited a wider cross-section of society as migration grew and diversified (Guarnizo, 2001, p.234; personal communication with the author).

205 The study measuring the type, scale and intensity of political transnationalism of migrants from Colombia, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic in the US concluded that Colombians were "the least likely to take part in home country politics" (Guarnizo et al., 2003, p.1232).

206 Calderón Chelius points out that one of the arguments against granting migrants political rights in their countries of origin has been their perceived lack of "interest, enthusiasm and political commitment" (2003, p.35).

207 In the US, where the first known experience of external voting took place, in 1862, the rate of electoral participation by civilians abroad was of 31% in 1992 and 37% in 1996 (IDEA, 2006; Calderón Chelius, 2003, p.581).

average turnout in presidential elections just above 40% during the 1940s-1990s (García and Hoskin, 2003, p.8; see also Zovatto, 2005; and Table 7.1). By contrast, official data shows that participation in the 2002 presidential election in Colombia was higher for external voters (64.56%) than internal ones (46.47%).<sup>208</sup> Table 7.1 also indicates that in the 2006 election, levels of voting were actually higher among some communities abroad than inside Colombia.

**Table 7.1: Rates of participation in the May 2006 presidential election in Colombia**

	Spain	UK	Fran.	Germ.	Belg.	Italy	US	Can.	Ven.	Ecuad.	Total abr.	Nat. total
Poten- tial votes	39,193	5,632	3,935	1,723	764	2,563	126,959	7,268	81,298	13,575	319,045	26.7m
Total votes (%)	28.74	29.94	43.96	29.14	40.31	32.81	48.05	47.44	23.29	37.27	37.82	45.11
Votes for Uribe (%)	77.77	74.69	47.31	52.99	52.63	73.36	90.67	72.72	78.58	81.75	84.17	62.20
Votes for PDA (%)	15.13	18.42	40.65	33.86	38.49	15.29	5.21	19.31	16.33	7.32	10.13	22.04

Source: *Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, República de Colombia* (2006).

However, the table above also shows that voting rates from abroad were among the lowest in both the UK and Spain. The reasons for this could be several. On the one hand, the Colombian communities in these countries are smaller and have had less time to become established than those in the US. Geographical distance is also important. In addition, in the case of Spain, the Colombian population is quite dispersed, and in both countries estimates suggest large numbers of irregular migrants, all of which can affect levels of participation. During an interview with an embassy official in Madrid, he argued that despite efforts to increase voter registration and participation, the community in Spain was still too recent and too preoccupied with its economic wellbeing to focus on anything else (see Figure 7.1). The Colombian consul in London also pointed out that the main concerns of migrants in that city were to work hard to survive and send remittances to their families, and that people had little time for anything else, including participating in Colombian politics. In addition, Angell (2007), analysing Chilean politics, argues that declining participation and identification with party politics is part of a worldwide trend. Nevertheless, the Colombian embassy in Madrid celebrated the fact that for the 28 May,

<sup>208</sup> *Registraduría Nacional* [<http://www.registraduria.gov.co>] (12/03/07).

2006 presidential election, participation was twice that of the 2002 poll, and three times higher than during the March 2006 legislative election. This means that official efforts at increasing external electoral participation could be having an impact, although some respondents argued that more could be done. On the other hand, the responses of some interviewees also reflected those aspects of the Colombian political culture highlighted by other authors, such as distrust of the state, low appreciation of political parties, a generally negative perception of the political process and alienation from electoral politics (Guarnizo, 2003; Guarnizo et al, 2003).<sup>209</sup>

**Figure 7.1: Leaflet distributed by Colombian embassy to encourage voting**



Source: collected during fieldwork in Madrid.

Within the sample group in this study, data on participation in Colombian elections was obtained for 25 Colombian respondents in the UK and 20 in Spain (see Appendix 4). In the case of London, just over half (eight women and five men) said they had voted in Colombian elections from abroad, while four men and seven women said they did not. In Spain, a majority (seven women and eight men) said they had voted or had intentions to vote, while two men and three women said they did not vote from Spain.<sup>210</sup> Differences in the levels of participation

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209 Jones-Correa argues that Latin American migrants "have strong negative views of politics and politicians", contributing to low participation in elections in their countries of origin (and the US), with Colombians the "most striking example" (1998, pp.125-26).

210 Electoral information was not obtained for all respondents. Some Colombians were interviewed as 'experts' and offered no personal information, and in other cases interviews were more informal, or shorter than usual. In Spain, since some interviews were conducted well ahead of the 2006 elections, it was harder to collect this type of information (see Chapter 3).

between Spain and the UK were probably due to the characteristics of the sample group in each place, since as Table 7.1 shows voting rates from both countries were similarly low. It is difficult to contrast this with other studies of Colombians abroad, or the electoral experience of other Latin American migrants in the same countries, or even electoral participation inside Colombia, since there is little data available segregated by sex. At the national level, women in Colombia won the right to participate in elections in 1954 (see Chapter 3). According to the study by Arango and Guacaneme (2005), which contains data on electoral participation disaggregated by sex for 1957-2003, participation levels were generally higher for men than women to start with. However, by the mid 1990s they had become equal, with the percentage of women voters being higher than that of men in the 1994 presidential elections and the 2003 local elections (*ibid*, pp.19-28).<sup>211</sup> In the case of electoral participation from abroad, studies of Colombians in the US and London suggest that gender hardly plays a role in levels of political transnational participation, both electoral and non-electoral (Guarnizo et al, 2003; Guarnizo, 2006b; see below for more).<sup>212</sup> This could be partly related to the mainly urban, and according to these studies, middle-class origins of these migration flows.

Of the Colombian respondents who had voted, or had intentions to vote, from the UK and Spain, a significant number was also actively involved in party politics, as members of a political party, or through direct participation in the electoral campaign. They included two men (a member of MIRA [*Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta*] and a member of the Conservative Party) and two women (members of the Liberal Party) in London, and six men (three from the PDA [*Polo Democrático Alternativo*], one from the Liberal Party, and two who were standing as candidates for the *circunscripción especial*) and five women (three from the PDA, one from the Conservative Party and another one from a political movement organised by Colombians abroad) in Spain (see below for more on party politics). When looking at the other reasons given for participating in the elections, at least in the case of London, men seemed to be more politically aware, or involved, than women. Men, for instance, tended to emphasise the need to exercise their democratic rights, or to participate in order to have a say:

"Do you participate in the elections?"

Absolutely. I always vote. I always exercise my democratic rights, and I follow the election results and keep informed about what the authorities do. Yes, definitely.

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211 During 1994-2002 electoral data stopped being diseggregated by sex (Arango and Guacaneme, 2005).

212 The study by Guarnizo et al. does not include data on voting, instead focusing on party-related politics, as well as non-electoral politics. It found that Dominican and Salvadoran men in the US were more likely to be politically involved than women, but for Colombians gender was "an insignificant predictor" (2003, p.1235). Another study by Guarnizo of Colombians in London, which includes electoral as well as party-related political participation and non-electoral activities, found "no statistically significant differences" by gender (2006b, p.79).

(...)

And in Colombia, did you use to participate in elections, and did you follow the political situation?

In Colombia too. Yes. Also, because I used to cover the news on public order issues ... I always covered the news around election time ..." (Pedro, a journalist in his 30s, London).

"Do you participate in the elections?

Yes. The last time around I did not do it because I was sick. I fell ill on election day, but I had registered to vote, and I wanted to participate. People do not participate and later complain, but I do not think is fair. You have to participate if you want to complain, even if you know that at the end of the day it is all going to remain the same" (Omar, a journalist in his 40s, London).

On the other hand, some of the women voters, such as Jessica and Rosa, both of whom were long-term residents in London, admitted they had stayed away from Colombian politics for a long time, but had decided to participate more recently in response to what they saw as the changes taking place in Colombia. Vanesa, another woman in London, said that she had no experience of voting in Colombia before, but recently started voting following the recommendations of her brother, who was directly involved in politics in Colombia. The reasons for not participating also varied, with some differences between men and women. Women were more numerous in the group who was not interested in participating, did not know how to vote from abroad or had experienced other bureaucratic problems preventing the voting. Men who did not vote were almost all refugees, or were politically active but gave other reasons for not voting, as illustrated below. For instance, despite official efforts at increasing external voting, there was still a general lack of information and uncertainty about the process:

"Do you follow the political situation in Colombia, or do you participate in the elections?

No. Since I arrived here I haven't. I don't know what one has to do here to vote in the elections in Colombia. I don't know how people do it. I still have not found out how to do it. Since we arrived here some four years ago, we have not visited Colombia, so I don't know what goes on there, although of course I do have a certain idea, based on the news and other things that happen in our country" (Gladys, a cleaner in her 40s, Madrid).

"Do you participate in the elections? Do you vote?

To be honest, not. I have not done it.



But did you use to vote in Colombia?

Yes. In Colombia I used to vote.

(...)

And why did you not vote in the last elections?

During the last elections the truth is that it was due to lack of information. Yes, that was the reason" (Edelmira, a housewife in her 30s, London).

For those with refugee status, both men and women, there was the added difficulty of having to go to a consulate or embassy to vote. Given the reasons why they had to leave Colombia, a majority felt that they could not access, or did not want to be in contact with, such places:

"Do you vote in the Colombian elections?

No, I don't vote. I am not sure, but I think us refugees cannot go to our embassy, and the embassy is the place to vote, isn't it? If we have denounced our own government for not protecting us, and that is the reason why we left our country, well I can't imagine we are going to go there and vote" (Elena, a refugee in her 30s, Madrid).

"And do you participate in the elections in Colombia from here?

No. Since I have been here I haven't done it. I don't do it because it requires going to the consulate and registering, and when it involves things like that I prefer to remain on the sidelines. I do not want to get involved. Maybe if it was something crucial I would do it. I know it might look like I am taking a passive stance, and it might be a bit silly because if we all thought like that there will never be a strong enough opposition ... Also, as I told you before, I have been told to keep well away from this sort of involvement, and to not to get involved in any stories" (Iván, a refugee in his 30s, Madrid).

Some respondents also experienced bureaucratic problems, or had personal circumstances to explain why they did not vote. Mariano, a young refugee living in London since 1994, said that although he had applied for his *cédula* (a national identity card needed to vote) a long time ago he had not yet received it. In other cases, people had been travelling and had no time to register in a different place to be able to vote. This was the case of Carol, a young student who arrived in London only a few months prior to the elections and thus missed the registration phase. Estefanía, another young student in London, voted in the legislative elections but had to travel to Madrid for the presidential elections and did not have enough time to register to vote from there. Similarly, Diana, another young Colombian woman, said that since moving to London four years earlier, she had failed to participate in any of the elections, either because she was traveling or because she failed to register on time. Floralba, also living in London, had only

voted once in her life, but although she had made up her mind to vote in 2006 she was too late for registration. The representative of MIRA in London argued that some of these problems could be resolved if greater facilities were given to people to vote, for instance, by setting up polling stations in places more accessible to the migrants:

"The elections are far removed from people's interests ... People are too lazy to vote ... For the next elections we want to suggest that they open other polling stations. People find it hard to go all the way to the consulate on a Sunday, which is the only day of the week some Colombians have to rest. They say, what a pain, I prefer to go with my family to a park, rather than go all the way to the consulate to vote, so I don't vote. Unfortunately, that is how many people think".

Ruth, a political activist and community worker from London, also agreed that the authorities could do more to increase the vote from abroad. According to her, in the past there had been a concerted effort to increase registration in the consulate, and that yielded results, so if more was done numbers could grow exponentially. Finally, some respondents, mostly women, said they had not voted, whether in Colombia or from abroad, because they were apolitical, did not trust the electoral or wider political system, or could not see the point of voting from abroad. These reasons are often used to explain the high abstention rates in Colombia, and they can affect migrants even more, given their physical distance from their country of origin (see Box 7.1).<sup>213</sup>

#### **Box 7.1: Reasons for not voting**

**Blanca** (labour migrant Madrid): "I never liked politics, nor in Colombia, when I was there, and even less here ... I don't like to be involved in politics, I have never liked it ... In Colombia I managed to vote once ... but they are all liars, so no, we don't vote, and here in Spain even less".

**Beatriz** (refugee, Madrid): "Yes, one could vote someone who more or less agrees with our ideas, but in Colombia I only voted once, because to me they all look like lies. I think they are all lies, it is all false. Because over there, the government, well, you have probably heard and you know, that everyone over there is a thief. Colombia is such a rich country, and people are just thieves".

**Julieta** (community worker, London): "I have never voted in my life, until today ... Nor in Colombia, or in any other place, and I have both British and Colombian passports, but I do not vote in any elections. I do not lean towards one side or the other. That is not the way I am".

**Alvaro** (refugee, London): "No, I have never voted from outside Colombia. I think that it is a bit silly to give someone the vote from here, someone that you do not know well. During the last presidential elections, we had here all the scoundrels coming and promising things. But what can they offer you here, if they can't even solve the situation of people in Colombia?".

Source: in-depth interviews.

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213 For similar comments from other Latin American migrants in the context of the US, see Jones-Correa (1998).

Other factors, such as length of stay, social class or type of migration, did not seem to play a significant role in participation rates.<sup>214</sup> Among those involved in electoral politics, date of arrival ranged from 1980 to 2005 in the UK, and from 1986 to 2006 in Spain. The same could be said of those who were not involved, although in the case of Spain the date of arrival for these tended to be 2001-2005. This could be because the most recent arrivals are mostly focused on their socio-economic survival (see earlier). In terms of migration status and social class, Colombian voters in the sample group included middle- and upper-class students, professionals from diverse social origins, working- and middle-class labour migrants, refugees from different social strata and people who had migrated for other reasons. However, those most heavily involved tended to be professionals and students, who usually come from the middle- and upper-classes. Among those who did not participate in the elections, the majority were refugees and people from working- and middle-class backgrounds who had migrated to work and/or study. The former, as explained above, because of the reasons why they left Colombia, and the second, probably due to their more unstable economic and/or legal situation. Finally, in terms of voting patterns, the data suggests that participation in the elections could have been fuelled by the current climate of political polarisation in Colombia between supporters of President Uribe and the opposition, mainly gathered around the leftist PDA (see below and Table 7.1).

#### Party politics and congressional representation from abroad

A recent study of Colombians in London suggests that within the generally low levels of formal political participation by migrants, voting is the most popular activity, with rates of membership in political parties and active involvement in electoral campaigns being even lower (Guarnizo, 2006b). By contrast, a significant number of respondents in this study were active members of political parties or had direct participation in the campaigns (eight men and seven women), and at least another three women and a man in Spain and two men in the UK had attended political or campaign meetings. This is partly a reflection of the sampling method used (see Chapter 4). Research on gender and politics argues that there are differences in the ways men and women become politically involved, with men being more active and visible in formal politics and women in informal activities (see Chapter 2). The number of men and women in this study involved in party politics was more or less equal, but the over-representation of women in the sample in real terms meant that men predominated. In addition, men were more involved as candidates and party representatives, while women were active mainly as party and/or campaign supporters. Recent studies on the political participation of women in Colombia argue that women are still under-represented at the highest levels within political parties and in elected and

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214 This was also the conclusion of Guarnizo's (2006b) study of Colombians in London.

non-elected political positions, despite some progress.<sup>215</sup> On the other hand, research on the gender aspects of transnational migrant political participation tends to emphasise that men predominate in the more institutionalised and public arenas, while women are more active in other transnational activities mostly relating to the family and conditions in the receiving country (see Chapter 6). The women involved in party politics and campaign work in this sample were mostly refugees and middle-upper class students, with the exception of two (the men were also mostly refugees and from middle-class backgrounds), which could explain the lack of a significant gender gap (see also Guarnizo, 2006b).

As political parties become more aware of the potential of the external vote, their presence among the largest Colombian communities abroad around election time has become more visible. The traditional Liberal and Conservative parties have representatives and campaign actively during elections among the largest Colombian communities in the US (New York, Miami and Chicago) (Guarnizo, 2001). Colombian supporters of the Liberal Party in New York, for instance, played a key role in the formation of the *Directorio Internacional Liberal* (International Liberal Directorate) and actively campaigned for the right of party members abroad to participate fully in party congresses (Serrano Carrasco, 2003; see also Hazán, 2001). The presence of the Colombian political parties in Europe seems to have been less prominent, probably a reflection of the lesser importance in numerical terms of the migrant population in this region, and also the greater physical distance from Colombia.<sup>216</sup> However, in the case of the newer political movements, the vote from abroad could become more significant, and as such there seems to have been stronger efforts to court it. Two examples of this are the activities of the PDA and MIRA explored below.

#### *The PDA and the role of exiles in Europe*

The PDA emerged in 2006 as an attempt to unite the different groupings representing the Colombian democratic left, organised mainly around two parties, the PDI (*Polo Democrático Independiente*) and AD (*Alternativa Democrática*). With 22% of the vote received at the national level in the presidential election, against 62% for the incumbent Uribe, it has quickly become the main opposition group. Its presidential candidate, Carlos Gaviria, also received the second largest percentage of votes abroad (10% against 84% for Uribe - see Table 7.1).

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215 See for instance, Córdoba (2002), Cuevas de Dolmetsch (2005), *Observatorio de Asuntos de Género* (May-August 2004), *Observatorio Mujeres y Participación Política* (2004), Bernal Olarte (n.d.), Figueroa Cubillos (n.d.) and other articles in [<http://www.fescol.org.co/mujeres-documentos-campana.html>] (25/07/07).

216 A not-very exhaustive analysis of the electoral campaign abroad by Loboguerrero (n.d) hardly mentions any activities by some of the main presidential candidates in Europe, and only a little more in the case of the US. See: [[http://www.terra.com.co/elecciones\\_2006.reportaje\\_25-05-2006/nota285985.html](http://www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2006.reportaje_25-05-2006/nota285985.html)] (16/07/07).

