

COLOMBIAN-SPANISH MIGRANTS IN LONDON SINCE THE GREAT RECESSION: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ATTITUDES AMID (DIS)INTEGRATION PROCESSES

MIGRANTES COLOMBIANO-ESPAÑOLES EN LONDRES DESDE LA GRAN RECESIÓN: PARTICIPACIÓN Y ACTITUDES POLÍTICAS DURANTE PROCESOS DE (DES)INTEGRACIÓN

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***Abstract:** This article discusses the (dis)integration processes of Colombian-Spanish migrants arriving in London since the 2008 economic crisis, as the background to understand their political attitudes and participation. It is based on data from qualitative-quantitative fieldwork, complemented with statistical and bibliographical sources. From a transnational perspective that takes into account the home country and more than one destination, the results indicate that the context of the Great Recession in Spain and 'Brexit' in the United Kingdom have had diverse impacts in migrants' integration processes, which are appreciable in their remigration trajectories, work and social experiences, but also in their political interests, participation and ideologies. From this data, we confirm the need to interpret migrants' complex mobilities and their*

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political participation based on a broader conception of integration processes, which includes their multidimensional character and reversible condition, and reflects the growing diversity of (in)mobile political experiences in contexts of crises.

Key words: *Colombian-Spanish migrants; London; crisis; (dis)integration; political participation.*

Resumen: *Este artículo analiza los procesos de (des)integración de migrantes colombo-españoles llegados a Londres tras la crisis económica de 2008, para entender sus actitudes y formas de participación política. Nos basamos en un trabajo de campo cualitativo-cuantitativo, complementado con fuentes estadísticas y bibliográficas. Asumiendo una perspectiva transnacional que tiene en cuenta el país de origen y una pluralidad de destinos migratorios, los resultados indican que la crisis en España y “Brexit” en Reino Unido han tenido impactos diversos en los procesos de integración de estos migrantes, apreciables en sus trayectorias migratorias y experiencias laborales y sociales, pero también en su interés, participación e ideologías políticas. Subrayamos la necesidad de interpretar estas complejas movilidades y la participación política de las personas migrantes desde una concepción amplia de los procesos de integración, reconociendo su carácter multidimensional y condición reversible, y que refleje la creciente diversidad de experiencias políticas (in)móviles en contextos de crisis.*

Palabras clave: *migrantes colombo-españoles; Londres; crisis; (des)integración; participación política.*

INTRODUCTION

The recent history of migration in Spain reflects a strong contrast between two differentiated stages. The first decade of the 21st century was marked by an important increase in inflows, resulting in the growth of the foreign population to previously unknown levels (Martín, Cuberos and Castellani, 2012). Amongst it, Colombian migrants have had a specific weight, with the population born in this country and residing in Spain increasing from 17,928 in 1998 to 440,540 in 2019 (more than half with Spanish nationality) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE). Their arrival must be framed in the coincidence of a political and economic crisis in Colombia with the need for immigrant labour in a Spain fully integrated in Europe.

Historical links between both countries as well as the tightening of immigration policies in the United States, traditionally one of the main destination countries for Colombian migrants, caused flows to be directed increasingly towards Spain since the late 1990s.

From 2008, however, the Great Recession translated into significant changes in migration across Europe and the Americas, affecting Latin American migrants (Aysa-Lastra and Cachón, 2015). In Southern European countries like Spain, it resulted in a fall in new migrant entries and greater returns, a restrictive turn in border policy and a shift in discourses linking migration with security (Kuptsch, 2012; Lindley, 2014). At the same time, the crisis stimulated a considerable increase in outflows from Southern European countries to Central and Northern Europe (Lafleur and Stanek, 2017). Emigration from Spain increased notably, reaching a peak in 2013 to decrease afterwards, and included both people of foreign origin returning to home countries and migrants and natives migrating to other countries. In this context, authors have addressed the remigration of populations of foreign origin in Spain, mainly Latin Americans, to other European countries, analysing individual and family mobilities (Bermudez and Oso, 2019; Sanz, 2015). These works point to the consolidation of London as a favourite destination for these new intra-European flows. In this article, we look at the (dis)integration processes of dual nationality Colombian-Spaniards remigrating to London since 2008, to understand the impact on political practices and attitudes. The hypothesis is that political attitudes and participation will reflect the effects of the economic crisis in integration processes in Spain (López-Sala and Oso, 2015), as well as (re)adaption to the new host society in London. Considering the multidimensional nature of integration, we analyse simultaneously and relationally advances and setbacks in the experiences of these remigrants at the legal —acquisition and precarization of rights—, economic —access to employment and basic resources—, and political —evolution of discourses and practices— levels.

