Colombian Migrants in Australia:
Their Positioning Processes and Identities in
Narratives of Lived and Imagined Experience

Liana Mercedes Torres Casierra

School of Languages and Cultures
Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Sydney

2017
# Table of Contents

Abstract v  
Statement of Originality vii  
Acknowledgments viii  
List of Abbreviations x  
List of Graphs, Tables and Figures xi  
Transcript Notation xii  
Preface 1  

**Introduction** 3  
  *Research Questions and Theoretical Framework* 10  
  *Latin American Studies Scholarship in Australia* 15  
  *Research on Colombians in the Diaspora* 21  
  *Thesis Structure* 23  

**Chapter 1**  
Dis-engageing and Dis-locating Colombian Migrant Narratives: An Ethnography on the Identities of a Growing Community in Australia 26  
  *The Insider/Researcher Position and the ‘Accumulating Layers’ of Knowledge* 29  
  *Dis-engageing and Dis-locating Narratives of Migration* 35  
  *Mixed Narrative Sources and Mixed Spaces of Telling* 38  
  *From Identity Theory to a Multivoiced Identities Theory* 43  
  *In Dialogue with the Self and with Others: Dialogical Self Theory* 50  
  *Colombian Identities in Australia Seen Within a Global South Perspective* 55  

**Chapter 2**  
Australia’s Composition as a Country of Immigrants and as an Emerging Preferred Destination for Latin Americans and Colombians 59  
  *Australia, a Country of ‘Settlers’ and Immigrants as Planned by the State* 63  
  *The Idealized Images of Australia’s Multiculturalism and Tolerance* 66  
  *Resecuritization of the Australian Nation-State* 72  
  *Skilled Migration and Other Pathways for Migrating to Australia* 76  
  *Australia and Latin American Countries Relations* 78  
  *Synthesizing the Pathways of Colombians in Australia* 83
### Chapter 3

**Colombia-born Migrants to Australia: Who are They? Who are We?**

- Colombians’ Internal Displacement and Emigration
- Colombians in the World
- Official Data on Colombians in Australia
- Preliminary Survey of Colombians in Australia
- Participants’ Biographical Data
- Decision-Making Process
- Envisioning Australia and People Here
- Post-Migration Contact with Colombia
- Personal Future Endeavours

**Colombian Migrants in Australia: A Broad Profile**

**Profiles of Four ‘Old’ Colombian Migrants**
- Camilo, 76, arrived in 1972
- Carlos, 77, arrived in 1983
- Diego, 60, arrived in 1994
- Francia, 44, arrived in 1997

**Profiles of Four ‘New’ Colombian Migrants**
- Martha, 37, arrived in 2006
- Andrés, 36, arrived in 2003
- Nancy, 34, arrived in 2008
- Carmen, 58, arrived in 2004

**Colombians in Australia**

### Chapter 4

**Colombians’ Understandings of Social Distinction and National Identities**

- Elements of Social Class and Race Distinctions in Colombia’s Territory
- Social Identifications by Region of Origin
- Colombian Migrant Narratives: New Imaginaries of Social Class and Citizenship
- Narratives on the Imagining of Residency Status
- Narratives of Social Positioning Based on Job Mobility and English Language Proficiency
- Shared Understandings on the National Identifications of Colombians
- Identifying Oneself as Colombian vs Identifying Other Colombians
Chapter 5

Imaginaries of a Colombian Community in Australia and Their Intersection with Identifications of the National Back Home

From the Imagined Community of Colombians in Australia to its Material Aspects

Acknowledging the Existence of a Community of Which One Is Not Part

The Colombian Community Seen as ‘Weak’ in Reference to Other Migrant Groupings

The Imagining of a Virtual Community by ‘New Migrants’ which Resembles Spaces Opened by ‘Old Migrants’

A Generalised ‘Lack of Sense of Community’ amongst Colombians in Australia

The Breaking of Rules as a Further Element in the Discourse of Community and National Identities of Colombians in Australia

Intersections of the Colombian Community and National Identifications of Colombia through Collective Remembering

Mistrust of Fellow Colombians, the Government, and Politicians

Lack of Reciprocity amongst Colombian Migrants

Lack of Civic Engagement in Colombia and Australia

Chapter 6

Social and Political Questioning over Colombia’s Past and Present Within Stories of Political Dissent and Silencing

Political Participation and Identity

Colombian Migrants’ Participation in Politics Abroad, a Question of (Mis)trust

Describing the Arena of Colombian Organising in Australia

Forms of Political Dissent and Political Silencing

Invisibility of Dissent

Overtly Silencing Dissent

Selected Voiced Dissent

Collective Social and Political Questioning over Colombia’s Past and Present

A Limited Political Identity amongst Colombian Migrants in Australia

Chapter 7

Multiple Identities, Positionings and Positionalities: Five Case Studies of Colombians in Australia

Positioning Processes in the Multiplicity of Identities of the Migrant Selves

Diego, 60, 1994

Early Childhood and Adolescence

Asylum in Venezuela

Fleeing to Australia and Diego’s Last 20 years here

Nelson, 52, 2009

Dealing with Other Colombians

Becoming a Migrant Facing the Australian System

Waiting for a Chance to Obtain Permanent Residency
Colombians Multiple Migrant Identities, Positionings and Positionalities

Conclusion

References

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Interviewed Participants

Appendix B: Tables in Original Spanish Versions

Appendix C: Focus Groups Transcript Extracts (Chapter 5)

Appendix D: Focus Groups Transcript Extracts (Chapter 6)
Abstract

This thesis examines the positioning processes of forty-four Colombian migrants in Australia that traces their discursive construction of social, national and migrant identities in view of their stories of lived experience before and after their migration. It looks at the socio-historical contours of Australia as an increasingly preferred destination for Colombians, bearing in mind the country’s treatment of its Aboriginal people, its foreign labour force, and its immigrant population. This project offers an overview of the flow of immigrants from Colombia and the features that characterize them as a growing national group in Australia. They could be broadly divided between ‘old’ and ‘new’ migrants, but their wide range of personal stories of mobility and the dimensions that have accompanied their experience here require a further consideration of factors beyond ethnicity and year of arrival. The thesis explores these elements from extant research and official census data combined with details obtained through a preliminary ethnographic approach. Data were collected during 18 months of fieldwork which included an open survey for Colombians in Australia, personal interviews, observation of public events, focus groups, written narratives and further personal communications with participants. This research takes its theoretical base from a combination of standpoint theory, narrative theory, positioning theory, and Dialogical Self Theory (DST) to examine the discursive formation and views of identity that Colombians articulate at different times and in different spaces, be they part of fieldwork or observation of private and community events. Employing these theoretical frameworks, the thesis departs from a perspective that posits both Colombia and Australia as part of the geopolitical Global South, with a given composite of social order practices. The research attends to the key concepts of positioning and positionality to study the reflexivity of participants in their narrative performance.
The thesis interrogates the scope of the multiplicity of identities that participants construct and how these are influenced not only by the social and economic conditions they find in the new country but also a number of shared understandings on Colombia’s past and recurrent social practices. This thesis maintains that Colombians in Australia mould their perceptions of citizenship and community in view of what they imagine these values are for Australians. Additionally, the study shows how features like employment mobility and relations with other Colombians effectively leave an imprint on the participants’ perceptions of their own community as fragmented and dispersed. Thus the forming of multiple identity positions or stronger and less volatile ones depend on the individual’s own early experiences as an immigrant, their reasons for leaving Colombia, and their own reasoning over the migration paths they have followed to date. As a result, the narratives examined here reveal how national identities in Colombian territory are intertwined with the participants’ reflections on their own socio-economic, educational and political background constructing at the same time an array of new positions that evoke a multiplicity of migrant identities.
Statement of Originality

I certify that this thesis submitted to the University of Sydney for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the product of my original work and contains no material previously published except where due reference is made. The information collected through fieldwork was obtained with the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee and after full consent of participants.

Liana M Torres C
Acknowledgments

The preciously agitated journey of the writing of this project was only possible thanks to the unreserved and generous support of my supervisor Dr Vek Lewis. From the very first time we met at his office in 2011 and for over four years profe Vek believed in this project and offered me incommensurable academic and personal guidance to make this contribution to the field of Latin American studies from the South. I bestow him an immense gratitude for his timely advice and encouragement when my role and responsibilities as a mother needed to be negotiated for the smooth development of fieldwork and completion of the thesis. Vek’s tireless passion for intellectual work has undoubtedly been a great inspiration to continue my academic career beyond this research.

I am also truly thankful to my co-supervisor Dr Fernanda Peñaloza whose timely observations on my methodology and theoretical approach facilitated the task of defining the scope and narrowing the goals of the project. Dr Fernanda’s frank support at difficult times where I had to cope with personal and administrative burdens was pivotal to see the final stages of the project accomplished.

I would also like to thank Dr Anne Walsh and the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies at the University of Sydney for giving me the opportunity to undertake an invaluable teaching role in the Spanish language courses and enrich my experience as a PhD student.

I am deeply grateful to those who fund the University of Sydney International Scholarship (USydIS) program, the Postgraduate Research Support Scheme (PRSS), Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and the School of Languages and Cultures, because it was their financial assistance which allowed me to execute this project.
My deepest gratitude goes to those Colombian migrants in Australia who trusted in my work, decided to share part of their lives with me, and kindly gave up their free time to tell me about their experience here. I hope to have made justice to the uniqueness and strength of their stories and that these can inspire further research on Colombians and Latin Americans in Australia.

Thanks are also due to the kind staff of KU Childcare Centre at Carillon Avenue in Newtown. They were a truly helping-hand in the care of my son and in reassuring me I could go to my desk and he would be well cared for.

Lastly, I acknowledge the tireless support of my mum, Adelina, who from far-away Colombia has listened to my worries and prayed for our wellbeing in Australia. I thank especially my husband, Eider, and our son, Thomas, who have been permanent companions in every step of my work and have patiently waited countless nights and weekends to see this thesis accomplished.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABN</td>
<td>Australian Business Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELICOS</td>
<td>English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDPs</td>
<td>Internally Displaced People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIAC</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DST</td>
<td>Dialogical Self Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DANE</td>
<td><em>Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística</em> (National Administrative Department of Statistics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBP</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Border Protection (formerly DIAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIP</td>
<td><em>Viviendas de Interés Prioritario</em> (Priority needs housing program)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Graphs, Tables and Figures

Graph 1  Number of Participants per Age Groups and Sex
Graph 2  Number of Participants per Year of Arrival and Sex
Graph 3  Participants Region of Origin
Graph 4  Participants Residency Status Vs Job Status

Table 1  First Choice Reasons to Come to Australia
Table 2  Further Reasons to Migrate to Australia
Table 3  Colombians’ Comments on Situations Where They Have Felt Unwelcome in Australia

Figure 1  Colombian Migrants’ Profile upon Arrival to Australia
Figure 2  Diego's Positioning Process Inflected by a Meta-Position
Figure 3  Nelson's Dialogical Triads Positioning
Figure 4  Marcela's Dialogical Triads Model of Positioning
Figure 5  Rebeca's Repositioning Process Fighting Ambiguous Thirds
Figure 6  Andres’ Performing of Meta-Positions and Awareness of Multiplicity of Identities
Names of all participants and personal details that could lead to their identification have been changed to preserve their anonymity. Oral discourse is presented in its original form in Spanish accompanied with an English translation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>overlap in the speech of a single participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>start of speech overlap between two participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>]</td>
<td>end of speech overlap between two participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>short pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[…]</td>
<td>part of speech has been omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(( ))</td>
<td>inaudible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPITAL</td>
<td>raised tone or louder than surrounding speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

Twelve years ago I had in mind that the next step in my career had to be going overseas to complete a master’s degree, which would secure me a better job in Colombia. That was the natural thing to do after finishing my degree in teaching modern languages. I had a passion for languages, teaching, and also research, and in my early twenties had reached milestones many could only dream of. On the other hand, my family was not indifferent to the migration phenomenon; half of my dad’s siblings had made their own way to the United States and on my mum’s side one of her sisters, a few cousins, and other extended family members were also abroad. I would not just migrate to make a better living, but to continue my postgraduate studies. I had found different scholarships to apply for, and one of them was in Australia. One of my dad’s sisters had moved to England in her 20s to study English and work; she ended up marrying a Hungarian man who took her all the way to Australia. At home, my aunt was always seen as a sort of heroin and a role model to follow because she had left too young and had made a family on her own in such a wild country that Australia was. Since her calls back home were rather sporadic everyone would get very excited to hear anything from her. I thought she would react in the same way if I told her about my plans, but her response was the least expected of all. ‘What are you going to do here?’ she said with a raised tone indicating she was not impressed at all. I was relieved that I did not intend to rely on her since I was travelling on a scholarship, had my own savings and my family’s financial support, plus I was going to Sydney, and she lived in Melbourne. Yet, it really hurt me when instead of showing some excitement as my family truly would for her when visiting us, she was doing the exact opposite. What had happened to that woman who could not be happy to hear someone will travel so many miles over the Pacific Ocean and potentially visit her? Why would she sound so mean, detached, and heartless towards family? I would only begin to understand three years later when we met for the second time in Australia at her home in Melbourne. Her life abroad was never easy; she had a failed marriage but, with two little children to care for, she could not give up. She had to endure very personal issues alone, with no one from her family to help or give her support. Her body and her mind
were all cast-iron; she was hardened by the circumstances of her settling in Australia and had been so for many years. She did not long to be in Colombia, much less after her mum died. She says she has nothing to do and has nobody there, even though her siblings hope she visits them again one day. So she belongs to her own children, who are the same age as me, who do not speak Spanish nor Hungarian, and who grew up without that extensive family embracement I was lucky to have, and are, therefore, uninterested in Colombia and their family there. Could it be the same story for other Colombians who decided to make a living in Australia? Could it be my own story years later if I decided to stay? How could someone give up their own language, their culture, and their family and not have the need or will to be closer to them? I did not see this happening with the very few Colombians I had met, because they were certainly like me: young, on temporary visas, without children, and with strong family ties still in Colombia. Today, after over three years of research I can provide here some answers to these questions. The stories of other Colombians have given me more clues to grasp how it was for my aunt to leave her country and make a new life in Australia thirty-two years ago. The lives of forty-four Colombia-born migrants produced and explored in this research are all interestingly unique, yet studying such diversity provides a better understanding of the Colombian migrants in Australia.
Introduction

The National Farmers Strike\textsuperscript{1} that mobilized thousands of peasants and small growers across Colombia between 19 August and 12 September 2013 was the last straw of a deep agrarian crisis ingrained in the country over its unequal land tenure system and weak protection laws for local producers. Colombian peasant regional groups, including Indigenous peoples, were able to organise themselves and call for national protests that were soon joined by school and university students, unionists and various industry sectors workers across most of Colombian territory. President Juan Manuel Santos’s infamous statement ‘el tal paro no existe’ or ‘such a protest doesn’t exist’, provoked a public outcry that invigorated the peasant movement to resist and hold onto their demands. Colombian nationals around the world also organised to show support for the strike and send messages requesting government authorities to respond to the agrarian crisis promptly. Online social networks and Colombian national media reported these mobilizations abroad which offered a renewed sense of unity amongst Colombians despite the political interest attributed to the strike leaders. In Melbourne and Sydney demonstrators were mostly young people who wanted to visibilize to the wider Australian public the problem of multinationals overpowering small farmers in Colombia. In Sydney’s Town Hall on 31 August 2013, around one hundred people, mostly Colombians, joined a two-hour rally where information was given to attendees on the background of the strike, the progress of talks between the peasant movement leaders and the government, and the initiatives that could be followed to show further support to the campesinos. The solidarity picket was mainly filled with young people who might be seen as having strong ties back in Colombia and who can be identified as recent migrants, international students, and people with temporary visas in Australia. Only a few young families could be spotted with small children—suggestive of potentially stronger connections to Australia forged by raising a family here—and almost no mature adults or elderly people were present. Pictures of the Melbourne rallies show a similar make-

\textsuperscript{1} Translated from ‘Paro Nacional Agrario’.
up of the attendees. Yet, these features could only become apparent after attending a different type of event where Colombians with a differentiated set of traits can be identified. Scarcely three weeks prior to the Sydney’s Town Hall rally, not very far from there in Rozelle, a group of around seventy people attended the launch of a new book by Colombia-born writer Humberto Hincapié. The attendees were mostly in their late sixties and over, accompanied by a few younger adults. This was undoubtedly a closed event to people who knew the trajectory of Hincapié, not only as a writer, but mainly as one of the founding members of the Asociación Cultural Colombia en Australia. The majority of those present could be pictured as older migrants who live in Sydney permanently and who are retired from work and find in these type of gatherings a good excuse to meet old friends. This was different to the city demonstration where many people joined in by chance because they were passing by and did not know any other attendees; even organisers were scarcely familiar with each other and had just started joining forces through the Colombian groups in social media.

The farmers’ strike solidarity demonstrations can be catalogued as a political event via which class and social causes were addressed in the critique of the current Colombian government and state policies affecting the work and living conditions of campesinos. Although, at least in Sydney and Melbourne, solidarity protests were not pictured as a partisan political event, the central aim was to call on the attention of the national government to the fact that Colombians abroad, despite the great distances, can develop synergies to support people in their country and make visible Colombia’s internal problems to the rest of the world.

By contrast, the literary event on 4 August 2013 in Rozelle was not political at all. Attendees were celebrating the creativity and dedication of one of their fellow migrants and no mention of solidarity was made to the mounting social crisis back in Colombia pre-empting the national strike. After the pertinent interventions of guest speakers and the writer, people had a short time to enjoy the aperitifs and chat about how long they had not seen each other, about their families, work, and future holidays. What was at play here was much more a positive experience of nostalgia (Hage, 1997: 108)

---

2 Colombians organised demonstrations through social media groups in several countries including Ecuador, France, Spain, and the USA.
where the migrants’ desire to go back to their country or to connect with it, is outweighed by ‘a desire to promote the feeling of being there here’ (Ibid; emphasis in original), celebrating a fellow Colombian’s achievements here. As one Colombian migrant who had lived sixteen years in the country expressed: ‘one never ends of being here and over there, but mostly here than there’.

The two gatherings did not coincide in many aspects even though they were held in the same city in Australia and in the spatio-temporal context of the Colombian national farming strike, and beyond that, in the spectrum of the social, economic and political crisis of the country. Indeed, both events can be depicted as exclusive to each other in that organisers, attendees and purposes are widely differentiated. In this way, the portrayal of both events suggests a broad description of the Colombian community in Australia as a segmented group where ‘older’ and ‘younger’ migrants do not seem to congregate in the same physical or social spaces. There are those who have recently arrived in the country and are in the process of building economic and cultural capital which according to Bourdieu refer to the material and symbolic ‘capacities for appropriation of the instruments of material or cultural production’ (1984, 2013: 295). That is, the newly arrived migrants tend to keep strong connections with people from their country of origin, be they families in Colombia or new acquaintances in Australia, who can help in the accumulation of valued material and symbolic goods, for example by providing temporary economic support or access to information. While those in the second event appear to be settled in Australia, most of them with strong ties in this country having lived here for certain time and having gained sufficient symbolic capital—in Bourdieu’s terms, the external acceptance, recognition and prestige given to their cultural capital (2013: 297)—to grow independent from their national community. These groups are recognizable mainly in reference to their year of arrival. The ‘old migrants’ group I have identified include Colombians who arrived in the period between 1960 and 1990, and who were a rather small number, and between 1991 and 2000, a period which saw an increase in the skilled labour force, and also the arrival of political refugees from Colombia. For the ‘new migrants’ group two waves are identified between 2001 and 2006 with the arrival of mainly tertiary students and between

---

3 Translated from ‘uno nunca termina de estarse aquí y allá, pero si más de acá que allá’.
Both groups of migrants, ‘old’ and ‘new’, manifest their relationship with their country and their fellow nationals in markedly different ways. For example, the ‘older migrants’—most of whom have formed their own families in Australia—reflect on missing the ways that they used to celebrate special occasions in Colombia, or the food, or the ‘ambience’ there, yet, most of them do not conceive the idea of going back to the country as they would lose access to the ‘social guarantees’ that the Australian system has provided them, especially those related to health services. On the other hand, there are younger or ‘new migrants’ who relate that they long to be in their country with their families and, therefore, maintain relatively close connections with them by travelling with certain frequency and also by bringing family members to visit them in Australia. This is understandable since they are in a process of greater mobility between both countries as their own personal ties in Australia are still under construction.

Notwithstanding, despite the apparent distinction at play amongst these ‘old’ and ‘new’ Colombian migrants, such a description can only partially reflect the character of the individual stories of migration, and the multiplicity of identities that collide in the immigrants construction of subjectivity and sense of community abroad. Indeed, the migration networks that old migrants have built have facilitated the mobility of new generations and have left an open door for fellow Colombians to find jobs, accommodation and access information on local rules (Castles 2014: 192). Therefore, the fractures within the Colombian community, advanced here initially in relation to age and year of arrival, ought to be repositioned in a context of high mobility facilitated by a globalized economy with cheaper technologies of communication and transportation (Vertovec 1999: 455; Glick, Basch and Szanton 1995: 52) which have seen the increase in the flows of migrants across multiple national borders (Castles 2005: 207). This mobility, however, is seen in this research within a South-to-South paradigm, whereby Australia’s historical positioning as a developed, western or country of the north, is called into question attending initially to its detrimental treatment to Aboriginal peoples and how this can be seen concomitant to the treatment given to Indigenous peoples in Latin America and Colombia. What
transcends from such disparaging treatment are inequalities exercised towards the less powerful in both countries. Back in Colombia, for example, over 5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and those who live in the periphery languish with lack of access to justice and state provisions (Garcia Villegas 2014). They have been the receptors of the crudest social inequalities which at the same time have favoured the exit of other Colombians as ‘economic migrants’ abroad. A large section of those immigrants call Australia home and having occupied a ‘second class’ citizenship, at least before acquiring full official citizenship, while settling in menial jobs and trying to secure long-term stays. I have therefore chosen to study the increased movement of people from Colombia to Australia looking at the identities being formed when migrants’ views of themselves fluctuate between two countries which are positioned within the Global South.

It is precisely such increased border-crossings which allow immigrants to become ‘transmigrants’ as they reconfigure their identities while maintaining their connections in their homecountry and building and influencing new ones in the diaspora (Glick et al 1995:48). Migrants move back and forth and gain a variety of cultural and economic capital for their job mobility and that of their families, as well as for the networks that they help build in multiple locales. Transnational relations are thus related with the flow of resources ‘to and fro and throughout the network’ (Vertovec, 1999: 453) established in the different nodes of the migration trajectory. In the making of such networks prevail a number of features attached to the very context of the migrants’ exit of their country, their early experiences in the host country, and the re-creation of their personal, social and political identities in their different geographical locations. The initial downward mobility, work restrictions, high living costs and mistrust in fellow country people are some of the common themes amongst migrants, not only in Australia but in other parts of the world (Glick et al 1995: 50). These dynamics seem to test both the recent arrivals and more settled migrants’ capacity to cope with their move and enhance, but also deter, the forging of relationships with locals and fellow migrants. In this light, Colombians, just like other Latin Americans and other migrants in Australia, experience and express with different intensity their sense of belonging to the new country and to the groupings forming their own communities in the diaspora.
Colombian migration has gained an important space in Australia since 2001 with the increase in the number of student arrivals. For example, the number of student visa holders alone increased from 2,651 in the 2006-2007 financial year to 5,152 in the 2008-2009 period (DIAC 2010) while the overall population of Colombia-born in Australia recorded in the 2011 Census was 11,318 (DIAC 2013b). According to unofficial data from the Consulate General of Colombia in Sydney, the floating population of Colombia-born immigrants in Australia, including temporary residents, numbered 14,000 in 2012. Notwithstanding these revealing figures and its continued growth, Colombian migration has not been dedicated a significant space in Latin American studies scholarship in Australia. This study seeks to start filling this gap by offering an interdisciplinary, mixed methodological approach to further study Latin American migration to Australia in view of the increasing number of Colombian and Latin American migrants here, the very context of Australia as a country of immigration and the implications brought about by a highly mobile world. It also offers insights linked to the social and historical contentious background of the migrants’ own country of origin and to extant scholarship on Latin Americans in Australia and on Colombians in the diaspora.

In this light, the body of research on Brazilians in Australia (Duarte 2005; Rocha 2006, 2008, 2009; Wulfforst 2011, 2014; Wulfforst, Rocha & Morgan 2014) underpins some of the traits that can be found amongst Colombians such as a similar trends of growth, alike experiences of community making and multiplicity of identities related to social class ideals migrants bring from their country of origin. However, in spite of such resemblances, Colombian migrants own history, social and political turmoil—which has evolved in a frantic political polarisation with and after Alvaro Uribe’s presidency terms—deeply rooted class distinctions, normalisation of crime and corruption in their territory, as well as their perceived insertion in Australia with long periods of downward job mobility, affect in quite different ways the building of their identities and their positioning as immigrants. I argue that for Colombians in Australia, different to the shared experiences of migration with other Latin American communities, there are two key elements marking their belonging to the new country and their alliances with fellow Colombians. These are, the transposing of class distinctions from social class into formal and informal citizenship, and the silencing of their political dissent. At the same time, Australia’s own
history as a country of immigration and its struggle to recognise Aboriginal people’s sovereignty and original land ownership establishes a rather particular site to investigate the dynamics of positioning of those outside the spectrum of white Australia. As Ghassan Hage’s (1998) seminal critique on White multiculturalism in Australia unveils, Aboriginals are often called to enrich the cultural production of Australia to make it distinctively Australian but are not invited to stay in (122). What is therefore the case for the immigrants who bring with them their own culture, language and so many traits of their own distinctiveness? Any attempt to answer this question should therefore reflect on the perennial ‘violent dispossession’ of Indigenous Australians whereby, as Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos (2004) put it, ‘dominant white Australia seems to render indispensable a perpetual positioning and re-positioning of the foreigner-within as white-non-white or as white-but-not-white-enough’ (32). To be sure, the history of labour migration post-World War II illustrates how migrants have conveniently been included or excluded in national space responding to the political economy needs of Australia (Hage 1998: 134). However, as Hage attests, ‘the distinctiveness of the migrant workers’ position in this process is that while they were subjected to certain processes whose effect was their marginalisation and exclusion, these processes did not aim to marginalise to the point where they were driven outside social space as was the case with many Aborigines’ (Ibid, 134).

Despite the uninviting scenario, the high mobility of ‘transmigrants’ and the processes involved in their acquisition of citizenship along with changes in employment restrictions have seen their yesteryear conditions improved. Yet, new forms of vilification tend to appear along with those of approval of migrants’ mobility, not only from the core of the receiving country, but from within the diaspora communities themselves. Stephen Castles (2005) draws on the hierarchies of citizenship that give migrants from certain countries more or less possibilities to establish ties in a new country depending on their country of origin and concurrent labour liabilities in the destination countries. In the case of Australia, temporary migrants are allowed to work abiding to certain limits while gaining permanent residency, is subjected to a lengthy and costly skills-based selection process. My subject-object of research are those Colombians who have dared to migrate further south, down under, and have tried to establish certain economic, study and family ties in Australia prior to 2010.
Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

This project addresses three research questions. First of all, the thesis seeks to outline how Colombians construct and reflect on their own identities as immigrants in Australia. Secondly, it aims at establishing in what ways Colombian migrants in Australia reflect on the socio-political events and current state of affairs of their country and whether they are seen to be taking particular stances mediated by their own positioning as immigrants. Finally, the project aims at ascertaining the identities that Colombians re-construct and re-create within individual and collective spaces of the telling of their lived experience as immigrants.

These questions seek specifically to unveil how the common understandings of social practices in Colombia are transformed in the geography of Australia and in what ways this permeates the reproduction of social and political identities in the migrants’ tenets of citizenship in Australia, their identifications of the national back home, and the making of a Colombian migrant community in the new country. The project is conceived within an interdisciplinary approach that combines theoretical and empirical elements of migration studies, Global South theory, narrative enquiry and identity theory, along with Dialogical Self Theory, to present a preliminary ethnography of Colombians in Australia. The purpose of such ethnographic approach subsume the task of studying ‘locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world’ (Appadurai 1996: 52) by observing the endeavours, stories, and collective memories of a group of participants that live and imagine their experience as immigrants.

In reference to migration theory, I have presented above some of the key literature that informs the project’s location in a transnational context where the mobility of migrants is analysed in view of both the sending and receiving countries social, economic and political tokens (Hage 1998; Castles 2005, 2014; Vertovec 1999, 2009), the relationships migrants tailor in both locales (Glick et al 1995; Castells 1997) which ultimately facilitate the forming of groupings and differentiated communities in the diaspora. The research questions also reveal the theoretical and epistemological perspectives that animate this study. By studying Colombian migrants’ construction of identities in Australia the research is located in a south-to-south paradigm which corresponds to the view of the South as a hemisphere
sharing a colonial settler history, oppression against Indigenous people and the violent occupation of their land (Connell 2013; Watson 2007). Raewyn Connell has projected Southern Theory (hereafter called Global South interchangeably) as a way to enable thinking about and linking those countries in the far South (that is, South America’s southern cone, Southern Africa, Australia and New Zealand) where the colonial occupation of ‘new’ lands, resulted in ‘a racially stratified society in which Indigenous communities were disrupted, dispossessed and marginalized’ (2013: 60). Even though Connell’s original far South group of countries does not include Colombia, I argue that Colombia’s history matches the description she offers especially in view of the continued marginalisation of Indigenous and Afro-descendent groups. More specifically, and in the field of migrant labour incorporation, present-day Australia embodies the symbolic constructions of racial and hegemonic power crisscrossing its own Indigenous population, depriving them not only from their land rights, but also from maintaining their own culture and their own modes of organisation.\(^4\) Examples of this are the overt intentions of mainstreaming services for Indigenous Australians and the forced closure of Remote Communities announced in 2014, seen as a clear detriment of the Aboriginal peoples’ rights to communal land tenure (Walter 2007) and self-determination (Watson 2007) that started in 2005 with the closure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Thus, Australia appears to hold a number of similarities with other more recognizable countries of the South which Connell exposes as ‘an uncomfortable reality for Australians’ (2014a: 223). In this light, this study seeks to unpack the relationships that exist amongst and around Colombians in Australia, with the latter not easily recognised as a ‘southern country’. As an example, the common elements between the history of abuse and prolonged inequality exercised over Indigenous communities in both regions is acknowledged by only two of the forty-four participants of this research. Their new country and the people immigrants find here appear mostly exalted as role models of what is desirable and lacking in their home country. Imaginaries of Australia and Australians as egalitarian, welcoming of cultural diversity, with opportunities for all appear to epitomize what Terence Irving and Raewyn Connell (1992) describe as the ‘longstanding doctrine’ that Australia is a ‘classless society’ and imagined as ‘a paradise

\(^4\) The latest example on this was the announcement on November 2014 by Western Australia government to close about 150 remote Aboriginal communities as a way to redirect funds to bigger towns in the state (The Guardian 2014; ABC News 2015).
of the working class’ (11). Such ideas are frequently invoked in the Colombian migrant narratives unwittingly reproducing discourses that take Australian equal access for granted and preclude ‘the history of workers’ struggle and protest and their lobbying for change and justice’ (Elder 2007). Furthermore, the ‘civilized culture’ of Australians is often pictured by research participants as the embodiment of the desirable national, something that other Colombians lack in Colombia and in Australia when reproducing the now openly ill-regarded Colombian practice of ‘breaking the rules’. Overwhelmingly, alongside discourses praising the desirable equality and social behaviour of ‘Australians’, Colombians describe experiences of downward job mobility and difficulties regarding social insertion and economic independence. Yet, these drawbacks are not pictured as resulting from the overarching structural conditions of the new country, but are framed by the migrants’ accounts as a normal process or narrative migrants are supposed to go through.