Although Gaviria only attracted 5% of the vote from Colombians in the US, its percentage of the vote was much higher in Europe, coming almost equal with Uribe in countries like France and Belgium. This reflected the greater presence of left-wing activist refugees in Europe, and the active transnational political role that these supporters played, as party authorities in Bogotá acknowledged (see Chapter 5):

"On May 31<sup>st</sup> we celebrated our first campaign evaluation meeting, during which we highlighted the role and achievements of the Polo teams abroad. In particular, we underlined the work undertaken in Europe and Canada, the results of which came across in percentages of voting of between 18%-42%, which the PDA and our candidate received in those countries and cities where party teams worked with persistence, unity and compromise for our presidential candidate". (Flores, 2006).<sup>217</sup>

PDI supporters in Europe began organising formally in 2005 with the celebration of their first meeting in Brussels (27-28 August), attended by 15 party members from Belgium, Germany, France, Holland and Spain. During this meeting, party sympathisers decided not only to participate actively in the forthcoming election campaign, but also "to contribute from abroad to the debate and the creation of the policy proposals of the PDI on international relations and the migration of Colombians abroad, as well as on national issues".<sup>218</sup> A second meeting was held in Montmeló, Barcelona (28-30 October, 2005), which was attended by some 60 members and sympathisers of the PDI and AD from Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Austria and different regions of Spain (Basque Country, Valencia, Asturias, Madrid and Barcelona).<sup>219</sup> Around a third of those attending were women, some of them representatives and members of the left-wing political groups integrated in these parties, who participated actively in the debates. However, men predominated in the discussions, while some of the women participated more in support or organisational roles. This second meeting was called to debate "the situation of Colombian migrants in Europe, the current political context in Colombia, the unity of the democratic left in Colombia, the electoral campaign, and the building up of the Polo Democrático in Europe."<sup>220</sup> Soon after this meeting, the party authorities in Bogotá signed a 'political agreement of unity' which culminated in the creation of the PDA (*Circular No.1*). This process of unity was experienced very intensively both inside and outside Colombia, as a member of the PDA *Mesa de Unidad* (working group on unity) explained:

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217 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish [<http://www.polodemocratico.net/Carta-a-los-colombianos-y>] (16/07/07).

218 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish [[http://www.polodemocratico.net/Informe-del-Primer-Encuentro-del?var\\_recherche=exterior](http://www.polodemocratico.net/Informe-del-Primer-Encuentro-del?var_recherche=exterior)] (17/03/07).

219 PDA supporters in the UK started organising much later, which could be partly related to lower levels of leftist activism by Colombians in the latter and higher divisions (see below).

220 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish [[http://www.polodemocratico.net/Encuentro-del-Polo-Democratico-en?var\\_recherche=exterior](http://www.polodemocratico.net/Encuentro-del-Polo-Democratico-en?var_recherche=exterior)] (17/03/07). Information also obtained during participant observation.

"Outside Colombia there was a process of unity too ... over here there was also a lot of fragmentation and disunity among Colombians, especially those who had left the country for political reasons, who are the ones most involved in party activities abroad. The process of unity in Colombia helped and contributed to unity abroad. As a result, those Colombians abroad, who before would rarely get together because they were dispersed, each one doing what they could in a very valuable way but individually, started getting together and generating their own dynamic of unity ... this has also been a process of unity abroad, with its own characteristics, its own agendas and problems, sometimes very different from what we are living in Colombia. And this has helped to create a sort of interrelationship between the processes of internal and external unity, with each one contributing to the other" (PDA representative, Madrid).

The process of organisation of PDA supporters in Europe and the formalisation of their links with the party in Colombia continued throughout the campaign period and after the elections. Apart from its relative significance as a potential electorate, the Colombian diaspora in Europe represents something special for the party, given the number of political refugees from the Left who have sought asylum in different European countries, some of them experienced leaders. This was highlighted by the PDA officer from Bogotá interviewed in Madrid:

"As you know, we represent a specific sector of Colombian society, what we call the democratic left ... for Polo members, Colombians abroad are equated with a group of people, of co-nationals, who had to leave the country in many cases because of the armed conflict ... This explains why the party is so sensitive to the theme of migration ... Also, electorally speaking, the number of Colombians abroad represents a significant potential ... In the case of Spain, the Colombian community is very important, in terms of numbers it carries an important weight ... In addition, Colombians here play a political role. Those who have kept their political work have built important relations with the European political world, with political parties here, with social movements, associations, NGOs, migrant groups, and so on. And these relations represent a very valuable asset for the political struggle we carry out in Colombia".

**Figure 7.2 : PDA electoral meeting held in Madrid**



Source: Photo taken by the author during fieldwork.

Thus, for political parties the importance of transnational links go beyond recruiting voters abroad to include the forging and strengthening of international relations with parties and movements of a similar ideology that could help their domestic and foreign agendas. Such links and relations can be of extreme importance at times of severe political conflict and upheaval, as Angell demonstrates for the Chilean case (2007; see also Landolt and Goldring, 2006). In recognition of this, the PDA is the only Colombian political party that included a section on international issues in its website, together with other sections representing women, youth, homosexuals or the different regions of Colombia.<sup>221</sup> The international section included a sub-section on Europe, and other ones organised by individual countries, all European (Germany, Belgium, France, Spain and Italy), except for Canada. These sub-sections offered up to date information on party organisation and functioning, both in Colombia and abroad, visits by party members and representatives from Colombia, political acts organised to protest against the government in Colombia and migration issues. A detailed look at this space showed the active role that PDA members played abroad, and especially in Europe, in the development of this new political movement. During the first PDA congress (Bogotá, 30 November-2 December, 2006), the party allowed for more than 60 representatives from abroad to participate, including 30 representing Europe (eight from Spain and two from the UK).<sup>222</sup> One of the proposals of party members in Europe was the creation of an *estatuto del emigrante* (migrant treaty) to enhance the transnational political, social and economic rights of migrants.<sup>223</sup>

The section of the party website dedicated to women also included a selection of articles, events, activities and official pronouncements on women and gender issues. According to the PDA official interviewed in Madrid, gender issues played a prominent role in the agenda of the party, with specific policies being promoted to contribute to greater equality. In this space, the presence and activism of women party members abroad was also significant. There was information, for instance, about a PDA female group organised in Germany. Women supporters in Spain have also been active in the organising of the party and its election campaign, as witnessed during the fieldwork. Despite this, the official *Coordinación Estatal del PDA-Estado Español* (PDA Spanish Coordinating Committee), elected during the second party congress organised in Spain (June 2007), included only four women out of 15 members.<sup>224</sup> However, the provisional European coordinating committee established in February 2007

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221 See: [<http://www.polodemocratico.net/>].

222 See PDA/Documentos/Congreso de Unidad 2006: [<http://www.polodemocratico.net/-Congreso-de-Unidad->] (16/07/07). The greater weight afforded to PDA supporters in Spain is a reflection of the larger size of the Colombian community there, but also of the leadership role that party members in this country have played in Europe. In the UK, PDA supporters started organising only a few months before the elections, and their campaign work was partly damped by internal divisions (interview with *Polo* supporter, London).

223 See: [<http://www.polodemocratico.net/Propuesta-del-PDA-en-Alemania-a-la>] (16/07/07).

224 See: [<http://www.polodemocratico.net/Resolucion-No-001-de-2007>] (30/07/07).

offered a greater gender balance (two women and three men, with another three seats yet to be filled, representing seven countries, and another woman observer from a future eighth country to be included).<sup>225</sup> Nevertheless, a recent report on the progress of the *Pacto para una inclusión efectiva de las mujeres en la política*, an 'agreement for the effective inclusion of women in politics' signed by most political parties in Colombia in 2005, shows that most parties, including the PDA, have not fulfilled their commitments (Figuroa Cubillos, n.d.). Most, with the main exception of MIRA, included a low percentage of women in their lists for the 2006 congressional elections (14% to the Senate and 11% to the lower chamber in the case of the PDA, compared with 48% to the Senate and 61% to the lower chamber for MIRA, 4% and 17% respectively for the Conservative Party, and 13% and 22% for the Liberal Party) (*ibid*). This is related to the on-going debate, in policy-making and academic research, about the generally low representation of women in formal politics and the relevance of this for gender equality.

#### *MIRA and the 'circunscripción especial'*

Another new political movement that is beginning to organise its support abroad as an integrated part of its strategy is MIRA. This party was legally constituted in 2000 out of the *Iglesia de Jesucristo Internacional* (Church of Jesus Christ International), which was established in Bogotá in the 1970s and now is a truly transnational organisation, with centres spread throughout Colombia and in those countries with large Colombian communities.<sup>226</sup> Although the literature on religion and immigration has usually focused on integration in the receiving societies, recently there has been increased interest in religious transnationalism (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006; Levitt, forthcoming, 2007). This is usually related to diaspora philanthropy, but also includes "the influence of home country religious institutions on their expatriates" (*ibid*, p.313).<sup>227</sup> Given its religious roots, it is no surprise that MIRA describes itself as having a "social vocation", both "a national and international presence", and a focus on "work with vulnerable populations", including Colombians abroad.<sup>228</sup> According to its representative in London, this party emerged as an alternative to traditional politics, to focus instead on the social and economic needs of the people:

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225 See: [<http://www.polodemocratico.net/Mecanismos-para-el-funcionamiento>] (30/07/07).

226 Information obtained from *Votebien.com*, a website financed by USAID and run by several media outlets in Colombia, as well as the organisations *Transparencia por Colombia* (Transparency for Colombia) and FESCOL (the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Colombia), to offer independent electoral information to voters. See: [[http://www.terra.com.co/elecciones\\_2006/partidos/05-01-2006/nota270824.html](http://www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2006/partidos/05-01-2006/nota270824.html)] (26/07/07). For an overview of the relationship between religion and politics in Latin America, see Levine (2007).

227 For more on this in the context of Latin American migrants in the US, see Levitt (2007), Mahler and Hansing (2005). For studies based in Spain, see Escrivá (forthcoming). For the links between the Catholic church and Latin American migrants in London, see Davis et al. (n.d.).

228 See: [<http://www.webmira.com/>] (19/03/07).



"This party was created with the aim of doing a politics that was clean and transparent ... To become part of MIRA is not enough to have a political background and the wish to participate, or the possibility to bring in votes ... What we look for is honest people ... and, although it might sound funny, people who have never participated in politics ... people without political vices ... our focus is on people with a desire to do social work, to work for others and help them ... to help us decide what are the needs of others, so we can adapt ourselves to those needs".

The party's website offered information on the social and political activities of the movement, as well as access to MIRA's own radio, television and on-line newspaper, and also included a section on women. Two of the four senators elected for MIRA in 2006 were women, including one of the leaders of the movement. Although there is no specific data on the activities of the party abroad, MIRA has begun to organise actively among Colombian migrant communities, which is no surprise given the international presence of its church. Its representative in London explained that the party had a widespread presence in Europe, with other offices in Stockholm, Frankfurt, Vienna, Rotterdam, Zurich and Spain, and plans to open one in Paris. The work of these offices varies according to the characteristics of each community. In Spain, where the movement is present in several cities, including Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia, the focus has been on creating committees to support Latin American migrants, to promote regularisation, or to provide subsidised phone services. Their presence in London was very recent, and they were still in the early stages there:

"Here things are different, because the law is slightly different. What do we look for here? We realised that the main need of Colombians here is to learn English. But we are only starting to work here, we are such a young group still! We don't even have an office yet. We are looking for one, and collecting money for it. We are planning to finance this with the sale of Colombian products ... We are looking for a place where people can come to see us, where we could offer English classes and at the same time offer advice and help to the Latin American community" (MIRA representative, London).

It is through their community work, and their appeal to a new type of honest and unconventional politics, that MIRA seeks to attract voters, especially among those Colombians least involved in electoral politics. Its representative in London said that he had never participated in politics before he joined MIRA some six years ago in Colombia. Previously, politics had been "alien" to him, until he discovered the social work of MIRA, and "the transparency with which it did everything". This is why, together with other MIRA supporters in London, he had decided to promote the movement within the migrant community. Their official launch was at a Colombian event in London in 2004 and, according to him, they had some 85 members. Their main community projects included setting up affordable English classes, offering a free

interpreting service, and specific programmes for the elderly and children. Although their services were open to the wider Latin American community, the focus was on the Colombian population, since MIRA is a Colombian political movement. It is through this work that MIRA seeks to recruit affiliates and voters in those places where it has an active presence:

"...what do we ask in exchange? For people not to forget about MIRA when it comes to the elections ...

...for traditional parties, voters are like a client they get back to every four years, and in between they do not want anything to do with them. In MIRA it is the other way around. We want to keep seeing them throughout the four years and help them, and on election day we leave it to their conscience, but we say, hey, we helped you ... Now, help us so we can keep going on...

... here, the great majority of people who voted for MIRA were people who had never voted before from abroad. But suddenly they got interested in voting, may be because they saw the social focus of our work here, and they said ok, I will give you my vote, and I am going to tell a friend of mine to do it too" (MIRA representative, London).

Electorally, MIRA has done relatively well. In 2002, it won a seat in the Senate, and in 2006 another seat in the Senate and one in the lower chamber. Its leader in Congress, Senator Alexandra Moreno Piravique, has focused on international relations issues and the Colombian migrant population abroad. She created a law to assist Colombian prisoners in foreign jails, and is a member of the 'accidental commission on migration' established by the Senate in 2005 to "analyse current policies and evaluate the most urgent problems regarding migration".<sup>229</sup> MIRA has obtained good results abroad too. During the 2006 elections, Colombians abroad were able to choose for the second time their own representative to the lower chamber.<sup>230</sup> Out of 32 candidates (30 men and two women), MIRA obtained the second largest percentage of votes (19%), after the official candidate (resident in Florida, with 25%). The total percentage of valid votes for the special international district was only 37%. In Spain, out of a potential electorate of some 34,000, only 13% voted, with the MIRA candidate obtaining a majority of votes (43%). Similarly, in the UK, where the voting rate was only 11% (out of a potential electorate of 4,700), MIRA won the first place (44%). However, in the US, where voter turnout was also low but the potential electorate was much larger (over 16% out of 108,400), the candidate of the official *Partido de la U* came ahead (36%), followed by MIRA (16%).<sup>231</sup>

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229 See information on MIRA included in the website *Votebien.com Elecciones 2006* [[http://www.terra.com.co/elecciones\\_2006/partidos/05-01-2006/nota270824.html](http://www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2006/partidos/05-01-2006/nota270824.html)], and in the official party website [<http://alexandrapiravique.com/perfil.php>] (17/07/07). For data on the commission see Lobo-guerrero (2006).

230 Colombia is one of only seven countries that allow their citizens abroad to elect their own representative to Congress, "enabling promotion of their own legislative agenda and direct intervention from an overseas viewpoint in the debate and processes of political decision making on topics of national interest." (IDEA, 2006, p.5).

231 Registraduría Nacional [<http://www.registraduria.gov.co/>] (17/07/07). The IDEA (2006) report points

As the figures above show, the participation rate of voters for the *circunscripción especial* in Spain was relatively high, when compared with the UK. During fieldwork in Madrid and Barcelona, I spoke to four male potential candidates for this *circunscripción*, although only three finally registered. At least two had previous experience of running for this seat, or of supporting another candidature. Their electoral campaigns, although based in Spain, were also coordinated with activities among other diaspora communities in the US (New York, Los Angeles, Miami), Venezuela and Mexico. Their electoral manifestos focused on the demands of Colombians abroad for greater political, economic and social rights, as well as on improving the conditions of migrants in their new societies (emigrant and immigrant politics). However, they also tackled wider issues to do with the international relations of Colombia, or the need to find a solution to the armed conflict. Their emphasis was on the need to unite and organise the diaspora abroad so that it could play a more active role in the politics of the country. As one of the candidates, a lawyer who had to leave Colombia for security reasons and with ample experience of community work, said:

"the idea is to chose a representative who knows not only about migration, but also has the necessary parliamentary initiative in Colombia to fight for better conditions, not only for migrants abroad, but also inside the country, since our families are back there".

### Politics 'here' and 'there'

Some studies of transnational politics analyse the political involvement of migrants both in the countries of origin and settlement, particularly in the context of the US. For instance, Jones-Correa (1998) argues that the low levels of Latino naturalisation and participation in formal politics in the US are the result of political marginalisation, as well as their situation in a 'politics of in-between' based on the 'myth of return' (see also Ueda, 2006). In his research with Latinos in New York, most of whom were Colombian, he concluded that this affected migrant men more than women, because the former were more exposed to professional downward mobility. This explained why transnational organisations and activities focused on the country of origin were dominated by men, while women had more to gain from migration to the US and thus their focus was on their new settings (*ibid*; see Chapter 6). García Bedoya (2005), in her study of Latinos in Los Angeles also found that women were more active than men in US electoral politics. On the other hand, Portes and Rumbaut argue that most evidence suggests that transnational political participation in the country of origin versus political loyalties in the country of settlement does not equal "a zero-sum game", but rather "many aspects of

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out that in the 2002 elections in-country voters played a greater role in electing the candidate of the diaspora than Colombians abroad, although the electoral authorities are seeking to remedy this.

transnationalism end up *accelerating* the political integration of immigrants in the United States" (2006, p.138; see also Chapters 5 and 6). As an example, they explain how the events organised by the *Centro Civico Colombiano* (Colombian Civic Centre) in New York to celebrate Colombian independence day every year are often attended by Colombian politicians, as well as local government representatives from New York, and how community leaders use these events to raise their profile in the local political context.

In the context of Europe, this subject has not received much attention to date, although there is an ongoing debate on the political rights of migrants in many European countries (see Miravet, 2006; Morris, 2002).<sup>232</sup> The political participation of Colombian migrants in the host country was not the main focus of analysis in the current study, but the data collected offers some pointers. Some of the migrant organisations researched in Madrid and London were actively encouraging political participation by community members in the host country. Colombians in Spain, despite being a recent migrant group, like other Latin Americans, enjoy special facilities to acquire Spanish nationality, and thus the right to vote in Spanish elections. In 2005, Colombians were the largest group of migrants acquiring Spanish nationality, with 7,334 (OECD, 2007). Some Colombian respondents in Spain had experience of participating in Spanish politics, whether formally or informally. Andrew, a Colombian refugee who had recently acquired Spanish nationality, explained that although he was not involved in party politics, he had always voted in Colombia, and had tried to do the same in Spain:

"I have Spanish citizenship. During the last elections I was already Spanish, but had not received my identity card yet, which meant that I could not vote. But my boyfriend, with whom I lived for five years, was not interested in voting, so I asked him to vote for me. On other occasions, friends have also voted for me. I find it incredible that people do not vote if they can, it is a shame. Since they were not voting, I asked them to do it for me and told them who to vote for".