The article provides new data of interest for two main reasons. First, the literature has analysed migrant political participation in relation to host countries or transnationally (towards the home country) (Bermúdez and Escrivá, 2016; Guarnizo and Chaudhary, 2014). The case of onward Colombian-Spanish migrants in London presents an important novelty, since they can participate simultaneously in

multiple political contexts, characterized by unequal opportunities and limitations. On the other hand, this population has suffered the effects of a strong economic crisis resulting in increased austerity measures, greater labour precarization and rising prejudices against migrants (culminating in 'Brexit', the departure of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU)). These political, economic and institutional transformations add a specific interest to the strategies of migrant populations and patterns of political participation. Our text is structured as follows. The initial section offers a brief discussion of the concept of migrant integration, with special emphasis on political participation, to frame how the 2008 crisis may have affected the integration and political experiences of Colombian-Spanish migrants in Spain and the UK from a transnational perspective. Subsequently, basic methodological details are explained and the situation of the Colombian-Spanish population in London is contextualized. This is completed with the data collected during fieldwork, focusing on political attitudes and patterns of participation in relation to the different contexts experienced, including Spain and the UK as well as Colombia. Lastly, we include some concluding remarks, in which we take up the most relevant findings and discuss them with regard to the 2008 crisis and its impact on integration processes and migrant politics.

1. MIGRANT INTEGRATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Migration implies the incorporation of new populations into societies, where they must be inserted into the economic fabric, accommodated in the residential space and incorporated into the political agenda and, to a greater or lesser degree, into decision-making processes. In order to tackle these challenges, we have relied on the concept of integration, generically understood as a gradual process by which migrants become active participants in the civic, economic, political, cultural and social life of the host country to the same level as natives (Bauböck, 1994a; Entzinger, 1997). This conception of integration is based on two fundamental premises: its multidimensionality and gradual nature.

Regarding its multidimensionality, the idea that integration is played simultaneously in different spheres has an important weight

in the analytical models built. Thus, Bauböck (1994b) differentiates between legal-political, social and cultural integration, to refer respectively to the rights and modes of participation formally recognized to migrants, levels of well-being and the degree of respect for their beliefs and behaviours (see also Penninx and Martiniello, 2010). Heckmann (2003), in turn, distinguishes structural integration —the acquisition of rights and institutional recognition of membership—; the cultural one —the assumption by migrants of cognitive, behavioural and attitude traits and competences; the social one —relations between immigrants and natives; and identification —feelings of belonging by migrants. Other authors have come up with similar classifications, with dimensions of integration corresponding more or less with those we use to classify social life for all populations. In these analyses, it is assumed that integration is a complex process that requires parallel advances in all spheres.

On the other hand, thinking about integration as a gradual process assumes that it develops in phases following one another over time, with clearly differentiated characteristics. In the classic approach of Park and Burgess (1921) and the Chicago School, these phases always follow the same order, starting from an initial distance between migrants and natives that decreases with time through interactions between groups, until reaching a final stage of undifferentiated assimilation, a process that can take several generations. This has been disputed since, with authors such as Castles (1995) highlighting models of integration that do not necessarily translate into the disappearance of differences in all dimensions. Vermeulen and Penninx (2000) point out that the gradual advance towards integration cannot be thought in the same way in each dimension. Thus, in the sphere of economic integration, there is general consensus on the objectives of access to resources and equity for migrants. Such access can be measured through indicators, with some authors differentiating between levels of insertion in the host society based on the idea of segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller, 2005). However, disagreement is greater when thinking about socio-cultural integration, with proposals ranging from cultural assimilation to coexistence preserving the autonomy of different groups. Therefore, integration can follow different rhythms and patterns.

Ponzo (2018) and Telles and Ortiz (2011) point out the need to analytically address a hypothesis which is widely agreed but poorly developed: the reversible nature of integration. From this point of view, integration between migrants and natives may suffer a setback if the conditions that structure coexistence undergo a significant change. Taking Southern Europe as a reference, Finotelli and Ponzo (2018) analysed the impact of the 2008 crisis to conclude that it has favoured a mismatch between the dimensions of integration. They observe that the cultural and legal-political dimensions have resisted better, while in the economic sphere the consequences allow us to speak of a setback in terms of integration. By contrast, in a previous study Ponzo et al. (2015) confirm with Eurobarometer figures that in countries like the UK and Germany there was a faster recovery from the economic effects of the crisis, combined with greater increases in negative attitudes towards immigration. This leads Finotelli and Ponzo (2018) to suggest the importance of linking analyses of the crisis to other factors such as the migration histories of countries, their legal frameworks, political environments and welfare regimes.

In this article we take this perspective to analyse first, changes in the integration processes of Colombian-Spanish migrants who left Spain for London as a result of the Great Recession, and second, how these remigration experiences affect their political attitudes, participation and ideologies. We assume a broad conception of political participation, including any pattern of intervention in public life that develops beyond the sphere of immediate reciprocity (relatives and friends) or commercial exchange (employment and consumption) (Pereda, Actis and de Prada, 2007), taking into account formal participation (such as voting in elections) and other informal or civic types (in migrant organisations, etc.) from a transnational perspective, referring to home and host countries. Likewise, we are interested not only in political actions, but also in perceptions and opinions (Bermúdez and Escrivá, 2016). In the population studied, this approach may reflect the effects of a crisis that has impacted the whole of Europe but, in any case, are unequally articulated with the different legal, historical, political and economic contexts that frame the Colombian presence in Spain and the UK. Taking into consideration the home context as well, the political attitudes and participation of Colombian-Spaniards in London can be interpreted as a reflection of diverse complexities and discontinuities in their migratory experiences.

