INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION,

TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS AND CONFLICT

The Gendered Experiences of
Colombian Migrants in Europe

Anastasia Bermudez
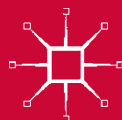
Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship

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Anastasia Bermudez

International Migration, Transnational Politics and Conflict

The Gendered Experiences of Colombian Migrants in Europe

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This book is dedicated to my parents, Carmen and Alfredo.
Todo lo que soy y he hecho se lo debo a ellos.

In other ages, exiles had similar cross-cultural and transnational visions, suffered the same frustrations and miseries, performed the same elucidating, and critical tasks… But the difference between earlier exiles and those of our time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age – with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rules – is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration.

(Said, 2012, p.174)

This single vision began to break down with new forms of global economic unequal interdependency beginning in the 1970s but with increasing intensity by the 1990s. As part and parcel of the expansions of neo-liberal capitalism and its new interweaving of people, places, economic processes and discourses about human rights and freedom, a new wave of transnational/diasporic theorizing emerged. However, today, nation-state building projects are resurgent and are constraining transborder imaginaries. The contemporary world context is one in which the political leaderships of neoliberalizing states search for new legitimacy as they dramatically slash their state's commitments to social welfare. In place of social services they offer nationalism.

(Glick Schiller and Meinhof, 2011, p.27)

La misma Oculta, aunque parezca eternal, ha estado asediada siempre por mil peligros; cuando no son las guerras civiles o las crisis, entonces son la delincuencia o la guerrilla; después son los mineros, los narcos de la amapola o los urbanizadores que ofrecen millonadas para hacer fincas de recreo.

(Faciolince, 2015, p.141)

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Acknowledgements

This book is the result of my research on different aspects of Colombian migration to Europe carried out over the last 20 years. My interest on this subject grew out of informal encounters with Colombian and other Latin American migrants in London in the 1990s, and it is to them and many others I met later in Spain and Belgium that I owe my initial gratitude. My research and this book would not have been possible without the generosity and the desire to tell their stories of the Colombian migrants I have interviewed, as well as their trust in me. I hope, if they ever get to read the results that they will be satisfied about them reflecting at least a tiny bit of their lives, difficulties and hopes. The opinions and expertise of key experts contacted throughout the years have also proved very valuable, so my thanks go to them as well. In particular, as part of my research I have had ready access to many groups and organisations that allowed me to investigate their actions, interview their members and participate in their events. Some I revisited throughout the years and were extremely generous and I would like to mention specifically (AESCO, Aculco, Maloka, PDA, Carila, LAWRS, Coras, FVI).

Equally, the research on which this book is based has benefited from the institutional and financial support of various research centres and funding bodies. I would like to formally acknowledge Queen Mary, University of London (especially the School of Geography), and the Economic and

Australia; and some very special friends whom I have not mentioned yet: Bettina Quellhorst and family, Esther and Maca, Nubia and family, and Mercedes. I hope I have not forgotten any of the most important friends, colleagues and other people who have helped.

Anastasia Bermudez

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List of Abbreviations

ACULCO	Asociación Sociocultural y de Cooperación al Desarrollo por Colombia e Iberoamérica (Socio-Cultural and Cooperation Development Association for Colombia and Latin America)
AESCO	América, España, Solidaridad y Cooperación (America, Spain, Solidarity and Cooperation)
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia)
CARILA	Latin American Welfare Group
CC	Conexión Colombia (Colombian Connection)
CEAR	Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid)
CEDEM	Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies
CIP	Centro de Investigación para la Paz (Peace Research Centre)
CNMH	Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (National Centre for Historical Memory)
CNU	Colombia Nos Une (Colombia Unites Us)
COMADHECO	Comité Madrileño de Derechos Humanos por Colombia (Madrid Committee for Human Rights in Colombia)
CORAS	Colombian Refugee Association

CP	Colombia es Pasión (Colombia is Passion)
CSC	Colombian Solidarity Campaign
ECP	Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)
ESPAS	European Strategy and Policy Analysis System
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FIV	Foro Internacional de Víctimas (International Victims Forum)
FOCSA	Friends of Colombia for Social Aid
GMH	Grupo Memoria Histórica
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IESA	Instituto de Estudios Sociales Avanzados
INCORE	International Conflict Research Institute
INE	Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Statistics Institute)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRMO	Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation
JFC	Justice for Colombia
JISLAC	Joint Initiative for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean
LAWRS	Latin American Women's Rights Service
LFS	Labour Force Survey
M-19	Movimiento 19 de abril (19th of April Movement)
MIPEX	Migrant Integration Policy Index
MIRA	Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta (Independent Movement for Absolute Renovation)
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
OPAM	Observatorio Permanente Andaluz de las Migraciones

PDA	Polo Democrático Alternativo (Alternative Democratic Group)
POS	Political Opportunity Structures
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States
YCC	Yo Creo en Colombia (I Believe in Colombia)

1

Introduction

International migration has become a main feature of our societies. Its causes and consequences are heterogeneous and constantly evolving. Migrant lives and experiences represent an amazing variety, depending on countries of origin and destination, personal circumstances and year and duration of migration. This book does not aim to capture the entirety of such a complex phenomenon but rather focuses on three aspects that have attracted increased academic, policy and public attention. One is how international migration impacts on political participation and the emergence of transnational political fields. The second is the impact that armed conflicts have on migration flows and how diasporas relate to conflict and peace efforts in homelands. And the third one has to do with the role that gender plays in migration, conflict and peace.

These three strands of research come together neatly in the case study of Colombia. For decades, the country has been immersed in an armed conflict involving left-wing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary groups and state forces. The illegal drugs trade and socioeconomic problems have fuelled the conflict further, creating multiple and interconnected types of violence affecting all sectors of society in different ways. One of

the main consequences has been the displacement, 'forced' and 'voluntary', of millions of Colombians, both internally and abroad (to neighbouring countries, North America, Europe and beyond). This context has not affected equally men and women or Colombians from different social classes and ethnic groups. Moreover, the displaced population has become a point of discussion in the recent peace talks, at the same time that Colombians abroad are seeking to exercise their agency in the process. This has not been analysed in depth in the academic literature or attracted sufficient political attention. Thus the current publication represents a timely and significant contribution to the study of migration, conflict and gender.

Finally, this book is the result of over twenty years of research on Colombian and wider Latin American migration to Europe, a flow that has not been amply studied. It is also the product of my interest in this country and region, gender (in)equality, migration and armed conflicts and efforts for peace. But above all, it is my encounters with Colombians in the United Kingdom (UK), Spain and Belgium and their willingness to share their stories with me that have made this project possible. In the next sections, I explore in more detail the aims and contributions of the book and introduce the rest of the chapters.

International Migration and Migrant Transnational Politics

According to the United Nations (UN), in 2013 there were 244 million international migrants worldwide, a large majority of them coming from the Global South. Europe and Asia are identified as the main host regions, although flows are very heterogeneous both in terms of origin and destination. Moreover, an estimated 48 % of all migrants are women (UN 2016). Since international migration has been increasing rapidly in the twenty-first century, it is no surprise that interest in this subject has grown both at the academic and the political and social levels. Studies of migration have proliferated and diversified with emphasis varying from the micro to the macro, focusing on different regions or countries and undertaken from the perspective of both sending and receiving societies.

Despite this, the general image we tend to have of migrants is one of poor people moving in search of better socioeconomic opportunities or escaping conflict; at the other end of the spectrum is high-skilled migration. Often migrants are seen as the product of specific contexts and as passive recipients of policies rather than as active agents not only economically, but also socially, culturally and politically. This portrayal has been further exacerbated in recent years as a result of the global financial crisis and its impact on some countries as well as the so-called refugee crisis. However, new theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of migration have helped highlight the many ways in which migrants contribute and participate in their host societies as well as in their countries of origin and beyond. One of these approaches is transnationalism.

Following on from the seminal work by Glick Schiller and others in the 1990s and beyond, the transnational migration paradigm has helped uncover how migrants maintain a wide array of links with their home (and other) countries, at the same time that they integrate or become incorporated (or not) in their host societies. This means that although nation-states remain important entities, '[m]ore and more aspects of social life take place across borders' (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007, p. 130). As a result, many studies have drawn attention to the way migrants participate in transnational fields or spaces encompassing economic, social, cultural, religious, emotional and political activities. A key example of this is the sending of economic remittances by migrants to their families back in the home country. Equally, with the easing of communications and transportation, migrants are better able to maintain regular contact with relatives and friends left behind through calls, emails and other technology as well as frequent travelling. Technological changes have also favoured the following of events in the home country, including in the cultural, religious and political spheres. Politically, migrants are now able in many cases to participate to varying degrees in the life of their home and host societies.

Nevertheless, the political capacities and agency of migrants, whether locally or transnationally, has received less attention than other aspects of migrants' lives. This is due to several factors. In the host countries, migrants have often been seen as mainly workers rather than as full social and political actors. The political capital they bring with them, based on

their past experiences and the political culture in their home countries, has been ignored or discarded as less valuable, especially in the case of migrants from the South moving to the Global North. In addition, in some cases they are excluded from the formal political sphere. It is only recently that countries of origin and destination began to move towards the full political inclusion of migrants. The focus on formal or conventional politics (elections, parties) has also served to obscure the many other ways in which migrants participate, for example through trade unions, migrant organisations and other civic initiatives at the local, national and transnational levels. It is precisely to the transnational political participation of international migrants that this book is largely devoted.

One of the main aims of the present study is to demonstrate that migrants are not apolitical, as many studies and politicians tend to portray them. They have an important political capital that they carry with them and transform through the migration experience. Such capital is used (or not) in myriad ways in combination with the structures that allow or restrict their political involvement in the home and host societies to produce diverse and evolving ways of thinking about and participating politically. One way they do this is through their engagement in conflict and peace building in their countries of origin.

Diasporas in Conflict and Peace

Another way to look at international migration is through the concept of diasporas. Although in the classical tradition this term is associated with the forcible dispersal of large national, religious and ethnic groups, such as the Jews, the Armenians or the Palestinians, recently it has been expanded and used in a greater variety of contexts. For Evans Braziel and Mannur (2003, p.1), diasporas can 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'. This broader use of the concept has generated some criticism, but proven very useful to encompass the growth and complexity of current international migration flows. Thus, scholars today speak of different types of diasporas (see Chap. 2).

Despite this variety, there are some common elements shared by most, if not all, diasporas. One is their association with the idea of forced migration or exile caused by conflict. Contemporary wars have become increasingly complex, with a shift towards internal conflicts or intra-state wars and with civilians accounting for a disproportionate share of those affected, both directly as victims and indirectly.[1] One of the consequences of these new wars as well as conflict and violence worldwide is the forced migration of people internally and internationally. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2015), there are almost 58 million 'people of concern' globally, with Colombia being one of the main source countries due to its large internally displaced population. Women account for around half of this population. Some of the new diasporas that have emerged in the modern period are the result of these refugee movements (Van Hear 2009). In addition, these social formations often engage in transnational politics, both in relation to the home country and also between different diaspora destinations (and internationally).

Thus, another key element often present in diasporas is the link maintained with the society of origin, whether this is based in the home country or dispersed throughout the world. Such links can involve personal, social, economic, political, religious, cultural and other activities, making diasporas, almost by definition, active global players. This means that they are not just the passive victims of conflict or migration but also actors in their own right, including politically. Moreover, as Shuval (2000, p. 46) points out, in recent years there has been 'a strong trend towards [the] politicization' of diaspora links.

The academic literature has long dealt with the issue of diaspora politics. However, recently there has been renewed interest on the impact that diasporas can have on general development in their home countries, as well as on politics more specifically. This is connected both to concerns about security, loyalty and social cohesion in host societies, as well as the emergence of concepts such as 'codevelopment'. It is widely acknowledged

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[1] The webpage of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) offers detailed information on the nature of modern wars and armed conflicts: http://www.sipri.org/, data accessed 17 March 2015.

that diasporas can play an important political role vis-à-vis their home country as well as internationally, whether by lobbying, denouncing, voting, and so on. Examples of this are the cases of the Jewish and Cuban diasporas in the United States (USA). This politicisation extends also to the ways that diasporas participate in the creation, continuation or resolution of conflicts, as well as in post-conflict situations.

As conflicts throughout the world have become more complex, it has come to be increasingly recognised that diasporas and transnational migrant communities can play an important role in them. There is a long history of migrant economic and political involvement in civil wars and nation-building, both directly and indirectly. This involvement can include support for one group or faction, the sending of money, arms and other supplies, fighting in the conflict, providing a safe haven and lobbying in the host society or at the international level. Modern examples of this are the way émigrés from the former Yugoslavia helped fuel nationalism and the war in the home country, the material and symbolic contributions of the Eritrean diaspora towards independence from Ethiopia or more recently the participation of Muslims from across the world in the different conflicts in the Arab world (Hepner 2009; Hockenos 2003).

The participation of diasporas in conflict transformation has received increased attention as well. This is connected with the wider theme of diaspora contributions to development, but also with general interest on civil society engagement in conflict resolution. Although the concept of civil society remains a nebulous one, sometimes involving only voluntary organisations such as NGOs and others, including powerful actors such as the media and businesses, there is widespread agreement on the idea that a healthy, active civil society is key for democracy. Researchers have drawn attention to the existence of transnational, diasporic or global civil society (Kaldor 2003; McIlwaine 2007). In some cases, these formations have vied for active participation in conflict resolution and social transformations in the home countries.

Summarising, another main aim of my research is to broaden the meaning of transnational politics beyond the most obvious forms of participation to look at the way migrants relate to and become involved in conflict and peace in the home country. In this respect, the literature on diasporas proves very useful, since it has long been accepted that

these remain politically connected to their societies of origin, including at times of conflict and peacebuilding. This ties up with the idea of civil society engagement in such contexts and its transnational dimensions. Moreover, as considered next, women and gender have come to occupy a central place in discussions of these issues.

Introducing a Gendered Lens

Over the last few decades, there has been a revolution in the social sciences in terms of the centrality of women and gender analyses, mirroring what has happened in the world at large. This applies to almost all fields and subjects of study, albeit with differences in degrees and evolution. An example of this is the changes that have occurred in migration studies and policy. If early thinking about migration tended to be androcentric, based on the idea of a male migrant either on his own or with female dependents, the 1980s saw the emergence of a focus on gender. This was related to a growing awareness that women form a significant part of population movements, and of the differences in the ways men and women participate in and are affected by migration. In addition, gender roles and relations are being transformed by migration.

Early studies focused on making women visible in their different roles, as individual migrants, part of family migration or when they are left behind. This coincided with the so-called feminisation of international migration flows. However, later research went beyond this narrow focus to look more broadly at 'how gender as a social system contextualises migration processes for all immigrants' (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999, p.566). Within this, debates have centred to a large extent on whether migration leads to greater oppression or emancipation for women. However, to encompass the heterogeneity of women's (and men's) migrant experiences, more recently the emphasis has been on the relationship between gender and other interrelated factors, such as class, race and ethnicity. This is what the intersectional approach to gender and migration aims to do (Anthias 2012).

The transnational approach to migration was also gender blind to start with, but in recent years studies adopting a gender or intersectional

perspective have emerged. Similar to what has happened in migration studies more generally, research on gender and transnational migration has sought to investigate 'the degree to which participation in transnational activities and in transnational social fields in general is gendered' (Mahler 1998, p.83). Initially, work looked at the transnational activities of labour migrants, highlighting how men are more active at the formal or institutional level, including politically, while women are associated with the sending of remittances and the keeping of family ties. However, studies have also emerged on the transnational experiences of other groups of migrants, such as the highly skilled or refugees, offering more mixed views.

The attention given to the role played by gender in migrant transnational politics has been less, partly because the theme of gender and politics is also underdeveloped. Traditionally, women and politics have been seen as mutually exclusive (Randall 1987). However, interest on gender and politics has evolved in the last few decades, especially as women's participation in formal and informal politics has become more visible. This has helped highlight the links between gender and migrant political participation, whether locally based or from a transnational perspective. Some research points out that while male migrants become more active in the politics of the home country, women are more focused on social relations in the host society. Other studies though find that women are also actively involved in transnational and diasporic politics. Nevertheless, in the transnational field (as in other contexts), gender justice and women's needs, when considered at all, are often subordinated to other struggles (Mugge 2013).

However, if there is a political arena where women and gender issues have gained a strong foothold recently is in relation to conflict and peace. This is the product mainly of two phenomena, the impetus of feminist scholarship and activism, as well as the development of a global human rights movement that has brought attention to the effects of conflict on women. The impact of feminism in academia has been notable, helping bring forward the changes already mentioned in the fields of migration and politics. This has also affected studies and policy on conflict and peace. Today, there is growing recognition that men and women participate in and are affected by conflict and peace in different manners, and that this can lead to modifications in gender roles and relations. Moreover, given

the long association between women and peace, it is no surprise that the role of women in conflict resolution and reconstruction is receiving increased attention. Despite this, there has been little consideration of women and gender in studies of conflict and peace from the perspective of transnational migrant communities or diasporas. This subject has been hardly considered either from an intersectional point of view.

As a result, a third main aim of this volume is to focus attention on the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which transnational migration, politics and conflict impact on women and men, as well as the active ways in which men and women take part in these contexts. This is an area of research that so far has not received enough attention and one that needs to be analysed in greater detail given the continuation of armed conflicts and international migration flows. In order to achieve this, the book focuses on a particular case study that as explained next provides an ideal context to explore such questions.

The Colombian Case

Colombia has a long history of population movements, both internal and external. However, migration abroad in large numbers is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although there is no precise data on the number of Colombians currently residing outside the country, Mejía Ochoa (2012) in his recent review of official figures from the home and host countries as well as international data, comes up with an estimate of 2.7–4.1 million (depending on whether the second and third generations are included or not).According to him, women make up a majority of this diaspora. Initially, flows were directed mainly to Venezuela and the USA, as well as to other neighbouring countries such as Ecuador. However, in recent decades destinations have diversified, with new host countries emerging as a result of the current global financial crisis.

Traditionally, Europe was only a migrant destination for the Colombian economic and political elites, as well as intellectuals and political exiles. It is only from the 1990s and especially with the arrival of the new century that large labour migration flows to Europe took place, with Spain being the main destination. As explored later, there are several reasons for this,

including increased difficulties to access other, traditional host countries such as the USA. Within Europe, as visas and other barriers were imposed in different countries, the Colombian migrant communities spread out, maintaining close links with each other. This will prove important for the development and maintenance of transnational connections, including in the political sphere. Two other European destinations that form part of this study are the UK and Belgium. Together with Spain, these three host countries offer different contexts in terms of the size and distribution of the Colombian population, the history and characteristics of migrant flows, and the structural opportunities and barriers encountered.

Colombian migration abroad, including flows to Europe, is generally described as mostly economic, with migrants leaving the home country to escape poverty and unemployment or in search of better socioeconomic opportunities. However, the Colombian conflict and general levels of violence and insecurity are also main push factor. Not only is it important to take into account the official figures of Colombian refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, but also the fact that many other migrants that leave the country directly or indirectly affected by the conflict do not necessarily claim or gain refugee status. Colombians also migrate abroad for other reasons, such as to study, as high-skill migrants or to join their families. In addition, studies of Colombians in some destinations in the Global North point out that in general this is a relatively young population in the productive age bracket and with relatively high levels of formal education (Ramírez and Mendoza 2013).

It is undeniable that the armed conflict that has been raging Colombia for over five decades has had a large influence on migration flows. The war between the left-wing guerrillas, the State and right-wing paramilitary forces has left thousands of people dead or imprisoned, created a large climate of human rights abuses and impunity and led to the forced displacement of millions of people. Despite several peace processes, most notably in the 1980s and in 1999–2002 that led to the demobilisation of some guerrillas as well as the peace deal reached with paramilitaries in 2005, the conflict has continued. Currently, the Colombian government is involved in new peace talks with the two main remaining guerrilla groups, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the Ejército de Liberación

Nacional (ELN, National Liberation Army), in what is seen by some analysts as the most hopeful effort at ending the conflict so far (GMH 2013).

The climate of violence created by the armed conflict reached a peak in the 1980s and 1990s, coinciding with the emergence of the illegal drugs trade as a powerful violent force. There are many ways in which the drugs trade and the armed conflict have fed each other, producing high levels of violence, corruption, socioeconomic and political destabilisation and the migration of more Colombians. These include the drug wars among the different groups and against the state and other armed forces, the alleged links between the paramilitaries and the guerrillas with the drugs trade, the representation of the drug groups and their interests at different political levels, and the involvement of poor and disadvantaged young people in the trade (Thoumi 2002).

Both the armed conflict and the drugs trade have been linked, directly and indirectly, to migration outflows (Cruz Zúñiga et al. 2008; Mejía Ochoa 2006). Little is known though about the many ways in which Colombians abroad relate to the conflict and efforts for peace. For instance, not all Colombians displaced by the conflict or other violence(s) claim refugee status, therefore they do not appear formally as victims. Equally, through the many interviews conducted with Colombian migrants in Europe, independently of the reasons for their migration, references to the conflict or past instances of violence in the home country are frequent. In addition, as the book aims to demonstrate, there are different ways in which the Colombian diaspora seeks to contribute to peace efforts in the home country.

Thus this book, using the case study of the armed conflict in Colombia and the international migration of Colombians to Europe, seeks to contribute new empirical evidence and theoretical knowledge on the subject of migrant transnational politics from a gendered perspective. The analysis is based on data collected as part of different research projects during 1994 and 2015 focused on different aspects of the Colombian migrant communities established in Spain, the UK and Belgium. The book is also the product of my interest in specific aspects of migration, such as the ways transnational migrants and diasporas contribute to the politics of the home and host countries, and how gender and other factors intersect to shape the experiences of women and men migrants.

The Structure of the Book

The rest of the book is structured in the following manner. After this introduction, the first part of the volume deals with the conceptual and contextual framework. Chapter 2 explores current theoretical and empirical research on migrant transnational political participation, the role of diasporas in armed conflict and peace and the subject of gender and migration. This is complemented by contextual information on the Colombian case offered in Chap. 3, which looks also at the migration of Colombians to the three European countries studied. Some methodological details of the research carried out are also provided in this chapter.

Parts II and III of the book offer an analysis of the data accumulated organised around several key issues. In Part II, dedicated to the broad topics of migration, integration and transnationalism, Chap. 4 focuses on the migration trajectories and transnational connections of the Colombian migrant communities studied. This is followed by Chap. 5, which looks in more detail at the specific experiences of Colombian refugees and asylum seekers in Europe, an important part of the diaspora given its involvement in diasporic politics. This part finishes with Chap. 6, which offers an exploration of the settling and integration stories of the Colombian diaspora in the three countries researched up until the recent economic crisis.

In Part III, the emphasis is on the transnational political practices of Colombian migrants and especially on those related to the armed conflict and efforts for peace in the home country. First, Chap. 7 analyses the role of the state and other actors 'from above' in the political transnational field. Secondly, in Chap. 8, the analysis shifts towards transnational politics 'from below' and more particularly the participation of Colombian migrants in home-country elections and party politics. This part ends with Chap. 9, in which the political role of migrant organisations and migrant participation in informal politics is analysed, especially in terms of diasporic politics. This includes the work done by Colombians abroad on human rights issues, protesting against the conflict in Colombia, or seeking to have a voice in the different peace processes.

The book finishes with Chap. 10, presenting the general conclusions of the study. These will seek to highlight the main conceptual and empirical

contributions of the research, as well as other implications and future avenues for research. In addition, an appendix is included at the end, before the references, with additional information on the research conducted. This book brings together several research projects I have conducted and the results of studies in which I have participated in relation to the migration of Colombians (and Latin Americans) to Europe. The research involved both qualitative and quantitative methods, resulting in total in some 200 interviews and 800 questionnaires to Colombian migrants as well as other information obtained from key informants. Participant observation and content analysis of websites and documentary material were also used as research methods during the fieldwork. Some aspects of this research have already been published or disseminated in the form of articles and book chapters or during conferences and other academic events; when using some of this material, the relevant reference is included. Nevertheless, the book is my first attempt to connect the different aspects of the research, around the three main issues mentioned (international migration, conflict and gender), integrating the way the migrant communities studied have evolved over the last 20 years.

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Part I

Conceptual and Contextual Framework

2

Transnational Migration, Politics and Conflict

The research on which this book is based draws from three broad fields of study. One is transnational migration, which deals with migrants' cross-border practices. The transnational approach to the study of international migration emerged in the 1990s largely in the context of Latin American and Caribbean labour migration to the USA, but has later been applied to other flows and geographical areas. Linked to this is the work done on diasporas, although both bodies of literature are not always analysed together. The second field of study covers research on migrant political participation, both in the host society and transnationally or diasporically. The myriad ways in which migrants become involved politically have not received as much attention as other aspects of the migration experience, either from an integration or transnational perspective. The third body of literature is that dealing with armed conflict and peace in the context of migration. This means considering displacement as a consequence of conflict, but also seeing migrants as transforming agents. Finally, the research conducted uses a gender and intersectional approach to the study of migrant transnational and diasporic politics.

As well as offering new empirical evidence about the many interconnections between international migration, transnational politics and conflict, the book aims to make some conceptual contributions. The theoretical framework adopted includes the use of a broad definition of migrant transnational political engagement that includes both 'formal' and 'informal' politics as well as practices from 'above' and 'below', focusing on the micro (individuals), meso (organisations) and macro (the State) levels. This brings to the fore migrant political agency, highlighting the importance of 'political capital' for understanding the many ways in which they become involved in politics, how and why. In addition, by considering studies of diaspora engagement in armed conflict and peace in home countries, this intersects with the concept of transnational civil society. The book also seeks to further develop the gender analysis of migration, politics and conflict by using an intersectional approach that takes into account other key variables, such as class, type of migration and life cycle.

In order to explain in detail the theoretical and conceptual debates underpinning the current study, as well as the empirical antecedents, the rest of this chapter provides a review and critical discussion of some key themes and concepts in relation to existing debates in the fields identified above. It focuses first on the transnational approach to the study of international migration, as well as work on diasporas. This is followed by a more thorough discussion of how migrants become politically involved at the transnational or diasporic level. In addition, the growing body of research on conflict and peace and the interconnections with international migration flows will be examined. The chapter ends with an analysis of how gender and the intersectional approach can be integrated into these bodies of work in order to provide a more holistic perspective.

Transnational Migration and Diasporas

Transnationalism, understood as 'a set of sustained long-distance, border crossing connections' has become a main characteristic of our societies, affecting not only migrants, but also businesses, communications, criminality, social movements and populations in general (Vertovec 2004, p. 3).

This approach started to be applied to studies of migration in the late 1980s, taking off in the 1990s mainly in the context of Latin American and Caribbean labour migration to the USA. It represented a reaction to assimilationist theories that saw migrants as adapting to their new host environment and losing all connections with their previous lives. In their seminal work, Basch et al. (1994, p. 4) pointed out how the traditional vision of immigrants as 'people who have come to stay, having uprooted themselves from their old society in order to make for themselves a new home and adopt a new country to which they will pledge allegiance', did not reflect what researchers find in the field.

However, the transnational approach represents more than a critique of assimilation, since one of its fundamental premises is a rejection of the methodological nationalism present in the social sciences that sees 'each society as a discrete and bounded entity with its own separate economy, culture, and historical trajectory' (Basch et al. 1992, p. 6). In a migration context, these two ideas combined argue for the need to cease analysing migrants' sending and receiving societies separately to focus instead on the many connections that link them to the 'home' and 'host' (and other) countries (see also Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Mahler 1998; Vertovec 2004, 1999).

The concept of migrant transnationalism appears intimately related to that of diaspora. Kennedy and Roudometof (2002) argue that the use of one perspective or the other has to do mainly with disciplinary or regional preferences; while the transnational approach was developed in the US context within migration studies, politics and economics, work on diasporas has been more common in Europe within cultural, historical and literary studies. Although initially the term diaspora was associated with forced displacement and victimhood, based for instance on the Jewish experience, more recently the concept has expanded and received wider attention (Cohen 1997, 1996; Evans Braziel and Mannur 2003). Shuval (2000) argues that this has to do with a reappraisal of ethnicity within migration studies and discussions around transnationalism and globalisation. As a result, the concept of diaspora now refers widely to groups of 'expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities' (Cohen 1996, p. 514) from the same homeland displaced to one or more countries who keep some sort

of connection with the home country and/or between themselves (Evans Braziel and Mannur 2003; Van Hear 1998). This has been criticised by purists, but recognised as very useful by other scholars since it grasps the complexity of current international migration. As a way to resolve this conflict, authors differentiate between 'classical' and 'new' or 'incipient' diasporas (Van Hear 1998; see also Reis 2004; Van Hear 2014).

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that there are some nuanced differences in meanings. While diasporas are about the movement of people, transnationalism is a wider phenomenon also affecting goods, capital and information (Evans Braziel and Mannur 2003). Van Hear (1998, p. 6) also argues that the term transnational community is more inclusive because it 'embraces diaspora, but also populations that are contiguous rather than scattered and may straddle just one border'.

Summarising, the transnational approach to migration seeks to go beyond the traditional focus on 'migration *from* and migration *to* particular nation states' to look at 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, pp. 21–22). Within this premise, several debates have emerged as research has expanded.

One of the earliest critiques of transnationalism as applied to migration studies was its supposed novelty; critics pointed out that migrants have always remained connected to their homeland through families, property or politics. However, transnational researchers claim that although this might be true, what is new are the prevalence, sustainability and multiplicity of such connections, partly due to transformations in transportation and communications (Glick Schiller 1999; Morawska 1999; Portes 2001; Portes et al. 1999). This does not mean that all migrants are necessarily transnational at all times. In response to this additional critique, studies have sought to classify transnational practices according to whether they are 'narrow' (institutionalised and continuous) or 'broad' (occasional), 'core' (more stable and focused on one area) or 'expanded' (broader but more occasional) (Itzigsohn et al. 1999; Levitt 2001).

A further distinction has been made between transnationalism from 'above' and 'below' (Smith and Guarnizo 1998). While the former refers broadly to those practices emerging from global capital, the media or

political institutions, the latter is about the transnational activities of grassroots groups and individuals. This is linked to debates about whether migrant transnationalism can be conceived of as a liberating force (against globalisation from above) or as a reaction to discrimination and lack of integration in the host society. Discussions of transnationalism versus integration have been prolific, with most experts now agreeing that one does not preclude the other (Guarnizo et al. 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Vertovec 2004).

Equally, as research has developed, attention has shifted from the initial focus on specific flows and connections to cover other types of migration and geographical contexts as well as a multiplicity of approaches. For instance, studies have looked into whether refugees and high-skilled migrants sustain transnational linkages (Al-Ali et al. 2001; Willis and Yeoh 2002). The transnational focus on migration in Europe took a bit longer to emerge, but in the last two decades it has grown significantly as well. With the growth in popularity of this perspective, concerns have also emerged about its indiscriminate and uncritical use. New approaches, such as that of Faist et al. (2013), now distinguish between 'transnationalisation' (the processes involving transnational ties and practices), 'transnational social spaces' (social formations emerging from such processes) and 'transnationality' (the level of connectivity between migrants and non-migrants across borders). Other authors, such as Boccagni (2012a, b), also call for further efforts to conceptualise and operationalise 'the transnational', especially in the context of everyday micro practices.

Migrant Transnational and Diasporic Politics

Migrants and Politics: The European Context and Beyond

Part of the reason why the study of migrant politics has developed less than other themes is because for a long time migrants were not thought of as political actors, especially in the European milieu. Rather, they were seen as temporary guest workers, which implies that they were not going to remain in the host society and that their sole field of activity was the

labour market. In the USA and other societies with a longer term vision, the predominance of assimilationism meant that if migrant politics was considered at all it was mostly from the point of view of the host country (Bloemraad 2006; Gerstre and Mollenkopf 2001; Hochschild and Mollenkopf 2009).

However, with time perceptions about this issue changed. For one, guest workers in Europe became permanent residents, bringing over their families or creating new ones and becoming involved in all aspects of society. Moreover, attempts to make visible different types of political participation (more 'informal'), and not just electoral or party related ('formal' politics), including that taking place across borders, showed that migrants were not outside the political sphere, even if often they remained at the margins of the political system (Martiniello 2005). In addition, in the European context, following the liberalisation of nationality laws and the extension of political rights to foreign citizens, first and subsequent generations of migrants have increased their access to the formal political sphere (ibid.).

The subject of migrant political participation in host societies has received renewed attention owing to debates about integration and the quality of democracy, as well as security. Already, the third report on migration and integration by the European Commission (2007) stressed the importance of active migrant participation in democratic processes and policy formulation. This is linked to wider preoccupations about low levels of political and civic participation. In addition, events such as the disturbances involving disenchanted ethnic youth and the terrorist attacks in several European cities have provoked discussions around issues of national identity and social cohesion (Odmalm 2005; Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008). Similar debates have emerged in the US context (Hochschild and Mollenkopf 2009; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008). In the current climate, this subject has acquired even greater importance. According to the latest ESPAS (2015) analysis, amongst the global challenges Europe faces right now, are 'dealing with inequalities' and 'restoring trust in democracy'; these are intimately related to migration, since one of the most vulnerable groups in our societies are migrants and their descendants. This report also warns that despite heightened barriers, migration pressures will continue to affect the region.

As Morales and Giugni (2011) point out, existing research on this topic has been approached from different perspectives. They argue that in the USA, studies of migrant political engagement have lagged behind and have focused mostly on the historical and political processes that explain incorporation, as well as individual characteristics. In Europe, the main framework of analysis has been the political opportunity structures (POS), focused on contextual and institutional factors such as citizenship rights, policies and institutional discourses. More recently there has been greater emphasis on both sides of the Atlantic on the meso level and the role played by migrant associations and the social capital they generate in political incorporation processes (see also Boccagni and Pilati 2015; Jacobs and Tilli 2004; Moraes et al. 2013).

More innovative ways of looking at migrant political participation have also emerged in the last few years. Some authors have put greater emphasis on the agency of migrants and their organisations even in the face of adverse contexts, thus going beyond the narrow focus of the POS (Moraes et al. 2013; Pero 2008). Equally, amongst the individual factors relevant to understand migrant political participation in the host country, a few studies are beginning to consider the relevance of migrants' previous political experiences. This could be explored in greater depth by expanding the concept of political capital. Finally, it is becoming increasingly difficult to analyse migrant political participation without taking into account the transnational or diasporic dimension.

The Transnational and Diaspora Approach

Within diaspora studies there has been a growing recognition that migrants and ethnic minorities retain political allegiances with their former homelands, partly linked to discussions around security concerns and migrant loyalties (Sheffer 2003, 1986; Shuval 2000). Amongst the topics covered, there have been debates on how links between displaced populations and homelands are challenging traditional concepts such as nation-state, citizenship and borders, and on migrants' increasingly complex political and cultural identities. These are related to the concept of 'long-distance nationalism' as developed by Anderson (1992) and later

expanded to take into account developments in communication (Cohen 1996; Conversi 2012; Evans Braziel and Mannur 2003; Nuhoglu Soysal 2000). Work has also been conducted on the influence of organised diasporas on foreign policy in host countries and on global politics. Some studies have looked at this in the context of Latin American migration to North America (Molyneux 1999; Shain 1994–95).

As research on migration also moved away from traditional theories of assimilation, there has been growing recognition that migrants 'do not delink themselves from their home country; instead, they keep and nourish their linkages to their place of origin' (Itzigsohn et al. 1999, p. 317). Initially, the focus was on social and economic linkages, particularly remittances and their impact on development (Escrivá and Ribas 2004; Guarnizo 2003; Landolt et al. 1999; Maimbo and Ratha 2005; Portes et al. 2002). Some authors later broadened this concept to include 'social remittances' to refer to the ideas, values and social practices that migrants contribute to sending countries (Levitt 1998); Goldring (2004) added 'technical or technological' and 'political' remittances. The latter is about the 'changes in political identities, demands and practices associated with migration' (ibid., p. 805). Also, it was argued that all remittances can have a political impact, since they not only help sustain families but also local and national economies (Goldring 2003). For Goldring (2004), remittances can be 'multi-directional' (not just from migrants to home countries) and 'multi-polar' (involving several destinations).

Somehow related to this, Moser (2011) and others have used the Asset Accumulation Model, originally applied in poverty studies, to analyse the different assets including political ones that migrants bring, accumulate and transform, and transfer back (see also Ginieniewicz 2011). It is in this context that the notion of migrants' political capital is used in this study, going beyond Bourdieu's more restrictive definition, to encompass the different political assets that migrants carry with them including their political identities, perceptions and attitudes, and forms of participation (Bermudez 2011; Boccagni et al. 2016).

With time there has been growing recognition that transnational social fields also encompass political and symbolic links. Such fields are broadly conceptualised as the 'interactions and exchanges that transcend political and geographical boundaries' (Itzigsohn et al. 1999, p. 317). Attention

has focused on migrant transnational political activities and their impact on countries of origin and settlement, from a micro (individual), meso (organisations) and macro (the State) perspective. A lot of this research has looked at Latin American and Caribbean migration to the USA. For instance, the study carried out by Guarnizo et al. (2003) comparing the transnational political activities of Dominican, Colombian and Salvadoran migrants in the USA, concluded that political transnationalism was not as significant or extended as assumed. In particular, Colombian migrants were described as having very little transnational political participation due to the divisions and distrust caused by the social and political situation in the homeland (see also Guarnizo et al. 1999; Guarnizo and Díaz 1999). However, this research relied on a very specific definition of what counts as transnational politics.

Since then, research has expanded to cover many different forms of migrant transnational politics, from the most formal, related to elections and political parties, to other more informal activities such as participating in protests and hometown associations. In another key text, Østergaard-Nielsen (2003, pp. 762–63) distinguishes between five types of migrant transnational politics: homeland politics ('pertaining to the domestic or foreign policy of the homeland'), diaspora politics ('usually about political disputes over sensitive issues such as national sovereignty and security'), immigrant politics ('activities that migrants or refugees undertake to better their situation in the receiving country'), emigrant politics ('work towards the institutionalization of their transnational status as residents abroad') and translocal politics ('initiatives from abroad to better the situation in local communities of origin'). Also, migrant transnational politics can happen through direct participation in the home country or indirectly via the political institutions of the host society (or internationally) (ibid.).

The meso level has received less attention, but some research has debated the importance of migrant associations as political actors and in fomenting transnational involvement and political incorporation in the host society (Landolt et al. 2009; Moraes et al. 2013; Portes et al. 2008). Finally, although transnational studies at first disregarded the role of states in the transnational field due to a misplaced conception that transnationalism meant the death of the nation-state, authors such

as Gamlen (2008) have advocated for greater attention to be devoted to 'emigration states' and their policies (see also De Haas and Vezzoli 2011; Smith 2003; Yeoh and Willis 2004). As part of this, researchers have grown interested in the political rights that nations are increasingly affording emigrants, especially around the issue of the external vote; Latin American states have been very active in this respect (Calderón Chelius 2003; Escobar 2007; IDEA and IFE 2007; Lafleur 2013). This research has led to broader discussions around the 'deterritorialisation' of citizenship or the concept of 'denizenship' (Bauböck 2007; Collyer 2014; Faist 2000a; Vertovec 1999). However, there are many aspects still to be explored in detail, such as the relationship between the quality of democracies and the transnational political participation of migrants or the way political ideas, practices and norms circulate transnationally (Boccagni et al. 2016).

Diasporas, Transnational Migration and Conflict

Recently, there has also been a resurgence of interest in the role that transnational communities and diasporas can play in situations of conflict and peace in homelands. The nature of wars has changed significantly since the end of World War II, including a shift towards mostly internal armed conflicts (Goodhand and Hulme 1999; Kaldor 2012).[1] One of the consequences of this is the massive displacement of populations; a record 38 million people were internally displaced by conflict and violence at the end of 2014, with others fleeing abroad as refugees and migrants.[2] Kaldor (2012) argues that although these conflicts tend to be described as civil wars, they involve transnational connections (see also Jacobson et al. 2000; Kaldor and Luckham 2001). Recognition of the transnational scale has also emerged in studies of urban conflict and violence, as well

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[1] See also the information available in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program: http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/program_overview/about_ucdp/, data accessed 15 May 2016.

[2] See information offered by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC: http://www.internal-displacement.org/) and UNHCR (http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home), data accessed 15 May 2016.

as research and policy on conflict transformation (Moser and McIlwaine 2014).

As wars have become more complex, so the search for negotiated and peaceful outcomes has developed. Peace processes have also happened mostly at the domestic level, albeit in many cases with international participation and transnational ramifications.[3] One area in which it is possible to see this is in the role played by civil society. Notions of civil society have evolved from the locally and nationally bounded, to incorporate new spatial scales such as the global and transnational or diasporic. In relation to this, Vertovec (1999, p. 454) mentions the emergence of 'a transnational framework—a global public space or forum' where politics is undertaken at the transnational level, with the help of modern communications (see also Kaldor 2003, 1999; McIlwaine 2007). However, few studies consider how migrant and diasporic civil society is part of this global forum. Attention has focused mainly on the potential of migrant communities for development; although some work has looked at the role of global or transnational society in contexts of war and peace, few have considered how transnational migrant communities and diasporas contribute to this.