Another refugee woman in Madrid, Elena, said that although she could not vote in the Spanish elections yet, she had sought to keep up her involvement with left-wing politics by joining a Spanish party. Although she had tried to remain actively involved in Colombian politics, this was not easy, given the physical distance and the fact that she lived in the outskirts of Madrid and could not always attend community events. In addition, Elena argued that she now had a daughter born in Spain, whom she wanted to learn about the political history of both her country of birth and that of her parents. At least another three Colombian refugees, two men and a woman, in Madrid also mentioned they had links to Spanish political parties on the Left. One of them had participated in the process of creating a base of supporters for the PDA in Europe, and

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232 See also the US-based Social Science Research Council  
[[http://programs.ssrc.org/europe/Transnational\\_citizenship/](http://programs.ssrc.org/europe/Transnational_citizenship/)] (17/07/07).

later became active in a new political party created by immigrants in Madrid to fight the local elections. There is also the recent local electoral success of a Colombian migrant woman, Yolanda Villavicencio, previously the director of Aesco in Spain (see Chapter 6). She was elected to the Madrid assembly in the 2007 local elections, the first migrant of Latin American origin to occupy such an elected post.<sup>233</sup> Aesco, and another Colombian migrant organisation in Madrid, Aculco, had recently become active in initiatives aimed at promoting the associationism, empowerment and citizen participation of migrants at the local level, through projects such as the *mesas de diálogo y convivencia* (committees for dialogue and coexistence established by the local authorities at the neighbourhood level):

"we are participating on a project of the townhall in Madrid to create the neighbourhood committees for dialogue and coexistence. This is an innovative process, but we believe that we have to participate, and if this helps enhance citizen participation, then it will be a good thing. We also think that participating in this process might give people more opportunities for integration, and for having their voices heard, and that is why we are participating. This process is also interesting because it allows any person over 16 to vote, with the only requisite that they are registered in their neighbourhood, so they do not have to have legal migrant status or a residence permit of any kind" (Interview, Aesco worker, Madrid).

This is where "transnationality" plays a role, according to Yolanda, through the work Aesco has done inviting people to vote, both in the elections in Ecuador or Colombia, as well as in the neighbourhood committees (Interview, Madrid). Aculco in Madrid also had plans to enhance this transnational political participation through the organising of political workshops for the migrants. At the same time, Aculco in London was involved in the political organising of the Latin American migrant population through an associated project, the Latin Front, led by a Colombian woman, Gloria Gómez. This, together with the recent organising of the Latin American Workers' Association, also led by Colombian trade unionists, represented two very recent attempts at increasing the political and social position of Latinos in London (see Peró, 2007). **The Latin Front** started as an attempt to solve the high levels of irregularity and exploitation suffered by the Latin American community. Some of its initiatives include lobbying for an amnesty for all irregular migrants, greater political rights for the migrant population, or the automatic granting of British citizenship to all children born in the UK.<sup>234</sup> According to its leader, as well as lobbying the UK authorities, the Latin Front also sought the cooperation of the countries of origin through their diplomatic offices. Gloria is a member of the Colombian Liberal Party and was actively involved in the campaign for the *circunscripción especial* in 2002. However, she had become disillusioned with the lack of attention that politicians in Colombia afforded migrants abroad:

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233 See: [<http://www.aescoong.org/>] (09/06/07); [<http://www.yolandavillavicencio.com/>] (17/07/07).

234 Interview with Gloria Gómez, London, February 2006. See also: [<http://www.aculco.org/londres.htm>] (17/07/07).

"This year I am not campaigning because I am totally disillusioned, after seeing the behaviour of the Colombian government towards Colombians abroad. I am not interested in Colombian politicians contacting me during election time, or when they need to count the remittances that arrive there ... I am more interested in helping Colombians locally, and see how they can get on their own feet and think by themselves ... these are my political interests at the moment".

As a result, Gloria had focused her attention more on the local political context, running for local elections with the Liberal Democrats in the borough of Lambeth in 2006, although she was not elected<sup>235</sup>, and continuing with her Latin Front project. According to her, the Latin Front had some 4,000 affiliated members, and around 20 people working for it, twelve of them dedicated to the political side, and others focused on social issues. Most of its members were Colombians, although people from other Latin American countries had become involved too. This initiative had become well known within the community, with some praising it as a valuable way to unite the Colombian, or wider Latin American, community and increase its influence at the local level. However, other respondents saw it with scepticism and even suspicion. Critics saw it as a personal project to gain political power by promising migrants an amnesty for the undocumented, while others saw this promise as too ambitious and naïve. In addition, the fact that the Latin Front was an overtly political project put some people off, as Edelmira, a Colombian woman who had attended a couple of meetings explained:

"I did not like it. She seemed to be the typical *politiquera* [derogatory term for party politician], promising things right and left, and letting people think that she would solve their problems just to earn some points, or votes, to attract people, because that is what she needs, to obtain support from the people, but at the end nothing gets done ... the meetings were around election time, and there was an MP present who wanted to support the Latin American community, to achieve ethnic recognition for the community, to organise the rights of Latin Americans here and to apply for ... an amnesty. All these issues were extremely interesting, but you know that nothing will come out ... I only attended two of their meetings, and I never saw more than 20 people there".

The examples above support Portes and Rumbaut's argument that participation in home country politics can accelerate the political integration of migrants in the country of settlement. In the case of the UK, some respondents who said they voted in elections in Colombia were also involved in elections in the host country, and vice-versa. Vanesa, for instance, said that although she had never voted while in Colombia, more recently she had participated in elections both in Colombia and the UK, since she had British citizenship. On the other hand, Julieta, who also had British nationality, said that she did not participate in the elections in one place or the

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235 See:

[<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/CouncilDemocracy/DemocracyElections/LocalElectionResults2006.htm>] (26/07/07).

other. However, for Colombians in the UK, participation in formal politics is harder, since few have access to British nationality and thus full political rights in the country of settlement. According to Home Office data, 1,580 Colombians were granted British citizenship in 2006. the largest category in the Americas after the US and Jamaica; another 1,500 and 1,290 did so in 2005 and 2004 respectively.<sup>236</sup> Guarnizo, in his study of Colombians in London, also found that those Colombians in his sample with European citizenship tended to participate more in election campaigns in Colombia, while also voting in the UK, which according to him suggests a hybrid mode of political incorporation:

"On the one hand, it formally links them to the British political society as citizens who exercise their right to vote. But on the other hand, it keeps them tied to the political society of their country of origin, exercising their right to express their political opinions, even if these are not necessarily accompanied by the exercise of the right to vote" (2006b, p.80).<sup>237</sup>

#### Gender and general interest in conventional politics

Some studies looking at conventional political participation, apart from voting and party politics, include other activities such as expressing political opinions or generally talking about politics (Desposato and Norrandar, 2005). García Bedoya (2005) suggests that discussing politics within migrant networks is actually an important determinant of wider political participation. Despite this, the work available on Colombian transnational politics in the US and UK does not include a measurement of general interest in home country politics (Guarnizo et al, 2003; Guarnizo, 2006b). The study of Colombians in London measures "following the general Colombian news", but this is listed as a socio-cultural transnational practice, even though presumably most of the news would be political (a different measurement is taken for following sports news) (Guarnizo, 2006b, p.78). The percentage of Colombians following the general news is significantly higher than other measurements of political participation: 57% of the sample followed the news frequently or regularly and 26% sometimes, while 17% said never or only a very few times (*ibid*). Similarly, a majority of Colombians interviewed in Spain and the UK in this study, whether they said they were involved in Colombian politics or not, followed the news in Colombia and had a good knowledge of current political developments. In addition, many came from families who were involved in politics or identified themselves as members of a political party (mostly Liberal or Conservative).

Appendix 4 divides those Colombians in this sample group into those most heavily involved, those with some involvement and the least involved. It shows that in general men were more

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236 See: [<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>] (18/07/07).

237 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

involved than women in transnational political activities. In the UK, among the most heavily involved were nine men and three women. They included active members of parties, refugees involved in human rights work and other types of unconventional politics (see below), and others who participated in other political activities (regularly voted, closely followed political events, attended meetings or participated in organised transnational political activities). By contrast, in Spain, there were 15 women, eleven men and a couple in this sub-group. The slight majority of women in this case could be partly due to the general over-representation of women in the sample and other biases (see Chapter 4). A majority of the men and women in this group were involved with a political party, were active members or leaders of community organisations involved to a certain degree in Colombian politics, or were part of the transnational activities analysed in Chapter 6. Many of the people in this category were refugees, but there were also students, professionals and labour migrants. It is interesting to note that some in this group, like Elena, a refugee woman living in Madrid, did not consider that they were politically involved, despite the range of activities that she participated in:

"Do you consider that you have transnational linkages at the political level?"

No, I always try to keep an eye on the activities taking place, and go to demonstrations and the like ... I also try to read, and keep in touch with some of the people I worked with in Colombia ... but practically, I don't do anything. It would be a lie to think that because I go to some demonstrations and talks ... I also know some people here ... and sometimes I meet with them ... hear what they have to say, and the view they have of our country".

Elena was an active member of the Left in Colombia and comes from a family strongly committed to such ideas. Her parents were both trade unionists, her grandmother had been a member of the Communist Party, and she had joined the M-19 after its demobilisation. Compared with this, she felt that what she did in Spain was hardly significant. However, García Bedoya (2005) argues that people ascribe different meanings to the word 'politics', and some studies have shown that women tend not to define their activism as political participation. This could be because people identify politics with the most visible aspects of conventional politics, such as being a member of a political party, voting, being elected or holding some other type of political position. Historically, women have been excluded, or had had limited access to this kind of politics, which would contribute to their more active participation in unconventional politics (see Chapter 2). The director of Aesco, when asked about her participation in Colombian politics, distinguished between party politics and politics in general:

"Let's say that in party politics not, but politically involved, indeed. I participate in the elections, with my support to social movements, and denouncing the violation of human rights too, as an individual, and sometimes we do it as an organisation,



but not linked to a political party".

Not all in the sub-group with some level of political involvement, which included people who had voted in the Colombian elections from abroad some times, or who had attended some political events and meetings, thought they participated in politics either. This was the case of Marta, a young student who despite participating in community initiatives and organisations related to Colombia, thought that she was not politically active. This sub-group was composed more or less in equal numbers by men and women, and included people who had migrated for different reasons, with different lengths of stay and migration status. In the case of Spain, a few were refugees who had left their political involvement to the side mainly due to practical reasons, i.e. lack of time or because they were experiencing some other personal problems. In the UK, it included several women, who despite not being members of a party or organisation had some levels of political participation, two male refugees who were not participating actively but followed political events closely, and a few others who said they at least voted some times. Finally, among those least involved in politics, all were women except for one male refugee (part of a couple interviewed together) in Spain. This couple, like another two refugee women interviewed in Spain, had decided to leave behind their past activism. Another two women in Spain were also refugees, but had escaped guerrilla threats and had never been involved in politics, and the rest were labour migrants, or women who had migrated for other reasons. This included Lucia, a young woman who moved to the UK in her teens to join her mother, who said that with time she had lost interest in what was happening in Colombia (for more on who gets involved or not and why, see section below).

This would seem to corroborate Jones-Correa's (1998) claims, and that of other authors, that men tend to dominate migrant activities oriented towards the homeland, while women's activities tend to focus on the host country (see above and Chapter 2). Among the Colombians in this study that had become more involved in the politics of the host country at the formal level, there were two women and one man. However, the sample group for this study was too small, and women were over-represented in relation to men. In addition, Chapter 6 showed that women were very active in transnational initiatives oriented towards the home country as well as being focused on conditions in the host country. Generally, although some interviewees thought that the transnational political involvement of men and women was equal, a majority of respondents thought that men participated more than women. They reasoned this was because in general men were more involved in politics than women, or because women had less time to participate in any activities beyond work and the family. Elena, quoted above, said that although she had tried to keep her involvement in Colombian politics, and had also sought to become involved in Spanish politics, the main impediment to this had been lack of time. She

was the main bread winner in the family, with her husband finding it difficult to obtain regular work, and time pressures had increased after the birth of her daughter. Some male refugees interviewed also complained about the lack of time to become more involved, given the pressures of daily survival (see section below). However, others agreed that such pressures affected women more, given their family roles and the fact that it was easier for them to find work. This would resonate with studies of gender and migration that emphasise the double or even triple burden of women migrants (see Chapter 2). In addition, some studies of refugee communities have shown that for women it can be harder to regain their public space, since they lose the wider kin support networks they enjoyed in their country (see Chapter 2).

### **Transnational human rights and peace work by Colombians in Spain and the UK**

In her study of Latino political participation in the US, García Bedolla uses a broad definition of these, arguing that "political participation is multidimensional, with many different modes of activity, including community activism, contacting government officials, protests, and communicating with community members" (2005, p.137). She found that respondents in her sample "were more comfortable with nonelectoral political activity than with participation in electoral politics", which coincided with the results of other studies (2005, p.173). Desposato and Norrandner also highlight the importance of looking at unconventional politics, which includes activities such as protests and demonstrations, when studying political participation. They argue that although less studied, "for many Latin Americans, unconventional participation was the only form available to them during long years of military dictatorship" (2005, p.3). Looking more specifically at transnational political participation oriented towards the home country, in their comparative work of several Latin American migrant groups in the US, Guarnizo et al. concluded that levels were higher for non-electoral politics than electoral ones both for Colombians and Salvadorans (with Dominicans being more or less even) (2003, p.1227). By contrast, in his study of Colombians in London, Guarnizo found that participation was lower for non-electoral politics, which he found surprising given that this "tends to be motivated by a rationality based on national solidarity, rather than on ideological political interests or identities which affect electoral participation" (2006b, p.79).<sup>238</sup>

The previous chapter analysed the participation of Colombian migrants in Spain and the UK in some of these types of unconventional politics, mainly state initiatives and civil society attempts from above to establish links with the diaspora, as well as examples of transnational community activities from below. This section seeks to explore the unconventional political transnational practices of Colombian migrants in these two communities further by focusing more

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238 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish.

specifically on 'diaspora' politics (see Chapter 2). Previous studies of Colombian transnational political participation limited the definition of non-electoral politics to membership in hometown associations, monetary donations for development projects in the country of origin and membership of charity organisations. This definition reflects modes of migrant organisation that have been found to be popular among some Latin American groups in the US, but of which there is less evidence among Colombians (with the exception of participation in charity or diaspora philanthropy – see Chapter 6). At the same time, it does not include participation in other types of transnational unconventional politics, such as the work done from abroad in connection with the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia. This is a very important part of diaspora politics for Colombia that involves not only migrant or diasporic civil society, but also involves the participation of non-migrant civil society in host countries and generally transnational civil society efforts in the defence of human rights and peace (see Chapter 2).

#### Migrants' relationship to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia

Martínez Saldaña (2003), referring to the transnational political participation of Mexicans in the US, argues that it goes beyond electoral issues to include "more radical alternatives", especially at times of high political tension, such as protests in front of diplomatic offices. This happened, for example, during the victory of Salinas Gortari in the 1988 presidential elections, and again during the initial military repression of the Zapatista uprising in 1994 (*ibid*). Such 'radical politics' have always been part of diasporas coming from countries or regions in conflict, and should be expected in a political context as polarised and conflictive as the Colombian one. Indeed, demonstrations, protests, marches and other similar public events by Colombians abroad in relation to the human rights situation in the country, the armed conflict and the search for peace are common. Recently, Colombians abroad celebrated different acts to support the protests inside Colombia against the killing of eleven politicians by the FARC, and organised marches to demand the release of all those kidnapped by the guerrillas. In Madrid, Colombian and Spanish human rights protesters used a public appearance by the Colombian ambassador, to question the role of the Colombian authorities during the 1985 Palace of Justice massacre in Colombia (see Chapter 3). In London, during the 2006 presidential vote, some Colombian protesters gathered outside the consulate to draw attention to the situation of human rights abuses in Colombia.<sup>239</sup> These are recent examples of such type of events, in which Colombians abroad often engage as an alternative to formal politics, as the quotation below from an interview with a young refugee man in London illustrates:

"Do you vote in the elections?"

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239 Information obtained from different websites, media sources and during fieldwork.

Not, because I do not have my *cédula* yet.

Of course.

But I make noise in other ways.

In which ways?

Speaking, arguing, standing outside the Colombian embassy playing drums, which is a form of discussion."

Much of this unconventional politics is linked to the struggle for human rights and peace in Colombia. The Colombian armed conflict clearly plays an important role in the lives of migrants. A significant number of the Colombian men and women interviewed in this study had to leave their country because of reasons related to the conflict, even if at the formal level they were not recognised as refugees (see Chapter 5). In addition, references to the current conflict and past instances of political violence were common in the narratives of respondents, even among those who had emigrated for other reasons. At least four men and a woman in London, and two men in Spain, had some personal stories of *La Violencia*. Both Mariano, a young refugee living in London, and Mauro, who had joined his mother in the UK to finish his studies, commented on how their grandfathers had lost everything during this period of inter-party fighting, and their families had become internally displaced (see Chapter 5). A refugee woman interviewed in London who had been in a guerrilla group also narrated how her grandfather was killed during *La Violencia*, when her mother was only five. As she said, "in Colombia everyone has been affected, we all have our dead in the family". Some of these experiences had helped shape political allegiances and commitment, as Iván, a young refugee man in Madrid, explained when reflecting on his political involvement. His father had lost all his family as a little boy (and was badly injured himself) during the political violence of this period, and this had made him an ardent Liberal supporter:

"Yes, my father was always a Liberal party member. He was always an active 'red' militant<sup>240</sup> ... He was very passionate, and would fill you with his enthusiasm. I used to see him, at political meetings. As a little boy, I would go up into the platform with him, and he would start speaking, and sometimes he would even cry. And I was seeing it all".

Personal narratives of the armed conflict and violence(s) affecting Colombia also stretched into more contemporary events. Once again, although these were more prominent among refugees, it affected all types of migrants. For instance, neither Floralba, nor Vanesa or Blanca had left Colombia for political or security reasons. The first moved to London with her English husband

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240 In Colombia, the Liberal party is associated with the colour red (and the Conservative with blue).

to help her family economically, the second went to the UK to study English and the third followed her husband to Madrid, where he had migrated to look for work. They all came from relatively poor neighbourhoods in Cali and Medellín, two of the largest cities in Colombia, and they shared stories of how the current violence(s) had affected them (see Box 7.2).

**Box 7.2: Personal narratives of political violence**

**Vanesa** (London): "I suffered the violence of a city like Cali. My neighbourhood was on a mountain. In 1982, the M-19 took that neighbourhood, right in the middle of Cali ... our houses were destroyed, with bullet holes everywhere ... Thank God there were no deaths, but I would never forget that".

**Floralba** (London): "I lived in a neighbourhood where every day people were killed, and we were told it was because of war between gangs ... and we got used to it, to run away every time we heard shots, and to not sleep since many times the bullets would go through the walls. We were all scared, but no one did anything ... sometimes they killed innocent bystanders ... they were killed by accident. Also, we had to pay a tax. Every eight days they would come to collect it, and they said it was to look after the neighbourhood ... No one knew who or what was behind all of this".

**Blanca** (Madrid): "I remember when the guerrillas started in my village, where I lived first. My village was in *tierra fría* (a cold area), and they used to organise mock attacks, and people got scared thinking the guerrillas were coming ... ever since my village has been militarised".

Source: in-depth interviews.