2. METHODOLOGICAL DETAILS

In order to understand this reality, we contribute data produced through qualitative-quantitative fieldwork aimed at addressing complex perceptions and strategies through the concrete experiences of informants. As well as making use of secondary statistics and the literature available, the analysis is based on data from several projects: one looking at the impact of the economic crisis on Colombian migrants in Europe conducted in 2014-2015 (complemented with cases from a previous study of Colombians' transnational voting in the 2010 elections completed in London and Madrid); and ongoing research into Spanish emigration to European countries since 2008 focused on family, labour and political strategies (data collected until 2020).¹We analyse mainly the results of a subset of a survey of Colombians in London (63 with Colombian-Spanish nationality who remigrated from Spain since 2008) and qualitative interviews with eight Colombian-Spaniards recently remigrated and key informants (from migrant organisations, trade unions, embassies, etc.), all over 18-years of age, men and women, and with different mobility experiences. The survey was non-representative, given difficulties in ascertaining the real number of Colombian-Spanish migrants resident in London, while interviewees were selected from previous contacts and fieldwork. To make up for as varied a sample as possible, participants were contacted through events and organisations, consulates, social media, etc.

3. COLOMBIAN-SPANISH MIGRANTS IN LONDON

Colombian migration abroad was traditionally directed towards Venezuela and the United States, however since the end of the 20th century Europe became an important destination. According to

¹ 'Crisis, migration and integration: the experiences of Colombian migrants in Madrid, London and Brussels' (Marie-Curie COFUND Université de Liège, 2013-2015); 'Transnational voting practices among migrants: the Colombian 2010 elections from the UK and Spain' (British Academy, Queen Mary, University of London, 2010-211); 'New intra-EU mobilities: decisions around work, family and politics among Spanish transmigrants' (Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades, CSO2017-84618-P, 2018-2020).

available studies, the majority of Colombian migrants in Spain left the home country for a mixture of socioeconomic reasons, as well as insecurity in Colombia after decades of armed conflict and different violence(s). Statistics show the bulk of this migration began to grow in the 1990s and especially after 2000, with a notable increase until 2002 coinciding with economic crises, neoliberal policies and high levels of violence in Colombia (Aparicio, 2010; OIM/UN, 2003). The Colombian community in Spain continued to grow until it experienced a decline from 2013 to 2016, during the Great Recession, followed by some recovery.

The experience of Colombians in Spain is marked by a contradictory evolution. At the legal level, they found a relatively advantageous scenario for integration. Organic Law 7/1985, which regulated for the first time the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain, imposed a visa for non-nationals entering the country, with the exception of countries covered by special treaties, including many Latin American states (Martín et al., 2012). Colombians were able to enter Spain without a visa until January 2002, which facilitated the initial strong growth of the community. Colombian migrants also share with other Latin Americans the comparative advantage of needing only two years of continuous, legal residence to start the process for naturalisation. This favours a relatively easy access to a stable legal status, and acquisition of the same political rights than natives. In 2002, the imposition of visa requirements caused a decrease in the rhythm of growth, but in December 2015 Colombia signed a new treaty with the EU by which the compulsory Schengen visa is waived. The Colombian population with Spanish nationality has been growing since the late 1990s, and most notably since the Great Recession (from 30,687 in 2006 to 231,795 in 2019, INE).

However, socioeconomic integration has presented difficulties. Beyond minority sectors of highly qualified migrants and students, the experience of the majority is similar to that of other migrant groups in Spain. Incorporation into employment concentrates on heavily precarious sectors, such as hospitality, construction, agriculture and domestic work, mostly in the secondary labour market (Aysa-Lastra and Cachón, 2015; Piore, 1979), characterized by low wages, high temporality and widespread informality (Martín et al., 2008). Beyond the harshness of working conditions and low professional prestige, low income jobs entail added difficulties accessing basic services to participate in social life, although some,

with time, achieve a more advantageous position, for example accessing employment more in accordance with their studies, better contractual conditions and higher in the social scale, or setting up their own businesses. Even so, their vulnerability is especially noticeable in access to housing, coinciding with a context of strong real estate speculation and hyperinflation in land prices. Thus, a significant part of Colombians in Spain have to invest a large part of their income in housing, with a considerable decrease in their ability to save. Starting in 2008, this precariousness will make migrants one of the groups most affected by the crisis that soon generated a dizzying rise in job insecurity and unemployment, as well as the loss of homes (for property-owners) and difficulties finding affordable housing to rent (Bruquetas Callejo and Moreno Fuentes, 2015).