The location of this study in a Global South view of the world stems from the link between the lives of migrants arriving to the conditions of a country that has historically re-produced unequal treatment and racial discrimination towards its own Aboriginal people and to its immigrant labour force. This enterprise is hardly recognised by Colombian immigrants who, amid their personal difficulties, develop a narrative over time which portrays Australia as a safe haven country that cannot compare to Colombia. It is through these particular ways of telling of the group of migrants, and especially in view of the second research question, that prominence is given to the concept of positionings and positionalities developed by Rosaura Sánchez (2006) and its connection to the theorizing of multiple identities drawn from the social-psychology approach to the dialogical self, or Dialogical Self Theory (DST). Sánchez (2006) exposes more precisely her definitions of positioning and positionality, the first referring to ‘one’s location within a given social reality’, which is structurally determined and conceptually mediated and ‘always situated with respect to other locations’ (38). This dichotomy of positioning and positionalities expands on that of identities and roles presented by Manuel Castells whereby ‘identities organize the meaning, while roles organize the functions’ (1997: 7). One’s social positioning is determined by external discourses which assign roles, like those of social class, gender, and ethnic relations. This is different to the ‘reflexivity with respect to one’s positioning’, which
Sánchez calls ‘positionality’. That is, one’s positionality can be understood as one’s own reflection and standpoint in regard to one’s social positioning, the identity that one assumes or the meaning and direction one assigns to roles or positionings occupied. One of the many examples of how participants evince their positionings as different from their positionalities is the narrative of those political refugees who arrived with such a status, or role, and have either chosen to pursue their political agenda or decided to block it away from their everyday life to avoid conflict with people around them. Both these positionalities emerge in the life stories of migrants with marked political ideologies.

The readily connected world we live in today permeates the positioning structures or roles we are assigned and the positionalities we take to respond to increased levels of uncertainty. DST scholars propose that the self, which is dialogical by virtue of the internal dialogues that go on amongst one’s own positions, responds to this uncertainty by forming ever new positionings, reproducing old ones for the sake of counteracting, avoiding, and even fighting emerging positions. Peter Raggatt’s (2012) model of the dialogical triads works as an example of how opposing positions taken by individuals become enhanced or controverted by either internal or external positions he calls ‘ambiguous thirds’\(^5\). Therefore, Sánchez’s model of positioning theory, which includes a critique of postmodern identities, effectively focused on socially imposed positions, can be seen as substantiated in the model of a dialogical self which holds multiple positions in response to the circumstances of uncertainty and inequality of the globally interconnected world. Colombian migrants and their multiple positionings as illustrated in this thesis exemplify the workings of both models in view of their own conditions as immigrants from a Global South country who enter a country they believe holds superior and better conditions for their own personal and social positionings but which, in fact, re-produces and foments other modes of positioning and subordination.

For the purpose of elaborating on the realities of immigrants in Australia as a southern tier country, this research attends to the concept of lived experience derived from Dorothy Smith’s (1991, 1996, 1997) work on feminist standpoint theory. As she argues, such an approach ‘aims at knowing the

---

\(^5\) These are defined by Raggatt (2012) as positions that ‘may take the form of another person, an event or an object that, in semiotic terms, is structurally ambiguous; for example, a partner may promote conflict by being both accepting and rejecting of you; or a boss may be alternately supportive and hostile, producing decentralizing movements’ (33).
social as people actually bring it to being. Its objects would not be meaning but the actual ongoing ways in which people’s activities are coordinated, particularly those forms of social organization and relations that connect up multiple and various sites of experience since these are what are ordinarily inaccessible to people’ (1996: 194). Here, Smith’s touching on how people enact their everyday social relations points to a key element of this research, looking at the ways Colombians in Australia not only feel, adjust, or idealize their own positions, but how these are performed in different spatio-temporal instances of their discourse.

The interdisciplinary orientation of this study is further embraced by the use of a mixed method of data collection and analysis to address the research questions in a three-centred circle approach to identity whose core are the narratives of life shared by Colombian migrants themselves extended to a level of their memories of the past in Colombia, and further, in an outer circle, their experiences in Australia and their reflections of both their past in Colombia and present and future in Australia.

Narratives were collected in a set of social spaces over an 18-month period, starting in June 2013 and ending in February 2015. The preliminary space was on the advertising of the research asking potential participants to help evaluate the documents and questions proposed for the study. This was called the Pilot Study, where ten people trialed earlier versions of what later became the online survey, the individual interview, the written self-narrative, the discussion or focus group, the post-observation journey or visit to participants’ households, and the observation of community and public events attended by some participants. From the semi-private spaces of the survey, the interviews and the self-narratives initial indications were drawn on who the participants are, how they describe themselves and other Colombians in terms of their past life in Colombia, their motivations to migrate and the process they lived through in their early days as immigrants. These early portrayals were later expanded through narrations in more public spaces, that is, where other participants take part or where a broader community is involved.

---

6 These spaces refer to where only one participant and the researcher interact.
This thesis prioritises the search of life stories that come from the same participants in different spaces of elicitation and in different forms of production, whether these be written, in a survey or self-narrative, or taken down in oral form, individually or in groups, and whether they represent part of their own ‘real life’ outside the frame of the study. This intertextuality of their stories allows for a more comprehensive view on how research participants undertake certain positions and elaborate on a reflexivity of those positions. The examination of their narrative performance through the lens of Dialogical Self Theory requires looking at the reflections emanating from the participants’ past in Colombia and their present and future in Australia. The concepts of DST scholarship—whose central tenets will be addressed in Chapters 1 and 7—serve to outline differentiated individual positioning processes that invigorate the understanding of those processes that may be at work across the wider community of Colombians here in Australia.

**Latin American Studies Scholarship in Australia**

The two-day conference *Imagining Latin America in Australia: Migration, Culture and Multiculturalism*, held in August 2011 by the Center of Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney, congregated scholars researching Latin Americans culture, migration, identities and citizenry in Australia. The conference program appeared to make justice to the body of scholarship available at the time (Aizpurúa and Fisher 2008; Cohen 2001, 2003, 2004; Collin 2004, 2006; Dawson and Gifford 2001; Moraes-Gorecki 1988; Zevallos 2003, 2004, 2008; Duarte 2005; Rocha 2006, 2008, 2009; Wulfhorst 2011), which has notably focused on traditional migrant communities from Latin America such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Chile; the inescapable Mexican diaspora whose flows to Australia are rather new, and the studies on the also fast growing Brazilian community. With views on the social, national, gender and sexualized identities that these immigrants express, the conference provided an insightful state of art of the field of Latin American studies in Australia. The papers presented certainly encouraged me to continue research to document and disseminate information on the lives of these
In the following I present some of the salient research works in the field drawing on their contribution to my own project on Colombians in Australia.

Zuleyka Zevallos (2003), explores issues of gender and sexuality in second-generation Central and South American women living in Australia. She outlines four ethnic identities emerging from the women’s social relations in the country: localised (regarding their family's country of origin), regional (over their South or Central American location), pan-ethnic (assuming a Latin American identity) and the Australian side of their identities. Zevallos reads those identities from a multicultural ideology, particularly influential in the period of her study, forming in the context of migration. While valuable, her study is mainly bound by coordinates of context and time that are not diachronic; a longitudinal enquiry of the process of adapting to the new country and the role played by these women’s identities before migration may have resulted in a more complex positioning process and the revealing of a further number of identities.

In another study by Erez Cohen (2003) Salvadoran and Chilean migrants and political refugees reflect on their relationship with and roots traced to indigeneity and how the struggle of the Indigenous people in Latin America is regarded with certain affinity in relation to the Australian Aboriginal struggles for land and recognition. Cohen’s study, although revealing of his participants’ views on the presence and acknowledgment of Indigenous ancestry, focuses observations on groups that have certain level of social and political organisation and activism. This is not the case in my research where the invitation to participate was open to the whole community, although limited to those with arrival prior to February 2010. In this way, the project did not target a group with any particular social or political stance. Instead, my informants represent a larger number of Colombian migrants without expectations of participation in social activism.

Cohen exemplifies the conflicting imaginaries of Latin Americans and their indigeneity with the description by one of the organisers of a Latin American cultural exhibition in Adelaide in 1988. Even though it included a good number of Indigenous-related works, he believed the exhibition would help demonstrate to Australians that ‘we are not indians’ (2003: 41). The use of ‘indian’—referring to
the image of uncivilized and ‘culture-less’ people—tells of the different affiliations to the notion of indigeneity, but also of how immigrants imagine Australians want them to be. This goes in line with Coronado’s (2014) analysis on how immigrants dismiss their cultural behaviours and ways of doing things in their Latin American countries and conform to what they imagine is preferred and expected from them in the Australian culture. Similarly, Colombians unveil in their stories their idealized imaginaries of what it means to be in Australia and how they should change an otherwise accepted deviant behaviour re-mould their identities to the expected behaviour and new order in Australia.

With a particular focus on the Chilean community in Australia, Philippa Collin (2006) presents a discussion on ‘the tenability of the concept of national identity’ in the context of the constant movement of people worldwide (15). Her arguments are built upon Chilean-Australian responses ‘to issues of national identity and discourses on the state, immigration, refugees and border protection’ in the wake of the Tampa crisis and the Pacific solution in Australia in the late 1990s (15). Collin proposes that in response to the notion of national identity, ‘immigrant identities are framed by the postcolonial conditions’ that led them to migrate and their migratory experience is ‘profoundly implicated in the development of a sense of cultural identity’ (Collin 2006: 17). Her research is based on participant accounts responding directly to the issue of defining a number of identities. This makes one wonder whether such a construction is heavily permeated by the research purpose itself leaving behind other relationships or a different degree of engagement with certain identities participants may undertake. For instance, even though my study has included Colombia-born participants with different periods of stay in Australia, from 3 to 50 years, they make few references to their Australian-ness as a relevant part of their own identities; indeed, another forthcoming work by Vek Lewis and Fernanda Peñaloza demonstrates that even among Chilean migrants in Sydney the notion of their own ‘Australian-ness’ or being Chilean-Australian is highly contentious. Instead, as in the smaller-scale study conducted by Lewis and Peñaloza on Chileans in Sydney, from the discourse of my study’s participants, remarks emerge that exemplify how Colombians have adapted or integrated to the new country having to change certain customs and following the system of rules here. Also, there are reflections on ‘going back home’ (that is, to visit Colombia) and ‘coming home’ (that is, from overseas to Australia) but these
appreciations do not entirely relate to issues of identifying what is Colombian and what is not in their claim of being Australian as Collin’s Chilean informants emphasized. More broadly, Colombian migrants’ discourse gives more importance to how they re-adapt their national identifications. This results, for example, in the reframing of social and class distinction categories that are commonly used in Colombia into new categories following their shared migration experience.

In another research studying the challenges faced by Latin Americans here, Romina Aizpurúa and Adrian Fisher (2008) focus on women’s stories of adaptation to the Australian socio-cultural context. The authors elaborate on the definition of ‘acculturation’ as a continuous process for migrants with both psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of adaptation based on data from women aged between 45 and 75 and who migrated to Australia as adults. The authors’ focus on the women’s family and interpersonal relations seems to leave aside the possibility that these women had any group agency in the improvement of their conditions at the time. The scope of the sense of community is absorbed by the emphasis on how to feel accepted and integrated to Australia. To be considered as locals, language mastery and labour skills should go along with ‘looking, talking and behaving as close as possible to members of the mainstream’ (39). The exercise of social or political agency is not considered as part of adapting to the new country despite the well-known political hardships and conditions of forced migration that Latin Americans, especially those from the Southern Cone and Central America, have historically confronted.

For Colombians, notwithstanding the absence of a military dictatorship in their country that would account for their massive emigration, the intensified violence and social crisis have been major drivers of their exit from their country. Reflection upon and posture around such conditions would logically be expected in their narratives; however, no direct request on them was made in order to allow participants to freely present their political standpoints, if any, and not to overdetermine responses. In that sense, according to the 2011 Census data, there has been a shift in the migration movements from Latin America to Australia opening the doors for people from new source countries, such as Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, and Venezuela, where varied social and economic upheavals have acted as pushing factors to international mobility. This has left a wide possibility for research that has only
recently started to look at bridging paths between other Latin American countries, like Mexico or Brazil, and Australia exploring gender relations (Lewis 2014), reflections on perceived cultural values of Latin Americans (Coronado 2014), and alternative transnational mobility relations that include linkages to religion and spirituality (Rocha 2006; 2009) and with more than one destination country, in the case of Japanese-Brazilians moving from Brazil to Australia and Japan (Rocha 2014). Notwithstanding, the approach to these new source countries of Latin American mobility to Australia has scarcely included a view on the political agenda of these migrants that reflects on their countries status quo.

It is especially in view of the multiplicity of factors conditioning migration from Latin America, exposed by Steven Vertovec (2007) as the factors of ‘super-diversity’, that country of origin, race or ethnicity are no longer seen as exclusive markers of difference amongst migrant communities. There appear commonalities amongst national groups like Mexico, Brazil and Colombia, sharing transnational connections built, for example, on the migration-education nexus between these countries and Australia. Shanthi Robertson (2011, 2013, 2014) exemplifies how this migration-education nexus works as a pathway for long term mobility that allows ‘student-migrants’ to arrive on student visas and remain on temporary or short term work visas over certain period of time before they can gain a permanent migrant status (2013: 2). This is the case for many migrants, and in particular for Brazilians and Colombians who occupy the forth and twelfth positions respectively in international student visa grants to Australia (DIBP 2015: 21). Many newcomers enrol in English intensive courses and bring with them some level of knowledge of the English language which gives them greater chances to find a job and adapt more easily or in a shorter time. They also may have less family or financial difficulties as they are predominantly young, educated, single, and without children. The challenges for this new generation seem to be of a different kind to the ones signalled by Aizpurúa and Fisher's (2008) participants: paying debts in their home country; working beyond the legal hours to save money and pay their course and visa fees; paying high rent and food prices which challenges their own customs (for instance, eating well, homemade and varied food or staying with friends without having to pay for it). The process of adaptation of the ‘new’ Latin American migrants is also in great part a back and forth relation with their home country, since there are issues of instability for their stay in Australia given the need to renew
costly visas; their desire to obtain a permanent residence (which is a complex process itself); their economic ties with their country of origin because they left debts that need to be paid, or because they have family to support with their remittances from Australia. Yet, a reflection on the lives of migrants needs also to embrace the greater social, political and economic issues that both preceded and have accompanied their migration. Robert Mason’s (2014) research on the impact of emotional connectivity to Latin America is a key example of how political relations amongst migrants in Australia are hindered by the imposing expectations of a country that requires them to insert themselves in its neoliberal economic model.

The South-to-South relations between Australia and Chile, mediated by whiteness and male dominant gender relations, is documented by Irene Strodthoff (2013) in the context of presidential visits and the FTA agreement between both countries. Strodthoff makes recourse to Critical Discourse Analysis to unveil how government discourse between 1990 and 2012 re-produces both countries as part of the white hemisphere, amid the question marks posed in relation to their own social equity projects, especially in Chile. Strodthoff’s work provides a rich direction on the discourse practices that predominate in the imagined constructions of national identity and identification superposing economic benefit and expansion as the centre of Australia–Chile relations. Strodthoff’s critical analysis focuses on mediatized and institutional discourse that constructs and undergirds white-male relations within and between the two countries. Although she does not engage with migrant discourse and identity configurations, her study offers pertinent ways of thinking the historical and enduring connections in national imaginaries and links, within the already mentioned South-to-South paradigm. The question of ‘race’ prefigures each nation’s mutual constructions; this is also true of what emerges in the context of the imaginings of Colombia and Australia posed by my own study’s participants although there is prevalence to constructs of social class, economic affluence, and job mobility. Strodthoff’s research finely highlights the economic and political threads that further link Latin America and Australia, a task that Barry Carr’s and John Minn’s (2014) book, *Australia and Latin America: Challenges and Opportunities in the New Millennium*, has deemed necessary to guarantee more stable and profitable relations between both regions.
The growing educational, cultural, economic, and political exchanges of Latin American migrants in the Australian landscape also calls for further research on the emerging communities like the Colombian, Brazilian, Venezuelan, and Ecuadorian, to understand how they respond to the conditions posed by their migration experience and what avenues are required to ameliorate it. In this sense, the present thesis serves an important role with an interdisciplinary approach.

*Research on Colombians in the Diaspora*

Studies on Colombian migrants elsewhere, particularly the United States (Escobar 2004; Guarnizo and Diaz 1999; Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003; Guarnizo, Sánchez and Roach, 1999), England, (Bermúdez 2003, 2011; Mas Giralt 2011; Guarnizo 2008; McIlwaine and Bermúdez 2011), and Canada (Landolt and Goldring 2010; Riaño-Alcalá and Goldring 2006), have contributed to delineate the historical and socio-economic trends that marked the initial flows of immigrants to these destination countries and their conditions of reception there. Guarnizo’s (2008) *Londres Latina: la presencia colombiana en la capital británica*, offers a vast overview on the history of Colombian emigration and a socio-economic analysis of the forming Colombian community in central London. Other contributions in the space of the United Kingdom have been made by Mas Giralt (2011), studying the specific identity formation of second-generation migrants and their relations within their migration locality which have challenged the cultural expectations of geographical closeness with fellow migrants and extended families. Bermúdez’s (2003) report on the Colombian refugee community in the UK unveils their motivations to seek refuge cannot be easily differentiated from those of economic migrants:

The reasons for Colombian migration involve a complex mixture of violence, poverty and unemployment. Many Colombians do not claim asylum because of the fear of being denied or because they cannot apply for refuge on convention grounds. However, this should not be read as ‘proof’ that Colombian asylum seekers are ‘bogus’. The economic and political causes of migration are often difficult to disentangle, especially in the context of a long, protracted, internal conflict like the one in Colombia (15).
This underlying relation between economic and political emigration, rightly highlighted by Bermúdez, has been eroded from most of the studies on Colombians abroad, thereby omitting deeper reflections on the very social, economic and political conditions that the Colombian State has been unable and unwilling to resolve for over fifty years. The actualities of the Colombian people and the implications of the social and political crisis for their mobility are also often missed in this scholarship, something that appears to stand in contradiction with the well-known heated political environment in the country. Luin Goldring and Patricia Landolt (2010) shed timely light on how the state of current social and political affairs has had negative effects on the relations of political engagement that Colombians try to establish in their Canadian diaspora. Similarly, Colombians’ transnational political organising in Australia is limited to cultural and solidarity events established upon personal or small group relations rather than larger political activism or partisan politics. In this thesis, however, the role of Colombians’ silent political dissent is captured as a relevant narrative to understand the forming of migrant identities when Colombians relate their interest or indifference in political matters in Colombia and Australia.

Concrete forms of political activism seem to be overshadowed by the preference for an idealisation of the country’s cultural symbols and the seemingly peaceful and better quality life Colombians find in Australia. A practice of silent dissent predominates when Colombians identify with a new country where respect for the norms is widespread and where they feel certain behaviour is expected from them to avoid ideological conflict with fellow countrymen. Such beliefs inhibit them to find spaces of discussion towards social transformation back in Colombia. This is also noted by Robert Mason’s (2014) critique of the Australian framing of identity with a lack of connectedness with ‘discourses of continued struggles elsewhere in the world’ and assuming that ‘all migrants choose to come to Australia to become citizens’ (551). This narrow perception has had an effect on seeing refugees as part of the economic model which in turn ‘discouraged migrants political lobbying within Australia and overseas’ (552).

This thesis exposes, however, how, in contrast to other Latin American groups which have indeed formed spaces of social dialogue and political agency, Colombians in Australia have not moved
much towards this form of civic engagement. Their own conditions of exit—which have not had to do directly with military dictatorships or extended civil wars—and positive insertion in the labour market in Australia have delayed their establishing of groups that might take a lead on social and political activism.

**Thesis Structure**

Chapter 1 captures the overarching theoretical considerations that are imprinted on the making of the project and on the examination of the participants’ narratives and personal stories. The key elements of the performance and multiplicity of migrant identities are explored from the relevant literature with an emphasis on the researcher-insider reflexivity that the study hinges on. I elaborate on the situatedness of this project within the theoretical frameworks of narrative enquiry, feminist standpoint theory and Southern theory and how these can be seen connected to the mixed methods approach pursued throughout the project. The chapter outlines in depth the concepts of positionings, positionality, and lived experience to explain the research contribution to Latin American studies from a Global South perspective.

Chapter 2 emphasizes the tenet of Australia as part of this Global South by drawing a parallel between the racial violence and tensions endured by Aboriginal Australians and non-Anglo migrant labour in Australia and the conditions of alienation of Indigenous peoples and lower social classes in Colombia. I argue that the historical conditions of discrimination that the original owners of the land endured after the British settlement in Australia, and those immigrants have historically been faced with, have paved the way for a seemingly smooth integration of Colombian skilled workers in Australia. This has been largely mediated by the re-production of imaginaries of Australia as an egalitarian country and as a consequence via the invisibilization of the Aboriginal struggle in the new country which at the same time re-enacts the marginalisation that Indigenous people and Afro-descendent groups have historically faced in Colombia and extends itself to the lower socio-economic classes.
By focusing on the history of internal and international Colombian migration, Chapter 3 revisits some of the official figures that describe the migration paths commonly used by Colombians and how Australia has emerged as a new destination country more prominently since 2002. The chapter unveils specific data about the migration of Colombians in Australia, the key factors that appear motivating their exit from Colombia, and a series of socio-economic features that appear to form two distinct groups of migrants, ‘old’ and ‘new’. These two groups are identified by participants in their own narratives and therefore part of their descriptions of other Colombians, and the Colombian migrant community, are used to complement the relevant quantitative data found through surveys and archives.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the narratives whereby Colombian migrants perform identifications of themselves as Colombians and identify other Colombians in the context of their Australian migration. It examines how these identifications bring about alternative practices, new ‘common understandings’ and new symbolic capital to represent individual, collective and national identities which differ but are not completely divorced from the social practices of identifications used in Colombian territory. Specifically in Chapter 4, I draw on the social distinction categories Colombians recreate in Australia in view of the class distinctions in Colombia. I discuss a number of examples to illustrate how social segregation is still part of Colombia’s everyday relations. I examine the narrative accounts my participants have offered and which tell of three emerging categories used for social distinction in Australia: residency status, occupation and English language proficiency. A sense of the national, whereby immigrants have overcome the social distinctions that are based on region of origin, is overwhelmingly spoken of by the group of participants who claim they do not come from a certain town or city, but come from Colombia. Nonetheless, an opposing position is unveiled when Colombians describe their fellow immigrants using negative remarks which embody a critique of the touted widespread practice of deviant behaviour in their home country.

Chapter 5, ‘Imaginaries of a Colombian Community in Australia and Their Intersection with Identifications of the National Back Home’, continues exploring the identifications Colombians make of themselves and other Colombians with a focus on their understandings of the existence of a Colombian community in Australia. I examine the contours of the model of sense of community
proposed by David McMillan and David Chavis (1986) and which are revealing of Colombians’ own description of their community in Australia. Their belonging to this community is challenged and placed at odds with their former claims of regionalism, being replaced by a sense of the national in the new country. In view of their experiences back home and more recently in Australia, participants show fluctuating positions describing why they see a segmented community and how they distance themselves from it.

Chapter 6 examines the political positionings that participants reflect on in their narratives and the dissenting practices that take place in the broader Colombian community in view of specific events organised by and for Colombians in Sydney. By elaborating on a working definitions model of dissent amongst my participants, I argue that their political positions are silenced in the migration context, which in turn replicates the social and political underpinnings of political dissent in Colombia’s territory. Notwithstanding participant narratives related to silent dissent shed light on constructions of national identifications their perceptions of the community in the diaspora and why many prefer distancing themselves from it.

By focusing on the identity positions repertoire as conceptualised in the Dialogical Self Theory scholarship, Chapter 7 presents in more depth the case of multiplicity of identities in the life stories of five of forty-four of the participants of this research. The concept of dialogical triads by Peter Raggatt (2012) is used as a model to elaborate on how these participants’ discourse prompts the forming of a number of positions that subsidise, enhance or hinder one another. This chapter demonstrates how the positions that are articulated by participants in their new location, and which have been explored thoroughly in Chapter 4, 5, and 6, are not only permeated by their new experience as immigrants but are able to transform, at least discursively, how they narrate the positions or identities they held in the past. Chapter 7, via the use of select case studies, outlines an array of positionings and identities that are seen at play amongst Colombians in Australia. The three research questions are therefore revisited in view of the narratives that reconstruct the lives of participants.
Chapter 1

Dis-engaging and Dis-locating Colombian Migrant Narratives:

An Ethnography on the Identities of a Growing Community in Australia

My first attempts to visualize the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of my fieldwork research reverted into feelings of fear that Colombians would not want to talk about their lives and their migration process to Australia. I suspected the political divisiveness at hand in Colombia would be transferred to Australia and people simply would not want to risk much in talking to someone whose political position was unknown and, even worse, I feared people would challenge my objective of giving them a space, here, to re-construct their experiences. Indeed, many of those who were excited to see the project running found it was too intrusive when the online survey asked them to provide specific details of their lives in Australia, for instance their occupation. I could have avoided that question, and many others, however, these questions served to give a more specific picture of those who participated in the study and to better understand the overall traits of the Colombian migrant community in Australia. The challenge was set. Some of my prospective informants would act cautiously, as they would in Colombia, and as it appears they do with other Colombians in Australia. I found fifty Colombians who wanted to share something about their lives in Australia, although to differing degrees, and I had to make the most of it. In that sense, the title of this chapter works as a reminder of the three pillars that marked the process of designing and crafting this research so that I could manage the foreseen task. First, this is a study on Colombia-born migrants who make up a growing and under-researched community in Australia. Second, the study focuses on examining the multiplicity of identities that this group of migrants invoke in their stories of migration.
Third, my position as a Colombian has inflected the responses of participants to the purpose of the research. This is not by any means a definite account that will reveal every detail of the formation of the community, which is itself a much disputed terrain; rather, it is an initial approach to that task. In order to start interpolating the histories and developments of the community, I thought I would listen to the life stories of its members, especially those who have established stronger family or work ties within Australia’s territory. Then I had to think of and execute ways of gaining access to Colombian migrant narratives. In doing so, I had to locate those narratives in the landscape of their migration to Australia, and also engage with participants’ understanding and telling of their migratory experience and their life afterwards.

My position as a Colombian migrant/researcher who shares many traits with a segment of my participants (that is, educational background, length of migration, plans to stay in the country) prompted the two-fold actions of dis-locating and dis-engaging their narratives. Participants both locate their stories in terms of their past lives in their home country, and re-locate those same stories to tell of their present lives in Australia. The shared social habitus, in Bourdieu’s terms the ‘product of a system of schemata of perception and appreciation’ (2013) between participants and researcher, because of our background as Colombians who migrated to Australia as adults, allowed us to link our life experiences to common understandings on ‘well-known’ issues or practices in Colombia’s territory or among Colombians. Yet, at the same time, the fact that I presented myself as Colombian may have led participants to attribute a specific agenda to my work and myself, and therefore to restrict their accounts by providing less sensitive information. Therefore, a seemingly open engagement in storytelling and a more restricted or disengaged sharing of experience can be noted throughout the participants’ narratives. Examples of this can be found where some participants chose not to talk about their current work, or avoid providing details on how they managed to stay in Australia.

7 Bourdieu refers to the habitus in *Logic of Practice* as composed of the ‘common schemes of perception, conception and action’ belonging to and expressed by a particular group or social class (1990, 60). It is made up of ‘durable, transposable dispositions’ that are shaped by and shape the possibilities of being in the social world, one’s mobility, values and aspirations (53).
My intention to re-construct my dialogues with fellow Colombian migrants, their life stories and my observations of themselves and their ‘community’ in Sydney is framed in an ethnographical view that localises this particular national group within the Global South sphere and the transnational migration flows facilitated by the globalised market economy. The major source of information are the narratives told by a group of forty-four Colombian migrants in Australia.8 The participants’ stories offer approximate indications on what has happened to the rest of the community members at large, both within geographical locations in Colombia, before migrating, and in Australia, after their migration. That is, the stories documented here, were produced within various spaces, by Colombians with diverse social, economic and political backgrounds serve to showcase what many other Colombians with similar circumstances of migration may have experienced on their own. Participants’ narratives of life experience, which configure their own personal and collective identifications and identities, shed light on a number of identities that other Colombians in Australia may be taking on as well given their shared circumstances of upbringing and migration. Notwithstanding this, as mentioned earlier, the commonalities found in the new flows of migration blurr the markers of ethnicity and allow a more diversified characterisation of migrant grouping beyond their national origin.

In this chapter I address the theoretical concepts and frameworks this study employs. I start with an exercise of reflexivity of my insider/researcher position, which has played a critical part in the examination of the participants’ narratives and my own views of their multiple identities as migrants in Australia. Here, I follow very closely Erving Goffman’s (1959) definition of performance as ‘all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants’ (14). That is, Colombians in this study perform various narrative exercises and it is their discourse and their ways of telling their stories which influence my views, as an observer, on their positioning and identity processes as immigrants and also those of other participants when sharing storytelling spaces. My researcher-reflexivity follows elements of standpoint theory, as drawn by

---

8 50 Colombian migrants filled out the online survey; 44 of those were taken as valid responses (that is, complete). 33 of those participants met the researcher in person at least once and 30 of these were formally interviewed in a second meeting and continued with the ongoing activities (self-narratives, group discussions, format-free chats, and email correspondence). From the initial group, 39 reside in New South Wales, 5 in Victoria, 3 in Queensland, and 1 in Western Australia; the remaining two did not provide their location.
Dorothy Smith (1991, 1996, 1997), which attain the relevance of listening to those people who have been historically marginalised or do not hold power positions and whose everyday life experience is revealing of the social structures that permeate the lives of the largest majority. In this chapter, I also discuss how the performance of both participants and researcher, in the production and reading of narratives related to their experience as immigrants in Australia, brings to light practical elements of the positioning theory developed by Rosaura Sánchez (2006) and the formulation of multiple identity positioning presented in Dialogical Self Theory (DST) literature. The participants’ stances on their social positions—which Sánchez calls positionalities—back in Colombia and in present-day Australia, necessarily illuminate the practical traits of Australia as part of the Global South where migrants are subjugated to vulnerable work and social conditions amid the so-called egalitarianism of the Australian society. In anticipation of Chapter 2, I explore the historical and present time elements that make this research a hands-on example that approaches the South-to-South relations existing between Colombia and Australia.