As one of the respondents, a Colombian journalist in London, said: "We were born inside it [the conflict], and I suppose this affects people". Thus it is no surprise that most Colombian interviewees had something to say when asked about the armed conflict and search for peace, although opinions differed greatly, partly a sign of the divisions affecting Colombians both inside and outside the country (see below). Nevertheless, the fact that most followed the news on the conflict was also a sign that the 'apolitical' nature of Colombians is more a reflection of general dissatisfaction with the political parties and formal political system, rather than lack of interest in politics in general, as the section above argued. The opinions of respondents on this subject can be categorised into four main groups, depending on their understanding of the conflict and their views on how to end it, allowing for overlapping between them and diversity within each (see Chapter 3):

'Government supporters'. Many in this group said that in Colombia there was no armed conflict, but rather a group of drug-related criminal gangs seeking to destabilise the country, although some also mentioned socio-economic factors to explain the rise of the guerrillas. People in this group included professionals, labour migrants, and a refugee man in Madrid. All supported the government's security policies to end the conflict, and one woman in London argued for direct

US military intervention. Still, the majority thought that the situation was too complex, and that a solution would take a long time, or would never arrive.

'International conflict'. The common denominator here was the view that the armed conflict was not just a Colombian problem, but an international one mainly related to the global drugs trade. For others, like Adrian, a refugee man in Barcelona, the international dimensions of the armed conflict also included economic and security interests in the region. Thus, the solution, if there was one, must also be international, although opinions differed between those like Edelmira above, who believed in US military intervention, to those who sought international involvement was necessary to tackle the illegal drugs trade, or to help bring negotiated peace in Colombia.

'Critics of the government'. For another group, the emphasis was on the structural roots of the conflict, such as levels of poverty and inequality, the need for land reform or a weak state. This view was mostly held by refugees. Some, like Lourdes, a refugee in Madrid, also emphasised the political aspects of the conflict, such as the lack of freedom of expression and the human rights abuses. Most did not agree with the policies of the current government, which they thought would only serve to intensify the conflict, although some also criticised the guerrillas. But in general, they all believed in a negotiated solution to the armed conflict, and on the need for structural reforms. However, they thought this would not be easy, and a few thought there was no end in sight.

'The neutral, those who don't know and those who don't care'. This group includes respondents who said they were not with the government, nor with the opposition. For some, like Omar, a journalist in London, a solution to the conflict would involve de-radicalising positions on all sides. Others, like Cecilia, a student in Madrid, believed the conflict was so entrenched that it would be difficult to solve. Another sub-group are the respondents who said they did not have much of an opinion on the conflict or that they did not understand it. At least six respondents, five women and a man said they did not really understand what was going on in Colombia. Some said they did not follow events there closely, while other complained about the manipulation of information. In addition, three other women said they did not want anything to do with the conflict or with Colombia in general, while Pilar, a student in London, answered that she was tired of talking about it. Among those who talked about possible solutions, the consensus was that it was difficult to think of any, with most emphasising that there were too many interests involved or that the causes were too deep-rooted. However, some argued for the need to focus more on the social problems in Colombia.

It is interesting to note, that despite the general belief in the complexity of the armed conflict in

Colombia, and the common opinion of how difficult it would be to end it, a majority of respondents thought that Colombians abroad could (or should) play a role in this context. This was even when most seemed to agree that migrants in general were not interested in participating in Colombian politics. This could be due, among other reasons, to the tension between a belief in the 'duty' of all Colombians to do something for their country, and a certain level of pessimism about finding a solution to the current problems (see below for more on this). There was also agreement that in spite of the believed general lack of interest on the part of the migrant population in the political situation in the homeland, there were some groups and individuals working from abroad in activities to do with lobbying the international community, raising awareness of the conflict, denouncing human rights abuses and supporting the search for peace in Colombia. This work was not seen as positive by all, given the different opinions on the conflict and its solutions mentioned above, but even some respondents not ideologically committed thought such transnational efforts were a good or necessary thing (see below)

#### Organised transnational political participation in human rights and peace

The linkages between the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia and its migrant population abroad do not happen only at the individual level, but are also part of the transnational political collective activities of the diaspora. There is a long history of involvement by Colombian exiles in diaspora politics, probably going back to the Independence era. The peace agreements that ended inter-party political violence of the 1950s and inaugurated the National Front were signed by the leaders of the two main parties in Benidorm and Sitges, Spain, where some of the political elite had been exiled (see Medina and Sánchez, 2003, and Chapter 3). The role of exiles, and the wider Colombian diaspora, in focusing international attention on the current conflict, defending human rights in Colombia and peace-building initiatives has also been important. This is no surprise, given the strong relationship between the armed conflict and associated violence(s) and migration flows over the last four decades. This role was particularly significant in the 1990s, coinciding with new peace initiatives in Colombia and the beginnings of large-scale Colombian migration abroad. Colombian migrants participated actively both in the 1990 plebiscite on constitutional reform,<sup>241</sup> and the 1997 *Mandato Ciudadano por la Paz* (Citizenship Peace Mandate) (Serrano Carrasco, 2003). The latter was a sort of referendum organised by NGOs and others in Colombia in response to the spiralling levels of conflict and violence in Colombia in an attempt to rally civil society involvement in the search for peaceful solutions. Through it, some 10 million

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241 This plebiscite was called in part to confront the explosion of violence and crisis the country was facing at the end of the 1980s (see Chapter 3). According to figures from the *Registraduría* quoted by Serrano Carrasco (2003, p.133), the number of total valid votes from abroad in the plebiscite was 14,871 in favour and 675 against.

Colombians voted in favour of peace and respect for International Humanitarian Law, and although some critics have questioned its practical effects, the *Mandato* served to give a further boost to the peace process (see Chapter 3). Colombian migrants in New York, the largest and oldest Colombian community in the US, also participated actively in the marches organised in 1999 in support of the peace process (Pérez-Brennan, 2003).

In the case of Colombians in Spain and the UK, despite being smaller communities and of more recent establishment, there was also evidence of involvement in this type of collective transnational political work. Some of the community migrant organisations analysed in Chapter 6, like Aesco in Spain, emerged in this context:

"This organisation was founded by people who arrived here in the 1980s ... Colombians who came in search of asylum, because of the violation of human rights. They wanted to become involved from here, to support the human rights struggle, and the incipient civil society movement for peace that started to emerge then. This was at the time when some groups started to surrender arms ... and the idea was to support this constitutional process ... But later this became frustrated, because the FARC, the main guerrilla force, did not hand in their weapons, and the process of negotiation with the government was broken" (Aesco director, Madrid).

As an Aesco worker explained, many of their ideas and projects when they started organising (first informally, and later institutionally) was aimed at seeking to attract international attention and support for the situation in Colombia, as well as finding a way in which exiles could contribute to a negotiated solution to the armed conflict. Both personally, and as an association, Aesco members were active in organising marches and other events supporting peace in Colombia in the 1990s, and especially coinciding with the Pastrana peace process (see Chapter 3). Two of the other largest Colombian organisations in Spain, Aculco and Aicode (both based mainly in Madrid), were also involved in this work. However, with the failure of the Pastrana peace negotiations, and as the Colombian migrant community in Spain grew in size and heterogeneity, and its problems in the host country multiplied, the focus of these organisations shifted towards other types of community and political involvement (see Chapter 6). This coincided with a decline in civil society efforts for peace inside Colombia, as general pessimism about finding a negotiated solution to the armed conflict spread and support for a military defeat of the guerrillas increased (demonstrated by the election of President Uribe in 2002 – see Chapter 3; and below on the importance of the national and international context).

Nevertheless, both the directors of Aesco and Aculco affirmed that they remained committed to the struggle for peace and human rights in Colombia, both at the personal and institutional levels. Sometimes this work links more widely with a denunciation of the general situation of migrants from the South:



"The theme of human rights runs across all our work, because in our discourse we incorporate the phenomenon of forced migration, created by the lack of democracy, of spaces for participation, the lack of institutional strengthening in the countries of origin, and all the large disequilibriums in the distribution of income and wealth, inside and between the countries" (Interview, Aesco director, Madrid).

Referring more specifically to Colombia, the struggle for peace is also seen as something relevant to all Colombians, including migrants, since as Aculco director said "people have left the country fed up with the violence, and we want them to return to a peaceful country". In addition to the initial (now more marginal) focus of these large organisations in this type of diaspora politics, this study found other smaller groups involved fully or to some degree. The work of the *Fundación Vida*, explored in the previous chapter, also related partly to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia. The two main foci of interest of this group (both in Colombia and through its delegation in Spain) were environmental issues and the defense of ethnic (mostly Black) communities. As such, one of its aims has been to raise international awareness about the situation of the Afro-Colombian population in Colombia, and the effects that the conflict is having on them (see Chapter 3):

"We organised a very nice event called 'Agenda 2004', which involved bringing [to Spain] some town mayors, well they were 22 in total, from different municipalities of the Pacific region, and some civil servants too. And I organised it so that they were received in Congress, so that the government here knew more about the social problems of the black population in Colombia, and the problem of internal displacement, which affects in greater numbers the black population, and we even managed to go to Brussels, and that was incredible ... It was very emotional, because they represented municipalities that are very marginalised in Colombia, and when they realised that they were in the European parliament, some of them were on the brink of crying. It was a very important event" (*Fundación* founder, Madrid).

Three other organisations researched in Spain were more directly involved in this type of transnational political work, but in different ways, as the case studies below show:

**Imago-Casa Amarilla** (Barcelona). Imago is an NGO created in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1997, to work mainly with deprived youth on issues related to peace and development through cultural activities.<sup>242</sup> As the organisation and its needs grew, one of its founders came to Spain in search of funding and to establish links with other, similar groups. In 2001, this woman, Sandra, established an office for the NGO in Barcelona. As she became involved in a local cultural project called *Casa Amarilla* (Yellow House), this provided the first organisational link for

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242 See: [[http://www.fundacionimago.org.co/quienes\\_somos.htm](http://www.fundacionimago.org.co/quienes_somos.htm)] (18/06/07). Information also collected during interview with one of Imago's founders (Barcelona).

Imago in Spain.<sup>243</sup> As head of the cooperation and solidarity work of *Casa Amarilla* and president of Imago, Sandra has played a key role in connecting the work done in Barcelona with that in Colombia. As part of her work, she organised workshops and seminars addressed to young people in Barcelona, to raise their consciousness of the conflict in Colombia (and other global conflicts), promoted exchanges with Colombia or set up exhibitions of young Colombian artists in Barcelona. Although these are small steps, Sandra argued that this type of transnational work was important, on the one hand, because it helped visibilise and support civil society work for peace in Colombia, and on the other hand, because the conflict in Colombia "is not only a Colombian problem, but a global one".

The **Colectivo Maloka** (Barcelona) and **Comadheco** (*Comité Madrileño de Derechos Humanos por Colombia* – Madrid Committee for Human Rights in Colombia).<sup>244</sup> The Colectivo Maloka, as its website explains, was formed in 2002:

"as a space for Colombians resident in Barcelona and all those interested in the Colombian situation to meet, with the idea of initiating some urgent actions in response to the deterioration of the war in Colombia and its most visible consequences, such as the internal displacement of people, the attacks on defenceless communities, the selective assassinations, the polarisation of the armed conflict and the criminalisation of popular protests".<sup>245</sup>

However, as one of its members explained, the origins of this initiative go back a little further, to a platform organised a year or two earlier to protest against 'Plan Colombia' (see Chapter 3). Comadheco was established in Madrid by a group of Colombians at about the same time, in 2000. Both organisations were mainly created by Colombian refugees, but included the participation of Spanish activists or worked in cooperation with non-migrant civil society initiatives and groups in Spain interested on the Colombian situation. Their work related mainly to informing people outside Colombia about the armed conflict in Colombia, and the effects on the most vulnerable populations, such as peasant and indigenous communities, the afro-Colombian population, human rights defenders, and women. This is what they call "*sensibilización*" (sensitizing), or making people aware of what happens in Colombia, through workshops, debates, presentations and other events. Comadheco's work focused mainly on the denunciacion of human rights violations in Colombia, while at the same time offering practical support to Colombian refugees in Spain. The Colectivo Maloka, on the other hand, seeks to publicise and support civil society initiatives in Colombia against the conflict and in favour of

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243 The *Casa Amarilla* is a web-based "not-for-profit, cultural entity, which aims to contribute and promote closer cultural links and interchange between the peoples of Latin America and Catalonia" [<http://www.lacasamarilla.org/>] (18/06/07).

244 Information obtained from interviews with members of both organisations and their websites.

245 Translated by the author from the original in Spanish [<http://www.colectivomaloka.org/quienes-somos-colectivo-maloka.php#objetivos>] (23/07/07).

peace, and often bring leaders from Colombia to speak at public events, as well as raising funds to support specific projects in Colombia. This sometimes involves representatives of women leaders of peace initiatives in Colombia, and the group has a special section on the effects of the conflict on women and their resistance in their website. This is probably a reflection of the fact that many of its members are women, but also acknowledges the protagonism that Colombian women and their organisations have acquired as part of civil society efforts against the conflict (see below).<sup>246</sup> In addition, the Colectivo Maloka has just started a project to help Colombian women migrants integrate at the local level.<sup>247</sup> Thus, these two organisations provide another example of how migrant transnationalism and integration often go together, as the section above and the previous chapter showed.

Similarly, in the case of the UK, the origin of some of the migrant organisations serving the community mentioned in Chapter 6, such as IRMO and Carila, go back to the fight for human rights in Colombia, and Latin America more widely. However, although these organisations continued to do some work on these issues, their main focus now was on host country conditions. This is partly owing to the same reasons mentioned in the case of Spain, but could also be related to the fact that these organisations were older and the refugees involved in them had been living in England for longer and thus their political priorities had changed (although this is not always the case, as the case studies below show). Equally, the two migrant organisations more politically oriented researched in London, the Latin Front and the Latin American Workers' Association, were mostly focused on integration issues, although the latter, being organised mainly by Colombian trade unionists, also participated in events related to the political and socio-economic situation in Latin America (including Colombia). Nevertheless, as in the case of Spain, there were other groups and organisations still mainly involved in the situation of armed conflict and struggle for peace in Colombia. Some, like Coras, were mainly Colombian and similarly to Comadheco focused both on denouncing human rights violations in Colombia and supporting refugees (and migrants more general) in their new settings. The latter involved defending the right to asylum for Colombian refugees, as immigration law in the UK became more restrictive. However, Coras had recently been experiencing financial problems and intra-group divisions that had led to their activities being reduced (see below). Others, like **Justice for Colombia** (JFC) and the **Colombian Solidarity Campaign** (CSC), in common with Maloka, were mixed or British-led organisations that focused mainly on solidarity and human rights work to do with Colombia.<sup>248</sup> JFC describes itself as "a coalition of British organisations

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246 See: [<http://www.colectivomaloka.org/quienes-somos-colectivo-maloka.php#objetivos>] and [<http://www.colectivomaloka.org/movimiento-femenino.php>] (23/07/07). See also Mondragón (n.d).

247 See: [<http://www.colectivomaloka.org/quienes-somos-proyectos.php?ID=5>] (31/07/07).

248 Information obtained from interviews with organisation members and other Colombian activists in London, as well as their websites.

working in support of the Colombian people and trade union movement in their campaign for basic human rights and their struggle for peace with social justice".<sup>249</sup> However, some of its members were Colombian. According to its director, it was founded in 2002 by a group of trade unionists in the UK in order to raise international solidarity with the situation of the trade unions in Colombia, where some 184 unionists had been killed that year. JFC has four main areas of work: funding and supporting other organisations and projects in Colombia; sending delegations of British trade unionists, members of Parliament, journalists and lawyers to Colombia to make them familiar with the situation in the country; campaigning among British politicians, or even at the EU and UN level, on issues such as reducing military aid to Colombia; and increasing awareness of the political situation in Colombia within British society in general by bringing Colombian trade unionists, peace activists and leaders of the student, women and other social movements to give talks in the UK.

CSC, on the other hand, is a Colombian-British group that emerged in the context of the protests organised against Plan Colombia, out of a wide-ranging coalition that later broke up. According to its website:

"The Colombia Solidarity Campaign is an anti-imperialist organisation, campaigning for a socially just and sustainable peace in Colombia based on respect for the human rights and diversity of the Colombian people."<sup>250</sup>

Most of its activities revolved around the opposition to Plan Colombia, and any foreign military intervention in Colombia in general, as well as the policy of fumigation of coca-growing areas. In addition, the group organised campaigns to denounce the violation of human rights of Colombian workers by big multinationals, "the policy of Colombian state terror", and "the criminalisation of social protest", and calls for an end to impunity. Through their work, they also aim to support organisations and individuals working for the same goals inside Colombia, while at the local level they support and defend "the right of Colombian refugees to asylum" (see note 250). In addition, in London the research found informal networks of Colombians, mostly refugees, working on these issue on a less institutionalised basis, for instance through the convocation of meetings and talks organised on a word of mouth basis, or using modern telecommunications through e-mail lists. Thus, in general, the main difference with the work done from Spain was that in London there were less organised involvement in this type of transnational political work on the part of Colombian migrants, a reflection of the smaller size of the community, and that this work was sometimes mainly done by British-led organisations. Although in the case of Spain there was also significant involvement of non-migrant civil

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249 See: [[http://www.justiceforcolombia.org/dev/home\\_index.php](http://www.justiceforcolombia.org/dev/home_index.php)] (23/07/07).

250 See: [<http://www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk/content/view/15/26/>] (23/07/07).

society, Colombian organisations were more actively engaged.<sup>251</sup> This could also be related to issues of access to resources by migrant organisations, as well as to higher levels of division and polarisation within the politically-committed Colombian community in London (see below). In addition, the work done from London seemed to be less focused on bringing to the fore the work of Colombian women in the search for peace, or more generally in discussing the gender implications of the conflict (with the main exception of JFC - see below for more on this).

### **Potential and limitations of transnational civil society work for peace in Colombia**

The sections above showed that Colombians in general know about and are interested in what happens politically in Colombia, especially in the context of the armed conflict and search for peace, both at the individual and collective levels. Much of the work described above was transnational (or global) in nature since it involved connections with activities and organisations not only in the homeland, but also in the host country, as well as with other migrant communities abroad and at the wider international level. Although some of these connections are just being built, and are more informal than formal, they could potentially develop further. In the US, for instance, there is already a wide network of Colombian human rights groups.<sup>252</sup> Such international solidarity and human rights work has always been important for diaspora politics, and depending on the national and international contexts can have a significant impact, as Angell (2007) documents for the case of Chile (see also Landolt and Goldring, 2006). This impact could be even greater with the growing transnationalisation of the human rights lobby and other social movements, although some authors are critical of the potential of global or transnational civil society (see Della Porta and Tarrow, 2006; McIlwaine, 2007b). Looking more specifically at the search for peace in Colombia, the transnational connections are also numerous. On the one hand, as several respondents pointed out, both the conflict and its solution were not only a national, but also an international problem. The international input includes not only US military aid, but also European involvement in the peace process (see below). It is in this context that the Colombian diaspora could contribute to the transformation of the conflict at home, in the way Zunzer (2004) argues for other diasporic populations (see Chapter 2). This subject has not been explored yet, but the section below offers some indication of the potential and limitations in the context of the two communities studied.