There is a long history of migrant economic and political involvement in civil wars and nation-building conflicts in the home country. Migrants and diasporas can play significant roles in homeland conflicts and peace processes both directly and through the foreign policy of host states and the international community. Awareness of this reached transnational migration studies as work began to consider 'how refugee groups are also developing transnational linkages' (Al-Ali et al. 2001, p. 579; see also Cheran 2006). Research has explored the transnational actions and capabilities of different groups, including refugees in the Global North as well as forced migrants in Africa and other regions, highlighting their diverse experiences as well as positive and negative impacts (see also Halilovich 2012; Koser and Van Hear 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Riaño-Alcalá and Goldring 2014). Some authors, for instance, analyse

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[3] See the websites of Escola de Cultura de Pau (Ecp: http://escolapau.uab.cat/index.php?lang=es), International Conflict Research Institute (Incore: http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/) and SIPRI (http://www.sipri.org/), data accessed 15 May 2016.

how refugee remittances help sustain families back home, but together with other transnational activities can also fuel conflict (Hockenos 2003; Shain 2002; Van Hear 2003).

There has been limited work though on how transnational migrant communities and diasporas can contribute to the resolution of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction, with tentative conclusions. The Eritrean diaspora is often quoted as an example of success, given its active role in the achievement of independence and the development of this country; by contrast, the contribution of Bosnian refugees to peace and reconstruction has been found to be less clear (Al-Ali et al. 2001; Bernal 2006; Koser 2003); Faist (2000b) highlights the tensions present in the transnational work of Kurds in Germany, while a more recent analysis of the Sri Lankan diaspora shows the multiple activities migrants abroad carried out in relation to the conflict in the home country and the positive and negative aspects (Orjuela 2008). A comparative study conducted by Zunzer (2004) looking at the communities from Sri Lanka, Cyprus, Somalia and Afghanistan in Western Europe, highlights the mostly positive role diasporas can play in conflict transformation. This, he argues, is due to the more neutral position gained by being removed from the conflict; the expertise and experience obtained abroad; and their potential for lobbying the international community and offering support to allied actors in the home country. Also important to consider is the human and political capital many of those refugees and migrants abroad bring with them. This is why some authors believe diasporas can act as 'a distinct third level between interstate and domestic peacemaking' (Shain 2002a, p. 115; see also Haider 2014; Shain 2002b).

Migration, Politics and Conflict Through a Gendered Lens

Gender and Transnational Migration

Although initially migration, like many other fields of research, ignored the role played by gender, since at least the 1980s there has been growing

interest on this coinciding with greater awareness of women's participation in all aspects of migration and wider changes in the social sciences (Chant 1992; Morokvasic 1984; Pessar 1999; Phizacklea 1983). Earlier on the emphasis was on making women 'visible', but as research expanded studies begun 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). Still debates have ranged mostly around the question of whether migration leads to greater emancipation for women or increases their vulnerability, with some work emphasising the gains migrant women make and others denouncing their increased oppression. Other research has pointed out that 'migration simultaneously reinforces and challenges patriarchy in its multiple forms' (Pessar 1999, p. 577; see also Menjívar 1999). To explain such contradictions, 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 also Anthias and Lazardis 2000; Herrera 2013; Kofman et al. 2000).

Despite such advances, in 2006 2(p. 27) Mahler and Pessar argued that most research did not consider gender 'as a key constitutive element of migrations', especially in transnational studies. These scholars pointed out that initially in the transnational approach to migration gender was less taken into account than race, ethnicity or nationality. As scholarship advanced, more studies have sought to investigate 'the degree to which participation in transnational activities and in transnational social fields in general is gendered' (Mahler 1998, p. 83; see also Mahler 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2003). However, work has focused on particular aspects of migration. Studies have looked at Latin America and Caribbean labour migration to the USA and labour migration from Asia, while there has been less research on South-to-South flows or high-skilled migration (Kofman 2004; Oso and Ribas-Mateos 2014; Yeoh and Willis 2005). In addition, gender has been considered mostly in reference to women migrants and their participation in the so-called global care chains or through the phenomenon of transnational motherhood and other family practices (Hondagneu Sotelo 2000; Mata-Codesal 2014; Parella 2014).

Similar debates and developments have happened in relation to gender and forced migration and diaspora studies, although the focus has been

placed on different issues. In the case of refugees, studies have considered how men and women are affected differently by forced displacement and the consequences of this for gender relations more broadly, while research on diasporas has also looked at the connections between gender and culture, religion and politics (Indra 1999; Moghissi 2006; Pessar 2001; Yeoh and Willis 1999). More recently too, authors have given greater attention to men and masculinities in transnational migration and diaspora studies (Charsley 2005; Farahani 2012; Hoang and Yeoh 2011; Montes 2013).

Gender and Politics

Gender analyses have been even more absent within work on the politics of diaspora groups and transnational communities. As well as being due to the still marginal role that gender plays within migration research, this is the result of the traditional exclusion of women and gender from the study of politics (Elshtain 1993; Hawkesworth 2005; Phillips 1998; Randall and Waylen 1998). Nevertheless, the greater involvement and visibility of women in social movements and civil society initiatives helped widen traditional definitions of politics to favour 'the inclusion of women and gender as basic analytical categories' (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 and military dictatorships (see also Craske 1999; Fisher 1993). With time, interest and research also developed on gender and more formal politics.

Nevertheless, in their review of scholarship on gender and migration Donato et al. (2006) single out Political Science as one of the disciplines most deficient in this respect. Piper (2006) explains that there has been research on some political aspects of the migration experience from a gendered perspective looking at issues such as political incorporation, but a lot remains to be explored. The focus on gender increased as studies begun to consider migrant participation in informal politics as well, mostly from a qualitative point of view. Thus, for example, early research on Latino politics in the USA brought to the fore the politicisation of Latinas and the different ways in which migrant men and women engage

in politics at the formal and informal levels (García Bedoya 2005; Hardy-Fanta 1993; Jones-Correa 1998; see also McIlwaine and Bermudez 2011 for a European perspective).

Some of the work employing a transnational approach has also taken gender into account. One of the main conclusions of this research suggests a division 'in relation to men being more likely to be involved in formal and transnational political participation, while women participate more in informal politics in the host country' (McIlwaine and Bermudez 2011, p. 1500). This is due to women's greater association with informal or unconventional politics and men with more formal and institutionalised activities, but also to the argument that with migration men lose social position and status while women make some gains (see also Goldring 2001; Itzigshohn and Giourguli-Saucedo 2005; Jones Correa 1998; Mahler 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Willis and Yeoh 2002). Nevertheless, as McIlwaine and Bermudez (2011) argue, when the interrelationships between different forms of political participation and other social factors affecting migrant experiences are considered the picture becomes much more complex. That is why Piper (2006) claims that there is a need for better understandings of men and women's involvement in diasporic and migrant politics.

Gender, Conflict and Peace

One of the areas in which there has hardly been any consistent gender analysis is research on diasporic and transnational migrant political work in relation to conflict and peace. Although there has been increased awareness and interest on the subject of gender, war and peace, in response to changes in modern armed conflicts and feminism, this has not translated widely into scholarly work on diasporas and transnational migration. There has been research into the different ways in which wars affect men and women, as well as gender roles, identities and relations, some of it challenging classical identifications of men as perpetrators and women as victims (Cohn 2012; Goldstein 2001; Moser and Clark 2001; Skjelsbaek and Smith 2001). Elshtain (1995) criticised that studies of armed conflict only consider women as victims, 'Spartan mothers' (women who send

their husbands and/or sons to war eagerly) or the 'Ferocious Few' (female fighters); on the other hand, it is understood that violence 'remains a primarily masculine preserve' (Kelly 2000, p. 46). Others, however, have argued that conflict and refugee situations can also offer opportunities for changes in gender statuses, roles and relations (El-Bushra 2004, 2000; Cockburn 2001; Hague 1997; Turner 1999).

Feminism has played a greater role in peace studies, given traditional associations of women with peace (Goldstein 2001; Roach Pierson 1987; Skjelsbaek and Smith 2001). There is a long history of women and women groups' peace activism as part of civil society in different contexts, although their influence at the formal level tends to be limited (Beckwith 2002; Sharoni 2001). In the last few decades there has been growing interest in involving women officially in peace processes as well as studying their gender implications, with some work seeking to make visible women's specific vulnerabilities in post-conflict settings. Nevertheless, even in those peace contexts in which women have been actively involved, gender considerations and the impact on gender conditions and inequalities are quite limited (see also Barth 2002; Carey 2001; Pankhurst 2008). This has serious implications for the maintenance of peace and the creation of more democratic societies.

Looking more specifically at the contributions of diasporas and migrants to conflict and peacebuilding in countries of origin, Koser and Van Hear (2003) early on argued that gender equality within diasporic populations is an important factor in increasing capabilities to participate in reconstruction (see also Al-Ali et al. 2001). Nevertheless, they did not explain the implications of this in detail. Other studies have looked at the differential impact of exile on men's and women's political commitments. Zabaleta (2003), a Chilean refugee, has reflected on how during her exile 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 Eastmond 1993; Kay 1989; Shayne 2009).

Nevertheless, beyond these very few studies on the impact of exile on refugees' political work, some focusing on the experiences of Latin Americans displaced by dictatorship and violence, hardly any work has analysed more broadly the involvement of diasporas and transnational

migrants on home country conflicts and peace from a gendered perspective (for some exceptions see Al-Ali 2007; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Bermudez 2013; Mojab and Gorman 2007; Mügge 2013).

The Intersectional Approach

As McIlwaine and Bermudez (2011, p. 1500) argue in another context, the complexity and heterogeneity of all these experiences 'can be captured more fully through theorisations of intersectionality that can help us to challenge simplistic narratives of changing gender relations and subsequent political and civic participation'. Although the main concept around which intersectionality is built, that of 'the interlocking of and interactions between different social structures' (Lutz et al. 2011, p. 1), goes a long way, it has been developed mainly within recent debates in gender and feminist studies. Generally, intersectionality takes into account how gender, race or ethnicity and class intersect to produce different inequalities, but emerged initially within discussions of race and class differences between women and within the feminist movement (ibid.; Anthias and Yuval Davies 1992; Crenshaw 1989). With time, other aspects of people's lives and identities have also been taken into account, such as age, life cycle and sexuality.

Within migration studies, intersectionality has also been taken up as a useful approach, looking beyond gender, race and class, to include other variables specifically related to the migration experience such as type of migration, length of residence and so on. One of the key scholars in this respect, Anthias (2012), argues that intersectionality has been central to the theorisation of gender and migration. For her, this approach is not just about varying identities, but more about 'the multiple social structures and processes that intertwine to produce specific social positions and identities' (ibid., p. 106). Nevertheless, although intersectionality has been applied in some studies of transnational migrant activism, this is still a very new area of research and a lot remains to be explored (see also Bastia 2014; Bose 2012; Bürkner 2011; *Environment and Planning A* 2011).

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3

Colombian Migration to Spain, the UK and Belgium

Colombia has a long history of migratory movements. Although initially migration abroad was directed to other countries in the region and the USA, Europe acquired increased importance as destinations diversified. According to UN figures, some 500,000 Colombians resided in Europe by mid-2013, Spain being the principal country of settlement; while a majority of these migrants are women.[1] Despite this, in comparison to US flows, Colombian migration to Europe has received less academic and policy attention. This is even though the historical, political and economic ties between Europe and Colombia are many. Such connections have contributed not only to the development of migration flows between the two regions, but also to the growth of a multiplicity of migrant transnational practices connecting home and host countries. Together with the fact that Colombia has been in the midst of an armed conflict for the last few decades, this makes the study of migrant transnational politics in such a context an interesting case study.

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[1] UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, International Migration, International Migrant Stock: by destination and origin: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesorigin.shtml, data accessed 24 April 2015.

But before presenting the analysis of the data, it is important to take into account the heterogeneity of the sending and receiving contexts. On the one hand, Colombia has been immersed in an internal armed conflict over the last 60 years or more. This has left a legacy of violence, displacement, human rights abuses and other tensions. Such problems were aggravated by the irruption and expansion of the illegal drugs trade. However, the country also has a long history of democratic government and peace efforts. The political scenario has become more complex as it opened up, and new alternatives to the traditional parties emerged. Socioeconomically, Colombia presents relative macroeconomic stability, combined with high levels of inequality. At the same time, Europe as a destination region offers some commonalities and diversity. The three host countries considered—Spain, the UK and Belgium—share similarities and differences regarding the size and history of their Colombian communities, policy contexts, opportunities and obstacles for integration and the impact of the current economic crisis. This allows for a stimulating comparative exercise.

In this chapter, there is first a brief discussion of the Colombian context, focusing on the armed conflict and peace efforts. Some historical information is provided, but the contextualisation centres on the current situation. Second, Colombian migration abroad is explored in general, before bringing to attention the specific migrant communities studied. The last sections offer some background information about diaspora politics, conflict and gender in the Colombian case, and the chapter ends with some basic methodological details of the research that informs the book.

The Colombian Socioeconomic and Political Context

Colombia has a reputation for stable democracy and economic growth. The country has had uninterrupted elected governments since the beginning of the twentieth century, with the exception of the brief military regime of Rojas Pinilla (1953–1957). For most of its history, political

power has been shared by Liberals and Conservatives; during the National Front period (1958–1978) both parties alternated in power closing the political scene to other actors (Bushnell 1993). However, since the return to open democracy, the political scenario has become more complex. In the 2014 general elections, the Liberal and Conservative parties won around 13 per cent of the congressional vote each, with seven other parties earning representation. President Santos, of the *Unidad Nacional* (National Unity), a coalition of mainly Conservative and Liberal factions, was re-elected with 51 per cent of the vote in a second round (but with only 48 per cent turnout).[2]

Colombia was less affected than other Latin American countries by the debt crisis. Following recession in the 1990s, the country has been growing positively, with annual GDP increases of 4 per cent or more over the past five years. Despite this, unemployment, the informal economy, poverty and inequality remain major problems (Joumard and Londoño Pérez 2013). Paradoxically, political and economic stability have coexisted with high levels of violence. The country came into the twentieth century in the midst of the War of the Thousand Days involving a confrontation between Liberals and Conservatives. This was followed by a period of relative peace broken by the eruption of *La Violencia* (The Violence, mid-1940s to mid-1960s), when inter-party warfare and conflicts over land left 80,000–300,000 people dead. Although partisan fighting declined during the National Front, there was a new escalation of political violence from the mid-1970s (Palacios 1995; Sánchez and Peñaranda 2007).

Colombia holds the unenviable record of hosting the longest surviving guerrilla war in Latin America. The FARC and the ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, National Liberation Army), the two guerrillas still active, emerged in the 1960s linked to conflicts over land, left-wing politics and the Cuban revolution. Other groups, such as the M-19 (*Movimiento 19 de abril*, 19th of April Movement), the EPL (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*, Popular Liberation Army) and the *Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame* (Quintin Lame Armed Movement) have now demobilised. As a result of the war between the state, guerrillas and

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[2] Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil: http://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Elecciones-2014,1995-.html, data accessed 24 April 2015.

right-wing paramilitaries grouped under the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC, United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia) it is estimated that at least 220,000 people died in the period 1958–2012 (Bergquist et al. 2001; GMH 2013; Medina Gallego and Tellez Ardilla 1994) (see Fig. 3.1). The development of the illegal drugs trade, with links to all sides in the conflict, made the situation worse, converting Colombia into one of the most violent countries in the world (Geneva Declaration 2011; Thoumi 2002).

Violence has been accompanied by multiple attempts at peace (Medina and Sánchez 2003). The National Front accords ended the wars between Liberals and Conservatives but created other conflicts. During the 1980s and 1990s, reforms were put in place and negotiations led to the demobilisation of several guerrilla groups. Nevertheless, talks with the FARC and ELN failed amidst counter accusations and more deaths (Carrigan 1993; Chernick 1988–89). This period also saw increased civil society mobilisation for peace, both inside and outside Colombia, with women in particular playing a key role (Moser et al. 2006). Nevertheless, demoralised and worried about the spread of violence, in 2002 the country voted for President Uribe and his security policies; he was also responsible for a controversial peace deal signed with the paramilitaries. During the past few years, the surviving guerrillas have faced serious defeats and
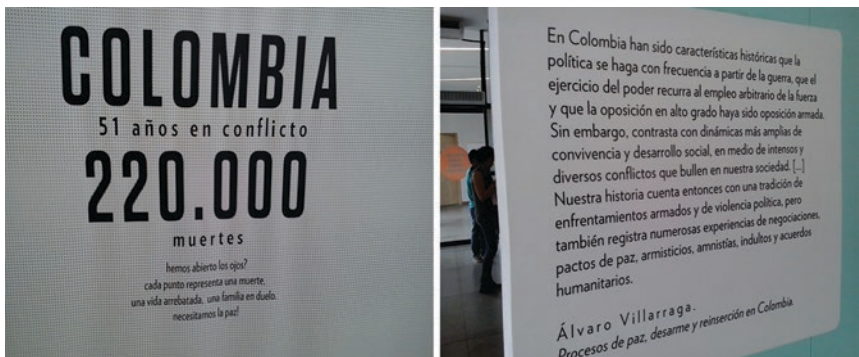
Fig. 3.1 Exhibits from Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellin, Colombia, about the conflict. Source: Photos taken by the author during fieldwork, 2015

increased popular opposition, leading into new negotiations under the Santos presidency (2014–2018). The ongoing conversations in Havana between the FARC and the Colombian government have been heralded as the most hopeful yet; peace talks have been initiated with the ELN as well (Beittel 2015).[3]

Colombian Internal and External Migration: Forced and Voluntary Flows

The armed conflict in Colombia, together with inequality and lack of economic opportunities, has been the principle cause of population displacement. During *La Violencia*, some 2 million people were uprooted (Loughna 2002). These flows joined other movements of people from the countryside to the cities in search of work and better living standards. There is also a long tradition of emigration to other countries in the region, mainly Venezuela (since the 1930s) and the US (since the 1950s) (Pearce 1990). Migrant flows to neighbouring countries increased from the 1960s in response to violence and lack of economic opportunities in the home country as well as demand for workers in the host societies. From the 1990s, there is a new upsurge in internal forced displacement and refugee flows fleeing across borders (see also Ramírez et al. 2010).

By 2014, the UNHCR accounted for over 6 million internally displaced Colombians, the consequence of the armed conflict and the violence caused by the drugs trade and land dispossession (Segura Escobar 2000; Shultz et al. 2014). Officially there are over 400,000 Colombian refugees and asylum seekers throughout the world, although this figure is probably an underestimate (UNHCR 2015). Many refugees end up in neighbouring countries living precarious and vulnerable lives, while others seek asylum in other countries in the region and in the Global North (Table 3.1). However, little is known about these flows (Bermudez 2013; Cruz Zúñiga et al. 2008; Gottwald 2003).

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[3] For up-to-date information on the current peace talks see http://www.eltiempo.com/noticias/dialogos-de-paz (provided by the newspaper *El Tiempo*); Virginia M. Bouvier's (Senior Adviser for Peace Processes, US Institute of Peace) blog 'Colombia Calls': https://vbouvier.wordpress.com/, data accessed 16 May 2016.

Table 3.1 Total number of 'persons of concern to UNHCR' originating from Colombia by main destinations, 2014

In Latin America		Elsewhere	
1. Colombia	6,044,163	1. Canada	16,702
2. Venezuela	173,770	2. US	12,296
3. Ecuador	121,322	3. France	555
4. Costa Rica	16,831	4. Italy	501
5. Panama	16,346	5. Spain	391
6. Chile	1,465	6. Switzerland	307
7. Brazil	1,371	7. Netherlands	275
8. Peru	706	8. Australia	206
9. Argentina	692	9. UK	122
10. Mexico	334	10. Germany	117

Source: UNHCR, Persons of Concern, http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/persons_of_concern, data accessed 24 November 2015

In recent years, many more Colombians have moved abroad motivated by economic and other reasons. Some have migrated to traditional destinations such as the US, where by mid-2013 there was an estimated 721,533 Colombians residents. This population includes not only professionals, but also unskilled and skilled workers, peasants, traders and business entrepreneurs; preferentially, within the US Colombians have settled in New York and Florida. The Colombian population in Venezuela, on the other hand, totals 819,024, thus making it the largest destination. Although labour migration to this country has declined with time, flows caused by the violence continue (Mejía Ochoa 2012; Ramírez and Mendoza 2013).[4]

However, with time Colombian migration has grown more diverse both in terms of routes and social composition, with Europe becoming a main destination as well. According to UN data, Spain is now the third main country of residence, with an estimated Colombian population of 359,178. Migrants have also headed towards Canada, Japan, Israel and Australia, as well as other countries. Based on OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and remittances data, Mejía

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[4] UN Population Division (see footnote 1). Following a border conflict between Colombia and Venezuela in 2015, thousands of Colombians were expelled or left Venezuela (*El Colombiano*, 11 September 2015).

Ochoa (2012) argues that since the world financial crisis erupted in 2008 migration to traditional destinations has declined, while newer places of settlement are experiencing increases (including Brazil, Peru, Argentina and China). Although estimates of the total number of Colombians living abroad vary, emigrants represent a significant proportion of the country's population. According to the 2005 Colombian Census migrants abroad total 3.3 million, while UN data for mid-2013 quotes almost 2.5 million. In addition, migrant remittances reached 4.6 billion dollars in 2013, a small decline from the peak of 5.3 billion calculated for 2008 (Khoudour-Castéras 2007; Ramírez and Mendoza 2013).

The studies available tend to make a clear distinction between internal displacement and forced migration across borders caused by the armed conflict, and economic migration elsewhere. However, the reality is that motives often interplay in complex ways. In the same way that those forcibly displaced by *La Violencia* joined other rural–urban migrants at the time, flows to neighbouring countries have included both forced and economic migrants. Migration to the Global North, by contrast, has been characterised as mostly economic, the result of lack of opportunities in the homeland and demand for workers in recipient countries. Nevertheless, research has highlighted that it is often difficult to separate security concerns from economic or other motives, at least in the flows directed to Europe (Bermudez 2011, McIlwaine 2005).

Latin American and Colombian Migration to Europe

There is a long history of population movements between Latin America and Europe, starting with colonisation. During the emergence of the new Latin American republics, Europe was a source of economic and other support for the warring factions, as well as a site for the education of wealthy creoles and those in search of exile. Throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Latin America also became a region for European investments and migration. Although Colombia was not as successful as other countries in the region attracting migrants, during

that period there were some flows from Europe and beyond (Mejía Ochoa 2012; Tovar Pinzón 2001). Spanish emigration to Latin America (including Colombia, albeit to a lesser extent) accelerated as a result of the Civil War (1936–1939) and the economic woes that followed.

These flows helped shape later migratory movements and the experiences of recent Latin American migrants in Europe. However, up until the 1980s Europe remained mostly a migrant destination for the Latin American elites, political refugees, intellectuals and students. It was not until the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century that the continent became a major destination for Latin American migrants, especially in the case of Spain. Figure 3.2 shows other main European countries of reception based on UN data. As briefly explored next, flows to the three countries chosen for the study share similarities but also differences.

Latin American migration to Europe has to be understood in the context of growing inflows into the region since the second half of the twentieth century, with differences between countries. The UK and Belgium have a longer history of immigration than Spain, since the latter changed only recently from a mostly emigration to an immigration country (Hansen 2003; Iosifides and King 1996). In policy terms, there has also been a move within Europe from being quite open to both labour and
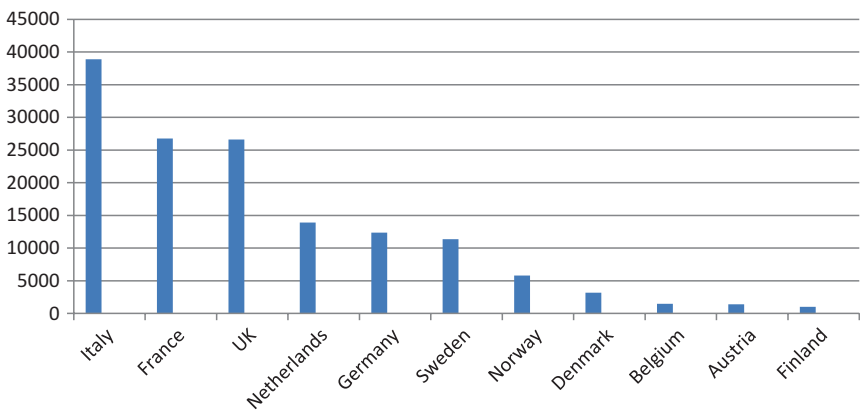
Fig. 3.2   Number of Colombian migrants in main European destinations (excluding Spain), mid-2013. Source: UN Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesorigin.shtml, data accessed 8 May 2015

refugee flows, to growing barriers being erected against low-skilled immigration and asylum seekers. This is most evident currently, especially in the case of the UK. By contrast, countries like Spain have been criticised for encouraging migration through wide 'regularisation' programmes. With the emergence and development of the European Union (EU), steps have been taken towards common migration and integration policies albeit with limited success (Collet 2014; Roos 2013).

As regards migrant integration, this also varies widely across time and space. Despite efforts to harmonise policies across Europe, national integration 'models' have verged between more assimilationist tendencies (in the case of France) to multiculturalism (closer to the UK example) and inter-culturalism (as claimed by new immigration countries such as Spain); Belgium is harder to classify given the wide differences between its Francophone and Flemish regions. Recently, there has also been greater awareness of the importance of the local level in terms of integration (Adam and Jacobs 2014; Caponio and Borkert 2010; Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). Moreover, in the last few years there has been a backlash against multiculturalism throughout Europe. Taking this into account, the latest Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) for 2015 shows that Belgium, with an overall score of 70, and Spain, with 61, are in the 'slightly favourable' group of countries, while the UK, with 56, is in the 'halfway favourable' category (having reduced its ranking over time).

The socioeconomic context and impact of the economic crisis in Europe display variations as well. The UK and Belgium have stronger economies and more advanced welfare systems than Spain, although the Spanish economy experienced an economic boom just before the crisis began in 2008. Both these factors are intimately related to the development of migration flows to each country. In addition, the repercussions of the crisis on the labour market have been remarkably worse in Southern Europe. While in 2014 the total unemployment rate reached 24.5 per cent in Spain, in Belgium it was 8.5 per cent and in the UK 6 per cent. These rates were considerably higher for the foreign born, especially if coming from 'third countries' (non-EU nationals): 35, 23.5 and 8 per cent respectively.[5] Austerity measures and welfare restrictions have further

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[5] European Labour Force Survey (LFS), http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/main-tables, data accessed 30 July 2015.

complicated life for many migrants and non-migrants. This has led to new patterns of migration involving some return movements and emigration or remigration within Europe (Lafleur and Stanek 2017). In Spain, migration inflows have stabilised and even declined, while emigration has increased. On the other hand, the UK and Belgium are among the countries receiving increased numbers of EU migrants. This has contributed to a growing social and political anti-immigration climate throughout Europe, which is less prevalent in countries such as Spain (Arango 2013).

Colombians in the UK: Increasingly Visible but Still a Small Community

The origins of the current Colombian community in the UK date back to the 1970s, with the arrival of political refugees and economic migrants. During these years, thousands of Latin Americans sought refuge in Europe escaping military dictatorship and repression. Although Colombia enjoyed a democratic regime at the time, the security policies put forward by the Turbay and subsequent governments left a trail of imprisonments, torture and disappearances affecting political leaders, community activists, trade unionists, human rights workers, students and academics (CNMH 2014; Jiménez 2009).[6] The number of Colombian asylum seekers in the UK continued to grow as political violence in the country heightened, reaching a peak in 1997 to decline following the introduction of new visa requirements in that year (despite a smaller rise in 1999) (Bermudez 2003; Gilbert and Koser 2006; The Refugee Council 1997) (see Fig. 3.3).

In addition, as Guarnizo (2008) points out, England, and especially London, has 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 population. During the 1970s, an estimated 4,000–10,000 Colombians migrated to the UK under the work permit system to occupy low-skilled

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[6] For more on this, see also the *Proyecto Colombia Nunca Más* (Project Colombia Never Again), http://www.movimientodevictimas.org/~nuncamas/index.php, data accessed 4 May 2015.
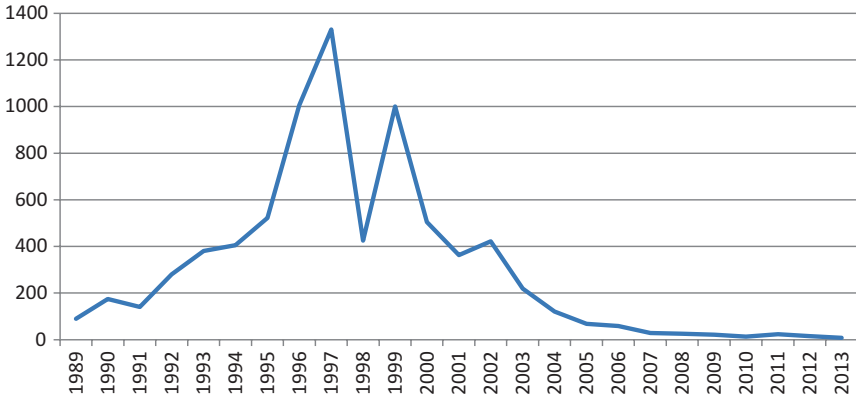
Fig. 3.3 Colombian asylum applications (excluding dependents) in the UK, 1989–2013. Source: Home Office, https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office, data accessed 17 May 2016

positions; many of the women were employed in domestic and other services (Semana 2003). Once migration networks became established, Colombians continued to arrive, in some cases overstaying their visas or working in irregular conditions. Although it is difficult to estimate its real size, official data shows that the number of Colombian born people resident in the UK went up from 12,331 in 2001 to 30,000 in 2013.[7] Unofficial estimates from the few studies available are nevertheless much higher (Buchuck 2010; Guarnizo 2008; McIlwaine 2005, 2012a; Open Channels 2000).

Colombians are the second largest nationality within the UK-based Latin American population after Brazilians and have settled mostly in London (McIlwaine 2007b, 2008, 2012a, b; McIlwaine et al. n.d.). According to the studies cited, while the community is very heterogeneous there are some key characteristics. The majority of Colombians in London have an urban, working- or middle-class background, coming from Bogota and other large and medium-size cities in Valle del Cauca, *Eje Cafetero* (coffee-growing region) and Antioquia. There is also

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[7] UK Office for National Statistics, http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/index.html, data accessed 31 July 2015. These are Census estimates and contrast with the data reported by the UN by mid-2013 as included in Fig. 3.1.

a significant share of upper-middle-class professionals and students. Most migrants have relatively high levels of formal education, but a large proportion is employed in low-skilled sectors such as cleaning, catering and retail. A high percentage is also self-employed, while a small number work in skilled professions. Suggestions are that there are more women than men, and that a majority of migrants are in the productive age bracket. Regarding family status, Colombians in London are mostly married or cohabiting, including a high percentage of mixed marriages. Official figures show that from 1983 to 2014, approximately 17,819 Colombians were granted British citizenship.[8]

In addition, Colombian migrants have played an important role in the growth of a lively Latin America community presence in London through their leadership in business ventures, media initiatives, cultural events and migrant organisations. There have also been community mobilisations for improved workers' rights and ethnic recognition, which have led to greater public awareness of this migrant group (Jones 2012; McIlwaine et al. n.d.; Pero 2008a, b). Nevertheless, by and large Latin Americans and Colombians in the UK remain highly invisible, which has advantages in terms of not being singled out in anti-immigration campaigns but also disadvantages when it comes to seeking support for the community. As regards transnational links, UK-based Colombian migrants sent 46 million US dollars in remittances in 2014 according to World Bank data.[9]

Currently the UK is witnessing growing anti-immigration politics, and this is having an impact on all migrant communities. According to MIPEX 2015, of the eight integration domains considered, UK scores are lowest in family reunion policies, followed by permanent residence and political participation, and only come 'favourable' in anti-discrimination. Comparing with previous editions of this index, most indicators have worsened, especially in access to family reunion, permanent residence and

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[8] Home Office statistics: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/british-citizenship-statistics-united-kingdom-2009, data accessed 31 July 2015; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2015, data accessed 31 March 2016.

[9] World Bank, http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,contentMDK:22759429~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html, data accessed 31 July 2015.

citizenship. The country has also been singled out for reducing resources for labour integration and diversity policies.[10]

Colombians in Spain: A Relatively Recent but Large Migrant Group

Up until the 1990s, the number of Colombians entering Spain grew slowly, but with the new century the community expanded very rapidly, soon becoming one of the largest migrant groups in Spain (Actis 2009; International Organization for Migration (IOM)/UN 2003). Growth slowed down after the introduction of new visa requirements in 2002, but the Colombian population kept augmenting through family reunification and other means until 2010 (Fig. 3.4). According to the municipal registries (*Padrón Municipal*), as of 1 January 2014 there were 363,667 people born in Colombia residing in Spain, a majority of them women; of the total, approximately half had Spanish nationality. This figure does not include the second generation born in Spain or those in an irregular situation who might not register. Also, the recent decline experienced reflects return and migration to other countries in response to the economic crisis in Spain (Mejía Ochoa 2012).[11]

Thus, compared with the UK, the Colombian population in Spain is larger but more recently arrived. It is also more geographically spread, with a majority of migrants settling in the regions of Madrid, Catalonia (mainly Barcelona) and Valencia. Among the reasons that explain these flows, researchers have highlighted economic and security factors in Colombia, growing barriers to migration in other traditional destinations and demand for low-skill workers in Spain (Mejía Ochoa 2012). This means that although a large part of the Colombian community in Spain are economic migrants, refugees (including those not formally recognised as such) are also an important component (Clavijo Guevara and Perdomo Blanco 1999; Cruz Zúñiga et al. 2008; RestrepoVélez 2006).

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[10] See MIPEX 2015 data and UK country report, http://www.mipex.eu/united-kingdom, accessed 30, July 2015.

[11] Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), Padrón Municipal, http://www.ine.es/jaxi/menu.do?type=pcaxis&path=%2Ft20%2Fe245&file=inebase&L=0, data accessed 04 May 2015.
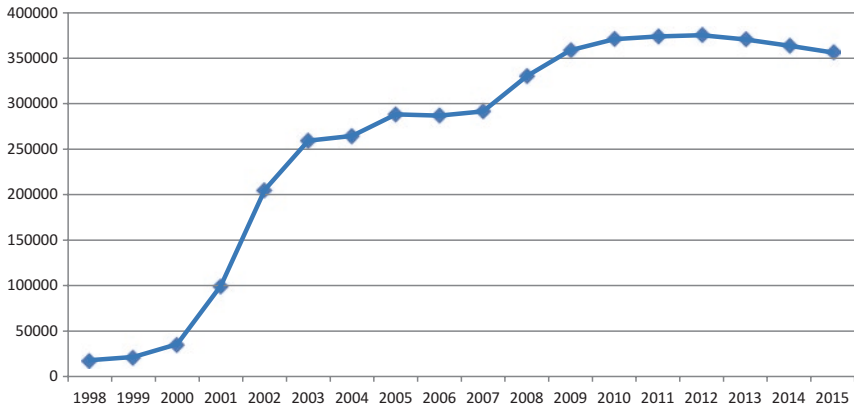
Fig. 3.4 People born in Colombia registered in the *Padrón Municipal*, 1998–2015*. Source: INE, Padrón Municipal. *Data as of 1 January of each year, http://www.ine.es/jaxi/menu.do?type=pcaxis&path=%2Ft20%2Fe245&file=inebase&L=0, data accessed 29 March 2015

The Colombian refugee and asylum-seeking population reached a peak of 1,183 in 2010, as recognised by the UNHCR.[12] Equally, there are numerous Colombian students and professionals residing in the country.

As to other characteristics, the studies available suggest that this is a relatively young population with high levels of education mostly working in domestic service, catering, construction and retail, as well as in self-employment. Most migrants originate from Valle del Cauca, *Eje Cafetero* and Antioquia, as well as the capital city, Bogota. There is also a strong correlation between place of origin in Colombia and specific destination in Spain, which reflects 'the existence and great importance of migratory networks' (IOM/UN 2003, p. 176). They also suggest that in many cases Colombian migrants arriving in Spain have tried other destinations first (such as the UK). The proportion of migrants that arrived alone is large, but the majority of Colombians in Spain have children. In addition, there is evidence of social mobility as migrants abandon sectors such as domestic service or catering and move into industry, business services or retail (see also Cruz Zúñiga 2007; Echeverri Buriticá 2011; Garay Salamanca and Medina Villegas 2007).

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[12] See: http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/persons_of_concern, data accessed 24 November 2015.

With regard to the community settled in Madrid, a detailed representative survey carried out in 2005 found that the majority were women, with migrants being predominantly in the economically active ages and having high levels of formal education. There is evidence too of the strong presence of transnational families (with members spread over more than one country); Colombian migrant remittances from Spain totalled 625 million dollars in 2014 (the third largest—World Bank data). Migrants choose Madrid because of perceptions of greater employment opportunities and social networks (Garay Salamanca 2006). Colombians in Spain are also to a large extent behind the expansion of Latin American political, social and business-community initiatives.

While Colombian migrants in the UK have gained a more stable position on the basis of their length of stay, in Spain they have benefited from several regularisation processes and special citizenship policies.[13] Nevertheless, as other migrant groups and the general population, they have been badly hit by the economic crisis, especially in terms of employment and housing (Colectivo Ioé 2012). In addition, although anti-immigration policies in Spain have not been as widespread as in other European countries, the crisis has served to implement some changes such as reduced access to health services by those in an irregular migrant situation. As analysed in more detail later, some of the strategies Colombian migrants have put in place to cope with the crisis have been return and remigration to countries such as the UK and Belgium.

Regarding the general integration policy context, MIPEX 2015 suggests that of the domains considered Spain is strongest in family reunion, permanent residence and labour market mobility, while weakest in education. The MIPEX country report highlights that Spain has not experienced great changes in policy over the last few years despite being badly affected by the crisis. However, it mentions some drawbacks, especially in the areas of political participation and education due to reduced funding caused by austerity measures.[14]

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[13] Latin American migrants in Spain can apply for naturalisation after two years of legal residence in the country, compared with a 10-year requirement for most other migrants.

[14] See MIPEX 2015 data and Spain country report, http://www.mipex.eu/spain, accessed 30 July 2015.

Colombians in Belgium: A More Marginal but Active Community

Not only is Belgium a smaller country, but its historical links with Latin America are less obvious, which could explain in part the smaller size of the Latin American population there. Still, it is possible to find references to past connections between Belgium and the region, as well as to the early presence of Latin American nationals in the country, whether for political, economic or study reasons (Yépez del Castillo 2002). The origins of current Latin American migration to Belgium can be traced back to the arrival of political refugees in the 1960s and 1970s and earlier student flows (Plata and Rodríguez Arévalo 2013; Murillo Perdomo 1989; Plata Quezada 2010).

Despite their small size, the Latin American and Colombian populations in Belgium have been growing fast. Past data shows that migrants from the Americas (including the USA and Canada) residing in the country went up from 414 in 1890 to 20,882 in 1996 (2.3 per cent of the total foreign population), with Colombians accounting for only 706 of this latter total (the third largest Latin American nationality after Brazilians and Chileans) (Eggerickx et al. 2002).Historically, most Colombian migrants settled in the capital city, Brussels. While at first men predominated, with time women took over; most migrants were in the economically active age bracket. The community also moved from being formed mainly by unaccompanied individuals to a predominance of migrant families (ibid.).

Other sources point out that by 2004 Latin Americans in Belgium numbered around 30,000, Colombians being the third largest group after Brazilians and Ecuadoreans. However, these figures do not take into account the estimated high levels of 'irregular migrants' (the *sans-papiers*) (Bach and Yépez del Castillo 2006; see also Leman 1997; Van Meerteren 2014).Whereas earlier migration was mostly composed of refugees and students, since the 1990s flows have been largely as a result of economic or labour migration. In the case of Colombians though, studies point out once again to a mix of reasons for their migration (Plata and Rodríguez Arévalo 2013). Research also highlights that women predominate within

Fig. 3.5 Images of a Latin American shop and Spanish-speaking mass services in Brussels. Source: Photos taken by the author during fieldwork, 2014–2015

the Latin American community and are mostly employed in domestic service, while men work in construction, transport and industry (Freitas and Godin 2013; Godin et al. 2015). Migrants have settled mainly in Brussels, Ambers and Gent, where there are greater economic opportunities. Finally, this migrant group has remained highly invisible and reliant on informal support networks, although with time, organisations, businesses and religious and cultural initiatives have emerged (see also Andino and Craenen 2009; Plata Quezada 2010) (see Fig. 3.5).