At the same time, the crisis precipitated a series of transformations in discourses about the migrant population in general, and Latin Americans in particular. There has been an increase in hostility towards migrants, who are framed as competitors for resources like jobs or public services. Latin Americans, who during the boom years were presented as preferred due to their cultural compatibility with the Spanish population (Izquierdo, 2004), lose this benevolent consideration in a general context of deterioration in the perception of immigration (Cea D'Ancona, 2015). The arrival in London of recent Colombian-Spanish migrants is preceded, in short, by unequal and contradictory experiences in Spain whereby legal incorporation has not necessarily been accompanied by sustained improvements in material living conditions; nor has access to formally recognized rights gone hand in hand with economic and social equality.

Through the years, Colombian migrants in Europe have built transnational connections between different destinations, with people coming and going and families spread over several European countries depending on conditions for entry and perceptions of where is better to settle. After Spain, the UK has become one of the main destinations, with officially some 38,000 Colombian-born residing in this country (Office for National Statistics, 2019). Even before the crisis, some Colombian migrants first arrived in London via Spain, or settled in Spain after finding it impossible to migrate to the UK (or being deported) (Bermudez, 2016). These networks are key to understand recent remigrations to London. The origins of the current Latin American community in the UK go back to the 1970s, with a majority of this population residing in London and Colombians

being one of the main nationalities. They are a very varied migrant group, including elite migrants, workers, students and refugees (McIlwaine, 2012). A recent study shows secondary movements from EU countries to the UK by Latin Americans accelerating since 2008, with estimates of more than 15,000 Latin Americans with Spanish passports entering the country in 2012-2013 (the majority originally from Colombia, Ecuador and Brazil) (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016). Research highlights the difficult circumstances these onward migrants face despite their EU citizenship (Bermudez, 2020; Mas, 2017). However, most studies have not tackled this together with an analysis of political thinking and practices.

4. PROCESSES OF (DIS)INTEGRATION BETWEEN SPAIN AND THE UK

Out of the 200 Colombians participating in the survey in London in 2014, 67 reached the UK via Spain, the vast majority since 2008; most have lived in London for up to five years and 17% for less than a year, so they are relatively recent migrants. Of the 63 arrived from 2008 (sub-sample analysed here), all are dual Colombian-Spanish nationals except for two with only Colombian citizenship, while one person has applied for British citizenship, which means that largely they enjoy a secure migrant status. Regarding the causes of their onward migration to the UK, 84% mention work or socioeconomic motives as the main reason, and the rest mainly family or study motivations. Many explain that they lost their jobs, had no employment opportunities or experienced socioeconomic problems in Spain (directly or affecting family members), while others perceive greater opportunities in London in terms of work, income or to learn English (especially for the children). Thus, their onward migration seems a matter of having lost the possibility of continuing their lives in Spain and the belief that London offers some potential, if not for them, for their offspring.

When asked about how different aspects of their lives were affected by the economic crisis starting in 2008, none perceive impacts on their migrant status, but 54 respondents state it has affected them socioeconomically, mostly while in Spain, although some mention impacts in London as well (access to worse jobs,

working hard with less time for family, poor housing). Regarding other areas, 36,5% believe the crisis affected their studies (lack of time, no money), 71% perceive an impact in family relations (breakups, temporary separations through selective return and remigration strategies), while 17,5% admit the crisis affected their political participation and 52% feel more discriminated. Thus the consequences for integration processes, while affecting mostly socioeconomic conditions, have been uneven in other respects, but still significant in the socio-political sphere.

These results are backed by the data from in-depth interviews with Colombian-Spanish migrants in London. Many of them are not new to “crises”, since it was the lack of proper jobs or income opportunities that made them leave Colombia. Following McIlwaine and Bunge’s (2019) concept of “onward precarity”, which explains how labour and other precarities accompany Latin American migrants through their diverse mobilities, it is possible to see how diverse ‘crises’ have interrupted the lives of these Colombian-Spanish migrants, prompting new mobilities. This is the case of Marimar², a 47-year old single mother living with her daughter in London since 2008, who explains that she left Colombia, where she was a nutritionist, because of the crisis in the health sector. After arriving in Spain in 2001, Marimar became an ‘irregular’ migrant and found employment as a live-in domestic and looking after children and the elderly. Later, with the help of the Church she obtained a residence permit and completed training to work in old people’s homes. During this time Marimar left her daughter in Colombia, worked hard and earned well. However, she felt dissatisfied and in 2008 left for London, where she brought her daughter. Although Marimar only lived in Spain for seven years, she experienced some socioeconomic progression, as well as achieving a secure legal status offering her the same rights as the native population, including freedom of movement within the EU. For other interviewees with longer stays, the promise of full integration went further, especially in the socioeconomic sphere, as is the case of Abigail, 34-years old, separated with one child, and in London since 2009. She left Colombia in 1999 after finishing secondary school in search of better opportunities in Spain, where initially she found things harder than expected: «I hoped it was going to be easier... but it wasn’t... To be

² These are pseudonyms, to protect anonymity.

able to find a type of job... where one could advance». Still, after first working as live-in domestic, later she was employed as a waitress and sales assistant: «when I had my papers, at least I could gain access to more normal jobs». As well as getting married and having a son, Abigail and her husband bought two properties in Spain, until the economic crisis hit them and they lost everything. She recounts her feelings after having to give back to the bank their flat in Madrid:

the second (house) was where we were living and had made our life. It was very traumatic... that feeling that after all these years... All the work, so much, and when we thought we had reached some level of stability in our lives, and to see that really there was nothing... And the fact of coming here [to London], to start again.