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251 The organisations researched in Barcelona, for instance, worked in cooperation with a very active locally-based non-migrant civil society involved with Colombia, mainly through the *Taula Catalana per la Pau i els Drets Humans a Colòmbia* (Catalonian Association for Peace and Human Rights in Colombia).

252 See the website of the Colombia Human Rights Network [<http://colhmet.igc.org/>] (23/07/07).

### Only a small minority gets involved

For some members of the Colombian diaspora, like Aristizabal, a political exile living in Spain, it is clear that Colombians abroad have a role to play in homeland politics, and more specifically in achieving meaningful peace:

"This includes the political refugees and exiles, political leaders and activists, social leaders and human rights defenders, all of whom have played a significant role in the struggles for the transformation of our country and represent a very valuable cumulus of experiences and knowledge that cannot be wasted ... But the Colombian exodus also includes a large number of professionals, technicians and qualified workers, whose knowledge and qualifications acquired abroad represent a social capital that our country is losing. This diaspora together has a political role to play in the Colombian situation. Both because of personal interests, if people aim to return to Colombia one day with dignity and security, and due to the crisis in the country. This diaspora can and must assume a compromise with peace and reconstruction" (2005, p.1).

However, the studies available argue that the large majority of Colombians abroad are not interested in playing such a political role, with only a minority getting involved. This was also what a majority of Colombian respondents in this study, even those involved in transnational political activities, thought (see Box 7.3).

#### **Box 7.3: Lack of political activism among Colombians in the UK and Spain**

**Cristina**, community worker, Barcelona: "I think here in Spain very few Colombians have a direct involvement in what happens in Colombia. I think you will find that once people leave Colombia, they are not interested in having any compromise with the country, beyond their own families. They won't even vote, because they are not interested".

**John**, refugee journalist, Madrid: "I don't think people are interested. Maybe as a defence mechanism, which is what happened to me in the last few years. One starts to forget, to leave things behind ... to say, I don't know anything about Colombia, I am now living here ... I think is a defence mechanism, a reluctance to establish links that could help and contribute to the resolution of the conflict because is not easy".

**Ruth**, political activist, London: "At the political level there isn't much interest, very little. A lot of people are totally apolitical, or have very negative feelings about politics ... although we are trying to get people organised and more interested in the politics of their home country, but most people do not care".

Source: in-depth interviews.

Those who are more directly involved tend to be a minority, mostly refugees with a history of political and social activism in Colombia, as indicated by other authors (see Guarnizo 2006b; Landolt and Goldring, 2006). This was also the case in this study, both for Spain and the UK (see Appendix 4). This is not surprising, since for many of these activists, continuing their political or social work was also a matter of personal fulfillment, and a way to survive the

experience of exile, as Gustavo, a refugee political activist in Barcelona, explained (see also Bermúdez Torres, 2003a):

"one of the hardest things about exile is that you are not only far from your country and family, but also from the activities that you have done all your life. This is not my case here, because I am always active, participating, working in projects, creating new proposals, moving around, or organising meetings".

Cristina, a Colombian community worker in Barcelona, agreed with this, explaining that for those who had been involved in this type of political work in Colombia, continuing with such commitments was natural. It was a way to keep in touch with the life they left behind, and also to face the psychological consequences of "the loss of power, authority and self-esteem" associated with their experiences of exile. Loss of power and status can affect migrants in general and has been pointed by some studies as one of the reasons why these engage in transnational activities oriented towards the home country. The research available tends to emphasise that this affects men more than women, although the results of this and other studies point out that this is not necessarily the case, especially among refugees. A majority of the refugees in this study were politically active, although the level of direct participation depended largely on personal circumstances. Some of the refugees in Spain complained that despite their commitment to continue working for Colombia, their legal and economic circumstances made this difficult.<sup>253</sup> This was the case of Martin, a refugee man living in Barcelona, who after five years in Spain was still in a very precarious situation and unable to dedicate as much time as he wanted to continue the political work he did in Colombia. John, who had been living in Madrid since 2001, was better off financially but was still waiting to receive refugee status. Although the courts had recently ruled in favour of his appeal, the whole process had been so emotionally demanding that for a while he had to put his work for Colombia on one side until his situation was resolved. Given the valuable experience that many refugees had in formal politics, human rights work or peace activities, this represented a significant loss of human capital for Colombia, as some respondents argued.

As previously mentioned, such situations can affect women more. Studies highlight how migration can bring gains to women migrants, for instance, through greater access to employment and personal autonomy, but also losses, depending on other factors, such as class, nationality, race, age or family status (see Chapter 2). These losses can be particularly high for middle-class professional or activist refugee women, as argued before. Thus, women migrants' greater facility to find employment in the host country means that they might acquire greater

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253 Some reports argue that Spain is "one of the European countries most hostile to refugees" (CEAR, 2005, p.21).

economic responsibilities towards their families, and hence have less time to continue their political involvement as the case of Elena explained earlier suggests. Jesús, a Colombian refugee in Madrid, explained that of the cases he knew, women exiles had had a harder time:

"I think it is different for women. From what I hear, and the people I know, some of the women here came to claim asylum on their own right. It was them specifically who suffered the threats. They were leaders of women's associations, or other groups, and they did not come because of the activities of their husbands or partners, which is the usual. In these cases the men feel relegated ... and the women find themselves in situations where they have to go and clean houses, look after the elderly, or similar types of work, and it is a very conflictive situation, for many of these women it is a shock".

However, there were other reasons for some refugees not to be involved in transnational political work relating to the armed conflict and the search for peace. A couple interviewed in Madrid had found their experience so traumatic that apart from keeping in touch with their families, they had broken all ties with Colombia, instead focusing on rebuilding their lives in Spain. Cristina, a refugee woman in Barcelona, also said that her experiences had made her too bitter to have any positive impact. She also added that with her husband being fully involved, she needed to remain outside to keep her sanity. In other cases, like that of Iván, a refugee man in Madrid, it was a mixture of lack of time, as well as fear and distrust of getting involved with other Colombians. The other three refugees interviewed in Spain who fitted this profile were women. Two of them had claimed asylum on the basis of persecution by the guerrillas. One was waiting to resolve her legal status, since she had applied for asylum with her husband but they had later separated on the grounds of domestic violence. The other, who had also applied for refuge with her husband, had her application rejected and after living undocumented for some time had only managed to apply for residence in the last regularisation process. By contrast, Meli, a refugee woman in her 50s who had been an active member of the Left in Colombia, said that she had grown tired of the divisions, and internal in-fighting affecting Colombian activists in Spain, and had decided to retire from such work to focus instead on improving her precarious economic and labour circumstances.

Among respondents in the UK, the participation levels of refugees were broadly the same. The main difference was that lack of time, or the need to work hard for an income, especially for women, did not come up as a main issue, which could be due to the fact that their longer stay or that they had achieved full refugee status meant that they enjoyed greater government support in terms of income and other benefits and thus were less constrained by their basic needs in general than those in Spain. Among those most involved in political work relating to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia there was a woman, who had been part of a guerrilla group in Colombia, and three men, a human rights lawyer, who had been exiled to the UK for



the second time, a Leftist political militant, and a young man who came to London as a child with his family. On the other hand, the non-involved refugees included two men journalists, and two long-term refugees, a man and a woman, who said they had grown tired of the internal fighting and wrangling within political groupings, and had decided instead to focus their attention on the local community needs. The director of JFC argued that the level of political activism within the Colombian community in London had declined greatly over the last five years, after the flurry of actions generated by the rejection of Plan Colombia. This, he thought, was partly due to internal divisions, but also to the decline in the numbers of Colombian asylum seekers and refugees arriving in the UK as immigration rules became stricter. His views were corroborated by other respondents, such as Freddy, a former human rights lawyer involved in political work, who said that currently there were few groups and organisations participating (see also Bermúdez Torres, 2003a; McIlwaine, 2005).

For those who migrated for other reasons rather than political ones, interest in participating in the political conflict back home tended to be even lower. Most labour migrants interviewed had no direct political involvement, since their main preoccupation was to work hard to sustain themselves and send remittances home. If involved, they tended to participate more in general community activities, or the types of immigrant politics and diaspora philanthropy analysed in Chapter 6. Students, on the other hand, were quite active in some of the transnational activities from above (and some from below) studied in the previous chapter, but some had also become involved in organised activities relating to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia. Both for Sarah, a member of Maloka in Barcelona, and Marta, a Colombian student in London, two young women from upper-middle class backgrounds, their political activism had not really started until they moved abroad, as the former explained:

"For me, Maloka has been very important because when you live in Colombia you can perfectly spend all your life in a bubble without knowing what really goes on in the country ... especially if you live in the cities. I lived in Bogotá, and come from a middle-upper class background, and in this context some problems do not affect you ... You do hear about it in the media, but the news almost make you insensitive because it is all about deaths, bombs, and you end up assuming it as normal, and you could end up the rest of your life like that, without being motivated to do anything about it".

Nevertheless, the fact that the number of Colombians participating from abroad in the political context at home represent a minority, should not obscure the potential role of the diaspora. A majority of those interviewed, including some respondents who were not actively involved, thought that Colombians abroad should contribute to improving the situation in the homeland. Only a few respondents said that it was not possible to do anything to solve the conflict in Colombia from abroad, either because they were far removed from the country or because they

thought the conflict had no solution anyway, at least nor in the short or medium-term. Some added that if the basic needs of migrants were met, and Colombians could be more organised and united, they could potentially play a very important role in the political situation at home. As the leader of the Latin Front in London said: "if you work with Colombians here, and are persistent, there are possibilities".

The director of Aculco in Spain, in an interview quoted in their website, also vindicates the role that Colombian migrants can play in Colombia:

"The director of Aculco, Alvaro Zuleta, considers that Colombia needs the support of the millions of Colombians who live abroad. "We Colombians living abroad are trying to create an international movement to support social processes in Colombia". According to him, several Colombian leaders living in Europe and the US are working together to find political solutions to support social development in Colombia ... From abroad we can see that there have been no real advances in a peace process, and that the Colombian problem remains unsolved".<sup>254</sup>

#### Problems of mistrust, divisions and fragmentation within the communities

As mentioned earlier, in their pioneering work on Colombians in the US, Guarnizo and Díaz (1999, p.397), despite recognising that there was "a dense web of economic, political, and socio-cultural transnational relations" connecting these migrants with their places of origin, also questioned whether this led to the formation of a 'transnational community'. They argued that Colombian migrants in the US were highly divided not only along class, regional or ethnic lines, like other migrant groups, but also there was the mistrust and fragmentation caused by the armed conflict and the drugs trade (*ibid*; see also Guarnizo et al., 1999; Collier and Gamarra, 2001). Studies of Colombian migrants in Europe and other parts of the world have also highlighted this issue (see Bermúdez Torres, 2003a; Guarnizo, 2006b; McIlwaine, 2005; Landolt and Goldring, 2006; Restrepo Vélez, 2006). Respondents in this study to a large extent corroborated such findings. A few, especially in London, commented on the class, racial and regional divisions affecting Colombians, which were a reflection of those existent in the country of origin (see Box 7.4).

In addition, some said that Colombians lacked solidarity towards other fellow countrypeople, and there were stories of migrants denouncing each other to the authorities, or causing other type of harm to each other because of jealousy, envy or personal advantage. Such divisions and problems affect other migrant communities too.<sup>255</sup> However, Carmen, who has experience of

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254 See: [<http://www.aculco.org/articuloL.htm>] (07/02/07).

255 During previous research, I heard similar comments from Peruvian migrants in London (Bermúdez Torres, 1995; see also McIlwaine, 2007a on Latin Americans in London).

working with Latin American migrants, thought that in the case of Colombians they could be more pronounced because they are a bigger group, and a significant number of them are people with higher levels of education and professional jobs. In addition, in the case of Colombia such divisions and problems are aggravated by the feelings of insecurity, mistrust and alienation caused by the conflict. This was reflected in some of the comments by respondents both in the UK and Spain. A few, mostly women, like Blanca, a labour migrant living in Madrid, said that they did not like going to Colombian events because it was just an excuse for people to get drunk and misbehave, and they did not like that. Iván, a refugee man in Madrid, added that such behaviour fuelled Colombians' bad reputation and for that reason he disapproved of it. Others mentioned that they only mixed with a small group of close friends and/or relatives, and that one had to be careful when meeting some other Colombians because they did not know what they could be involved in (see McIlwaine, 2005). Rumours abound as to the penetration of the Colombian drug cartels among the migrant communities (see Mejía Ochoa, 2006).

#### **Box 7.4: Divisions affecting the Colombian community in London**

**Carmen** (middle-upper class, white, community worker, London): "This is a very dispersed community ... here, the Colombian system is replicated in its entirety. Those who are in a good situation, study at the LSE and then go to work at JP Morgan, and they will continue going to the LSE meetings, and once a month they might have lunch at Elephant & Castle as a sociological experiment or because they want to eat a good pork fillet. And the cleaners only relate with other cleaners. They do not mix together, and those of us who are in the middle, because we work in community organisations, mix with others like us too".

**Diana** (middle-class, white, former student, London): "I don't really have many Colombian friends here, because most of the people come from Pereira, Medellín, and other places, and for those of us who come from Bogotá, or Cali, well, they do not like us much ... If I go to Elephant & Castle to buy something, they look at me thinking where does she come from? There is always a barrier, and is not easy to cross it".

**Marta** (upper-middle class, white, student, London): "with time, and as you mix with people, you start differentiating ... in Colombia, if you live in Bogotá or any other large city, there are two key questions you ask people, where they studied and where they live, and with that you practically know their life, and here is the same. We ask each other these questions and then you know which class they come from, whether they have an education or not ... sometimes you can even know from their physical appearance, it sounds awful but it is true, by looking at their face you can differentiate ... and in the way they speak too"

Source: in-depth interviews.

In general, levels of mistrust and fear tended to be greater among refugees, given their personal experiences. Many felt that although they were in a safer environment, they had to be careful who they spoke with and what they said, since all sides of the conflict were present in their communities. All of this has had an effect on the collective organising and transnational political work of the communities studied. Analysing the responses of interviewees, it seems

that the growth of the Colombian communities in the two countries, and especially in Spain, where the Colombian population has increased very rapidly and significantly, has had two seemingly contradictory effects. On the one hand, the increase in numbers has facilitated the emergence of organisations, businesses and services representing and serving these collectivities. On the other hand, together with the increased heterogeneity, it has also opened more room for divisions and conflicting interests, between, for instance, political refugees and labour migrants, 'real' refugees against 'non-real' asylum seekers, 'left-wing' refugees and those escaping guerrilla violence, as well as between professionals and low-skilled workers (see Landolt and Goldring, 2006, for divisions among Colombian refugees in Canada). Ruth, with her long experience working with Colombians in London, agreed with this:

"We are not as close to each other as we used to be, we are more divided now, some people have had problems, and people do not want to mix up with others just in case. Before, when we were less people, we were more united".

Rosa, a refugee living in Spain, also argued that the Colombian community in Spain was more united before, when they were a small group of mainly refugees escaping the repression in Colombia. Such divisions and conflicts extend from the individual to the collective level too, affecting groups and organised activities. The great majority of respondents thought that although there was now a significant number of community organisations and activities, these tended to be small operations and often worked in isolation from each other. This was sometimes blamed on the competition for resources. In Spain, the head of a migrant organisation complained that groups would sometimes get more or less resources depending on their links with host political parties and authorities. This, according to him, explained the rivalry and lack of cooperation between some of the groups. Others agreed with this:

"Unfortunately, there are many organisations, but they work on their own, I don't know exactly why ... but there is a lot of competition. Partly I think it has to do with the subsidies they get. Because of these subsidies, they compete with each other and as a result relations between them are not good. Maybe a couple of them work together, but in general the relationship between them is bad" (Nubia, Madrid).

There was a certain level of distrust too about the role that such organisations played. Some respondents saw these groups as nothing more than individual initiatives created for self-benefit, whether to provide a living for some people or to give them a certain level of protagonism (a problem that affects NGOs in general). Cecilia, a student living in Madrid said that when she needed advice or information she preferred going to Spanish organisations rather than Colombian ones, "maybe because ... of distrust. I don't identify with some of them, and don't like some of the things I see, so I don't go". These problems affected the most politically-

oriented groups and organisations too. Rosa, a refugee living in Madrid who had experience of political participation, argued that for Colombians it was difficult to organise, since each Colombian, man or woman, "wants to be a leader. There are too many leaders and not enough people". This, she said, was most palpable among Colombians abroad because of the experience of exile:

"a lot of the people who came here had some sort of leadership position over there, and you have to realise that here they become a no-one and that motivates them to achieve some recognition, unfortunately based on certain elements that have not been processed yet, and when these are political, it involves the dogmatism, sectarianism, and everything else that they bring with them from their organisations. All of this is reflected here".

As mentioned above, ideological differences and the divisions and polarisation surrounding the conflict in Colombia have also had an impact on the Colombian communities abroad. This is no surprise, given the political context in Colombia. There are divisions between the 'Right', i.e. groups that are seen as closer to the Colombian government, and the 'Left', and also within the latter.<sup>256</sup> Some of the quotations above already refer to the internal divisions affecting the groups and individuals working on issues relating to the armed conflict, most of them organised or led by left-wing refugees. The director of JFC in London explained that although at the beginning they had sought to work in coordination with the Colombian community, they had been put off by internal divisions and competition between the different groups and personalities (see also Landolt and Goldring, 2006). Many respondents in Spain also complained about this. Respondents in both countries complained that their communities were as divided and polarised as in Colombia, which was making it difficult to create a more united and cohesive collectivity:

"I don't think Colombians here are organised, because the conflict has moved here too, we haven't been able to break with it" (Cristina, community worker, Barcelona).

"I would say that there are many organisations, but they are as divided by the conflict as in Colombia, they are as polarised here, it is the same process ... there are groups but they are divided. But one of the things we are trying to achieve is to create a wider movement, to try and work those things that unite us rather than those who separate us" (Lourdes, refugee and human rights activist, Madrid).