The latest official data suggests that in 2013 Latin American citizens in the country totalled 21,084, with Colombians being the second largest group (numbering 1,469 according to UN figures). In addition, 2,276 Colombians were naturalised between 1991 and 2012 (DEMO 2014). The number of Colombian refugees and asylum seekers accounted for by UNHCR has remained between 32 and 97 per annum since the late 1990s.[15]

The few studies available also suggest that for many Latin American migrants, Belgium was initially thought of as a transit country (e.g., on the way to the UK), with some arriving also through other European countries.

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[15] See: http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/persons_of_concern, data accessed 24 November 2015.

Since the eruption of the economic crisis in 2008, the community has grown through the coming of new migrants from Spain (most of them with Spanish nationality). Latin American migrants in Belgium have also had access to several regularisation programmes. With regards to the integration climate, MIPEX 2015 gives Belgium higher scores for policies on permanent residence, family reunion and anti-discrimination, and lower scores for political participation and labour market mobility. On the other hand, the country report praises Belgium for maintaining strong integration policies, with the exception of the restrictions introduced with respect to family reunion and citizenship.[16]

Diaspora Politics, Conflict and Gender

In their pioneering work on US-based Colombian migration, Guarnizo and Díaz (1999, p.397; see also Guarnizo et al. 1999) identified 'a dense web of economic, political, and socio-cultural transnational relations connecting migrants and their places of origin'. However, they argued that these did not necessarily lead to the formation of a transnational community, since migrants were divided along class, regional and other lines, as well as by the mistrust and fragmentation caused by violence and criminality in the home country. It has been argued that this has led Colombian migrants to prefer individual transnational relations over collective (or organised) ones, and little 'continuous political engagement with their home nation' (Guarnizo et al. 2003, p. 1219; see also Guarnizo 2008).

Nevertheless, other research has placed a heavier emphasis on transnational connections, including political ones, and the role played by the Colombian state. According to Guarnizo (2003b, pp. 25–26; see also IOM/ UN 2003), this is expressed in several ways: the extensive rights that the state has granted Colombians abroad and the emergence of initiatives aimed at connecting migrants with their home country; the growing dependence of the country on migrant remittances; and the density of the social, cultural, political and economic relationships that those abroad maintain with

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[16] See MIPEX 2015 data and Belgium country report, http://www.mipex.eu/belgium, accessed 30 July 2015.

their families and communities of origin in Colombia. These connections have contributed to the emergence of a Colombian transnational social field which 'affects both civil society and the exercise of power by the State, which manifests itself in several ways'[17] (Guarnizo 2006, p. 81). One aspect of this that has hardly been explored is the role played by diasporic civil society in the context of armed conflict and peacebuilding in Colombia (Bermudez 2011a, b). This is despite the fact that the Colombian conflict has many transnational ramifications, including the direct and indirect involvement of the USA, European support for peace, guerrilla diplomacy and the international reach of the drugs business, as well as the activities of Colombian exiles in favour of human rights and peace.

In the last few decades there have been important improvements in gender equality throughout Latin America, as evidenced by feminist activism and policy and institutional changes. Four interrelated trends behind these improvements have been identified: a general decline in fertility, increasing levels of participation by women in education and employment, a weakening of patriarchy, and the so-called crisis of masculinity. This does not mean though that there are no challenges still ahead, including in the areas of reproductive rights and violence against women (Blofield and Haas 2011; Bott et al. 2012). Also, these general trends have to be considered in the context of inter- and intra-regional diversity.

According to the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme 2014), Colombia is ranked 92 in the Gender Inequality Index (below most other large Latin American countries), with a Gender Development Index of 46. Gender imbalances are especially evident in the socioeconomic sphere, with labour market participation rates of 56 per cent for women against 80 per cent for men and an estimated gross national income per capita of 7,698 USD and 15,485 USD respectively. In the political arena, Colombian women won the right to vote and be elected to political office in 1956, one of the last countries in Latin America to do so. Following the 2014 national elections Colombian women held 20 per cent of parliamentary seats (less

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[17] All quotes from the work of other authors in languages other than English have been translated by the author of this book. Quotes from interviews conducted in Spanish have also been translated into English by the author.

than other neighbouring nations), despite the introduction of gender quotas (Tula 2015).[18]

Gender inequality has to be understood in the context of the armed conflict, with studies highlighting the connections between this and violence against women (Amnesty International 2004; Corporación Sisma Mujer 2005; Tovar Rojas 2003).Research has looked into the differentiated impact of the conflict on men and women, as well as the wider gender implications of political violence. Meertens (2001, pp. 151–2) discusses three aspects of this: the symbolic representations of masculinity and femininity in political violence, which varies according to the context; the different presence and specific roles of men and women victims of violence; and the diverse experiences of men and women refugees (see also Meertens 2012). Some work has looked at other aspects such as the situation of female guerrillas, women victims of violence and as family members of the killed or disappeared (Amnesty International 1995; Bermúdez 2001; Casas Castaño and Melo Rodríguez 1995; Londoño and Nieto 2008; Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado 2015). Moreover, given women's role in peace initiatives in Colombia, research has focused on this aspect as well (McDonald 1997; Moser et al. 2006; Tuft 2001). The latter reflects the fact that although levels of female participation in formal politics in Colombia are still low, they have a larger representation in informal politics, including at the transnational level.

Some Methodological Details

This chapter ends with some details about the primary research on which the book is based (also see appendix). My interest on this subject first grew out of personal encounters with Latin Americans in the UK and the lack of information there was about this group. In response, in 1995 I completed my first qualitative project analysing the migration of Colombian and Peruvian women to London, which included 9 detailed questionnaires and 7 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Colombian women. This brought to the fore, among other issues,

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[18] See also information offered by Colombia's *Observatorio de Asuntos de Género* (Observatory of Gender Issues): http://www.equidadmujer.gov.co/OAG/Paginas/Observatorio-Asuntos-Genero.aspx, data accessed 4 August 2015.

the many reasons that explain these flows, including the conflict in Colombia. In 2002–2003, I undertook another small project focusing on the gendered experiences of Colombian refugees in London, which involved 16 qualitative interviews (including 3 with non-Colombian key informants). As a result, I became deeply interested in the political practices some of these refugees maintain vis-à-vis the homeland. This was the prelude to a larger project completed in 2008, which looked more widely into the transnational politics of Colombians in the UK and Spain in relation to the armed conflict and prospects for peace, from a gendered perspective. This involved 96 in-depth interviews (71 of which were with migrants), as well as contact with organisations, participant observation and content analysis of websites and documents.

These studies have been complemented through other research, such as a 2008–2009 project on the local-transnational political participation of Latin American migrants in Andalusia (led by Dr. Escriva at the University of Huelva), later extended to Madrid and Barcelona; 13 Colombian migrants were interviewed in total. So far, my research had taken a qualitative approach, given the lack of official data about Colombian migrants (especially in the case of the UK), the scarce research available on the aspects investigated and the sensitivity of some of the issues explored. Nevertheless, in 2010–2011, I took part in a larger study focusing on the 'external vote' of Colombians in London and Madrid (led by Prof. McIlwaine at Queen Mary, University of London) that used quantitative and qualitative methods, involving 800 questionnaires plus 29 in-depth interviews. In 2014–2015, I undertook a final study looking at the impact of the recent economic crisis in Europe on the integration experiences of Colombian migrants in Madrid, London and Brussels. Adopting once again a mixed-methods approach, some 200 questionnaires and approximately 15 qualitative interviews were conducted in each city (most of them with migrants).[19] This last project completed some 20 years of research on Colombian migration to Europe and migrant transnational politics from a gender perspective, the results of which are explored in detail throughout the rest of this book.

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Part II

Migration, Integration and Transnationalism

4

Trajectories of Colombian Migrants in Europe

Colombia has a long history of international migration linked to the conflict and other factors. This chapter analyses why migrants leave the home country, as well as their trajectories and the development of transnational connections, while Chap. 5 deals more specifically with the experiences of Colombian refugees. Labour migration has become an increasingly important feature of our globalised world, with the IOM (2012) highlighting that a large part of today's more than 200 million world migrants are the result of socioeconomic and demographic disparities between countries. To this, we have to add all those people who migrate for other reasons, such as to study, to join their loved ones or as a result of environmental pressures.

To understand these flows it is important to consider 'push' and 'pull' factors as well as the role played by networks based on family, culture and history through time and space and at the macro and micro levels. In the case of Colombian migration to Europe, and in particular Spain, the UK and Belgium, this translates into a multiplicity of personal and family migrant stories, trajectories and experiences involving both agency and structure. The chapter thus starts with an in-depth analysis of the

different reasons why many Colombian men and women have migrated to the three countries considered.

Among labour migrants, there is a wide variety of situations such as those who leave the home country because they are unemployed or in search of better career opportunities to help relatives or progress as a family. These reasons often intermingle with others, such as to escape gender oppression or sociopolitical insecurity. The experiences of labour migrants also vary depending on their education and skills and whether they migrate alone or as a family. Many other Colombians have migrated to Europe to study or to join their loved ones. Student migration, both on its own and as precursor for more permanent settlement, is a phenomenon that has grown exponentially over the last few years (Blinder 2013; Hawthorne 2008). Finally, migration for love refers to all those cases of people who migrate because of a personal relationship or to join their family.

The second section of the chapter explores why Colombians 'choose' to migrate to Spain, the UK or Belgium, and how they arrive there. In the case of these migrants, many reach their 'final' destination after previous internal and international moves or when other options are discarded or closed. The chapter ends with a look at migrants' broad transnational linkages through personal communications, travel, remittances and other economic activities. Such connections are multidirectional and multipolar, since they can involve more than one migrant destination as well as the home country and assume different directions (not only from the host to the home society).

Colombian Labour Migration to Europe: A Gendered Story

Different Types of 'Labour Migration': Historical Overview

Colombian labour migration abroad started to grow from the 1960s, reaching significant proportions during the twenty-first century. Among the push factors authors quote structural unemployment, low salaries and lack of

socioeconomic opportunities, as well as the neoliberal reforms and crisis of international coffee prices (Echeverri Buriticá 2011; Guarnizo 2006; Mejía Ochoa 2012). Also crucial is the deteriorating social, political and security situation in the country, analysed in more detail in Chap. 5. Pull factors and migrant networks have also influenced these flows, as discussed elsewhere (see Boyd 1989; Prieto Rosas and López Gay 2015).

Focusing first on those who migrate mainly for labour or economic reasons, they represent a majority of the Colombians taking part in the 2014–2015 survey (50 per cent in London, 47 per cent in Madrid and 44.5 per cent[1] in Brussels). In addition, among those Colombians interviewed, there is a highly heterogeneous group who explained their migration in similar ways (22 in the UK, ten in Spain and four in Belgium). These interviews allow for a more nuanced understanding of the socioeconomic motivations of Colombians migrating to Europe through time.

Amongst the earliest arrivals there are at least eight Colombians who entered the UK in the 1970s, all women except for a man. They are some of the pioneers within the growing feminisation of migration flows from the Global South to the North (Buijs 1993; Morokvasic 1984; Phizacklea 1983). Three of the women migrated for economic reasons but represent different experiences. For Alejandra,[2] a lower middle-class woman from Medellin landing in London in 1974 with her husband and children, the idea was to migrate temporarily to improve their finances: 'to save and buy a small house [in Colombia]'. Julieta, from Cali and of working-class origin, who migrated on her own and also arrived in the city in 1974, the main motivation was to help her family in Colombia: 'because I had to provide for my six siblings'. In the case of Loreto, from a smaller city in Valle del Cauca, her migration to London in 1977 was to 'help my husband and work to pay a debt'. These women and their families ended up settling in London, often bringing over other relatives or friends.

After the UK work permit system ended, Colombian migration continued and accelerated through other means such as family migration, student or tourist visas, with some migrants overstaying and working

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[1] Percentages of interviewees selecting these as their main or additional reasons for migrating.

[2] All names used throughout the book to refer to respondents who participated in the research are pseudonyms. The real names or institutional details of some key informants are given occasionally, but only when it is necessary and with their permission.

illegally. Flows also became more diverse and included other destinations in Europe. Among these migrants, the reasons for migrating vary too, according to class, gender or year and place of arrival. Some left Colombia owing to serious economic problems, such as a man from Bogota who after 15 years in the same company was made redundant and lost his savings in a failed business. A friend in England told him to come and he went 'as an adventure' (London, arrived 1986). Jezabel, a woman from Pereira, had a similar experience: 'I used to work for the government … and there was a 50 per cent reduction because of the austerity … and today to set up a business is a risk. I did it, and it collapsed … and I got the opportunity to come here' (Madrid, arrived 2005).

Many more said they left Colombia to find better work opportunities and earn more, with some migrants having to pay debts in the home country and others who just aspired to a more favourable future. Amongst the ones who migrate to overcome unemployment and economic woes or to help their families there are more migrants from the lowest socio-economic groups, while those who want to increase their earnings or improve their career are more often from the middle classes. Among the men there are also some Colombians who migrated after receiving a job offer or looking for business opportunities. Women, on the other hand, mention more frequently wanting to find better-paying jobs or to help their families. Of the Colombians arriving in London and Brussels after 2008, there is a group who has migrated from Spain because of the economic crisis (see Chap. 6).

Mixture of Different Reasons: Women's Special Status and Men's More Privileged Position?

Labour or economic migrants can have additional reasons for migrating such as to escape violence, further their studies, travel and know new places or join their loved ones. Escaping oppressive relationships can also be a contributing factor, especially for women. Sometimes these extra motives only emerged as the interviews progressed. Some cases mentioned above exemplify this well. Julieta starts explaining that she left Colombia to help her family: 'my dad worked but he had vices, drinking

and gambling … everything he earned, he would lose. I was the eldest and thus everyone depended on me'. Thus, it was her position within the family and economic difficulties that encouraged her to go abroad despite her mother's opposition. However, Julieta also speaks about how migration transformed her life as a woman:

> one has so much more freedom [here] … my life changed a lot from what it used to be in Colombia. In Colombia it was a structure … of family, church, of what the family said and that was it. But when you leave Colombia, you are yourself and take your own decisions … in my case my family, my mother was very, a 100 per cent Catholic … it can become a barrier, and make life hard. So personally, it helped me … I think for men is a bit different … in the sense that already in Colombia men are freer.

Five other women in the sample talked about similar issues, although not all had migrated for economic reasons. A young woman from Bogota said she wanted to study English, travel and become independent. She had a good job in Colombia but her mother was too dominant and protective (London, arrived 1976). Another woman in her 30s from Armenia also left to study and because she had family problems (Madrid, arrived 1997), while an older woman from Cali included in her motivations her desire to leave behind a failed relationship (Madrid, arrived 2002). Other explanations included not being happy or having a romantic disappointment. In addition, some female migrants argue that although the economic problems in Colombia force or encourage both men and women to migrate, the latter are particularly pushed by family needs (see Ribas Mateos 2005). In Jezabel's words:

> I think that women risk more … women always have … a huge responsibility because the economy there was affected … we sacrifice everything for our families, and we take more risks … knowing that here we have to start from zero, and maybe occupy a low status job … while a man would not be so, how can I say, so willing … because our family … and that great love towards our children.

Colombian men also migrate to improve their life chances and that of their families. However, their motivations are more often related to personal or

professional advancement. This was the case of Rodrigo, in his 40s and from Bogota who arrived in London in 2000: 'I came here because I was offered a job … they paid everything and brought me here with my family … I came with my work permit'. Two other men in London migrated because they were offered a job or were looking for a business opportunity. Several others were working in Colombia but decided to go to Spain in the early 2000s because of their desire to progress and also because they were attracted by the stories they heard: '*le pintaban a uno pajaritos*'[3] (Brussels, arrived 2011). Quite a few migrated to other countries once the economic crisis hit Spain. There are also men migrating in search of new experiences, like a young Colombian who travelled to Spain in 1999 to visit a friend and stayed after finding work. For Mauro, in his 40s and of Afro-Caribbean origin, his arrival in Madrid in 2000 was because he was 'bored' personally and professionally. Although he adds that his difficulties finishing university and surviving economically were probably a factor as well: 'I think I emigrated with the desire to offer myself the opportunity to start a new life, because there it was too difficult'. In this case, his ethnic background may also be an influence, as he elaborates later during the interview:

> I thought Spain was a racist country … but the fact that I can seat freely in a bar and people will serve me, of being able to go anywhere I go, because I have lived in Colombia and know what it is to be black and what it is to feel being treated in a sneaky way … and that is why I don't feel like going to Colombia much.

Such stories highlight how women and men labour migrants can have different motivations and experiences of migration, something that both theory and research struggle with. Their stories also vary according to class and ethnic origin, age and stage in the life cycle, as well as the structural framework in which they make their decisions and the specific home- and host-country contexts (see Anthias 2012; Lutz 2010).

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[3] The expression 'pintar pajaritos en el aire' (literally 'paint birds in the air') means to present things in a very nice way, probably hiding away the negative aspects.

Students and Other Types of Migrants

In the 2014–2015 survey, when Colombians were asked their motivation for leaving the homeland, the most numerous responses were economic or labour related. After this, in Madrid and Brussels the top answer was family reasons, while in London it was to study. International student migration has grown in importance and although many students return to the country of origin after a short stay abroad, in other cases they extend their residence or settle permanently in the host society. Still, often they are not considered migrants by the authorities or even themselves, as Eva, a Colombian community worker in Barcelona (arrived in 2000), argues: 'I also lived through this of not considering myself an immigrant … and I missed the regularisation [process] … they would tell me, but get your papers and I was doing a postgraduate [course] … and I am not an immigrant, I am a student'. Nevertheless, she later married and remained in Spain. This is why the IOM (2006, p. 9) points out that 'student migration from developing countries can become a back door for permanent migration'.

Quite a few interviewees were students at the time of the research or had migrated to study, often mixed with other motives. There are also Colombians who have different reasons for migrating, such as to advance economically or escape violence but enter Europe with student visas because it is easier (for more on refugees see Chap. 5). Paola from Bogota explains that she left Colombia for economic reasons but entered the UK in 2000 as a student. Although she comes from a middle-class family, their economic situation was affected by recession in the 1990s and she went to London to continue her studies and help her family. Thus, as barriers to political and economic migration increase in the North, people explore other channels for migrating. Nevertheless, growing costs in the UK have made it increasingly difficult for Colombian students to go there, as Paola recognises: 'they are closing down the options more and more'.

Those who migrate to study generally do it to learn languages or complete higher education. Many young Colombians go to the UK to learn English and continue their graduate or postgraduate studies, like Guido,

who arrived in London in 1988: 'personally, let's say I did not have a future in Colombia, regarding what I wanted.' After improving his language skills, he completed his higher education in the UK and at the time of the interview worked in the financial sector. Those going to Spain to study do it because of the language facility, in search of a specific course or because they have a scholarship. Another reason to study abroad could be related to the growing costs of higher education in Colombia, as a young woman who studied in France explained: 'In Cali … going to a public university is extremely complicated because there is too much demand … and the private ones … are too much for a Colombian person' (Brussels, arrived 2010).

Like Eva above, among those who migrate to study, many remain in the host country after forming a relationship. This situation is quite common among women. In other cases, students decide to extend their education or gain professional experience before an eventual return. Irene, who arrived in Madrid in 2003 with a scholarship, finished her master but was staying because: 'I was going to return with a title, but without real tools … is not easy because you have to have a track record … you need many contacts … and … because Colombia is like a prison … if you go back you don't leave, because we need visas.' In other cases though, students were ready to return or did so soon after being interviewed, often when they had a job to go back to.

As well as those who migrate for other motives and end up settling in the host country because they form a relationship or a family, some Colombians emigrate for similar reasons. Family migration is one of the main types of international migration flows, and has been a feature of the European migration system for decades (Kraler et al. 2011; Kofman 2004). At least 15 interviewees in London and five in Spain migrated to join their partners, parents or children. All except four were women. Among the men was Guido, mentioned earlier, who left Colombia when he was very young to join his mother in London and continue his studies. On the other hand, Miguel first migrated to Spain to study and join his family, and in 2005 moved to the UK: 'in Madrid I met … my fiancé … she was there visiting a friend, but she lived in London.' Of the other two males, one joined his sons in London in 2007 and the other went to Madrid in 2010 to marry his wife.

In the case of the women in this group, a majority migrated to Europe to join boyfriends and husbands, or mothers and other relatives. Some women

refugees talked about in the next chapter also left Colombia to join their loved ones rather than owing to their own political or security problems. Their dates of arrival range from the 1970s to 2012 and various mention additional motives for migrating such as to work and pay off family debts or to study and experience life abroad. This is the case of Inmaculada: 'since I was at university [in Colombia] I really wanted to be abroad'; after living for a while in Venezuela, she joined her husband in Spain and in 2012 both moved to London because he lost his job. Although she had always worked, since arriving in the UK she was studying and volunteering.

Inmaculada's story highlights the fact that migrants who join their partners abroad often find themselves in a dependent and vulnerable situation. Although this will be explored further in the next two chapters, it is worth mentioning that sometimes these relationships break and leave the dependent spouse, more often than not a woman, without a stable migratory or economic status. Such situations can also lead to domestic violence as members of LAWRS (Latin American Women's Rights Service) interviewed in London explained. In the UK case, the rights of dependent spouses have worsened as laws and policies have grown increasingly anti-immigrant (see Anitha 2015; Sirriyeh 2015). However, this worry is also shared by Latin American migrant organisations in Madrid, especially in the context of mixed marriages (Ayllón 2010).

Among other reasons Colombians in Europe give for their migration are their desire to travel and know other places, live an adventure or change their lives. In the case of Spain, research also highlights the presence of trafficked Latin American women (including Colombians) or of women migrating to work in the sex industry (Bonelli Jáudenes and Ulloa Jiménez 2001; Oso 2003).

Choosing a Migrant Destination: Why Spain, the UK or Belgium?

Information, Networks and Other Factors

The process behind 'choosing' a migrant destination can involve a lot of thought or be the result of ad hoc factors. Decisions can also be voluntary or imposed, although there is generally a degree of choice (see Castree

et al. 2004; Richmond 1996). Many other factors can intervene in these processes, including structural, contextual, relational and agency-based. For instance, world systems theory emphasises the role of historical, cultural and economic links to explain the development of flows between origin and destination (Massey et al. 1993). This might explain Colombian migration to Spain, but not so much to the UK or Belgium. On the other hand, there are pull factors such as demand for workers or regulations and policies making it easier or harder to migrate to one place or another. However, once a flow has started, migration networks and social capital become key (Castles and Miller 2009; Massey et al. 2005).

Although many factors are behind the development of Colombian migration to Europe, the research conducted highlights the importance of networks. When interviewees are asked why they chose their particular destination, the vast majority mention having family, friends or contacts there. They include people who migrated to join their loved ones, but also others who moved to the UK, Spain or Belgium because they had personal or professional connections. This coincides with the results of other studies looking at Colombian migration to these countries (Guarnizo 2008; IOM/UN 2003; McIlwaine 2008, 2005). This makes sense, since networks play a key role as sources of information and support before, during and after migration. Several migrants expressed it in their responses, like Guido, who joined his mother in London: '[this] facilitated the process of integration a lot … undeniably, without my mother's help the whole process would have taken much longer.' Equally, Emilio, who moved to Madrid in 2006 to boost his earnings, said: 'my aunty was here. She helped me come here. I received a job offer and came, and I settled here with her.'

In other cases, the connections linking migrants to their chosen destination are weaker and offer less support; they can have negative effects as well. Emma migrated first from Colombia to Madrid to join her sister, but relations between them soured quickly and she relocated to another city. After becoming unemployed during the crisis, in 2014 she moved to Brussels to live with her brother, but that decision did not work out either:

He has a very different way of living from me. He likes partying too much, being with friends … he likes drinking … I came with a debt from Colombia, and he knows it. He charges me rent and I don't think this is normal, because when I lived in Colombia and he used to spend Christmas there he did not have to spend a penny … And I arrive home in a bad state … and I have to start cooking … when he lived on his own he had to cook, look after his clothes and all that. And now I am doing it. And this is more work for me, and I feel exhausted … and he is drinking, going out with women and all that.

As well as networks, migrants mentioned other reasons why they chose their destination. In a few cases it was because they had been in the country or city in question before, either as a tourist or during a previous migration experience. Others explain that they knew people were moving there, had been advised by others or were attracted by tales of success. Such reasons apply particularly to Spain, given the more recent development and much larger size of these flows: 'I came to Spain … thrilled by the stories I heard from here' (man, Madrid, arrived 2008). Many migrants also chose Spain owing to language and cultural affinities, because of job offers and anticipated economic opportunities, to study a course or after receiving a scholarship, and because they liked the country. Language and education opportunities also attract Colombians to London. This is especially so among younger migrants from the better-off classes, but also for families with children. The UK, or at least London, is likewise perceived as a land of work and economic opportunities, especially after the economic crisis in Spain. Moreover, as Guarnizo (2008) argues, despite the lack of strong historical links, many Colombians have a great affinity with London and England, even if perceptions do not always prove right:

I was never interested in the United States, what interested me more was London … maybe because of its history … in school we studied Europe a lot … in Latin America, in general people are anti-American … and when I arrived it was a shock because it was not as I had it in my head … everything so untidy … obviously some things are very good, but in reality … I was a bit disappointed when I got here (woman, London, arrived 2002).

In the case of migrants in Spain, perceptions were also not always as expected, leading to feelings of discrimination (see Chap. 6). Nevertheless, the preference for Europe over the USA was an argument among quite a few migrants (especially refugees), whether for political, socioeconomic or legal reasons to do with migration regulations. Studies have highlighted that the growth of Colombian (and Latin American) migration to Europe has to do in part with increased restrictions in the USA (Guarnizo 2008; IOM/UN 2003; McIlwaine 2007). Within my sample, at least three people say they chose the UK or Spain because it was easier to enter: 'I always wanted to leave Colombia to go to the United States … but since I realised how difficult it was for us Colombians, because we needed a visa … and other things impossible to get … I came to Europe' (man, arrived in Madrid in 2000 and in London in 2014). Others also thought the UK was better to study than the USA because it was cheaper or because in the former students were allowed to work. In other cases, migrants tried the USA first but visas were denied or they were expelled. Only a woman who arrived in London in 1990 says she obtained a US visa but decided to go to London instead because it was a safer place.

As explored next, visa regulations and migration laws also have an impact on where in Europe Colombian migrants end up residing, with examples of people moving between the three countries studied (and beyond) or families dispersed among different destinations.

Secondary and More Migrations

Colombia has a long history of both internal and international population movements. Therefore, it is not surprising that many interviewees had previous experiences of migration. Some had moved from rural to urban areas or at the city and departmental levels, following their families or for study and professional purposes. There are examples of internal forced displacement too, dealt with in the next chapter. At the international level, at least 46 interviewees talk about having visited, studied or worked in another country before, or reaching their final destination through another country.

Thus, for Ofelia, who arrived in London in 1991, this was not her first migration experience. As well as moving between towns in the region where she was born, she lived in several large Colombian cities before venturing abroad to travel and earn money. Her first idea was to migrate to the USA, but she joined a friend who was going to Europe. They obtained tourist visas for France and after visiting Paris travelled to London. However, she was caught working and deported back to France, from where she returned to the UK hidden in a lorry. Other migrants had visited, studied or lived in the USA or another Latin American country before making it to Europe. Aurora arrived in Madrid in 2007 to join her husband, who had travelled there to improve their economic situation. Both migrated through Venezuela, where they went first to obtain false passports: 'yes, the issue is that … Venezuelans, to come here are not asked for a visa, like us Colombians, so many Colombians and especially from my village would say, look you pay that lady some money and she gets Venezuelan papers for you and you enter Spain easily.' The first time Aurora tried, she had to travel via Mexico and from there was deported back to Venezuela, but the second time she was successful.

Within Europe, the connections between countries are many. Miguel, talked about earlier, first joined part of his family in Spain, where he went to continue his studies, but later moved to London to live with his girlfriend. Petra, on the other hand, had spent some time in Brussels visiting a cousin. Back in Colombia, the family decided to migrate to Europe to find work and boost their earnings. They tried Belgium first but a friend told them the UK offered more opportunities, and in 1996 they arrived in London:

> our tickets were about to expire, so he told us pack your things for tomorrow and I'll help you cross the border and take you to Paris, if you don't return that same day is because they let you go in … and that's how we came, and in the Eurostar they interviewed us … my husband said we were coming to see a football match … we showed them our tickets and they saw that it was true, that we were coming as tourists … so after a while they told us ok, welcome to London.

Quite a few Colombians arrive in one European country but end up moving to another for a variety of reasons or because they are expelled. One interviewee explained that although most of her husband's family lived in London, he and his brother ended up in Brussels because they were not admitted into the UK. Visa rules also affected Margarita's migration. She wanted to migrate to the USA but it was too difficult; instead through a contact she obtained a visa to go to Israel. After 11 years there her permit was not renewed and since she was determined not to go back to Colombia, in 2005 she migrated to Barcelona where her sister lived. Past studies also argue that Spain has acted as an important gateway for Colombian migration to London (Guarnizo 2008; McIlwaine 2012). More recently, there has been a further surge of Colombian onward migration from Spain to the UK and Belgium because of the economic crisis (see Chap. 6).

The Building Up of Transnational Links

Personal Contacts and Travelling Backwards and Forwards

Guarnizo (2008) argues that recent Colombian migration has acquired a truly 'global character'. This is evident not only through the multiple migrant experiences and destinations just explored, but also in the transnational links that have developed. He explains that these connections are expressed through: the extensive rights that the Colombian state has granted nationals abroad and the emergence of initiatives aimed at linking migrants with the home country; the growing dependence of the country on migrant remittances; and, the density of social, cultural, political and economic relations between those abroad and their families and communities of origin (ibid. 2003b, pp. 25–6). Research on Colombian migration to the UK, Spain or the USA shows evidence of these transnational connections, especially within the personal and economic realms (IOM/UN 2003; Guarnizo 2008; Guarnizo and Díaz 1999; Guarnizo et al. 1999; Guarnizo et al. 2003; McIlwaine 2008). The majority of respondents in my studies also admit to maintaining strong links with

the home country, as well as with relatives and friends in other migrant destinations. This has been made easier by developments in modern communications:

> [contacts] Permanent … I wake up and switch on internet and the Colombian newspaper. This is like my daily routine. Eh, now, let's say with Skype and all that, one can talk with friends, with my parents, all the time. (Flo**r**, woman, Madrid, arrived 2003)
>
> [contacts] very active, I mean now with these communication means and high technology, internet and Skype, messenger and all that, they happen I would say daily, with my family, almost daily, when they are connected to internet, or we talk on the phone. (Jessica, woman, London, arrived 1985)

Both Flor and Jessica, like many other migrants, travel backwards and forwards visiting family and friends. For some, transnational ties prove even more satisfactory than social relations in the host society, as Stephanie (London, arrived 2002) explains when asked if she maintains contacts with Colombia: 'All, because as you can see all my friends are there, and well, I have not made that many friends here, so my social life happens through the phone.' These transnational links can be harder to nurture for migrants in a vulnerable legal or socioeconomic situation, such as refugees, undocumented migrants or the unemployed. Vanesa, who moved to London in 1992 to study but decided to stay to work and earn some money, had to wait eight years until her legal status was resolved in order to visit Colombia. Studies also point out that the ability to use modern communication technologies vary across gender, generational and class lines (Benítez 2006; Panagakos and Horst 2006). Equally, as seen in Chap. 6, the impact of the crisis on migrants in Spain has meant in some cases reduced or tenser transnational connections.

Remittances and Wider Relations with Family and Others

Irregular migrants, refugees and others in a poor socioeconomic situation can also be at a disadvantage in the field of transnational economic relations. Migrant remittances have acquired enormous importance in

Colombia, both at the micro and macro levels. The country is one of the largest recipients of remittances in South America, and this money represents the second most important source of foreign exchange (Khoudour-Castéras 2007; Mejía et al. 2009). Although the impact of the global economic crisis led to a decline in remittances, they have somehow recovered reaching 4 billion USD in 2014 (Multilateral Investment Fund 2014). The studies available suggest that most Colombian migrants send remittances to the home country to sustain their families, invest in housing or other goods and save for the future (Guarnizo 2008; IOM/UN 2003; McIlwaine 2008).

A majority of respondents in my research admit to sending remittances more or less regularly and in varying quantities depending on personal and family circumstances. In the 2010 survey, 64 per cent of Colombian respondents in Madrid and 57 per cent in London said they sent money to Colombia. Percentages are lower in the survey conducted in 2014–2015, but not by that much (57 and 52 per cent respectively, plus 59 per cent in Brussels).[4] Both studies indicate that almost all remittances circulate from the host to the home country, although there is evidence of flows between migrant destinations (within Europe and with other Latin American countries and the USA). Equally, 11 per cent of respondents in Madrid, 13 per cent in London and 3.5 per cent in Brussels said they receive money from Colombia, and to a lesser degree other countries. They are mostly migrants studying or in a vulnerable socioeconomic situation, as the survey data and qualitative fieldwork suggests.

The interviews show that migrants with children or other close relatives in Colombia are amongst those sending money most regularly. These include women like Stephanie in London or Margarita in Barcelona; the first has a daughter from a previous marriage living in Medellin and the latter is a single mother with a son in Bogota. Both send remittances regularly to cover their children's expenses and help other family members. But there are also men in a similar situation, such as Gabino, who sends money to his wife and children since they went back to Colombia as a result of the crisis in Spain. Thus, sometimes even those in a precarious situation seek to send as much money as possible to sustain their families,

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[4] It is important to keep in mind that the samples for each survey were different.

in the meantime making their lives in the host country harder. Emma, introduced before, was in this dilemma: having relocated to Belgium from Spain recently, working as a domestic worker and having to cover her expenses as well as pay her debts in Colombia, she had also to send money to her family in the home country.

Other migrants said they cannot send remittances due to their circumstances or did not because it was unnecessary. Sometimes money is sent occasionally for a special occasion or to cover a particular expense, depending on the migrant's purchasing power. This was the case of Paola: 'Yes, I send [money] to my mum … during a time I was very constant, every month … but lately I do it every six months, depending on my income … or for mothers' or fathers' day.' Finally, it is important to notice that these transnational economic relations are not exempt from controversy. Julieta explained how even though her remittances from London paid for her parents' dwelling in Colombia, after their death the issue of who owned the house created sibling tensions. Emma in Brussels also complained how she is often the one to send money to the family back home, even though her brother and sister also live abroad. Studies point out how women migrants tend to be the main remittance senders, as well as the complex web of family hierarchies produced by these transnational practices (Abrego 2009; Carling 2014). At the macro level, authors also question the link between remittances and development and the deleterious economic effects the former can have (Datta et al. 2007).

Businesses, Investments and Other Transnational Links

Migrant transnational economic relations are not only represented by monetary remittances. For instance, several interviewees were involved in business ventures with Colombia or other migrant destinations. Men predominated in these activities. Miguel, mentioned before, comes from an upper middle-class family in Bogota and before migrating to Spain to study, he already had an internet-based business which he continued to run first from Madrid and later from London. Mauro, of middle-class origin and from Cali also moved to London to continue his studies and was involved in business projects in Colombia. Some women like Vanesa

were also active in this sphere. Although she works in an office in London, she has also started a small business with a friend in Colombia: 'she is working with local artists … we buy the t-shirts … hand-painted … they send them to me here in London and I am selling them, but I don't want to sell them always to individuals, I want to sell them to shops … or in a market.' The owners of an ethnic business in Brussels also explain that they get their supplies mostly from shops and importers in Spain, rather than directly from Colombia.

Remittances and other transnational links developed with the home country can be non-monetary and happen outside the economic or personal realms (Goldring 2004; Levitt 1998). They can involve the exchange of other goods as well as ideas, values and practices that can transform behaviour 'here' and 'there'. This will be explored in greater depth when looking at the transnational political practices of Colombian migrants in the next part of the book. Equally, transnational connections are not only maintained with the homeland but also between migrant destinations. Many Colombian families are spread globally, with members in different countries and continents. Linkages between the Colombian communities in Spain, the UK and Belgium are growing (McIlwaine 2012). Many respondents remarked they have family and friends in other countries apart from Colombia and are in close touch with them. Also, some Colombians in London were investing in second homes in Spain as a holiday or future retirement plan, as a community worker explains: 'I love Spain, it would be the second country I would live in … if I don't go to Colombia I'll go there, because I have many Spanish friends … many Colombians here go to Spain … if they don't go to Colombia they go there, to Alicante, Torrevieja, Torremolinos' (woman, London, arrived 1987).

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5

The Experiences of Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Although Colombian migration abroad is mostly economic, refugees and asylum seekers represent a significant share of the diaspora. However, their stories and experiences are rarely considered. Moreover, not all Colombians escaping violence and repression are recognised as such in official statistics. Many arrive in Europe and other countries as asylum seekers and obtain refugee status, while others fail to demonstrate their cases or enter the host country as tourists, students or dependents. As the nature of armed conflicts and international migration becomes more complex, so do the reasons Colombians have for leaving their country. Often, interviewees give a mixture of explanations for moving abroad, with violence and insecurity present in many cases. It is important to remember too that the legal status of migrants is influenced by immigration policies, with different types of migration increasing or declining as barriers are lowered or raised.

Despite the increasing blurring of lines between what constitutes a forced migrant or a refugee and a voluntary or economic migrant (Yarris and Castañeda 2015), in some respects their stories of fleeing, arriving in Europe and integrating into their new host societies can vary. As Joly argues (2004, p. 143), '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.' This is why this chapter focuses on the less well-known experiences of Colombian refugees in Europe, based on the primary data obtained from the questionnaires and in-depth interviews carried out in Spain, the UK and Belgium over the last 20 years.

Here, the label 'refugee' is applied to all those who mention violence, repression or insecurity affecting them or their immediate families as one of the main reasons for leaving Colombia, independently of whether they have been officially recognised as such. The first two sections are dedicated to disentangling some of these reasons and how refugee experiences have changed through time, reflecting the wide heterogeneity present in the Colombian case. Next, as in the previous chapter, the focus is on how refugees 'choose' their destination and arrive there, finishing with a brief look at how transnational links develop and are maintained. Throughout the chapter, similarities and differences with the rest of the diaspora are highlighted. As well as completing the picture of Colombian migrant flows and communities settled in Europe, this chapter aspires to bring notice to a specific group, Colombian refugees in the Global North, which has received little attention. Not only is this a worthy academic pursuit, but I also owe it to those who shared their difficult stories with me and often showed frustration at how invisible they felt.

Different Experiences of Colombian Refugees in the Earlier Years

The Straight Forward Political Refugee from the 1970s

At least 63 of the Colombian migrants interviewed in depth between 1994 and 2015, when asked about their main reason(s) for leaving the home country mentioned their political work, suffering threats or persecution and feeling that their lives or that of their families were at risk. They have different social and ethnic backgrounds, varying ages and labour market experiences as well as family statuses, and approximately half of them are women. The percentage of people who in the 2014–2015 survey chose 'security reasons' as one of their motives for migrating is smaller (around 25 per cent), with only a small minority of Colombians declaring to be refugees or asylum seekers in

the 2010 survey. Such a discrepancy has to do mainly with the fact that for the qualitative research, refugees were the protagonists of the study or the most politically involved and as a result interviews focused on them (see Chap. 3 and appendix). In addition, as said before, refugees do not always achieve this status and therefore might appear in surveys as being in an irregular situation, having tourist or student visas, or as residents and naturalised migrants.

Among the refugees interviewed, year of arrival ranged from 1978 to 2008. This partly determines the 'type' of refugee they are and is one of the main variables influencing their experiences in Europe. Thus, those arriving in the late 1970s and to some extent up to the early 1990s, have more in common with the straight forward image of a political refugee, such as those escaping the well-known military dictatorships in the Southern Cone (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil). These Colombian refugees were real or suspected left-wing activists and as such suffered from persecution, imprisonment, and kidnapping and assassination attempts. They include mainly human rights lawyers, political activists, trade unionists and community workers, but also artists and teachers. Colombia enjoyed democratic governments at the time, but as national and international organisations denounced and as interviewees describe, repression and abuses were widespread in the context of the war against the guerrillas and social change (Amnesty International 1994; GMH 2013; Liga Colombiana and Colectivo de Abogados 1988):

> we … worked with groups, left-wing ones. During the times of [presidents] Belisario Betancur, Turbay Ayala, there were around 68,000 people detained, according to the Ministry of Defence itself, lots of killings, torture and the rest. We managed to escape, came here and stayed (Victor, London, arrived 1978).

> This was more or less in 1970, from 1970 onwards. But this was used as a pretext, a greater pretext for increased repression of social sectors, because then everything was justified under the, of fighting against the guerrillas … then everyone was suspected of being a guerrilla, and all detentions, torture or killings were justified (Enrique, London, arrived 1988).