These feelings are common among onward migrants in London, who saw the crisis suddenly interrupting their lives and reversing some of the gains made. All interviewees in London arrived in Spain between the late 90s and the beginning of the new century, during a period of growing immigration and economic bonanza, entered the country as tourists and later achieved a regular migration status through employment or regularization schemes, after which they applied for Spanish nationality. In parallel to this legal progression, they started at the lower echelons of the labour market, women mostly as live-in domestics and men in construction or low-paid service jobs, and with time and a more secure legal status gained access to better jobs (with contracts, social security, better hours). Some found employment more in accordance with previous experiences in Colombia or completed new training, such as Vicente, a 36 year old man, married with two children, interviewed in London two months after arriving, in 2014. In Colombia he studied and worked in industrial maintenance, but after arriving in Spain, for «the first year... the hardest» he held all sorts of jobs, until he underwent training and found employment installing and maintaining phone networks. Among those who migrated on their own to Spain, most formed their own families, while in other cases, they brought spouses and/or children from Colombia, and in many instances bought their own apartments, thus becoming like many ordinary Spanish families. We could argue that they achieved a level of integration in the host society, even if joining mostly the working- and lower-middle class sectors (see Aysa-Lastra and Cachón, 2015). The economic crisis put an abrupt end to integration for many, including those

who had become “new Spaniards”, the same way that it impacted badly on other vulnerable sectors of society. However, for migrants it presents extra difficulties, since often they do not have access to the same support through family and social benefits. On the other hand, Latin American migrants with strong transnational links have the recourse of returning or remigrating to another country, even if this means starting from zero again (Bermudez, 2016; Sanz, 2015).

The latter is the case of Colombian-Spanish migrants interviewed in London, who face a paradoxical situation, since as EU citizens they enjoy certain advantages (compared with other migrants), but as migrants with hardly any English and low-skilled or semi-skilled, they join the ranks of other Latin Americans in the least desirable jobs, mainly the cleaning sector. Almost all Colombian-Spanish interviewees (and their husbands or wives) are looking for jobs or working as cleaners, mostly part time, paid hourly and at unsociable hours, while in the survey sub-sample, the situation is similar: 73% are employed (women mostly as part-time cleaners, working in small businesses, or as waitresses and kitchen assistants; men in cleaning and hospitality, as handy people or in industry), 15% are unemployed or inactive (including stay-at-home mothers) and 13% self-employed (in cleaning, home repairs, selling food, etc.). Some explain they are looking for work but it is difficult, or they have stopped working as cleaners because it is hard and tiring, while others mention working only a few hours per day. The majority earn less than a thousand pounds a month, or between 1,000 and 2,000, which as most interviewees admit it is more than what they earned in Spain prior to their onward migration, but not much to live in such an expensive city to the same standards they had in Spain before the crisis. Also, 80% in London live in rented properties, sometimes in subsidised social housing but in other cases renting a room in shared houses or with family and friends. This is a main source of stress among some families, such as for Vicente, who in London lives in a room with his wife and two children in a house shared with relatives, while in Spain:

I had many jobs... and that made me buy a flat in Spain, and I helped my family [in Colombia] a lot. I also bought a house in Colombia... [I had] an excellent life, a car... weekends we always went out, to many places... because there was money. The crisis came and I lost my work, my flat, I do not send money to Colombia monthly any more.

All in all, while these migrants maintain their legal advantages in the UK to some degree (with growing restrictions on access to welfare as anti-immigration measures increase in the run-up to Brexit) and have the advantage of access to transnational networks (with many remigrating to London because of family and friends there), in socioeconomic terms the crisis reversed the gains made in Spain, having to start as new migrants in a different context that, at least initially, offers limited labour and social integration. This supports the idea of reversible integration processes at times of crises (Finotelli and Ponzo, 2018; Ponzo, 2018; Telles and Ortiz, 2011), or (dis)integration in a context where Colombian-Spanish onward migrants combine their transnational migration rights (as EU citizens) with renewed forms of onward precarity, a situation that as we analyse next has an impact on their socio-political integration.