Zunzer (2004), in his study of diaspora communities in Europe from societies in conflict, acknowledges the heterogeneity and the many divisions existent within these, whether based on class, gender, ethnicity or ideological issues. However, he argues that such differences sometimes can become more diluted abroad, thus allowing for more cooperative work. This

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<sup>256</sup> See Angell (2007) on how divisions within the Left also affected the political work of Chilean exiles during the Pinochet dictatorship.

seemed to be the case, up to a point, within the Colombian communities in the UK and Spain. Some interviewees, for instance, agreed that the regional, class and ideological differences affecting Colombians were less prominent abroad. Cristina, who was a university teacher and human rights researcher in Colombia, explained that personal relations change a lot with the process of immigration:

"here you don't choose your friends, you just happen to become friends with different types of people. I have many friends here who are not the type of person I would be relating with in Colombia ... because the things you have in common here are different".

Carmen, who comes from a middle-upper class background, argued that for Colombians abroad there was a lot to learn from the experience of living in more democratic and socially egalitarian societies. She said that one of the things she had learned to appreciate living in London was how there was more social mixture there, with people from completely different backgrounds, for instance, sharing the same nursery for their children. This is something she would miss if they went back to Colombia, where she said the life of her daughter would be much more predictable. Many other respondents also thought that one way migrants could contribute to create a better Colombia was to learn some of the good things in their host societies to take them back to their own country. This could also be done at the political level. In the UK, some commented on the impact that living on a more democratic and less conflictive political system based on greater respect for people's rights had had on them, and on how migrants, especially the second or younger generations, could transfer these values to Colombia. In Spain, where the experience of uniting the different sectors of the Colombian exiled left around the PDA has been riddled by ideological divisions and personal rivalries, some also said working from a distance and being able to compare with the historical experience of Spain had helped them see things differently. Rosa argued that although Spanish society had not overcome completely the Civil War it experienced, at least it had learned to live with its differences. Despite the ideological divisions still existent among Colombians in Spain, she thought with time people would learn to overcome many of these:

"some people, when they leave the country, start taking some distance that allows them to see things in a clearer way, may be not in a more neutral way, but at least taking into account more elements, and in a calmer manner ... At that stage, you stop dividing the country between the good ones and the bad ones. The country starts acquiring nuances, and those who were supposed to be the bad ones could have elements that before were not taken into account, and equally, it is possible to see that the good ones could have done something wrong ... With time you can see both countries, the one there and the one here ... you can even start to understand that even if what is here is not perfect, it might be the best for your country right now ... and when you travel there you start comparing, and wondering, why can't

Colombia have what Spain has?"

### Reflections on the role of the diaspora in conflict transformation and gender

Following from the above, Zunzer argues for the need to explore in more detail "how a more active bridge-building role of diaspora groups and key individuals in the peace process and reconstruction efforts in their home countries could be encouraged by national and international organisations" (2004, p.42). This research shows that Colombians abroad are having an input in the situation of armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia and the wider political situation. Respondents argued that even if only a minority were actively involved, the ways to contribute were many. At the individual level, they emphasised the need for migrants to improve their education and learn from different experiences while abroad, so they could apply their new knowledge in Colombia if they went back, or contribute positively from abroad. At the collective level, the potential contributions were many, ranging from improving the image of the country to attract investment and tourism, to lobbying at the international level for greater respect for human rights in Colombia and a negotiated solution to the armed conflict. Regarding the latter, interviews with members of groups based in the UK and Spain, and in Colombia, reflected the view that this type of work was seen as invaluable, in that it helped provide extra funds for groups and projects in Colombia, increased international awareness of the Colombian situation, and offered some sort of protection to those groups and members of civil society most threatened in Colombia. This was recognised by the representative of a Colombian women's organisation working for peace interviewed in Barcelona, as well as by other respondents.

One of the most vital elements of civil society peace efforts in Colombia has been feminist and women's groups (see Bermúdez Torres, 1996; Moser and Clark, 2001 and 2002; Moser and McIlwaine, 2001; Moser et al., 2006). These groups are becoming increasingly active at the transnational level, not only sustaining links with other similar peace-based and/or feminist organisations in other countries (and at the international level), but also through their connections with Colombian migrant organisations abroad.<sup>257</sup> In Spain, for instance, Maloka supported women's peace groups in Colombia with funding and lobbying activities, as well as raising awareness of the gender implications of the Colombian conflict (see Chapter 3). A peace research group based at a university in Barcelona, which had a project on Colombia, also had links with some of the larger women's peace initiatives in Colombia, such as the *Ruta Pacífica*

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257 See, for instance, the report on a recent delegation visit to Colombia by the Geneva-based Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). WILPF, one of the main organisations behind the UN Resolution 1,325 on "Women, Peace and Security", has been closely following the situation in Colombia (UN, 2002; WILPF, 2007).

*de Mujeres* (Women's Peace Route), and regularly brought over women from such groups to study and publicise their work in Spain. JFC, in London, also sometimes invited women leaders from Colombia to talk about the human rights situation and their peace work in Colombia. Despite this, respondents in general had little to say when asked about the role that women were playing in Colombia to bring about peace, or about the wider gender implications of the conflict and how to contribute from abroad to these issues.

Only those who were more closely involved in human rights and peace work were willing to debate how the armed conflict in Colombia was affecting men and women differently, the role that women's groups were playing in the search for peace or the need to integrate gender issues in peace efforts to achieve a more stable and equitable society. However, even in these instances, most of the discussions revolved around the situation of women internally displaced by the conflict, or women's association with peace, thus reflecting on the more traditional gender roles identified with women in situations of armed conflict (as victims, or peaceful agents - see Chapter 2). This view was equally shared by the male and female respondents. Elena, a refugee woman living in Spain, argued that it was very important to allow for a specific input by women in the conflict in Colombia, since they have an "innate capacity to resolve conflicts". Men, on the other hand, were generally seen as the main instigators of the violence, or as those in power not willing to bring peace. Very few were willing to discuss other aspects of gender, conflict and peace, such as how to incorporate the different gendered needs of men and women in peace processes, for instance, when dealing with ex-combatants, return migration or improving socio-economic opportunities for the population in general and opening up the spaces for greater democratic political participation. This could be due to several factors. On the one hand, the relationship between gender, war (or conflict) and peace, is a relatively recent area of research and interest (see Chapter 2). On the other hand, the work of women's groups for peace in Colombia, and gender issues more generally, although increasingly visible is still seen as relatively marginal (see Chapter 3; see also Moser et al., 2006). Cristina, a Colombian refugee woman interviewed in Spain with previous experience of human rights work, for instance, was aware of the work for peace that women's groups were carrying out in Colombia, but she thought that they were still marginal, since women in general were still not present in sufficient numbers in decision-making positions in Colombia. For her, the work these women did in trying to raise the importance of taking into account gender issues in the context of the armed conflict and a possible peace, had more of an audience at the international level than within Colombia, and when included in official initiatives it was partly to curry international favour rather than to include them:

"Yes, I think these groups, and the work they do, are important, but I don't think



inside the country they are achieving much ... Their role is above all at the international level ... I don't think right now they can have a real influence in how the conflict evolves. They do some important things, but at the end of the day it is men who take the decisions. The only thing is that inside the government, and the social movements, and in Colombia in general, they know that they must incorporate women's views, and take them into account because of international pressure, it is some sort of marketing, but they don't really believe in it".

Nevertheless, the recent efforts of feminist and women's organisations working for peace in Colombia to unite behind a common agenda are relevant in several respects (see Moser et al., 2006). One, because they represent an example of different sides of the conflict coming together, with the aim of achieving peace. Secondly, these efforts might help put women and gender issues in relation to the conflict and search for peace in a more visible place. In addition, as Cristina argued, the international projection of the work of women peace-builders can be important. Recently, Madrid was host to the 1st International Assembly of Women for Peace, Human Rights and Against War in Colombia (see Figure 7.3). This event was organised with the help of Colombian activists in Spain and in cooperation with local and national women's organisations, trade unions and political parties from Spain and Europe.<sup>258</sup> Interestingly, discussions at the assembly were divided along five main thematic areas: women as peace builders; women's perspective on a negotiated solution to the armed conflict and humanitarian agreements; women's work for human rights; the situation and role of women migrants and refugees; and initiatives of citizenship diplomacy and development cooperation for peace from international civil society, international organisations and foreign governments. The last two points inherently accept the importance of the role that the diaspora can have in peace in Colombia, and the need to incorporate the views of women on this, as well as the relevance of working from a transnational civil society approach. The latter was recognised by the *II Plenaria Internacional por la Paz de Colombia* (Second International Plenary for Peace in Colombia), celebrated in Madrid coinciding with the women's international assembly:

"Today, more than ever, the active presence of civil society in the democratic building of peace [in Colombia] is needed ... There are in the country many expressions of civil resistance. Society and the victims of all types of violence are now key actors in bringing the nation in favour of Peace. But the Colombian civil society needs the decisive support of Latin America, North America and the European Union and their institutions, as well as their governments and civil society, with the purpose of revitalising and prioritising a negotiated political solution".<sup>259</sup>

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258 See "Propuesta Metodológica" of the *I Asamblea Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz, la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos y Contra la Guerra en Colombia* [<http://www.ddhh-colombia.org/mujeres.pdf>] (02/11/07).

259 See:

[[http://www.nodo50.org/asipazcol/CONVOCATORIA\\_II\\_PLENARIA\\_INTERNACIONAL\\_POR\\_LA\\_PAZ\\_FINAL%5B1%5D.pdf](http://www.nodo50.org/asipazcol/CONVOCATORIA_II_PLENARIA_INTERNACIONAL_POR_LA_PAZ_FINAL%5B1%5D.pdf)] (02/11/07). For the first time ever, in this event there was an explicit recognition of the role of Colombian exiles within civil society ('citizen diplomacy') efforts for peace in Colombia.

**Figure 7.3: 1st International Assembly of Women for Peace, Human Rights and Against War in Colombia**



Source: Obtained during fieldwork

However, as Zunzer (2004) argues, to make full use of the positive impact that diaspora communities can have on civil conflict transformation in the homeland, conditions in both the origin and host countries must be right (and at the international level). On the one hand, the work of Colombian political activists in Spain and the UK, although less significant in quantitative terms, is enhanced by the role that Europe has assumed vis-a-vis the conflict and search for peace in Colombia. The EU has supported peace efforts in Colombia, both through offers for mediation and funding for peace and social projects, as well as pressure on respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.<sup>260</sup> Both Spain and the UK have played a key role in these efforts, with one of the main aims being to support and enhance the role of civil society in Colombia, with an emphasis on gender and other important factors (see Footnote 260). On the other hand, Colombian activists working from abroad do not face the same favourable international context that Chilean exiles did in the 1970s and 1980s, especially with the current focus on terrorism (see Angell, 2007). Some Colombians interviewed in Spain, for

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260 See information on the web site of the EU:

[[http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/colombia/intro/index.htm#2](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/colombia/intro/index.htm#2)] and [[http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/colombia/csp/07\\_13\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/colombia/csp/07_13_en.pdf)] (01/09/07); and on the Spanish research group CIP-FUHEM and its Colombia/Europe project: [[http://www.fuhem.es/portal/areas/paz/p\\_europaycolombia.asp](http://www.fuhem.es/portal/areas/paz/p_europaycolombia.asp)] (02/08/07).

instance, said they had recently attended a conference on the conflict in Colombia, where it became clear that the EU's main priority was business links. This is no surprise, given the increasing levels of Spanish investment in Colombia, and UK business and military ties with the country.<sup>261</sup> Also important is the political context in Colombia itself. As mentioned above, civil society efforts for peace in (and outside) Colombia reached a peak in the second half of the 1990s, but lost momentum as the Pastrana peace process collapsed. This was followed by increasing general pessimism about an end to the conflict, or by demands for a hardline stance on the fight against the armed actors. In conversations with an expert on the situation in Colombia, he argued that the most likely positive scenario for Colombia would be a gradual decline in the intensity of the armed conflict, together with greater political and social stability, rather than a formal peace process ending the violence. In this context, he believed the role of the diaspora, rather than participating in an eventual peace process, could be in the construction of international networks that help strengthen this gradual move towards greater stability.<sup>262</sup>

## Conclusions

This chapter has argued that the participation of Colombian migrants in transnational homeland and diaspora politics is much wider than previously thought. The first section showed that the ample political rights that Colombian migrants enjoy in their home country are exercised through external voting, as well as increased transnational party politics, a reflection of the expansion of concepts such as citizenship and the nation-state. Although levels of this type of participation are still low, this is a reflection of national conditions and factors associated with migration rather than lack of interest or the apolitical nature of migration highlighted by other studies. The data obtained in this study is also the result of a very specific context, the Colombian migrant communities in the UK and Spain, which are of more recent establishment, smaller and geographically further away from the homeland, than those in the US (where most research is based). As argued in the previous chapter, this section showed that there are some gender and class differences in levels and types of participation in transnational politics, although these were not highly significant. On the one hand, those most directly active at the level of formal politics tended to be upper- and middle-class professionals and students, while men tended to predominate in the party politics (with women assuming more support, or less active roles). Refugees were very active in participation in Left party politics, but not necessarily in general voting, a reflection of their particular experiences and legal situation. In

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261 The International Business Leaders Forum, an institution set up by The Prince of Wales in England, recently held a meeting and issue a report to help understand the role of businesses in the context of conflict and peace in Colombia (see Amis et al., 2006).

262 For a very recent analysis of prospects for a negotiated solution to the armed conflict in Colombia, and the role of civil society and international actors in this context, see: Bouvier (2007).

addition, political projects like MIRA, reflect on the transnational role that the Church is acquiring, a subject recently taken up by research on migration. Finally, the section on transnational conventional politics concluded, like other studies, that transnationalism and integration can go hand in hand, rather than being opposing forces. However, neither this chapter nor the previous one agrees with evidence from other research suggesting that migrant men focus more on transnational activity towards the home country, while women are more active in activities oriented towards the host society. Although this might have been true in the case of men in this sample group, women in this study participated in both types of activities.

The second section focused on the transnational human rights and peace work conducted by the diaspora or migrant civil society, mainly Colombian exiles, an area hardly studied to date. It showed that this work, although quantitatively relatively marginal, remains important and is a reflection of the wider interest of the diaspora in the situation of armed conflict and peace in Colombia. Participation in this type of transnational activity tended to be dominated, on the one hand, by male Leftist refugee activists, but also women refugees and non-refugees, a reflection of gender patterns of political participation, as well as women's involvement in peace efforts. Some of the organisations studied specifically supported women's groups in Colombia working for peace, but among the general migrant population there was only limited knowledge of or engagement in the discussion about the gendered implications of the conflict and search for peace, partly a reflection of the still marginal condition of this debate within Colombia. However, this marginality could be improved if international connections were strengthened. The human rights and peace work of Colombian migrants abroad could be seen as the emergence of a nascent transnational civil society in search of peace in Colombia. However, there are many limitations to this, mainly in terms of the level of divisions, fragmentation and mistrust affecting both civil society in Colombia and the diaspora. Finally, the national and international contexts are very important when considering the potential of the Colombian diaspora in civil conflict transformation at home.

## CHAPTER 8

### **Conclusions: Re-thinking gendered political transnationalism among Colombian migrants in Europe**

#### **Introduction**

This final chapter highlights the conceptual and empirical contributions made by this research, outlines some tentative policy implications and suggests paths for further research. The main objectives of this study were twofold. First, to explore Colombian migration flows to Europe, by focusing on the communities in Spain and the UK. This was to provide a contrast to the few existing studies that are mostly based in the US. Second, to analyse the gendered transnational political practices of Colombians abroad, in relation to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia. Through a comparative exploration of these issues, this project aimed to contribute to the fields of research on international migration as well as conflict and peace studies. Besides recognising the importance of context, the type of migration and social class, the current research has focused specifically on the gender implications of the phenomena studied. As such, it has brought together and contributed to existing research on the differential impact that armed conflict has on men and women, and their different contributions to peace-building efforts, as well as that on the gendered nature and outcomes of international migration. All these issues must be taken into account both at the academic and policy levels, in terms of conceptual advancements and when thinking about improving the lives and rights of migrants, and about finding a negotiated solution to the conflict in Colombia.

#### **Key empirical findings**

The limited research available on the transnational political practices of Colombian migrants, based mostly on labour migration to the US, has highlighted the divisions and fragmentation affecting communities, the primacy of individual over collective transnational links, and the largely apolitical nature of Colombian migrants. In addition, these studies, often from a quantitative perspective, have argued that gender plays a limited role in these processes. However, by focusing on two different contexts of arrival for Colombian migrants in Europe, using a qualitative approach and adopting a wide definition of transnational politics (including both formal and informal practices), this study has shown a much more complex picture.

The main empirical findings of this study can be grouped into three main areas. The first relates

to the causes of migration, settlement of migrants and emergence of transnational linkages. The main reasons why Colombians in this study migrated abroad included political, economic and other factors. This is not always reflected in other studies which treat Colombian migration abroad largely as an economic phenomenon. Officially, asylum-seekers and refugees represent a small percentage of Colombian migration flows abroad, but they remain significant. In addition, many other Colombians flee the country for security reasons (directly or indirectly) but do not claim asylum or are not recognised as refugees. This means that in many instances it is difficult to distinguish between the different types of migration (economic, political, student, other). However, this study has shown that although all types of migrants share some experiences, there are also important differences depending on the type of migration. Refugees, and those migrants in an irregular situation, tended to be the most vulnerable, but there were also differences within each group, mainly according to gender but also to social class.

Generally, women in this study were in a more disadvantageous position, since they were mainly labour migrants (sometimes in an irregular migrant situation), and tended to be less represented among recognised refugees. Although they were seen as having greater access to employment, and sometimes being better able to socially integrate in the receiving society, family responsibilities and the limited range of jobs available to them, especially in the case of Spain (mostly domestic service), militated against them. However, this was not necessarily the case for women from the middle and upper-classes, who had migrated to study or for other reasons.

This study also found that contexts of exit and arrival are key for understanding migrants' experiences. The year in which people left Colombia and arrived in the UK or Spain often helped explain the type of migration and the migrant destination chosen. The UK was a prime destination in Europe for labour migrants (mostly women) and refugees from the 1970s until the early 1990s, while Spain became a major destination from the 1990s onwards, attracting a more varied and complex type of migration. The decision on where to migrate to mostly depended on migration networks, migrant policy at the receiving end and economic or professional considerations. Migrants in this study considered the UK to offer better possibilities for earning money, and more facilities for refugees (at least initially). Spain, on the other hand, was not only seen as more accessible in terms of visa restrictions (until recently), but also due to the common language and culture. All these factors had an effect on the nature of the transnational linkages being formed. At the individual level, most linkages were manifested through family/social contacts and sending economic remittances. But these connections were multi-directional, linking each migrant community not only with the country of origin (in both directions), but also with each other and with other migrant destinations.