Although there are more men in this situation, women active in the public sphere have also suffered political violence (Meertens 2001a, b; Restrepo Vélez 2006). These are the cases of Bea and Nelly, a human rights activist and a community worker involved with left-wing movements. The former

arrived in London in 1989 with the help of an international organisation, and the latter in 1988 following other friends and relatives who left before her. Other women interviewed were also affected personally because of their participation in politics, trade unions or guerrilla movements. Their stories serve to dispel the myth of the male political refugee and dependent woman, or women as only random civilian victims of conflicts (Bermudez 2013; Mascine and van Bochove 2009). Nevertheless, more women than men in the sample left Colombia because of their partner's political work, either fleeing at the same time or joining them later (with or without children). These situations, as discussed later in more depth, can bring additional problems:

> first he arrived, my husband, and then me. And eight months later the children came … since I saw … that my husband was not coming back, that he couldn't … and that the situation got worse … Then, I said I'm going, I have no other choice, otherwise he was there, me here, and the children in the south; I had sent my children to another city with the grandparents (Rita, Brussels, arrived 1990).

Whether male or female, these pioneers arrived as asylum seekers and were awarded refugee status relatively easy, thus in a way experiencing lesser difficulties than those coming after. As Victor and other 'senior' refugees in London explain, the reception context in those years was very different, both in terms of how they were perceived by the host society and by the smaller but more homogenous and cohesive Latin American refugee community present then, even if the Colombian situation was not the main focus of international solidarity:

> In those years, we, Latin American refugees, were considered heroes, now they, we, are rubbish, now we are frowned upon. In those days we … hardly had any free nights because we received so many invitations, to conferences, meetings; some people wanted to invite you to eat at their house and share your experiences to know a bit more of, of what was happening in Latin America. There was a huge solidarity campaign with Chile, Argentina … with Central America … Less with Colombia because the Colombian reality was hardly known, Colombia had been historically a democratic country … but in general we were seen as heroes. Not only in certain circles, of, universities, intellectuals, no, even amongst normal people … Nowadays no one invites a poor refugee, a poor asylum seeker, to tell their stories … no one wants to know.

The Widening Colombian Refugee Problem from the 1990s

Awareness of what was happening politically in Colombia and in relation to human rights abuses increased as the conflict deepened and became more complex, intersected by different violence(s) related to the war between left-wing guerrillas and the state, the emergence of right-wing paramilitaries and the spread of the illegal drugs business (see Chap. 3). In consequence, wider sections of the population were affected and the stories of Colombian refugees become more complicated. During the next few decades thousands of Colombians arrived in Europe as exiles owing to their political activities, and also because they felt threatened while practising their work as lawyers, journalists, social and community workers, trade unionists or teachers. Box 5.1 reflects several stories of refugees interviewed in the UK and Spain who left the homeland in the 1990s and at the turn of the century.

Box 5.1 Stories from different Colombian refugees in the UK and Spain

Ignacio is a man in his 40s working for a community organisation in London. He arrived there as a refugee in 1992, escaping years of persecution and threats. Both he and other members of his family had militated in left-wing political parties, and in some cases became involved in guerrilla movements. This brought the family many problems. However, it was while working for an education project with indigenous communities that Ignacio denounced some practices and started to receive death threats. By then, he was so tired of what was happening in Colombia and of seeing so many people die that he decided to leave: 'it was a very hard time … for the country … it was sad, sad … so I said no, I mean, I just cannot stand it anymore, I cannot … A lot of people left, we left, in those years.'

In the case of Arturo, also a man in his 40s and working at a university, he was living in Barcelona since 2003. He was a former guerrilla who abandoned arms and became involved in left-wing party politics, as well as human rights, social and peace work. As a result he suffered threats and attempts on his life, left the country temporarily and after being back and realising that the situation did not improve decided to leave for Spain. Arturo arrived there with the help of Amnesty International and stayed longer than expected after receiving a permit for 'exceptional circumstances'. His wife accompanied him into exile, but they left their children back in Colombia, which made things harder: 'well, I'm divided, my children are there and my wife here.'

Box 5.1 (Continued)

Eva, a woman in her 30s, arrived in Spain in 2000 and at the time of the interview was working as a cultural mediator. She studied history in Colombia, where she was a teacher and researched human rights issues. Although officially she moved to Spain to study for a PhD, the real reason is that her research group received threats and one of the members disappeared. Scared by the experience, Eva moved to Spain where she knew some people. Despite her story, Eva never applied for asylum but later married and ended up staying in the host country. After the psychological impact, she had finally found peace: 'it took me a lot of time, because leaving Colombia it was, well, it was not because I wanted, and everything was very traumatic for me … I never felt able to tell my family what happened.'

A young couple interviewed in Madrid, Manuel and Pepa, migrated from the coffee-belt region of Colombia with their children in 2000–2001. She owned a small business and he worked 'with the community, with social issues'. However, Manuel was elected town councillor and this brought them 'many problems'. The family experienced pressures and threats to try and stop his social work. Although it was not clear who was behind such actions: 'knowing how certain things are solved in my country … we did not want to find out more.' Through personal contacts Pepa migrated first because it was deemed easier. Seeing that the situation in Colombia did not improve, a year later Manuel followed with the children. Once in Spain they claimed asylum and received refugee status. The family had no intention to return.

Source: elaborated by the author based on interviews conducted in 2005–2007

In most of the cases referred up until now, despite their heterogeneity there is a common thread; they are refugees escaping political violence and repression carried out by state forces or right-wing paramilitary groups. Nelly describes well the atmosphere in the home country at the time she left: 'when the civil war started again in Colombia … when the genocide and massacres started, well, many of us left the country, those who didn't, well, they died.' This is important, since these refugees knew they were fleeing because of their political or social ideals and work, which in a way might help accept the consequences. In addition, as international attention on the Colombian conflict and human rights abuses grew, in quite a few instances the refugees interviewed were assisted by national and

international organisations. Research with other groups points out how the refugee experience can be harder for those who in a way did nothing to merit such a move or do not even know what they did to deserve it. This can be applied to women and children accompanying relatives into exile, as Al-Rasheed (1993) details for the Iraqi case. A Colombian refugee man interviewed, Enrique (see above), elaborates on this point, both in reference to those refugees who arrived in London after him and to his second wife who came with him when he left the home country:

> we could say that I arrived as a celebrity, eh?, in the sense of what this means in the field of human rights, but when other type of people who do not have such a dimension arrive, who do not even have the capacity that I could have, based on my experience as a lawyer, of my political experience, of my history of struggle, that I knew why I was here, because despite everything I knew why I was, why I was in exile, and that made me stronger, to know that there were people there, that I had some direct contacts … and still for me it was a trauma too big, now, how it would be for people who arrive in a more anonymous fashion, and are even more vulnerable?

Although Box 5.1 includes stories from refugees arriving in those years and settling in Spain, a majority of those in my sample ended up fleeing to London, which reflects the peak of Colombian asylum seekers entering the UK and the longer history of the Colombian community there. Nevertheless, with the turn of the century, as migration flows from Colombia to Spain accelerate, my research finds many more Colombians escaping insecurity in the latter country (see Chaps. 3 and 4).

The More Complex Stories of Those Escaping Violence in the Twenty-first Century

Fleeing Amidst Multiplying Types of Violence(s) and Growing Barriers

With the arrival of the new century, and sometimes before, the stories and experiences of Colombian refugees in Europe become ever more heterodox. This is partly the result of the further deterioration of the conflict and

spread of different types of violence(s) (political, social, drugs-related) in Colombia, but also of increased barriers to migration and asylum in host countries. Thus, on the one hand, Colombians arriving in Spain, the UK and Belgium at this time are not only activists escaping political violence, but also people from all walks of life threatened by right-wing and left-wing groups (paramilitaries and guerrillas), drug mafias and other violent actors, or in some cases not even knowing the provenance of their menace. In a way this makes it harder for them to prove their asylum claims. Moreover, as European countries close their frontiers to further immigration from 'third countries' (non-EU) including refugees, those seeking asylum have to find other ways of making it into safe havens, whether it is entering the host country as tourists or students, or going through multiple migrations as explored later. Some of their stories are summarised in Box 5.2.

Box 5.2 More heterodox stories from Colombian refugees

Gladys is a 39 year old woman from Cúcuta, in Colombia. Prior to her arrival in Madrid in 2001, she lived with her husband and three children near Pereira, one of the main cities in the coffee-growing region, where they owned a small family business. It was there that her husband was kidnapped by the guerrillas: 'just because a person works or owns a business … and earns some money, then the guerrillas start bullying them, asking, asking for a *vacuna* (war tax), and if they don't comply … well, they kidnap them, they ask for some money and if you don't pay they kill them.' After he was released by the police, they moved to other cities and departments several times in fear of their lives. Still feeling unsafe, they decided to seek asylum in Spain.

Another woman from Cali, Rocío, moved to London with her husband in 1997, but her story reflects well the growing complexity of the security situation in Colombia. She worked as a teacher in primary schools in poor areas, also lobbying for support from politicians and the better off. At some stage she started collaborating with a woman colleague, and it was this that brought her problems: 'she was "in a good situation", working in the same place as me but as a hobby, because she wanted to help people … she was very formal and when I started there she offered to, I mean to give me a lift to work in her motorcycle … I started to work with her and things were going well … [but] this woman was involved in something bigger, I don't really know if she worked for the guerrillas or the military … the story was that she was transporting weapons.' After a package went missing, Rocío's friend disappeared and she started receiving threats. This is why they left Colombia. However, her asylum claim was denied: 'they said they believed our story … but that we were not covered by the Convention … because really I could not

accuse anyone because I did not know who I was talking about, so I needed to apply for human rights … but I am still waiting.'

For Javier, a young Colombian journalist who sought asylum in Spain in 2001, it was his work for a sociocultural project led by a university and the culture ministry in the region of Urabá, one of the most heavily affected by the conflict, that got him into trouble. The project went well and they decided to extend it, researching diverse issues including the recent history of colonisation, violence and economic relations in the area: 'The project lasted a year … and I could not finish it because at the end, when we started talking publicly … well, the threats commenced.' Threats were particularly directed to him, and later extended to his family. However, he did not know where they were coming from and could not obtain help from the authorities: 'it could be the paramilitaries, for lots of reasons, but it could be, it could be the guerrillas … is the game they play, "I don't identify myself" and thus you are left in the air, cannot denounce anyone … the *Fiscalía* (public prosecutor's office) told me, we cannot give protection until you suffer an attempt on your life … and even then they couldn't because of insufficient resources.' That is when he decided to leave.

Source: elaborated by the author based on interviews conducted in 2003 and 2005–2007

These stories are a reflection of how the armed conflict and violence(s) in Colombia over the years have affected different people in complex ways. On the one hand, as Meertens (2001b, p. 136) 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.' On the other, there is the violence produced by the illegal drugs trade, poverty and inequality, which often intermingles with the armed conflict. This is why Landolt and Goldring (2006, pp. 16 and 23), when comparing the experiences of Chilean and Colombian refugees in Canada, to better highlight the heterogeneity present among the latter, differentiate refugee activists from accidental refugees ('people who are unwittingly drawn into politics and become targets of political violence') and security refugees ('people leaving because of the generalized violence and insecurity').

Other Mixed Experiences of Violence

As well as the different types of Colombian refugees sketched above, other interviewees who say they migrated to Europe for economic reasons, to study or join their loved ones, also mention the violence, insecurity and sociopolitical context in the home country as contributing factors for wanting to leave. In some cases, despite alleging different motives for migrating, such as 'change my lifestyle' and study, like Tomás, a male journalist in his 30s, as the interview proceeds other reasons emerge. Although he never applied for asylum and entered the UK as a student in 2000, Tomás elaborates on his decision to leave Colombia:

> I came because after working for a long time there in the country as a war correspondent … I wanted to sort of change my lifestyle, because the pressure we had because of the threats and coercion received from the armed groups, including the guerrillas, the paramilitaries and the narcotraffickers, and the state itself, well, kept us too stressed in exchange for little … several colleagues were killed, and in exchange for little I would say, the money was not sufficient to risk your life. So we decided to take a break, although we never received direct threats.

Others were not so directly affected by the conflict, but in their descriptions of life in Colombia the general climate of violence and deteriorating social and political conditions come up as factors conditioning their experiences and making it harder to carry on their normal lives. For instance, Guido, mentioned in Chap. 4, moved to London to join his mother and continue his studies, and because he could not have the future he wanted in Colombia. However, he explains that at the time he left, life in his home country was hard: 'Colombia was going through a very critical political situation, with the problem of drugs trafficking, the violence, and also, the social disintegration related to narcotrafficking and all that.' At least three other migrants interviewed for the 2014–2015 project fit this description. Their overt reasons for migrating included studying, broken relationships, wanting a better future for the children or following other Colombians moving abroad. However, they also mentioned:

the social situation, the political situation in my country. It was too sad for me, then, it was a time, when the drugs trade was perpetrating barbaric acts in all cities (woman, worked in Bogota as an actress, arrived in Madrid 2002).

well, it is also because of the social problems in Colombia. Many Colombians left, have left after the war in the 90s and all that, and I, I was one of them (woman, had just finished secondary school in Colombia, arrived in London 2004).

I lived in a neighbourhood in Medellín and there was … a lot of mafia … the police would come to the houses … I don't know what was more corrupt … the government, the police or the guerrillas. People did not have enough to eat and the police would take their earnings away … so I decided to come (woman, was a housewife and was studying, arrived in Brussels 1990).

Thus, as all the stories analysed so far show, the armed conflict and other violence(s) in Colombia have had a significant influence in the motivations of many people for leaving. Moreover, the reasons for migrating, and therefore the type of migrant one becomes, are often intermingled and not as clear as researchers or policy makers portray. As said before, this is a key issue in understanding migration flows and their increasing complexity, as well as how to deal with them, as the current migration-refugee crisis in Europe unleashed by the Syrian and other conflicts best exemplifies.

How Refugees Reach Europe: Tales from Spain, the UK and Belgium

'Choosing' a Destination: Information, Alternatives, Networks and Chance

Structuralist theories of migration have been criticised for their emphasis on wider structures to the detriment of individual agency, which makes migrants look like passive agents in the migratory process (Kofman et al. 2000). Refugees tend to have less choice about when or where they migrate than other types of migrants. However, the ways in which the Colombian refugees researched reached their final destination shows

great diversity, with different degrees of 'forcefulness' but also agency. The stereotypical view of refugees is of people escaping from their home with few belongings and often little time to prepare and few choices about destinations. This is real or close to reality in many cases, as Elena's story portrays. She is a social worker who was involved in community projects and left-wing politics in Colombia, which put her life under threat and as a result had to flee:

> One day I was in my house and I left and I was never able to go back, my books, my music, the pyjama I wore the day before, I never returned home. I mean one morning I left for work and they tried to get me into a van, I resisted … people around started making a lot of fuss and they did not manage to introduce me into the van. And that night I couldn't go back home … I have friends who had to dismantle my house … others packed my suitcase, one day I would stay in someone's house and then in another's, and since that morning until the day I went to the airport I didn't see my mother … I never prepared, I never thought, and I did not want to (Madrid, arrived 2000).

When asked why she chose Spain, Elena added: 'now that I think a lot about it, I realise that it wasn't a decision, I had no option.' However, later in the conversation she mentions that she had worked with Spanish people before, so when the situation became unsustainable she contacted a family she knew in Andalusia and they took her in. Other refugees interviewed obtained asylum through the help of an organisation, which often meant little choice about where to go. In some cases, refugees applied for asylum in different places before leaving Colombia and opted for the one they thought most convenient. In others, it depended on which country accepted them: Anita, who had been a member of a guerrilla group and arrived in London in 2000, explained that after trying several options, the UK was the first country to admit her and her family.

As others argue, refugees are not just passive victims; in forced migration, human agency and social networks play a significant role (Castles 2003; see also Camino and Krulfeld 1994; Koser and Pinkerton 2002). Many interviewees had a degree of choice in where they went, within a limited range of options. For some, their decision was influenced by advice received. For others, it was based on similar factors affecting other

migrants: whether they had family, friends or contacts in a country; or perceived advantages and disadvantages in legal provisions, social services, language, culture or weather. Bloch (2002) argues that colonial ties can be one of the most important predictors of country of settlement for asylum seekers. In the case of Colombians, this can explain their migration to Spain, but not to the UK or Belgium. As the following quotes show other factors are also key for choosing Spain: '[it] was the closest to my homeland' (man, Madrid, arrived 2000); 'because of the language … the children's studies … people talked about Spain' (woman, Madrid, arrived 2001); 'in our case some of my colleagues had gone to Spain already … so it was easier to come here … we wanted to remain as a team … to continue our work' (man, Madrid, arrived 2001).

Studies of why and how refugees end up in the UK show that in many instances decisions are made by others, such as agents, and that often asylum seekers have limited or hardly any information about the host country. At most, the UK is identified as sympathetic to refugees and offering good protection (Crawley 2010). However, Gilbert and Koser (2006) found that quite a few Colombians in their sample had contacts in the UK and previous information, even if this was sometimes misleading. As in the case of Spain, some of the refugees in my research also said they preferred the UK or Belgium because of the social support offered or because they could continue their political work from there: 'because my uncle was already here' (man, London, arrived 1994); 'it was the only country … offering sufficient guarantees' (man, London, arrived 1988); 'I have two sisters that worked here, they came when they were very young' (woman, Brussels, arrived 1990).

Country-specific laws also have an effect on refugees. Increased restrictions for Colombian asylum seekers entering the UK from the mid-1990s coincide with numbers going up in Spain, at least until 2001 when new visa requirements are introduced in the latter. This can lead to the spread of families and networks over different destinations, thus helping create transnational links. Ignacio (Box 5.1) explained that her sister and family had to leave Colombia after him, but chose to go to Spain because it was easier to enter. Isaac, a refugee man from Antioquia, rushed his trip to Spain in 2001 before new visa regulations were imposed, but these affected the later arrival of his wife and children. Quite a few also said they

favoured Europe over the USA because of their political views. Although the USA is one of the main countries of reception for Colombian asylum seekers, for left-wing activists it can be an anathema given Washington's historical involvement in Latin America and links with the Colombian conflict (see also Eastmond 1993, on Chileans).

Looking at gender differences, in my sample more women than men followed their partners into exile, thus exercising less choice. This, together with the fact that more women refugees apply for asylum as dependents (see Chap. 6), means that they tend to be more in a 'dependent' situation and thus suffer increased vulnerability. Virginia and her son joined her husband in London in 1986 some months after he went into exile because of his family's left-wing activities, but she argues that she had little saying in the matter: 'I arrived very young … I had no idea what political asylum was … I came after, since we had no alternative by then, we loved each other and that, and we were living separated from one another.' Esther, who arrived in London in 1998 with her son, was in a similar situation, since she also followed her husband. Moreover, as some of the quotes from interviewees reflect, refugee women who migrate because of their own activities often take decisions based on what they think is best for the family and especially children. In the case of Meli, a refugee woman in her 50s living in Madrid since 2003, she could have joined her grown-up daughters in France but decided not to be a burden. For Pilar, a worker and trade union activist together with her husband, her decision to seek refuge in the UK in 1997 while he stayed in Colombia was also influenced by the children:

> when one really chooses to fight to defend human rights … one knows that is going to die … knows the risks … I chose to come because I could not stand the pressure, especially because of my children, yes? I thought I had no right, if only I die, ok, but … they are not old enough to decide, and I cannot answer for their lives … he on the other hand decided to continue the struggle.

Agger (1992, pp.74–5), in her book about refugee women describes the agonising decisions that those involved in politically dangerous work sometimes face because in 'the midst of rebellion and violence, she must

be careful of her children'. Since care of children is primarily connected to women's private sphere, this can lead to serious conflict: 'she must remain in the private sphere and care for her children, but seen in a longer perspective, the political struggle against the dictatorship in the public sphere is perhaps the best care she can give her children' (ibid.). Other Colombian women activists interviewed talked about this, like Sarah, a human rights lawyer and single mother, who arrived in London in 2003 with her daughter: 'those of us who are so committed with the people, eh, yes, sometimes we neglect, like, like to spend more time with the children, but she knows … and she would tell me that if I had to do something … so in that sense she liked it and would sacrifice herself.'

Secondary and Multiple Migrations

There are also differences amongst refugees with previous experience of exile and those who left Colombia for the first time. As in the case of other Colombian migrants (see Chap. 4), quite a few of the refugees interviewed had previous instances of displacement internally or abroad. In some cases, narratives of exile went back to family histories during *La Violencia* period (see Chap. 3): 'My grandfather had a large *finca* [farm] … he had cattle and lots of other things, but during *La Violencia* he had to leave, because he was a Conservative … with the little bit they had they started again in a village … but they also had to escape' (Mariano, London, arrived with his mother 1994). Bernardo, a refugee in his 70s exiled in Belgium since 2002, talked about his family being ejected from their lands during this time, and how this helped form his left-wing political consciousness, as well as that of many others. Interviewees also mention migrating within Colombia as children or young people following their families, to study and work or owing to their activism.

Many refugees, once their lives and that of their families were at risk, tried moving to a different city or region within the country before fleeing abroad. Often this caused the breakup of families, even if only temporarily, while some went into hiding in one place and others were sent somewhere else deemed safe. At times this led into more permanent separations, as in the case of Enrique and his first wife:

> I had my family there … my first wife and two children, and that practically forced me to separate … my wife did not resist the situation … initially I had taken them, my ex-wife and children, from Turbo to Medellín, and was thinking of taking them to Cartagena to avoid problems … and in Medellín, at the airport, the attack happened … I was taken to Bogotá … until I was able to leave for exile.

In the case of women activists, the level of commitment to their work in Colombia and the dangers they are exposed to can also cause families to break up, especially because women are still not expected to assume such roles. This was the case of Sarah again, who explains that although her former partner was also a lawyer and had participated in human rights issues, he never understood her getting so involved, which contributed to their breakup: 'Colombia is still a *machista* society … and my work, which as I told you is seven days a week and 24 hours a day … and also the threats … and he would question me a lot because of that, yes?, and due to the constant travelling and all that, so we always had lots of problems because of that.'

For some refugees interviewed, men and women, it was not the first time they moved countries. Some experienced exile abroad before, went back to Colombia and had to leave again, like Meli, a woman engaged with left-wing movements; she and her daughters lived for a time in Panama and Mexico, went back to Colombia and had to flee anew. Others, like Bernardo in Brussels or Juan, a refugee man in his 40s settled in London since 2001, returned to Colombia for a while but after realising their security was still compromised experienced a new return to their host country. In the case of Anita, together with her husband and child, they moved through Latin America first, but still feeling unsafe went to France and finally to the UK, where they were offered refuge. A few tried a country first, but not feeling satisfied moved to a second destination: 'I had a cousin exiled in Switzerland … I arrive there and I thought it was horrible … I had all the papers to stay … but I said no … I already had friends in Spain … so I came here' (man, Madrid, arrived 2000). As in the case of the wider diaspora, these moves helped build and cement transnational relations across countries.

Transnational Connections: Weaker Private and Economic Ties

As established in the previous chapter, migrants in a more vulnerable situation can find it harder to create and maintain transnational links with the homeland or with Colombian communities in other countries. Refugees are in this category, although this does not mean that they do not engage transnationally. To start with, for people with refugee status or waiting to have their asylum claim resolved it is harder to travel to the homeland, since this might compromise their legal condition or put them at risk. For quite a few refugee respondents, it was years before they could return and visit family. Some brave going back during family emergencies even if it could have serious consequences: 'we had to go for a few days, in total, total secret, totally hidden, because … my mother had an accident and when she was in hospital my brother died … so I had to go' (man, London, arrived 1999). Others do not want to take such a chance and feel the pressure of being permanently away from their loved ones. Daniel, who arrived in Brussels in 1999 with serious health problems and waited five years to be awarded refugee status, was very bitter about the fact that his father died while he was away and he had not seen his mother since leaving Colombia. This was also a source of sadness for Mateo: 'I couldn't go to the burials of, of my two brothers killed, to neither of them, I do not believe in the cult of the death but I wasn't even able to accompany my family at that time.'

Refugees can also suffer difficult socioeconomic circumstances, sometimes surviving on public support until their claims are accepted or even after depending on age, health conditions and other factors affecting their incorporation into the labour market. This can affect their ability to keep in touch with family and friends back home, send remittances or participate in other transnational activities. During visits to a migrant organisation in Madrid, a woman asylum seeker asked how she could worry about transnational political participation when she was waiting for her legal status to be resolved and in the meantime worked as a domestic worker. Still, some refugees admitted to sending money to their families in Colombia, even if it was little or only sporadic. Others had

received money from their relatives and friends instead, at least initially when they arrived in the host country.

Nevertheless, research with other Colombian communities such as in Quebec argue that in some cases refugees manage to re-establish family connections from safety abroad, after these were disrupted while they were in hiding or fleeing from danger in Colombia (Arsenault 2010). As in the case of other migrants, Colombian refugee communities in Europe have also developed links with one another, either because family and friends are spread among different countries or due to their continuing political work regarding the situation in Colombia (see Chap. 9).

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6

The Colombian Diaspora: Settling and Integration

The stories explored so far highlight the variety of experiences of Colombian migrants in Europe in their reasons for leaving as well as choosing a destination and arriving. The development of transnational connections has also been introduced, to be analysed further in reference to the political domain in the remainder of the book. This chapter completes Part II of the book by focusing on what migrants and other informants identify as the most relevant issues during settlement and integration in the host society. It looks at migrant preconceptions, as well as difficulties and achievements. Such processes need to be taken into account because they help shape migrant political involvement.

The chapter commences looking at the feelings and problems migrants experience when they first arrive in the UK, Spain or Belgium. A differentiation will be drawn between refugees and other migrants, although similarities are also explored. Some of the main issues impacting on integration are sketched here, before being treated more in depth in the following sections. The focus is on immigration status, access to employment and housing, health and discrimination. Settling and integration stories, as explored in another section, have an impact on gender roles and relations. Studies have looked at this, with inconclusive agreement on

whether migration leads to greater emancipation for women or not. The main argument here, using an interdisciplinary approach, is that changes are mediated by other personal, contextual and structural variables.

The chapter ends by analysing what has happened to Colombian migrant communities in Europe since the eruption of the global financial and economic crisis in 2008. This crisis has had a particularly negative impact on vulnerable groups, including migrants. As well as reinforcing their socioeconomic precariousness, migrants have witnessed growing anti-immigration feelings and policies. Spain is a good example of a deteriorated socioeconomic context as a result of the crisis. The UK and Belgium have been less affected comparatively, but provide an increasingly hostile sociopolitical environment for migrants. In the face of this, Colombian migrants have produced different strategies, including staying and resisting, returning to the homeland and remigrating to another country.

Main Feelings and Problems Upon Arrival

As already intimated in the previous chapters, in some instances Colombian migrants land in Europe with some preconceived ideas, while in others there is almost a total lack of information about the host country. These early ideas or absence of them often frame migrants' first experiences. In the case of refugees, both fear and relief can mix during the trip and the initial settling process. Experiences depend on what the person did in Colombia, the conditions under which they left and their priorities. Alfredo's account of how he felt flying to London with his partner and child in 1993 after being released from jail in Colombia expresses this:

> I had some idea, I don't know, seems one doesn't think, but I, the only thing I had was that I was not enthusiastic about coming. Well, this is different from what other people think, even other refugees … Despite the fact that in Colombia I lived under the pressure of persecution, I was happy with what I was doing … I knew I was going to lose it here, something told me that would be the case … I was not happy, even when the plane was

landing I had like a stinging sensation, like, the uncertainty of not knowing where one is going … I didn't know anything about here, I knew they spoke another language … When I got here everything was confirmed.

Even for those coming in better conditions, first thoughts about where they are going and what they experience upon arrival can be quite different. Laura, a middle-class young woman from Bogota moved to London in 2002 to study, but after meeting her husband ended up staying. She had learned about Europe and always wanted to go to the UK, but when she came 'it was a shock, because it was not the same as what I had in my mind … I was a bit disillusioned.' Accounts of first days in the host country can also differ based on time and place of arrival, first or subsequent migrations and individual characteristics. The stories of the 'pioneers' can vary from those of migrants following on, both in terms of advantages and disadvantages. When Julieta landed in Spain in 1974 at the age of 20 to work in domestic service, things were very different from today: 'it was Franco's time.' Difficulties renewing her work permit took her to France, but things did not work out there either and she moved to London: 'at the beginning it was very difficult … but there was a lot of work … good because I progressed a lot economically, which was my goal.' Despite difficulties, the relative ease of movement and work opportunities that Julieta enjoyed are not necessarily shared by those coming after.

Interviewees in Spain also talk about problems experienced upon arriving, although in general they tended to have more information and access to networks. In many cases, these have to do with preconceived ideas of how they would be treated as Latin Americans and perceptions of reality, as well as cultural differences. A Colombian man interviewed in Brussels (arrived 2009) who first migrated to Spain, mentions the shock of ending up in Burgos, a middle-size city in the north of Spain, in December because of the cold weather. While Elena (Chap. 5) explains: 'we still have the idea of the mother country … I thought, for instance, that in Spain people spoke better Castilian … and I come and find … a way of treating people, very abrupt.'

Migrants joining family or others in the host country enjoy certain advantages compared to those arriving alone. Networks are one of the main factors explaining migration flows, and a key source of information

and support. These benefits are explored briefly in the previous chapters. However, studies have given less attention to the perverse effects that networks can have (Portes 1998; Portes and Landolt 1996). During fieldwork, I heard tales of abuse of co-nationals and of people feeling morally tied to those who had helped them. Moreover, interviewees and others talk about the gossip circulating within the community and the unhappiness and distrust this causes. Emma (Chap. 4) lives with her brother in Brussels, but his lifestyle is causing her hardship: 'I get together with Latinas … and they all talk about each other … My brother was going out with a girl, then, everyone talks about him. Because he is very flirtatious and all that. Then, many say I am an accomplice.' In addition, networks can limit opportunities for new arrivals by pigeonholing them. As Fernando, a refugee man who migrated to London in 1999, remembers of the first few days as a migrant: '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.'

Migrants with no previous connections can find it harder to settle, at least initially. However, they often hook up into existing networks and organisations. A woman working in a Latin American shop in Brussels explains that they are a first point of entry into the city for many migrants: 'people recommend them, well, this place, they come here with their suitcase saying "help me find a room", "where can I stay?", "is there any work?"' Others receive help from religious institutions or other groups. A refugee woman, Cristina, who arrived in London in 1999 with three children, explains how by chance on her second day in the city she ran against protesters outside the Colombian embassy who put her in touch with an organisation. In general, networks are more important for those in a more vulnerable socioeconomic or legal situation.

The Importance of Immigration Status

Once in the host country, one of the most important issues is legal status, since this conditions almost everything else. In this sense, those in an 'irregular' situation tend to be among the most vulnerable. Out of the 829 questionnaires completed in Madrid and London in 2010, 16 Colombians

admitted being 'irregular' or 'undocumented', with another nine stating they were waiting for their asylum claim or other status to be resolved plus 41 not responding or choosing the option 'other' (these could also be in a precarious legal situation). During the 2014–2015 survey, only one person in Madrid and two each in London and Brussels were undocumented, with a few others holding temporary residence permits. Although not all respondents offer information about migration status, during the interviews some talk about their experiences of 'irregularity' (see Box 6.1).

Undocumented migrants are not the only ones to be in a difficult situation. Students in the UK mention growing difficulties to renew visas, given rising costs and stricter regulations. Paola (Chap. 4) stopped studying two years into her degree because the academic fees and cost of renewing her visa were too much. Respondents in Spain also explain how

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Box 6.1 Stories from Colombians in a vulnerable migrant situation

Dylan has been in Brussels for two years, after migrating from Spain with his residence card. He registered at the municipal office and was given permission to stay for three months. Due to health problems, his stay was extended but now he thinks he is 'semi-illegal'. He was asked by the police in the street to identify and when he showed his Spanish residence permit he was told 'this has no use.' Since then he tries 'not to spend too much time in public places'.

Gladys and her family applied for asylum when arriving in Madrid in 2001 and were sent to a hostel and later to a reception centre. After finding work the family moved into rented accommodation and continued with their lives. Two years later their application was denied and they became undocumented, had to leave their jobs and move houses. The family obtained residence permits in the 2005 regularisation process, except for their oldest daughter.

Vanesa arrived in the UK in 1992 with an au-pair visa but later left her job and became an 'irregular migrant'. Although being undocumented in those days was not as bad as now, she found it hard and was very worried. When she started a relationship with an Italian man, they were advised to get married. Their marriage broke up later but by then she had obtained residence. It was eight years until Vanesa was able to go back to Colombia to see her family.

Source: elaborated by the author based on interviews conducted in 2005–2007 and 2014–2015

difficult it is for Colombians to obtain student visas, as the authorities were clamping down on student migration.

For refugees, the main problems are having their asylum claim accepted and being awarded full status. Interviewees in the UK and Belgium mostly achieved this, although processes can take years. For Adrián, a trade union leader who left Colombia with his wife and children in 1991, it was no problem: 'I presented the newspaper documentation I had with me, a document where a doctor confirmed that I have been tortured … our legalisation here in the UK was very quick.' Daniel (Chap. 5), on the other hand, is still angry about how long it took him to be recognised as a refugee by the authorities. Others were waiting for their claims or appeals to be resolved, which produced uncertainty and problems accessing services. This was the case of Rocío and her husband, who three years after applying for asylum in 1997 had their claim denied; they appealed on humanitarian grounds but in 2003 were still waiting for a response.[1] Amongst refugees interviewed in Spain (around 31), hardly anyone obtained refugee status.[2] Some arrived through a special programme for human rights defenders and later gained temporary or permanent residency through other means. Quite a few entered as tourists or students or applied for asylum, but later took advantage of regularisation programmes to obtain residency. A male journalist living in Madrid since 1999 was granted refuge relatively easily, but admitted this was unusual. Javier, another journalist who arrived in Spain in 2001, waited four years for the highest court to award him refugee status. He explains that although his case is very clear, the problem was that legal professionals did not know the situation in Colombia.

Gladys' case shows how families can be affected by asylum processes, as well as the gender impacts of these. Studies argue that women looking for asylum in the Global North face greater discrimination because it is harder to prove their public status, their stories differ more from that of the typical political refugee or due to them been considered

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[1] For more on this in the UK case, see Bermudez 2003; McIlwaine 2007b, 2005; The Refugee Council 1997.

[2] See CEAR (Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado), http://www.cear.es/que-hacemos/cifras-y-estadisticas, data accessed 3 September 2015. For more on Colombian asylum seekers in Spain, see Clavijo Guevara and Perdomo Blanco 1999; Restrepo Vélez 2006.

dependents (Asylum Aid 2003; Crawley 2000; Freedman 2007). Beatriz and her husband owned a business in Colombia and were persecuted by the guerrillas. Tired of the situation she fled to Spain in 2001 as a tourist and overstayed illegally. After her husband and children arrived, he applied for asylum and the family later applied for regularisation. Before receiving a response Beatriz separated from her husband on domestic violence grounds and she was concerned this would affect her status. Three other women in Spain, two in the UK and one in Belgium, depended on their husbands' asylum claims.

For refugees, being recognised as such also has a psychological impact. This is why Isaac (Chap. 5), despite obtaining residency through regularisation, persisted with his asylum claim: 'the Spanish government can think whatever it wants, that foreigners come here because there is better quality of life and that, but … I didn't come here because food is better and cinemas are bigger or because there are more shopping centres … I'm here … with another story.'

Employment, Housing, Health and Discrimination: Four Dimensions of Integration

Accessing Work and Housing

For migrants, entering the labour market is seen as 'the starting point of integration' (Papademetriou 2003, p. 2). In addition, since many people migrate to improve their socioeconomic conditions, this is a key concern. The employment experiences of Colombians in Europe are diverse but offer some commonalities. The studies available and the research conducted show that they have access mostly to low-skill jobs in cleaning, care, catering, retail and construction (Actis 2009; Freitas and Godin 2013; Garay Salamanca and Medina Villegas 2007; Guarnizo 2008; IOM/UN 2003; McIlwaine 2012). Although there is some degree of mobility over time, this has not proved significant while gains have been eroded by the recent crisis. The 2014–2015 survey shows some differences among the communities studied. While a majority of Colombians are employees, the

largest percentage of unemployed are in Madrid (25 per cent), of self-employed in London (16 per cent) and of the inactive in Brussels (23 per cent). Among those who specify type of work, the most important sectors are catering, cleaning and commerce, with a significant percentage of professionals in the last two cities.

These services might offer easy access to the labour market initially but can become niches difficult to escape. This is a common source of frustration, especially for migrants with high levels of education and experience, many of them refugees. Meli (Chap. 5) is one: 'when searching for work … you are offered jobs looking after the elderly, as a domestic servant … does this mean that when I arrived in Spain my hard disk was erased? … I have 45 years of experience.' The studies available highlight the decline in social and employment status most Colombian migrants experience due to difficulties having titles and careers recognised, lack of language skills (in the UK and Belgium), migration status and discrimination. Demand for low-skill workers in the host countries also plays a role. In addition, refugees might be prevented from working by health problems related to their experiences: 'I used to work … I suffered from a headache that became very serious, and a facial paralysis, and now I cannot work. Basically, I live off social security' (Cristina, London, arrived 1999).

Given these difficulties, some opt to study, do voluntary work or in the case of refugees continue with their political involvement. This depends on whether they receive state benefits or other members of the family work, situations that can lead to feelings of dependence and shame, as Sarah (Chap. 5), expresses: 'I'm not used to be given anything or receive any handouts.' Nevertheless, for her, it was preferable to depend on the state and study English, in order to access better employment in the future: 'I don't feel good about having to work cleaning, or the normal jobs you find, since I think I didn't come here to do that … to see if later I can have something, that even if it's not great, at least something that I can feel good about and that I can be of better use.'

Housing also comes up as a major concern for migrants. Preoccupations range from lack of access to social housing or affordable and decent rental accommodation to problems relating to the buying of property. Refugees in particular are very vocal about this issue. Amongst their earlier memories of arriving in Europe are tales of shocking accommodation conditions in places provided by the authorities, sharing with relatives and friends or rent-

ing privately: 'hostels were degrading … I didn't know what was happening in my life, it was so frustrating' (Virginia, Chap. 5); 'it was our salvation [being given social housing], otherwise we wouldn't have been able to cope, we would have ended up exploding in that hostel' (Enrique, Chap. 5) (see also CARILA 1996). Housing conditions can improve with time, but this tends to depend on socioeconomic status. In the case of Reyes, a refugee woman in Brussels (arrived 1999), who together with her husband owned a small business, their project was to buy their own place: 'we are looking to buy a house, and they won't lend us because my husband, his, he is self-employed … I don't have a job.'

In Spain, migrants also talk about difficulties finding suitable accommodation and cases of discrimination. Here, many were lured into buying property during the boom years and when the crisis arrived, with interest rates rising and prices plummeting they ended up in serious debt and losing their houses. There are also reports of worsening conditions and abuse as a result of the crisis:

> there was a lot of people, with their children and partners already here, who had, had got a mortgage, and they had their flat. So then, imagine … what happens? They go back to overcrowding conditions, they go back to accommodation, to sharing a room with their kids (woman working in an organisation for domestic workers, Madrid, interview 2014).

> many obtained housing here … but this is increasingly difficult because … public housing … privatisation tends to limit it or finish with it … Here, some years ago it wasn't difficult to find a room … Today is a complicated problem (man, political leader, London, interview 2014).

Health and Discrimination Issues

Health can condition employment and housing, while access to health services might be a problem for migrants. In the UK and Belgium, Colombian migrants' lack of language skills makes it difficult to access health services. Migration status and limited knowledge of the system are additional barriers. A woman working in a migrant organisation in London identifies health issues as one of the main challenges facing the Latin American community, in particular mental health and conditions

for the elderly: 'people are becoming blind, or deaf, or have a problem of incapacity … the stress did not help' (interview, 2014). The leader of another organisation adds 'very few Latin Americans, because of the language barrier … register with local doctors' (London, 2014).

Many migrants raise health issues while talking about life in the host country. Cristina, mentioned above, was unhappy about the medical attention she received in London and went to see a Spanish-speaking doctor in Belgium, as recommended by a friend: 'it was horrible because medicine here is very bad … I don't know if it is the same for everyone or if it is … because is not our own language.' There are also tales of emotional hardship related to loneliness, frustration and identity. These are more common for refugees, since their experiences involve 'a complex process involving loss and regeneration' (Camino and Krulfeld 1994, p. XIX; see also Clavijo Guevara and Perdomo Blanco 1999; Eslava González 2004; Murillo Perdomo 1989; Restrepo Vélez 2006). For Elena (see above): '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.'

Health conditions can also make it harder for migrants to think about return, as two older men interviewed in Brussels, one with a heart condition and the other having been treated for cancer, point out, given fears of not being able to receive the same medical care in their homeland. During the 2014–2015 fieldwork, migrant organisations and community leaders raised the issues of increased restrictions on access to health services for some migrants, as well as declining social benefits.