The Insider/Researcher Position and the ‘Accumulating Layers’ of Knowledge

In essence, my task has been to investigate the narratives constituted within the life stories of Colombian migrants in Australia—principally of those living in Sydney—around their lived and imagined experiences both as immigrants, and before their migration. The stories I have found are as varied as the thirty-nine participants with whom I was able to have continued contact, who ranged in age between 27 and 87 years, and were from a varied set of social, educational and political backgrounds. Within the individual stories of these immigrants, there is a narrativity or certain way of telling their stories that serve to imagine shared and differing views of their country’s history, present, and future. My methodology falls in line with Pablo Vila’s (1997, 1999, 2000) interest in exploring how the telling of life stories by Mexicans on the US-Mexican border can be the basis for studying the interpersonal, intercultural and transnational relations migrants face when positioning themselves and reflecting on their own experiences of immigration. Reading Vila and Anna De Fina (2003) I started to contemplate
a more comprehensive way to investigate how the migrant-border-narrative relations that they studied in the US-Mexican nexus are evoked and performed in the case of Colombian migrants in Australia. I called my research an enquiry into the construction of identities among this group of migrants whose visibility, at least in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, appeared to be increasing, not only due to the growing number of Colombians present but also due to the opening of businesses owned by Colombian immigrants and the organising of public events involving Colombians. Yet, it needs to be noted that I part ways with Vila and DeFina’s North-South nexus perspective as I frame my study positioning both Colombia and Australia within the Global South, following Raewyn Connell’s (2011, 2014a; 2014b) extensive work on southern theory, as I detail later in this chapter.

A large part of my reconstruction of the participants’ life narratives is accompanied by observations of these migrants, their familial circles, and the wider Colombian community in Sydney. It is precisely here that I borrow William Labov and Joshua Waletzky’s (1967) crucial definition of narrative as ‘a verbal technique for recapitulating experience’ (4), acquiring form in even the most apparently simplistic of structures where there is ‘any sequence of clauses that contains at least one temporal juncture’ (21). This is a rather formalistic description of what may count as narrative, but it makes sense when the variety of discursive forms that can be distinguished as types of narrative (for instance, myths, jokes, farewell speeches, letters, and satire) means that this genre is almost omnipresent in any instance of language use. From this wide repertoire Jens Brockmeier and Rom Harré offer a definition of narrative texts, in either oral or written form:

Narrative is the name for an ensemble of linguistic, psychological, and social structures, transmitted cultural-historically, constrained by each individual’s level of mastery and by his or her mixture of communicative techniques and linguistic skills [...] in communicating something about a life event—a predicament, an intention, a dream, an illness, a state of angst—it usually takes the form of narrative; that is, it is presented as a story told according to certain cultural conventions (2001: 41).

---

9 For an extended review on the growth of Latin American-Australian commercial relations see Carr and Minns (2014), Australia and Latin America, which I mention in the introduction to this thesis.
From this definition, two elements are key to understand the scope of the narrated events: first, the communicative skills of those who tell their stories; and, second, the cultural expectations that both the narrator and the audience have with respect to each other’s ability to abide to conventions of storytelling. Here, for example, I would expect participants to provide very detailed descriptions which, at times, if not often, would make reference to unasked matters, or apparently unrelated issues that they would like to share. At the same time, from my own positionality as Colombian, I knew I was expected to be very open about my interest in this research, and tell participants about my own migration story. Thus, the making of this research implicated high expectations of reciprocal tellability.

In the formal structuring of the participants’ discourse, there might be as Liz Stanley (1993) underlines, narratives which present stories ‘told by structural and rhetorical means in which there is an unfolding, a development of progression, a denouement and/or conclusion’ (213). Yet, the stories I was gathering need not have had the classical orientation-complication-resolution structure Labov and Waletzky (1967) describe. My understanding of narrative falls more in line with Brockmeier and Harré’s (2001) tenet of a ‘story telling repertoire [that] has become “transparent” [and] is universally present in everything we say, do, think, and imagine’ (47). Hence, I frame all the telling of experience that participants shared with me as narratives. I do so, not for the ease of avoiding the meticulous task of structural identification of specific instances taken from the contexts of telling—which I present at different points of my data analysis—but from the perspective of the conceptualisation of narrative as married to identity with the purpose of verbalizing the process of one’s life experience. If I am to interpret migrants’ stories as refinements of how they see who they are, who others are and how they relate to each other, I had better bear the whole narrating instances and not only those where an ‘exceptionality’ (Bruner 2001), or ‘complication’ (Labov and Waletzky 1967) seems to appear. In that sense, I avoided asking direct questions on what they feel their Colombianness or Australianness is defined by and let my participants’ narratives of lived experience reveal how they perform their personal, social, immigrant and national identities. Furthermore, the process of eliciting such narratives has given shape to my own performativity and understanding of my insider/researcher identities. As Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh (2001) define it in their introduction to Narrative and Identity: Studies
in Autobiography, Self and Culture, ‘narrative proves to be a supremely appropriate means for the exploration of the self or, more precisely, the construction of selves in cultural contexts of time and space […] the very idea of human identity […] is tied to the very notion of narrative and narrativity’ (15). That is, as I have pointed out, the participants’ performativity needs to be read in line with the fact that it has been produced with the involvement of my own self—an educated woman with certain class affiliations, a Colombian, an immigrant and a researcher—which determined, in part, the scope of their story telling.

The feminist epistemology frameworks of Liz Stanley (1987, 1993, 2013), Dorothy Smith (1991, 1996, 1997), and Linda Martín Alcoff (1988, 2006) have given me more direction in the role I have taken as an insider/researcher of my participants’ life stories. Stanley’s (1993) autobiographical account and detailed reflections on the relationship with her sick mother, based on a research diary she kept for over 19 months until the latter’s death, offers a vivid model of constructing a narrative (of herself), but she does so via focussing on, in her words: ‘a set of ontological problematics (what did all this mean, regarding my mother’s self, regarding myself, regarding selves and consciousness in general) with epistemological consequentiality (what did all this entail for how I, we, understand what it is to have knowledge about another person, about one’s self)’ (Stanley 1993: 211). In my own project, I do not compose an autobiography but, rather, a sketch of the fragmented biographies of the research respondents. The sort of ontological questions I face are, in a way, posed to my participants: what has their own process of migration meant to them? How has it impinged on their own selves, the selves they presumably embodied before migrating, and the selves they have become afterwards? The epistemological consequentiality here can be seen as a further reflection of what the narrativity of my participants brings to the understanding of a migrant self, specifically, a Colombian migrant self, as a possible site or set of perspectives. It would, of course, be easier to think of a straightforward collection of narratives as a biography project on its own where I play the part of researcher only and give a (partial) account of my participants’ lives. However, as it is, the collection of such stories transcends the scope of a fragmented biography, and involves ethnography in that I followed the participants’ lives, accompanied and observed them in a range of events that went beyond the data collection stage.
Moreover, my relationships and endeavours with participants made me part of their own narrative performance, shaping not only how questions were raised but also their responses. I was not only the direct audience of their storytelling, but the bearer of information of interest for those who decided to maintain contact with me well after fieldwork had finished. Participants were interested in my progress, my findings, and in discovering whether their statements were similar to those of other participants. In this way, I undoubtedly became an insider/researcher as understood by Gabrielle Hosein (2010), that is, one able to ‘cross my outsider status in different settings’ (34), and to observe ‘reciprocity obligations [that] may be taken more seriously’, while at the same time allowing the participant/researcher dialogue to continue well after the end of the project (42). I knew that to maintain such evolving relationships during fieldwork I had to be trusted, and this implicated not raising any sort of judgmental observations about what participants had said, and instead trying to emphasize the richness of experience and uniqueness of the stories found.

This richness is part of the defining element of feminist standpoint theory articulated by Dorothy Smith (1996, 1997), for whom the actualities of the lives of those who are in disadvantaged positions can offer a much more comprehensive view of reality, as they not only have endured social, political, and cultural alienation at different levels of social relations, but, are a key element in the functioning of societies. From this perspective, it is paramount to listen to the day-to-day experiences of women as they play a role in almost all spheres of social life. Taking this premise to examine my research on Colombian migrants in Australia, as researcher I am in a privileged position as I have found familiarity in the stories of my participants and common experiences with them. Yet, I am also in the precarious position of a migrant having fought myself with what Luin Goldring and Patricia Landolt (2011) conceptualise as the ‘complex institutional and geographic pathways’ that pose immigrants to confront vulnerability and uncertainty until securing legal status in a new country (327). Concretely, Stanley’s (1987) analysis of her extended diary readings and research of Hanna Cullwick and Arthur Mumby demonstrates how interpretations of the same data can change over time. Stanley illustrates how she had seven different levels of understanding or ‘accumulation’ of knowledge on Hanna and Mumby’s relationship over various periods of time. Indeed, Stanley’s metaphor that biography is to be
seen as a kaleidoscope through which ‘each time you look you see something rather different, perhaps composed of the same elements but in a new configuration’ (1987: 19), largely informs my choice of offering participants rich, ever-evolving spaces for their storytelling, in which they also become the audience of their own performativity. Yet, this works in two parallel ways. On the one hand, I work as the insider/researcher in the field who approaches the source of her data by asking questions, visiting, keeping contact, emailing, and the like, thereby collecting narrative discourse from the same people at different times, and in varied spaces. Away from the field, I examine in closer detail what the narratives reveal about the lives that I have already pictured and have started to re-construct in my ethnographic notes. This analytical work, I believe, has assisted me in accumulating layers of knowledge, to use Stanley’s term, in the construction of my participants’ lives. On the other hand, what the participants make of themselves constitutes another set of accumulating layers of knowledge. These layers represent the different levels of understanding of their lives that participants reach during our meetings and communications in-between. Here, my interpretation of the data constitutes, as Stanley proposes, ‘an act of comprehension on the part of the researcher/writer […] and thus a dimension of how she sees, using what evidence’ (1987: 30; emphasis in the original). What I present in the following chapters are the initial layers of knowledge I have gained over three years as an insider/researcher complemented by eight years as a Colombian migrant. However, much of the content of this thesis is based precisely on the varied ways participants present their own selves and verbalize their life stories. Even though their experiences are intrinsically unique, the point that finds a common space here is that, despite their own subjectivities, these participants belong to a broader group of transmigrants to Australia and worldwide. The complexity of their mobility here has seen the common ‘binaries’ used to identify migrants ‘student/worker, tourist/worker, skilled/unskilled, legal/illegal’ (Robertson 2014: 1930) rendered towards the building of more fluid and diverse identities. This study precisely shows how participants imagine a multiplicity of identities, engage with them, and recreate them in their life stories.
**Dis-engageing and Dis-locating Narratives of Migration**

Pablo Vila (1997) provides an understanding of border relations beyond the border itself by outlining not only the multiple border environments in existence in the US–Mexican frontier, but also the multiple social identities and systems of classification that border dwellers express in their narratives of everyday life. That is, the narratives that Mexicans on both sides of the border can tell of their lives are differentiated according to their physical location or border scenario. For instance, these geographies vary in terms of the distinct social topographies of the Tijuana–San Diego–Los Angeles border environment as opposed to that of the Texas Lower Valley–Tamaulipas border (1997: 148). There are, as Vila puts it, ‘very different processes of internal and international migration, ethnic composition and political identities on both sides of the border’ (148). Vila shows how such processes are described in the stories told by Mexican nationals, Mexican-Americans, Anglos, and the *fronterizos*, among others. The effects of the presence of Mexico are at permanent play in the social, ethnic and racial identifications among them. This, following Vila, results in ‘an unusually common sense, in which people are forced to move from one classification system to another [...] to make sense of the perceived Other’ (1997: 152). I borrow Vila’s ideas of the ‘common sense’, or common understandings of the processes of internal and international migration for Colombians in Australia and how these showcase an array of positions (social, economic, and political) among my participants. In doing so, I endeavour to understand how, despite a non-physical border relation between Colombia and Australia, there are differentiated classification systems, or ways of ‘othering’, amongst Colombian migrants. In turn, these lead to certain identifications and overall ways of describing the migration experience. In chapter 4, for example, I illustrate how social and class distinctions, created in Colombia, are brought into play, emphasized, re-created or re-framed, and at times erased, in their new environment. In that sense, the stories told by participants, which in part they use to describe themselves and the ‘other’, are effectively locating the imagined border and class relations in their migration as well as dis-locating or re-locating those within the Colombian community in Australia. Similarly, participants have chosen to both engage and dis-engage in the telling of these new relationships with fellow migrants. Yet, as I already
foreshadowed, I acknowledge that their choice has been inflected by my own presence and performance as either one of them or different from them.

This point of inflection began from the very choice people made to participate in the study, guessing that the researcher was of Latin American extraction, if not Colombia. My Spanish name printed in the research notices led prospective participants to see me as one of them, someone who could speak their language. Yet, for some, this familiar name may have been a deterrent to participate as they would prefer not having anything to do with a Latin American. In a number of cases people sent their enquiry in English, even though the research itself was about Colombians and advertisements were produced in Spanish. Some also chose to direct their query to Vek Lewis instead of Liana Torres. From that moment, I understood that I may be seen as an undesired insider by some participants. Thus, I learnt I had to negotiate with them to convince them from the beginning that I would be worth talking to and that this was a much needed research and a well-supported one. I also learnt to assure them that I would not pre-judge whatever information they wanted to share, as our ‘shared understandings’ would lead us to suspect could be the case with ‘other Colombians’. I persuaded them that I could be trusted as a researcher, not as an outsider but as an insider, with an educational and social profile and hence would be someone with whom it would be worth sharing their migration experiences.

During fieldwork, not only were my participants telling me of their own lives and experiences, that is, not only were they engaged in their narrativity, but I was consciously performing my role and constructing an identity as an insider/researcher, engaging with their stories so that they could feel more at ease. I engaged with them by responding to their tales with interest. I let them know that I wanted to hear more, even if they were taking longer to respond to the set questions meaning that we had to meet again to finish the interview at another time; or if they had different viewpoints to my own. I also respected their ways of telling or not telling: if they gave me short answers or cut their answers off, I would follow their prompts and not push for further explanations. A single interview may have moments where participants offer detailed responses to some questions while being short or avoiding others. I was even asked to stop the voice-recorder on three occasions when participants were unsure whether their comments would cause controversy or harm. In all these instances, my role as researcher required
me to dis-engage my persona as insider within the community. For instance, in several occasions, I had to take on parts of my own self, and perform different identities or positionalities responding to certain conducts or ways of thinking that I have come to know, accept or reject after years of living in Sydney. On one occasion, I interviewed an elderly Colombian male, Oscar, who was telling me of his life back in Colombia as a poor peasant who had moved to different places and ended up in Bogotá without money to buy milk for his infant son. He decided he had had enough and started planning to leave the country in order to improve his economic situation. I completely identified with his narrative for a number of connections I could see with my own life. Oscar’s story not only took me back to my early experience in Australia as a newcomer who had to save every cent to be able to live, but to my present life as a mother. At the same time, I listened without objections, without bringing in further discussion as I would in a different context, when three participants manifested their acknowledgement that Alvaro Uribe’s government may have done some things wrong, and yet commented ‘who is not corrupt there?’ or ‘it doesn’t matter as long as they [politicians] do good things’. I could not disagree more with such views that seemingly legitimize means over ends. I had to take on my identity that once, a long time ago, thought that Uribe had given the country peace and safety in the departmental and regional roads by controlling guerrilla terrorist attacks, for example. I can understand why many people like him or used to like Uribe and disregard his wrong-doings, even though I do not share this position. Therefore, I had to dis-engage my own narrativity to engage with the participants’ ways of telling and to gain access to the way they describe their own reality: how they see and tell it. Conversely, I must assume my participants do the same, they engage or dis-engage with certain stories as they see me with either an agreeable or an opposing perspective. Therefore, I find the most suitable way to balance these potential shifting contexts of interaction is to create more opportunities for the participants to share their stories.

10 Alvaro Uribe, president of Colombia for two consecutive periods, between 2002 and 2010, has been extensively accused of paramilitarism, and espionage against opposition officials, among other corruption charges. There are at least 276 legal proceedings against Uribe in the Comisión de Acusación, the disciplinary section of Colombia’s Congress (Semana 2013; El Universal 2013). Over sixteen of his government officials have also been accused, with eight of them already sentenced to prison (Bluradio 2015).
The recurrent (dis)location and (dis)engagement of my own self into and out of different positions I hold from my own experiences (for instance, as a lower-middle class university student, a university teacher in Colombia, and a teacher of young overseas students in Australia) led me to consider the ways in which my fellow Colombian participants re-position themselves in dialogue not only with the researcher, but also with other selves, their own selves, and those of fellow Colombians and the wider Australian community. My overall aim became to investigate how my participants not only tell of their personal experience as immigrants, but also how their storytelling is used as the social space to display, strengthen or weaken certain attitudes and ways of thinking; and, overall, to perform their individual and collective identities (personal, group, national, and diasporic identities). This was inspired in part by findings presented by other researchers in studies of other Latin American migrant communities in Australia (including Zevallos 2003, 2008; Cohen 2001, 2003, 2004; Collin 2004; 2006; Rocha 2006, 2008, 2009; Wulfhorst 2011, 2014), and the fact that no prior work had been dedicated to Colombian immigrants here.

**Mixed Narrative Sources and Mixed Spaces of Telling**

Since my arrival to Australia in 2007, I have heard many stories of Colombians who had gained a university degree in Colombia, or who had come from a middle-class family, yet, here, have to work in jobs which are either completely unrelated to their careers, or ones which are ill-regarded back home (for instance, as cleaners, wait and delivery staff). I was interested in the views of Colombians from different social and educational backgrounds on their migration process and on how they had overcome the general difficulties and the ‘stages of adaptation’ that I had also overcome. I wanted to use their stories to document the ways in which Colombians identify, describe and interrogate their migratory experience and to discover whether there exist common stories that could capture the experiences of the community, and how these are at play with stories of the broader Latin American communities. I also wanted to explore the ways in which Colombians express their colombianidad or Colombianness in their particular location of Australia by going beyond questions directly related to this and giving
preference to the participants’ reflections on their own lives, their past, present and future. Finally, I was interested in seeing if the critical and contentious political polarization evident in Colombia—during and after Alvaro Uribe’s double presidency term—was translocated by the immigrants in their reflections of personal and national identities in the new country. Such concerns bear relation to what became my main research questions.

At the time I started planning my research, in 2011, I did not have many acquaintances from Colombia in Sydney, and I had very limited access to the wider Colombian and Latin American communities here. I had very little, if any, contact with Colombians who held a permanent residency or Australian citizenship. This was so because, for over four years, I had been immersed in my postgraduate studies and work as an ESL teacher and, as many fellow migrants would agree, one gets caught up with work and new responsibilities while trying to settle in the new country. Therefore, I assumed that my primary participants would mainly be recent migrants or international students, and that they would have very fresh and impassioned memories of the recent past in Colombia and would be eager to talk about them. This, I believed, could potentially spark confrontation when they started sharing their views on their social and political stance with other participants, just as it does in Colombian territory. In light of these assumptions, I decided my work would address three research questions: How do Colombians construct and reflect on their own identities as migrants in Australia? In what ways do Colombian migrants in Australia reflect on the socio-political events and current issues of their country? What are the identities that Colombians re-construct and re-create within individual and collective spaces of telling of their lived experience?

I was tempted to pursue an ethnography that included the entire Colombian immigrant population available, ranging from recent arrivals to retired or elderly Colombians. Nonetheless, I chose to limit the pool of participants to those with an arrival date prior to 1st February 2010, bearing in mind that by July 2013—when I started fieldwork—these people would have been living in Australia at least three years and would have a better understanding of their position as immigrants, having managed to

---

11 English as a Second Language.
gain stable jobs or secured visas that allowed them to stay in Australia longer. Certainly, this was attuned to my own experience and what I could see happening among the few Colombians and Latin Americans I had met. The fact that not only the permanent resident population was invited to join the study, but also the floating population, those with a temporary residency status, may appear questionable. I believe, however, that as much as it is my personal case, many fellow Colombians on student visas have made themselves at home in Australia, regardless their official legal status, and that this is part of the process of being an immigrant: finding yourself; how and when to become an official resident of the country you have lived in for so long; making new friends, a family and, certainly, a life. This overarching notion of who ends up being called ‘migrants’ is dispensed in Steven Vertovec’s concept of ‘super-diversity’ (2007), which emulates a multiplicity of factors that accompany the characterisation of the new flows of migration in late modernity.

Border-crossing in the last ten to twenty years has been conditioned by a multiple array of factors that include ‘more socio-cultural differences going through more migration channels leading to more, as well as more significantly stratified legal categories (which themselves have acted to internally diversify various groups) (1043) Temporary migrants in Australia include a number of visa categories (for example, students, sponsored work, work and holiday, visitors) which can be extended and eventually changed to permanent residency and citizenship. Therefore, the arrival date criterion was conceived as a way to both include the most diverse ‘types of migrants’, regardless of their residency status (that is, temporary or permanent) and to manage the expected drop-out from the study. Participants with at least three years here were expected to have stronger ties to the country while people with short-term visas would be more likely to leave the country before fieldwork was completed. The opportunity is left for further research examining specific members or features of the Colombian community in Australia who are not directly investigated here (for example, Australia-born Colombians, recently-arrived international students, returned migrants in Colombia, spouses of who are non-Colombians).

12 Participation of two more recent migrants was allowed in the Pilot Study only.
The first space I entered to start a relationship with potential participants was in the advertising for the study. Notices posted online and through Latin American boards like *Latino America Viva* and the Sydney Latin American Film Festival newsletter, stated the purpose of the study—the exploration of the Colombian migration experience in Australia—and invited people to request further information if they were interested in taking part. When people contacted Vek Lewis, my supervisor, or me by email or by phone, we briefed them on the details of the project and I sent them an information package with a detailed summary of activities proposed, their purpose and estimated duration, and a set of frequently asked questions. I divided fieldwork into two stages: first, the Pilot Study, which involved trialling and assessing all documents and activities designed for the research with a small group of participants; and second, the Main Study, where revised versions of materials were used.

I offer a work-in-progress description of the Colombian community in socio-demographic terms to better situate their presence in Australia, this presence’s growth, and the broad educational and occupational profiles of Colombian-born migrants, before concentrating on individual stories. A preliminary survey was designed for this purpose. The Pilot Study surveys were filled out in person at the first meeting. Later, the survey was available online and the interviews became the first personal contact between researcher and participants, although in a few cases the paper version was still preferred. I explained to participants the range of activities planned and that they could choose to take part in all or some of them, according to their interest and availability. Reassurance regarding the confidentiality of their participation was given at least twice in the first meeting.

In order to imbue my study with the ethnographic thickness recommended by Clifford Geertz (1973), I entered and copiously observed social and physical spaces of interaction where members of the community were able to share their personal experiences as migrants with myself, other participants, and among their personal circles. In the one-on-one interviews participants had the space to give detailed reflections on their migration, which some had begun at the first survey meeting. These initial spaces were the opportunity for both me, as researcher, and the participants to know more about each other and forge a process of connectedness and eventual trust wherein we engaged in, and at times disengaged from, storytelling. I thought that after the interviews participants might remember other details
they may want to share. Thus, I planned a set of further spaces that would help me gather more personal and extended narratives and at the same time lessen the effect of the framed context of the interview as a counter power relationship between the interviewees and myself. This would provide a locus where participants could share their own (self-) narratives with each other. Nine out of thirty people interviewed chose to write their reflections on their story of migration aided by a list of broad topics I suggested and that had been discussed in the surveys and interviews (early days in Australia, meeting people from other countries, finding a job, accommodation, free-time activities, visiting Colombia). Focus groups, or discussion sessions, became a social space where a small group of participants met and conversed about these and related issues. I was able to hold four of these groups with fourteen people. This was both a sharing of experience which touched on questions previously asked individually, and a space to see, in action, how we present ourselves to fellow Colombian migrants, which resulted in expressing a deeper sense of the collective reconstruction of migrants’ stories and identities. In many ways, I believe this replicates and simulates the everyday interactions of Colombians in Australia, making new acquaintances, and building new relationships on the spot which may or may not last, and may become part of the network that facilitates the immigrant’s process of feeling at home in Australia.

The surveys, interviews, self-narratives, and focus groups were hence spaces with a linked purpose of materializing narratives of migration, both lived and imagined experiences. However, I had in mind that I had to find spaces beyond the setting of formal guidelines and planned a ‘post-observation journey’, a format-free meeting with participants. This was possible with twelve participants with whom I kept personal contact by email or phone, whom I visited in their households, or whom I met at Colombian community events in Sydney. As I was advancing in the collection of stories and getting to know more about the community, I found a number of such events were being organised for and by Colombians. I attended six major events between 2013 and 2014 and this helped me to re-position my analysis of the individual and collective performance of identities within the Colombian community in Sydney.
My multi-site and multi-storytelling space approach was organised attending to a number of drawbacks usually foreseen in this kind of ethnographic study, such as participants not recalling important details when asked, and the availability of all parties. Going through the first email exchanges, conducting a first meeting to fill out the survey or simply to introduce myself in person, undertaking the individual interview and then maintaining contact to arrange the further narrative spaces, along with meeting participants at community events, all helped to build up a researcher-participant relationship where both parties could share part of their lives. This approach allowed me to investigate the lives of participants in different spatial frames, be they geographically located in Colombia or Australia; with differing temporalities, indicating certain stages of their personal upbringing or migration history. The intertextuality of various narratives as common traits is found throughout the group of Colombians and in relation to various themes like citizenship, national identification and political participation. These features demonstrate the sense of incompleteness of one’s identities despite the privileging of multiplicity of positions found. As Brockmeier and Carbaugh’s state, ‘there is always, potentially, a next and different story to tell, as there occur different situations in which to tell it. This creates a dynamic that keeps in view actual stories about real life with possible stories about potential life, as well as countless combinations of them’ (2001: 7). Such multiplicity is revisited in line with the theories of positioning theory and dialogical self.

From Identity Theory to a Multivoiced Identities Theory

In this section, I emphasize the connections I find between the early concepts of identity from cultural studies and feminist epistemology, and more precisely, those found in identity theory and the concept of multivoiced identities and the dialogical self as they are sustained in Dialogical Self Theory (DST). To explore such identities both a personal and collective past need to be made explicit together with the recognition of their continually transformational character. Stuart Hall’s (1995) reflections on the meaning of identity shed light on this special linkage between history and culture in the formation of identities:
I understand identities as points of suture, points of temporary attachment, as a way of understanding the constant transformations of who one is or as Foucault put it, ‘who one is to become’. You only discover who you are because of the identities you are required to take on, into which you are interpellated: but you must take up those positionalities, however temporarily, in order to act at all (Hall 1995: 65).

The points of suture, or temporary attachment, have to do with the historical composite of one’s individual or collective past. Such a past has real, material, or symbolic effects and may indicate the identities that an individual has taken or will take on and which can be constructed through real or imagined narratives (Hall 1990: 226). What is at stake here is the pivotal importance of the recalling of past events, real or imaginary, to identify the ‘positional identities’ one has taken on, that is, the narratives or the stories one can tell or has told oneself about oneself (Hall 1995: 66). One’s individual identity is always fluid and changeable because it assumes positionalities that vary with the historical past and with the re-presentations or interpellations one is to respond to and take on. Such past imaginary or real events and re-presentations gather collectivities into ‘imagined communities’ that are imagined ‘because they are constructed between the real and desire […] and can act as a mobilising political force’ (Hall 1995: 66). To be sure, the flexibility and expansion of information technologies have rebooted the concept of imagined communities (Anderson 1991; Hall 1990, 1995) from closed units of cultural understanding to a multiplicity of ‘sources of meaning and social recognition’ (Castells 1997: 63) where ‘ethnic roots are twisted, divided, reprocessed, mixed, differentially stigmatized, or rewarded, according to a new logic of informationalization/globalization of cultures and economies that makes symbolic composites out of blurred identities’ (Ibid, 63). That is, the common markers of ethnicity that are usually called to frame and identify national groups and their identities are increasingly in flux and re-framing in an era that intersects those imagined communities with global mobility and global communications with more heterogenous organisations, social networks and groupings. Therefore, recognizing the fluid and unstable attributes of identities is necessary to avoid seeing them as being in conflict with reason and to keep the possibilities open for the rational deliberations needed.
in group identity politics, for example (Martín Alcoff 2006: 45). For Martín Alcoff such a conflict is due to the misconceived idealisation of identity as ‘coherent, uniform, and essentially singular’ (45). Understanding the complexity of migrant communities and their multiplicity of identities within this context facilitates a further approach to respond to their needs from policy-making to practical social relations.

Notwithstanding my initial foreboding around disagreements related to the socio-political perspectives Colombians may hold back home, I do not intend to lead their storytelling toward any expectations of ideological or political rapport. At a much simpler level, I believe that upon drawing on the re-presentations that build up the community as a collective, and Colombian migrants at the individual level, a set of positionalities can be described and in effect these can be said to accrue certain political effects, which I discuss in Chapter 6. The incomplete, and always-in-process character of identities that Martín Alcoff (2006) and Hall (1990, 1995) describe might appear as rather pessimistic virtues of identity. This incompleteness can be re-sorted through the inspection of the situated cultural ‘horizon’ (Martín Alcoff 2006) that may bring about a wider identification of the historicized account of the self. In this study, the robustness of such an identification coheres in part via the use of Dialogical Self Theory as a model of analysis of the narrative accounts provided by the participants.