The second area relates to forms of collective transnationalism adopted by Colombians in Spain and the UK. Despite the emphasis by other studies on the divisions and fragmentation affecting Colombian communities abroad, this study found evidence of collective transnationalism among the groups studied. The work available has placed emphasis mostly on the growing importance of remittances and other economic links in this context, based on evidence from studies of Mexican, Central American and Caribbean migration to the US. However, this study has brought attention to other types of transnational initiatives from above and below connecting migrants with the home country.

In the case of Colombia, attempts to link with the diaspora from above have emerged not only from the state, but also from private interests (including economic and civil society groups). These initiatives have focused mainly on diaspora philanthropy and promoting a new image of Colombia. The first is an aspect of transnational practices that has only begun to be explored in the literature concentrating on migrants' initiatives. However this study has shown that diaspora philanthropy can be promoted both from above and below, and in the case of Colombia was mostly associated with the traditional philanthropic activities of the better off classes (in many instances, by women). A more explicitly political aspect of the transnational linkages from above related to the use of migrants abroad as lobbying groups or 'ambassadors'. Not surprisingly, this has been an important aspect of such linkages in the case of Colombia, given the situation of conflict and the image that the country has abroad. Knowledge and interest in these transnational initiatives by the Colombian migrants in this study was limited, with participation often dependent on socio-economic status. This was the case for both men and women. Refugees were among those most critical and less reluctant to participate in transnational activities from above.

On the other hand, this study found evidence of participation in transnational collective practices from below, with differences in the types of organisations involved and their activities between the communities in Spain and the UK. In both countries, Colombians were behind some of the largest and most important Latin American community organisations. Although the main emphasis of these was on immigrant politics, at least in the case of Spain there was also a significant amount of transnational activity. Some of the organisations researched in Spain had been involved, for instance, in lobbying the Colombian government for improved rights for nationals abroad, or in emigrant politics. More recently, there has also been a heavy emphasis on co-development projects, linking migrants in Spain, Spanish society and development projects in Colombia. These organisations and activities were more prominent in Madrid, where the Colombian community was larger, than in Barcelona. In the UK, where the

transnational linkages of these organisations were fewer, the study found, on the other hand, evidence of migrant participation in charity activities organised from below, as well as a dynamic and growing ethnic media market (which was also present in Spain, but was of a more recent nature).

Another key empirical finding in this area related to gender. The limited work available on transnational migration and political practices from a gendered perspective suggests, in general, that men dominate such practices, especially at the institutional and state-directed levels. Women, on the other hand, are seen as most active in the maintenance of transnational family relations, and in political and civil society involvement in the host society. However, the current research showed that women were very active in the transnational activities promoted from above, partly as a result of traditional gender roles. In addition, women (and men) were also very active in the transnational collective practices from below, whether these were oriented towards the host society or the home country. Some studies have suggested that gender differences in transnational political practices were less significant among Colombians than for other Latin American migrant groups to the US, partly because of the more middle class origin of the Colombian flows. However, this study found that this is also due to the active role played by refugees (both men and women) in the migrant communities researched.

The third main area of empirical findings relates to the more overtly political aspects of migrants' transnational connections. Contrary to what research among Colombian migrants in the US has concluded, this study has shown that Colombians in Spain and the UK were involved in a wide range of transnational political activities. At the formal level, participation in elections in Colombia was low, but these rates have to be contextualised; voting rates in Colombia are traditionally low, and voting from abroad in general generates low participation levels. In addition, the fact that the two migrant communities studied are smaller and/or more recent, and physically further away from the homeland, than those in the US, makes formal political transnational connections harder to sustain. Despite this, the current research found evidence of active participation in party politics, especially in the case of Spain, where the community is larger and more recent. Although there was evidence of political distrust and apathy, as previous research had highlighted, the vast majority of the Colombians in this study, far from being apolitical, followed the political situation in their country, especially around election time. There was also a significant level of participation in the politics of the host country, especially by those migrants with a longer period of residence.

By including the more informal (related to wider civil society) aspects of the transnational political field, this research has brought to the fore the work of Colombians abroad in relation to



the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia. This is a key aspect of the transnational political activities of the Colombian diaspora, but it has hardly been taken into account by other studies. The current research showed that most Colombians in the two communities studied had a strong opinion about the armed conflict at home and proposed solutions. However, only a minority of activists participated in this type of transnational political work. They were mostly male Leftist refugees, but also women refugees and non-refugees, a reflection of gendered patterns of political participation, as well as women's active involvement in peace work. The latter, however, did not translate into wider discussions and consideration of the gendered implications of the conflict and search for peace in Colombia. This is partly a reflection of the still marginal condition of this debate within Colombia.

The human rights and peace work of Colombian migrants abroad could be seen as evidence of the emergence of a transnational civil society in search of peace in Colombia. Although quantitatively small, the work of the organisations and activists interviewed was emerging as a key source of support (both material and non-material) for civil society efforts for peace in Colombia. However, there were also limitations to this, partly to do with the fragmentation and mistrust affecting both civil society in Colombia and the diaspora. Also, levels and types of participation in transnational politics varied, depending mostly on type of migration, and to some extent gender and class. At the formal level, both men and women were involved. However, those most directly active tended to be upper- and middle-class professionals and students, with men being more present than women in party politics, especially in leadership positions, which is a reflection of general gender divisions in politics. Refugees, on the other hand, both men and women, were very active in participation in Left-wing party politics, and in civil society work for human rights and peace.

In general, levels of participation in politics oriented towards the country of origin seemed to be higher in Spain than the UK. This could be due to the characteristics of the sample group in each place, but also to other factors. The Colombian migrant community in Spain was larger and more recent. On the one hand, this could mean that migrants are more preoccupied with integration than transnational participation. However, other studies have suggested that transnational activities often tend to be more significant for newly arrived migrants. Nevertheless, in contrast with other available research, this study did not corroborate suggestions that men become more involved in transnational activity oriented towards the home country, while women are more active in host society politics. Although this might have been true in the case of men in the current research, women participated in both types of activities. This can be explained partly by higher levels of migrants of upper- and middle-class origin coming from Colombia, as well as the role played by refugee women in these communities.

## **Main conceptual contributions**

At the conceptual level, this study has sought to link concepts and theories used in research on international migration and in conflict and peace studies, to understand better the transnational political linkages of diasporas with countries of origin in conflict. This is a very new area of research, and as such many aspects of it remain under-studied, not least the role of gender in these processes. By focusing on the experiences of Colombian migrants in Spain and the UK, this research has made several conceptual contributions.

One major issue to emerge from this research is that the concept of political transnationalism cannot be used in a monolithic way, but instead needs to be disaggregated at different levels. First, although using the distinction between transnationalism from above and below has its limitations, in this study it has served several purposes. It has shown not only how states and governments, but also private interests, have grown increasingly interested in establishing links with the diaspora and seeking to influence their transnational practices for economic, social, cultural and political purposes. Also, while most research considers either transnationalism from above or below, by exploring both this study has brought to the fore convergences and tensions present in the transnational field.

Also significant is that this research has explored transnationalism not only from the individual and state levels, but has also included the meso level by considering the work of migrant and wider civil society groups and organisations (both in the countries of origin and settlement), which has been neglected by other studies (see Landolt and Goldring, 2006). Therefore, in this study I argue that it is important to differentiate between individual and collective transnationalism.

A related point is that in order to understand better levels and types of political transnationalism within a specific migrant group, or in an geographical context, it is important to use a wide definition of what constitutes political transnational practices, including both formal and informal politics. Using a qualitative approach, rather than quantitative measures of political transnationalism based on specific cases, this study analysed an aspect of migrant political work that has been often overlooked in the case of Colombia. The latter was also possible by considering refugee flows and other types of migration, rather than focusing exclusively on labour migration as other research tends to do. The transnational practices of refugee migrants have been less studied, and even fewer studies have looked at diaspora populations including both (and other) types of migrants. However, as the current research shows, refugees, students,

professionals and labour migrants often engage differently in the transnational political field.

Also important to highlight conceptually is that the relationship between transnationalism and integration is complex. This study suggests that length of stay in the country of settlement does not necessarily contribute to higher or lower levels, or specific types, of transnational political participation. What seemed more important in this respect is people's previous experience of political activism.

In relation to gender in the context of migration and armed conflict and peace, this study has highlighted the importance of considering the experiences of both men and women when analysing the relationship between gender and migration. It is necessary also to explore differences and similarities between men and women vis-a-vis other factors, such as social class and type of migration. Thus, for instance, when analysing levels and types of transnational political practices among Colombian migrants, gender differences tend to be less significant than among other Latin American migrant groups. This is because of the more middle class nature of Colombian migrant flows (as other studies have suggested), but also due to the active political role of female refugees. Nevertheless, a qualitative exploration of these practices still show some differences in participation between men and women in line with traditional gender roles.

When focusing more specifically on the transnational political work of Colombians abroad in relation to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia, this study found that women participated actively in the latter. This coincided with traditional associations of women with peace, and with the active role that women in Colombia are taking in pressing for an end to the conflict. However, it also showed that women are involved in the conflict in many other ways, and as a result are becoming increasingly affected by it. Despite this, within the migrant communities studied, there was a general lack of interest in discussing these issues. This shows that although the debate on gender, armed conflict and peace has achieved certain significance at the level of international organisations or in academia, on the ground it remains marginalised.

Another key area is the emergence of a transnational and diasporic civil society. By focusing attention on the transnational political work of Colombian migrants in the context of the conflict and search for peace in Colombia, this study develops further the concepts of transnational and diasporic civil society. This is done by considering the connections not only between the work of migrants and civil society in the country of origin, but also between different migrant communities, as well as between migrants and civil society in the host society. Recent conceptualisations of civil society have begun to analyse the transnational and diasporic scales,

but this has been done mostly in the context of development studies (McIlwaine, 2007b). The analysis of the human rights and peace activities of Colombian migrants in Spain and the UK shows that this work can become part of a developing diasporic civil society with transnational connections and implications.

Finally, the importance of context has been shown to be paramount. The approach taken in this study highlights the importance of the social, cultural, economic and political contexts in which migration takes place, and more specifically the contexts of exit and arrival of migrants, to understand better their experiences and transnational connections. Context is key for researching the scale, relevance and impact of migrant transnationalism at the micro, meso and macro levels. This is why experts like Guarnizo (2006c) advocate the need for more studies that compare different migrant groups settled in the same country, or the experiences of a migrant group settled in different countries. This research has sought to contribute both conceptually and empirically to the study of international migration through the latter.

### **Policy implications**

Although this study is not explicitly policy-oriented, it is possible to draw some policy implications in relation to migration and in armed conflict and peace-building situations. The transnational connections of migrants have attracted increasing attention, especially as a potential source of development for the countries of origin. This applies mainly to remittances, but has also been considered in terms of transfers of technology and values from the Global North to the South (see Guarnizo, 2006c). However, studies like this show that transnationalism is a much more complex phenomenon that works in different directions at the same time, and this needs to be taken into account when analysing its benefits and problems. Also, when designing policies to enhance specific aspects of migrants' transnational practices, this need to be thought in terms of the benefits for the migrant population as well, and not only at the macro level (or addressing the needs of the country of origin) (see also Datta et al., 2007). On the other hand, the analysis of transnational migration needs to go beyond the focus on its economic aspects, for instance, through remittances, to explore in more detail the role it plays in situations of armed conflict and peace-building in countries of origin. The transnational perspective also needs to be integrated into analyses of the role of civil society in situations of conflict and search for peace, especially in societies with a large diaspora, something which policy approaches have neglected to date.

The gendered approach of this study has also focused attention on the need to look at both men and women, and the relations between them, when analysing the experiences and needs of

migrants. More specifically, and given the prominent role that women are assuming in international migration flows (especially those from Latin America to Europe), it is important to consider the specific difficulties and challenges they face because of their family responsibilities and constrained access to the labour market. However, these experiences need to be analysed in a wider framework that also includes other factors, mainly type of migration and social class. This study, although acknowledging the interrelated causes of migration, advocates the need to differentiate between different types of migration, mainly refugees and labour migrants, when designing and implementing policy. Finally, the exploration of gender issues in relation to the armed conflict and search for peace in Colombia has brought to the fore the still marginal condition of this subject and the need to bring this type of analysis to the centre of policy making.

### **Future avenues of research**

There are still many aspects of this study that merit further research. Colombian migration abroad in large numbers is a very recent phenomenon and we need to know more about it. Will current levels of migration and the growing diversification in the origin of migrants and selection of migrant destinations continue? This is still a diaspora in the making, and as such we need to follow up its evolution. With respect to the Colombian communities in Spain and the UK, there are also other aspects to investigate. In the case of the UK, being a more established community, even if smaller, we need to have a closer look at what is happening with the second generations, as well as follow recent attempts to raise the profile and political clout of the larger Latin American migrant population. In Spain, despite increasing restrictions on further migrations, there is still ample room for the Colombian community to grow, for instance, through family reunification. In addition, there are many aspects of migrant integration to be analysed, being as this is such a recent migration flow. All of these issues will have an impact on the transnational connections and activities of migrants, as well as on the interplay between transnationalism and integration. How is the Colombian transnational social field going to evolve, particularly at the political level?

The answer to some of these questions will be partly related to what happens in Colombia, including politically and vis-a-vis the armed conflict and hopes for peace. Are we moving towards a negotiated resolution to the conflict, a gradual improvement in general conditions of security or a continuation of similar levels of violence for the near future? Depending on each context, what role can the Colombian diaspora play, at the political, economic and social levels? How can gender factors and considerations be integrated into this? These are the sort of questions that future research will need to tackle. However, some of the findings in the current

research could help illuminate further some of the areas that have been neglected to date in relation to the lives of Colombian migrants and their attempts to engage politically in their former and new homes.

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<http://www.directorio1.com/indice.php?ciudad=LON&TPN=LAT>

En Contacto Londres: <http://www.encontactolondres.co.uk>

Equipo Nizkor (Human Rights): <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/eng.html>

Etnias de Colombia: <http://www.etniasdecolombia.org/>

EU/Colombia:

[http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/colombia/](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/colombia/)

Express News: <http://www.expressnews.uk.com/>

Ferine: [http://www.fferine.org/consulta\\_p.php](http://www.fferine.org/consulta_p.php)

FescolL <http://www.fescol.org.co/mujeres-documentos-campana.html>

FOSCA: <http://www.friendsofcolombia.co.uk/>

Fundación Imago: [http://www.fundacionimago.org.co/quienes\\_somos.htm](http://www.fundacionimago.org.co/quienes_somos.htm)

"Genocidio a Unión Patriótica" (Fundación Manuel Cepeda Vargas):

<http://www.desaparecidos.org/colombia/fmcepeda/genocidio-up/>

Home Office: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

IDMC: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

INCORE (International Conflict Research):

<http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/services/cds/agreements/>

IOM: <http://www.oim.org.co/>

<http://www.iom.int/>

Inter-American Development Bank (IDB): <http://www.iadb.org/>

Justice for Colombia: <http://www.justiceforcolombia.org/>

Latin American Disabled Project: <http://www.ladpp.org.uk/>

Latin American Elderly Project: <http://www.laeplatin.com/>

Latinoutlook: <http://www.latinoutlook.com/kenlivingstone.html>

LAWRS: <http://www.lawrs.org.uk/>

London School of Economics' Centre for Civil Society: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/>

Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado:

<http://www.mujeryconflictoarmado.org/palma.html>

Migrant Resource Centre: <http://www.migrantsresourcecentre.org.uk/home.php>

MIRA: <http://www.webmira.com/>

Nueva Generacion: <http://www.myspace.com/newgenerationlondon>

Philippine Diaspora Philanthropy: <http://www.filipinodiasporagiving.org/>

PDA: <http://www.polodemocratico.net/>

Red de Estudiantes Colombianos:

<http://es.groups.yahoo.com/group/redestudiantescolombianos/>

Registraduría Nacional: <http://www.registraduria.gov.co>

Ruta Pacífica: [http://www.rutapacifica.org.co/nuevo\\_sitio/qs.htm](http://www.rutapacifica.org.co/nuevo_sitio/qs.htm)

The Asia Pacific Philanthropy: <http://www.asianphilanthropy.org/>

The Philanthropic Initiative: <http://www.tpi.org/>

UNESCO: <http://www.unesco.org/>

UNFPA: <http://unfpa.org/>

UNHCR: <http://www.unhcr.org/>

Untold London: <http://www.untoldlondon.org.uk/>

World Bank: <http://www.worldbank.org/>

Yo Creo en Colombia: <http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/>

## APPENDIX 1: Interview Schedule

Interview schedule for Colombians living in Madrid/Barcelona and London (order and number of questions asked is flexible).

1. Thank them for coming, introduce myself and briefly explain what the research project is about.
2. Ask for permission to tape, reassure them about anonymity and answer to questions is voluntary. Agree how long the interview is going to be for (1-2 hours).

### Personal questions:

- When did you arrive in Spain/UK (and why did you choose this migrant destination)?

How did you arrive here and what is your legal situation?

What do you do here? (education, occupation, family situation, activities...)

- Why did you leave Colombia?

How was your life in Colombia? (regional, education, family, occupational and political background)

- What sort of contacts do you maintain with Colombia?:

With family and friends?

Do you visit Colombia often?

Do you send money?

Do you participate in activities or meetings to do with Colombia?

Do you closely follow Colombian politics? Do you vote? Do you participate in any other way in Colombian politics?

- Do you belong to any Colombian group or organisation, or to any group working with Colombians or towards Colombia, or generally attend Colombian events?

Why not?

What type of organisation or group is it? How did you get involved and why? What do you do? Do you consider these activities political?

### General questions:

#### Migration:

- What do you think of the growing migration of Colombians abroad?

What are the causes and consequences?

- What do you know about Colombian migration to Spain/the UK?

What do you know about the Colombian community in Madrid/Barcelona/London?

• Gender:

- Do you think that there are differences in the migration of men and women (in their reasons, migration processes, life in the new country...)?
- How does migration affect men and women, and relations between them?
- Is life for Colombian men and women here very different to their lives in Colombia?

Politics:

- What do you think about the political situation and the armed conflict in Colombia?
- Do you think that men and women contribute in a different way to the current situation?

Do you believe that the armed conflict affects the same men and women, and what is the impact on gender relations?

- What do you think about efforts for a negotiated/peaceful end to the armed conflict?
- How do men and women contribute to this?
- Do you think it is important to consider gender issues in the search for peace? Do you think this is important to improve gender equality? How can this be achieved?

Role of the diaspora:

- Are Colombians in Spain (Madrid/Barcelona)/UK (London) organised? How well organised are they? How many groups and people participate? What do they do, and what for?

Do you think there are differences in the way men and women organise and/or participate in these activities?

- Do these organisations, groups and activities have anything to do with the political situation in Colombia?

It is their objective or do they help in maintaining links between Colombians abroad and their country of origin?

Do these activities have anything to do with the armed conflict and the search for peace in Colombia?