In addition, in the 2014–2015 survey, 39 per cent of Colombians in Madrid say they have felt discriminated sometimes or frequently, compared with 35 per cent in Brussels and 30.5 per cent in London (levels are also superior in Madrid than London in the 2010 study). Moreover, migrants believe discrimination has increased with the crisis. During the interviews, respondents comment on different ways they have felt discriminated. In the UK, some argue that compared to other groups Colombians are not overtly discriminated plus are recognised as good workers. However, others talk about labour discrimination, especially when trying to access more skilled jobs. Paola (see above) complains of only being offered jobs in shops and restaurants and widespread 'discrimination and psychological abuse'.

Some also accuse migrants of not doing enough to integrate: 'there is a large number of Colombians who never go to a museum … don't get out of their Colombian circles … but if we are here we should first, first learn the language' (Julieta, mentioned before). The leader of a migrant organisation in London thinks that with the proliferation of Spanish-speaking services, there is the risk of creating a ghetto (interview, 2007; see also Guarnizo 2008; McIlwaine 2007, 2005).

In Brussels, interviewees do not feel discrimination is a big problem, with some emphasising similarities with the native population in terms of religion or that it was common to find people who speak Spanish. Hugo, who arrived in 2009 from Spain, adds that in a city so multicultural it is difficult to be discriminated. However, some mention abusive work practices. Nevertheless, many more interviewees in Spain complain about discrimination. Meli's case, explored above, shows how for women it is difficult to find work outside domestic or care activities. Santiago, a human rights lawyer who came to Spain in 1998 as a refugee, managed to validate his qualifications after three years, but still feels discriminated in his profession. Migrants in Spain and the UK denounce as well the negative stereotypes suffered owing to the country's identification with violence and drugs, as Elena details: 'when we were going to rent a flat … the owner said, look, the thing is, I hope, this is a vote of confidence, because when everyone realises that you are Colombian they would say … but how can you get Colombians into the building?' Migrants in Spain also feel that their initial thoughts about been welcomed because of their historical and cultural connections did not correspond with reality.

Changes in Gender Roles and Relations and Impact on Families

Do Women Really Have More to Gain Than Men?

During the 2003–2007 fieldwork in the UK and Spain, it was a common perception among respondents that integration in the host society is easier for women than men. This is justified in terms of greater access to work for women, even if they are confined to domestic and cleaning services:

'maybe is a bit easier in terms of employment for women, in the sense that, in, in the service sector, in the black economy, eh, there are possibilities for them to work … looking after children, or the elderly … for men, eh, is a bit more difficult' (Guido, Chap. 4). However, some women believe it is also because they are more prepared to do anything to sustain their families. Julieta compares herself with her brother, who migrated to London after her: 'he found it too difficult, to work, to perform, eh, manual work, like, for instance, cleaning offices, because they, their mentality is already made that a man does not clean, that it is not a way to earn a living … you have to have the right personality and be adaptable.'

Respondents in London also believe that women are better at learning English and integrating in the host society: 'men in this country learn the language later than us, and they connect less, they integrate less in the community, and they allow women to do everything' (woman community leader, London, arrived 1980; see also McIlwaine 2005). They argue this is because women's caring responsibilities put them in touch with schools, doctors and so on. However, migrant women can also be more isolated if they stay at home, have a dependent migrant status or suffer from domestic violence. Representatives of Latin American organisations raised this issue: 'women, like I said now, with eight years [here] and they don't speak the language, with three and four kids and they don't know how to get into a train, but that's because they have been waiting for their papers for a long time, and they couldn't be themselves' (London, interview 2003). Cases of women being abused at home and at work or not being able to access health and other social services are confirmed by the leader of another organisation interviewed in 2014.

In addition, women's family responsibilities can make it harder for them to access better jobs. Beatriz, a refugee woman who arrived in Madrid in 2001, was an accountant and found it quite difficult to accept the lowering of her professional status. Less than a month after arriving she was washing dishes in a restaurant: 'it was horrible.' Her husband took longer to find work but when he did it was a better job, with a proper contract and earning more. Since separating, things have become more complicated: 'I have been very careful with the hours worked, because I have my children … not him … he can work all day … he has to give me 300 but gives me 200, 200 euros for the three kids.' Nevertheless, research points out that for migrant men, not being able to find suitable work can also

have negative consequences emotionally, given traditional gender roles. Viveros Vigoya (2003) during a study of masculinities in certain regions of Colombia finds that paid work outside the home is central for the construction of the masculine identity for reasons other than subsistence: to gain autonomy as well as recognition and prestige, to assert themselves as family providers and protectors and for personal development. Some of the Colombian men interviewed in the later project who lost their jobs, apartments and socioeconomic status with the crisis expressed their feelings about it: 'it was a completely lost year for me, because I depended on unemployment benefit, was all alone at home, it reached the stage where I was falling into a depression' (Gabino, see below).

Colombian women refugees, most of them with high levels of education, are in an especially difficult situation. Samuel, a refugee man living in Madrid since 2001 and working for an international organisation, talks about cases of women activists he knows: 'when they find themselves, eh, in situations where for instance they have to go and clean houses, look after the elderly … is very conflictive.' Arturo (Chap. 5) also believes that for his wife it is harder. While he has been able to continue his political work and has a job at the University, she is unemployed: 'she's an economist … it has been difficult for her to get organised workwise.' Although the literature looking at migration from the Global South to the North tends to believe that women gain greater independence and autonomy through the labour market, there are major differences according to type of migration, social class, educational status and work experience, and stage in the life cycle.

Changes in Roles, Relations and Families

Migration can lead to family ruptures, both at the nuclear and extended levels, as we have explored in previous chapters. In his London study, Guarnizo (2008) finds that one of the things Colombian migrants miss most are their relatives, friends and contacts in the homeland (see also Arsenault 2010). This is the case for many interviewees in my research. Blanca, who joined her husband in Madrid in 2001, says that what depresses her most is not having her relatives around. Men like Manuel (Chap. 5) also talk of the anguish of thinking about his parents: 'how is

my dad?, is he ok?, is he ill?, how is my dad?, please don't let him die …
I start feeling very scared about my parents.'

The stress can be worse when the nuclear family breaks down. Over the years, many Colombian families have gone through reunification. However, the 2014–2015 survey shows that in Madrid, around 15 per cent of respondents mention having children and/or partners in another country, mostly Colombia (less for London and Brussels). In some cases it is older children, while in others it represents new separations as a result of the crisis. Family breakups can be more frequent among refugees, with a few interviewees saying their partners did not go into exile with them or returned to Colombia. Sometimes, refugees decide to leave the family in the homeland because they think exile will be short lived. Bernardo (Chap. 5) initially moved to Brussels with his wife and children but later they decided to go back; he talks about how difficult it is to be a father 'through internet'.

Whether couples and families carry problems with them or these are created or exacerbated through migration, respondents raised concern about family breakups. This can be due to 'the socio-economic difficulties, the psychological crises, the deterioration in the quality of life, and the constant uncertainty' (Clavijo Guevara and Perdomo Blanco 1999, p. 63). In other cases, problems are associated with changes in gender roles, with men perceiving they are losing their dominant status, while women gain in independence and confidence (Al-Rasheed 1993; Eslava González 2004). Rita (Chap. 5) exemplifies some of these changes:

> We separated two years ago … He chose another way, another woman …
> But it was forty years putting up with it, because for me the most important thing was the children and being together, which is what they put in your head since we are kids, for all women. Then in that sense, coming here helped me, because I shook off all that.

Two other refugee women in London (arrived 1986 and 1998) who joined their husbands, separated soon after arriving due to the men starting new relationships. Rocío (Chap. 5) also explains about tensions with her husband over housework because he still expects her to do most of it although she is working and studying. On the other hand, Adrian, a refugee man who flew to London with his family in 1991, comments on how his household resists changes in gender roles and relations that he

believes are not part of his culture: 'we still maintain our home, like good Colombians … we don't let English customs be imposed on us (…) I am in charge of the economy, and she is in charge of cooking, although I help sometimes (…) women here, sort of try to dominate us, and, and be, they presume to have more rights here. That has happened to me, in several occasions, but I try to control it.'

The breakdown of couples is not always a consequence of migration, but also a factor leading to it (McIlwaine 2007). Many interviewees come from broken families; in some cases separation led to the mother migrating first and the children following later. But whatever the cause, there is widespread concern within the communities studied about the effects of separations and broken families on children and youth (Echeverri Buriticá 2005), as the following story, narrated by the leader of a migrant organisation in London (interview 2014), shows:

> I had a young kid who ran away from his mother. She had to leave her partner in Spain, in her house, a beautiful house, because he still had no residence card … and she came to work, with the baby, the youngest, three years old, and the young kid of 15 or 16 years. And another young man, who was already 22 … this woman is trying to keep up with her mortgage, the children badly fed, living in a room, sleeping in the floor, the one who is 16 sometimes looking after the little one … The oldest kid managed to leave and ended up lost in vice, in a room where he didn't have to pay anything … The youngest kid escaped twice from her.

The Impact of the Crisis on Colombian Communities in Europe

Increased Vulnerability and Survival Strategies

The crisis started to have an impact on European economies from the end of 2007, with the southern countries amongst the most affected. In Spain, unemployment has spiralled, the mortgage crisis has left many families homeless and indebted, while poverty and inequality have increased. Migrants are amongst the most affected, given their labour market insertion and lesser recourse to aid and networks. In addition, the policy emphasis has

been on reducing immigration and promoting return, under the premise that migrants are no longer needed and the labour market cannot accommodate them any longer (Bermudez and Brey 2017). The other two countries studied have also been touched by the crisis, but differently.

The study in 2014–2015 shows the diverse ways in which Colombian migrants in Madrid, London and Brussels have been affected by the crisis and reacted. As mentioned before, the survey shows much higher percentages of unemployed migrants in the first city. In addition, to the question of whether the crisis has affected them socioeconomically, in Madrid, 79.5 per cent of respondents answered yes; in Brussels it was 39 per cent, plus 4 per cent who said they were affected in their previous country of residence (presumably Spain); and in London it was 33 per cent, and 24 per cent respectively. In the interviews, Colombians in Madrid clearly associate the crisis with deteriorating working and living conditions, as Box 6.2 shows.

Box 6.2 Stories of migrant survival in Madrid during the crisis

Ernesto is 51 and has lived since 2007 in Madrid, where he came as a refugee, leaving his wife and children behind. From the beginning he felt the crisis, since it was difficult to find work, especially while waiting for his migration status to be solved. However, he survived doing low-skill and odd jobs. Things have deteriorated further since: 'I have a contract for five hours a month … the rest, I keep working … in 'black'… I'm living, eh, I am ashamed, in a dental clinic.'

Gabino is 44 and has been in Madrid since 1996. He migrated with his wife; later they brought their child and the family grew. They worked hard and managed to own two small businesses and their own flat, until the crisis arrived. He had to close the businesses, and the company for which he worked made him redundant. As a result the family had to return to Colombia while he remains in Madrid trying to rebuild a future for them: 'today you don't live, you survive.'

Milena is 21, studies and does low-skill jobs (assisting in schools or in a fruit shop). She joined her mother in Madrid in 2003. She has worked since she was 18 to help at home and explains how her family has noticed the crisis: 'I started looking for work and found it. I mean, it was easy, but not for my mother and sister. They work the same, but get paid less. They take away hours from them, of work.'

Source: elaborated by the author based on interviews conducted in 2014–2015

In terms of employment, men seem to have been hit by the crisis hardest, given the economic sectors they occupied (mainly construction). However, not all are tales of increased hardship. Some migrants in Spain comment on the crisis having some benefits such as reduced rental prices, or argue that their labour circumstances have not changed or even improved. One respondent alleges that since the crisis has affected the native population as well, 'people are less arrogant because they, because Spanish families have learned a lesson, that has made them … realise that we are equal' (woman, Madrid, arrived 2002). In Brussels, migrants and informants believe the labour situation has deteriorated and it is harder to find work or receive a proper contract, especially for recent migrants. Interviewees tell the case of a Colombian family recently arrived from Spain: 'The man has Spanish residency, he came to Brussels, because he had a job, he is a lorry driver … afterwards he was diagnosed with cancer, and the boss in Brussels, who was Spanish, fired him, because he was ill. And now no one will cover his health expenses' (political activist, interview 2014). Another two men interviewed in Brussels, who arrived there from Spain in 2009 and 2011 respectively fleeing the crisis, also talk of difficulties finding work with a proper contract, of being cheated by employers and of falling wages.

In London, research participants associate the crisis mostly with the situation in Spain, and especially recent arrivals from there. They also speak about tensions within the Latin American community because of competition for low-skill jobs, and abuses committed against new migrants but also by those arriving with EU passports: 'up to a point there was a kind of confrontation in some spaces, amongst immigrants' (political activist, interview 2014). Another worry is increased anti-migrant feelings and policies, and the constant changing of rules that makes it harder to obtain residency, a social security number or a bank account (participant observation, trade union workshop, 2014).

Remigration and Return

As well as staying put and surviving, two strategies Colombian migrants are implementing against the crisis are return and remigration. This affects especially the community in Spain. In the 2014–2015 survey in Madrid, 60 per cent say they intend to stay in Spain while 36 per cent

want to migrate to another country. The reasons for remaining have to do with feeling settled, having a family, perceiving better opportunities in the host country or fearing violence in Colombia. On the other hand, those who wish to go back to Colombia or remigrate mention the crisis, missing their family and having better opportunities in Colombia. Some 33 per cent of respondents would like to go back to Colombia, while around 29 per cent mention other destinations (North America and other EU or Latin American countries).

Six Colombians interviewed in London and four in Brussels have recently arrived from Spain, and I heard of many other cases during the fieldwork. A political activist interviewed in London in 2014 said that all of his wife's family and contacts in Valencia (Spain), over 20 people in total, had moved to the UK since the crisis started. The leader of a Latin American organisation in the same city quotes that 80 per cent of their clients the previous year had EU passports (see also Care-Connect and LAWRS, n.d.). Of the ten interviewees who had remigrated, all except one had Spanish nationality. Their reasons for remigrating include: being tired of life in Spain, receiving an invitation from a friend and the crisis. Those affected by the crisis were unemployed or in search of better opportunities: 'because of the economic situation and also because there were more opportunities of a better future, with my son' (woman, London, arrived 2008); 'I lost my job and then you enter in the world of informal jobs' (man, London, arrived 2011); 'my work finished, then, slowly, I started to spend the few resources I had … I decided to come here, because here I have family' (Dylan, Box 6.2).

Despite the policy emphasis on return migration, official figures show this has not been the main response to the crisis. Still, the data and studies point to some return flows, more prominent amongst some national groups than others (González-Ferrer 2013; Herrera and Pérez Martínez 2015). The perception of interviewees and informants in Madrid is that Colombians are not returning to the home country in large numbers. Consulate officials interviewed in Madrid in 2014 confirmed this idea: 'the mood is not one of return.' This was partly blamed on the lack of strong return policies on behalf of the Colombian government (Bermudez 2014; Echeverri Buriticá and Pavajeau Delgado 2015). Nevertheless, during the fieldwork some stories of return came up, like that of Gabino, mentioned before:

when the crisis started, my wife was pregnant with our second son, and the situation was very difficult … our debts were huge, it was necessary to attend those needs first, and we managed to do it but sacrificing a lot our family economy … she entered a strong depression because of her mothers' death … I wasn't able to look after her. Before something bad happened I took the decision, in 2009, I sent her to Colombia with the children … it was an opportunity for me to dedicate more time to work … to improve my situation and start helping in this way.

Another case is that of Emma (Chap. 4), who despite having remigrated to Belgium, is very unhappy and planning her return to Colombia: 'I am waiting for my husband to get his pension in Colombia … if that happens I return … because with his pension we can both live … and if … the money is not enough, well I have Spanish nationality, and a contact, a friend of my husband who has a restaurant in Madrid.' These two stories suggest that return or remigration are not always thought of as an end to the migration experience, but rather as temporary measures or at least with a back-up plan behind it. They also show that integration processes are not unilineal or irreversible; they can be interrupted or even reversed in contexts of crisis and policy change or due to personal circumstances.

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Part III

Transnational Political Practices and Conflict

7

Actors 'From Above' in Transnational Politics

Although earlier debates around transnationalism augured the imminent death of the nation-state as increased activities happen across borders, later reflections have argued that the state plays a very important role in the transnational field. Both sending and receiving states can promote or hinder migrants' political transnationalism through their policies, institutions and structures. Gamlen (2006, p. 3) points out that until relatively recently the emphasis was on immigration management by host states rather than emigration policy by origin countries, ignoring that the latter 'is also a fact of daily life for many states'. According to Portes et al. (2006, p. 13), it is understandable that sending states show increased interest on their nationals abroad, 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'. This is why authors argue that transnationalism is leading to a reconfiguration of the nation-state rather than its demise, and to new forms of citizenship (Collyer and King 2015; Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003).

Studies have debated these issues in the context of Latin American state–diaspora relations, with varying conclusions. While some argue that the impetus behind trends to strengthen links with migrants abroad and expand their political rights is more the result of internal politics than pressure exercised by those abroad, others have put the emphasis on migrants' transnational activism 'from below' (Bermudez et al. 2014; Délano 2014; Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003; Moraes et al. 2009). In addition, initiatives 'from above' can involve other actors apart from the state, as seen next. It is also important to consider this from the perspective of receiving countries, although the focus here is on sending countries.

This chapter explores how Colombia has considered migrants abroad historically, and the development of state–diaspora relations. It analyses several initiatives, some state-led but others privately promoted, that have sought to develop and reshape Colombian migrant relations with the homeland. In general, these have tried to use migrants for their own aims including politically, rather than focus on their needs and demands. As such, their success, in terms of migrant opinion and involvement, has been limited. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that Colombians abroad enjoy a wide array of formal political rights vis-à-vis the home country, a theme that is developed in detail later in the book. The final section of the chapter analyses migrant involvement in transnational initiatives from above from a gendered perspective, and briefly discusses the role of host states.

The Role of the Colombian State

Historic Relations with the Diaspora

Migration management in Colombia, like in many other countries in the region, historically focused on immigration rather than emigration. However, with the growth of outflows and internal migration movements from the 1960s onwards a more holistic approach starts to develop, including measures to stop emigration and help nationals abroad (Mármora 1979; Mejía Ochoa 2011). Nevertheless, in the early days emigration was generally seen as an outlet for internal socioeconomic and

political tensions, and state preoccupation centred almost exclusively on the issue of 'brain drain'. It is at this time that the first 'policies of repatriation and circulation' emerge, in the case of Colombia exemplified by the *Programa de repatriación de cerebros fugados* (Programme for the Repatriation of Brains 1970) (Bermudez et al. 2014; Guarnizo 2006). The country was pioneer in this respect, although it was not until the 1990s, following the acceleration and diversification of migration outflows, that steps towards a more 'diasporic approach' were taken (Meyer et al. 1997).

Ardila (2009) lists several factors that explain this shift: the growing importance of remittances and continued concern for brain drain; preoccupation about the linking of migration and security in host states; the heightened role of non-governmental actors in international politics as well as the desire to improve Colombia's image abroad. Global and regional trends also played a role (Bermudez et al. 2014; Délano 2014; Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003). In Colombia, the progression towards a diasporic migratory policy is also the product of the new constitution approved in 1991 in an attempt to overcome the violence and exclusion affecting the country. This awarded wide political rights to co-nationals overseas. Although Colombians have been able to vote in presidential elections in the home country from abroad since 1961, one of the first Latin American countries to approve such a measure, this was mostly a policy from above aimed at safeguarding the political rights of elite exiles. It is not until the new constitution that pressures from below contributed to expand migrant rights in relation to the home country, including the rights to dual citizenship, vote in legislative elections and elect a diaspora representative (Restrepo de Acosta 2007; Serrano Carrasco 2003).

Equally, the Colombian state has sought to strengthen consular and other services for migrants abroad, as well as launched specific initiatives to connect with the diaspora and 'preserve and affirm the historical, cultural and social values of Colombia' within it (Ramírez et al. 2010, p. 71). Examples of this are the *Programa Colombia para Todos* (Programme Colombia for All 1996), *Programa para las Comunidades Colombianas en el Exterior* (Programme for Colombian Communities Abroad 1998) and *Colombia Nos Une* (Colombia Unites Us 2002) (Guarnizo 2006). Little is known about how these have operated, something that is explored next.

Colombia Nos Une (CNU)

CNU represents the most ambitious initiative so far. It was launched in 2002 as part of the first Uribe administration (2002–2006) national development plans (see also Clavijo Padilla 2013). From the start its main aims included: strengthening links with Colombian communities abroad, recognising them as part of the nation and developing policies towards them. These translated into four concrete objectives: to know better the reality of Colombian migration abroad; to boost migrants' economic, social, political and cultural participation; to create transnational networks; and to improve migrants' conditions in the host countries.[1] Nine thematic areas were created around these objectives: economic participation (to facilitate the sending of remittances and their channelling towards savings and investments); transnational networks (to strengthen links with the homeland and between Colombians overseas); population (to help identify the characteristics of migrants abroad); social protection (to help diminish vulnerabilities in areas such as employment, pensions and health); education (to contribute to research on Colombians abroad); political participation (to boost migrants' transnational politics); culture (to help reaffirm national identity among migrants); consulate issues (to improve services); and other projects.[2]

Since then CNU has evolved following the guidelines of different governments. The programme, part of the Foreign Ministry's Department of Migration, Consulates and Citizen Services, now organises its work around four broad subjects: Plan Community (to strengthen communities abroad and disseminate CNU initiatives), System of Services (dealing with migrants' needs in health, social security, education, banking, etc.), Return (organised around Law 1565, approved in 2012) and Organised and Regulated Migration (to promote 'regular' forms of migration). Its website also offers information about related legal matters and events, Colombian associations and businesses around the world and other

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[1] Information taken from CNU's website during my earlier research: 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, data accessed 5 June 2007.

[2] See also: 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, data accessed 5 June 2007.

important issues such as the current peace process. Forums and other spaces for virtual participation are offered as well, including some dedicated to specific sectors of the migrant population such as women, Afro-Colombians and children.[3]

During the 2005–2007 study, the research showed that CNU was very active in the creation of transnational networks, with three projects under way linking students and professionals abroad, businesses in Colombia with migrants abroad, and RedEsColombia. The latter was described as 'a system of social networks for Colombians with the aim of creating positive links between the country and its population … promote and facilitate the participation of all Colombians … [and] develop processes of transnational citizenship, participative culture, trust, solidarity and a better use of the Colombian social capital.'[4] There were also economic initiatives, such as the launching of a Guide for Donations in Kind, and efforts to improve consular services, boost migrant participation and identify their needs. This was reflected in CNU's website and its monthly electronic bulletins. An analysis of these since they were first published in 2005 until the end of 2006 evidences that a majority of activities related to migrants in general or to the communities in the USA; only 11 and eight referred to Colombians in Spain and the UK respectively. In the case of the UK, the few activities listed were mainly of a business, charity or cultural nature; while in Spain, they included the celebration of housing fairs, migration conferences and practical information for migrants (mainly in Madrid). These differences reflect the composition of each community, as well as the priority afforded to different sectors (the prominence of middle and upper-class migrants in the smaller London community, and the larger and more diverse Colombian population in Spain).[5] Hardly any activity related to the promotion of migrant transnational political engagement.

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[3] See: http://www.colombianosune.com/, data accessed 10 March 2016.

[4] Information taken from CNU's website at the time: 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, data accessed 5 June 2007; and http://es.groups.yahoo.com/group/redestudiantescolombianos/, http://www.colombianosnegocian.com/VBeContent/Home.asp, data accessed 9 June 2007.

[5] Information taken from CNU's website at the time: http://www.minrelext.gov.co/wps/portal/!ut/p/.cmd/cs/.ce/7_0_A/.s/7_0_DH/_th/J_0_69/_s.7_0_A/7_0_162T/_me/7_0_CI-7_0_A/_s.7_0_A/7_0_DH, data accessed 6 June 2007.

An analysis of CNU's website news from November 2011 to February 2016, identifies some differences.[6] The spread of the programme is now wider, with many activities organised for Colombian communities in Latin America (Ecuador and Mexico) especially in the last year, reflecting the growth of these flows. North American communities (New York, Newark, Miami and Toronto) continue to grab the most attention, which is no surprise given their size and longer history. Some 32 news related to Europe, mostly Spain (Madrid and other cities) and London. The projects undertaken in Europe are mainly cultural and business-related or address migrant needs in relation to the home and host societies. They include meetings with Colombian entrepreneurs and professionals, Christmas celebrations, visits to migrant neighbourhoods, Colombian representation in cultural or sport events in the host country, promotion of Colombian culture and arts, activities for women and children, talks about specific issues (health, trafficking, student visas, violence in Colombia, the economic crisis in Spain) and the celebration of service fairs and CNU meetings.

The presence of CNU in different countries and cities depends not only on the size and significance of the migrant community there, but also on the personal implication of embassy and consular staff as well as migrant interest and involvement. As consulate representatives in the three cities studied argued, they do as many activities as they can, given their limited resources and reliance mostly on volunteers. A Colombian woman participating in one of the 'working tables' that CNU had in London, also talks about how their work relies mostly on volunteers and donations, as well as whatever help the consulate can: 'we lack hands and a budget' (interview, 2014). On a more political level, through its website CNU keeps migrants informed about issues such as national elections and the peace process, and how to participate from abroad:

> The Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, of the Presidency of the Republic, with the aim of encouraging the participation of the Colombian community abroad and keep it informed about the advances in the Dialogues for the Termination of the Conflict, has developed a website where Colombians everywhere in the world can know about the progress made in

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[6] See: http://www.colombianosune.com/noticias-para-colombianos-cnu, data accessed 10 March 2016.

the process of the talks. And through the website of the 'table of talks', they can send their proposals about the 6 discussion points established in the General Agreement, or comments about the preamble to this document.[7]

Other State Initiatives and Recent Policy Developments

Migrant communities are seen by sending states not only as sources of remittances or political actors, but also as development agents and informal ambassadors (Gamlen 2008; Guarnizo and Díaz 1999; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). These activities can be organised from below, like in the case of hometown associations and collective remittances, but also from above. In the case of Colombia, there have been other state-led initiatives not exclusively addressed to migrants abroad, but seeking to use the diaspora in such ways.

Already during the Samper administration (1994–1998), migrants were seen as key actors abroad to help counter the identification of the country with corruption, violence and drugs (Guarnizo 2006, 2001). Such efforts took renewed force with initiatives such as Colombia, Un País Positivo (Colombia, A Positive Country), run by the office of the president, and Colombia es Pasión (Colombia is Passion, CP), run by Proexport, a government entity designed to promote exports, investment and tourism (see also Echeverri et al. 2010). CP was launched in 2005, and despite being coordinated by the government it was privately financed. As part of this country-branding strategy positive news about the country were spread through internet, in combination with events organised to promote Colombian products and a new image of the country (interview, head of Proexport, London, 2006). The participation of all Colombians, and especially those abroad, was seen as vital for its success:

> Colombia es Pasión aims to unify all efforts that we Colombians are making … because passion is the motor behind what Colombians do on a daily basis … It is the passion that unites us, what distinguishes us as Colombians … It is

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[7] See: http://www.colombianosune.com/informacion-de-interes/conversaciones-de-paz, data accessed 11 March 2016.

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.[8]

As the quote demonstrates, initiatives like this seek to appeal to migrants by playing with patriotic feelings and sense of national identity and belonging. These, as authors point out, are no longer tied to the territorial aspect of the nation-state, but can reach across borders (Basch et al. 1994; Glick-Schiller and Fouron 2001; Westwood and Phizacklea 2000). Such ideas have been further developed in other initiatives from above, non-state-led, as analysed below.

In recent years, the different Colombian governments have also made additional efforts to improve the conditions of migrants abroad, through bilateral agreements and other measures aimed at extending access to health, education and pensions. Moreover, following the effects of the global financial and economic crisis on migrant communities in the USA or Spain, the issue of return has received renewed attention. Developments include a new Return Law[9] and the approval in 2009 of an Integral Migratory Policy (Bedoya Bedoya 2015; Conpes 2009; Echeverri Buriticá and Pavajeau Delgado 2015). However, as explored below these have been criticised for not taking fully into account the needs and demands of migrants.

Other Actors from Above Linking the Diaspora with the Homeland

Conexión Colombia: An Example of Diaspora Philanthropy

Initiatives from above to connect with the diaspora and use it as an economic, social, political or cultural resource do not emerge exclusively from the state, but also from business and civil society interests in the

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[8] See: http://www.colombiaespasion.com/VBeContent/newsdetail.asp?id=4173&idcompany=1&ItemMenu=0_251, data accessed 31 January 2007.

[9] See also: http://www.colombianosune.com/ejes/planretorno/tipos, data accessed 11 March 2016.

home country. This section examines two examples that at the time of the 2005–2007 research had a presence within the migrant communities studied. Although neither of them sought to promote migrants' transnational politics, both form part of the emerging transnational field connecting migrants with the homeland and each other. Moreover, as the next section analyses, migrants perceived them as part of homeland efforts to tap into the diaspora's resources economically and politically.

Conexión Colombia (Colombian Connection, CC) specifically appealed to Colombian migrants abroad. Branded as a civil society creation, CC was supported by Colombian companies and foundations, the Colombian government, the IOM and USAID. It was simultaneously launched in Bogota and New York in December 2003. Its main function was to promote diaspora philanthropy (Aysa Lastra 2007) by channelling monetary and non-monetary donations to worthy causes in Colombia from nationals and 'friends' all over the world: '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 positive social change.'[10] In common with state-led programmes, CC's second aim was to keep Colombians everywhere connected and enhance feelings of national identity: '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 … 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.'[11]

CC functioned mostly through its website, social media platforms such as Facebook and organised events. Its website offered information about how to donate, Colombia and the diaspora, events 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

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[10] See: http://www.conexioncolombia.com/conexioncolombia/content/page.jsp?ID=3996, data accessed 12 June 2007.

[11] *Ibid.*

and chats. CC played with feelings of nostalgia and national sentiment to use the diaspora as a resource for the home country (see also Semana 2003). The initiative ceased to exist in October 2014 after reporting astounding success in donations attracted: 27 million dollars (mostly of a monetary nature), with almost 9.5 million coming from abroad. Although the majority of donations were generated within Colombia, CC makes special mention of the role of migrants:

> In 2003, 4 million Colombians lived away from their country. Despite the distance, they felt the connection with their home, family, music, friends, and most important, an origin that with pride allowed them to say I am Colombian. This is how Conexión Colombia was born, a place that over a decade maintained alive the link between those, close and far away, who believed that solidarity is the motor to achieve a more equitable country.[12]

As well as functioning virtually, CC had offices and organised groups of supporters in countries with a large Colombian migrant presence, such as the USA, Spain and Mexico. In Spain, the initiative was launched in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia, three cities with an important Colombian population, at the end of 2004. At the time of my earlier research, the team in Madrid was led by a woman, an economist with experience in corporate social responsibility, and seven other volunteers, six female and a male, most of them students. The Colombian embassy in Madrid described CC as:

> 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 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 … it opens a space to nostalgia and the outstanding activities of Colombians inside and outside the country.[13]

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[12] Message taken from CC's Facebook account: https://es-es.facebook.com/conexioncolombia, data accessed 10 April 2016.

[13] See: http://www.embacol.com/sala_de_prensa/noticia.shtml%C2%BFnew sid=1099662825,13304,.html, data accessed 2 February 2007.

During an interview with the members of CC in Madrid, they claimed that there was no affiliation to any Colombian political party. However, they believed in the idea of promoting a more positive image of Colombia abroad, which they argued was possible because of the Uribe administration's improvements in security (see more below).

Yo Creo en Colombia: Improving Colombia's Image Abroad

In 1999 started Yo Creo en Colombia (I Believe in Colombia, YCC), described at the time of my initial research as a not-for-profit foundation operating inside the country and abroad. Its aims were to promote a more positive image of Colombia that would foster confidence in the country; and through community associations unite Colombians everywhere and create more positive citizens. These new citizens would then help change the image of the country:

> 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.[14]

This initiative continues to exist, and in its website the founder explains how he was inspired to create it:

> Yo Creo en Colombia was born of a personal frustration as a university teacher and businessman, when in 1999 I asked my 39 students in Industrial Engineering at the Universidad de los Andes:
> - How many of you think would still be in Colombia in 5 years? Only 12 of them raised their hands.

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[14] See: http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/fundacion/, data accessed 7 June 2007.

> Colombia was then in a complicated situation, in the intersection of three crises: a political crisis, an economic crisis, and even more serious, a crisis of confidence. In 1999 the country hit rock bottom.[15]

Thus from the beginning, YCC had a strong link with migration flows abroad as well as the desire to counter negative images of the country, at the height of its identification with corruption, violence, insecurity and illegality:

> 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, cultured, curious, intelligent, hard-working and energetic.[16]

As well as its website, YCC spread its message through conferences, seminars and workshops. At the time of the research in 2005–2007, it claimed to have active 'chapters' in 11 places with a Colombian migrant presence, including four in the USA and one in Spain and the UK each, and 670 volunteers. In 2006, the chapter in Spain had been operating for two years. The one in the UK was more recent and led by a young professional man who first lived in Madrid, where he had helped set up the Spanish chapter. He had been involved also in the creation of YCC in Colombia, which he said was the result of 'a search for arguments for Colombians to believe in their own country' (interview 2006). The London team had six volunteers, all Colombian except for one woman and all women except for the coordinator and another man. The leader of the team explained that since the main objective is to improve the image of the country, it was logical that Colombians abroad are involved, since this affected them: 'for us is also very important to change the image of Colombia within our local communities. It is no secret that the perception that people have about Colombia is very negative.'

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[15] See: http://yocreoencolombia.com/nosotros/, data accessed 12 March 2016.

[16] See: http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/fundacion/frentes/, data accessed 7 June 2007.

Currently, YCC says that it works actively to change the image of Colombia and Latin America. It does so through four main areas of work: the development of communities and associations in Colombia and abroad (boosting social capital through chapters, networks, etc.); education and empowerment (through videos, conferences, workshops, etc.) focusing on national, regional, local and business interests; dissemination (through conventional and non-conventional means); and advice and consultancy (to companies, organisations, individuals, etc.).[17]

Migrant Responses to Diaspora Initiatives from Above

A Story of Limited Success: Explaining Participation

Clavijo Padilla (2013, p. 114) argues that the relationship between the Colombian state and migrants abroad is characterised for its top-down approach: 'it seems to be formulated from the demands of the State to migrants and not the other way around.' It is also based on a specific view of migration as 'ordered and regular' and of the diaspora as an 'input' (ibid.). Nevertheless, the research conducted shows migrants were interested and participated in some of these initiatives, albeit in a restricted manner. This is marked by a strong class and gender component as explored below, as well as patriotic and political feelings.

At the time of the 2005–2007 study, some of these programmes were quite recent and their spread within the diaspora limited. CNU was formally presented to Colombian migrant communities in Europe in January 2007. Amongst the priorities of the Colombian consul in London at the time were to introduce the programme to the migrant community and strengthen links with it (interview 2006). Partly to achieve this, a *Consejo Colombiano* (Colombian Council) of community leaders was established in March 2007. Since then, CNU remains a key element of the consulate's activities. During an interview in London in 2014, its coordinator said the aims remain to strengthen links with the homeland, improve

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[17] See: http://yocreoencolombia.com/nosotros/4-frentes-de-trabajo/, data accessed 12 march 2016.

social capital and offer services vis-à-vis the home and host societies. The initiative relies on a network of some 150 volunteers that rotate, which makes the work sometimes slow.

Although participants come from all walks of life, they tend to recruit professionals because they are deemed more committed and efficient. To increase their reach, work is propagated through open events, the mass and social media, networks and community organisations. Nevertheless, as they pointed out, it was difficult to reach all migrants. CNU's current work in London is organised around four themes, and Alba**,** a young woman from Bogota (arrived 2005), volunteers in 'connections and opportunities' (the other areas are business, education and health). Her work involves identifying community needs and 'generating opportunities for development, not only within the labour market, but also at the personal, social and family levels'. At the time of the interview, they were organising a social services fair for which 1,200–1,500 participants had registered. Her group is managed by around 40 volunteers, all professionals. Alba is involved because she likes the initiative, and also owing to her background as an economist with experience in social policy she realised that 'the community has many needs.'

During another interview with part of the CC team in Madrid (the director and three women volunteers) in 2005, motivations for involvement also related to feelings of nostalgia and patriotism, as well as the desire to continue the activities and work they did in Colombia or perform skilled jobs even if they are unpaid. For those coming from a privileged social background, there is the urge to give something back to their country, as Flor (see Chap. 4), a volunteer, explains: 'I am working and I am happy in Conexión Colombia … is important that if one has had sort of the opportunity to travel and see … one must help the people in my country who don't have that opportunity, yes? This is sort of coherent with my social profile.' She explained that her volunteering was temporary, since what Flor really wants to do is practice her profession, psychology, but this was difficult in Spain: 'I have tried to work as a psychologist, and people say, well, see, but you are Colombian, and a psychologist in human resources has to have a lot of contact with everyone … there is a stereotype that that will not allow people to connect with you. So I can't see much future for my professional situation here.'

The leader of YCC in London in 2006 elaborates on these patriotic sentiments when asked about his involvement: 'something that I always do as a principle is to speak well of my country, and well, anything I can do to change its image … working for Yo Creo en Colombia.' They had organised two events in London, one addressed to the Colombian community and another more tailored to a non-Colombian audience. He thought the initiative had been well received by migrants, with people attending out of curiosity or pushed by 'some sort of patriotic feeling'. This is backed up by information collected during fieldwork, since respondents in London knew about YCC and liked it. By contrast, knowledge of CC within the migrant communities, like in the case of CNU, was more limited. The director of CC in Spain at the time thought one of the barriers they faced was low levels of internet use among migrants, although this has probably improved since then. Support among migrants tended to be higher for non-state, private initiatives, like YCC, also because it did not demand money from the diaspora like CC. Finally, schemes like YCC and CP were more attractive because they had to do mostly with nationalism and patriotism. At the time there was a lot of discussion about what it meant to be Colombian: '*la colombianidad*' (Lozano and Arias 2006), and renewed efforts 'to dispute the well-established stereotype that identifies our nation only with war and violence' (Posada Carbó 2006, p. 11). This is especially important for migrants abroad: 'subjected to harder offenses and more serious humiliations, where our identity is immediately confused with criminality' (ibid., p. 10). Respondents talk about this, and some wore bracelets with the CP logo or the Colombian flag. Flor said these feelings had spread widely within the migrant community in Madrid.

The need to keep connected with the home country, contribute from abroad or promote solidarity with worthy causes in Colombia runs against the distrust and lack of solidarity that other studies of Colombian migrant communities highlight (Guarnizo et al. 2003; Guarnizo and Díaz 1999; McIlwaine 2005). However, as discussed next, some of these initiatives from above, especially those built around specific views of Colombia, raise controversy as well. This is because migrants identify them with a particular political project, because they object to being 'used' as a political or economic resource by these programmes, or because they do not feel represented by them.

Criticisms of Diaspora Initiatives from Above

Although patriotic sentiments are widespread across the Colombian communities studied, the migrants more actively involved in diaspora initiatives from above tend to be middle- or upper-class students and professionals. In addition, there is a heavy presence of women (see below). By contrast, other migrants saw them with suspicion or negatively. First, the fact that some programmes are linked to the Colombian government raises criticism and mistrust about their real objectives:

> this is part of a strategy, part of a political strategy … whereby they start to raise a feeling, not so much of belonging but nationalist, populist nationalism, among Colombians … they reflect people who are doing very well, and these are few, and those who are really well is because from before, always, they had been well. Very few Colombians are truly well, eh, due to, to policies or conditions for them because they have worked or emigrated (Lucas, Madrid, arrived 2000).

The initiatives that draw heavier criticism are those state-led or supported. The director of a migrant organisation in Madrid interviewed in 2005 explains that at the beginning they collaborated with CNU, but later grew disappointed since benefits for migrants were minimal. According to him, the programme was little more than a website, a mechanism to collect data on Colombians abroad and a publicity exercise for the government. During the 2014–2015 study, complaints centred on the return plans created in response to the global financial crisis and its impact on migrants. Although official sources claim that the Positive Return Plan has benefited 3,723 returnees,[18] interviewees think policies are insufficient or do not work in reality: 'the Law of Return was useless' (migrant organisation representative, Madrid, 2014). The media has reported problems with some of the return plans implemented by the Colombian government, such as a recent initiative addressed to migrant entrepreneurs in Spain (*El Tiempo* 29/07/2013). In addition, research highlights the limited input that migrants

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[18] See   http://www.colombianosune.com/noticia/PlanRetornohaBeneficiado3723Colombianos, data accessed 16 March 2016.

and wider civil society have had in other initiatives like the Integral Migration Policy (Ardila 2009; Bedoya Bedoya 2015; Clavijo Padilla 2013, Mejía Ochoa 2011).