Hall’s (1987) anecdote on the fictional but acceptable narratives he had to create in order to explain his own migration from Jamaica to Britain, points out the relevance of the historicity and the imaginary character of identities. It makes me think of the position I have occupied as the first audience of the participants’ accounts and their performance in the telling of their experiences. Were they constrained in or led to telling their stories in certain ways because of my presence? If they were, I have, luckily, inflected a similar result across the group which can be noted in the ways participants responded with an overall willingness and interest to continue with most of the research activities proposed. This indicates the exercise has at least been fairly addressed in terms articulated by Hall:

One is where one is to try and get away from somewhere else. That was the story which I could never tell anybody about myself. So I had to find other stories, other fictions, which were more authentic or, at any rate, more acceptable, in place of the Big Story of the endless evasion of
patriarchal family life [...]. Identity is formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives which have been profoundly expropriated the colonized subject is always ‘somewhere else’: doubly marginalized, displaced always other than where he or she is, or is able to speak from (Hall 1987: 44; emphasis in original).

I find Hall’s remarks about having to find other fictions which were more authentic, more acceptable, to speak of his own story, consistently embody and underpin the aims of my work. I listen to the participants’ stories, the narratives of their unique life fictions of pre- and post-migration and which can give some meaning to the migrant epistemologies that scholars like Pablo Vila and Anna De Fina have given in a different socio-political environment, but which also count as examples of how to approach identities in narrative. I believe the richness of the life stories of the migrant participants coincides with Martín Alcoff’s purpose to ‘strengthen the case for taking social identities into account as deep features of the self’ (2006: 287). The identities of the participants cannot, therefore, be encompassed in minimal fixed accounts; they need to be broadened, touching on as many aspects as possible to understand how their migrant selves ‘perceive, act, and engage with others’ (287). A work such as this, centered on Colombian migrant identities, may serve to identify the spectrum, into which this particular group of migrants relate their individual experiences with those of fellow migrants, which can be considered as their shared cultural and symbolic repertoire and capital.\footnote{A discussion of such capital is proposed in Chapters 4 and 5 exploring, for example, the shared stories of social distinction practices, both in Colombia and Australia, and the stories of perceived job mobility and desired citizenship status among Colombian participants.} Thus, the process of re-construction of Colombian migrant identities goes from the individual, the experiential, the social, and, finally, the collective understandings of a past that has a visible but not a unique meeting point: their staying in Australia.

Martín Alcoff’s (2006) genealogy of the treatment given to cultural identity and self in modern Western philosophy allows us to draw on the permeability of the concept of identity and how an individual or a group of individuals hold limitless, but historicized, possibilities for transforming, emphasizing and weakening certain positions, and certain modes of acting, within their personal or
collective identities. This is regarded in view of Charles Taylor’s definition of personal identity which equates it to a vast spectrum of knowledge and choices:

> My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand (1989: 27)

This definition can be seen as containing the critical elements of what multivoiced self theory, and Dialogical Self Theory advocate. Identities are displayed, and heightened differently in every instance of interaction while subjects may pick different elements of their identities in their discursive performance. At the same time, this resonates with Goffman’s (1959) rendition of the role played, not only by one’s past, but also that which ‘significant others’ played in one’s past. One’s identities may display both endorsing and opposing views towards different subjects, at different times. Therefore, the possibilities are virtually endless as to how identities are performed and articulated in different spatial-temporal instances. However, the choices available and undertaken by the self are historically attached to its past and, also, to the history of other selves and identities that have surrounded it. Here the concept of the ‘Other’ assumes paramount importance due to the lengthy philosophical and political discussion about its role in the constitution of the self. Martín Alcoff addresses the relationship between the self, the Other, and social identity to concur with the hermeneutic insight that ‘the self operates in a situated plane, always culturally located with great specificity even as it is open onto an indeterminate future and a reinterpretable past not of its own creation’ (2006: 82). Martín Alcoff argues that when one is identified it is the situated plane, ‘the horizon’ which is identified, and it is the Other who constitutes such an identification. Therefore, we come back to the issue of representations made of the self where the Other is part of the ‘horizon’, part of one’s own identity (82).

There are, hence, three necessary elements attached to the notion of identity: its historical character; the constitutive function of the Other in its identification; and the openness of possible
identity positions and positionalities the self can take. However, this conception of the self and its identity does not come about as a simple resolution to the philosophical and contentious interpretations that have been given to it by different traditions of thought. Instead, Martín Alcoff’s (2006) collage on the interpretation of identity acknowledges the influence, for adhesion or controversy, of a number of previously-made interpretations of the self, especially in the Hegelian tradition, Jean Paul Sartre’s ontology, Foucault’s postmodern subject and subjectification, and Judith Butler’s constructivism, among others (57). My own reading of identity touches on parts of these interpretations towards the embracement of identity as built upon in the recognition of the Other; an Other who is part of the cultural, social, political, and historical ‘situated plane’ from where the self can be constructed, or rather, identified, by the Other, by other selves.

The notions of identity, encompassing social and cultural identities, transcend the struggle of identity groups and move into identity politics. Identity-based movements (for example, race-, ethnic-, or gender-based movements) lead to a description of identity as a source of subordination but also of agency, of action, which is collective rather than individual, and which corresponds to diverse political agendas and historical contexts (Castells 1997: 7). What are initially taken as individual realities are better understood as ‘processes that interconnect and emerge within specific historical conditions’ (Sánchez 2006: 34). Hence, as alluded to before, the historical character of identity—its social particularities and connections—needs to be acknowledged as an important basis of its formation. However, notwithstanding the prominence of the historical context in which they evolve, the construction of identities is also served by subjective, individual, and particular perspectives that contain deep information and knowledge of the world (Mohanty 2003: 401). Here, individual lived experience will then serve, partially, as the ‘raw material’ needed to construct identities (393). This experience is mediated between one’s social location or ‘positioning’ and one’s imagined relation, ‘positionality’, relative to that positioning as Rosaura Sánchez (2006) explains in her critical realist analysis of identity formation (further discussed in Chapter 7). Revitalizing Hall’s term of positioning,

---

14 Hall (1995) equates identities with positionalities and describes them as temporal interpellations which need to be responded to or taken up somehow. Sanchez (2006) invigorates the term to the reflexivity or stance one takes in regard to the social positions one has been given. These positionalities are the necessary connection with identity politics since they bring the possibility of ideological understandings and social agency.
positionalities are the necessary connection between personal and cultural identities with political action since they bring the possibility of ideological understandings of the social world and further may lead to transformative practices (36). For Sánchez (2006), social positioning not only has to do with class, since one can be located in an array of positions in the economic, political and cultural spectra. Thus, it follows that gender, racial/ethnic and sexual relations and structural realities, among others, produce different positionings, which allows us to argue that even though identity cannot be reduced only to social locations within these frames, these different structures cannot be ignored. For Sánchez, ‘social location and identity could be said to be distinct but inseparable’ (35). This is what I have found in the narratives of Colombian migrants in Sydney: their migrant identity formation is mediated by a number of social understandings of their positioning within them, as present—and at times hidden—in their own discourse where their positionalities, their standpoint relative to their positionings, are narrated. One example to illustrate this comes from Guillermo, a participant who voiced his discontent with the way the Colombian consulate in Sydney operates. As many other informants did, Guillermo resented the consular body’s inefficiency and poor quality service to the Colombian community. At the same time, Guillermo is happy to concede that the scandals of corruption and paramilitarism related to Uribe’s government are not to be demonised as ‘finally something was being done regardless of the means’. Both positions may stand in opposition as in one instance Guillermo criticises the public officers’ work while from another vantage point it is praised despite the negative value accorded to their actions. The politics of identity at work here appears as a paramount level where, after recognition of one’s own positionalities (identities), an individual, or a group, may reach a space of critical reasoning and questioning. Sánchez puts it this way:

The moment positionality is mediated by counter discourses and one experiences alienation and becomes aware of disjunctures, social inequalities, lacks, the non-parity of citizens, the social constraints and inconsistencies in society, then one has reached the space of critical questioning which can give rise to a critical assessment of hegemonic ideologies (Sánchez 2006: 39).
Thus far, I have collated a number of elements constitutive of the conceptual understanding of identities. Identities are in permanent change and cannot be taken as complete since one’s histories—one’s past—will be more or less prominent in each identity one takes on. Therefore, to reiterate, identities are temporal and need to be seen as partaking of a whole spectrum or ‘horizon’ (Taylor 1989; Martín Alcoff 2006), which may allow the visibility of different ‘positionalities’ towards the social, economic, political and cultural positioning via which individuals are framed. If such positionalities are indeed varied and almost limitless, identifying them requires identifying a historical past that sets at least the basic features of the positionings available for individuals to reflect on and leads them to assume certain positional identities. One’s reflective work may lead to critical questioning and indeed among many of my participants it has. However, my purpose is to identify the positionalities of my participants, the identities they seem to have taken based on their own accounts of life experience before and after their migration, that is, their identities as migrant selves. Encountering these positionalities requires the understanding of a further element, the multivoiced self, the dialogical relations the self makes to give room to the reflexivity on the different positionings such a self may hold.

**In Dialogue with the Self and with Others: Dialogical Self Theory**

Hubert Hermans’s (2001) article ‘The Dialogical Self: Toward a Theory of Personal and Cultural Positioning’ formulates the underlying theoretical elements of a methodological approach that includes self and culture in terms of a multiplicity of positions and dialogical relationships (Hermans 2001: 243). Hermans explains the use of the concept of ‘dialogical self’ as an intersection between William James’s (1980) psychology of the self and Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1973) polyphonic novel. In James’s view, according to Hermans (2001), the self holds features of continuity, which give it a sense of sameness through time, distinctiveness from others or a feeling of individuality and personal volition by which the self appropriates or rejects certain thoughts. Bakhtin’s literary analysis of Theodor Dostoevsky’s work—which identifies not a single, but several authors with their own ideology—brings to the fore the idea of multiple voices that go along or oppose one another in dialogical ways. As Hermans surmises:
For Bakhtin, the notion of dialogue opens the possibility of differentiating the inner world of one and the same individual in the form of an interpersonal relationship. The transformation of an ‘inner’ thought of a particular character into an utterance enables dialogical relations to occur between this utterance and the utterance of imaginal others (2001: 245).

The dialogical self is theorized considering the multiplicity of ‘I positions’ a person can occupy at different instances of time and situation. These positions can be different and even opposing and each may be endowed ‘with a voice so that dialogical relations can be established’ (Hermans 2001: 248; emphasis in original). That is, the self takes up positions that interact with each other and are dialogical in the sense that they ask questions and respond to one another, or interact from the different stories and experiences with which they have been built. This dialogical self is a combination of continuity and discontinuity in that the experience and the different positions, internal or external, belonging to the self are ‘extensions of the one and same self’ (248). The voices enacted by the self and its different positions may not only be different but opposing ‘in the spatial realm of the self’ (248). It is precisely this feature of the self as extended in space which helps us to see the connections between the self and culture in today’s globalised world. Cultures are no longer seen as homogeneous sets of traditions exclusive to certain groups of people. Instead, an individual’s experiences may incorporate a wide array of traditions, values, and practices brought about by the almost immediate connections and shared knowledge of the world allowed by technology and global relations (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 2). These globalising processes result in an increase of the experience of uncertainty, of not knowing how to respond to the events of the outer world, or better, in a more positive view, result in a complex range of positions, global and local, which can be occupied by the self:

On the interface of different cultures, a self emerges with a complexity that reflects the contradictions, oppositions, encounters, and integrations that are part of the society at large and, at the same time, answers to these influences from its own agentic point of view (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 2; emphasis in original).
The self reacts to increased levels of uncertainty in different ways, by reducing the number and variety of positions, or by giving prominence to a more powerful position, by raising the flags to differentiate between oneself and the other; by having readily available new positions with which to respond; and finally, by allowing a dialogicality whereby uncertainty is faced with initial positions that are influenced or changed to different degrees by the events or situations encountered (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 3). This dialogue between the self’s existing positions and those facilitated in the process of responding to uncertainty within the social and cultural landscape we inhabit today, is the central tenet of the Dialogical Self Theory. DST scholars use the metaphor of the self working as a ‘society of mind’, in that the actions which take place between people (such as consulting, agreeing, disagreeing, criticising) are also seen within the self (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 7). More broadly, the complexity of both culture and the self can be seen daily within local and global spaces. A person may take up a ‘religious’ position, for example, attending Catholic celebrations while also rallying for women’s abortion rights.

In a diasporic context, examples of migrant selves are even more illustrative of how the ‘hybrid phenomena’ transforms existing cultural practices and creates ‘multiple identities’. The case cited by Hermans (2001) of ‘a London boy of Asian origin playing for a local Bengali cricket team and at the same time supporting Arsenal football club’ (267) is a recurrent example of the blending of, for instance, migrants’ national sporting, familiar, and social practices and affiliations with those they find in the new country, including those brought in by other migrant groups. The dialogicality of the selves involved in global–local relations such as these needs to be explored pragmatically in regard to a number of positions that have been characterised in Dialogical Self Theory literature. First there are the internal and external positions, for which the self converses with herself, with imagined selves, or significant and unpredictable others, respectively (Raggatt 2012: 29).15 However, there is a wider variety of positions and processes which determine the multiplicity of the self, as seen through DST. Peter Raggatt (2012) synthetizes them under basic elements and dynamic elements. Within the first group, there are

---

15 “The repertoire contains a variety of interacting “internal positions” (e.g. I as adventurer, I as pessimist), “external positions” (e.g. the imagined voice of my father), and “outside positions” (e.g. interlocutors, significant others, groups)” (Raggatt, 2012:29).
the fundamental concepts of ‘I-position’ and ‘counter-position’ for which the extension, multiplicity and decentralisation of the self is possible: when the I takes up a position in relation to the world, or one is positioned by others, movement is immediately implied by a range of potential counter-positions, whether these positions are internal to the self or have origins outside (30; emphasis in original). Within the second group, there are the elements that facilitate development by either allowing a coalition of older positions, or the innovation of the self by new positions. Amongst this group there are seven elements: core-position, meta-position, promoter position, shadow position, third position, ambiguous third position, and dialogical triads. The author clarifies that even though their names may suggest it, core or meta positions are not dominant or a synonym of a unified self; instead, they appear to affect a number of other positions (Raggatt 2012: 32). Of particular interest for this study are the third position and the dialogical triads. Third positions were introduced earlier by Homi Bhabha (1990) in his definition of third space as the site enabling other positions to emerge: ‘this third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives’ (211). Third or hybrid positions mediate between two positions in conflict and this mediation results into a centralising movement of the self (Raggatt 2012:33). Within this context, Raggatt introduced the term ‘dialogical triads’ to identify a set of ‘two opposing I-positions that are simultaneously polarized and attracted by a mediating third position that has dynamic ambiguous properties’ (Raggatt 2012:33, emphases in original).16

In similar terms to Sánchez’s (2006) critical realist theory, social positioning is described in DST as primary positioning in relation to the external domain of the self, therefore the influence of external other is acknowledged whilst reflexive positioning ‘arises from conflicts between internal positions’ (Raggatt 2012:34). My findings draw especially on how, from a narrative approach, those positions are catalyzed and occupied by the group of Colombian migrants who tell of their lives and reflect on their migration process and stories. Similar analyses of migrant narratives have helped me frame the scope of my own research towards a reconstruction of Colombian migrant identities. Personal, social and group identities of diverse migrant groups have been studied based on the

---

16 This model is discussed further in Chapter 7.
discursive elements of their narratives of lived experience. Anna De Fina’s (2003) discourse analysis of Mexican economic migrants, which tells of their ‘border crossing experience’, works as a model to approach the specificities of language use in constructing storylines by migrant narrators. Her analyses shed light on the narrative strategies (that is, types of accounts given, chronicles, stories; use of direct and indirect reported speech; individual and collective narrating voices) that can be found in this type of telling, within the context of migration by people in similar socio-economic conditions to those of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Identity formation among her group of participants arises from the central role given to race and ethnicity, under which migrants are categorised in the United States, and in view of how migrants respond by evoking, transforming, or challenging such categories. Vila’s previously mentioned research goes beyond the analysis of discursive elements in his US–Mexican border fieldwork, attending to the differences in the process of migration, and therefore identity construction, of the different border environments available in the region (for example, Tijuana–San Diego–Los Angeles, Ciudad Juárez–El Paso) (Vila 1997: 148). Vila takes recourse in the systems of classification that seem to operate on both sides of the border looking at discourses of regional and national identities constructed by different border actors. Both works emphasize how migrants reconstruct their memories (their lives, past and present), and the ways in which they construct race, ethnicity, and class therein appear as interwoven elements of their identity formation, given the context of elicitation of their narratives of experience. To these approaches by Vila and De Fina, I add an understanding of the identity positions my participants take on in different contexts of telling, by combining narrative and discourse analysis in specific migration contexts. That is, I draw analyses of how Colombians narrate their lives and what their narrative tells of their identities in at least two of the spatial-temporal contexts in which they shared their experience. In so doing, I can capture the extension of their selves approaching not only different issues of their migration, but also their past and present construction of identities, while taking into consideration both feminist standpoint theory and South-to-South relations emanating from the conditions of migration and reception of Colombian migrants in Australia.

17 These contexts, as alluded to earlier, included preliminary meetings, online surveys, self-narratives, interviews, group discussions, community events, and continued contact after fieldwork.
The location of this project in the realm of the Global South, which posits Australia as part of the geopolitical South-to-South hemisphere along with South Africa, Brazil, and the Southern Cone Latin American countries (Connell 2011: 104), is founded on the social and political history of Australia that has denied Aboriginal existence (Watson 2007: 19) and to date maintains an array of excluding policies towards its first inhabitants. Raewyn Connell’s exposition of southern theory explores the ‘uncomfortable’ position of Australia in the Global South (2014a: 223) in view of the above issues, as well as, the extensive dependence on scholarship from the North to treat issues emanating from the South, or the periphery, which happens not to be the minority, but the vast majority of the world.

Connell (2014b) argues that literature from the North ‘works on the tacit assumption that the Global South produces data and politics, but doesn’t produce theory’ (520). Her criticism of the use of Northern theory to problematize, document, study, and publish on peripheral regions, excluding knowledge produced from within, outlines the need to conceive the problems of the South with the tools, knowledge, and scholarship produced therein. Yet, the expanse of the South should suffice to justify the reading of the world from the so-called periphery, and the inclusion and valuing of its scholarship across diverse areas of knowledge, including scientific and technological development (521). Connell (2014a) stresses Australia’s position as a country of the South: ‘Modern Australia is a small settler-colonial society, created by violence, remote from the centres of global power, with a dependent culture and a dependent economy currently dominated by primary export sectors largely owned overseas’ (223). She rightly criticizes the common orientation of academic work to ‘intellectual authority from outside one’s own society’ (2014a: 224), by questioning how we are to learn about gender violence or women’s struggles from scholarship produced in places distant from where these issues are truly at hand. Even though this research revisits elements produced in northern contexts like migration of Colombians and other Latin Americans to the US, the turning point here has been to weight in the transcendence of the
historical, social and political issues that Colombia and Australia share and impose over their disadvantaged populations.

Dorothy Smith’s feminist standpoint theory (1991, 1996, 1997) emphasizes the need to look at women’s issues to uncover the actualities of people from the broader perspective of those who are oppressed and who are able to give more comprehensive accounts on how the social dynamics work, looking from the bottom to the top of the social and economic power structures. It is precisely gender issues which have helped configure the ‘new sociology’ which now looks at this periphery from a Southern perspective. This thesis relies on a significant perspective taken from feminist standpoint theory, as expressed by Dorothy Smith. She posits that experience is not only something one feels; instead it takes form in the ‘actual practices in particular local settings’ (1991: 156). This contends that, given the multiplicity of those particular practices and settings, there will be an almost unsubstantiated repertoire of experience. In that sense, Smith argues that it is precisely from exploring such diversity of actualities that the relations organising experience can be better discovered. Lived experience is therefore that which can be seen from an insider’s point of view, as Smith puts it: ‘I want to be able to explore, analyse, and explicate a world we know only as insiders but that actually happens, that is always being organized, ordered, put together, regulated, controlled, by us, by others’ (1991: 166). Even though the intrinsic preoccupation of standpoint theory starts in the actualities of women, and from the need to see the world from women’s perspectives, as they participate in virtually all spheres of the worlds’ organising, the need to emphasize such realities extends to the lives of all those in disadvantaged positions. To study immigrants—their paths of migration, life changes, social mobility and adaptations to a new country—requires the exploration of their very lives, their own personal experiences, even though these may be varied and not always predictable in individual cases. Smith highlights the value of interrogating experience as ‘people’s activities connects us with a world that is actually happening, at least for the time period in which we are interested’ (1997: 128). Yet, I believe that scrutinising the participants’ migrant stories needs to bear in mind not only their present-day experience, but, following the discussion in this chapter, also the history of their personal trajectories, that which made them migrants. Also included, would be the histories of their post-settlement experience, where one could
argue they are not only migrants, but also citizens of a new country and bearers of a new complex of experience in this new position. It is here where I see the connections between the three theories I have discussed in this chapter: positioning theory, Dialogical Self Theory, and feminist standpoint theory.

The realities of migrants participating in this research are indeed embedded in Global South relations, as described by Connell. Colombians come from a country where the social, economic, and political conditions, either directly or indirectly, had a bearing on their exit. They arrive in Australia, a country where, despite the many social and economic advantages, as compared to Colombia, there also exist limiting conditions affecting a large segment of the population, not only locals, including Aboriginal Peoples, but also immigrants who become part of an economy that relies on them as a vulnerable, secondary labour force (Bauder 2008; Chauvin and Mascareñas 2012), for example. To legitimize an understanding of the immigrants’ conditions in the new country, their actualities and every day practices need to be voiced. Colombians’ narratives explain how volatile, vulnerable or shifting their own positionings have been in their recent past as newly arrived immigrants, and further in view of their own positionings before migrating and after settling and embracing their new geographical location in Australia. The multiplicity of positionings that the group of 44 participants narrate in their stories, anecdotes, and collections of lived and imagined experiences are examined through a lens of continual changes and uncertainty as termed in DST scholarship. Uncertainty paves the way for a number of identities concerning not only their new life in Australia, but also their ever-present ties with Colombia, whether these are because of their family, economic interests, or political affiliations, or simply because of their very own personal past in their country of birth.

The new positions and identities taken up by these migrants should necessarily be seen as produced in a country that has problematically set aside the needs of their own Indigenous peoples. In the next chapter a critical overview of such conditions is offered with the objective of contextualising such stories broadly within their narratives of experience, and also specifically within their very situatedness in Australia. Australia, as already outlined, is a country of immigrants, pertaining to the Global South, where Indigenous peoples were dispossessed of their land, their territories, and their freedom in ways that display parallels with Indigenous realities lived out in Latin America, and
specifically in Colombia. It will be argued that just as there are historical conditions that posit Australia and Latin America as part of the Global South, such positioning prevails in the present, as the ‘super-diversity’ of factors (Vertovec 2007) that characterize the new migrants’ arrival conditions and needs are still tackled and addressed.
Chapter 2

Australia’s Composition as a Country of Immigrants and as an Emerging Preferred Destination for Latin Americans and Colombians

On 13 February 2008, the National Apology Speech given by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd at the Australian Parliament House was broadcast live on national television. The pictures showed the delivery of the apology and also the crowds outside Parliament cheering and crying at the historic twenty minutes that reverberated in the hearts of the audience the injustices inflicted with the forced removal of aboriginal children from their parents to be placed in foster care in the early 1900s. At this time, having only lived six months in Sydney, I was not fully aware of the tumultuous history of disgrace and persecution endured by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia. The physical agony that only a mother can ever feel when her children are taken away from her and the desperation and fear of young children being separated from their parents, their family, their home, was represented in the life story of Nanna Fejo related by Kevin Rudd in his speech:

[S]ometime around 1932, when she was about four, she remembers the coming of the welfare men. Her family had feared that day and had dug holes in the creek bank where the children could run and hide. What they had not expected was that the white welfare men did not come alone. They brought a truck, two white men and an Aboriginal stockman on horseback cracking his stockwhip. The kids were found; they ran for their mothers, screaming, but they could not get away. They were herded and piled onto the back of the truck. Tears flowing, her mum tried clinging to the sides of the truck as her children were taken away to the Bungalow in Alice, all in the name of protection (Rudd 2008).
Nanna Fejo’s incredibly sad story was only one of tens of thousands, as acknowledged by the Prime Minister and following the *Bringing them home* report (1997) produced by the HREOC National Enquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families. Yet, according to David Hollinsworth (2006: 14), despite the ‘devastating evidence of the arrogance and cruelty of past government practices,’ an official apology from the Australian government had long been ruled out. The Howard government (1996-2007) had dismissed the report’s findings arguing Australia was a liberal and tolerant society and that the generations of today could not be blamed for the actions of people in the past (Augoustinos, Lecouteur, and Soyland 2002).

Kevin Rudd disputed the argument of intergenerational responsibility by stressing that ‘the forced removal of Aboriginal children was happening as late as the early 1970s’ and that as he spoke there were still members of parliament who had been elected around that time. Martha Augoustinos, Brianne Hastie and Monique Wright’s (2011) critical discourse analysis of Rudd’s speech underline that his use of ‘reason and emotion was rhetorically significant’ to gain vivid public support for the apology. He presented a finely crafted speech touching on the inequalities and sufferings of Indigenous people perpetrated by the governing bodies of Australia which rendered his apology ‘direct, unambiguous and unqualified’ (Augoustinos *et al* 2011: 508).

Rudd’s call to all Australians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to embrace together their history and the future ahead of them, to engage in the bridging of equal opportunities for aboriginal people at all levels, ‘on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities’ (Rudd 2008) made me believe, once more, that Australia was a benevolent, pacifist and welcoming country as I had pictured it for scarcely six months. I was pleased that the Australian governing bodies were at least able to apologise for the wrong doings of their predecessors. Kevin Rudd’s words were and still are very touching, yet today, eight years on, I have to sadly reflect that I have not seen major political or social advances for the inclusion of Aboriginal Australians and I see them equally alienated from the rest of the nation. The situation for the Latin American Indigenous peoples is no different. No similar apology has been made by the Spanish or Portuguese colonisers, nor by the ‘criollo’ or ‘mestizo’ governments that followed and share the inherited responsibility for the violent abuse, killing and exclusion of these
Indigenous people, an exclusion that persists to date on the same grounds highlighted by Rudd, blocking access to health services, education and employment.

Despite the early positive perceptions I had of Australia, Rudd’s speech made me question what was behind the apparent lack of social, economic and racial segregation among migrants in this country while Aboriginal people had been subjected to such prolonged abuse. What was out there in Australia that had allowed so many migrants, including South Americans, to come here and seem so ‘well integrated’, so much attuned to the Australian system whilst Aboriginal Australians were still fighting for their land rights and recognition? I have found in my own migration, and later during my research fieldwork, different answers to these questions arose where there is an undeniable influence of the globalised economy and the transnational character of today’s mobility along with the migrants’ very own social, economic and cultural capital as they indicate in their life stories. Yet, another angle is needed to understand the dynamics of their integration and the generalized positive telling of their experiences, that is, the perspective from the receiving country, its past and present.

To start with, there is an extensive history of neglect that the Aboriginal people of Australia has endured and continue to endure. This situates in part the context of racial prejudice to which non-British and later non-European migrants were subjected to in the making of the modern Australian nation. After the abolition of the White Australia policy in 1975, the country’s immigration system exacerbated a tradition of selective immigration that had given entry to a much needed labour force after World War II but switched its priority to the import of skilled migrants in the 1990s to date. Notwithstanding the heavy control Australia has historically imposed on its borders, aided by its geographical position as an isolated continent island, asylum seekers arriving by boat are equated with ‘aliens’, ‘illegal migrants’ or ‘queue jumpers’, and these are indeed widely used representations in political campaigns that problematize migration as an issue of security. The media speculation on this matter has not necessarily translated into a consistent approach from Australian political leaders or institutions, nor the public,

---

18 Here after I use both terms, Latin American and South American, interchangeably. Even though the latter may be seen as excluding parts of Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean which share the Spanish language, I have found it is more easily recognizable by non-English speakers outside the continent of America especially in Australia and New Zealand. This might be due to the large number of immigrants who come from countries of the southern part of the region.
beyond the spur of Federal elections. The portrayal of the asylum seekers issue by the Australian government and media has turned it into a security issue. This has resulted in dormant manifestations against the prolonged confinement of children and adults in detention centers, such as Manus Island and Nauru, devoid of their basic human rights.

That Australia is often presented by immigrants themselves as welcoming, egalitarian and multicultural, and where different cultures, ethnicities and religions are able to ‘coexist’, needs to be re-framed within the history which made White Australia a different country to Aboriginal Australia for over 70 years and the role of the Australian governments in reproducing longstanding racial prejudice in the name of the political and economic advancement of the country. In this vein, this chapter outlines part of the history and literature I have pursued to better situate my research and my participants’ migration paths in the very context of their Australian migration. I propose a description of the key elements that characterize Australia as a country of immigrants and as an alternative and increasingly preferred destination for Latin Americans, here, specifically for a floating population of 19,00019 Colombians in 2015 who call this country their home. First I present a review of the history of migration to Australia spanning from the 1901 beginning of the White Australia policy to the ‘stop the boats’ campaign that the current Coalition government has fiercely promoted since 2007. This shows how the historical pre-conditions of Australia have permeated the political economy of its immigration system in the planning, selection and integration of immigrants responding to the making of the country and its own economic interests. Then, I focus on two ambivalent issues of the Australian migration system, its adoption of a multicultural policy in the mid-1970s (Collins 1991: 226) and its changes from the early migration intake of settlers and labourers to the placing of an overt emphasis on skilled migration since the early 1990s. A third element in the contextualisation of Australia’s recent migration history is the securitization of the border protection in the 2000s (Humphrey 2014), that is, the imposing of further restrictions to people’s mobility from countries deemed as ‘high risk’ for national security. This securitizing has seen the diversity of cultures and stereotyping of certain ethnic groups as a threat for

---

19 My own estimate combining the 2011 Census Data and figures on international student visa grants by DIBP referenced throughout.
the Australian way of life, reviving the prejudices of White Australia while asylum seekers have been the subject of aggressive electoral campaigns rather than consistent human rights provisions. I also draw on how the current ‘migration regime’ (Robertson 2008, 2014) and skilled migration scheme break ties with the widely positive perceptions of Australia as an ‘egalitarian country’ and inclusion following the fragility that new migrants are faced with in terms of job mobility and citizenship rights alongside outright and covert acts of racism. As Nina Glick Schiller and Noel Salazar (2013) put it the ‘regimes of mobility’ imply not only imposing constraints to the free movement of poor and powerless people, but it is precisely the labour of these which facilitates the mobility of people in better economic and power positions (188). Finally, I outline some of the dynamics of Australia-Latin America relations contending that this relationship has been unknowingly mediated by the neglect that the first inhabitants of these regions, the Indigenous peoples in each continent, have been subject to. Latin American migrants and Colombians like myself seem not to be willing to recognise such similarities as they appear blurred and difficult to grasp amongst the more positive features of a country that has welcomed them and where they can live without armed conflict, and the constant fears for their own safety.