5. IMPACT ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, BELONGING AND DISCRIMINATION

Colombian-Spanish migrants in London enjoy certain political rights both in relation to their current and previous host societies as well as the home country, including voting from abroad (in elections in Spain and Colombia). From the perspective of host societies, political participation has been signalled as one of the weakest spheres in integration policies, while at the same time emphasis is put on the idea of the “good citizen” based on notions of participation and belonging (Horst, Erdal and Jdid, 2019). In Spain, migrants enjoy certain political rights, especially in the case of Latin Americans, with some nationalities allowed to vote in local elections owing to bilateral agreements (Bermúdez and Escrivá, 2016). Still, for Colombians, the studies available highlight generally low levels of electoral participation based on a culture of political apathy, distrust and lack of collective action, a reflection of years of corruption and violence in the home country (Guarnizo and Chaudhary, 2014; Guarnizo, Sánchez and Roach, 1999). For Colombian-Spanish onward migrants in London, having suffered a severe reversal of their integration processes and starting anew, the situation is more complex. Formally they have some access to three different polities, but their weak socioeconomic position

leaves them unable to exercise such rights or at least shapes their involvement. Moreover, socio-political participation might relate to feelings of belonging and discrimination, and whether or not they perceive themselves as 'integrated'.

5.1. Do they participate politically and where?

Only 32% of survey respondents claim to be able to communicate in English effectively, which may partly explain why 49% have no participation in political or civic activities in London; among the rest, a majority collaborates with NGOs or take part in cultural, social and religious activities, with little involvement in formal politics. Participation is also more occasional than regular, and although 68% are interested or very interested in what happens in their new reception country, only 54% care significantly about UK politics. As to voting in the host country, a majority think they cannot vote or do not know (although EU citizens can vote in local and European elections), while a few others claim they have not lived in London long enough to be politically informed, are preoccupied about other things or do not like politics, although 52% say they would vote if they could. Colombian-Spanish migrants interviewed also feel quite detached from UK politics, mostly because they have not lived in the country long enough, with language and lack of time the main barriers to greater political integration. This is the case of Marimar (mentioned before), who after been in the country for six years, explains: «I don't participate politically... language is a big limitation... I would like to, because I really think... it's necessary».

Thus, although acknowledging the need to participate and that she can vote in some elections, Marimar has not registered to do so owing to lack of «information about the candidates». Still, both she and other interviewees try to keep informed through media and other channels. Luciano, 47-years old, married with one son and living and working as a cleaner in London since 2011 (after becoming unemployed in Spain, where he arrived in 2001 and worked in farming), also recognises the need to be involved but finds it difficult owing to lack of time and the language barrier. However, both he and other migrants interviewed volunteer for Latin American migrant organisations. Luciano started with a local group a few months earlier: «when I was studying [English], I was

able to see that [here] there were problems... and I said... why not help». In Spain he had fewer opportunities to take part in this type of initiatives, especially living in a smaller town like León, but in London he finds many organisations helping migrants. The Latin American community in the UK is heavily concentrated in London, and albeit smaller and less visible than other ethnic groups, it has a strong network of organisations (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016), to which new arrivals are often directed to. Other interviewees started volunteering with Latin American NGOs after approaching them for help, like Abigail (see above), who was advised by a women's group during her separation from her husband and felt the need «to contribute something» back. Such activities can lead to acquiring new skills and work experience, like for Inmaculada, 40 years-old, married with one child, in London since 2012, currently unemployed and volunteering for a migrant organisation (with university studies, arrived in Spain in 2006, where she worked in a call centre): «I am learning things that are going to help me find a good job». In her case, like for many others, there is no previous history of similar engagement in Spain (or in Colombia), so these are new forms of participation related to the higher importance of volunteer work in the UK socio-political context, where these activities are «valued as regular work» and used as an entry point to the labour market by marginalised groups such as migrant women (Carlisle, 2006, p. 244). This also suggests that these migrants access Latin American networks in the city, rather than Spanish or British ones. During an interview with a Colombian man in charge of services for Spanish speakers at a trade union, he confirmed that many people attending courses and meetings arrived recently from Spain and were mostly of Latin American (or other migrant) origin, rather than native Spaniards, whom he describes as having higher levels of education and better prepared to live in the city. Such practices indicate as well a more practical orientation to political participation than as a means for collective mobilisation for their rights, something that became also apparent when talking about their participation in Spain (and Colombia).

The majority of interviewees had little or no political participation in Spain, beyond voting. This is partly related to their levels of political involvement in Colombia, with Armando, 43 years old, married with two children and in London since 2011 working as a cleaner (after 14 years in Spain), explaining that his family in Colombia

was «political» and he started studying politics, so he has always been active, voting in Colombia, Spain (where he joined a party) and now in London (in local elections). Some mentioned voting from abroad in the Spanish and/or Colombian elections, although most, since coming to London, have not registered to do so yet. Thus, political participation can be part of a continuum whereby people with greater political capital and experience participate more and others remain more detached (see also Guarnizo and Chaudhary, 2014). Still, among the later, detachment might only apply to formal politics, which tends to be viewed more negatively: «politics has always been bad» (Luciano). Nevertheless, such views and patterns can be altered at moments of crisis or sudden change. Some survey respondents (17,5%) and interviewees admit the economic crisis affected their political participation, mostly in relation to what happened in Spain, but with the impact extending far beyond. Here, we identify two main positions. Some respondents argue they have lost confidence in the system («don't believe in politicians any more») or that they do not vote because «they are all against migrants». Luciano believes the crisis has increased his pessimism and incredulity, but admits these feelings go back to his life in Colombia: «if politics didn't exist we would all be ok». In the same line, Vicente (see above), draws a parallel between his perceptions of Colombian politics and Spain, although this does not affect his desire to become more involved in the future:

I thought Spanish politicians were more serious... with the crisis it is evident that it is the opposite... I don't know who is more corrupt, Colombians or Spaniards... Spain had some benefits and social services and since the crisis they have been reduced [...] how are you going to support them if they are taking away your rights?

But critical junctures can also increase political motivation or change ideologies, as the vulnerable see their situation more threatened and feel the need to be informed and participate. Although most interviewees believe the economic crisis affected them only in Spain, they recognise as well the impact of anti-immigration policies in the UK in the run-up to Brexit, which increased their political interest. Thus, Abigail believes the crisis does not affect her politically, since she remains «in the margins», but adds that she is more interested now about what happens: «we hear so much about immigration... even for those from the European Community». Alicia, 34 years old,

married with one child, in London since 2012 working as a cleaner (arrived in Spain in 2001, where she worked cleaning and in a shop), also shows preoccupation about Brexit and despite expressing little interest in politics, voted in local elections in London: «if you are in a country that is giving you things, you also have to support that country». Although she does not believe in parties, Alicia votes for candidates offering more to migrants: «you follow what is more convenient for you». In these cases, political motivation is the result of some sense of belonging or duty to where one lives, mixed with practical concerns about the collective they feel part of.

By contrast, transnational politics vis-à-vis Colombia is less prominent amongst interviewees. In the survey, there was evidence of participation in NGOs, recreational and other activities, including more political ones, in relation to the home country. However, although most interviewees follow the situation in Colombia, their interest in politics is limited, partly because they do not envisage returning or because they are tired of things not improving: «in Colombia there are many injustices... promises and they never achieve anything... There is no peace... I prefer not to hear» (Alicia). Thus, a majority of interviewees, despite their (dis)integration and new uprooting, believe their future remains in the UK or Spain. The context in the home country, including improved economic perspectives and the beginnings of a new peace process, do not have much of an impact, as people remain sceptical. Also, maintaining political interest and participation in three different contexts while in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability is difficult, with only one interviewee, a 30-year old architect who left for London in 2008 (after four years in Spain), where he was offered a job, maintaining active participation in Colombian politics transnationally.

5.2. Do they feel discriminated and perceive themselves 'integrated'?

As some responses above point out, political and civic engagement (being a 'good citizen') relates to feelings of belonging and being 'integrated'. Gaining access to citizenship has been seen as a goal or a means to full migrant integration, with the prize being the ability to participate totally, even politically (Bauböck, 2006). Colombian migrants in Spain naturalise for a number of reasons,

including instrumental ones, but also based on genuine links, with the practical value of obtaining an EU passport increasing during the Great Recession, especially for those returning or remigrating (Bermudez, 2020). However, dual nationality does not necessarily mean equal degrees of belonging, as some interviewees remark: «I have dual nationality... but the main one is Colombian» (Alicia). This is further supported by the evidence that hardly any respondent mentions accessing Spanish services in London, in comparison to those addressed to the Latin American community. But if dual nationality complicates matters of belonging and participation, remigrating to a third country presents a new challenge.

None of the migrants interviewed have applied for British nationality, largely because with EU citizenship they do not think it is necessary (or even possible), although some say they may consider it in the future, if the UK leaves the EU: «In the future, maybe[...] I have the same rights now, but sometimes I fear they are going to take [the UK] outside the European Community» (Abigail). This can also relate to plans to stay or not in the UK. Around 73% of survey respondents intend to remain in the UK, with the rest saying no (24%) or do not now (3%). If among those wanting to stay the main motivations are access to jobs, living standards and family reasons, for the ones intending to leave, most consider returning to Colombia and a smaller percentage either going back to Spain or another country (like the US). The main motivations for not wanting to remain in London relate to language difficulties, how expensive the city is, or because they do not like the lifestyle. Still, despite showing greater cultural affinity with Spain, when talking with interviewees, there is a widespread feeling of being integrated in London and suffering less discrimination than in Spain.