Furthermore, there is a generalised perception among respondents of lack of interest on the part of the Colombian state and its institutions about nationals abroad, with many criticising the functioning of consulates. Some migrants think that consular services have improved with time, but many others complain that processes are slow and expensive and attention inappropriate. Juan, a community leader re-interviewed in London in 2014 (see Chap. 5), summarises this: 'there has never been a migration policy … [we have] a diplomatic mission that does not turn to look at migrants. Quite the opposite, they exploit them … the state does not have a policy to protect migrants.'

Regarding private diaspora initiatives, they are also perceived by some migrants as the result of economic and government interests, especially those with an emphasis on improving the image of the country. Javier (Chap. 5), talking about Conexion Colombia at the time when this initiative was active, says:

> it paints everything very nicely, you know, ah, love for Colombia and all that, but we are not talking about that, of, what Colombia needs is another thing, it is more drastic solutions. We cannot be talking about wonders … when people are dying in Colombia, about sending flowers and I don't know what else … we have to feed that part, the emotive link with Colombia, but … we cannot maintain this political system, and this violent way of life … there are many people supporting these and that is what they want, to offer a nice image because deep down they need to … they are strong companies … strong economic groups, those economic groups that move politics a lot in Colombia.

Similar judgement was levelled against CP during the fieldwork in 2005–2007. In the words of Jezabel (Chap. 4), this programme is 'supported by some industrialists, mainly to promote the consumption of Colombian goods by migrants abroad'. She thinks it is in the interests of these initiatives to sell a vision of Colombia that is unreal: 'it's like when I invite you to my house, and I get the front painted, make it very nice,

and I organise the garden and plant a rose, yes? And you come in and the living room … is spectacular, all comfortable and luxurious, and then inside, in the bedrooms, people sleep on the floor, the chairs are turned, the fridge is empty.' But it is no surprise that Jezabel does not feel represented by CP. She left the home country after losing her public service job in the name of austerity, plus she is of Afro-Colombian origin. One of the publicity tools of CP collected during the fieldwork is a postcard with smiling Colombian faces, but none of them looks indigenous or Afro-Colombian (see Fig. 7.1).

The issue of what vision of Colombia migrants and nationals in general should present to the rest of the world generated a lot of controversy during the 2005–2007 study. This was the time of the Uribe administration and its democratic security policy, which garnered support among Colombians for making the country safer but also criticism because of human rights abuses (see Chap. 3; CINEP 2010; Yagoub 2014). Polarisation was at its maximum level, and this was reflected in the diaspora.

Fig. 7.1 Marketing postcard from Colombia es Pasión. Source: Collected during fieldwork in London, 2006

A Colombian columnist complained that it had become 'a sin against Colombia to criticise the government abroad', in reference to attempts to disqualify those who talked about the country's problems as 'antipatriotic' (Samper Pinzano 2007). Some interviewees like the coordinator of YCC in London believed that criticising the government damaged the image of the country. However, others like Laura (Chap. 4) were wary of such patriotism: 'in Colombia, there is now a nationalism that I think is very dangerous. Everyone says that Colombia is the best … Colombia is not the best, but we can make it better.' A Colombian academic woman interviewed in the UK explains that the national obsession with improving the image of the country goes back a long way, especially among the better-off classes. She remembers as a student in London in the late 1990s, how discussions amongst Colombians were always divided between those who want to show what is 'good' or what is 'bad' about Colombia. For her, there is no doubt that her country has some positive things, but in common with Laura, she thinks that rather than changing the image of the country it is more important to solve its problems.

The Role of Gender and Host States in the Transnational Political Field

The Gendered Nature of Political Transnationalism from Abroad

Work analysing the relationship between gender and transnational politics has looked at differences in migrant men and women's involvement as well as the implications for gender relations and equality. By and large, this body of research argues that while migrant men participate more, especially in institutionalised activities and in formal politics, women tend to be involved in informal politics and are more oriented towards the host society (Goldring 2001; Itzigshohn and Giourguli-Saucedo 2005; Jones-Correa 1998; Mahler 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2003;

Willis and Yeoh 2002). Migrant women's transnationalism has also been equated with 'private', individual activities such as the sending of remittances and other practices associated with 'transnational motherhood'. This means that up to a point traditional gender differences and relations are maintained. However, later studies, by including different types of transnational activities, taking into account other factors such as type of migration or adopting an intersectional approach, have come up with a more complex picture (McIlwaine and Bermudez 2011).

In the Colombian case migrant women have been very active in transnational initiatives from above. They were a majority within the CC team in Madrid. When asked about it, they thought this was a reflection of the fact that migrant flows towards Europe are highly feminised. However, a look at the back pages of the CC bulletin for March 2007 shows that the leaders of all the different sections were women (Conexión Colombia 2007). Women predominated as well within the group working for YCC in London at the time of the 2005–2007 research. The two migrants working for CNU (the coordinator and a volunteer) interviewed in London in 2014 are also women. Another explanation for this could be the focus of these programmes, primarily concerned with diaspora philanthropy, links with the home country and migrant needs, mostly areas associated with traditional female roles.

The limited research available on diaspora philanthropy suggests that migrant women and their organisations often play a key role, describing this concept as 'those contributions from diaspora communities that extend the household and aim to contribute to broader social change' (Mama Cash 2006, p. 10). Given the identification of women with the household, their involvement in this type of transnational activities is no surprise, even if such philanthropy contributes to wider social change. Research in the UK also highlights that many migrant women's organisation are involved in 'a number of "giving back" activities'. However, authors argue that although such activities can be framed within traditional definitions of philanthropy, they can also include 'non-elite' actions aiming to support people in general or women in particular in the homeland (Esin and Kurt 2006, p. 42).

In the case of YCC, Colombian migrant women also played a large role. The website of YCC during the 2005–2007 fieldwork showed that of the six branches listed within the country only two were coordinated by women, but in seven out of the 15 branches abroad the coordinators were women.[19] The leader of the team in London at the time, a man, argued that women participate more because they are more committed and feel closer to their homeland:

> The initiative motivates everyone equally, but when it comes to committing, women commit more than men. I don't know if this happens in every field, or only in this case … I don't know, I think that may be women end up feeling closer to Colombia when they are abroad, and maybe that motivates them to do more things for their country.

This can be related to the growing participation of highly educated Colombian women in international migration flows, but might also be the result of traditional associations between the nation and women. Among the migrants interviewed in 2005–2007, more women than men expressed their love for Colombia and Colombian things, although some women also had negative feelings towards the home country. Glick-Schiller and Fouron (2001, p. 133), in their account of long-distance nationalism among Haitian migrants, also highlight the close identification with Haiti that many women felt, which they argue is a reflection of 'the different historical relationship that men and women have to the Haitian nation-state, as well as their different life experiences.' In the case of Haiti, 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.). This reinforcement of traditional gender roles and relations was very clear in the case of YCC. At the time of my earlier research, its website included a section on '¿Por qué no creer en …' (Why not believe in?) addressing different national subjects, such as the Colombian countryside, science, culture, tourism, children and women. The project on 'why not believe in Colombian women' tried to emphasise the positive contributions of

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[19] See: http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/proyectos/iniciativas/, data accessed 7 June 2007.

Colombian women to the nation and identify prominent women as national examples. However, it was rooted in a vision of women as individuals and on traditional gender ideologies:

> [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.[20]

However, when asking respondents involved in these activities within the diaspora, none of them thought of this as a problem. Actually, the women interviewed, most of them middle- and upper-class students and professionals, argued that in Colombia there was general gender equality. Although some were dissatisfied with their role in these initiatives from above as unpaid volunteers, they said that they were quite happy to collaborate.

The Political Opportunities Structure (POS) in the Host States

The main focus of this book is migrant transnational political activities in relation to the home country, and more specifically the context of violent conflict and search for peace in Colombia. However, as other authors point out, the host context has to be taken into consideration:

> I operate with a rather wide definition of 'political transnational practices': various forms of 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). In the latter case the transnational element includes the way that political participation in one country, such as voting patterns or lobbying, is informed by political events in another (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001, p. 24).

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[20] See: http://www.yocreoencolombia.com/proyectos/2007/mujer.html, data accessed 7 June 2007.

The classical approach to the study of migrant political integration in host societies concentrates on two aspects: the specific characteristics of migrants and migrant groups, and the POS in the receiving country. This means that rights granted to migrants, migration and integration policies, political and institutional contexts and discursive frames in the host society can influence migrant transnational politics (Martiniello 2005; Morales and Giugni 2011). Although I will not analyse in detail this aspect of the transnational political field, it is worth mentioning a few features affecting the transnational politics of Colombian migrants in the three countries studied (see also Chaps. 8 and 9).

According to MIPEX 2015,[21] of the three countries considered, Belgium scores slightly better in migrant political participation, followed by Spain and the UK. However, while the first two countries have reduced their score in this respect since 2007, the UK has improved slightly. Looking at specific policies affecting migrant political participation, the data shows that the three countries have maximum scores in political liberties awarded to migrants, but present significant differences in other aspects (see Fig. 7.2). Belgium does rather well in implementation policies, while Spain performs better in consultative bodies and the UK in electoral rights. In terms of access to nationality, key for achieving full political rights in the host society, Belgium does better than the other two countries, with Spain coming last.

Some migrants commented on opportunities and barriers perceived in their local-transnational political involvement regarding conditions in the host society. Jacinto, a young Colombian man interviewed in Seville residing in Spain since 1998, believes that there is a lack of interest on the part of host political actors and institutions: 'there are no opportunities, there is no political group where migrants can fit.' Also, he complains that in a city like Seville it was difficult to get involved in homeland political campaigns: 'not much happens here, it is not like in Madrid' (see also Bermudez 2011a, b; Bermudez et al. 2014). In London, the leader of a Latin American migrant organisation explained recent successes in community attempts to gain ethnic recognition at the local level, which can lead to greater visibility and

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[21] See: www.mipex.eu, data accessed 18 March 2016.
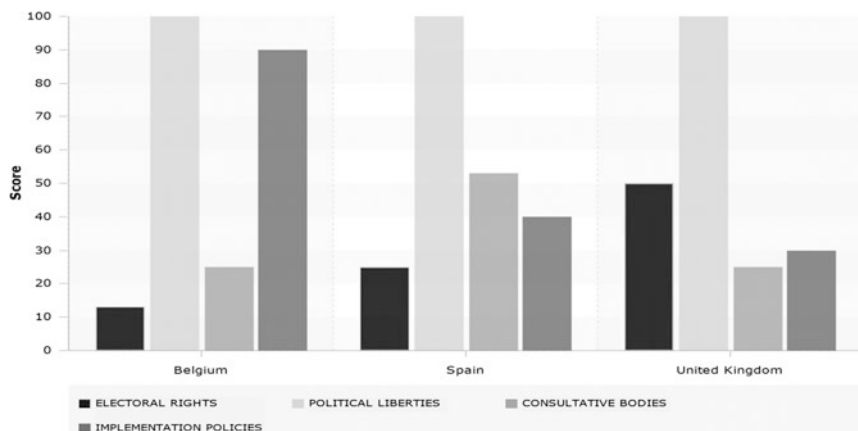
Fig. 7.2 MIPEX results for the three countries studied in the area of political participation, 2014. Source: Graph elaborated using the MIPEX 2015/The data/Play with the data function, 2016

support. She also highlighted achievements in terms of political representation at the local level.

Access to naturalisation is also considered a key factor to boost migrant political participation, especially at the formal level (both locally and transnationally). In the case of the Colombian communities studied, migrants have the right to hold dual citizenship which some studies point out can boost naturalisation rates (Jones-Correa 2001). With regard to this, the majority of Colombian migrants who in the 2014–2015 survey said they had naturalised explained that they did so to make their lives easier or because they wanted to remain in the host country. For them, holding the nationality of their host country meant easier travelling conditions, full accesses to the labour market on equal conditions with natives, or being able to claim different benefits. However, a few also mentioned political motives: the desire to acquire more rights and be on an equal footing with the native population, achieve full legal security and have total freedom, improve their integration in the host country, and become a real citizen and participate in decision-making processes.

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8

Migrant Participation in Electoral Politics

Countries of origin have developed policies to keep nationals abroad connected with their homeland. This includes the extension of formal political rights, allowing migrants to vote in home-country elections and be elected to parliament. On the other hand, host societies, concerned with integration and democracy, have implemented measures to encourage migrants to take part in their politics. As a result, new forms of 'external' and 'transnational' citizenship are emerging (Bauböck 2007; Lafleur 2013; Smith 2007). However, there is a debate over whether one type of participation can weaken and cancel the other, or if both can be exercised at the same time and influence each other.

In the Colombian case, migrants enjoy wide, formal political rights vis-à-vis the home country and in many instances in the home society. Previous research with Colombian migrant communities in the USA alleges that they 'want little to do with their country's politics, having escaped a situation of profound instability, official corruption, and widespread violence' (Guarnizo et al. 2003, p. 1233). Other studies also suggest low levels of transnational political involvement, with migrants more active in electoral than other types of political activity (Guarnizo 2008). However, the quantitative and qualitative data accumulated during the 2006, 2010

and 2014 Colombian elections among migrants in Spain, the UK and Belgium show a more nuanced picture. In addition, this chapter looks at migrant participation in conventional politics in the host society, seeking to highlight links between both types of involvement.

The chapter starts summarising the transnational political rights of Colombians abroad vis-à-vis the home country. Although the extension of these rights is mostly the result of interests from above, migrant demands from below have played a role. The next section explores the transnational voting patterns of Colombian migrants in home-country elections, and the reasons given for voting or not. The focus is on the institutional and political factors affecting participation, as well as socio-economic and demographic variables. However, voting is not the only way in which Colombians abroad engage in the formal politics of their homeland. Migrant engagement with political parties and in the election of a diaspora representative is also considered. The final sections analyse migrant formal politics in relation to host societies, and general migrant interest in politics from a gendered perspective.

Migrant Electoral Rights in Relation to the Home Country

Although the practice of awarding nationals abroad political rights vis-à-vis the homeland is not new, in recent years it has become more prevalent (Calderón Chelius 2003; IDEA and IFE 2007; Lafleur 2013). Lafleur (2013, p. 15) argues that external political citizenship consists of three main dimensions: 'consultation, representation, and participation'. Participation can be of many types, but the practice of external voting has been recognised as 'the one that most formally reflects membership in the home-state polity' (ibid., p. 16) and 'the most symbolically relevant' (Boccagni 2011, p. 79). A recent analysis of the political rights of diasporas claims that at least 119 countries include legislative or constitutional provisions for external voting (17 of them in the Americas) (Lafleur 2013).

According to Serrano Carrasco (2003, p. 115), 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' (see also Calderón Chelius 2003; Escobar 2007; Guarnizo 2006, 2001; Vono de Vilhena 2006). The country was the first in the region to pass legislation allowing nationals to vote from abroad in homeland presidential elections. This measure was part of Law 39 of 1961, which grouped several measures regarding the *cédula* (national identity card) and elections. Article 5 established that Colombian citizens resident abroad can vote for the President of the Republic on the day of the election through embassies and consulates. It also included provisions to make effective this right (República de Colombia 1975). During the legislative debates around this Law, it was stated that despite concerns about potential fraud, this was a key democratic step:

> The idea is to give this [the act of voting], which is the most transcendental democratic step, the greatest reach, allowing all absent countrymen to vote for the candidate they prefer. Other countries, among them the United States, have established this custom. Colombians resident abroad have asked at different times for the establishment of this measure to permit the expression in the ballot box of the opinions of those who despite residing outside the borders of the homeland have not lost their faith in the destiny of the Nation or their citizenship rights (ibid., p. 680).

Law 39 formed part of the political pacts agreed by Liberals and Conservatives during the constitution of the National Front that substituted the military dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla (see Chap. 3). Despite the reference to migrant demands for such a right, authors argue that Article 5 was the result of concerns by the political elite about their rights in case they had to go into exile during another episode of inter-party violence (Guarnizo 2001). This seems right, since at the time Colombian migration abroad in large numbers was only starting. However, with the increase and diversification of outflows, and following another critical period for the survival of Colombian democracy, a new Constitution in 1991 included additional provisions to expand

the transnational political rights of nationals abroad. These included dual citizenship rights, the right to vote from abroad for the Senate (regulated in 1997) and the election of a candidate for the diaspora as part of the special electoral districts in the Chamber of Representatives[1] (regulated in 2001)[2] (Escobar 2005).

Serrano Carrasco (2003) argues that the new constitution 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. However, in this instance migrants abroad played a more active role, with the largest migrant communities in the USA organising to participate in the constitutional process. They campaigned for the approval of dual citizenship provisions and the extension of formal political rights (see also Escobar 2014; Guarnizo et al. 2003; Jones-Correa 1998). However, González (2010) argues that such mobilisation was instigated by political parties, rather than being the result of grassroots activism. Nevertheless, Colombians abroad took part in this process and voted in the 1990 plebiscite for constitutional reform.

The Transnational Voting Patterns of Colombians Abroad

The number of Colombian nationals registered abroad to vote has increased from 3,227 in 1962 to almost 560,000 in 2014 (Restrepo de Acosta 2007).[3] Nevertheless, the latter is still a modest figure compared with the estimated size of the diaspora. Moreover, as Table 8.1 shows voting percentages for the presidential election have been falling since detailed records are available.[4]

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[1] This Chamber allows for the election of five members as part of the *circunscripciones especiales*: two for indigenous communities, two for Afro-Colombians and one for Colombians abroad (*circunscripción internacional*). In 2014 the diaspora was allowed to elect two representatives, but this measure has been cancelled since.

[2] See articles 96, 171 and 176 of the 1991 Constitution (Constitución Política de Colombia de 1991, n.d.).

[3] See also data from *Registraduría Nacional*, http://www.registraduria.gov.co/, data accessed 31 March 2016.

[4] In general, voter turnout for the congressional elections tends to be lower.

Table 8.1 Voter turnout in the Colombian presidential elections from abroad and at the national level, 2002–2014

	External Voters		National Count	
	Registered	Turnout (%)	Registered	Turnout (%)
2002	165,631	64.6	24.2m	46.5
2006	319,045	37.8	26.7m	45.1
2010 (1st round)	415,118	25.4	30m	49.3
2010 (2nd round)	415,118	22.6	30m	44.3
2014 (1st round)	559,952	18.0	33m	40.1
2014 (2nd round)	559,952	19.9	33m	48.0

Source: Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, República de Colombia

For the last elections, 1,890 polling stations were set up abroad in 64 countries, an improvement from the 948 installed in 2010. In addition, both the period to register to be able to vote and the time given to cast the vote were extended compared with previous electoral processes. Despite this, in relative numbers turnout continued to decline, contrasting with modest but more or less stable voting rates at the national level. Nevertheless, this data has to be put into context. In the first place, voting is not compulsory in Colombia, although those who participate in elections receive a certificate entitling them to certain benefits.[5] Secondly, in most cases where it exists, the external vote tends to be lower than inside the country, given extra barriers faced and the geographical and sometimes emotional distance from the home society. Finally, there are variations in the voter turnout from abroad depending on migrant destination, as reflected in Table 8.2 for the last polling exercise and selected host countries.

Spain being the third largest destination for Colombian migrants abroad has consistently registered some of the lowest turnout in percentages, at least since the 2006 presidential election. By contrast, in relative terms the communities in the UK and especially Belgium seem more prone to voting in home-country elections. In the second round of the last two presidential polls, migrants in Spain and Italy, two of the

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[5] These include paid time off work, a reduction of military service, discounts when applying for official documentation and preference when accessing some public services or benefits, http://www.urnadecristal.gov.co/gestion-gobierno/certificado-electoral-beneficios, data accessed 20 April 2016.

Table 8.2 Voter turnout of Colombian nationals in selected countries during the second round of the 2014 Colombian presidential election

	Registered voters	Turnout (%)
USA	183,108	22.0
Venezuela	171,944	18.3
Spain	80,641	10.7
Ecuador	21,324	20.5
Canada	15,466	29.0
UK	8,850	20.0
France	6,805	26.0
Italy	4,720	13.3
Germany	2,852	24.0
Belgium	1,402	28.6

Source: Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, República de Colombia

European countries worst affected by the global financial and economic crisis, recorded the smallest percentages of total votes. On the other hand, voters in North America and countries like France and Belgium seem to be among the most active. Based on this comparison, neither geographical distance nor the size of the migrant community or the duration of the flows seems to have a clear impact on relative turnouts. Migrant socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, however, could play a significant role, as some studies point out (Mejía Ochoa and Mejía Cubillos 2014). Traditionally, Colombian flows to the USA have had a larger component of high-skilled and middle-class migrants than those to other countries (Gaviria 2004; OCDE 2009; Ramírez and Mendoza 2013). Another factor that could boost levels of political participation in some European countries is the presence of political exiles.

It is also interesting to note that during the last three electoral processes, the electorate abroad as a whole has voted in larger percentages for the most right-wing candidate amongst favourites compared with national results. While Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos was re-elected in 2014 with 51 per cent of the vote, 58 per cent of nationals abroad voted for his hardliner opponent Zuluaga. In 2010, Santos was elected for the first time (as former right-wing president Uribe's protégé) during the second round of the presidential poll with 69 per cent of the vote (against Mockus, of the Green Party), but 74 per cent of the dias-

pora voted for him. And in 2006, Uribe won a second term as president with 62 per cent of ballots inside Colombia, compared with the 84 per cent support he received from the diaspora. Nevertheless, this pattern hides differences across migrant communities. Moreover, in their comparative study of the 2010 Colombian elections from inside the country and abroad, Escobar et al. (2014) conclude that candidate evaluation tends to be very similar in both cases.

Factors and Reasons Explaining Electoral Participation

After a review of the general literature on electoral behaviour as well as the specific case of the external vote, Lafleur (2013, pp. 111–4) identifies three sets of variables that could explain diaspora participation in home-country elections: political (presence of political parties abroad, perceived importance of upcoming elections, political culture); institutional (legislation and processes regulating the external vote); and socioeconomic and demographic ones. Among the latter there are classical factors (age, occupation, education) and others related to the migration experience (ethnic origin, length of residence, social capital, sociopolitical integration, transnational links) (ibid.). Other authors also highlight the relevance of migrants' previous political experience (Bermudez 2011).

Political and Institutional Factors

To vote from abroad, adult Colombians must possess a *cédula* and register beforehand. During the 2014 elections, it was possible to preregister online, but potential voters had to formalise their inscription in person in a consulate or embassy. Registration was available from 9 March 2013 to 9 January 2014, later extended to 25th March 2014 for the presidential poll. Once registered, voting must be performed at the relevant consulate or embassy (see Fig. 8.1). This time around, nationals abroad had a week to deposit their vote, rather than just the election day like in previous occasions or as in Colombia. This measure

Fig. 8.1 Election day outside the Colombian consulate in Madrid during the first round of the 2010 presidential election. Source: Photo taken by author during fieldwork, 2010

was implemented to encourage participation.[6] In addition, nationals abroad are offered extra benefits if they vote.[7]

Despite this, the questionnaires and interviews conducted with migrants highlight institutional and political factors as important barriers to greater participation. The survey carried out in 2014–2015 in Madrid, London and Brussels shows that a large percentage of respondents did not register to vote for the 2014 elections[8] (around 59, 56 and 71 per cent, respectively). The reasons given for this are related primarily to lack of interest or dislike of Colombian politics (associated with corruption, lack of change,

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[6] Information taken from the websites of Colombia's *Registraduría Nacional*, embassies and consulates, and newspapers.

[7] See Footnote 5, plus the information offered by the Colombian consulate in Miami, http://miami.consulado.gov.co/newsroom/news/2014-02-25/6638, data accessed 20 April 2016.

[8] The questionnaires were conducted after the period for registration had closed and the first round of the presidential election had taken place on 15 June.

etc.), followed by bureaucratic problems (with the id card, registration time, etc.) and absence of information (about the process, parties and candidates, etc.). The responses given by those who said they had not voted in the 2014 poll are similar: difficulties (lack of time, absence of documentation, etc.) and no interest or disbelief in the system,[9] followed by lack of information. These results are akin to those obtained during the 2010 elections, as well as the data collected through qualitative interviews (Bermudez and McIlwaine 2014; McIlwaine and Bermudez 2015). For some refugees, an added problem is distrust of the authorities because of their status. Regarding the lack of interest or dislike of Colombian politics, this is related mostly to perceptions of a corrupt political system, lack of confidence on things changing or improving and dissatisfaction with the political options available (see Box 8.1). An additional factor contributing to lack of interest could be the limited presence and campaigning of political parties among migrant communities abroad, at least in the case of Europe.

Box 8.1 Reasons given by Colombian migrants for not voting in home-country elections

'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' (woman domestic worker, Madrid, arrived 2001, 2006 poll).

'People work Monday to Monday. They then have to take a day off, so first they sacrifice their work, second they have to pay transport, which is very expensive, not only within London, but also if someone lives in Oxford or Cambridge and has to come all the way here … so it's too much of an effort' (man political activist, London, arrived 2005, 2010 poll).

'I don't do it because I have to go to the consulate, register and be around there … I have been told not to become too involved or meddle too much in these stories' (refugee man, Madrid, arrived 2001, 2006 poll).

'I haven't tried and I'm not going to find out because it doesn't matter who wins … there is a lot of corruption and it's all the same' (woman domestic worker, Brussels, arrived 2014, 2014 poll).

Source: elaborated by the author based on interviews conducted in 2005–2007, 2010 and 2014–2015

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[9] Difficulties were the main reason in London, while lack of interest or disbelief dominated in the other cities.

As to the reasons given by Colombian migrants for participating in home-country elections, the 2010 and 2014–2015 surveys show they have to do mainly with support for certain ideas, politicians or parties; patriotic feelings and the desire for things to improve; and the idea of voting as a civic right and duty. Regarding the first set of reasons, for the 2014 poll some respondents specified that they voted to support peace and avoid further war, to change the president (against the re-election of Santos) or to avoid a fascist government. Patriotic sentiment is also reflected in questionnaire responses such as: we have to avoid things getting worse, it makes me feel more Colombian, it is an act of patriotism or because one has to support or contribute to the country. Finally, a few explained that it was important to exercise the right to vote and decide your own future or that it was a duty. Interestingly, out of 34 people who gave a specific reason, only one said she had voted for a party that she hoped would improve the situation of Colombian migrants abroad.

These responses are supported by the results of the qualitative fieldwork. In the interviews carried out during the 2010 elections, Camila, a woman who migrated to Madrid looking for work in 1997, explained that she voted from abroad because 'even if we are far away we cannot forget our characteristics, our co-nationals, and is my country who gave me my life and my youth and everything.' Another woman refugee who also arrived in Madrid in 1997 added, 'we have to vote, because a change is needed.' Quite a few interviewees talked about wanting to remain connected to the home country, having a responsibility towards Colombia or the importance of participating in elections, particularly if it was an especially close or conflictive contest. Some explain that their interest in home-country politics has increased with migration, either because being outside Colombia gave them a fresh perspective or made them feel safer or owing to their need to keep connected. This is the case of Renata, who arrived in London in 1997 to study and escape from family problems. She argues that in Colombia she never felt like participating in politics because it was too dangerous, but now she feels she can do it. As well as voting, Renata was campaigning for a Colombian political party. This is similar to Lorenzo's story, who first moved to Spain in 2004 looking for better economic opportunities but following the recent crisis migrated to the UK in 2008. In his discourse, it is clear that the contrast between his

life in Europe and what he knows about Colombia motivated him to vote and participate actively in homeland politics. Finally, some also consider voting as a way to make demands on the Colombian government for their own needs as migrants (Bermudez and McIlwaine 2014; McIlwaine and Bermudez 2015).

Socioeconomic and Demographic Variables

In the comparative analysis carried out by Mejía Ochoa and Mejía Cubillos (2014) of the 2010 Colombian vote inside the country and from abroad,[10] they conclude that the main determinants of electoral participation are socioeconomic factors long identified by political scientists, such as age, income or education. Gender, on the other hand, was found to have little impact. They find that in the Colombian case, electoral participation increases significantly with age and education, and less markedly depending on type of occupation and income. Looking specifically at migrants, the data from the Madrid and London earlier survey show that among voters there are more men than women, and that these tend to have higher educational and socioeconomic statuses; the opposite can be said of those who said they would not vote.[11] Nevertheless, the gender difference is not large, which coincides with the results of other studies of general electoral behaviour. However, education, labour market status and income come up as key in the detailed analysis of the London and Madrid data (Bermudez and McIlwaine 2014; McIlwaine and Bermudez 2015). These results are similar to those obtained in relation to the 2014 Colombian elections in Madrid, London and Brussels.

As well as these general demographic and socioeconomic variables, Mejía Ochoa and Mejía Cubillos (2014) in their comparison of the external voting behaviour of Colombian migrants in the USA and Europe find

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[10] The 2010–2011 research project looking at the external vote of Colombians in Madrid and London was part of a larger, coordinated study that included the recollection of data inside Colombia as well as in other migrant destinations such as the USA and France (see appendix).

[11] Of the total 829 surveys carried out between the two cities, 415 represent 'voters' (those questioned outside polling stations on election day); of the 414 left (implemented before the legislative elections, and between these and the first round of the presidential poll), 64 per cent represent 'non-voters' (they expressed their intention not to vote).

that some factors associated with the migration experience can have an influence. In particular, they argue that migrants who demonstrate closer links to the home country (through the sending of remittances, travelling, etc.) and/or to the host society (stable migration status, relations with locals, perceptions of discrimination, etc.) participate more.

In addition, the 2010 survey in Madrid and London shows a high correlation between voting from abroad and past electoral behaviour, that is, those who used to vote while living in Colombia tend to vote from abroad, which according to McIlwaine and Bermudez (2015) has to do with the 'habit effect'. However, this can also be conceptualised in terms of migrant's political assets and capital (Bermudez 2011). As Lorenzo, mentioned above, explains: 'I used to vote all the time, but that's it … I was one of those who believed the story that it was the minimum one could do as a citizen.' Still, it is important to point out that the habit effect or migrant's political capital can be undermined by distance. For instance, in the 2010 survey, 58 per cent of respondents in Madrid and London who said they had no intention of voting used to participate in elections in Colombia. The 2014 survey also shows that low levels of voter registration and participation do not always correspond with low levels of voting in the past: 54, 62 and 57 per cent of respondents in Madrid, London and Brussels respectively, said they voted regularly in Colombia (but only 24, 43 and 31 per cent respectively, registered to vote from abroad in the 2014 elections). This suggests a wide discrepancy between voting inside the country and the external vote.

Party Politics and Congressional Representation from Abroad

As international migration has grown and migrants have gained greater political rights vis-à-vis the home country, homeland political parties have sought to have a more active presence at the diasporic level. However, in general this presence is limited, often controversial and result in modest levels of engagement among national abroad. There can be exceptions to this though, like in situations of intense political conflict. Regarding

Colombia, the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties have long been active within the largest and oldest migrant communities in the USA (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), campaigning for the right of party members abroad to participate in party congresses (Serrano Carrasco 2003). With time, other Colombian political parties have sought support among nationals abroad, especially around election time. However, in general this presence is not fully institutionalised and often depends on individual candidates and supporters, especially in the case of Europe.

The data available on Colombian migrant participation in homeland party politics and the election of a diaspora representative shows that this is very small. The 2010 and 2014–2015 surveys suggest little identification by Colombian migrants with home-country political parties, with less than 5 per cent of all respondents during the last elections saying that they had voted to support a party (12–21 per cent responded they had voted to support ideas). In addition, voter turnout from abroad for the election of a diaspora representative tends to be much lower than for the presidential poll. González (2010) partly blames this on the difficulties that this particular vote has carried since the beginning.[12] In 2014, two diaspora representatives were elected to Congress: Ana Paola Agudelo, of the Movimiento MIRA, who obtained the most votes (less than 12,000); and Jaime Buenahora (of the Partido de la U), who with the second largest number of votes (6,330) was re-elected. If in the past Colombia had a strong party identification system based around Liberals and Conservatives, in recent years it has been the newer parties that have made greater inroads among migrants abroad as the examples below show.

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[12] The first time, during the 2002 elections, the diaspora candidate was elected by a majority of votes from inside Colombia, since it was not until the 2006 poll that Congress changed the rules to allow only nationals abroad to vote for the *circunscripción internacional*. In 2006, the results were cancelled by the Constitutional Court (González, 2010, p.66-7). In the subsequent elections, as well as the low levels of participation, the choosing of a diaspora candidate was plagued by accusations of irregularities and discussions about how many representatives there should be.

MIRA and its Community Work

One of the political parties that has grown most within the Colombian migrant communities abroad is MIRA (*Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta*, Independent Movement for Absolute Renovation). MIRA was legally constituted in 2000 but is associated with the *Iglesia Ministerial de Jesucristo Internacional* (Ministerial Church of Jesus Christ International), which was established in Bogota in the 1970s and now operates globally.[13]

According to its representative in London in 2006, the party emerged as an alternative to traditional politics to focus on the socioeconomic needs of people. The party's website currently includes an international section with links to ten groups representing supporters abroad.[14] There is an international association, as well as organised groups in the USA, Europe (Spain, the UK and Scandinavia) and Latin America (Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador, Dominican Republic and Uruguay). Friends of MIRA Spain has its own website and claims to be present in 27 cities in the country, where it carries social and community work. In addition, the different groups are active in social media through Facebook and other means. In 2006, when the leader of the movement in London was interviewed, MIRA was only beginning to function there. He explained that the activities of the movement in each country depended on the specific needs of the migrant communities. In their case, they focused on offering English classes and other services, such as activities for children and the elderly, as well as migrant advice. The present website of the Spanish branch, on the other hand, mostly contains information about solidarity initiatives, events for migrants and news related to the peace process and women issues.[15] It is through this 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:

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[13] Information obtained from Votebien.com, a website offering independent electoral information to voters, http://www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2006/partidos/05-01-2006/nota270824.html, data accessed 26 July 2007.

[14] See: http://movimientomira.com/, data accessed 25 April 2016.

[15] See: http://www.amigosmira.es/, data accessed 25 April 2016.

…what do we ask in exchange? For people not to forget about MIRA, right now during the elections … there is not a single political party doing social work right now. MIRA … all year round is helping people … And all based on what? On voluntary people that believe in MIRA (MIRA representative, arrived London 2000, interviewed 2006).

Electorally, MIRA has done relatively well, especially from abroad. In 2014 it was the most voted option in the congressional elections among Colombian migrants. During the previous elections, it showed an active presence both in Spain and the UK. Kevin, a man collaborating with MIRA interviewed in London in 2010 (labour migrant, arrived 1997) explains how they organised the campaign:

Time was short for us, since as I said before we are all volunteers, but we did as much as we could to offer information. There was some publicity, we visited the places where Latinos congregate, and we elaborated the information. One of the candidates to represent the diaspora, Dr. William Ocaña, was in London and we organised some meetings and publicised the programme.

During an interview with the MIRA diaspora representative in the Colombian congress in Bogota in 2015, she explained that she had never been involved in politics before. It was through her contact with MIRA as a migrant in Spain and her voluntary work there that she ended up standing as a candidate and won a majority of votes (out of at least 30 candidates). She believes that as diaspora representative her mission is 'to bring the voice of migrants to Congress' and 'defend their rights'.

The PDA and Exiles in Europe

Another relatively new party with a strong presence among Colombian migrant communities in Europe is the *Polo Democrático Alternativo* (PDA, Alternative Democratic Group), created in 2006 as a project to unite the Colombian democratic left. In the 2006 presidential poll, its candidate (Carlos Gaviria) became the second most voted, after President Uribe. However, since then the party has lost support, coming fourth in

the two subsequent elections. During the last three presidential polls, the PDA obtained a larger percentage of votes inside than outside the country, but support has remained high in some communities with a strong representation of political refugees (Germany, Belgium, France, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK) (see Fig. 8.2).

The creation of the PDA was not easy, given differences within the legal left and the context of armed conflict in Colombia. Supporters in Europe played an active role in the process of unification, with a first meeting in Brussels in 2005 (27–28 August) attended by 15 people from Belgium, Germany, France, Holland and Spain. During this, party sympathisers committed themselves to help in the forthcoming election campaign and 'contribute from abroad to the debate and the creation of the policy proposals'.[16] A second meeting was held in Montmeló, Spain, later that year (28–30 October), attended by some 60 members and sympathisers from Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Austria and Spain. 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.'[17] Thus the process of unity was experienced very intensively both inside and outside Colombia: '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' (PDA representative, Madrid 2006).

In response, the PDA was also eager to highlight the special role of supporters abroad. Apart from their relevance as potential voters, the diaspora in Europe represents something special for the party, given the number of political refugees from the Left who have sought asylum and kept working from there, as the PDA officer from Bogota interviewed in Madrid explained: 'Those who have kept their political work have built important relations with the European political world … And these relations represent a very valuable asset for the political struggle we carry out

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[16] See: http://www.polodemocratico.net/Informe-del-Primer-Encuentro-del?var_recherche=exterior, data accessed 17 March 2007.

[17] See: http://www.polodemocratico.net/Encuentrodel-Polo-Democratico-en?var_recherche=exterior, data accessed 17 March 2007. Information obtained also during participant observation.

Fig. 8.2 Launching event in Brussels of candidate for the *circunscripción internacional* during the 2014 Colombian congressional elections. Source: Image ceded by the candidate, 2016

in Colombia' (interview 2006). Thus, for political parties the importance of transnational links go beyond recruiting voters abroad to include the forging of relations with parties and movements of a similar ideology that can help their domestic and foreign agendas. Such links can be of extreme importance at times of severe political conflict, as Angell (2007) demonstrates for the Chilean case (see also Landolt and Goldring 2006).

During the first PDA congress (Bogota, 30 November–2 December 2006), the party allowed more than 60 representatives from abroad to participate, including 30 from Europe (of these, eight came from Spain and two from the UK).[18] Nevertheless, during an interview with a candidate for the diaspora seat standing for the party in Europe in 2014, it emerged that institutional support for the campaign was almost absent, having to depend on personal resources as well as that of other supporters and technology: 'I had to campaign everywhere, which is absurd, but with no institutional network … if it wasn't for Facebook it's super complicated … I did not receive a single cent, so it was my face, my own pocket, and the people who wanted to support me. That's it, we did id as we could.'

Other Parties and Voluntary Efforts

Similarly, during the last two elections, supporters of the Green Party were active in some of the migrant communities studied. During the 2010 presidential elections, the webpage of supporters of Antanas Mockus (presidential candidate), who was among the favourites but did not make it to the second round, listed 30 different Facebook groups around the world, including seven in Europe (see Fig. 8.3). Lorenzo, mentioned above, became involved in the campaign in London and explains how the party started creating support groups through Facebook. He had previous experience abroad helping organise an anti-FARC march in Spain, and through his profession as an architect knew and admired Mockus. So he decided to create the Facebook group in London, and later other people joined in. However, as in the previous cases, campaign work was mostly ad hoc and depended on individual, voluntary efforts as well as social media:

> More people started joining our Facebook group … And it seems that yes, that there is people so convinced that they contribute money … The day before meeting in the park to know everyone, we met and said 'what do we do?' 'Let's print these posters, these sunflowers' … Each assumed their own responsibilities and that's it … We all believe in these ideas. And that's how we started. Always through internet … coordinating some activities in specific places where there are lots of Colombians.

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[18] See: http://www.polodemocratico.net/-Congreso-de-Unidad-, data accessed 16 July 2007.

Fig. 8.3 Webpage of supporters abroad for Mockus of the Green Party during the 2010 Colombian presidential election. Source: Taken from the party's website, https://yovotoporantanas.wordpress.com/sobre-partido-verde-y-campana-puntos-de-encuentro/redes-ciudadanas-de-apoyo-a-antanas-mockus-y-al-partido-verde/en-el-exterior/, data accessed 3 May 2016

Another woman candidate for the diaspora interviewed in Madrid in 2014, standing for the Green Party and with ample political experience in the home and host countries, also explains that she was asked to participate at the last minute and with only a few months to prepare it was almost impossible to garner sufficient support. She argues that electoral participation from abroad is extremely low and needs to be reactivated, but this is an effort for the medium-to-long term. At least three other men interviewed in Madrid around the 2006 elections were active in party politics, participating in campaigns for the *circunscripción internacional* or standing as candidates. What they had in common with most other migrants with similar levels of participation in home-country politics is a past of political and social activism in Colombia and thus a strong political capital.