**Australia, a Country of ‘Settlers’ and Immigrants as Planned by the State**

To understand why we talk about Australia as a country of immigrants we cannot leave behind the history of British colonisation and the ‘genocidal impact’ of Indigenous policies that ever since have precipitated the reduction of Aboriginal population ‘to less than 2 per cent of the general Australian population’ (Watson 2007: 24). Aboriginal peoples have inhabited the continent for at least 40,000 years—and in some parts of Australia nearly 60,000 years—before the first fleet of the British arrived here (Australian Museum 2009). Notwithstanding this, as Irene Watson (2007) puts it, ‘Terra nullius made black invisible; the question of ‘Aborigines’ being free to roam was irrelevant, for in law [they] were non-existent’ (17). Claiming Australia as a land devoid of life, empty and wasted, in a word, *terra nullius*, the British ignored the value of the civilization they encountered and which had sustained numerous generations of Aborigines across the vast territory of Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander peoples were simply dispossessed of their own freedom and ownership of their land. The scenario has not changed to date when the Australian state continues pushing for ‘pragmatic’ responses that aim at ‘practical reconciliation’ (Watson 2007: 24) instead of full recognition and reparation to Indigenous Australia.

David Hollinsworth (2006) notes how the racial discrimination against Aboriginal people in Australia, or the racist violence exercised by the British settlers and later from the constitution of the modern Australia—that still does not recognise the first inhabitants of the country—is often presented as a different kind of discrimination to that applied against non-whites or non-European arrivals. Hollinsworth argues that ‘these issues were inseparable and intersected with other discourses of gender and cultural heritage to gradually comprise an assertive and racialized nationalism by the beginning of the Federation’ (2006: 67). Yet, it seems that migrants were promptly accepted and embraced further than the Aboriginal people precisely due to the economic impact that foreigners were expected to have in the country’s industrial development. Hage (1998) explores this apparent disjunction by stressing the ‘desirability’ of the migrants’ inclusion in the nation’s economy as cheap labour which would only partially exclude them, differently to Aborigines, from social space (135). In fact, at the same time that Australia was trying to increase its labour force, the Aborigines were neglected of participating of such enterprise. They were not valued to help build the modern country in the land that had been taken away from them. This was aided by the misconceptions enacted in ‘Social Darwinism’ which drew on an hierarchy of races whereby Aboriginal people were at the bottom seen as an ‘inferior’ race which would have been at worse without the Englishmen arrivals and which would eventually disappear one way or the other (Jupp 2007: 8). Therefore they were to be ‘subjugated or eliminated’. Moreover, it was believed that ‘interbreeding between races would drag the higher down to the lower’ and thus contact between races should be avoided. This, following James Jupp (2007), was overtly supported at the time of the colony and had long lasting implications for the shaping of early immigration control like the White Australia policy from the 1880s and passed through the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901.

Legislation has been a key element of Australian racism, according to James Jupp (2007) who explains that in contrast to the United States, ‘rather than relying on riots, murders and lynching,
Australians looked to the state to exclude the inferior races by law’ (9). Yet, if this statement is taken without acknowledging the oppression and violence Aboriginals have endured since the first fleet of arrivals, the extent of racial discrimination in Australia remains rather underestimated. Entry restrictions to aliens were not worded as having to do with race, but rather as to preserve the ‘harmony’ of a mostly ‘totally homogenous white British society’ (Jupp 2007: 10). A shift in the immigration policy from 1966 officially ignores race, color or creed as the basis for immigration control (12). After the World War II response to fears for a potential invasion of the continent selective migration schemes were put in place. The making of Australia as an ‘immigrant society’, according Australian migration scholars (Collins 1991; Jupp 2007; Hugo 2014; Mares 2011), has thus resulted from conscious state planning in reaction to the economic challenges facing the country after World-War II. For Peter Mares (2011), this planning has been rather calculated and interested in ‘what the migrant might bring’ to the country instead of ‘what Australia might offer to the migrants’ (410). Even though the initial aims were to populate the country and keep it British, as proposed by the Assisted Passages scheme (operative from 1831), migration had to be soon opened to other nationalities, from 1947, given the competition to attract labourers posed by the US and Europe itself.

The economic and unemployment crisis of the mid 1960s precipitated a decline in the number of passages or assistance provided until the complete abolition of the scheme in 1982 by the Fraser government (Jupp 2007: 17). Yet, the planning of the composition of the Australian population continued under the control of the state. The entry restrictions of the twentieth century are revealed in the population data make-up of the 1947 Census: ‘in a total population of 7,579,358 an all-time high of 90.2% were Australian-born, with 6.6% born in Britain and 0.6% in Ireland and 0.6% in New Zealand’ (Hollinsworth 2006: 196). Only between 1947 and 1985 this trend started to change with 42% of arrivals from the UK and Ireland, while 58% were from other one hundred countries with a majority of Italians (8.8%), Greeks (5.2%) and Yugoslavians (4.2%) (Collins 1991: 28). More recent data from the 2011 Census shows Australia’s total population numbered 21,507,719 residents, with 69.8% of them born in the country, followed primarily by those born in England (4.2%), New Zealand (2.2%), China (1.5%), and India (1.4%) (ABS 2014).
This diversity of languages, cultures and traditions that migrants have brought into the country have been embraced in many different ways and oddly, it seems in a more positive light than those of the Australian aboriginal people. In the case of Latin Americans and more precisely, Colombians, it seems that the racial discrimination to which Latin American Indigenous people have been historically object of is reframed in a context of invisibility of the Australian Aborigines. That is, non-Indigenous Latin Americans who have migrated to Australia have found here a context that mirrors their own continent’s in that Indigenous people are left aside, dispossessed, unrecognised, and incommensurate to the ‘mainstream’ society. The British settlers decided to ignore the wealth of the Aboriginal ways of organisation and suppress it to impose their own, in a similar manner to the Spanish Conquistadors in America. I contend that to understand the pathways of migration that Latin Americans and non-whites have trodden to settle in Australia we must view these as having been historically facilitated by the already ongoing discrimination against Aborigines. That is to say, from a State level, essentially a rather ‘inferior race’ was to be the focus of discrimination which facilitated the insertion of immigrants who had also been discriminated, historically, by their own governing bodies, by the political powers making their own countries of origin. Yet, this fact is hardly acknowledged by immigrants who believe Australia is a welcoming country, like I, myself, did at the beginning without recognizing the outrages that have made possible such a positive positioning and erasure.

The Idealized Images of Australia’s Multiculturalism and Tolerance

Australia possesses a worldwide image as a multicultural country, where linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and sexual diversity are regarded as respected and celebrated. It is known as the ‘lucky country’ since Donald Horne coined the term with a high use of irony criticizing the fallacies of Australian economic system in the mid-1960s, but his statements were taken rather positively and served to reinforce the image of a prosperous Australia (Collins 1991: 153) with open doors for migrants. However, as I have indicated above, this picturing of Australia as a welcoming country to all cultures has not been without conflict and has only been the result of a slow process that moved from an official
racial discrimination scheme to the recognizing of difference attending to the economic and political needs of the country and the realities of its population in the early 1970s.

Assimilation was the ‘dominant philosophy of migrant settling’ in the first years after post-war immigration to Australia (Collins 1991: 228). The aim that the country’s own British legacy would not be affected by the arrival of non-British was imposed over the migrants’ needs for language assistance, for example. Migrant children were not provided with additional teaching aids and were to perform at school at the same pace of their English speaking fellows. Jock Collins puts it this way: ‘Migrants were trapped in a Catch 22. They had to learn English to successfully assimilate, yet they were not given any special support on the process.’ (1991: 229) But this was a problematic approach to maintain given the increasing difficulties that migrants had to face in so many aspects of their lives in the new country. The ethnic communities started to demand changes and their ‘right to maintain their own cultural traditions rather than having them discarded and insisted on resources to overcome educational disadvantage’ (Collins 1991: 230). After a period of transition known as ‘integration’ between the mid-1960s and early 1970s—whereby migrants were no longer required to ‘totally and immediately discard their cultural past and become part of a homogenised Australian culture’—the policy shift embraced ‘multiculturalism’ as ‘the official principle for migrant settlement’ (230-231).

Val Colic-Peisker and Karen Farquharson (2011) describe Australian multiculturalism in view of four related phenomena representing a ‘demographic reality’ given its ethnic diversity, seen as an ideology that through discourse has sought to normalise such diversity, referring to ‘policies of managing cultural diversity’ and lastly, the everyday interactions between people with different cultural backgrounds (580). This synthesises the history of development of multiculturalism whereby the once mostly Anglo-Celtic or Anglo-Australian population prevailed, but given the economic needs of the country entry was allowed to other non-white groups identified then as ethnic groups. The discursive change to accepting diversity can be seen more clearly in 1973’s Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s call for renouncing to ‘all discrimination in immigration selection on the basis of ‘race’, colour or nationality’ (Hollinsworth 2006: 215). This opened the door for an officially-led shift towards acceptance of cultural difference. Since then, ‘a significant proportion of migrants to Australia now
come from countries in the Global South, particularly from the Asia-Pacific region rather than from Europe’ (Mares 2011: 415). With Whitlam’s leadership and his newly appointed Immigration Minister, Al Grassby, multiculturalism was to replace the unfruitful assimilation ideology of the past and the weak ‘integration’ response. The origin of the use of the term ‘multiculturalism’ in Australia is attributed to the model first developed in Canada in response to the political pressure of migrant minorities there (Jupp 2007; Colic-Peisker & Farquharson 2011) Yet, the new Australian multiculturalism did not seem to fully include Aboriginal Australians who in their own right ‘refuse to be seen as one ethnic group among others’ (Vasta 1996: 51) as they were the original inhabitants of the country.

The discourse of acceptance and tolerance towards minority groups has brought, however, a different type of ‘racist violence’ enacted as ‘nationalist practices’ (Hage 1998: 78). In Hage’s critique, advocating for tolerance or claiming to be tolerant equates to taking an ‘imaginary position of power’ by which one has the choice to be tolerant or intolerant. Thus, as Hage’s work reveals, the tolerance advocated for in multicultural Australia is a form of ‘symbolic violence’ that goes on ‘reproducing and disguising relationships of power’ and presents domination as a ‘form of egalitarism’ (87). Such symbolic violence, as I expand on Chapter 4, is again reproduced by migrants who by virtue of their length of stay or residency status, feel in a position of power to replicate forms of (in)tolerance with new migrants and fellow country people.

Racial discrimination against aborigines is then seen as perpetuated by the lack of common understanding amongst the aboriginal communities and other cultural or ethnic minorities like those of migrant groups. Ellie Vasta (1996) asserts, both aboriginal and immigrant groups should ‘forge a coalition against racism’ (52) in order to see real changes in the ways their struggles are resolved. These groups, according to Collins have been faced with ‘racial discrimination in the labour market in particular, and society in general’ (1996: 74). Collins explains that in spite of the introduction of legislation which ‘prohibits the most overt dimensions of racial discrimination’ (74) the global economic crises and dynamics have forced the restructuring of the Australian labour market thus covert forms of discrimination persist which materialize the political economy of racism. Since 1979, the
Numerical Multi-factor Assessment scheme (NUMAS), a system for ‘allocating points for skills and qualifications, age and English language ability’ has been used for the selection of migrants (Hollinsworth 2006: 202). Notwithstanding this, the human capital of those immigrants arriving on the skilled programs has not been completely utilised by employers at large, precisely because of the demands that impose the globalisation of trade, business and services. Collins (1996) relates, for example, how despite the ‘cultural skills’ that people of non-English speaking background (NESB) or Indigenous backgrounds possess—including at least a second language and cultural knowledge which may signify an ‘ability to deal with a multicultural or multinational market’(75)—these groups are still pictured as a burden for the economic sustainability of businesses.

The social and cultural capital brought by migrants are often ‘reinterpreted’ by gatekeepers as drawbacks that need to be avoided in their labour force because NESB migrants have, presumably, poor English communication skills, while the mistrust around the overseas qualifications they hold, if any, means re-training needs to be facilitated which might be quite costly. In other cases, according to Collins (1996), having an Indigenous background triggers stereotypical images that places people as ‘unreliable’. These elements, according to the author, constitute examples of ‘indirect racial discrimination’ in that even though employment practices do not explicitly promote discrimination, their ultimate outcomes are discriminatory (Collins 1996: 76).

Concerns raised over the level of qualifications potential skilled immigrants possessed prior to entering the country and the workforce, have motivated changes in the immigration policies and diverted focus on the state and regional authorities to promote special skilled migration programs. Even though the structural reforms to immigration intakes have allowed the arrival of a much more diversified and highly qualified force since 1991, a large percentage of immigrants remain in jobs for which they are overqualified. In this sense, the critique of the image of the ‘lucky country’ assumes prevalence. How ‘lucky’ are immigrants who have been granted a visa to travel to Australia is often regarded via the partial view of their application success, which misses, quite often, the view of the varied personal sacrifices an immigrant makes to leave their family and what it requires to adapt to a new place, more than just physically, socially and even psychologically, so as to cope with the many changes their
migration poses. One of those changes is the occupational downgrading of migrants who arrive with technical or professional work expertise, but in order to secure their living have to take on different jobs and, as such, their social mobility progresses rather slowly.\textsuperscript{20} Castles \textit{et al} (1998) describe this phenomenon:

[D]ata on pre-immigration occupations and post-school qualifications suggest that immigrants bring a higher level of skills to Australia than is present in the non-immigrant workforce. But it is also true that many higher-skill and NESB entrants are employed in positions where their skills are not fully realised. Occupational downgrading is experienced by many immigrants on entry, though there is also evidence of substantial upgrading in occupation with time in Australia (124).

The focus on the skilled migration program, since the late 1970s, had led to a change in the immigration patterns with an increase in temporary migration and ‘the appearance of a hypermobile professional demographic and a decline in the one-way settler migration of low-skilled migrants that predominated in the post-war decades’ (Colic-Peisker & Farquaharson 2011: 581). This surge of a more multicultural middle class, whereby ‘ethnics’ were socially mobile and were increasingly visible may have targeted ‘the retreat from multiculturalism in Australia’ (581) and triggered the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment enacted in the surge of the One Nation Party. Even though short-lived, the discourse of hatred promoted by Pauline Hanson towards tougher controls around immigration revived the xenophobic passions of the past and paved the way for further debate on the need to harden immigration policies and border controls, especially for people arriving by boat seeking asylum.\textsuperscript{21} The debate turned into overnight sensation with Prime Minister John Howard’s response to the infamous Tampa crisis of 2001. Howard’s statement makes reference to the then current policies of reception of the so-called ‘boat people’ or ‘illegal migrants’ to Australia:

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Research on occupational downgrading and skills transfers of migrants in Australia can be found in Castles \textit{et al}, 1998; Wagner & Child, 2006; Iredale, 1987, 1997.
\item \textsuperscript{21} At the time of writing of this thesis, Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party resurged in the 2016 Federal elections winning 4 seats in the Senate representing 4.3% of the total votes (ABC 2016). During the election campaign to date, Hanson has continued with a fierce campaign against Islam, Sharia Law and especially against Australia’s intake of Muslim refugees.
\end{itemize}
It’s about this nation saying to the world we are a generous open hearted people taking more refugees on a per capita basis than any country except Canada. We have a proud record of welcoming people from 140 different nations. But we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come (Howard 2001).

The ‘Pacific Solution’ promoted by John Howard to respond to the influx of ‘irregular’ arrivals allowed the convened transfer of asylum seekers to other countries for their claims to be processed out of the Australian soil (Beeson 2002). This practice has not changed dramatically in the last ten years and has instead, at the time of writing, perpetuated the detention of ‘boat people’ in islands excised from the Australian migration zone (McDonald 2011: 285). Despite the negative images advertised around the suffering and journeys of asylum seekers, it is undeniable that the making of modern Australia has greatly benefited from the arrival of non-whites including refugees. Yet, it is also true that the rapid economic changes that have seen much more interconnected international businesses and the expansion of multinationals in rich countries like Australia, along with the social and economic conflicts other countries live, have boosted the number of ‘resident aliens’, or holders of legal but temporary visas (Robertson 2011: 2195), under specific forms of temporary labour migration (Robertson 2014: 1920) which has certainly benefited Australia’s economy. Here, as in the rest of the industrialised world, migration has evolved into more circularity and temporality (Castles 2002) with new forms of mobility that go beyond permanent settlement in one single country, to temporary affiliation to multiple destinations and under a range of social and legal conditions. And although the importation of labour has been adjusted in line with more selective conditions giving priority to high skilled migrants who can supply the industry needs both ‘elite knowledge workers’ and a more defranchised labour force continue to be in high demand in developed countries (Castles 2014: 192).
The fear of terrorist attacks in countries of the North continues to place strong barriers for the complete acceptance and embracement of Muslim communities outside the Arab world. 9-11 instilled so much fear not only for the dimension of the attacks and the huge death toll of innocent working people, but because of the speed and wide media coverage that reproduced live pictures of the events. The images were so incipient that virtually every corner of the world learnt of the attacks within minutes of them being executed if not in real time. It was not easy for the general public to escape the images of terror that were replicated later in further attacks in Spain and the UK and much more for the Australian public, the images of the Bali bombings. Months later the world would witness the scope of the retaliation commanded by US president George W. Bush bombing Afghanistan and taking control of the extremist supporting countries in the name of protection of the US and the world citizens.

In the wake of the 9-11 attacks, the Tampa crisis debate, the remnants of the One Nation campaigners, and later attacks attributed to Muslim extremists, like the Bali bombings in 2002—where 88 Australians died—and the terror attacks in central London in July 2005, can be seen as conditions that aligned the tensions leading to the infamous Cronulla riots in Sydney’s south. On 11 December 2005 hundreds of Anglo-Australians gathered at the Sydney’s beach to ‘reclaim’ it from the youths of Middle-Eastern and Lebanese appearance who had allegedly been harassing women and volunteer beach guards (Pardy 2011; SBS 2014). In counter-response, hundreds of Lebanese and Muslims joined to ‘retaliate’ with random attacks to the public in the Cronulla area, ‘men wreaked their own revenge—a drive thru rampage of Cronulla and surrounding suburbs, smashing up cars and severely injuring people’ (Pardy 2011: 52). Tensions were high and a crowd of almost 4000 people gathered at Lakemba’s mosque, in Sydney’s West, amid rumours it was going to be burned down (SBS 2014). The position taken by John Howard in response to the riots has been widely criticised by commentators arguing he lost a timely opportunity to single out racist behaviour and send a message of support towards the multicultural diversity existing in the country by dismissing the attacks as not racially based.
Australia has been rather fortunate not to see major religious motivated violence unfold on its own soil, yet many Australians have been victims of attacks overseas. Notwithstanding this, fear has been spread, not only by the international and local media reports over what has happened in other countries, but by the tensions that have arisen against Muslims who have been largely imagined as a threat to the wider Australian community. This has certainly been mediated by the images worldwide equating terror and religious extremism with the Muslim people and, as a consequence, the Australian authorities have had a more convenient basis on which to justify their lack of humanitarian response with people coming from Middle-Eastern countries claiming asylum and arriving by boat.

In effect, since 2001, as Michael Humphrey puts it, asylum seekers are a name that has been used to replace ‘Muslims’ and the securitization campaign around their arrival has helped Australian governments to install fear in the community by demanding support for their work in protecting the country from terrorism (2014: 92). More broadly, the contributions of migrants seem to be disguised and unacknowledged and the fears of diversity that immigration control and policies evoke embody this tendency. In spite of the international humanitarian agreements Australia is liable to, its current treatment of asylum seekers is far from desirable as the government contends that only those immigrants who arrive by air are worth incorporating into Australian society while boat people are aliens, illegal and unwanted, even if their lives are genuinely threatened or persecuted by their countries government or civil conflicts. Therefore, restricting the entry of what are mostly Muslim asylum seekers—even when there is a genuine need for protection—is justified ideologically in view of the danger they are said to represent to the safety of the Australian people.

The issue of asylum seekers has prompted major political debates in the lead-up to Federal elections. In 2007 Kevin Rudd seemed committed to make changes to his predecessors ‘heavy handed’ approach to asylum seekers which was based on emergency measures enabled by the security framing over ‘Australia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity’ (McDonald 2011: 286). Matt McDonald explains that Rudd’s approach can be seen as the desecuritization of the ‘apparent threat’ asylum seekers had been imagined to purport in Howard’s government. Yet, an increase in the number of boat arrivals in the two and a half years of his mandate was represented by the media and the opposition as the direct
consequence of Rudd’s Labor ‘soft’ stance. Opinion polls accelerated the deposing of Rudd’s leadership by his own deputy leader Julia Gillard. The new Prime Minister announced that ‘a national conversation’ on the issues of border protection should be taken ‘outside the straitjacket of “political correctness”’ (ABC 2010). This, according to McDonald, ‘served to legitimate the expression of intolerance and prejudice that could further societal concerns about border security and reinforce the idea that asylum seekers constituted an “other” from whom Australians need protection’ (McDonald 2011: 290). That is, following McDonald, opening up a space for debate on the asylum seekers issue not only normalized the fears and anxieties of Australians but made the construction of people arriving by boat more likely to be seen as a security issue (290-291).

The lack of consistency in the Labor government statements regarding the upsurge of ‘boat people’ arrivals since 2007 gave the Coalition led by Tony Abbott a unique opportunity to launch his border protection plans and gain the confidence of voters by promising to ‘stop the boats’ (Abbott 2010). It is precisely this kind of political debate that, according to McDonald (2011) and other scholars (Beeson 2002; Mares 2011; Humphrey 2014), produces an articulation of ‘fearful and exclusionary views about “others”’ (282), which renders the issue of asylum seekers part of the national security agenda. This securitization22 of the border issue was clearly started in Australia’s response to the Tampa crisis and more recently furthered in the 2010 electoral campaign.

The problem posed by this securitizing is extended to migration broadly. Castles (2014) explains that such securitization ‘emphasizes the security of rich northern countries and their populations, while ignoring the reality that migration and refugee flows are often the result of the fundamental lack of human security in poorer countries’ (191). Indeed, the richer countries have failed to help fully address security concerns from its very roots. As Michael Humphrey puts it, ‘by making migration a security problem migrants are constituted as the object of policies directed at managing risks. It misrecognises structural issues such as refugee flows, urban riots, crime, unemployment and

---

22 Securitization is defined by McDonald (2011) as ‘the process whereby through speech acts—and audience acceptance—particular issues come to be conceived and approached as existential threats to particular political communities […] the securitization framework draws our attention to the constructed nature of security as a political category and to the importance of what security does politically’ (282).
welfare dependency as the attributes of migrants which need to be policed and regulated’ (2014: 84).

Hence, the fearful images produced against ‘illegal arrivals’ rebounds into a politics of protection of the Australian identity that alienates migrants as not only an economic but also a security threat for Australians. This is continually refueled by the images of random attacks that involve Muslims abroad and more recently in Australia itself.

On 16 December 2014 Australians witnessed themselves an apparent act of religious extremism, in Sydney’s iconic Martin Place. Channel 7’s morning show broadcast the live pictures of what was happening next door in the popular Lindt Café. Man Monis, a self-proclaimed Muslim cleric and activist, known to police and the media, had taken patrons and staff hostage. A few people were able to escape shortly after the siege but at least nine people endured over fifteen hours of threats and uncertainty around their fate. The café’s manager, Tori Johnson, and a renowned barrister mother of three, Katrina Dawson, were killed as police tried to take control after 2am. During the siege the media tried to position the attacker as if he was related to the terrorist group ISIS. Indeed Monis had asked hostages to hold a flag with Arabic writing which was first believed to be an ISIS flag. Later it was known that he had requested to be sent such a flag but his petition was declined. Prime Minister Tony Abbott and NSW premier Mike Baird were cautious in rendering the event as a religious extremist attack. It later unfolded that the justice system had failed to foresee the character of the attacker’s mental health and the danger this person posed to society after being acquitted of his ex-wife’s murder and charges of sexual assault.

The image of a Muslim preacher who was able to perpetrate such an attack in the heart of Sydney threatened to awaken the feelings against the overall community of Muslims and in many ways prompts to see uncontested by the public the dehumanizing treatment to asylum seekers. The latter are now imagined as posing an additional threat, not only might they be Muslims but also linked to ISIS, the feared armed group that has taken over most of Iraq and parts of Syria and has displaced over 3 million people (BBC 2015). At the time of writing, 100,000 Syrians were trying to reach safe haven in Europe. Their journey gained visibility more recently with the picture of the body of a 3 year-old Syrian boy in a Turkey beach. Australia’s Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, was hesitant to announce any humanitarian measures his government would take to help those in need. After having announced
Australia could take up to 12,000 refugees he stated the government was to study carefully the situation before making any further commitments (The Guardian 2015). Once again the right to shutting the door to ‘illegal aliens’ was exercised by the ‘white Australian nationalist’, using Hage’s (1998) terms.

Skilled Migration and Other Pathways for Migrating to Australia

Three migration streams have predominated in the Australian migration system since 1973. These are the skilled, family and humanitarian streams (Hollinsworth 2006: 202). Following Hawke’s 1983 Labor government period there was a ‘progressive trend away from general labour and family migration’ giving more prominence to skilled and business migration (Mares 2011: 416). At the same time, there has been an increase in temporary migration ‘made up predominantly of temporary migrant workers and international students but also including New Zealanders and working-holiday makers’ (Mares 2011:416). The very much criticized 457 Visa—a long stay business visa conceived as a ‘transitional measure […] to fill temporary gaps in the Australian labour market’—has increased foreign workers dependency on employers who sponsor their application, and therefore sees workplace exploitation facilitated (418). Furthermore, the temporality of these migrants means they are only partially included in the new country with ‘no access to any government-sponsored social welfare, such as subsidised healthcare and education or unemployment benefits’ (Robertson 2014: 1923).

On the other hand, the steady growth of the Australian education export sector is due, according to Mares (2011: 416) to both, the need for a ‘lucrative source of funding’ with full-tuition paying overseas students which could counteract the ‘serious decline in government funding’ to universities and at the same time that those who were paying their own education would eventually ‘fill skill gaps in a rapidly growing Australian economy, moreover these students represent ‘a new highly flexible casual workforce’ (416). But this has not come without conflict given that the very perception that these ‘cheap’ labour sources are taking over the jobs of other Australians has increased resentment and has seen international students ‘vulnerable to opportunistic robbery and racist attacks’ (Mares 2011: 417).
In 2009, in Melbourne and Sydney, a number of cases of attacks against Indian students were reported by local and international media as racially based. However, Australian authorities, according to Kevin Dunn et al (2011), downplayed the motives of the attacks by saying these were opportunistic crimes denying they were instances of racism. The political economic pressure that negative reports may signify for the Australian education export sector, where international students enrolled in Australia represented in 2009 over AUD$26 billion per annum (Access Economics 2009), precipitated public calls for respecting diversity. Yet, Dunn and colleagues critique that the message given by authorities like the then Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, trying to reassure their Indian counterparts that Australia was a safe country for Indian nationals, did not address the racism behind the attacks per se but were only responding to the economic interests of the education sector (Dunn et al 2011: 76, Robertson 2011: 2201).

In a particular way, the attacks against the Indian students in Melbourne and the earlier Cronulla riots could be taken as ‘isolated’ cases of verbal and physical racial abuse based on skin color, cultural heritage and religious prejudice. Regardless of the triggers these seem to intertwine as expressions of race discrimination. Certainly the examples of random attacks on public transport in Australia’s cities are so numerous that they cannot be dismissed as ‘isolated’; they do reflect there is an underneath racist position expressed by some people against those who look different or speak another language. At least eight different cases of racist rants on public transport in Perth, Newcastle, Sydney and Melbourne were widely publicised in national media between 2013 and 2014 alone. Video recordings of the rants by fellow passengers has allowed a wider and stronger reaction, mostly against the attacks in social media networks. Yet, as Tim Soutphommasane (2013), Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner, pointed out at in a Sydney Morning Herald column at the time, ‘for every incident that gets recorded by someone on their mobile phone, many others go unnoticed and undocumented’. Video technologies have permitted a greater visibilization of what have worryingly become frequent reminders that the White Australia imaginary was not completely erased after 1975. The recordings also evidence a mostly passive reaction of bystanders who do not interfere with the racist abuse.
Racial discrimination is seen as more easily targeted against physically-evident stereotypes that accompany the images we have been exposed to for so long about those possessing a non-Caucasian appearance. For Latin Americans, a physical appearance is not always telling of their ‘othernesses’ due to the mixed races and cultures available amongst its people. This has meant that the relationships Latin Americans have forged in Australia have been less confronting than those for other ethnic communities who have been widely racialized (that is, people of Middle-Eastern, South-East Asian or Asian backgrounds). In many ways, the settlement and integration of the Latin American migrants in Australia has been slightly more positive amid particular difficulties and cases illustrated in the literature (Zevallos 2003, 2004; Cohen 2004; Collin 2006; Martín Alcoff 2008). In the next section I draw on key elements of the history of Latin American-Australian relations and the settlement of Latin Americans in Australia so as to further explore what has made Australia a new preferred destination for Colombians and what positions it as an increasingly preferred country of migration.

Australia and Latin American Countries Relations

Observing the historic tensions between the remnants of an imagined White Australia of the 1920s and the influx of non-European migrants and later on of refugees to the country, one is left with the crude sensation that the very first people of Australia were and still are treated with disarray and excluded from the discussion of the making of the country and not much seem to have changed. To date, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders have not been recognised fully in the Australian Constitution. Even though the case is different for Indigenous groups in Latin America, and specifically in Colombia where their culture, language and traditions were praised and acknowledged from the 1886 Constitution, the land struggle of the Aboriginal Australians, since colonial times can be seen as the same struggle that Latin American Indigenous communities have been fighting since the arrival of the conquistadors. That is, the very complex tensions in the forming of the Australian state whereby the first inhabitants of the continent were regarded as ‘less than human’ deprived of their land rights, the freedom to live in their own cultural and social system are very similar to the impositions and oppression endured by Latin
American Indigenous peoples back in the colonisation of the continent. Yet, overwhelmingly, even though modern states have emerged in both continents, the fight of their first peoples for equal social, economic and political recognition is still unfinished.