Colombian-Spanish migrants in London, although mentioning they missed aspects of life in Spain, were very critical of how they were treated there, especially during the crisis. Almost all believed there was less discrimination in London, this being a very multicultural city where Latin American migrants remain fairly invisible. Some acknowledged lack of English and anti-immigration attitudes can cause discrimination in London, but normalised it by believing it was only temporary or due to too many people arriving in the country: «I don't think it is against [immigrants]. I think the country has to regulate... immigration» (Marimar). By contrast, almost all felt discriminated in Spain, with some arguing they did not realise

until they arrived in London. Such discrimination related mostly to Spain's history of conquest and colonisation of Latin America or the labour market, and was aggravated by the crisis:

In London, no... here there is a lot of mixing [...] In Spain I felt very discriminated... Spaniards still live 'la conquista' [the conquest]... In Spain one sees racism [...] with the crisis more. And the government then is to blame... because it is making anti-immigration policies but hides it. (Vicente)

Others, like Inmaculada, recount discrimination at work in Spain: «of the 300 employees, only 10 of us were Latinos... and you noticed the comments, the discrimination... against Latinos». So though, in general, Colombian-Spanish migrants were more integrated socioeconomically in Spain (before the crisis) compared with the precarious lives they have carved in London, there is a sense of feeling integrated in the city and better prospects, with few exceptions (those experiencing more precarity). Nevertheless, this sense of integration is not so much linked to UK society, since very few have significant contacts with British people or politics, conducting their lives mostly through Latin American networks. Thus, Marimar keeps informed through Latin American media in London, shops in ethnic businesses and works with other Colombians. Their idea of integration relates mostly to getting together with other Latin Americans or migrants to help each other or fight for better rights, especially among those with some participation, as well as having a 'normal' life (working, consuming, using public services). Even for those experiencing difficulties, expectations are that their conditions will improve with time, as Inmaculada expresses when asked what integration means: «I don't mean to feel English, but to feel part of the system [...] it is a process... I am in a stage of this process [...] studying, working... participating». Thus, despite experiencing (dis)integration, the idea of lineal progression still dominates, with integration and belonging relating to one country or another depending on the sphere of integration and current conditions. Their main foothold in London so far remains their legal status, being an EU citizen, but this is about to change through Brexit. Meanwhile, some are seeking to keep this advantage by applying for 'settled status', this time making use of Spanish-based services to aid with the process, as personnel at the embassy confirmed, but others, especially those in most vulnerable situations and with little information, might fall through.

CONCLUSIONS

Studies of migrant integration have long argued for the need to understand the multidimensionality of such processes: that is, that they occur in separable spheres, mainly the socio-legal, socio-economic and cultural-religious, with classical approaches predicting simultaneous progress over time. However, more recent studies have put in doubt the unilineal and univocal qualities of integration, with authors distinguishing between economic assimilation into different sectors of society (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Portes et al., 2005) or highlighting how integration can be reversed at times of crises (Finotelli and Ponzo, 2018; Telles and Ortiz, 2011). Research has also raised the need to understand the precise impacts of economic crises on migrant integration taking into account diverse host country contexts (Finotelli and Ponzo, 2018). However, our article offers an interesting contribution, as it uncovers the (dis)integration effects caused by the Great Recession and discusses its impacts on migrant political participation.

Our research is also novel because it considers migrant politics from a transnational perspective taking into account the home country and more than one host country, thus reflecting increasingly complex mobilities following the 2008 crisis. Particularly, this article presents how the crisis produced (dis)integration processes among some Colombian-Spanish migrants as they left Spain for London (Bermudez, 2020). Based on a survey carried out in 2014-2015 and interviews with migrants and key informants (from 2010 to 2020), we establish that the crisis severely interrupted integration in Spain, especially in the socioeconomic sphere, with migrants losing their livelihoods and lifestyle, only to start again from zero in London, where they become inserted in Latin American migrant networks surviving in precarious conditions. Ready access to basic jobs and some public welfare allow Colombian-Spanish citizens to gain a foothold in the new host society from which they can envision a better future, somehow ignoring the processes of onward precarity accompanying them through their multiple mobilities (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2019). However, Brexit raises concerns that holding a secure legal status through their EU citizenship might not be enough if another 'crisis' (leaving the EU) takes place (as it became a reality on 1st January 2021).

It is against this background that Colombian-Spanish migrants in London conduct their political and civic participation in relation

to three different polities. By and large, political integration in London is limited by their EU citizenship and the language barrier, thus leading to significant detachment, the main exception being involvement with Latin American migrant organisations through volunteering, which seems to be oriented more to practical reasons than to collective mobilization for rights. On the other hand, political participation vis-à-vis Spain and Colombia seems to be part of a continuum whereby migrants with greater political experience try to continue this, while others remain deeply sceptical or even suspicious of any such activities, particularly with regard to formal politics. All in all, maintaining involvement in all three polities at the same time seems difficult, especially taking into account their vulnerable existence in London. However, for some there is a sense that the 2008 economic crisis impacted their political orientation or participation, with two main results, either to make them more involved or increase their scepticism. Engagement also relates to feelings of belonging and discrimination, with migrants partly missing life in Spain but also recognising the discrimination they suffered, especially during the crisis, and at the same time building up allegiances to their new host country, where they feel less discriminated. These aspects merit further investigation, as Colombian-Spanish migrants rebuild their lives in London or think of new mobilities to survive and progress, for instance, in response to new crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This new context could add complexity and produce new discontinuities in their integration and political experiences.

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