The Formal Politics of Colombian Migrants Vis-à-vis the Host Society

One of the reasons behind Colombian migrant demands in the USA for dual citizenship rights was their interest in acquiring political rights in both the home and host societies (Escobar 2005). Jones-Correa (1998), in an early study of Latinos in the USA, including Colombians in New York, found that levels of naturalisation and participation in formal politics in the host country were low. He argued that this affected particularly migrant men, since they were more exposed to a lowering of their status and compensated by focusing on transnational activities. Women, on the other hand, made gains through migration and were more oriented towards the host society. 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 (2006, p. 138) point out that migrant politics oriented towards the home or host countries often go hand in hand: 'many aspects of transnationalism end up accelerating the political integration of immigrants in the United States.' Although the focus of this book is on migrant transnational politics, the data from the research conducted supports what other authors highlight. This is that often political connections with the home country coexist with political engagement in the host society, with focus on one or the other sometimes alternating or combining depending on particular contexts. This is true both at the individual and meso levels.

At the micro level, the 2010 and 2014–2015 surveys found correlation between engagement in home- and host-country elections. There are differences between the cities studied, but these can reflect the characteristics of the sample and the political opportunities structure in each. Mainly, participation in host-country elections depends on whether migrants are allowed to vote and in which elections, depending on age, legal status or time of residence. In the case of the latter survey, 50 per cent of respondents in Madrid said they had acquired Spanish nationality, while in London and Brussels slightly more than half of the sample held an EU passport. This means that at least a significant proportion of the total sample can vote in local elections, providing they are registered to do so. However, when asked if they voted in local elections if allowed,

only 18 and 19 per cent of respondents in London and Madrid respectively said yes compared with 52.5 per cent in Brussels.

During the qualitative interviews, migrants explained their levels of engagement in the politics of the host country, sometimes relating it to their participation in Colombia. Cristopher, a refugee man in Madrid (arrived 1999), argues that he had always voted in Colombia and had tried to do the same in Spain even if he had to resort to informal mechanisms: 'The last time I was already Spanish but had not received my identity card, so I wasn't going to be able to vote. But my boyfriend … since he wasn't interested in voting or anything, I told him to vote for me.' Other migrants clarify that unable to continue their political involvement in the homeland because of lack of opportunities and barriers, they had turned their attention towards the host country instead. Elena (see Chap. 5) could not vote in Spanish elections at the time of the interview, but was involved with a left-wing Spanish political party. She argues that for her it was not easy to remain active in Colombian politics, given the physical distance and the fact that she lives in the outskirts of Madrid and cannot always attend community events. In addition, now that she has a daughter born in Spain Elena feels that she wants her to learn about the political history of her country of birth and that of her parents. Guarnizo (2008), in his study of Colombians in London, also finds that migrants in his sample with EU citizenship tend to participate more in the Colombian elections while also voting in the UK, which according to him suggests a hybrid mode of political incorporation.

At the level of active suffrage, two women interviewed in Madrid and London combined their interest in homeland and host-country politics. Yolanda Villavicencio arrived in Spain in 1987 and is the president of AESCO, one of the largest and oldest Latin American migrant organisations in the country. In addition, at the personal level she has maintained her activism in party politics in Colombia and Spain. Yolanda holds dual nationality, is affiliated to the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and in 2007 became the first woman of Latin American origin to be elected to the regional parliament in Madrid. In the 2014 Colombian elections, she stood as diaspora candidate for Congress as well. During an interview in 2006 she insisted on the idea of working politically with a transnational focus that 'allows us to have a real impact there and here'. Gloria

Gómez, on the other hand, has been living in London since 1980, where she became involved in community activities from the start. Interviewed in 2006, she explained that she was a member of the Colombian Liberal Party and was active in the campaign for the *circunscripción internacional*. However, lately she became disillusioned with the lack of attention that Colombian politicians offered migrants abroad and decided to focus on her local work: 'I am not interested in being contacted only … when is time for voting … I am more interested in helping Colombians … here.' As well as being part of ACULCO and the Latin Front, two migrant organisations (the first a branch of ACULCO Spain), Gloria run for local elections with the Liberal Democrats in the borough of Lambeth in 2006.

The work of these migrants, plus the growing interest of political parties to attract the migrant vote, have given rise to institutional initiatives such as Xarxa Latina within Catalonia's Socialist Party in Spain, which describes itself as a 'door for the [Latin American] collectivity to access the party' (Eixdiari 2008) (see Fig. 8.4), or Ecolo-Latino, a section of Belgium's Green Party founded by a woman of Colombian origin, Marie Nagy, who ran as party candidate in the 2014 municipal elections in Brussels.[19] The political work of migrant organisations will be explored more in depth in the next chapter. However, it is worth mentioning that in many cases their orientation and activities relate both to the home and host countries. In terms of conventional politics, Yolanda Villavicencio added that AESCO promotes the electoral participation of migrants in Spain and in their homelands. During an interview with members of ACULCO in Madrid in 2005, they said that they were organising workshops for migrants to encourage political participation, similar to the work Gloria was carrying out in London.

The examples above support Portes and Rumbaut's (2006) argument that participation in home-country politics can accelerate political integration in the country of settlement. But it can be the other way round as well. Some migrants started participating politically after they migrated, either because they felt safer in the host country or because of the contrast observed between one reality and another. Another case is that of Vanesa

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[19] See: http://www.europaforolatino.com/t50-marie-nagy-candidata-ecolo-n-70-region-de-bruselas, data accessed 5 May 2016.

Fig. 8.4 Meeting of the Xarxa Latina of the Catalan Socialist Party in Barcelona. Source: Photo taken by author during fieldwork, 2008

(see Chap. 4), who explains that she started voting in Colombian elections after becoming a UK citizen and being allowed to participate in host-country elections: 'It's only been two years that I have started voting, for Colombia … I voted here too, because now I'm British … I never voted in Colombia.' Some migrants also expressed that they were not interested in elections in one country or another even if they could participate, because they did not want anything to do with party politics.

Finally, political contexts matter. During the 2014–2015 project migrants in Madrid, London and Brussels were asked if the economic crisis had had an impact on their political participation. In the survey, 36, 11 and 19 per cent respectively responded yes. In most cases the crisis increased their interest or levels of participation, while in some instances they became more disaffected. During the interviews, migrants like Nelson (man, Madrid, arrived 2007) explained that now 'it's more probable that I will go to a demonstration, that I consider more important to be part of a group … because of the measures the government has taken.' On the other

hand, Bautista (man, Madrid, arrived 1986) claims that as a result of the crisis, he participates only 'when my time and emotional state allows me.'

Gender and General Interest in Conventional Politics

Studies of migrant electoral participation tend to portray migrants as mostly apolitical. However, engagement with conventional politics can adopt many forms, including activities like following political news, expressing political opinions or talking about politics (Desposato and Norrander 2005; García Bedoya 2005). These other ways of participating can be very important for groups excluded from more formal political involvement, such as migrants. Thus, during his research on Colombians in London, Guarnizo (2008) points out that despite the low levels of political participation, a majority of migrants followed the news about their homeland frequently or sometimes. The quantitative and qualitative study carried out in Madrid and London during the 2010 Colombian elections also found higher levels of interest in Colombian and host-country politics than active participation (Bermudez and McIlwaine 2014; McIlwaine and Bermudez 2015).

The 2014–2015 survey offers other interesting results. On the one hand, the number of respondents who claim to be 'very interested' in what happens in the home country is significant: 66 per cent in Brussels, 52 per cent in London and 39 per cent in Madrid. In the last city, this percentage goes up to 62 per cent when respondents are asked more specifically about Colombian politics, while in the other two cases this share is lower (39 per cent in London and 35 per cent in Brussels). Interest in what happens in the host society is generally lower (with the exception of Madrid) but still significant, while the numbers halve when respondents are asked about host-country politics (35.5, 24 and 20 per cent in Madrid, London and Brussels respectively are very interested). In addition, a majority of respondents say that they use internet to keep in touch with events in Colombia, followed by the mass media and family and friends. However, often access to the latter sources of information is also through modern communication technologies (see Chap. 4; IOM and UN 2003).

Both the 2010 and 2014–2015 questionnaires show slight gender differences, with men more likely to participate in the elections in the first case and the opposite happening in the latter study. However, when analysing the qualitative fieldwork, a more nuanced picture emerges. Out of the approximately 69 Colombian migrants interviewed in depth around the 2006 Colombian elections, more men than women were actively engaged in transnational politics, while women predominate amongst the least involved. The first group includes migrants who were members of a Colombian political party, refugees involved in human rights work and various types of unconventional politics and others who regularly participated in different political activities (see also Chap. 9). However, in general not all interviewees admit to being actively involved in home-country politics when first asked. As García Bedoya (2005) argues, people ascribe different meanings to the word 'politics', and more women than men tend not to define their activism as political. This was the case within this group of respondents, as the example of Elena (see Chap. 5 and above) demonstrates. Elena thought that her transnational political links are not very strong, but through the interview it emerges that she is informed and participates at different levels: 'I always try to keep an eye on the activities taking place and other things, I go to demonstrations … and I try to read, I keep in touch with the CUT people [Colombian trade union] there.' Elena was also involved with a Spanish political party, but given that she has a long family and personal history of involvement in left-wing politics in Colombia, all these activities, for her, do not amount to real participation.

In general, men and women respondents involved mostly in informal politics or civic activities sometimes do not recognise their actions as political. Moreover, Colombian migrant women interviewed are more likely to distinguish their activism from formal party politics, such as in the case of the leader of a migrant organisation in Madrid. When she was queried during a first interview in 2006 about her involvement in Colombian politics, she responded: 'Not in terms of party politics, but politically yes, of course, in the elections, supporting social movements, eh, denouncing, the violation of human rights, as an individual, um, and sometimes as an organisation, but not linked to a political party.' However, despite this clarification, later she ended up running for election both at the local and transnational levels, thus enriching her political capital.

In terms of leadership in the transnational formal political field, at least within my sample, migrant men tended to be more visible or active than women, although this was not always the case. During the 2005–2007 qualitative fieldwork, approximately the same number of men and women were involved in party politics, but the former predominated among candidates and party representatives interviewed while the latter were active mostly as party and campaign supporters. During attendance at a PDA political meeting in Spain around the time of the 2006 Colombian elections, it was observed that of the approximately 60 members from different left-wing groups attending, around a third were women, and while they participated actively in the debates, men often lead the discussions with more women acting in support and organisational roles. In addition, during this fieldwork, four male potential candidates for the *circunscripción internacional* were interviewed in Madrid (three finally registered and none won), while only one woman involved in the election, as campaign supporter, was interviewed in London. Nevertheless, as part of the later research projects, at least two other Colombian migrant women respondents assumed formal political leadership, one of them, already mentioned, acting as candidate for home- and host-country political parties (in the second case with success), and another standing for election as diaspora representative (without winning). Still, the official list of candidates for the *circunscripción internacional* remains heavily male dominated. Despite the introduction of reforms to increase equality and recent advances in the representation of women in formal politics, electoral politics in Colombia (like in many other countries around the world) remains a male field (Tula 2015).

Finally, within my sample, among those migrant men and women more heavily involved in transnational formal politics, a majority come from the middle and upper classes or are refugees. Given that Colombian women represent a significant part of such flows, it is no surprise that they have a role to play in the transnational political field. However, during the research it also emerged than in many cases, women's levels and types of political participation, to a greater extent than men's, are also mediated by other factors such as life-course stage, something that is further explored in the next chapter (see also McIlwaine and Bermudez 2011).

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9

Migrant Organisations and Diaspora Politics

Although migrant involvement in formal politics might be limited, this is not necessarily the case with other more informal or civic forms of engagement in relation to both the home and host countries. At the transnational level, not all efforts at linking migrant communities with the home country come from the state or private interests in the homeland. Migrant organisations are also protagonists. These organisations often work with a local–transnational perspective, focusing on both 'immigrant' and 'emigrant' politics. Migrants also participate civically and politically through a wide array of other organisations, such as trade unions, consumer and neighbourhood groups, human rights and peace movements, churches and cultural and sport clubs. These activities can represent a continuation or new forms of political engagement, thus increasing their political capital. Moreover, for home countries involved in armed conflict and efforts for peace 'diaspora politics' can play a significant role.

This last chapter before the conclusions analyses first general migrant involvement in informal politics at the transnational–local levels and the intersections between them. Emphasis is put on the role of migrant organisations, these being one of the main forms of political participation in the informal or civic sphere. The second half of the chapter focuses on

the human rights and peace work conducted by the Colombian diaspora in relation to the situation of conflict and peace-making in the home country since 2006. This is a subject that has received very little attention, both inside and outside Colombia. The aim is to defend the need to take into account the views and situation of Colombians abroad in the conflict, peace negotiations and post-conflict scenarios, as well as highlight their actual and potential contributions. The last section offers a brief analysis of the gender implications of migrants' transnational informal politics, complementing what was said in the previous two chapters.

Other Forms of Local–Transnational Political Participation

As well as through elections and political parties, migrants get involved in organisations and political activities oriented towards the home and host countries in a myriad other ways. At the meso level, studies have analysed the important role that migrant organisations play in the local–transnational political field (Moraes et al. 2013). Individually, migrants also participate in trade unions, NGOs, consumer and neighbourhood associations, parents groups, churches, cultural and sport clubs. Both at the transnational and local level, the relevance of these organisations and the active involvement of migrants in them increases partly as the institutional and political contexts open up to them (see Fig. 9.1). Informal politics includes as well activities such as participating in demonstrations, boycotts, and so on. Given that not all migrants enjoy full political rights, it would be expected that participation in unconventional politics might be higher than in formal politics.

The 2014–2015 survey with Colombian migrants in Madrid, London and Brussels asked about participation in activities and organisations related to formal politics, trade unions, NGOs, local communities, religion and recreation. Approximately a majority of respondents do not participate in any of these with disengagement higher in Madrid than in the other two cities. Participation is greater in relation to activities oriented to the host society than to the homeland. Regarding the former, between 29 per cent (London) and 12 per cent (Madrid) of the sample

Fig. 9.1   Immigration office of Spanish trade union in Seville, Spain. Source: Photo taken by author during fieldwork, 2008

are involved in recreational activities, 27 per cent (London) to 16.5 per cent (Brussels) with NGOs, and 19 per cent (London) to 15 per cent (Madrid) in political activities. Transnational participation is very similar, winning recreational activities (between 35 per cent in London and 28 per cent in Madrid), involvement with NGOs (27 per cent in London to 7.5 per cent in Madrid) and formal politics (16 per cent in London and 9 per cent in Brussels).[1] Religious activities are more important for Colombians in Brussels and London, community activities (neighbouring associations etc.) especially in London and engagement with trade unions higher in relation to the host than the home country and more important in Brussels and London. The 2010 study in London and Madrid showed similar results, with migrants engaged mostly at the recreational level.

These figures suggest that participation in political and civic activities is not the norm but cannot be discarded as insignificant. This is despite the fact that previous research with Colombian migrants has painted them as largely disinterested, distrustful and more oriented towards the private

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[1] The percentages do not add up to a 100 since respondents could choose more than one type of activity.

than the public sphere. Given the nature of my research, many of the Colombian migrants interviewed over the years were involved in unconventional politics, either locally or transnationally (or both) and for different reasons. In some cases, this amounted to volunteering in an NGO or migrant organisation to obtain work experience or because of personal affinities. Thus, Luciano in London (arrived in 2011 from Spain), volunteers for a migrant organisation, IRMO (see below), because he has the time, lives nearby and as he adds: 'why not help a bit?' Others, such as Rita in Brussels (see Chap. 5), have a long history of left-wing political involvement that she has continued, participating in organisations and campaigns related to the home and host countries both in the formal and informal spheres. This participation is the result of her political capital, but was also initially a response to her inability to find suitable work: 'since I arrived, I became involved with the Latin community … the labour market was impossible'. Another consequence of her migration is that she has moved towards a feminist approach in her political work:

> When I arrived here … I focused my struggle in the political, the rest I left aside as if it was sort of rubbish. Until you say, 'well, I'm fighting and my own interests, zero'. Neither politics, nor a Marxist education helped me see … because I was not a good example. Well, in the workers' struggle yes, but not in terms of women's liberation.

Interviews with other refugees in the UK and Spain confirm that for many, collaborating with a group or campaign in the host country can help alleviate frustration at not being able to access suitable employment or continue their previous political work. For other Colombian respondents, personal circumstances brought them closer to a particular organisation or activity. Abigail moved with her family from Spain to the UK in 2010 because of the crisis and in London contacted a Latin American women's organisation for advice on divorcing her husband. She explains that in the past she never participated with any organisation, but now is a volunteer for LAWRS: 'they were the ones who provided me with lots of advice … and they were the ones who suggested I did some volunteering.' Nevertheless, even this type of involvement can lead to greater political awareness and participation. Thus, for instance, the MIRA

candidate elected to Congress in 2014 as diaspora representative (see Chap. 8) developed her political activism through her involvement with this organisation and its community work in Valencia, Spain, where she lived for seven years (interview, Bogota 2015). A majority of the migrants interviewed who participated in unconventional politics did so through migrant organisations as well. Although these are not always considered 'political', their work can have political implications, at the micro, meso and macro levels (Landolt et al. 2009; Moraes et al. 2013).

The Political Role of Migrant Organisations: Case Studies from 'Latinos' in Europe

Jones-Correa (1998, p. 101) argues that immigration is disruptive and '[i]n response to this sense of dislocation, organizations form to patch over the rupture'. For him, migrant groups' sense of community comes mainly from their organisations and promotion of 'homeland identities' (ibid.). If this is the case, earlier studies of Colombians abroad, mostly based in the USA, have argued that there is little evidence of transnational communities, since migrants are divided along class, regional and ethnic lines, as well as by the mistrust caused by the drugs trade and armed conflict (Guarnizo and Díaz 1999). Such findings have to be put in context though, since Colombian migration to the USA is very heterogeneous and different from other Latino experiences in many respects (Guarnizo et al. 1999; Portes et al. 2006). Moreover, as other authors argue, variations in the history and characteristics of migration flows and contexts of exit and arrival can produce 'distinct repertoires of immigrant political practices' (Landolt and Goldring 2006, p. 26; see also Nyberg Sørensen 2002). Currently, the official programme *Colombia Nos Une* (see Chap. 7) lists in its website 186 Colombian associations and businesses in Europe and Africa (including 87 in Spain, nine in the UK and three in Belgium).[2] The research conducted in Europe from 2005 uncovered many forms in which Colombian migrants' organised transnational work occurs and how these have evolved.

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[2] See: http://www.colombianosune.com/directorio/, data accessed 7 May 2016.

Spain: A Latin American Community Confronted by Crisis

The few studies available show that the Colombian migrant community in Spain has not achieved the levels of organisation expected of its relative weight within the wider migrant population (González Ferrer and Morales Diez de Ulzurrun 2006; Mejía Ochoa 2006). However, an actual picture of the number of migrant organisations and their activities is not easy, since not all are registered or function at the formal level. Organisations can be quite unstable, appearing and disappearing with time or changing name and orientation. In addition, some initiatives assume a Latin American orientation or have mixed membership involving migrants and natives. Nevertheless, at the time of my research the Colombian presence in many of these was strong, as the following cases show.

ACULCO was created in 1992 as *Asociación Cultural Colombiana* (Colombian Cultural Association) by Colombian students in Madrid wanting to change negative stereotypes about their homeland. These, as the director explained during an interview in 2005, had to do with 'narcotrafficking, prostitution … in general [Colombia] had a very bad press'. Thus, from the beginning it complemented some of the transnational political efforts from above analysed in Chap. 7. However, as the Latin American community expanded and diversified, ACULCO's scope evolved to become *Asociación Sociocultural y de Cooperación al Desarrollo por Colombia e Iberoamérica* (Socio-Cultural and Cooperation Development Association for Colombia and Latin America). Although it continued to organise cultural activities, attention shifted towards the social needs of migrants both in relation to the home and host countries. At the time of my first interview with the organisation in 2005, ACULCO offered legal, social and health assistance, organised cultural events and participated in co-development projects and political initiatives. As well as in Spain, it had offices in the UK (London) and Colombia (Bogota) (other cities and countries emerged later).[3]

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[3] See: http://aculco.org/, data accessed 6 May 2016.

In the political realm, ACULCO Spain has participated in the campaign to grant migrants the right to vote in local elections and has acted as a defender of migrant needs and rights versus the host and home countries. The organisation also runs projects for migrant women and its website says one of its priorities is 'to work with women … their empowerment, promoting their full integration and social and labour participation'.[4] Moreover, as elaborated below, the organisation has been active in efforts for peace in Colombia. During a further interview in Madrid in 2014 with a member of this group, it was clear that the focus of activities has changed again as a result of the new economic context. A lot of work now revolves around return migration, language courses and other training, legal advice on employment and housing and psychological assistance. He also explained that as a result of the crisis there has been 'a collapse in participation', with organisations disappearing and those still active surviving as best as they can.

AESCO was also formally established in the early 1990s by a group of Colombian exiles and Spanish nationals preoccupied about the conflict in Colombia. Its name changed later as well from the original *Asociación Española de Solidaridad y Cooperación con Colombia* (Spanish Association of Solidarity and Cooperation with Colombia) to *América, España, Solidaridad y Cooperación* (America, Spain, Solidarity and Cooperation). Its director, a Colombian woman, explained in an interview in Madrid in 2006 that as migration flows to Spain increased and changed, the group focused more on the local needs of the wider Latin American and migrant populations. At the time, AESCO in Madrid offered various services, including advice on legal, labour and other issues, training courses and recreational activities. There were also projects on voluntary return and domestic violence, as well as development and co-development initiatives with Colombia. AESCO was equally involved in the promotion of 'associationism and empowerment' to encourage more effective migrant participation. At the local level, they took part in initiatives such as the *mesas de diálogo y convivencia* (committees for dialogue and coexistence) organised in Madrid:

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[4] See: http://aculco.org/quienes-somos/, data accessed 6 May 2016.

> if this helps enhance citizen participation, then it will be a good thing … participating in this process might give people more opportunities for integration, and for having their voices heard … 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 2006).

But AESCO has also worked to promote political participation vis-à-vis the home country, as well as defending human rights and peace in Colombia (see below). As the current website publicises, the organisation has offices throughout Spain and focuses on the socioeconomic integration of migrants in the host society and cooperation projects with Latin America. Furthermore, it claims to seek the promotion of migrant networks and their social recognition to have an impact on the design of public policy, with 'democratic participation' being one of its main values.[5] During another interview with the director in 2014, she also highlighted the growing precariousness of the migrant population in Spain as a result of the crisis, including the associative movement.

During the research, other groups and initiatives with a local–transnational orientation emerged, smaller and created by individuals with an interest in a particular area, such as cultural and recreational activities, environmental issues, and so on. The Colombian presence in Madrid and Barcelona is also visible in the Latin American 'ethnic' businesses, the organisation of festivals and the emergence of a 'Latin' media (newspapers, radio stations), as well as the spread of some religious organisations and services targeting mainly migrants (such as MIRA, see Chap. 8). Colombian migrants have also been active in other national and pan-ethnic groups and federations.

London: The Latin American Presence and Transnational Connections

Although Latin Americans are one of the fastest growing migrant communities in the UK, in comparative terms it is small and its lack of ethnic

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[5] See: http://www.ong-aesco.org/quienes-somos/, data accessed 6 May 2016.

minority status makes it almost invisible in terms of access to resources and support (McIlwaine et al. n.d.). Nevertheless, in London, where most Latin American migrants concentrate, the community has a strong presence and some official recognition. The city is home to several Latin American festivals and other cultural activities, businesses and sport leagues. As in the case of Spain, organisations have sprung focusing on diverse aspects of the migration experience and Colombians play a key role in them. Some of these centre on specific groups such as women, young people, the elderly or the disabled. However, there is also a lot of instability and precariousness, largely related to diminishing public funds and increased competition for resources. The coordinator of CARILA (Latin American Welfare Group), a Colombian woman, explained this during an interview in 2014:

> Projects like us have declined a lot … CARILA is an organisation established more than 30 years ago … in 1985 emerged the focus on welfare, and was registered as a charity, but it was in 1977 that the organisation was established as a centre for the South American or Latin American community … CARILA … [had] more than 2,000 clients a year … that lasted until 2008 … right now we just function, surviving and trying to generate some income.

Still, groups like LAWRS remain strong and new initiatives have emerged, some with a clear political commitment. In 2011, a coalition of Latin American organisations, CLAUK, was formed in response to a report detailing the needs of the community (McIlwaine et al. n.d.).[6] It focuses on three priorities: 'One is [ethnic] recognition, another is access to health services, and the other is access to everything related to employment and workers' rights' (interview, LAWRS director, Colombian woman, 2014). Some organisations had their origins in the support groups set up by refugees in the 1970s and 1980s. However, as in the case of Spain, with time interest moved more towards the local needs of migrants. A Colombian woman working for IRMO (Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation) elaborated on this during an interview in 2006:

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[6] See: http://www.clauk.org.uk/, data accessed 8 May 2016.

'IRMO before was called *Chile Democrático* [Democratic Chile], but following the, the downfall of Pinochet, since most Chileans returned to their country, only a small community was left … then they … what they did was to restructure, a new constitution, and they opened up what was Chile Democrático, calling it IRMO.'[7]

LAWRS, on the other hand, was set up in the 1980s by Latin American feminists, including Colombians, who wanted to defend migrant women's specific needs (interviews 2003 and 2006). Today, it is one of the largest and better-funded Latin American organisations in London. LAWRS has a firm advocacy role and seeks to promote the full social and political participation of migrants: 'we have a voice and the vote, and must be represented accordingly' (interview, director, 2014).[8] Colombian migrants are also behind the formation of the Latin American Workers' Association and political initiatives such as the Latin Front, the latter led by a Colombian woman representing ACULCO London. The Latin Front started as an attempt to solve the problems of irregularity and exploitation suffered by Latin American migrants, but their initiatives at the time included lobbying for local political rights and for support from the home countries (see also Pero 2011, 2008a, b).

During the fieldwork in 2005–2007, Colombians in London were also active in the growing Spanish-speaking media sector, including newspapers, radio programmes and internet sites. Georgiou (2013), in her studies of diasporic media in Europe highlights its importance for mobilising identities and expressing cultural and political belonging. Ethnic media keeps migrants informed about what happens in their local communities and in the homeland. An example is Express News, which at the time of my earlier research was the only Spanish-speaking weekly newspaper in the UK available in print and electronically. It was launched in London in 2000 and expanded to Madrid in 2005, with plans to create affiliates in other European cities and in Colombia. Its London-based editor, a Colombian man, explained that the aims were to: 'tell the stories of the people that are part of the Latin American

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[7] See also: http://irmo.org.uk/, data accessed 9 May 2016.
[8] See also: http://www.lawrs.org.uk/es/, data accessed 8 May 2016.

community here' and 'serve as a bridge between the Latin community … and what is happening in our countries of origin' (interview 2006). Another Colombian male journalist interviewed in London at the time, who led a radio programme, *En Contacto* (In Contact), emphasised the importance of these initiatives for reinforcing the sense of community and empowering it: 'the idea …. was to contribute with these programmes to the development of the Hispanic community in London.' As well as offering local advice and news, *En Contacto* organised an annual event to celebrate the best community leaders in different fields, and this was reported through the media in home countries, thus strengthening transnational links.

The prominent role played by Colombians in these wider Latin American initiatives from below, both in the case of Spain and the UK, can be partly explained by the size and long period of establishment of the Colombian migrant population there as well as its high levels of human capital. However, the political capital of refugees and other migrants is also important, as recognised by Ivanna, a Colombian woman journalist interviewed in London (arrived 1997). In the case of the community in London, there were also several charity organisations of British or mixed membership that sought the support and active participation of Colombian migrants in projects in the home country. One of them was Children of the Andes (which later changed its name to Children Change Colombia) and Friends of Colombia for Social Aid (FOCSA), the latter formed by well-to-do Colombian migrants, many of them women, and British people (see Portes et al. 2006, for similar 'alternative transnationalism' in the USA).[9]

As the cases above show for the Colombian migrant community in Spain and the UK, women play an important role in the more informal activism from below. The main emphasis of these initiatives is on immigrant politics, but as Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) argues these can also have a transnational side, especially when home countries get involved. In addition, many of these organisations have also

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[9] For more information on these two groups, see: http://www.childrenchangecolombia.org/ and http://www.focsa.org/#!about-us/cqn6, data accessed 3 June 2016.

adopted at times a local–transnational perspective. In the case of Belgium, where the fieldwork lasted less, an interesting aspect to add is that some of the Latin American organisations and collective activities researched had evolved from previous initiatives created at the time of the large emigration of Spanish people there from the 1950s. These are the cases of the association Hispano Belga and the Spanish masses organised by the Riches Claires church in Brussels (Plata and Rodríguez Arévalo 2013; Plata Quezada 2010) (see Fig. 9.2). As a Colombian priest serving in this church detailed, these religious initiatives can serve to reinforce a sense of community and as a 'committee of solidarity' to provide migrants with accompaniment services, French classes and a network of Spanish-speaking legal and medical experts (interview 2014).

Fig. 9.2 Leaflet commemorating the 50th anniversary of Hispano Belga in Brussels. Source: Leaflet obtained during fieldwork, 2014

Migrants' Relationship to the Armed Conflict and Search for Peace in Colombia

So far, we have analysed the participation of Colombian migrants in Europe in various types of formal and informal politics, including initiatives from above and below. But there is another form of transnational politics that in the Colombian case has hardly been explored, and that is diaspora politics (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). Generally, studies of Colombian migrants abroad and their transnational political activities do not take into account the human rights and peace work that exiles and others perform. This is partly because Colombian emigration has been identified mainly as economic and not connected to the conflict. Work on diaspora participation in conflict and peace has also ignored the Colombian case because it does not represent a classic example of a political diaspora and the Colombian conflict is a complex one. Nevertheless, this is an important part of transnational politics that involves not only migrant and diasporic civil society, but also non-migrants in the home and host countries as well as international efforts.

Martínez Saldaña (2003) defends that migrant transnational politics goes beyond electoral issues to include protests and the like, especially at times of high political tension. Such 'radical politics' should be expected in a context as conflictive as the Colombian one. Indeed, demonstrations and other similar public acts by Colombians abroad in relation to the human rights situation in the country, the conflict and the search for peace are not uncommon. For instance, the visits of controversial former president Uribe to Europe have been received by protests by migrants and others. Colombians abroad have also participated in the several marches organised outside the country to repudiate killings and kidnappings by the guerrillas. And during past peace processes in Colombia migrants abroad demonstrated to show their support or rejection. The following two examples are different but show the meaning of such forms of transnational politics at the individual level.

Lorenzo's (see Chap. 8) first experience of becoming involved in Colombian politics from abroad was during the organisation of a march against the FARC in Spain. He is a young professional man from Bogota,

who left Colombia because of lack of economic opportunities. His political engagement before was low, but since migrating he has become very involved:

> I left Colombia, and I voted, full stop. And I would get angry in the street when drivers threw their cars at me at pedestrian crossings and all those questions that have more to do with being a responsible citizen than becoming involved in politics. And later when I arrived in Spain I disconnected from the country for a couple of years, but later this thing about the march against the FARC emerged and from the beginning I participated … And that's where I got hooked into politics, because at the end I realised that in Latin America everything is politics.

Mariano, on the other hand, is a young refugee man who came to London with his mother as a child escaping violence (Chap. 5). During the interview he explained that he had been unable to vote in Colombian elections from abroad because he lacked a valid national id card. However, he participated in other ways: 'Speaking, and arguing, going to play the drums outside the embassy, which is … a discussion.'

The Colombian armed conflict plays an important role in the lives of migrants. A significant number left the country because of reasons related to the conflict. References to the conflict and past instances of political violence are common in respondents' narratives, even among those who emigrated for other reasons. These experiences help shape political allegiances and commitment, as Isaac, a refugee man in Madrid (Chap. 5) details. His father lost his family as a little boy during *La Violencia* and had been an ardent Liberal Party supporter: 'my father was always a Liberal party member … a very passionate guy who would fill you with enthusiasm. And I used to see him at political rallies, as a small kid.' Stories of the impact of violence on people's lives stretch into contemporary times and affect all types of migrants. None of the women in Box 9.1 are refugees, one moved to London with her English husband to help her family economically, another travelled to the UK to study and stayed while the third followed her husband to Madrid where he migrated to look for work. They all come from relatively poor

> **Box 9.1 Some examples of the impact of violence on migrant lives**
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> 'I used to live in a neighbourhood where every day people were killed, and we were told that, that it was the war between the, between the gangs … we would believe it, we didn't know what was behind it … and we got used to it, well, to run all day, when we heard shots and, well, to not sleep since often the bullets would go through the walls' (London, arrived 2002).
>
> 'I suffered the violence of a city like Cali … my neighbourhood was on a mountain … in 1982, the M-19 took over that neighbourhood, after that I abandoned completely the idea of supporting the guerrillas … I will never forget about that, about being at home with your family and then you start receiving shots, two groups that you don't know which one is the good or the bad one' (London, arrived 1992).
>
> 'I remember when the guerrillas started in my village. Where I lived was tierra fría [a cold area], then they used to organise mock attacks … my village is still totally militarised … if you go there, let's see, people are, everyone wants to be in charge … hired assassins, paramilitaries, guerrillas … for peace to happen as they want, I don't believe it' (Madrid, arrived 2001).
>
> Source: elaborated by the author based on interviews conducted in 2005–2007

neighbourhoods and during the interviews shared their stories about the impact of violence in their lives.

Thus it is no surprise that most Colombians abroad have something to say about the conflict and peace, although opinions differ. During the 2005–2007 research, four main groups were identified, with overlapping and internal diversity. They were those who supported the Uribe security policies and believed the conflict was the result of criminal activity and largely believed in a military end to it; the ones who thought the conflict had internal as well as international roots and therefore needed an international solution (peaceful or military based); critics of the government, who defended the structural roots of the conflict and by and large advocated a negotiated resolution; and the ones who did not want to support one idea or another, did not know what to say or were too despondent. Something common to all was a belief in how entrenched the conflict was and how difficult it would be to solve it. Still, a majority thought that the diaspora could (should) play a role in this context.

Organised Transnational Political Participation in Human Rights and Peace

The links between the conflict and search for peace in Colombia and migrants abroad do not happen only at the individual level but also as part of the diaspora's collective actions. There is a long history of involvement by Colombian exiles in diaspora politics going back to the Independence era. The peace agreements that ended inter-party violence in the 1950s and inaugurated the National Front were signed in Spain, where leaders of the two main parties had been exiled (Medina and Sánchez 2003). Colombian migrants have also participated in civil society initiatives against the conflict and in favour of peace, such as the 1997 *Mandato Ciudadano por la Paz*[10] (Citizenship Peace Mandate) and the peace marches organised in 1999 (Pérez-Brennan 2003; Serrano Carrasco 2003). Although the role of civil society in Colombia in the search for peace has been studied, the work of Colombians abroad remains largely ignored (ABColombia 2014). However, the cases explored below demonstrate that this work is not insignificant.

Migrant Organisations and Their Roots in the Refugee Movement

Some of the Colombian migrant organisations researched in Europe, as already mentioned, emerged out of the refugee solidarity movements being forged in different countries. AESCO's director explained this:

> it was established by people who arrived in the 1980s … Colombians mainly, especially people who came, well, in search of asylum, refuge, because of the violation of human rights. And, what they wanted was, well, to connect, to support, well, the human rights struggle in Colombia and the incipient movements for peace, eh, the citizenship movements that started to emerge because there was a process of, let's say, of arms surrender-

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[10] See: http://centromemoria.gov.co/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/punto_49.swf, data accessed 13 May 2016.

ing … and they wanted like to support that constitutional process … and then that process was frustrated (interview, Madrid 2006).

Another AESCO member added that many of their ideas and projects at the beginning aimed at attracting international attention to the situation in Colombia and at finding ways in which exiles could contribute from abroad. AESCO was active in organising marches and other events in support of peace in Colombia in the 1990s. Other migrant organisations in Madrid, such as ACULCO, were also involved in this early work. However, with the failure of the Pastrana peace negotiations (1998–2002) and as the Latin American migrant community grew and diversified, the focus of these groups turned towards immigrant politics. This coincided with a decline in civil society efforts for peace in Colombia as pessimism and repression spread. Nevertheless, during the 2005–2007 fieldwork both the directors of AESCO and ACULCO affirmed that they remained committed to the struggle for peace and human rights in Colombia. The same can be said of organisations researched in London such as IRMO and CARILA, although in the case of the latter the delinking from this sort of diaspora politics is clearer. During an interview with the coordinator of CARILA in 2014, she criticised this transnational work as diverting attention from the community's real problems at the local level:

> I find it sad that as organisations we remain hooked into foreign politics … a lot of young people are confused, fighting for Colombia … people don't know how to live where they are. So, just think, with all the problems they have, and living in two countries or nations … groups get together and go to marches, with banners, but they can't survive economically anymore, so our leaders get together, to be in marches for peace, to try and have an impact. I think we are missing now the real point.

Other, smaller organisations researched not necessarily linked to the refugee movement also showed some involvement in diaspora politics. This includes initiatives such as Fundación Vida, in Madrid, which focused on environmental issues but also on the defence of ethnic (mostly Black) communities in Colombia, some of them having been badly affected by the conflict. Others like Imago-Casa Amarilla in Barcelona worked from

a cultural perspective and with deprived youth in Colombia, but also incorporated initiatives on peace and development. As a member of this organisation interviewed in 2005 pointed out, their work might be comparatively small but it contributed to increasing the visibility of civil society efforts for peace in Colombia and boosted international support for their cause. In London, the group Nueva Generación (New Generation), sponsored by IRMO, worked from a similar perspective, involving young migrants in the host society, many of them Colombian, but also supporting youth groups in countries in conflict, including in Colombia.

Human Rights and Peace Organisations

As well as these groups and initiatives, there are other efforts more focused on diaspora politics. At the time of my earlier research, at least two organisations were active in Spain. Colectivo Maloka Colombia, in Barcelona, was formed in 2002:

> as a space for Colombians resident in Barcelona and Catalan people aware of the situation in Colombian to meet, all together conscious of the need to carry out urgent actions in response to the deterioration of the war in the country, where there is a systematic violation of the human and collective rights of the population.[11]

Comadheco (*Comité Madrileño de Derechos Humanos por Colombia*— Madrid Committee for Human Rights in Colombia), on the other hand, was established in Madrid in 2000.[12] Both organisations were created by Colombian refugees with the participation of non-migrant civil society groups interested in the Colombian situation. Their work revolved around informing people outside Colombia about the conflict and the effects on vulnerable populations, such as peasant and indigenous communities, Afro-Colombians, human rights defenders and women. This is what they call *sensibilización* (sensitising), making people aware of what hap-

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[11] See: http://www.colectivomaloka.org/es/colectivo-maloka-colombia/#objetivos, data accessed 13 May 2016.

[12] Information obtained from interviews during fieldwork in 2005–2007.

pens through workshops, presentations and other events. Comadheco's actions focused on denouncing human rights violations in Colombia, while at the same time offering practical support to refugees in Spain. Maloka works to support civil society initiatives in Colombia in favour of peace, bringing leaders to speak at public events and raising funds for specific projects. Women play a key role in this organisation, both in relation to its transnational politics and the locally oriented activities. At the time of the 2005–2007 fieldwork, Maloka was mainly led and staffed by Colombian women and they often carried out activities to make visible the role of women in civil society efforts for peace in Colombia. In addition, the group is linked to feminist local initiatives such as *Mujeres Pa'lante* (Women Ahead).[13]

In London, Colombian refugees and civil society have also participated in diaspora politics. An example is CORAS (Colombian Refugee Association), a small organisation which at the time of the research in 2003 was dedicated to supporting refugees and migrants at the local level while denouncing human rights abuses in Colombia. This group, however, was experiencing financial problems and internal fights and later it closed down, as the former coordinator of the group explained during a second interview in 2006. He believed that as the migrant community grew and diversified it was harder to do diaspora politics since those escaping poverty or migrating to make money were not interested. The context in Colombia at the time, under the Uribe administration, also had an influence:

> before, eh, it was, when many political refugees arrived … the role was one of denunciations, of, of fighting against the massacres and all that, the people arriving here now, a majority are right-wing, people who support the government of Alvaro Uribe Velez … the popular movement in Colombia, the movement in Colombia, more recently it has been completely destroyed … people don't have a clear position on this

Other organisations working on similar issues in London are Justice for Colombia (JFC) and Colombian Solidarity Campaign (CSC), but these

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were mixed or native-led. The two groups focus on solidarity and human rights work with Colombia. JFC describes itself as 'a British NGO that campaigns for human rights, workers' rights and the search for peace with social justice in Colombia'.[14] However, at the time of the fieldwork in 2005–2007 some of its members were Colombian. During an interview with the director then, he said that the organisation was founded in 2002 by trade unionists seeking to boost international solidarity with the situation in Colombia. Their work involved raising funds for groups and projects in Colombia, sending UK delegations to the country to increase awareness of the situation, campaigning at the national, EU and international levels and bringing trade unionists, peace activists and other civil society leaders to the UK to inform the British public. CSC,[15] at the time of the research, had similar goals but was a Colombian-British group that emerged in the context of the protests against Plan Colombia (in common with Maloka in Barcelona).[16] CSC also offered support to Colombian refugees in the UK, proving once again that often political transnationalism and migrant integration go together.