Lack of sincere and effective recognition of the Aboriginal peoples’ cultures is still apparent in statements of politicians like Prime Minister Tony Abbott for whom the government cannot support people living in remote communities, and therefore these should be closed and Indigenous people should move to where there is sufficient infrastructure for their living needs. He said in a radio interview, ‘it’s not the job of the taxpayer to subsidise lifestyle choices’ (Abbott 2015). That is, for the Prime Minister the Indigenous people in remote Australia live out a ‘lifestyle’—that can and should be changed for an economically profitable one just as the Britishmen thought two hundred years ago—not a culture worthy of recognition. Long standing prejudice, assertions, and stereotyping of minority and endangered communities as the Aboriginal people of Australia and the Indigenous groups of Latin America prevail today notwithstanding the gains they have made on political and social grounds. The lack of full official and structural recognition of their civilizations, their survival struggle upon the colony are too common features of their histories.

On the other hand, it is important to note that not only have been Latin American Indigenous groups left at their own expense of survival in their own territories, as in the case of Colombian ‘resguardos indígenas’, but have been in most cases excluded from the decision-making affecting their territories. Likewise, the aboriginal people of Australia have been marginalised and left lagging behind despite the calls for embracing multiculturalism (Jupp 2007: 95). According to Jupp, ‘Aboriginal and “ethnic” affairs had been kept strictly apart as they were the responsibility of two distinct departments’ and the communication between both ethnic and Indigenous organisations was rather limited until the 1990s (95).

This is a historical context that symbolizes a similar indifference to the rights and territories of the first peoples of both Australia and Latin America. I have outlined here the developments of the Australian official policies that have ultimately tried to encompass the diversity of aboriginal Australia and the diversities of non-British migrants, yet, Aboriginal people continue to be disregarded and
alienated from the promotion of equality that multiculturalism was supposed to evoke (Jakubowicz, 2006; Castles, 1990). This is the very context of Australia as a pluri-cultural country which needs to be acknowledged as the background in which Australia has established its relations with other countries and cultures.

In that view of foreign affairs, the book (mentioned in this thesis’s introduction), *Australia and Latin America: Challenges and Opportunities in the New Millennium*, edited by Barry Carr and John Minns (2014), an initiative supported by The Council on Australia-Latin America Relations (COALAR), explores the great potential that the still immature bilateral relations between Australia and Latin America could exploit. It presents a review of how ties have been enabled between both regions thanks to their emerging trade and business relations the education export sector of Australia, its foreign aid to Latin America, and the incursion of Latin American culture in the major Australian cities. The book ‘examines the nature of key elements of the inter-regional relationship and provides a series of broad recommendations that help to continue building Australia-Latin America relations’ (xxiii).

Victor Del Río (2014) identifies two major waves of immigration from Latin America to Australia. The first wave ‘arrived before the mid-1990s [and] integrated rather slowly’ (167) engaging mostly in manual labour where their English language skills were not a barrier to perform a job. The influx of immigrants from the Latin American region was greatly boosted by Australia’s 1975 Racial Discrimination Act from which entry to Australia could no longer be based on race selection (172). Political refugees were accepted and assisted under the Special Humanitarian Program and other migrants arrived under the Family Reunion program mainly from the Southern Cone countries (that is, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay) and Central America’s Honduras, and El Salvador (168).

A second wave, claims Del Río, began in 1998 and these Latin Americans tended to be less affected by the barriers imposed in the recognition of their qualifications. Yet, they had to overcome other difficulties like ‘reassert[ing] their credentials in the local market’ and forming social support networks that could facilitate their integration into the new country. In this sense it can be noted that a large number of those first-wave Latin Americans migrants brought with them their family units and helped others to do the same and were able to form bigger social networks of support, to take care of
their young children, for example. Meanwhile new migrants have come mostly on their own or with their partners but are unable to bring their parents or extended family given the costly procedures imposed by the Australian migration system. Second-wave migrants have been able to integrate more easily into the workforce at the expense of leaving their close knit family until they have been able to gain more economic stability. The steady growth in the number of immigrants since the late nineties has been aided by the new opportunities for gaining an international degree whilst having work concessions to help pay for their expenses. Despite this, the number of Latin Americans in Australia has historically been low compared to their numbers in Canada and the US. Ather Akbari and Martha McDonald’s (2014) combined census data analysis highlights that the percentage of migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean in 1999 was only 0.67% in Australia while it was 47% in the US. This was still a marked disparity in 2012 when proportions of Latin Americans were 0.98% for Australia and 38.1% for the US (807). Even though entry restrictions to the US have brought about a diversification in the migration destinations for Latin Americans, the geographical closeness of North America and the huge social and commercial networks these migrants have built there over decades are obvious reasons for them to continue preferring at large migrating closer to their homes. The second wave has been mostly made up by students, especially from Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Ecuador and Chile, who have been able to extend their stay in Australia or have eventually gained their permanent residency here (Del Río 2014: 168).

This ‘migration-education nexus’ as Robertson (2008, 2009, 2013) illustrates, has been facilitated by the Australian state through mechanisms of mobility regulation. International students pathways to officially belonging to the ‘body politic’ entail a staged process of migration, first as students with certain working rights, then as permanent residents and finally as citizens if their country of origin permits double nationality. As Sean Burges (2014) rightly states, it is the education sector which has likened Latin America and Australia amid their more apparent rivalry in ‘international natural resource and agricultural commodity markets’ (Burges 2014: 25). Even though the ‘bilateral relationship’ between both of them still only seems to be well established in the direction of Australia, through its tertiary education export sector, there are a few commercial and cultural areas trying to forge
more mutual understandings that might bring Australia closer towards Latin America. For Burges there are three major factors motivating Latin Americans to study in Australia. The first of them is their desire to learn English, for which most of enrolments are in the ELICOS23 sector or English language intensive courses. Second, there is a ‘distaste for the cultural marginalization that occurs in parts of Europe and the United States’ (Burges 2014: 37). Certainly the racialization of Latin Americans in the US, for example, is well-known in their countries and can be a deterrent for many. Thirdly, Australia may be a faraway country, but it seems preferable to travel where a student is able to work part-time while gaining a degree to improve his or her own job mobility rather than studying in a country where there are very very limited or none work concessions in their visas.

In spite of the rather positive stereotyping that Latin Americans are attributed with in Australia, like joyful, warm and hard-working people, they are still positioned as non-Australians and the difficulties they are faced with due to their migrant status can vary from their English language use to their physical appearance, cultural practices, and gender relations (Dawson and Gifford 2001; Collin 2006; Aizpurúa and Fisher 2008; Zevallos 2008). Yet, the experiences of each community may prove to be differently told in view of their own upbringing and the national histories that accompany their own journey of migration. Just as Rafaela López (2005) underlines, Latin Americans are a ‘community of communities’ (108) because of the many social, cultural and even language differences that make up the different national groups of Central and South America. Thus, even though they have converged in Australia as people of similar countries and cultures and have sustained a perception of cohesion or similarity in the eyes of Australians and Latin Americans themselves, the recognition of their very own national groupings enables a better understanding of their positioning as immigrants within Australia.

---

23 English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students.
Part of the analysis I present in Chapter 3 draws on the economic and labour insertion of Colombians in Australia. However, the data I present are very much related to the group of fifty survey takers and participants of the study rather than broader census data. Hence, the elements drawn in the situatedness of Australia as a country of immigrants shed light on the conditions that have seen facilitating the immigration of Latin Americans and Colombians to this country in more general terms.

Primarily, the long tradition of immigration planning and control of the Australian system has paved the way for the rise in the number of educated Colombians who have decided to follow tertiary studies or live permanently in Australia since 2002. Not only have Colombians preferred to migrate to Australia on the grounds of prospective career success and social upward mobility, but their insertion into the Australian economy seems to have been facilitated precisely by the low visibility and rather positive perception of their Latin American and Colombian migrant fellows in the country. In contrast to countries like the US, Spain, Canada and Venezuela, where there are visibly larger groupings of Colombia-born migrants, Colombians in Australia have found a rather accepting country for themselves. Here, amid the usual stereotyping related to violence and drug production, they have been able to find a job and even continue progressing in their own career. Although occupational downgrading is evident especially in the first years after their migration, Colombians are found to have high employment rates in a variety of industries. Following data presented by Del Río (2014) Colombians have a participation rate of 79.8% in the labour force which is one of the three highest for Latin American migrants alongside those from Brazil (79%) and Venezuela (79.8%). Meanwhile the unemployment rate for Colombians has been calculated at 6.8% based on the 2011 Census data (201), which is lower than other more recent Latin American communities like Mexico (9.7%) and Venezuela (8.7%). This, according to Del Río,

---

24 Following Del Río’s (2014) 2011 Census data analysis, Colombians seem to have an even participation across a range of the twelve different industries plotted. Yet, more people are employed in manufacturing (536), construction (417), retail trade (458), accommodation and food services (1,010). However, it is not clear where other common entry-level jobs like cleaning are located. It is also important to note that the 2011 Census may have not included details of a large section of Latin Americans and Colombians who did not hold a permanent residency and were, at the time, on a temporary visa.
implies that Colombians have been able to gain stable jobs and thereby make their integration and that of fellow country people less difficult.

Data from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (2014) shows the rapid increase in the number of Student visa applications by Colombian citizens. In the 2003 and 2004 financial year there were 938 lodged applications while the figure doubled in 2005-06 and peaked an astonishing 5,126 applications only four years after in 2007-08 (DIAC 2010: 12). The continuous growth in the number of visa applicants cannot be easily attributed to the social and economic crisis that subsumes Colombia. Rather this needs to be related to Australia’s renewed recruitment efforts in Latin America with a special work focussed on Colombia. As Sean Burges (2014) explains, these efforts have paid off ‘prompting a near four-fold rise’ in the number of Colombian students coming to Australia (34). More recently, the opening of a new Australian consular office in Bogota in 2014 comes as the endorsement of the growing relationship between Colombia and Australia which not only sees students coming, but increasingly tourists, and families of those who have moved to Australia for a longer term.

Colombia’s high unemployment rates, 15% in 2001 and 9.1% in 2015 (DANE 2015) are a natural push factor for the migration of those who can socially and economically afford to venture out into a life-changing journey. Therefore Burges’s (2014) proposition that students from Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Peru, have increased the numbers of VET\textsuperscript{25} courses enrolments because these are countries ‘seeking rapid expansion of technical skills in these industries’ and further, because of Australia’s ‘reputable vocational skills sector’ (44–45) can prove misleading. As figures from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection show, most student visa applications are for ELICOS courses, followed by VET courses. Latin Americans initial need to learn or achieve certain proficiency in English that eventually opens them the door for their permanent residency in Australia means they have to pay hefty fees, between AUD$250 and AUD$400 per week. VET courses can be almost 50% cheaper and are rather flexible in attendance arrangements and course timetables which give students more chances to find a part-time job that in many occasions exceeds their 20-hours-per-week restriction.

\textsuperscript{25} Vocational Education and Training.
VET courses also allow students to take in-session breaks where they are allowed to work without these limitations. Although the low academic quality of such courses and their providers can be easily challenged, this has not been a deterrent for international students who seek the opportunity to stay in the country and fully embody the transition from student to a more permanently settled migrant.

The effort of Latin American to succeed in their courses at the same time that they have to work in physically-demanding and low-paid jobs, evidences how the selective migration system of Australia reaches its objective to bring in not only millions of dollars into its economy from Latin America, but a young, flexible workforce which is denied the rights of residents in health services and work rights. This in many ways invigorates the idea of a modern political economy which has perpetuated the practices of the past alienating a major workforce with the soft-power given to the immigrants to come and try to settle in a country that provides them with new opportunities of economic mobility that appear more difficult to achieve in their own countries.

In the next chapter a more detailed description of the history and growth of the Colombian community is presented introducing the core aim of the thesis which is to examine the pathways followed by a group of fifty Colombians migrating to Australia, by looking at their decision-making, settlement process, personal relationships in the new country, and the multiple identity positions that surround their life stories in Australia.
Chapter 3

Colombia-born Migrants to Australia: Who are They? Who are We?

The population of Colombia is estimated at 48.1 million people as of May 2015. Official data on the number of Colombians living in a foreign country is only available from the 2005 Censo General (that is, the national census), which at the time calculated there were 3.3 million Colombians abroad (Khoudour-Castéras 2007; Mejía 2012). On the other hand, data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reveals an alarming trend of increase in the number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Colombian territory. 525,000 people were forced to leave their homes and move to other regions or departments within Colombia in 2001. The number almost doubled in 2002 and was estimated at 2 million for 2005 (UNHCR, 2005). By July 2014, the number of IDPs had rocketed to 5.7 million which represents over 8% of the total population in Colombia’s territory (UNHCR, 2015). The armed conflict presents itself as one of the main causes for such massive movements of people. However, there are other factors that also prevail, such as the historical social inequalities, a weak system of law and justice unable to protect the population, and a lack of real government and state projects that aim at improving Colombians’ quality of life. With both data on the number of internal and international migrants it is difficult not to think that a large portion of the latter may have actually shared the causes of migration that led IDPs to leave their homes in rural Colombia. Even though my focus is on the immigration of Colombians to Australia the research encompasses an analysis of the recent migration waves to Australia that have brought individuals with much more diversified social, economic and political identities. Within that context, migration has changed from a unidirectional phenomenon that charged rich countries with the need to import labour from...

---

27 Other authors have larger estimates of 5 million Colombian emigrants (Guarnizo, 2008).
impoverished regions to a phenomenon that sees more complex webs of mobility as social inequalities are also seen in developed countries (Castles 2003) and therefore internal mobility is also at stake. For Castles (2003) countries worldwide sustain areas of growth and decline, both social and economic, producing conflict and forced migration, and therefore distinguishing the latter from economic migration is increasingly more difficult. Thus, there is a clear ‘asylum-migration nexus’ given the difficulty to attest separately economic and human right motivations that forced and ‘voluntary’ migrants have for their mobility (17). Yet, this nexus is more difficult to problematize when the actors involved are either unaware or reluctant to acknowledge the structural reasoning that has led them and many of their fellow country people to migrate. It is therefore easier to attribute their international migration to economic or social mobility reasons rather than offering reflections on the underlying influence internal conflict and weakness of the state have had on their migration decision-making.

My aim in this chapter is to discuss the motivations that have led Colombians to immigrate to Australia and offer a work-in-progress description of their mobility here by drawing on the social and historical past of Colombia which necessarily puts forced displacement in the scenario of migration of Colombians. I review part of the history of violence in Colombia and the lack of State action in order to contextualise the factors that may lead Colombians to migrate, internally and abroad. The extant research on Colombians in the US, Canada and the UK has illuminated the history and trends of their emigration and brings to the fore the social, political and economic enclaves that can also be seen attached to their mobility to Australia. In this chapter, I present the official data available on the features of the Colombian community in Australia followed by results from a socio-demographic survey exercise that serves to describe the pool of people who participated in my study and which sheds light on the on-going task of describing the wider community of Colombians here. Finally, I present the profiles of five of the forty-four Colombians who completed the survey as an introduction to the narratives of life experiences of Colombian immigrants in Australia which are analyzed thoroughly from Chapters 4 to 7.
The few studies that approach the flows of Colombian migration, regional and international, coincide in attributing such phenomena to a set of internal and external factors. These are summarized by Mauricio Cárdenas and Carolina Mejía (2006) as economic factors, social networks, migration policies, armed conflict and violence. Tracy Vunderink argues that the specific case of forced migration is due to ‘severe historical inequalities and injustice, lack of state involvement in matters of justice, policing and territorial control in many areas of the country, and the socio-political fragmentation of the population’ (2005: 1).

There is a structural inefficiency of the state in providing Colombians, specifically in the peripheral areas, with minimum guarantees of their legal rights. García Villegas and Espinoza (2013) analysis of the ‘institutional capacity’ in Colombia, looks at two of its dimensions, justice and administrative provisions in 1,103 municipalities of the country (43). They demonstrate that in 60% of the territory, inhabited by over six million people, representing 14% of the total population, there is an insufficient, if any, presence of the state. That is, in these areas there is not an effective judicial and law enforcement system that can ‘guarantee the exercise of fundamental rights’ (43)28.

The social and political dynamics in the country have caused different streams of violence that have degenerated from the left peasant guerrilla groups in the late 1950s to today’s incommensurable and uncontrollable ‘delincuencia común’ or common crime. Violence is so deeply embedded into the daily lives of Colombians that the public opinion has lost the sensitivity to grand acts of violence. In fact, as Daniel Pécaut explained in 1997:

Violence has become a mode of society functioning […] very few acts of violence are able to cause a generalized shock (918; my translation).

28 Translated from ‘hacer efectivos los derechos fundamentales’.
Certainly, grave violations of human rights in the hands of all armed forces in conflict (that is, guerrilla, paramilitaries and the military) appear so frequently and in so many different forms that there seems to be no lasting surprising factor amongst the general public. Mass media report such events alongside rather trivial matters (for example, soap operas, reality shows and beauty contests) that work as smoke screens to hide the cruel reality that encumbers the nation and that people face either directly or indirectly. A large section of Colombians have been left behind by the local and national lack of government and justice which is called by Garcia Villegas and Espinoza as ‘an institutional apartheid’ (2013: 120).

Daniel Pécaut and Liliana González’s (1997) observations on the ‘kaleidoscopic apprehension of violent acts’ by the public opinion could not be more valid for today’s state of affairs almost 20 years later. Since colonial times violence resulted from the unequal land tenure system for which encomenderos, or the Spain-born, and the high caste nobility, were granted large tracts of land whilst Indigenous peasants had to labour there. The system is still at work in modern Colombia, with an inequitable distribution of land that affects many Colombians, particularly low-income farmers, Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities. Land reform initiatives have been scarcely put in place and only after decades of displacement perpetrated by illegal forces, especially the paramilitary, peasants have the hope of returning home with the Victims and Land Restitution Law (Ley de Víctimas y de Restitución de Tierras, Law 1448, June 2011). But the problem is deemed to persist given the high concentration of land ownership by a rather small section of the total population. The early liberal guerrilla movements fought against this and for other social causes and were lined up with more people defending their own lives after La Violencia, or violence era, struck in 1946. The power battle between the Conservador and Liberal political parties took its bloodiest turn after Jorge Eliecer Gaitan’s assassination on 9 April 1948. One of my participants, Oscar, who had to join the armed peasant groups explains how La Violencia escalated to massive murder across Colombian territory. He summarises the conflict arising for political power and makes a strong assertion on the reasons why such atrocities were not as publicised as the deaths caused in other South American countries in times of military dictatorship. Oscar attributes these murders as sponsored and praised by the Catholic Church and ultimately the Conservatives. I do not intend to discuss further such claims; instead, I use Oscar’s
narrative to illustrate with the voice of one of my participants the intersection between forced and voluntary migration of Colombians. He claims to have fled Colombia precisely because of the social inequalities and economic endurances he continually faced even years after ‘La Violencia’. His father was murdered by the ‘chulivitas’—the death squads of the time—he then joined an armed group to defend his life. Oscar’s internal migration path continued as he left his hometown in the North of Valle del Cauca looking for a job in the region’s capital Cali, and then Bogotá and Amazonas. He should be accounted for as an internal displaced person, but in 1970 he managed to find financial aid that he calls ‘limosnas’ or charity to make his own way out of the country. His venture was facilitated by an Australian migration system that was importing skilled labour. He was able to migrate to Australia, yet, without his wife and twelve-year-old son. He fled Colombia, but before he had fled the countryside and for many years did not find himself at home until he settled in Sydney reunited with his family.

Continuing with the history of ‘La Violencia’, the National Front—the bipartisan agreement to alternate power turns in the presidency and official posts—did nothing to solve the already sabotaged social system in Colombia. Indeed, the bipartisan division imposed has generated a perennial impeding of national movements and social vindications for which other forms of violence emerged and continue unopposed. The violence that has reigned in Colombia since the late 1940s, with varying climaxes of force, can therefore be associated with three contexts (Pécaut & González 1997) or levels of understanding that revert into the past and most recent phenomena: ‘El contexto inmediato, es decir, las circunstancias políticas invocadas por amplios sectores de opinion […] para explicar la consolidación de la violencia. El contexto más lejano, aquel constituido por un pasado que permanece presente en todas las memorias y es designado por todos con el nombre de la violencia […] Y finalmente el contexto aún más remoto, aquel que se inscribe en la perspectiva histórica y se relaciona con las condiciones de formación de la nación y de su unidad inacabada’ (Ibid, 900). This spiral of elements eventually opened a space for the economy of drugs to fulfill what Pécaut calls ‘el deseo de acceder al consumo’ (that is, the desire to have access to consumerism) to overcome poverty or satisfy personal desire. This evokes an ultimate problem, according to Pécaut, which is the ‘absence of public opinion on the issue of drugs’ (Ibid, 900; my translation). However, reducing the exacerbating economy of drugs in all social and economic spheres to a lack of public opinion on drugs alone leaves unaccounted for the longstanding
social inequalities that have made narcotics such sought after business. Beyond the perception of the public the problem has to do with the lack of governance and comprehensive public policy that prioritises the wellbeing of all Colombian citizens. Therefore, the essential problem might be the lack of public opinion, and action, on the role and effective work of the government at all levels, local regional and national. With this context, it will be easy to affirm that the international migration of Colombians is in large part due to the episodes of violence and absence of justice and law enforcement from the state and government institutions, in summary, the lack of social and economic equity and the perpetuation of violence. However, these are only part of the factors that appear recurrently in the picture of the migratory moves from Colombia. Likewise, internal forced displacement and emigration collide and it is difficult to quantify the percentage of migration that has been caused directly or indirectly by the violence and social chaos in Colombia. It is even more difficult when migrants do not acknowledge such reasoning outside their very familiar circles and when there is not sufficient research addressing their migratory experience beyond socio-demographic and economic factors which overall tend to swipe the colonial history that shaped the nation and its institutions and the current state of affairs in Colombia.

**Colombians in the World**

William Mejía (2012) in his review of the developments of Colombian migration explains that the first destination for Colombians abroad has been Venezuela where 16,976 Colombians were recorded in the 1941 census there reaching 684,040 in 2011. Migration to the bordering country was mainly due to the oil industry peak between 1973 and 1982 (Mejía 2012: 190). A slower and almost insignificant emigration of agricultural workers and labourers from Colombia to Ecuador inaugurated a higher influx only in 1982; when the internal conflict escalated in Colombia. 93,237 Colombian nationals were accounted living in Ecuador in 2011 (Mejía 2012: 192). Mejía also pinpoints that the history of migration to the United States, which places it as the second country of destination after Venezuela, developed in two periods, between 1880 and 1889 with migrants of privileged social classes, and from
the 1960s with the arrival of a more diversified group of migrants: professionals, skilled labourers, middle class landowners, and small entrepreneurs. In the first ‘wave’ metropolitan New York, New Jersey and southern Connecticut and in lesser degree the south of Florida, were the main destinations for Colombian migrants who, at large, held university degrees (Guarnizo 2008: 13). While the second wave of immigrants to the U.S. was visibly more diverse, Europe continued to be a destination for privileged sectors of Colombians and increasingly for ‘political refugees, intellectuals and artists’ well into the 1980s and the more recent arrivals were pulled by the labour migration policies in the United Kingdom (14). Traditionally the migration of Colombians to the UK and more specifically to London had been restricted to the richest minorities who could afford travelling to pursue further studies, for example (11). Yet, more recent flows of migrants – which are counted between 50,000 and 70,000 in the London area – are indeed more heterogeneous and reflect Colombia’s own social, cultural and political diversity (12). Luis Guarnizo explains that the change from a very place-specific concentration and social origin of Colombian migrants to the multi-destination and rich diversity of today’s migrants is due in part to the unstable national economy. Colombia’s production market was opened for international competition through imports tax exemptions in the early 1990s causing the closing of thousands of private local companies and the privatization of public assets, diminishing on a large scale the social investment programs of the Colombian State (15). Rising unemployment and the coffee crisis of that followed boosted the exodus of Colombians of all social and economic origins. The peak of Colombian migration to Spain, for example, is attributed to these factors. 71,575 new arrivals were recorded in 2001, adding to a total of 118,148 Colombian residents in Spain in the same year’s census (Mejía 2012: 196). In alike fashion, Colombians who arrived between 1990 and 2004 to the UK assign part of their reasons to migrate to the overflow of professionals’ unemployment in Colombia and the ‘labour death’ for those older than 30 due to the increasing number of young workers hired as cheap labour (Guarnizo 2008: 15). Other factors have contributed as well to an even broader diversification of the destinations Colombians choose to migrate. When the United States started to narrow its paths of legal migration Colombians found opening doors in Canada, Spain, England, Italy and Germany, without mentioning the permanent flux to bordering and more nearby countries in Spanish-speaking Latin America. Based on the International Migration Database there has been an important increase in
the migration to Chile, Italy, Germany, Mexico and Australia among others since 2005, as well as in the number of returned migrants (Mejía 2012: 198). Even though these figures show there is a large pool of Colombian mobility abroad only a few research works have focused on Colombian migration in the US, Spain, the UK, Canada and France (Bermúdez 2003, 2011; Blain 2005; Guarnizo & Díaz 1999; Guarnizo 2008; Lamela et al 2009; Landlot & Goldring 2010; Mas Giralt 2011; Pozniak 2009; Riaño-Alcalá and Goldring 2006) and much more research needs to be done in different countries.

The study of Colombians in London by Luis Guarnizo draws on the socio-demographic description of these migrants and their participation in the local labour market as part of their ‘integration’ and the transnational relations with Colombia. Following data from the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Colombia (Colombia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs), there are 90,000 Colombian migrants in the UK (Guarnizo 2008: 24). Yet, the author estimates that the anti-immigration policy in the UK has narrowed to three the paths for legal migration there: asylum seeking, high skilled migration and family reunion (Guarnizo 2008: 24). Given the increase in the number of Colombians seeking refuge in the UK, the process has been tighten up and it is more difficult to prove claims for protection. Between 1996 and 2004, following Guarnizo, only 6.5% of the 5,390 asylum applicants were recognised and granted refugee status. This undoubtedly alienates people and deters them from seeking legal status as refugees leaving a large section of migrants unaccounted for by official agencies and without government support.

**Official Data on Colombians in Australia**

Amongst the little information that can be found on the early immigration of Colombians to Australia there is the section “Colombians” in James Jupp’s (1988) *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, its People and their Origins*, which acknowledges their numbers were ‘insignificant until the 1970s’ and the first indication of their presence was only noted in the 1911 census (Jupp 1988: 235).
The Department of Immigration and Border Protection, DIBP, (formerly known as DIAC29) offers two important sets of data describing the Colombia-born community in Australia at large. First, their publication *The People of Australia* (DIBP 2014), which includes a comparison overview of the number of Colombians in Australia recorded in the 2006 and 2011 censuses (3). Second, *Net Overseas Migration* (DIBP 2012), reports on the specific visa categories Colombia-born migrants held upon arrival to Australia in the year ending 30 September 2012. Following the first report, the 2006 census recorded 5,609 Colombian-born people living in Australia. In 2011, only five years later, this figure had increased by 98.2% accounting for 11,318 Colombian migrants.30 Precise data is not available as to the current Colombia-born population in Australia and will not be until the August 2016 census data are released. Comparative census data rank Colombia as the twelfth country of birthplace with fastest growth in Australia between 2006 and 2011, overtaking Brazil (14th) and Mexico (18th), and only outstripped by Venezuela (10th) (DIBP 2012). The rapid growth of the Latin American communities in Australia has consolidated Spanish as the seventh main language spoken in the country—excluding English and Indigenous languages—with 117,498 speakers in 2011 (DIBP 2014: 44).

Most of the 2,176 Colombians who arrived between September 2011 and September 2012 held one of four major visa categories: Student (1,722); Skill (142); Temporary Work (92); Humanitarian (less than 5). The remainder of arrivals (215) are not specifically accounted for in the DIBP’s (2012) report. During the same period 774 Colombians reportedly departed from Australia. Therefore, the net migration from Colombia is estimated in 1,402 people in the year ending in September 2012. The number of Colombians on student visas in this period is made up of four different main visa subclasses: ELICOS 31 (1,472)—students of English language intensive courses; higher education (185); postgraduate research (23); Schools (less than 5). Strikingly Colombia ranks first in the countries of origin granted ELICOS visas during that year, with 18.9% of the total, followed by Brazil (18.3%) and

---

29 Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

30 It is important to note here that census data from 2006 and 2011 may not have included a large part of Colombian migrants whose residency status at the time was temporary. This is different to data in the *Net Overseas Migration* report as their figures are ‘based on an international traveller’s duration of stay being in or out of Australia for 12 months or more over the 16 month period’(DIBP 2012: 144). Therefore, only the second report may have included a broader range of migrants, those with a minimum 12-month stay in the country.

31 English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students.
Saudi Arabia (9%) (DIBP 2012: 29). From these data a profile of the recent migrants can be initially drafted. However, as noted above, it will be only partial because it is unclear how many temporary visa holders, like students and business long stay, were included there. It can be assumed that an important section of the 11,318 Colombians accounted in 2011 have held or still holds a student visa following data from a third report, *Student Visa Program Trends* (DIAC 2013). There, the number of Colombians in Australia on student visas went from 2,651 in the financial year 2006-07 to 5,246 in the 2009-10 period, 4,570 ending 2011, and has maintained a steady growth accounting for 5,528 Colombian student visa holders in the financial year prior to the writing of this thesis, 2012-13 (DIAC 2013: 43). With these figures combined I estimate that for the year 2015 there are at least 19,000 Colombians in Australia including around 14,000 permanent residents and a floating population of 5,000 temporary residents.

To sum up, a first wave of Colombian migrants can be counted from the late 1960s until 1990. A second period was between 1991 and 2000. A third period was from 2001 to 2006 where it is estimated 20% of the total population of Colombians in Australia arrived; and the final and current wave of migration from 2007 to date, 2015, which until 2011 counted for 46% of the total number of Colombians in Australia (DIAC 2013b: 2). Even though my assumptions that there was an increasing number of Colombians in Sydney in the last few years, since 2008, are defended by official statistics, one of the aims I wanted to fulfil was to find more details on the overall Colombian migration to Australia, not only to refer to quantitative data, but to identify the reasons leading to these people’s migration, their process of decision making and their early experience of settling in the new country. What these data shows so far is that the implications of being a migrant to Australia might be strongly attached to a social, educational and economic background that may differ from the implications in other border environments (Vila 1997), or more traditional destination locales, namely, Venezuela, Ecuador, the US, Spain and the UK, but at the same time this aspect needs to be contextualised more thoroughly since there is no further data on the characteristics of the community, their mobility and experiences in Australia.
The survey designed for this study had fifty questions asking participants for personal information (for example, age, occupation, highest level of education, work experience, residency status, and current postcode); arrival in Australia (for instance, reasons to migrate, initial accommodation arrangements); life in Australia (for example, relationships with other Colombians and people from different nationalities), contact with their home country (for example, frequency and means of); interest on Colombian and Australian news (for example, frequency and type of media sought); and their plans for the future. The estimated time for completion of the online survey was between 15 and 30 minutes. When completed in person (that is, the researcher asking the questions verbally) completion times stretched to about one hour and a half. In a very exceptional case, one of the participants was keen to tell his anecdotes relating to the survey questions and our first meeting lasted over three hours.