Do they work with or are they interested in gender issues?

- Do you think that Colombians abroad have a role to play in the current political context in Colombia?

Do you think Colombians abroad can or should contribute to improving the situation in Colombia, especially in helping achieve peace in the country and in a potential post-conflict stage? Would this include working towards greater gender equality?

How could this be achieved?

**To finish of:**

- Are you thinking of going back to Colombia? Why? How do you see your future?
- How do you see the future in Colombia?
- Ask me anything you want.
- What do you think of the interview? If you didn't like something, or have any other suggestions please let me know.
- What do you think of this research project? Do you think it could be of any use? Do you think that there should be more research in this field?
- Anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your time and confidence, which has been of great value. If you want to add anything else or get in touch with me please do it.

Do you know how I could contact other Colombians who could be interested in participating in this project?

## APPENDIX 2: Characteristics of Colombian Respondents

**Table 1: Background characteristics of main Colombian respondents in Spain**

Codes	Sex	Age	Social class	Place of Origin	Main activity in Colombia	Reasons for leaving
1(B)	F	20s	upper-middle class	Bogotá	student	to study, travel
2(B)	M	50s	N/A	Medellín	politics, human rights	threats to his life
5(B)	F	30s	middle class	Bogotá	historian, human rights	threats to her life
10(M)	F	34	working class	Pereira/Cali	social, community work	threats to her life
11(M)	M	40s	lower-middle class	Cartagena/Córdoba	community work, politics	threats to his life
12(M)	M	32	middle class	Medellín	journalist	threats to his life
13(M)	M	40w	working class	Medellín	research, human rights	threats to his life
14(M)	couple	40s	working class	coffee-belt	(M)community worker, politics (F)small business	threats to family
15(M)	F	40s	working class	Cali	small business	threats to family
16(M)	F	40s	working class	Medellín	factory worker	to join husband
17(M)	M	30s	working class	Antioquia	politics, arts	threats to his life
18(M)	F	40s	working class	Cúcuta/Pereira	small business	threats to family
19(M)	F	20s	middle class	Bogotá	journalist	threats to family
20(B)	F	50s	middle class	Medellín	economist, community worker	to accompany husband to exile
21(B)	M	50s	lower-middle class	Armenia/Bogotá	politics, human rights	threats to his life
22(B)	F	30s	middle class	Bogotá	academic, human rights, politics	threats to her life
24(B)	F	20s	middle class	Bogotá	student	career opportunities
26(B)	F	30s	N/A	Bogotá	NGO	NGO/to study
27(B)	F	42	middle class	Bogotá	shop assistant	to travel, earn more
28(B)	F	30s	N/A	N/A	N/A	threats to her life
30(B)	couple	40s	N/A	N/A	(M)politics / (F)sociologist	threats to their lives
31(B)	M	30s	lower-middle class	Pacífico	community work, politics	threats to his life
32(M)	M	40s	working class	Tolima/Bogotá	politics	threats to his life
33(M)	M	20s	lower-middle class	Meta	N/A	to study
35(M)	F	50s	middle class	Bogotá	research, community work, public administration	threats to her life
36(M)	M	50s	middle class	Bogotá	academic, politics, public admin.	threats to his life
37(M)	M	40s	middle class	Bogotá	academic	to study
38(M)	M	50s	middle class	Bogotá	lawyer, human rights	threats to his life
39(M)	F	20s	upper-middle class	Bogotá	student, human resources	to study
40(M)	F	59	N/A	Bogotá	politics, other work	threats to her life
41(M)	M	30s	working class	Medellín	journalist	threats to his life
42(M)	M	40s	N/A	Manizales	lawyer	threats to his life
43(M)	F	40s	lower-middle class	Pereira	public admin., self-employed	lost her job & savings
44(M)	F	20s	middle class	Bucaramanga	public administration	to study

45(M)	M	40s	working class	Cali/Palmira	environment/community work	to progress
47(M)	F	30s	N/A	Bogotá	NGO, development work	to study
48(M)	F	50s	N/A	N/A	development/community work	threats to her life
49(M)	F	40s	N/A	N/A	N/A	threats to her life

Note: (M) = Madrid / B = Barcelona

**Table 2: Migration details of main Colombian respondents in Spain**

Codes	Year of arrival	Why Spain?	Family status	Immigration status (entered;current)	Main activities
1(B)	2003	To do specific course	Arrived alone	Student visa; applying for work permit.	Works p t. volunteer
2(B)	2003	Special programme; personal contacts	Came with wife	Special programme; work permit	Academic. politics
5(B)	2000	Personal contacts	Arrived alone	Student visa; resident	Social community work
10(M)	2000	Personal contacts	Arrived alone	Asylum seeker; refugee	Social worker. research
11(M)	2000	Knew Spain	Came with partner	Student visa; resident	Retail, research, politics
12(M)	2001	Because of language	Arrived alone	Asylum seeker; refugee	Odd jobs, NGOs
13(M)	2001	To join exiled friends	Came alone; family followed	Special programme; N/A	Works for international NGO
14(M)	2000-2001	Personal contacts	She arrived first; he followed with children	Tourist; refugees	(F)domestic work p t (M)works in industry
15(M)	2001	Language; personal contacts	Came alone; husband joined later; children later	Tourist; asylum-seeker; applied for regularisation	Domestic work
16(M)	2001	Followed husband	Came with child	Tourist; resident	Factory/domestic work
17(M)	2001	Language; had family	Came alone; family followed	Tourist; asylum-seeker; applied for regularisation	Service industry, artist
18(M)	2001	Language; heard of people going to Spain	Came with husband and children	Asylum-seeker; applied for regularisation	P/t domestic work
19(M)	2002	Family sought asylum in Spain	Joined mother and siblings	Residency on humanitarian grounds	NGO/ human rights work
20(B)	2003	Accompanied husband into exile	Came with husband	Special programme; N/A	Voluntary work, politics
21(B)	2003	Special programme; contacts; language	N/A	Special programme; N/A	Research, politics
22(B)	2002	Special programme; contacts; weather	Arrived alone	Special programme; residence permit	Academic, politics
24(B)	N/A	Joined sister	Arrived alone	N/A	Domestic/community work
26(B)	2003	Language; to do specific course	Arrived alone	Student visa; resident	Works for NGO
27(B)	2005	Had family	Arrived alone	Tourist; illegal	Domestic work
28(B)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Works for NGO, politics
30(B)	2004	Special programme; language; contacts	Couple came together	Special programme; N/A	(M) does not work (F) student
31(B)	2000	Contacts	Came alone; family followed	Tourist; asylum-seeker; refugee	Odd jobs
32(M)	2000	N/A	Arrived alone	N/A; resident	Odd jobs, politics
33(M)	N/A	N/A	Arrived alone	Student visa	Student



35(M)	1997	Special programme	Came with children	Special programme; resident	Research, domestic work, NGOs, politics
36(M)	1996	Knew Spain; contacts	Came with wife and child	N/A	Academic work
37(M)	1999	N/A	N/A	N/A	Works for NGO, politics
38(M)	1998	Language, culture	Came with child	Special programme; resident	Law, politics
39(M)	2003	Language; had family	Arrived alone	Student visa	Student, voluntary work
40(M)	2003	Language; contacts	Arrived alone	Special programme; N/A	Student, domestic work, research
41(M)	1999	Liked Europe; personal contacts	Arrived alone	Tourist; asylum-seeker; refugee	journalist
42(M)	2000	Knew Spain; personal contacts; culture	Arrived alone	Tourist; resident	journalist, community work, politics
43(M)	2005	Knew Spain; family	Arrived alone	N/A	Domestic work
44(M)	2003	Student grant	Arrived alone	Student visa	Student, voluntary work
45(M)	2000	Work reasons; had family	Arrived alone	N/A	Self-employed, community work
47(M)	2000	Professional contacts	N/A	N/A	Community work
48(M)	1987	N/A	N/A	N/A / refugee	Community work, politics
49(M)	1986	N/A	Came with family	N/A	Journalist, academic

**Table 3: Background characteristics of main Colombian respondents in the UK**

Codes	Sex	Age	Social class	Place of Origin	Main activity in Colombia	Reason for leaving
1	F	40s	Middle class	Barranca/Bogotá	N/A	To study, travel
3	F	20s	Upper class	Barranquilla	Academic, politics	To study, relationship
6	F	40s	Working class	Medellín	unskilled work	To help family
7	F	20s	Upper-middle class	Bogotá	Student	To help family, student
8	F	40s	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
9	F	40s	Middle class	Cali	Teacher	To study
10	F	30s	Upper-middle class	Bogotá	Researcher	To study
11	F	20s	Working class	Cali	Student	Threats to his family
12	F	49	Lower-middle class	Medellín	Housewife	To progress financially
13	M	30s	N/A	César/Bucaramanga	Journalist	Threats to colleagues
14	M	30s	Upper-middle class	Bogotá	Student, own business	To study
16	F	37	Lower-middle class	Cali	Student, retail	To study
17	F	30s	Lower-middle class	Pereira	Musician	To study, travel
18	F	50	N/A	Bogotá	Tourism industry	Because of relationship
19	F	30s	N/A	N/A	Politics/community work	Threats to her life
20	M	40s	N/A	Cali	Journalist	To travel
21	F	54	Working class	Cali	Accountancy	To help family
22	M	40s	Working class	Valle	Politics, community work	Threats to his life
23	M	40s	N/A	Quindio	Politics, community work	Threats to his life
24	F	40s	N/A	N/A	Journalist	To change her life
26	F	50s	N/A	Medellín	Politics, community work	Threats to her life
27	(2)F	20s-30s	Lower-middle class	Bogotá	Clerical, retail	To study, relationship
28	F	26	Middle class	N/A	Studying	To join mother
31	M	40s	Lower-middle class	Bogotá	Transport industry	Because of job offer
32	M	40s	N/A	Llanos/Bogotá	Lawyer	Threats to his life
34	(2)F	20s	Upper-middle class	Bucaramanga/Cali	Studying & financial work	To study, relationship
36	F	50s	Lower-middle class	Medellín	N/A	To progress financially
39	M	34	Middle class	Cali	Studying	To study/join mother
40	F	30s	Middle class	Bogotá	Public functionary	To study
41	M	40s	Lower-middle class	Cali	Journalist	Threats to his life
47	F	40s	N/A	Bogotá	Psychologist	To study

**Table 4: Migration details of main Colombian respondents in the UK**

Codes	Year of arrival	Why the UK?	Family status	Immigration status (entered; current)	Main activities
1	1980	Knew UK, had family	Arrived alone	N/A; resident	Politics, community work
3	2004	Knew UK, liked Europe	Arrived alone	Student visa	Student
6	2002	Married to English man	Came with husband	Spouse; resident	Cleaning/care work
7	2000	To study English, father had lived in UK	Arrived alone	Student visa; resident	Student, community work, retail and catering
8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Cleaning work, translator
9	1985	To study English, tour Europe	Arrived alone	N/A, UK passport	Clerical, voluntary work
10	2003	Married to English man	Came with family	Spouse	Community work
11	1994	Came with mother	Came with mother	Asylum-seeker; indefinite leave	Community work, odd jobs
12	1996	Because of job opportunities	Came with family	Tourist; resident	Cleaning work
13	2000	Personal contacts	Arrived alone	Student visa; resident	
14	2005	Personal contacts	Arrived alone	Student visa; work permit	Human resources, own business, foundation
16	1992	Personal contacts	Arrived alone	Au-pair; UK passport	Clerical/voluntary work
17	2001	To study English; US visa denied; personal contacts	Arrived alone	Student visa; spouse	Housewife
18	1987	Because of relationship; knew English	Came alone; boyfriend followed	Au-pair; UK passport	Community work
19	2000	Was offered asylum	Came with family	Asylum-seeker; refugee	Community work
20	1994	Followed relatives	Arrived alone	N/A; resident	Self-employed, community work
21	1974	Because of work opportunities	Arrived alone	N/A; resident	Therapist, community work
22	1993	Was offered asylum	Came with family	Asylum-seeker; refugee	Community work
23	1992	Personal contacts	Came with mother	Asylum-seeker; refugee	Community work
24	1997	Professional contacts	Arrived alone	N/A	Journalist, community work
26	1988	Personal contacts	Arrived alone	Refugee	Community work
27	2002/2004	To study English, English boyfriend	Arrived alone	Student visa; resident; Spouse	N/A, housewife
28	N/A	To join mother	Arrived with sister	N/A	Community work
31	2000	Was offered job	Came alone; family followed	Work permit; resident	Politics, self-employed
32	2001	Knew UK; personal contacts	Came with wife and children	Resident	Works for international organisation
34	2005/2006	To join boyfriend / sister studied in UK	Arrived alone	Student visa	Voluntary work, studying
36	1973	Could not go to the US	Came with family	N/A	Retired, community work

39	1988	To join mother, liked UK	Arrived alone	N/A; resident	Works in finances. community work
40	2002	To study English, preferred Europe to US	Arrived alone	Student visa; resident	Works for international organisation
41	1999	Professional contacts	Came with family	Asylum-seeker; refugee	Cleaning work, self-employed

### APPENDIX 3: List of Organisations and Groups

List of organisations and groups contacted in Spain and the UK:

#### SPAIN

(Madrid)

Aculco (*Asociación Socio-Cultural y de Cooperación al Desarrollo por Colombia e Iberoamérica* - Socio-Cultural and Cooperation Development Association for Colombia and Latin America).

Aesco (*America, España, Solidaridad y Cooperación* - America, Spain, Solidarity and Cooperation).

Colombian embassy.

Comadheco (*Comité Madrileño de Derechos Humanos por Colombia* – Madrid Committee for Human Rights in Colombia).

*Conexión Colombia* (Colombian Connection).

PDA (*Polo Democrático Alternativo* – Alternative Democratic Party).

MPCEX (*Movimiento Político por los Colombianos en el Exterior* - Political Movement for Colombians Abroad).

CEAR (*Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado* - Spanish Commission to Help Refugees).

CIP (*Centro de Investigación para la Paz* - Peace Research Centre).

(Barcelona)

*Colectivo Maloka* (Maloka Collective).

Ecp (*escola de cultura de pau* - School for a Culture of Peace).

*Imago-Casa Amarilla* (Imago-Yellow House).

PDA (*Polo Democrático Alternativo* – Alternative Democratic Party).

*Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres* (Women's Peace Route).

*Sabores del Mundo* (Flavours from Around the World).

*Taula Catalana per la Pau i els Drets Humans a Colòmbia* (Catalonian Association for Peace and Human Rights in Colombia).

#### UK

Aculco-Latin Front.

Calthorpe Project.

Children of the Andes.

*Colombia es Pasión* (Colombia is Passion).

*Colombia Nos Une* (Colombia Unites Us).

Colombian consulate.

Colombian Society (LSE).

Compromiso Latinoamericano (Latin American Compromise).

*En Contacto* (In Touch).

Express News.

IOM (International Organization for Migration).

IRMO (Indo-American Refugee Migrant Organisation).

Justice for Colombia.

Latin Outlook.

LAWRS (Latin American Women's Rights Service).

MIRA (*Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta* - Independent Movement of Absolute Renovation).

*Noticias Latinoamérica* (Latin American News).

*Nueva Generación* (New Generation).

Praxis.

The Latin American Workers' Association.

*Vamos Juntos* (Let's Go Together).

'[www.comunalatina.com](http://www.comunalatina.com)' (The Latin American People Magazine).

*Yo Creo en Colombia* (I Believe in Colombia).

## APPENDIX 4: Levels of Transnational Political Involvement of Interviewees

**Table 1: Transnational political involvement of Colombian respondents in Spain**

Codes	Most heavily involved	Some involvement	Least (or no involvement)
1(B)	Member of peace/human rights organisation		
2(B)	Actively involved in party politics		
5(B)			Not involved
10(M)	Attends meetings, gives talks about Colombia, links with Spanish parties		
11(M)	Attends political meetings, participates in informal refugee group		
12(M)		Participates in NGOs/human rights work (less actively now); votes in elections	
13(M)	Member of group working on human rights		
14(M)			Not involved
15(M)			Not involved
16(M)			Not involved
17(M)		Works on human rights at individual level	
18(M)			Not involved
19(M)	Member of refugee/human rights organisation		
20(B)	Actively involved in party politics		
21(B)	Actively involved in party politics		
22(B)	PDA supporter; human rights work		
24(B)		Votes in elections	
26(B)	Member of peace/youth project		
27(B)			Not involved
28(B)	Member of human rights/peace organisation; attends meetings		
30(B)		Attends some political meetings	
31(B)		Attends some political meetings	
32(M)	Attends meetings; actively involved in party politics (in Colombia and Spain)		
33(M)		Organises and participates in talks on Colombia	
35(M)	Actively involved in party politics/peace work		
36(M)		Academic work related to political situation	
37(M)	Actively involved in party politics/member of transnational migrant organisation		
38(M)	Actively involved in party politics/peace work		

39(M)	Actively involved in party politics/ transnational initiative	
40(M)		Not involved
41(M)		Votes in elections (Colombia and Spain)
42(M)	Actively involved in party politics; votes	
43(M)		Attends some political meetings
44(M)		Actively involved in transnational initiative; attends some meetings
45(M)	Actively involved in transnational initiative; attends political meetings	
47(M)		Member of transnational migrant organisation
48(M)	Member of transnational migrant organisation; actively participates in Spanish party politics; human rights work	
49(M)	Actively involved in party politics	

Note: Unless specified otherwise, the political work referred to is in relation to Colombia (when it involves Spain it is indicated)



**Table 2: Transnational political involvement of Colombian respondents in the UK**

Codes	Most heavily involved	Some involvement	Least (or no involvement)
1	Actively involved in political movement/UK politics; votes in elections		
3	Actively involved in party politics; votes		
6		Attends some political/human rights meetings	
7		Attends some political meetings	
8			Not involved
9		Votes in elections	
10		Votes in elections; attends meetings	
11	Member of youth group		
12		Votes in elections	
13		Involved in transnational media; votes	
14	Actively involved in transnational initiative; votes in elections		
16		Votes in elections (Colombia and UK)	
17			Not involved
18			Not involved
19	Actively involved in refugee/human rights work		
20		Interacts with Colombian government	
21		Votes in elections	
22		Some involvement in refugee/human rights work	
23	Actively involved in human rights group		
24	N/A	N/A	N/A
26		Some involvement in human rights/peace work; member of migrant organisation	
27			Not involved
28			Not involved
31	Actively involved in party politics; votes		
32	Actively involved in party politics/human rights work		
34		Vote in elections	
36	N/A	N/A	N/A
39		Votes in elections; transnational initiative	
40			Not involved
41		Involved in transnational media	
47	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: Unless specified otherwise, the political work referred to is in relation to Colombia (when it involves the UK it is indicated)