The Foro Internacional de Víctimas and the Potential of Diaspora Politics

Contexts in home and host countries matter. Some of the diaspora groups and initiatives explored above emerged or declined depending on the situation in Colombia and the opportunities and barriers encountered. Colombia is currently involved in a new peace process between the government and the FARC and ELN guerrillas that is supported by the international community.[17] As a result, civil society work in favour

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[14] Taken from its current website, http://www.justiceforcolombia.org/about-us/, data accessed 11 May 2016.

[15] See: http://colombiasolidarity.org.uk/, data accessed 11 May 2016.

[16] Plan Colombia is a US-Colombia initiative supposedly for peace and social development that started in 2000, but that has focused more specifically on financial and military aid for the war against the illegal drugs and the guerrillas. As such it has attracted a lot of controversy.

[17] Several media and organisations offer up-to-date information about the peace talks. See, for instance: United States Institute of Peace, http://www.usip.org/category/countries/colombia; and

of peace has rekindled, including in the diaspora. An example of this is the Foro Internacional de Víctimas (FIV, International Victims Forum):

> From overseas, we consider that peace has no borders and therefore, many migrants and exiles, victims of all armed actors in the conflict, created the Foro as a mechanism for communication, organisation and participative action. Our objective is to collect the considerations and proposals around peace of civil society abroad, and call all Colombians who want to participate as active agents in the current negotiations between the National Government and the FARC-EP and the planned ones with the ELN.[18]

The FIV officially started operating in 2014, with a first international meeting in September in 19 cities of Europe and the Americas and more than 600 participants.[19] During conversations with FIV members in Brussels in 2015, it emerged that the *Foro* begun as an attempt to increase the visibility of victims of the conflict abroad and allow their participation in the peace process (see Fig. 9.3). It was a response from exiles to the fact that official initiatives in Colombia to address the victims excluded them. A member of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNMH, National Centre for Historical Memory) interviewed in Bogota in 2015, explained that initially, institutional efforts focused on internal victims: 'the nature of the internal phenomenon made us focus on what had happened inside.' As a reflection of this, he quoted that the report produced, 'Basta Ya' (GMH 2013), did not include a single chapter on those exiled abroad when dealing with forced displacement. However, the mobilisation of Colombian refugees abroad changed this, and the CNMH has created a virtual space for 'Las Voces del Exilio' (The Voices from Exile).[20] More importantly through their pressure exiles have won a place in the peace negotiations and refugees abroad are now included in the Law of

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the Colombian newspaper El Tiempo, http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz. Data accessed 3 June 2016.

[18] Taken from its website, http://www.forointernacionalvictimas.com/presentacion/, data accessed 11 May 2016.

[19] See: http://planetapaz.org/126-noticias-planeta-paz/noticias-2014/1413-foro-internacional-de-victimas, data accessed 3 June 2016.

[20] See: http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/especialExilioColombiano/, data accessed 7 June 2016.

Fig. 9.3 FIV meeting in Brussels seeking diaspora support for peace in Colombia. Source: Image taken by author during fieldwork, 2014

Victims 1448 (see Fig. 9.4). According to official data, by September 2015 some 2,141 Colombians abroad were in the *Registro Único de Víctimas* (Sole Register for Victims), including 88 in Spain, 29 in the UK and five in Belgium (Cancillería 2015). As such, the FIV, as well as serving as a means of recognition for victims of the conflict abroad, forms part of new initiatives, promoted from above and below, to increase the participation of conflict-induced diasporas in transitional justice and reconciliation processes in home countries (Haider 2014).

The Foro first worked through personal contacts and internet communication, but currently its website lists coordinators in 18 cities around the world, including four in Spain, one each in the UK and Belgium and six more in other European countries. A second international meeting was organised in Norway in 2016 and other related events have taken place addressing the diaspora. The official statement after this last meeting mentioned the participation of diplomatic representatives from Colombia, and highlighted the 'majority representation of women' as well as 'the positioning of the victims as a central objective' of the peace talks and the consolidation of the FIV 'as a space of participation for exiles, refugees and Colombian emigration'. Equally, the Foro took the opportunity to express its solidarity with current refugee flows from the

Fig. 9.4 Information about Law 1448 for victims of the conflict residing abroad. Source: Leaflet obtained during fieldwork in Bogota, 2015

Middle East and Africa into Europe and thanked the international community for its role in the Colombian peace process, thus demonstrating its transnational but also local-global positioning.[21]

Nevertheless, as expressed by some during fieldwork, the main problem of initiatives like the FIV is that they do not represent a 'strong, generalised and organised demand' (CNMH representative, Bogota 2015). A significant number of respondents think that the diaspora has a role to play in ending the conflict and achieving peace in Colombia: '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' (Aristizabal 2005, p. 1). However, they believe that diaspora initiatives face two

[21] See: http://www.forointernacionalvictimas.com/declaracion-final-del-ii-encuentro-del-fiv-en-tynset-noruega/, data accessed 3 June 2016.

important limitations: the fact that only a minority gets involved, and the divisions and mistrust present within migrant communities. The majority of Colombians abroad do not engage in diaspora politics related to the conflict and peace, and those who tend to participate are a minority of refugees with a history of activism in Colombia. For them, continuing their work is not only a matter of wanting to contribute to the situation in the homeland, but also of personal fulfilment as Arturo in Barcelona (Chap. 5) argues: 'one of the let's say, hardest things about exile is that you are not only far away from your country and family, but also from the activities you have done all your life, but this element does not happen here … because we are always active, permanently participating, working.'

Nevertheless, even for them this is not always easy. Some refugees in Spain complain that their insecure migrant status and economic circumstances make participation difficult. This can affect especially women, given their family responsibilities or because they are in a more vulnerable situation. In other instances, refugees' traumatic experiences render them unwilling to remain involved politically.

For migrants more generally, lack of interest, time or resources, as well as doubts as to what they can achieve are also barriers. However, at the time of the 2005–2007 project a number of students were involved in diaspora politics. This was the case for Nicole, a member of Maloka in Barcelona (arrived 2003), and Paola who collaborated with a Latin American trade union in London (see Chap. 4), both young women of middle-class origin. In Nicole's own words: 'For me, Maloka has been very important because … when I was in Colombia you can perfectly spend all your life in a bubble and don't notice anything of what goes on in the country … especially if you live in the cities.'

The second main problem is mistrust and fragmentation within the migrant communities. Studies of Colombians in the USA and Europe have documented this (Guarnizo 2008; McIlwaine 2005; Restrepo Vélez 2006). My respondents commented on the class, racial and regional divisions affecting Colombians, a reflection of those existent in the country of origin. Claudia (Chap. 6) in London explained: 'here, those who are well are well, and they are at LSE [London School of Economics] and from there go to JP Morgan … and the cleaners do not go out but with cleaners, Colombians, here, they don't mix.' There are also stories of

migrants' lack of solidarity or denouncing each other because of jealousy and other personal motives. These stories are common within migrant communities in general. However, in the case of Colombia, there is the added distrust and fear generated by the conflict and illegal drugs trade.

Distrust and fear is often greatest among refugees, especially because they do not know who has escaped from what. Discrepancies and leadership struggles between activists are also an issue, as respondents pointed out. Meli (Chap. 5), when interviewed in Madrid in 2005 said that she was tired of the infighting and had decided to retire from political work to focus on improving her personal circumstances: 'I want that, to live in peace.' Members of the FIV talked about struggles within the political Left and how these affect diaspora initiatives. Some interviewees believe that divisions are a natural consequence of the way Colombian migrant communities have grown and diversified: 'we're not so united now, we were more united before (woman community worker, London, arrived 1980). Competition for scarce resources among individuals, groups and initiatives is recognised as a problem too. Finally, some respondents complain about organisations and leaders being suspected of working for their own benefit, a reflection of people's idea of politics in Colombia. Still, other interviewees think that more can be done to unite and organise people in order to improve migrants' lives in the host country and contribute to create a better Colombia. As Rita (mentioned earlier), who is part of the FIV, explains: 'This is what we are missing, to reunite all Colombian economic migrants, and that is why now we are concentrating on people who left the country for economic reasons, they are also political.'

Migrant Organisations, Diaspora Politics and Gender

The previous two chapters offer elements that both confirm and contradict gender analyses of migrant transnational politics. In the communities studied, Colombian migrant women are active in transnational initiatives from above, especially students and middle-class professionals. Men predominate in leadership and in transnational electoral politics, although women have also achieved prominence in this field both in relation to

the home and host countries. These men and women include refugees, students and other migrants from varied social backgrounds. Something in common to most of them is the existence of a strong political capital, although in a few cases they had little previous political experience. The analysis here complements such a picture by showing that Colombian migrant women occupy a significant position in migrant organisations and diaspora politics.

Many of the migrant organisations researched include some commitment to women's needs, although LAWRS in London was the only group working specifically with Latin American migrant women. Mostly, they included projects on domestic violence and to promote integration, with LAWRS being committed as well to raising consciousness about gender asymmetries and promoting equality. Colombian women play a predominant role in these organisations, both at the leadership level and as members and volunteers. This includes more political initiatives such as the Latin Front in London. The female and male respondents involved in these organisations have different profiles. Quite a few community leaders are refugees with political experience, but others migrated as students or economic migrants without a previous history of engagement (see also Guarnizo 2008). Women respondents are also active in charity organisations working for Colombia, both in initiatives from above and below. Some of them are professionals and from the middle classes, but others come from lower social backgrounds. As it is, in their detailed analysis of the gendered transnational political field of Colombians in London, McIlwaine and Bermudez (2011) argue that working-class women have made the greatest gains, as opposed to working-class men who seem the most disempowered.

Nevertheless, the difficulties experienced by some activists mentioned above can affect women more. Studies highlight how migration can bring gains to women migrants through access to employment or personal autonomy, but also losses depending on factors such as class and family status (see Chap. 2). Women migrants' greater facility to find low-skill employment, generally in domestic or the service sectors, means that they might acquire greater economic responsibility towards their families and have less time to continue their political work, as was the case for Elena in Madrid (see Chap. 5). Samuel (Chap. 5) agrees with this:

> many women who came to claim asylum … when it was them who, who suffered like, the threats, yes?, they've been leaders of … women's associations … when they find, eh, in situations where they have to go, for example, and clean houses, look after the elderly, or this and the other, it is a very conflictive situation … to see themselves in this situation, well is a shock

The gains that some migrant women make, in terms of greater access to paid employment and public support, leading to increased independence and sometimes awareness of gender inequalities, can find resistance within the community, and especially from men (McIlwaine 2010; see also Chap. 6). The studies available emphasise how loss of power and status in the host society can affect migrant men the most, which is why they become involved in transnational activities. However, the research with Colombians in Europe proves that women migrants, especially those from the middle classes and political activists can also find themselves disempowered in the host country. In addition, Colombian migrant women in Europe are engaged not only in political and civic initiatives oriented towards the host society, but also in relation to the home country.

With regard to diaspora politics it is important to highlight that women and feminist organisations in Colombia have been very active in peace efforts, both in the past and currently (Corporación SISMA MUJER-Colombia and MZC-España 2010; Ibarra Melo 2007; Moser et al. 2006). They have been instrumental too in the public recognition of the gendered differential impacts of the conflict, and in integrating gender equality demands in the different peace processes. To strengthen their position, these groups have forged links at the international and transnational levels, including with migrant organisations in the diaspora (see Fig. 9.5). In Barcelona, Maloka supported women's peace groups in Colombia with funding and lobbying activities, as well as raising awareness of the gender implications of the conflict, while in London JFC invited women leaders from Colombia to talk about human rights and peace. During the 2005–2007 fieldwork, Madrid was host to the 1st International Assembly of Women for Peace, Human Rights and Against the War in Colombia, organised with the help of Colombian activists in Spain in cooperation with local and national women's organisations, trade unions and political parties (see Fig. 9.6). This meeting was held as

Fig. 9.5 Colombian woman carrying a message for peace in Colombia during Women's Day demonstration in Barcelona. Source: Photo taken by author during fieldwork, 2008

part of the Second International Plenary for Peace in Colombia, and was organised around five thematic areas: women as peace builders; women's perspective on a negotiated solution to the conflict; women's commitment for human rights; women migrants and refugees; and citizenship diplomacy for peace as part of international civil society, international organisations and foreign governments.[22] As well as recognising the specific needs and contributions of women, for the first time ever, these two events explicitly mentioned the important role that the diaspora, including exile and migrant women, as well as transnational and international civil society, can play in the search for peace in Colombia.

Within the current peace process, Colombian women in the diaspora have redoubled efforts as well to express their own voices and seek their own roles, both as part of wider and specific initiatives. An example of this is the Workshop for Rights, Peace and Gender, organised in 2016 in Barcelona with the support of the FIV, Mujeres P'lante and

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[22] See: http://www.nodo50.org/asipazcol/Convocatoria_definitiva.pdf and http://www.nodo50.org/asipazcol/declaracion1.pdf, data accessed 5 June 2016.

Fig. 9.6 Poster of the 1st International Assembly of Women for Peace, Human Rights and Against the War in Colombia, Madrid, 2007. Source: Image obtained during fieldwork, 2007

other civil society organisations and the regional government, with 'the objective of strengthening the social fabric of the Colombian diaspora … and promote citizen participation in the building of peace in Colombia from exile'.

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10

Conclusions

This final chapter brings together the different arguments put forward in the book, and considers the main conceptual and empirical contributions as well as other implications. These relate to three research and policy fields: migrants' transnational politics, diaspora interventions in conflict and peace in homelands, and the gender implications of these processes. With regard to the first topic, the book proposes the adoption of a wide definition of transnational politics in order to bring to the fore the diverse ways in which migrants become engaged in relation to the home and host countries, as well as globally. This, together with the recognition that migrants bring with them an important political capital, serves to dispel the image of migrants as passive recipients of policies. In the Colombian case, it also helps to make visible the many connections between the armed conflict and migration flows, as well as the work of the diaspora in favour of peace.

This takes us to the second main contribution of the book. Researchers, politicians and the international community have grown increasingly interested in violent conflict as a cause of migration and migrants and diasporas as a source of development for host societies.

This includes the role that migrant communities abroad can play in situations of conflict, peace and post-conflict. However, not enough is known about this yet, including what sort of contributions can be made, what problems and barriers do they face, who participates or not and why, and the many connections built between local, transnational and international civil society. Such questions have not been explored either in the context of Latin American migration flows to Europe, or more specifically in relation to the decades-old armed conflict in Colombia. The diaspora politics of Colombian migrants abroad might be limited and riddled with complications, but they also have a long history that has never been told in detail and can represent a valuable resource.

Thirdly, the book defends the need to analyse migrant transnational politics and diasporic contributions to conflict and peace from a gendered and an intersectional perspective. This includes going beyond identifications of migrant men with formal and collective transnational politics oriented towards the home country, while migrant women are studied mostly in relation to individual and family transnational activities as well as local civic initiatives. This might be true in certain cases, but a more nuanced picture emerges when we take into account other factors such as social class, type of migration and stage in the life cycle. Colombian men and women migrants get involved politically locally and transnationally in various ways, depending on these variables and others. Their interplay produces a more complex vision of gains and losses made through migration and in the transnational political field, with consequences for gender relations and equality.

The next sections explore in some detail these contributions and debates, focusing as well on the importance of contexts of exit and arrival, as well as at the international level, for understanding migrant transnational and diaspora politics from a gendered perspective. This is done first by focusing on the theoretical and conceptual discussion, and subsequently bringing together the empirical findings. To finish, the chapter looks briefly at the wider implications of the research.

Theoretical and Conceptual Debate and Contributions

Migrant Transnational Politics

One major issue to emerge from the research informing this book is that the concept of migrant transnational politics needs to be investigated integrating different perspectives. First, by taking into consideration transnationalism from 'above' and 'below' in a combined manner and bringing to the fore convergences and tensions in the transnational field. Transnationalism from above has to be understood broadly, including the actions of states and governments seeking to create, maintain or shape migrants' links with the homeland, but also those of private interests working in conjunction or pursuing their own objectives. At the same time, transnational efforts from below, those instigated by migrants and migrant civil society, sometimes integrated with grassroots initiatives in the home and/or host society and at the international level, can be integrated into initiatives from above, be parallel to those or oppose them. Thus, Colombian diaspora philanthropy can integrate efforts from above and below, while refugees' diaspora politics can confront state efforts to use migrants abroad as informal ambassadors disseminating a more positive image of Colombia.

As well as recognising the role that states and other powerful actors play in the transnational field, it is important to distinguish the micro and meso levels: that is, the transnational political work of individuals, as well as of migrant groups and wider civil society institutions and organisations in the home and host countries (and internationally). These three levels of analysis are not always integrated, but considering them at the same time allows for different types of political practices to become visible. This takes us to the next point, which is that in order to understand better the diversity of migrant transnational politics, it is important to consider the specificities of each migrant group or flow in addition to adopting a broad definition of what constitutes migrant transnational politics. Initial studies focused on initiatives such as those of hometown associations organised by Mexican and Central American communities in the USA. Later research has focused on transnational formal politics,

particularly through the phenomenon of the external vote. Nevertheless, by adopting a wide understanding of politics, including both formal and informal practices, as well as of what is transnational, other migrant political activities emerge. Nielsen-Østergaard's (2003) classification of different types of migrant transnational politics—immigrant politics, emigrant politics, homeland politics, diaspora politics and translocal politics—helps uncover some of these.

Focusing on a specific case study and taking into account its own characteristics, together with the use of a mix methodological approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative methods of research has also proven useful. This book analyses an aspect of migrant transnational politics that has generally been overlooked in the case of Colombia, that of diaspora politics. This has been possible by acknowledging the complexity of Colombian migration flows, which include not only low- and high-skill labour migrants, but also refugees and others escaping violence as well as other types of migrants. As the preceding chapters suggest, different types of migrants can engage politically in diverse ways both vis-à-vis the home and host countries. The book also shows that the relationship between migrant transnationalism and integration is complex. Some migrants focus their political efforts in the home or host countries, while others combine and alternate both types of activism depending on personal and local–transnational contexts. The same can be said about migrant organisations and migrant civil society more generally.

Diaspora Politics and Transnational Civil Society

For Østergaard-Nielsen (2003, pp. 762–63), 'diaspora politics' comprises those types of migrant political action oriented towards homeland politics that have to do with 'sensitive issues'. She bases this on her study of Turkish and Kurdish migrant communities in Europe, which include not only labour migrants but also refugees. In the past, this type of migrant politics was approached mainly within research on diasporas such as the Jewish one. However, more recent work has brought to the fore other examples of diaspora politics, in connection with countries such as Cuba or Eritrea and diasporic groups like the Kurds. This book, by considering the long and protracted armed conflict in Colombia and its role in

displacing people abroad, is able to integrate the study of diaspora politics within the investigation into the transnational politics of Colombian migrants in Europe. This shows that a greater cross-fertilisation between transnational and diaspora research is a positive move forward. In this instance, it has allowed for other type of Colombian migrant politics to become visible, thus dispelling the idea of an apolitical diaspora.

The transnational and diasporic approaches also come together in the study of migrant civil society. By exploring the diaspora and transnational politics of Colombian migrants in Europe, this book demonstrates the many connections that are established between migrants and their organisations with civil society in the home and host countries, as well as between these two and at the international level. These relations are context sensitive, with political work surging and declining or changing orientation depending on personalities, the interests of groups and organisations as well as the local, national, transnational and international circumstances. In the Colombian case, the work of national and international human rights groups in the host countries studied has been significant in the promotion or channelling of diaspora politics. European support for peace in Colombia, as opposed to the US-backed Plan Colombia, also helps explain the activities of Colombian activists and diaspora or transnational civil society (Castañeda 2009). A similar argument can be made about transnational feminist movements promoting women migrant's rights and a gendered approach to conflict and peace.

More importantly, in support of the incipient literature on diaspora contributions to peace-making and post-conflict situations in home countries, this book argues that migrants' transnational practices need to be taken into account. Diaspora politics can involve only a minority or be plagued by heterogeneous interests and tensions, as seems to be the case among the Colombian migrant communities studied. However, as Zunzer (2004) suggests, diaspora communities can still make a positive contribution to conflict transformation in the homelands: they can provide a more neutral position; offer new expertise and knowledge; and support civil society in the home country as well as lobby foreign governments and the international community. In addition, this book argues for the need to recognise the valuable human political capital that migrants and refugees carry with them and which should not be wasted.

Gender and Intersectionality

Integrating a gender and intersectional approach into the study of international migration, migrant transnational politics and diaspora contributions to conflict transformation, is also important. Studies have proved that men and women participate in different ways and are affected variously in these contexts, and that this has implications for gender identities, roles and relations. Nevertheless, the present book argues that looking at gender in isolation is not enough. The intersectional perspective calls for the need to acknowledge as well other social markers such as class, race and ethnicity. In the study of migrant transnational and diaspora politics, factors such as type of migration, migrant legal and socioeconomic status, levels of education and stage in the life cycle are key variables.

The few studies that analyse migrant transnational politics from a gendered perspective portray men as more oriented towards formal and homeland politics, while migrant women are seen as more interested in local conditions and participate especially in informal politics. This book shows that among Colombian respondents gender differences are less obvious, which is partly related to the high levels of education of Colombian migrants abroad and the presence of middle-class migrants and refugees in the communities studied, as well as the political capital some bring with them. In addition, it demonstrates that migration from the Global South to the North does not always represent greater empowerment and liberation for women. Some Colombian women respondents have made gains through migration, especially those coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, while some men in the same circumstances experience disempowerment (McIlwaine and Bermudez 2011).

However, other women have seen their socioeconomic and political opportunities restricted by the gendered labour markets in the host countries and their family circumstances, while some refugee men have been able to continue their political and civic participation. All of these continuities and transformations have an impact on gender roles and relations, even if this has not been analysed in detail in the book for lack of space.

In terms of diaspora politics, the book seeks to highlight how women and men migrants are both similarly and differently affected by conflict and migration, and how this affects their transnational political participation. Acknowledgement of the role that women can or should play in diaspora politics or in formal peace processes, especially at the leadership level, is limited and often reproduces stereotyped understandings of gender roles (women as peace makers and men as violent actors). Interest and knowledge of the impact of these on gender relations is also limited, as experienced during the fieldwork and based on the literature available. As an example, during participant observation at different political meetings (of the FIV in Brussels in 2014 and the PDA in Barcelona in 2005), the presence of Colombian women was less than that of men, with the former often acting in more subordinate positions and the latter leading the discussions. This means that a lot remains to be done in this subject to raise greater awareness.

Main Empirical Findings of the Research

Colombian Migration Flows

Colombians migrate abroad for a wide diversity of causes, often complex and interrelated, which include economic but also political and security factors as well as gender, ethnic, family and personal considerations. This is not always reflected in other studies that treat Colombian migration abroad largely as an economic phenomenon. Officially, asylum seekers and refugees represent a small but significant percentage of Colombian migration abroad, but such numbers do not encompass all those migrants who directly or indirectly have been affected by the armed conflict and other violence(s) in Colombia. As authors point out in other case studies, and as reflected in the migration and refugee crisis that Europe is currently facing, population movements are becoming increasingly diverse and difficult to differentiate.

However, this book also shows that the migration, political and transnational experiences of migrants can vary substantially according to type of migration. Often, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in an irregular

legal situation are amongst the most vulnerable. In addition, gender, social class and life cycle are important factors mediating Colombian migrant experiences in Europe. For instance, respondents believed women migrants have greater access to the job market and enjoy more social protection finding it easier to integrate in the host society, which leads to their increased independence and empowerment. In some cases this was criticised as conducive to family breakups. However, Colombian migrant women can also be in a more disadvantaged position since their labour market opportunities tend to be limited to low-skill niches in the domestic and caring sectors and they are less represented among recognised refugees. Thus some women from lower social backgrounds could be said to have made some gains, but this is not necessarily the case for middle-class women and especially for those with ample political experience.

The year in which people left Colombia and arrived in Spain, the UK or Belgium also has an impact on migrant experiences, from reasons for migrating and the 'choosing' of a destination through settlement and integration and in the configuration of transnational connections. These connections happen not only between the home and host countries, but also among migrant destinations. In the European context, different but interconnected Colombian migrant communities have developed, with numbers and characteristics of flows depending on the precise historical context in Colombia and the refugee and migrant legislation in each destination country. The Colombian migrants in this book maintain a wide array of personal, social and economic transnational linkages with their communities of origin in the homeland as well as with family and friends in other migrant destinations. In their case, transnational links are multidirectional and dynamic, and have proven an important resource in the current context of economic crisis in Europe.

Colombian Migrants' Transnational Politics and Gender

Furthermore, Colombian migrants in Europe get involved in transnational and local politics in diverse ways, both at the individual and collective levels and in the formal and informal spheres. Individually,

migrants in this research participated in host-country elections, political parties, trade unions, migrant associations, community groups and parents associations, as well as in churches and other more informal groups. These engagements often intersect with transnational political connections, both in home-country elections and party politics in addition to different collective activities related to Colombia through charity work, migrant organisations, diaspora media and other initiatives. Not all of these activities have a clear political component, although some of them do. However, many have political implications, whether in terms of the aims and work carried out or through the personal consequences for the migrants involved (increasing their political awareness and experience, for instance). In the Colombian case, at the collective or meso level, transnational political initiatives have emerged from above and from below, often with different emphasis and objectives, although in some cases working in conjunction. This picture contrasts with the results of other studies of Colombian migrant transnational activism.

The book seeks to highlight how home states and other powerful private interests in Colombia have sought to play a significant role in the migrant transnational field. The main initiative has been the granting of formal political rights to nationals abroad, allowing for the external vote and election of a diaspora representative. However, the promotion of diaspora philanthropy and the casting of migrants as informal ambassadors to spread a more positive image of Colombia are other examples of this. Diaspora philanthropy has been promoted from below as well, through the work of charity groups and NGOs organised by migrants. But the most important initiative from below is represented by the activities of migrant associations. The fieldwork carried out in Spain, the UK and Belgium shows that Colombian migrants are behind the creation and work of many migrant community activities serving the wider Latin American migrant population in Europe. Although the main emphasis of many of these is on immigrant politics, often they combine or alternate this with other transnational activities.

This does not mean though that all Colombian migrants in Europe are involved in transnational politics, and in the same activities or in similar levels. The book highlights the fact that a large number of Colombian migrants say they are not interested in participating politically, or find

major obstacles to becoming more engaged. A majority follows what happens in Colombia, and generally in the host country, including politically. However, this does not translate into more active involvement in many cases. The causes of this are several, and include political disaffection in addition to mistrust of formal and informal political initiatives, and lack of knowledge and other resources. Types and levels of participation depend as well on type of migration, socioeconomic status, gender and stage in the life cycle. Contrary to what other studies advocate, Colombian migrant women get involved politically formally and informally and in relation to transnational and local politics, although their role seems to be more prominent in informal immigrant politics. Refugee men and women are also behind many community and transnational political initiatives, with men often more able to continue their political work and assume leadership positions. Middle-class women and men tend to be more engaged in transnational initiatives from above. Finally, some men, but mostly women, are limited by their family and life cycle circumstances, such as having to care and provide for the children.

Diaspora Politics and Conflict Transformation in the Homeland

Finally, by taking into account the more informal aspects of the transnational political field, those activities often associated with wider civil society, this book brings to the fore the diaspora politics of Colombian migrants. This includes those transnational political activities more directly connected with the situation of armed conflict and search for peace in which Colombia has been immersed for the last few decades. The book argues that such activities are an important component of the transnational political field connecting migrants with Colombia and among themselves, but one that is rarely taken into account by other studies. This is partly because political refugees dominate this type of transnational politics, and Colombian migration abroad is generally associated with labour migrant flows.

However, the book shows how many Colombian respondents in the research had narratives of violence and insecurity in Colombia influencing

their internal and external mobility strategies and that of their families. The diaspora is also interested in the armed conflict in Colombia and efforts for peace, with some migrants believing that Colombians abroad can or should play a role in this context. Nevertheless, only a minority participated actively in diaspora politics. They were mostly men and women refugees, but there were also students and other type of migrants. The research found a wide variety of initiatives related to diaspora politics, some more formal and institutionalised, such as for instance the work of human rights NGOs in London or Maloka in Barcelona, others more local or smaller. The work of the FIV provides an excellent example of this type of diaspora politics, since it is an initiative coming from and organised by Colombians abroad, many of them political refugees but involving also young and second-generation migrants, connecting the diaspora with the current peace process in Colombia and among themselves, especially at the European level.

The human rights and peace work of Colombian migrants abroad can also be analysed from the perspective of the emergence of a transnational civil society in search of peace in Colombia, combining not only the efforts of the diaspora but also of civil society groups in the home and host countries as well as internationally. This work faces many barriers and limitations, to do with distrust and fragmentation within migrant communities, as well as the interests of home and host governments (and at the supra and international levels). However, as examples from other case studies show, the diaspora can become a key player to take into account in contexts of conflict and peace.

Wider Implications and Future Research

Although this study is not explicitly policy-oriented, the research conducted and the empirical findings can help draw some more practical conclusions that go beyond theory. In recent years, states of origin and destination, economic interests, civil society groups and international organisations have become increasingly interested in migrant transnational connections and activities. One example of this is the focus on international migrants as sources of development vis-à-vis home countries. This applies mainly

to economic remittances, but has also been considered in terms of transfers of knowledge, technology and values from the Global North to the South. However, this book shows 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 drawbacks. Studies of migrants' transnational fields, for instance, tend to ignore or undervalue the different types and levels of political capital that migrants bring with them and how these are transformed by the migration experience and can benefit home and host societies. Another important aspect to consider when designing policies to enhance specific aspects of migrants' transnational practices is how the macro, meso and micro levels intersect, in order to benefit all those involved.

Policy and legal frameworks should also acknowledge that political participation takes many forms, formal and informal, and that wider migrant transnational activities can have a variety of political implications, both in the home and host societies. Migrant transnational politics often happens in parallel to other civil society initiatives at the transnational and local levels, and greater convergence or communication between both realms can benefit the work and aims pursued. This is very important to recognise when analysing contexts of violent conflict and diaspora involvement in peace attempts and post-conflict scenarios in homelands. Finally, attempts to promote, make use or shape migrant transnational politics need to realise that gender as well as other intersected factors are important, to go beyond identifying differences to analyse the impact on inequalities and wider social relations. Given the prominent role that women are assuming in international migration flows and transnational social fields, especially in the case of Latin American flows to Europe, it is important to consider the specific difficulties and challenges that men and women face, in connection with other factors, mainly type of migration, social class and life cycle.

Although this book has sought to spell the many links between international migration, transnational politics and situations of conflict and peace in home societies by focusing on the Colombian case, this is a very complex subject that merits further study and analysis. The socioeconomic and political context both in Colombia and in Europe, and more particularly in the three destination countries considered, has also evolved

since the first research project was completed and is constantly changing. In the current setting, several issues come up as important to follow and explore further. First of all, there is the issue of how Colombian migration flows abroad are changing in response to the economic crisis in some key destinations, like Spain, and to developments in conditions for entry and residence in different host societies. So far, as well as return migration movements, the evidence points to remigrations or multi-stage migrations within Europe, Latin America and beyond. This could affect how the Colombian diaspora keeps evolving. The composition of migrant communities and personal and family relations at the local and transnational levels are likely to be affected by these new mobilities. In the European context, research has not explored yet in depth the issue of the second and further generation of Colombian migrants either, although given the long history of some of the communities this is another theme for further research. Work on this aspect has begun in the case of Spain, but less in relation to other migrant destinations (Aparicio and Portes 2014; Echeverri 2005; McIlwaine et al. n.d.).

These questions and others will have an impact on how the transnational political field of Colombian migrants evolves. The answer to this will also depend on what happens in Colombia, including politically and vis-à-vis the armed conflict and hopes for peace. If the current peace process goes ahead and succeeds in ending a decades-old armed conflict, will this mean a major improvement in the levels of violence, insecurity and human rights situation in the country? Will the end of the conflict contribute as well to greater social and economic opportunities for Colombian men and women, thus reducing the need for migrating abroad? More specifically, it will be interesting to follow up on initiatives such as the FIV and observe what role(s) the diaspora finally plays in the peace negotiations and subsequent implementation of agreements. The consideration of these and other aspects in future research will contribute further to our knowledge of international migration, migrant transnational politics, diaspora involvement in conflict and peace, and the Colombian situation in particular.

Future research should also keep expanding on the gender and intersectional approaches to the study of international migration flows, migrant transnational politics and diaspora initiatives for peace in home countries.

Not only looking at the different participation and roles of men and women, and according to class and other factors, but also analysing the impact of these on gender roles and relations as well as equality. This would respond to the UN's argument, in its Sustainable Development Goals, that peace and gender equality are 'mutually reinforcing' (Ranii 2014).

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Appendix

The primary data analysed in this book is the product of seven different but related research projects completed between 1995 and 2015. Below I offer some methodological details that might prove useful to understand the text.

1. 'The Migration of Colombian and Peruvian Women to London' (1995, research carried out at Queen Mary, University of London). This was a small, exploratory qualitative study undertaken between April and October 1994 based on a detailed questionnaire and in-depth interviews with 30 women (18 Colombian and 12 Peruvian). The sample consisted of women I already knew and others contacted using snowball techniques, and they were chosen to include different ages, length of stay, immigration and family status and socioeconomic background. The questionnaire and interviews focused on personal details, history before migration, causes of migration and migration experience, and settlement and integration experiences in the host country. The intention of the study was to start exploring a migration group that had hardly received any attention, that of Latin American women residing in the UK.

2. 'Gender and Forced Migration: The Experiences of Colombian Refugees Living in London' (2003, research carried out at Queen Mary, University of London, funded by ESRC). The fieldwork for this qualitative study was carried out in the months of December 2002–July 2003 and involved 16 in-depth interviews with Colombian men and women refugees as well as key informants, in addition to participant observation and many other informal conversations. The sample was 'illustrative' and aimed to represent various experiences (Valentine 1997). Participants were contacted through previous contacts as well as through several organisations, including CORAS, LAWRS, IRMO and MRC (Migrant Resource Centre), and using snowballing. Of the Colombian refugees interviewed, seven were women and six men, with different ages, length of stay and legal status, and class, ethnic and racial background. The interviews covered three main themes: their lives in Colombia; why they left their country and how was their arrival in the UK; and their experiences as refugees living in London. The rationale for this research was to analyse in depth the experiences of Colombian refugee men and women living in the UK.

3. 'Political Transnationalism, Gender and Peace-Building Among Colombian Migrants in the UK and Spain' (2008, research carried out at Queen Mary, University of London, funded by ESRC). This study adopted a qualitative, feminist and comparative approach, and was based on fieldwork during April 2005–March 2007. The methods used were one-to-one, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and content analysis of websites and other documentary material. A total of 96 interviews were organised, 49 in Spain (16 in Barcelona and 33 in Madrid) and 47 in the UK (London). In the case of Spain, five of the interviewees were non-Colombians (Spaniards) involved with the community, and the rest were migrants, including 23 women, 17 men, two couples and two groups of four women. In the UK, 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. In addition, a significant number of host-country institutions, migrant organisations and other groups were contacted or visited.

The sub-sample of Colombian migrants was once again illustrative rather than representative, with selection being driven by the characteristics of the research, snowballing and practical considerations. As such, people involved in transnational politics are overrepresented, many of them being refugees. I agree with Østergaard-Nielsen (2003a) 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. The sample also included economic migrants, professionals and students, as well as Colombians migrating for other reasons. There was an overrepresentation of women, but this is not necessarily a bias since the data available suggests a degree of feminisation within these migration flows. 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.

This time around, the fieldwork, as well as being designed to obtain information about the personal characteristics and migration experiences of respondents, was oriented mostly to collect data about Colombian migrants' transnational politics and attitudes towards the conflict and efforts for peace in the home country. This project was a continuation and expansion of the previous one.

4. 'Migrantes como actores políticos en espacios locales y transnacionales. Estudio cualitativo sobre las prácticas e identidades políticas de los latinoamericanos residentes en Andalucía' (Migrants as Political Actors in Local and Transnational Spaces. Qualitative Study of the Political Practices and Identities of Latin Americans Residing in Andalusia) (2008, project led by Dr. Escriva, Universidad de Huelva, funded by the Junta de Andalucía). The fieldwork was completed during the summer of 2008 using semi-structured interviews in Huelva and Seville, as well as participant observation during events at several Andalusian provinces. A total of 48 interviews were carried out, approximately half of them with Latin American migrants (five of them Colombians) and the rest with representatives of host-country trade unions, political parties, local and provincial administration and migrant organisations. Migrants were chosen depending on their

political activism, and included both men and women from different backgrounds and various migration experiences. The content of the interviews focused on the local and transnational political practices of Latin American migrants. This study focused on the political activities of the wider Latin American migrant community in Spain.

5. 'Political Mobilisation of Latin American Migrants in Spain' (2009, research carried out at Queen Mary, University of London, funded by JISLAC). This study took over from the previous one and extended the research of the local–transnational practices of Latin American migrants into other regions of Spain (Madrid and Catalonia). As such, the research objectives and methodology used were similar. The field-work took place in 2009 and involved in-depth interviews with 18 leaders and members of Latin American migrant organisations (11 men and six women), nine Latin American migrants involved in other political activities (six men and three women) and seven non-Latin American key informants. In total, six respondents in Madrid and two in Barcelona were Colombians. Information was also collected about several political initiatives, including 'ethnic', 'pan-ethnic' and 'mixed' organisations, such as Colectivo Maloka (Colombia)-Mujeres Pa'lante (association of immigrant women), a university-based association of graduate students from Latin America and Spain, a transnational Latin American migrant organisation, a 'Latin' newspaper, and several federations of migrant and Latin American migrant organisations. For the sample, I also selected migrants involved in home- and host-country political parties, trade unions, neighbourhood associations and other groups.

As well as these interviews, participant observation was undertaken during the visits to these organisations and related events, including a seminar on social capital and civic participation among migrants in Spain and Europe, a debate on the immigrant vote in Spain, a workshop on social capital and Peruvian migrant organisations, a meeting of migrants affected by the mortgage crisis, a workshop organised to debate Latin American migration to Europe in prepara-tion of the meeting of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly in Madrid, a Colombian demonstration in support of the victims of the armed conflict and human rights abuses in Colombia,

the presentation of Xarxa Latina, a demonstration for Women's Day, and the first meeting of Latin American women in Catalonia.

6. 'Transnational Voting Practices among Colombian Migrants in London and Madrid. The Colombian 2010 Elections from the UK and Spain' (2011, research project led by Prof. McIlwaine, Queen Mary, University of London, funded by the British Academy). This project forms part of a wider research effort, coordinated by Dr. Escobar in the USA, involving in total 3,369 questionnaires carried out in four destination countries for Colombian migrants—USA (Miami and New York), Spain (Madrid), the UK (London) and France (Paris)—as well as inside Colombia (in five main cities). Approximately half of the questionnaires were completed before the elections and the rest on the day of the legislative and presidential poll. The second set of questionnaires represents voters and in the case of migrants it was completed outside consulates and embassies, while the first set was carried out also in neighbourhoods, businesses and other places where migrants congregate (Escobar 2014).

   The UK and Spanish study used a mixed quantitative–qualitative approach, including four questionnaire surveys: one carried out with Colombian migrants before the congressional elections of March 2010 (78 in London and 89 in Madrid), another conducted on the congressional election day (110 in London and 100 in Madrid), a further one administered before the first round of the presidential elections of May 2010 (136 in London and 111 in Madrid) and the last one on election day (105 in London and 100 in Madrid). The total sample was of 829 questionnaires. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Colombian migrants to investigate further some of the issues that came up during the survey. These totalled 19 in London (11 men and eight women) and 10 in Madrid (three men and seven women), including both voters and non-voters (McIlwaine et al. 2011). The study sought to find out the characteristics of Colombian migrants voting or not in home-country elections, as well as reasons for it and interest in home- and host-country politics.

7. 'Crisis, Migration and Integration: The Experiences of Colombian Migrants in Madrid, London and Brussels' (2015, research carried out at the University of Liege, funded by Marie-Curie COFUND). This final

project completes 20 years of research with Colombian migrants in Europe, widening the research to the country of Belgium (Brussels). The aim was to find out what has happened to Colombian migrant communities since the eruption of the global economic crisis in 2008. The project used a mixed research approach involving a survey and in-depth interviews with Colombian migrants and key informants, seeking information on the legal, socioeconomic, educational, political and transnational experiences of migrants and the impact of the crisis. The study involved 200 questionnaires and 16 interviews in each city, using convenience sample techniques (with respondents reached in consulates, organisations, community events and businesses, as well as through phone and internet and using snowball techniques). Non-migrant key informants were also interviewed. The interviews with Colombian migrants were with 18 women and 17 men, representing different types of migrants with varying lengths of stay and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

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