The survey served two fundamental purposes; first, it was used to introduce the study and the researcher to the wider community of Colombians in Australia, as an open option for people interested in taking part of the study, advertisements included an electronic link for the online version of the survey. A second and ultimate purpose was to gather more specific details on the potential participants that could shed light on the profiles of the members of the wider community. It was intended as a way to contextualise the social and demographic characteristics of those who would participate sharing their experience of migration to Australia. The data analysis I present here remains as a work-in-progress task to be enriched in a larger interstate and national enquiry when the findings from this study can be socialized to a wider public. Information collected through the survey allows me to draw patterns in the biographical data of participants, their decision-making process to migrate, how Colombian immigrants envision Australia and their relationship with others here, their familiarity with Colombia and their personal future endeavours. The survey was accessed for completion by 50 people between June 2013 and August 2014, but six online surveys had to be withdrawn as personal details could not

---

32The initial aim was to reach 100 respondents but lack of trust in the online tool by people interested and the lack of serious support by the Consulate General of Colombia in Sydney made this task more difficult.
be verified, or there were a few missing responses and in one case, coarse language was used. Thus, analysis is based on responses by 44 people, fifteen of them filled out on the paper version and the rest from the online private software. Of those, 31 were interviewed and continued their long-term participation in the study.

Participants’ Biographical Data

Participants in this study are aged between 23 and 87 years old with a mean age of 43.3 and a median of 36.5 years. The length of migration of this group of Colombians is between 2 years and 51 years with a mean stay of 13.4 years in Australia. Twenty-four respondents are female and twenty are male, representing 54.5% and 45.5% of the sample respectively. Graph 1 shows the relation between the age groups plotted for analysis and the number of women and men in each of them. The largest number of participants (52%) is aged between 28 and 37 with seventeen women and six men. It is followed by the 38-47 year olds with an even gender distribution. The number of participants over 58 years old (N=8) represents 18% of the sample.

Graph 5: Number of Participants per Age Groups and Sex

Arrival dates are recorded from year 1964 to 2013 and for ease of analysis were grouped into seven periods. 8 out of 44 respondents (18.2%) arrived between 2001 and 2004 while half of the sample
did between 2006 and 2010. Graph 2 illustrates that a large number of female participants (N=16) arrived in this period. Data on year of arrival could be seen skewed into the period ending 2010 because of the preference calling for participants who had arrived in or prior this year. Yet, this also can be seen reflecting the overall population increase by 46% between 2007 and 2014 (DIAC 2013b). There were four survey respondents who arrived between 2011 and 2013.

![Graph 6: Number of Participants per Year of Arrival and Sex](image)

Participants are predominantly from Bogota (40.9%), Medellin and Risaralda (11.4% each). Graph 3 shows the other cities and departments of origin that make up for 36% of the sample and the number of women and men from each of them.

---

33 These figures are consonant with the data shown above on the increase of Colombian population in Australia, as officially recorded, between 2001-2006 and 2007-2011 (DIAC, 2013b).

34 Municipalities and small towns are represented with the name of their department for ease of reference (for example, Dos Quebradas and Marsella are included under their department’s name, Risaralda).
At the time of the survey 21 participants had an undergraduate degree and 16 a postgraduate one. Five had a vocational or technical degree and only one claimed he had not finished primary school and was self-taught. So, overall this is a sample with a high level of educational achievements with 84% of people at the graduate level. However, there is no information on whether people in this group obtained their degrees in Colombia or in Australia and only an assumption can be made from their responses to their reasons for migration where doing a postgraduate course is between the main reasons but only with 11.8% of answers. Therefore, it is safe to assume a large part of the sample obtained their degrees before migrating.

Contrary to my own expectations at the beginning of the study, a majority of participants (N=32) held an Australian Citizenship (54.5%) or the Permanent Residence (8.2%), while only 12 were on a Temporary Visa (including student visa). Most of them were in the workforce (75%) and for the 11 people who were not employed at the time of the survey, 5 were retired, 4 were seeking a job and 2
were caring full-time for their children. This is an indication that holding a permanent residence does not necessarily imply being employed in Australia as Graph 4 shows.

Amongst the wide range of occupations respondents had at the time of the survey there were architects, engineers, accounting assistants, project managers, childcare workers, waitresses, bartenders, cleaners, and quality control managers. The questionnaire did not ask about the perceptions participants had on their own job mobility, yet, combining information on the previous job they had in Colombia and their current position in Australia, it can be said that 12 participants (27.3%) have kept a similar occupational level to the one they had in Colombia, as they work in positions with similar levels of salary; 19 (43.2%) improved it as they have obtained higher paying jobs and higher responsibilities after migrating; and 13 of them (29.5%) have diminished it because they are not hired in their area of expertise or have low or unskilled jobs instead. These figures are rather approximations based on an arbitrary comparison between their past and present job positions and do not correspond to determined scales or measurements per se. Nonetheless, they help introduce the very much evoked issue of the type of work participants and Colombians are seen to be doing in Australia and which I discuss in Chapter 4.
Even though the reasons for leaving one’s country might be very personal and specific, respondents pointed out two main reasons why they left Colombia: To learn or improve their English language, and to live a new or different experience (17.6% each), followed by to complete postgraduate studies (11.8%) and to get to know another culture (8%). In addition to the closed options provided, 12 participants shared different personal reasons, counting for 11.8% of the total, which contributed to their decision-making: being sponsored by a company to work in Australia, to have met or married an Australian partner, to have family members living here, to increase the chance of getting a good job in Colombia, to achieve their dream of living abroad, for dissatisfaction with their life in Colombia, and to seek political protection.

Foreseeing that participants could be reluctant to acknowledge certain reasons to migrate when asked directly or that options may not have covered every reason, a further question sought to get more details. It confirmed that to learn English was indeed among the primary reasons to migrate (25%) and to obtain a university degree was also a clear motivation for their migration (15.9%). However, compared with the first set of questions, a larger number of participants acknowledged they chose to migrate to Australia because they could work here. Indeed, as it has been mentioned above, the recent mobility of people to Australia is largely composed of international students who can extend their visas through different migration streams, and since 2011 via the Temporary Graduate Visa, Skilled Migration Scheme and for some nationalities, including Chile, Work and Holiday visas (Robertson 2011, 2014). Even though initial plans may be for a short stay, many of those who arrive as international students and temporary residents have different options to prolong it. Tables 1 and 2 below display the frequency of options chosen by participants to explain their reasons to come to Australia.36

---

35 For original wording in Spanish see Appendix B.
36 Dichotomy groups tabulated at value 1 on SPSS.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons to come to Australia (First choice)</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To undertake postgraduate studies</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn or improve your English</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work and save money</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To live a different/new experience</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get to know another culture</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To seek a future for your family</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to the insecurity on Colombia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to the social/economic situation in Colombia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To become independent from your family</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You had family where to arrive</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to political persecution</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Reasons to come to Australia (First Choice)
These figures reveal that despite the self-evident social, economic and security crisis that a large number of Colombians endure and have lived with for decades, these are not presented as immediate or central reasons for this group of migrants in their decision-making to leave their country and travel to Australia. In fact, ‘insecurity in Colombia’ is only chosen as a cause in 3.9% of cases and ‘the social/economic situation’ 7.8%. Only one of the additional comments referred to the latter, and two more people claimed their only reason to migrate was to protect their lives from political persecution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Further reasons to migrate to Australia</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could work here</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted an opportunity to stay (e.g. finding a partner)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I saw it as an adventure</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to learn English</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted a postgraduate degree abroad</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had family here so things should be easier</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to travel</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was searching political protection</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Further Reasons to Migrate to Australia
Envisioning Australia and People Here

A number of questions gave respondents space to tell of the ways they perceived the people in the host country and their relationships with them. Overwhelmingly, Colombians construct a very positive image of Australia, Australians and other immigrants here. In their comments to open ended questions, they paint Australia as a country which offers ‘opportunities for everyone’ (for example, to get a job, to pay for their own studies), appreciates their knowledge, and awards their work performance; it has a ‘system with social guarantees’ and support programmes, ‘norms and rules for everyone’ reflected in ‘la cultura ciudadana’ (that is, their civic culture) and ‘the sensation of safety’. Australians are seen as ‘acogedores’, or welcoming and also ‘receptive, kind, honest’ and ‘simple people’, in cases where they were reported to be interested in the exoticism Colombians may bring; ‘accepting, tolerant and respectful’ of them and people from other cultures. ‘People in general’ are seen by some respondents as ‘open and interested’ in their culture. Among the things they like the most from Australia there are: to feel safe here (36.4%) followed by being able to study and work (11.4%) and among ‘other’ personal answers (20.5%) predominates a sense of having ‘quality of life’, have found their partner in Australia and formed their own family here.

Respondents highlight less positive aspects of their experience in Australia around four topics: language, work, stereotypes and legal migration processes. Table 3 shows some of the comments respondents provide referring to situations that have made them feel uncomfortable or alienated in Australia in reference to those issues. One of the problems they pinpoint is their lack or perceived lack of knowledge of the English language. They feel or have felt alienation when they ‘didn’t speak English well’ and ‘communicating was not easy’ or when some people do not understand their accent. Interestingly, they say to have felt discriminated in their early days in Australia when their ‘English was not very good’. Thus, their rapport in their social relations was very much affected by how they perceived their own use of the language and may not necessarily have been an issue of discrimination.
against them. However, as is explored in Chapter 4, the perceived lack of English predominates as a discriminatory factor amongst Colombians themselves when they have felt judged by fellow migrants on their good or bad level of English language use. A second difficulty, for some, has been to ‘grow professionally’ and being able to get ‘high paying jobs with big responsibilities’. One of the respondents says that the job options are limited for Colombians, but this is again very much related to one’s own experience. As I explain in the next section, a good number of Colombians have been able to find a job in their area of expertise or profession, whilst a large number of ‘newcomers’, especially on ELICOS student visas, have to work as cleaners and in the services and retail sector, understanding that these positions are at the entry level and deemed flexible for their English course timetables.

The Australian migration policy is seen as complex and adding to these migrants struggle to find jobs. The education-migration nexus, as explained by Robertson (2014, 2011) requires students-turned-migrants to endure not only the formal process of belonging to Australia’s polity, but, in the meantime, downward job mobility and even exploitation due to their initial visa working restrictions (for example, twenty hours per week, or maximum six months with a single employer for work and holiday makers). Colombians complain that because of their short term visas and visa type employers prefer not to hire them, even if their curriculum and experience is worthwhile. Lastly, a few respondents in the survey (and later much more in the interviews and related activities) refer to being the target of jokes, or meant-to-be-funny remarks on the relationship between Colombia and drug trafficking, violence and corruption. This is labelled as ‘racist’ and ‘discrimination’ by a number of participants. For some of those who have been targeted with comments on their relation with drugs, it is a matter of the ‘lack of education’, ‘lack of interest’ and in many cases the ‘poor knowledge’ mainstream Australians, seem to have of other countries and cultures. Informants offered these observations in the hope that the study can contribute to let people know different things about those from Colombia in Australia. Table 3 shows further remarks Colombians made on situations where they felt unwelcome in the new country.

37 Participants describe these Australians refering to people born or raised in Australia.
38 For original wording in Spanish see Appendix B.
## Respondents’ comments on situations that have made them feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in Australia

### Speaking English:
- When some people don’t understand ‘the accent’ and don’t ask you politely to repeat.
- When my English wasn’t at its best I felt some racism because I didn’t communicate easily.
- Some times discriminated because I didn’t manage the language very well.
- At the beginniing when I didn’t understand what they said.
- When I spoke in Spanish close to people who didn’t understand it.

### Finding a job:
- Lack of a better reception as working force
- Discrimination to get high level jobs or with big responsibilities.
- When job options for Colombians are limited.
- The difficulty to advance professionally. Likewise it is difficult to expand your social circle.
- It’s difficult to show that your experience and knowledge are valid in an English speaking country.

### Dealing with stereotypes:
- Most of people make jokes in relation to Colombia, drugs or corruption.
- Sometimes by saying that you’re Colombian people mention drugs and violence.
- There is discrimination in small or simple things, especially for Colombians, when people don’t see beyond the stereotype of drug trafficking.
- When people ask me if I got cocaine.
- The sarcastic sense of humour of the uneducated Australians and their ignorance about general culture and the reality of other countries.

### Australian migration procedures:
- A complex migration policy and in general excluding for Colombians.
- When I had to wait four years to get my residency.
- I’ve tried to find a job in my area and I’ve felt discriminated for my visa status.
- Sometimes I feel some uneasiness with the migration policies.

---

Table 3: Colombians’ Comments on Situations Where They Have Felt Unwelcome in Australia

106
On a different set of questions participants commented on the things that they did not like about living here. Travel time to and from Australia seems like an obvious choice among the things people do not particularly like (28.2%), but living cost and high cost of services (15.5% and 11.7% respectively), which could be placed in a single category, are more material-based choices. Even though efforts were made to include a varied set of options for these multiple-choice questions, I ought to admit that my early wording choices were influenced by my little knowledge of Colombians with an Australian Citizenship or Permanent Residency. I was more familiar with temporary visa holders and the options given on things Colombians like or dislike of Australia might be biased to some degree. Colombians underscore they have felt discriminated by Anglo-Australians (33.8%) and by other Colombians (21.5%) while those who recognise to have exerted discrimination say it has been against other Latin Americans (26.7%), other Colombians (23.3%), and people from other countries: non-ethnic or non-Anglo Australians, (23.3%). These answers are consistent with participants’ narratives on their relations with other Colombians and their wider community, as I explain in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5, where stories abound on the perceived non-collegiality among Colombians themselves.

Post-Migration Contact with Colombia

To understand more about the level and type of contact participants maintain with Colombia, three sets of questions were asked about their longing of their home country, their frequency of contact with family and friends there and their interest and knowledge of Colombia’s current affairs. Overall, participants would like to have the sensation of safety they have in Australia back in Colombia (26.3%), the quality of life (21.9%) and along with this, the ‘civic culture’ and respect for the law (14.9%). They overwhelmingly miss their family and friends (48.3%), the variety of foods (17.5%) and the ‘people’s energy’ among other things plotted in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things Colombians miss from their country</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people’s energy</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of social ambiences/choices for entertainment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and/or variety of food</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partying/nightlife</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety and/or low cost of services (e.g.convenience stores, hairdresser)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Things Colombians Miss from Their Country.

Despite claiming they miss their family and friends highly, the frequency of contact with each group differs. While 50% of participants say they have contact with their families several times a week, the contact with friends is mostly from time to time (52.3%) or rarely (22.7%). Two of the participants explain this difference saying that as time goes past they ‘distanced from people in Colombia’ especially when for certain age ranks their friends in Colombia are ‘getting married and having children and there is less free time’ to keep in touch.

Even though an important number of participants claim they rarely or never listen to or read Colombian news, 45% of them do seek this information often or every day and 20% from time to time. Amongst the media sources sought there are Colombian online newspapers (35.7%) and social networking (25.5%) and in third place Colombian online radio stations (12.2%). Colombians are mainly interested in politics, national security, the economy and the social situation of their country. In line with their state of permanence in Australia, Colombians have a higher frequency of access to Australian news compared to Colombian ones. 77% say they listen to or read Australian news on a daily basis or
several times a week while only 13.6% do rarely, compared to the 27.3% presented for the Colombian news case. Amongst the topics of interest in Australian news the economy predominates followed by politics. At least four of the respondents say they are interested in all topics that have to do with Australia, and one of them asserts, ‘when you are trying to be part of a country all events are relevant’.39

**Personal Future Endeavours**

Another way to look at the closeness of participants with their country was asking them whether they were willing to return to Colombia, for either a short or longer period, and this is approached with a four-tier set of questions: How many times have you visited your country since you came to Australia? Would you like to return to Colombia for good? How much longer do you plan to stay in Australia? What would you do in Colombia if were to return there? 18 out of 44 respondents (40.9%) have visited Colombia once or twice, another 10 (22.7%) have done it between 3 and 5 times and 7 participants (15.9%) reported six or more visits. Only 9 people (20.5%) have not returned for the first time. This indicates that 79.5% of the people surveyed have visited Colombia after their migration move, therefore it is safe to say that Colombian migrants in Australia have got a close relationship with their home country and despite the high travelling cost and distance, they keep a physical connection with Colombia. This trend is at odds with their responses to a possible definite return to their country. Only 6 of respondents (13.6%) are completely affirmative in their desire to return for good, while 18 (40.9%) are sure they do not want to return and other 18 do not know or are not certain. In summary, even though respondents are overwhelmingly in contact with their families and friends in Colombia and make physical presence and connections there upon returning more than once for holidays or personal matters, the majority of 36 (81.8%) is not considering a prolonged return to their home country.

39 Translated from ‘cuando usted está tratando de hacer parte de un país todos los acontecimientos son relevantes’.
For those who would consider returning an option, the main reason for such a move is that they miss their family (38.1%), but answers are scattered evenly for other choices related to having achieved their goals in Australia, good opportunities awaiting in Colombia, and to feeling bad about working on something different to their career or profession. However, given that the number of people responding to this is very low (N=6) further presumptions are not made. The lack of desire to return is reconfirmed in a further question asking on the thoughts it brings the possibility of going back home. Going only for visiting is the first option chosen with 40.7% of responses. Also, questioning their planned length of stay in Australia most of participants, 31 out of 44, say they intend to stay here permanently.

All participants shared their thoughts on what they would do in case they returned to Colombia. Their answers to this are related to three distinct options: to open their own business, travel within Colombia, and seek ways to help people there, the community. A few others believe they would have to start from zero if they wanted to go back to their profession. Two of the respondents’ comments reflect on how their experience in Australia inspires them to think of how to help improve the lives of other Colombians in their country:

P: Me gustaría ayudar a las personas de avanzada edad. Me gusta el sistema de ayuda y entretenimiento que tiene el gobierno australiano para la personas de la tercera edad y me encantaría que nuestro país tuviera una prioridad por tanta gente que existe en los ancianatos.

P: I’d like to help the elderly. I like the welfare system and entertainment [sic] the Australian government has got for the elderly people and I’d love that my country gave priority to so many people in geriatric centres.

P29 Carmen (58, 2004)

***

P: Trabajar en temas sociales. Aplicar mi carrera pero trabajando para contribuir al país. Definitivamente no sería empleado de nuevo. Acá en Australia me he dado cuenta de lo mucho que las empresas colombianas se aprovechan de los empleados y como resultado la calidad de vida disminuye, no hay tiempo de ocio.
P: To work in social issues. To apply my degree but working to contribute to the country. I wouldn’t be an employee again, absolutely. In Australia I’ve realized how the Colombian companies take advantage of employees and as a result the quality of life decreases, there is no leisure time.

P40 Rocio (36, 2007)

*Colombian Migrants in Australia: A Broad Profile*

Among my participants I find they identify other immigrants and themselves as two broader groups, the ‘old migrants’, the ones that are now elderly and retired, and the ‘new migrants’, those still in the workforce. The participants’ year of migration—which tells of their length of stay in Australia—and their age at the time of data collection, are the two main features that may allow for a socio-demographic characterization of these two groups of immigrants. However, a third factor prevails and that is the reason of migration along with the path followed for their current residency status.

Within the ‘old migrants’ wave there are three groups of migrants: those who arrived holding a professional degree or with high-skilled experience and pursued a job offer in their area of expertise; those with a technical degree and who worked in either related or non-related areas of their skill; and the political refugees who had initial financial support from the Australian government, but eventually had to find a job and grow independent of such aid. In the ‘new migrants’ wave, there is an overall dominant group of migrants holding a university degree, along with those with technical or vocational degrees. The sub-groups of migrants found are four: English language students (ELICOS), master or postgraduate degree students, sponsorship or working visa holders, mature professionals who decided to migrate bringing the whole family or joining their next of kin living in Australia. There are also tourist visa holders who found alternatives to extend their stay in the country. The means by which these immigrants became permanent residents of Australia, or are still pursuing such a status, are varied. There are those who at the end of their studies in Australia applied for residency given their occupational skill was included in the migration policy at the time of their application, or because they found a
sponsorship. Sponsors for those in my sample are two: a business or company endorsing their application, or a spouse or partner requesting their residency. Now, another three groups are traced from this. Among those ‘new migrants’ there are those with a permanent residence status, and those non-residents, either in process of application or still on student visas. A third group is those Colombian, primarily women, who got married to an Australian or a non-Colombian. Each of these sub-groups may be subject for further research.

The details presented above serve to characterise the cohort of participants based on: their key motivations to migrate; age of migration; their visa status at the time of arrival or their current visa status; their level of educational achievement, their occupation or job mobility; their family status; among other factors. However, certainly this group of migrants appear to share those and many other traits for which trying to categorise participants from a single category could leave other important features unaccounted for. Notwithstanding this potential for variables within a national category, in order to frame the profiles of immigrants somehow, Figure 1 presents the salient subgroups of participants according to their initial migration status and educational background upon arrival to Australia. More specific traits particular to each participant are discussed throughout the thesis when further analysis of narratives are presented. In the following, a detailed description of a number of participants helps introduce the type of personal histories, processes of migration and post-migration that can be found in each of the sub-groups identified. It needs to be clarified that circumstances of migration and the pathways participants used to being able to stay longer in Australia may be inter-related to one or another group’s circumstances. Thus, the following description touches on part of the process that some Colombians in Australia have faced and therefore fellow nationals are likely to have faced or face upon arrival.
Camilo, 76, arrived in 1972

Camilo arrived in Australia 43 years ago at 33 years of age and was 76 at the time of field research\textsuperscript{40}. He is one of the Colombians who migrated having a university degree (that is, in engineering) and with a job waiting for him in Australia. He migrated with his wife and children, but after a few years got divorced and formed a new family later in life with a European woman. Precisely his divorce marked a period where he lost his job in the multinational company which brought him to Sydney and the home he had bought for his family on their first year of stay. Finding a new job and progressing in his career brought along with it a new sense of life for him which he says to be enjoying to date when he is retired.

\textsuperscript{40} Participants’ age is that at the time of the interviews held in 2013.
and can spend his time going to the bowling club or his local RSL.\textsuperscript{41} club. At the time of migration Camilo enjoyed a good socio-economic position which had allowed him to graduate in Bogota and then study in France for two years. After returning to Colombia he decided he wanted to seek adventure somewhere else and a key push factor was the social situation he found back in Colombia. However, he acknowledges he simply wanted to travel and have a new life experience. He does not rule out the possibility of returning to Colombia one day and be closer to his family, as his wife would agree to this, but certainly leaving his grown up children behind is not an immediate option. He was first interested in sharing his life story for the study because he lauds himself as one of the early members of the Colombian Association based in Sydney and he was interested in contributing to the description of the community with documents and archives he has collected. However, I wanted to limit his participation to the individual level with the possibility of including archival work in further research. In his account of how he became involved with a group of Colombians in Sydney, he regrets having learnt that a good number of his fellow members were involved in illegal activities. Camilo was almost victim of a drug scam by agreeing to bring a parcel for a friend when he returned from Colombia. To make things worse, he tells me of his anguish when in one of the popular ‘Fiestas de Fin de Año’ (that is, end of year gatherings) organised by the Colombian Association in Sydney, his son was bullied by other young Colombians there, and since then he started to isolate himself and his family from the Colombian community to the point of having scarce contact with other Colombians in Australia. This is a rather ambivalent situation; Camilo enjoys telling me about the social activities he used to take part in with the Colombians he knew in his early years in Australia, and even though his experience with them did not end well, he is keen to contribute to the depiction of the Colombian community here. One could say the pride for his own work for the community at the time keeps alive vivid memories that could not be erased by the negative experiences he had later. His story is also found in a number of accounts where Colombians regret the behaviour of fellow immigrants and indicate they are better off without engaging with the community.

\textsuperscript{41} Returned & Services League of Australia.
Carlos, 77, arrived in 1983

Carlos has lived in Australia for 32 years and migrated at an age of 45. He had a sister living in Australia which helped him to make the final decision to migrate. His primary reason to leave Colombia was his growing concern for the safety of his children. At the time they were finishing secondary school and several of his family friends had children incarcerated in Spain for drug trafficking. Bad influences were readily available and Carlos did not want his own children to follow an increasingly common situation. The last straw was a serious incident his son suffered being robbed, he was stabbed and critically injured. Carlos describes the years leading to his migration as ‘the age of the apocalypses’ in Colombia where drug smugglers, corruption, guerrilla and ‘delincuencia común’ threatened the lives of Colombians daily. This was in the early 1980s; however, the situation does not seem to have changed at all. In fact, he regrets that after his only two visits to Colombia, the most recent in 2011, the country is stagnated without any visible social progress and predicts nothing will change the situation. Carlos was a chemical technician and worked as a laboratory manager at a public university in the department of Caldas. His family in Australia were able to find him a job in his field of expertise, therefore he maintained his technical currency after migrating and was able to retire in the same company where he started work. Even though he was not a fluent speaker of English upon arrival he believes he could communicate well using technical terms that were quite standard for the job he had.

Carlos describes the big shock his family had to see that local stores, restaurants and supermarkets were closed from Friday at 3pm until Monday 9am. He says it was difficult to adapt to this new schedule coming from the city of Manizales where commerce was open almost 24 hours or at least well into the night. In one of his anecdotes he recalls going away on a weekend with his wife and children and after running out of food not being able to find any place open to eat. They were all starving. Thirty years later commerce trading hours are still restricted and it seems to be a big difference also noticed by more recent migrants.

Carlos’s experience with the community of Colombians also in the early days of the Colombian Association in Sydney was much more positive than for Camilo. Carlos was even part of the executive
committee and prides himself on having achieved several fund-raising activities that maintained the finances of the group until he decided it was time to let others get involved. He regrets young people do not attend the events organised by the association and are quite ‘afraid’ of being with other Colombians. Carlos claims to have lived fully and have embraced his new life in Australia educating his children here and now seeing his grandchildren grow up as well. He has enjoyed making new friends not only from Colombia but from many other countries and socializing with them especially by playing golf. He does not long to return to Colombia; indeed, the first time he went for holidays was 14 years after his migration, and a second visit was only two years prior to our interview. In spite of this apparent lack of desire to be physically present in Colombia he keeps very close contact with his family there and has even engaged in tracking down the history of the past generations of his family. He does not think he would ever return to Colombia, he says ‘we are not going to separate the family again’; more than 12 people of his family live currently in Australia.

Diego, 60, arrived in 1994

Diego’s story is unique in most aspects starting from the fact that he is one of the few political refugees in Australia and the first I came across with in this project. Diego shared with me fascinating anecdotes and very personal accounts in a first meeting that lasted for about 3 hours. Since we first met he showed great interest in telling his story. I wanted him to read the documents and fill out the survey in his own time but he enthusiastically started telling me his story. Then, while I was filling out the survey for him, he was providing quite detailed answers. This was very helpful as I came to know a lot about him before our later interview. Diego arrived in Australia twenty years ago on a protection visa he secured from Venezuela where he had been living for over a year until his life was threatened again due to his political affiliations. He had started questioning social injustice from an early age and had endured poverty through academic excellence. In one of his teenage anecdotes he tells he won a bursary to cover his secondary school expenses in Chiquinquira, a small city about three hours from his hometown. But, at the time, his parents did not know what a bursary was and were even uncertain where the town was
located. He could not take the award. At another time he got very sick and was unable to attend school for weeks, he says he could not understand why his parents would not take him to a doctor, there was none in his town and they did not have the means to transport him to the closest surgery. This crude reality made him reflect on the inequalities that surrounded people in his town and the reasons behind them. Eventually he entered university and obtained an engineering degree but had been lured to take a real political position and started a career there. Things did not end well as he had to flee Colombia in the midst of the political persecution directed towards the left party UP (Unión Patriotica) of the late nineties. He longs badly to return to Colombia and continue with his political and social causes, but he cannot go back without safety guarantees as yet and instead he has to face the awkward and broken relationship with his children and ex-partner in Australia. This has left him with deep depression and thinking once and over again how bad it feels to be alone in this country, living by his own, and unable to do what he really wants, to work for Colombia's peace and future.

Francia, 44, arrived in 1997

Francia’s motivations to visit Sydney were mostly straightforward. Her father had died recently and the food business she had set up with a friend had to be closed. She had ‘nothing to lose’, she wanted to have a respite from her grieving and mostly from a failed love relationship she had invested a lot in. Francia was single, and certainly wanted to ‘be free’ from his family and her pain. She travelled to Australia on a tourist visa to ‘see how it was here’, she had the money and just wanted an ‘adventure’ at 27 years old, but also had in mind she could finally meet someone to start a family with. She did, but it did not last long. Francia found a Colombian in Sydney and had three children with him, but they got divorced and now, she says, she is a single mum who has to make decisions every day regarding her children on her own. Francia and her partner overstayed their visas and were undocumented for a while. She claims it was an absurd to have overstayed when she could have applied for a skilled visa, due to her university degree in Colombia, but no one told her what she could do and lived with the fear of deportation for a long time. They managed to ‘get the papers’ and because of her experience of not
being told by other Colombians critical information she wants to help other Colombians who are new in Australia and has set up a number of websites to do so. My first impression of Francia was solely related to the appearance of her household. She has three boys and her household was a bit messy on the first day I visited her. In my early notes I almost implied that her personal life was unbalanced and being a single mother had a big effect on that, but this was an inaccurate observation based only on how her house looked to me. When I came back to interview her this view changed quite a bit and even though there was still that sense of messiness around the house, Francia’s own views and personal reflections on her own life, her family and Colombia showed me she is a very strong well-minded person, much more down-to-earth than I previously thought. She gave me vivid examples from her experience as an immigrant that I felt identified with and others that sound like an insightful summary of what other participants have shared. In one of her remarkable anecdotes she tells me how she felt an incredible need to talk every day with her family in Colombia, she used to chat with them daily on Skype, but she then had to take the decision to break that tie, or the ‘umbilical cord’, as she says, because she was not living her life as she was spending too much time virtually connected to Colombia. She longed to be there but she ‘had to make a decision’ otherwise her anxiety would worsen, because after finishing her chat she would be left with a sensation of loneliness and she had to learn to live with that.

Profiles of Four ‘New’ Colombian Migrants

Martha, 37, arrived in 2006

Martha is one of the recent migrants who arrived in Australia in 2006. She is 35 years old and works in the corporate sector in Sydney as a finance manager. Her pathway to progress in her career was not an easy one though. She had come to Australia on a student visa to complete an English course, but she says she was motivated to migrate after a number of colleagues have done it recently and there were good opportunities and high prospects for obtaining a residence visa once she got here. Martha had saved enough money for her own expenses thanks to her previous job in the construction sector in
Colombia. She wanted a life change and the hope that she could keep working in her field of expertise was very appealing. She started working as a cleaner while she improved her English in a ‘marathon run’, and until she could find the opportunity of a ‘better job’. Her biggest worry was that she could ‘lose points’\(^{42}\) from her job experience in Colombia if she did not find a similar job in Sydney before applying for a permanent residence. She finally got an entry level job at a barrister’s office and was able to apply as an accountant under the skilled migration program in 2007. She kept her night job as a cleaner well after her residence was approved because it was not easy to find a job truly related to her career and she needed to pay for her expenses. At the time of our interview Martha was preparing her wedding to a non-Colombian Australian citizen. They had been living together for a few years and she wanted to get married in Colombia. She does not have plans to return there for good as her partner does not speak Spanish and does not see himself making a living there. Instead, Martha plans to bring her mother for a long stay in Australia to help her care for their future children and hopes her siblings will come to visit and stay as well. She thinks it does not matter that they are not in Colombia as long as her mother and her siblings are together, ‘the extended family does not matter, only us’.

Andrés, 36, arrived in 2003

Andrés is one of the many participants with a strong career progress and success. He arrived shortly after graduating from agricultural engineering in Colombia and to continue postgraduate studies at one of Sydney’s prestige universities. Similar to Martha he gained his permanent residence thanks to the skilled migration program of the time, in 2004, and thanks to his first job as a factory manager in southern Sydney. But it was not easy to find that first work experience:

---

\(^{42}\) These points are awarded related to different criteria achieved by an applicant for permanent residency in several categories such as age, profession, work experience, studies in Australia, among others.
P: comencé a mandar hojas de vida pero en esa época como estaba sin la visa es muy complicado, yo mande yo creo que unas ciento cincuenta hojas de vida, y de ahí me dieron como unas tres entrevistas.

P: I started sending out resumés but at that time because I was without the visa it’s complicated, I think I sent around one hundred and fifty resumés and from those I got three interviews.

P26 Andrés (34, 2003)

Andrés’s professional success is not only due to his perseverance, but to have been able to choose between his career progression and his real desire of helping others progress with his help. He quit the job he dreamed of since he was a university student and for which he tried at least three different times to get with a renowned multinational company. He is now a manager of a non-for-profit organisation which sponsors community projects in regional Australia. His partner is an Australia-born who is keen to learn his language and more so to live for a while in Colombia. He thinks this is a bit difficult because he is now used to certain ‘comodidades’, or comfort, he would not be able to have in Colombia if he was to find a job there: ‘the non-for-profit industry is not something easy to find in Colombia, and is only slowly starting to develop there’. From his managerial position he has had a range of experiences with Colombians who seek his help to find a job because of his top level job position and he is Colombian as well. ‘There are people who come here and ask me to help them, to help their cousin, their nephew, because they have been here for two or three months and haven’t found a job, and I think that is a long time, if they have not found a job it must be because of something else, I cannot help someone I don’t know anything about just because they are Colombian. The most I can do is to tell them to send their CVs and direct them to the human resources manager, but I cannot be accountable for anyone whose work I am not familiar with.’ However, he says, the Colombians that work for him on a contract basis are very good and reliable: ‘I am happy to work with Colombians because they are easily motivated as opposed to say local Australians’. Yet, the fact that many just want to replicate social practices in Colombia of finding a job because of a good acquaintance who helps
them is not something he is willing to do. In fact, he tells me of countless times when he has told off fellow Colombians on Facebook for asking advice on how to break the law, to pay less taxes, or to enter goods without declaring them for resale. This is the type of behaviour he regrets and will fight against at any given opportunity.

Nancy, 34, arrived in 2008

Nancy came to Australia with the financial support of her family. She first came on a tourist visa in 2008 and returned to Colombia to process a work sponsored visa within the same year. At the time of our first interview she did not have a job and was looking for a new sponsorship to stay in Australia. Her chances were very slim, but she managed to find a new employer. Nancy wished to live abroad since her teenage years and embraced coming to Australia as a way to earn a better salary than she could in Colombia and therefore be able to travel around the world, which is her ultimate interest. She believes Australia is her real home. She is in many ways detached from her family; her siblings also live overseas and only her father lives in Colombia. Therefore the family ties to return to Colombia are not really strong, she says. On the second week of her visit to Colombia she would feel bored and longing to be back in Australia. Her distant relationship with Colombia is also evident in her accounts about her lack of knowledge of the community of Colombians in Sydney, and more precisely her lack of interest in making acquaintances from Colombia. This exemplifies her statement of feeling ‘completely Australian’, having fallen in love with the country and the people here since the very first moment and not willing to return to Colombia. More precisely, she believes Australia is the place where she can truly become an artist, something that she could not afford in Colombia. She completed a degree in economics, but did so to satisfy her father. Whereas in Australia she is independent in all aspects, and she ‘can survive as an artist’. If she had to go back to Colombia she will have to join her fellow classmates in the banking industry and do ‘what all people do there’. She explains more on this when asked what she is still to accomplish in Australia.
Carmen, 58, arrived in 2004

Carmen arrived in Australia at 47 years of age with her husband who was turning 52 at the time. Both of them had well-paid jobs in Colombia in the oil industry. However, her husband’s company had been closed recently, according to Carmen, as a result of the constant guerrilla attacks to the oil pipes network. Her two daughters who were already in Australia told them there were good job opportunities for both of them here. Her husband took the final decision, she says, and they moved to Australia as ‘full paying parents’ because they were older for the skilled migration scheme. They were not coming just to see how things were here and paid over AUD$70,000 for their visas. They left everything they had and started a new life here to reunite with their daughters:

P: en el afán de estar con ellas, hicimos lo que tuvimos que hacer, de todo hicimos en Colombia, hipotecamos la casa y entonces nos vinimos, y aquí estamos

P: with the hope of being with them, we did what we had to do, we did everything in Colombia, set up a mortgage on our home and then we came here, here we are

P29 Carmen (56, 2004)

It has been a difficult experience especially for Carmen, because she has been unable to get a job in the auditing industry, at the same level she had in Colombia. In contrast to the rest of her family she has not ‘progressed’ and the only softener for her is to see her children and husband in good job positions, even though she has been unhappy along the way. Carmen worked as a cleaner for over eight years and only until recently was hired as a part-time office clerk, a job she combines with babysitting her grandchildren. She believes she has made a sacrifice which has paid off as she see her daughters having prosperous careers as well as her husband, but regrets that the time she invested in studying English and crediting her career here has not been enough to put her back in the workforce. She recognises she migrated at a mature age and learning the language was a long process which she only reached after nine years. Her husband did not have a greater language proficiency than her, but she explains that he
has got more technical skills which made it easier for him to find a job in his area of knowledge. Carmen’s friends in Colombia ask her if there would be opportunities in Australia for them, and she regrets to tell them that really without a good level of English it is quite difficult to get a good job, and advises them not to think about it if they are not fluent in English. In Carmen’s story there are gender elements intersected with age and division of labour which characterise the Colombian family structure and have been perpetuated in the new location. As Zevallos (2003) and Moraes-Gorecki (1988) found, migrating to a country where there are insufficient social and family support networks means that women take on new roles as breadwinners in the household, along with their expected roles within the family unity. Despite gaining employment and contributing to the household expenses, they are also to keep up with their role as main carers. This structural labour division in Carmen’s case is further stressed as she is expected to regularly look after her grandchildren and therefore accommodate to her daughters’ needs who also have work and family responsibilities and rely on her as a helper.

Carmen’s case in particular seems to resemble that of many other Latin American migrant women whose migration pathways have evolved around a ‘family unit’ decision to migrate (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1984: 56) where either their partners or both husband and wife plan the family move. In her case, it was her husband and herself who provided financial support to her daughters to migrate first and then evaluate the conditions for the parents’ migration. This can be seen as a variant of the ‘family stage’ migration, as illustrated by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1984), in that it is not the husband who migrated first but the children under the auspices of the family. Their daughters considered it was worthwhile for Carmen and her husband to migrate to Sydney as they could still have job opportunities despite their age. Thus, they decided to leave behind their well-paid jobs in Colombia and pay a hefty cost for their permanent residency in Australia. However, in the short term, the practical result of their migration was that Carmen had to ‘sacrifice’ herself, as she explains, for the sake of the family. Not only did she have to maintain her role as a mother but support the family economically taking on a night shift job as a cleaner for eight years until the birth of her first grandson. At that point, she had to balance her life with a part-time job, her household duties and the frequent care of the grandchildren, plus the deep regret of not being able to secure upward job mobility. Carmen’s case is
indeed different to those of other female participants like Marcela, Nancy or Rocio whose ‘independent migration’, borrowing Hondagneu-Sotelo’s term (1984: 56), meant they had to settle in the country on their own, find a job, study and pursue their own migration goals. They did so without family ties to rely on in the country, at least at the very beginning of the process. Even though these female participants tell of different stories of transition to the new country, there are common elements that indicate an intersection between gender relations and their migration. For example, the ambivalence women describe between the reality of downward job mobility and gaining economic independence from their families, or the ambivalence between their freedom to live independently and the lack of family ties in the new country. Although the intersectionality of gender relations and migration has been widely explored amongst Latin American diaspora outside of Australia (Pedraza 1991, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Fernández-Kelly 1983) and in broader gendered migration scholarship (Piper 2009, 2016; Basok, Piper, & Simmons 2013), a further review of gender dynamics in Australia may unveil diverse migration pathways that Latin American women take on. These may be due precisely to the job market of the country and the focus on independent skilled migration that has predominated in the Australian migration policies since the late 1970s, in addition to the elements composing the migration context explained earlier in Chapter 1.

**Colombians in Australia**

I started this chapter arguing that as a result of the social crisis and absence of state in Colombia, forced internal displacement and international migration need to be seen as quite related phenomena. It is difficult not to think that a large part of the Colombian migrants in Australia, estimated to be a floating population of 14,000 in 2012 and 19,000 in 2015, may have had the same need to leave their homes and family as one of the 5.7 million Colombians who have been internally displaced to date (UNCHR 2015). I have certainly argued that the sustained growth of the Colombian community in Australia particularly

---

since 2001 can be seen as the result of the worsening of the social, economic and political divisions at work in Colombia. However, responses obtained in the survey do not consistently support this. Even though the social situation and what participants call ‘insecurity’ have been mentioned as part of their reasons to leave Colombia in a few cases, motivations are seemingly more at the personal level, related to the participants desire to complete postgraduate studies and to improve their English language skills. Further, in the survey, respondents recognise that obtaining a degree abroad or at least being fluent in English were thought to be opening doors for a better job placement in Colombia. One could argue then that there is indeed a basic need to overcome unemployment, which is a social problem, through migration, but this reasoning is not presented by the migrants themselves, at least not in the survey. Participants offer more detailed accounts of their decision-making process and reflections on the current social situation of their country in the personal interviews and their self-narratives. I have only included here a summary of the profiles of 8 of the 44 participants as an introduction to the details they have shared in the study and which are explored in depth in the remaining of the thesis. The survey exercise served its primary purpose of establishing a starting point in the participants telling of personal experience, but it is not enough to understand their early process of decision-making, nor the whole process involved in their migration move. Therefore, a further analysis of the stories participants offered and the observation of Colombian events in the next chapters will illustrate both structural and subjective components of their life experience as immigrants.
Chapter 4

Colombians’ Understandings of Social Distinction and National Identities

Chapter 4 contributes to the broad analysis I present on the identification practices at play amongst Colombians in Australia in two parallel spheres related to their migration. The first sphere is that of shared practices of national identification, whereby Colombians assign class distinctions based on socio-economic strata, race/ethnicity, gender, and, to a different degree, regional origin within Colombian territory. The second sphere is that of Colombians’ conceptions of citizenship in Australia and how they ought to respond to their imagined expectations of social practices in the new country. The tensions stemming from such constructions oscillate between visible and invisible, spoken and silent forms of discrimination, as well as into the rendition of their national identities, though differently, in both Colombia and Australia.

In particular, the omnipresence of subjective values of social class in Colombia has been largely derived from a social stratification system that transcended the system of castes in the colonial period (Mörner 1967) to a structural political economy of segregation of the lower- and medium-income earning classes of modern Colombia. In practice, this has resulted in long-standing alienation of the lower classes and the prevailing of ‘clasismo’ or segregation based on socio-economic positioning along with the masked racism against Afro-descendants and Indigenous people (Agier and Quintín 2003; Gil 2008). The intensity of these well-known practices in Colombia appear to dissipate in the new location of migrants, where the second sphere of identification practices, that of migrants’ Australian citizenship, provides Colombians with new elements of social distinction applied to them in the new country.

In this chapter, I illustrate how participants’ narratives offer implicit constructions of social distinction which are often evoked as a reflection of the social class divisions present in Colombia. I also consider how more explicit descriptions of behaviours and attitudes of Colombians in Australia
result in broader collective identifications of the national and work along with the rendition of their national identities, in a similar way that community definitions and dissenting practices do, which are explored in Chapter 5 and 6, respectively. In line with Linda Martín Alcoff’s (2006) approach, introduced in Chapter 1, I present the situated cultural prisms into which Colombians inscribe constructs of social class, social mobility, and local and national identities in Colombia and in Australia. I demonstrate how Colombian migrants re-frame shared class distinctions into three fresh social status categories or markers of class: resident status, employment type, and language proficiency. This redefining of class echoes tendencies found in other research on Latin Americans, specifically Brazilians. In a similar way that Cristina Wulfhorst (2014) describes the categorisations that help redefine class amongst Brazilians in Australia, I argue that multiple elements are at play amongst Colombians here that blur the common relationships or boundaries between different social classes in Colombia. The stories that participants offer elucidating reframed elements of social distinction suggest there is a sense of common understanding in the ways Colombian-born migrants evoke descriptions of themselves and their fellow nationals in Australia. Across the accounts collected, for example, there is a marked correspondence between, on the one hand, the negative experiences participants have had with fellow Colombians in Australia and, on the other, a temporal erasure of the social distinctions that are commonly made in Colombian territory based on social strata and region of origin. Moreover, one’s official residential status in the new country, one’s occupation, and one’s proficiency in English influence how participants evaluate belonging to the new country and their Australian citizenship. This chapter analyzes the discursive links between the participants’ formal and informal features of citizenship in Australia, that is the official recognition of their belonging to the country via permanent residency and that sense of belonging gained more informally based on the level of insertion in the local working force, or social interaction through advanced use of the local language, for example. To invoke Harald Bauder’s terms, these forms of recognition or belonging work as ‘a mechanism of legal and cultural distinction’ (2008: 320). Furthermore, I make reference to the contrast between Australia’s perceived positioning as a ‘classless’ and ‘egalitarian’ society (Elder 2007) and the inequality of access to health services, and the unequal distribution of wealth which persist making it look ‘like any middle-sized capitalist country’ (Irving and Connell 1992: 11). In practical terms, Australians are faced with
problems that are deemed pertaining to developing countries, like lack of affordable housing, concentrated wealth and expensive health care. Nonetheless, immigrants and indeed locals imagine Australia’s strong economy, infrastructure and job market as the necessary symbols of prosperity and therefore becoming Australian, or at least living in the country, provides a sense of achievement in that social, economic and even political conditions are quite better than those of most of migrants’ countries of origin. In this light, Colombian immigrants sustain a discourse of adapting, integrating and belonging to Australia, which works to distance them from what they describe as the undesirable social practices of their compatriots. Just as new waves of Brazilian migrants, described extensively by Cristina Rocha (2006, 2008, 2009), Fernanda Duarte (2005) and Cristina Wulfhorst (2011, 2014), Colombians reflect on their shunning of fellow country people whose behaviour, occupation, or length of stay in Australia are seen as undesirable. Unwittingly, this group of migrants is reproducing a discourse of citizenship that accords them, as many other migrant groups, a vulnerable position in a ‘secondary labor market’ (Bauder 2008), even after changing their temporary visa status to permanent. Here, I focus on immigrants’ narratives of their ways of identifying themselves and fellow migrants in the scenario of shared values of citizenship and particular forms of social distinction. In Chapter 5, I turn to their descriptions of the Colombian community in Australia, how it is imagined, and what participants believe to be its challenges.

Elements of Social Class and Race Distinctions in Colombia’s Territory

The collective social class imaginaries of who is rich or poor in Colombia have been emphasised and expanded upon by the state institutions implementing Law 142-1994 for socio-economic stratification. This law serves to establish ‘charging of differentiated service rates for public utilities’ (that is, water, electricity, gas, home line, garbage collection) and also to ‘delineate public investment planning’, according to the national bureau of statistics (DANE 2015). Urban areas are stratified from 1 to 6.

---

44 Public Utilities Law (Ley de Servicios Públicos: Ley 142 de 1994).
45 DANE: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, National Administrative Department of Statistics.

128
based on the assessed value of the private property, not the income of the dwellers, to determine the ownership taxes they pay to the municipalities and whether or not they can access subsidies in the basic utilities rate.46

Landlords may seek a reclassification of their property strata through a communal petition to the local stratification boards. This is commonly done to avoid paying higher utility rates. Uribe et al’s (2006) study offers reflections on how the public stratification policy has deepened the imaginaries of socio-spatial segregation, specifically in Bogotá, for which people from the ‘upper strata’ suburbs do not blend with those considered ‘lower strata’. They also underline that the policy has inhibited an upward social mobility, in regards to moving to an upper strata suburb, given the higher living costs (Uribe et al 2006: 91). Indeed, the socio-economic divisions within cities, either material or symbolic, in Bourdieu’s terms, are aided by socio-spatial forms of segregation. For example, living in the southern suburbs of Bogotá establishes a direct link to poverty, lack of education and rare chances of economic mobility while all the opposite features are accorded for people dwelling in the north. Although the majority of Colombians belong to lower and middle classes, references to social class are a prevailing construct resulting from both the institutional and imagined socio-spatial classifications of the urban and rural areas and the people who inhabit them.

Instances of class and race clashes date back to colonial times when the sociedad de castas (the system of castes) recognised and named social strata based primarily on degrees of racial mixture, as Magnus Mörner describes:

People were classified in accordance with the color of skin, with the white masters occupying the highest stratum […]. Only ‘old Christians’, unsuspected of any religious contamination, be it Jewish or Moorish, were in fact permitted to migrate to Spanish America. This legal restriction made it easy for the Spaniards arriving in America to adopt a social attitude, and enabled them to pursue ambitions that in Europe were monopolized by the aristocracy. At the

---

46 Social strata 1, 2 and 3 receive each a 50%, 40% and 15% subsidy in their flat public utilities rate; strata 5 and 6 pay a 20% excess, which is collected toward the payment of subsidies for the lower strata; and strata 4 do not receive subsidies nor pay excess (Uribe et al 2006).
same time, they identified the dark-skinned members of the lower strata with the ‘vile’ plebeians of the traditional European society (1967: 54-55).

Peter Wade (1993) observes that the Colombian national discourses have ambiguously celebrated race mixture while at the same time indulging in racial discrimination against black and Indigenous people well into the strides of the colony and thereafter. He sustains that this is ‘a characteristic of the contradictory coexistence of mestizaje and discrimination in Colombian society’ (Wade 1993: 19; emphasis in original). A more recent example of national discussion over this ever-present classism resulted from the announcement that Bogotá’s mayor, Gustavo Petro, made about his project to build 372 commissioned housing (VIP⁴⁷) for internally displaced people in the core of three level 6 strata⁴⁸ suburbs in Bogotá. Petro presented the plan as an initiative to address the ‘caste-based, antidemocratic, antirepublican and antihuman’ social stratification system in Colombia (Lancheros 2014). The idea was widely criticised by Petro’s political opponents and, according to the media, by the inhabitants of the targeted neighbourhoods. According to some observers, the project will allow a long-term investment towards less social segregation in the capital city (Bradley 2014) while, for many others, the discourse of social inclusion has been politicized and will not only affect the residents’ property value, but also will cause major difficulties for the people to be relocated, given the lack of affordable infrastructure such as childcare, schooling, and medical services (Semana 2014; Lancheros 2014). A similar debate has taken place around the national government undergraduate scholarship program, Ser Pilo Paga,⁴⁹ for lower stratification high school students who obtain the highest scores in the national testing system, Prueba Saber. Beneficiaries will be granted acceptance into any degree, at any public or private university of their choice. They will be exempted from tuition fees and receive a monthly living stipend. The initial discussion concentrated on the spending of public resources to fund the studies of only 10,000 students, even though Juan Manuel Santos had promised 400,000 bursaries during his presidential campaign. The scholarship program replaced plans of investing money into the

---

⁴⁷ Viviendas de Interés Prioritario (that is, priority needs housing).
⁴⁸ This is the highest strata level in a scale from 1 to 6.
⁴⁹ Translated: It’s worth being smart, a national program launched in late 2014.
improvement of infrastructure at well-established public universities, where a greater number of ‘disadvantaged’ students could be enrolled (Cuevas 2014; Palacios 2014). Recently, the media has ignited a debate over alleged discriminatory reactions of upper class students to the prospect of sharing their university campuses with their ‘lower class’ counterparts (Pulzo 2015). Without discussing here the structural and planning drawbacks of both projects, which may lead to undesirable consequences for the beneficiaries themselves, I offer these as two examples of the ever-present mediatisation of class and social segregation in Colombia’s public sphere. Both government projects have re-enacted the socio-demographic stratification in Colombia as a key element in the identification, and self-identification within certain social class.

Furthermore, the socio-economic factors that serve such classifications are intrinsically accompanied by the racialization of social class. Being black, or a black descendant, or being Indigenous, especially when embodying traits of such ethnic descent, further attracts identification of class and social status. Being closer to the dark end of the skin color continuum is equated with being poor, uneducated, unemployed, and without any prospects of social mobility. As Franklin Gil (2009, 2010) asserts, this racialization of class means that black and Indigenous people are more likely to be identified as lower class based on their skin colour, regardless of the social mobility they or their families may have attained: ‘being white is not only a physical type, but a social position, in the same way that being black is not only to have dark skin: it is also to be less educated, poorer, and being into manual and undervalued jobs’ (Gil 2010: 136; my translation). The imaginaries of social difference in Colombia, and the ambiguous use of class, race, and ethnicity categories, are evident in contrasting examples of discrimination and acceptance, and even celebration of difference. Black and Indigenous collective land rights are, for example, a momentary vindication of these communities’ rights; the celebration of their cultural and artistic legacy in mass gathering events such as the renowned Festival de Música del Pacífico Petronio Álvarez in Cali, and at the same time the continued social and economic marginalisation brought about with ‘the urban spatial segmentation’ (Agier & Qintín 2003) exemplify such ambiguity. Classism and racism—bearing in mind that the latter is exerted along the continuum of
skin colour and physical traits—plus the sexualisation of race\(^{50}\), among other social categories of distinction and social difference are deeply and diversely tied to the social identifications Colombians apply to themselves and others across the geographical space of their locales, regional or national. Class, race, and gender distinctions, and the intersectionality of their values, to use Bourdieu’s term, are part of the cultural capital of Colombians and therefore emblematic of the idiosyncrasies that are commonly used to represent them in familial and public spheres, often reinforced by mass media representations.

**Social Identifications by Region of Origin**

There is an even more diverse and flexible category of identification among Colombians: region of origin, practiced as regionalism, which is commonly presented as rather positive during sport competitions or arts and popular culture events. For example, when supporting a local football team, fans from the same city or region unite and exercise an emphatic support that is able to harmonize, if not temporarily erase, class and race differences. Such temporary harmonization of social segregation expands to the national sphere when the country is being represented internationally, when breaking news bring to the fore sentiments of national pride or solidarity. This also happens around events such as natural disasters or any incidents heavily covered by the media. Yet, regionalism is also used to evoke the national idiosyncrasy that assigns people from different regions a higher or lower social status, a differentiated cultural value and worthiness. That is, as Wade (1993) stresses, Colombia is a country of regions which has seen people in the periphery relegated to a spatial dimension which breaks up the racial order that positions regions as very different to one another even though they are the result of the same social processes. To be sure, the social processes implicated are those of precarious governance, and lack of effective access to the state institutions and justice, especially in the peripheral or border departments and regions noted by Garcia Villegas and Espinoza (2013) to represent sixty per cent of the Colombian territory.

\(^{50}\) Specific references on this for the Colombian case are: Gil 2009; Wade, 1993; Wade, Urrea and Viveros 2008.
The regional dispersion and disarticulation of the state has allowed for another dimension in the understandings of race. As Wade puts it, ‘region has become a powerful language of cultural and racial differentiation […] the country’s racial order and its images of emerging nationhood are intimately bound up with a geography of culture (1993: 43). That is, this ‘geography of culture’ embodies an array of cultural representations and practices claimed and seen by people in the different regions as, the ones that make possible a national identity. Thus, regional identifications and symbols engender a diversified national identity, whose varying shades are accorded by the regions. The cultural differentiations have been indeed inflected by the geography and topography of each region whose people, economy, climate, and infrastructure appear to mould social and structural features forming the source of race–region worthiness. For example, people from the capital city are called ‘rolos’ and characterised as extremely proud, unable to acknowledge the beauty or development of other cities, and who cannot stand the temperate weather of holiday destinations like La Costa or Cali; those from Antioquia, ‘los paisas’, are usually imagined as very hard working people, entrepreneurs, whose tenacity and creativity allows them to successfully open any small business, anywhere in Colombia or abroad; people from Pasto (and the department of Nariño), called ‘pastusos’, are mocked as unintelligent folk, lacking the ‘viveza’, or cleverness, that other Colombians possess even though this region has produced many of the national intellectual and political figures. Each region of origin is widely recognised by particular cultural symbols and this, in turn, works as a socio-geographical distinction that adds to practices of social exclusion and inclusion. The exclusion is evidenced in the stereotypical representations that Colombians make of one another based on region of origin and which is constitutive of race and class segregation. The inclusion, broadly, is evident in the erasure of distinctions when people embrace their national identity and unify to support fellow Colombians, be they athletes, or victims of catastrophe.

The ambivalence of social categories attached to region of origin allows it to intersect with distinctions of class and race, as seen in historical and contemporary visions of the sexualisation of race or the racialization of class. When people come from certain regions or towns where poverty, apparent poor infrastructure, and limited government action are common (Choco, Cauca, Caquetá, Amazonas) they are identified as belonging to a lower social class and having a lower educational level. This
identification is more evident when combined with the embodied racial or ethnic traits. Someone from Cauca may be identified by people from other regions as Indigenous, merely by virtue of being from Cauca. Such an association is stronger and more immediate if the person being characterized possesses physical traits common amongst Indigenous people. However, if the person does not carry obvious physical markers associated with indigeneity, he or she is still thought to be poor and/or uneducated. People from the department of Cauca, and peripheral departments in the south of Colombia, are commonly represented in this way.

*Colombian Migrant Narratives: New Imaginaries of Social Class and Citizenship*

I have introduced the social distinctions used by Colombians to identify themselves and others in Colombian territory. The common understandings and symbolic and cultural capital of their locales transcend the nation and are used to distinguish one’s self and others as belonging to a certain social class, race, or region of origin, among other categories used as identity markers. The strength and currency of these collective imaginaries of social identification in Colombian territory is re-localised and re-invented among Colombian migrants in Sydney and, more broadly, Australia. I will argue that the context of migration of Colombian nationals to Australia creates new imaginaries of social class distinctions and national identity which must be viewed through the historical practices and common understandings migrants bring to the new country and the social contours of the host country.

The perception of Australia as a country where all people are equal, and have the same opportunities for financial and professional growth, as many participants state, mirrors Australia’s own longstanding discourse of being a ‘self-consciously egalitarian society’, ‘a classless society’, ‘the paradise of the working class’ (Irving and Connell 1992: 1), and having one of the world’s largest middle class. This is one of the initial contrasts that migrants from countries with strong class divisions find in Australia. As Catriona Elder puts it, ‘egalitarianism makes class a neutral descriptor that adds colour to the story without inflecting it with the stridency of social and economic division’ (2007: 41).
Yet, it goes without saying, class inequality does exist in Australia, even though the story of egalitarianism as the key marker of ‘Australianness’ has worked to obscure it. As Elder (2007) explains:

[I]n ‘spirit’ Australia is egalitarian. Class, as it is deployed in these stories of being Australian, obscures social and economic inequalities and encourages citizens to see themselves as ‘much the same’. To be Australian is to value the working bloke as much—indeed, more than—the up-town ‘toff’ (Elder 2007: 46).

Colombians in Australia are not indifferent to these well-imbricated symbols of what makes Australians’ views of social class apparently different to their own. Yet, as immigrants, Colombians play around the new constructs of social equality they find in Australia, and the ever-lasting concepts of social class in Colombia. The acknowledgment of a shared vision of social class amongst Colombians is evident in accounts given by participants like Milena who, being in Colombia, would not have become acquainted with the type of Colombians she has met here: ‘[over there] one is always in their own social circle and one discriminates against people following the format one grew up with’. That is to say, the social relations participants had in Colombia are different to those they have created in Australia. According to Milena, this is helped by the fact that ‘all of us are the same, we are all here on our own, we are all immigrants and we are simply people regardless of what our parents own or what we were’. The latter part of her statement emphasizes her new position as not having access to the same economic capital that was facilitated by her parents in Colombia. She also notes that over there she ‘was someone else’, someone who maintained boundaries of a certain social status, but that this has now changed. Statements like Milena’s illustrate a generalised detaching from social class divides as migrants become a single group who have to work through common disadvantages such as lack of family networks, occupational downgrading, and language limitations, among others.

In a similar vein, Nancy sustains that the simple fact of being from the same country does not imply that two Colombians would have been friends back there. Often, they would not have been friends because each would have had different jobs and completely different lives. Nevertheless, it seems that
a less accentuated class division among Colombians in Australia, is aided by the expectations that those
who migrate have a certain level of financial resources and education and come from similar social
backgrounds. For instance, according to Santiago, aged 32 and with 11 years in Australia, the vast
majority of Colombians are ‘from university, well-educated […] from families with a good income, or
at least relatively high to afford their travelling costs’. His early circle of friends in Sydney were people
like him, ‘middle and high-middle class, normal kids from Bogotá, from a private school’. His
assumptions are correct in that there are high costs to be paid upfront for visitors and those on student
visas. Santiago also remarks that there are no Colombian refugees in Australia, because he has not
met anyone with such a status. Overall, he does not conceive that there could be Colombians here who
arrived with a different socio-economic position to his own. This feeling of ‘all are the same, like me’
is very much derived from his own social status in Colombia, by which the existence of others who are
not part of a high-income class, is usually unacknowledged or avoided. This perception is described
also by Lucia, who has been in Australia for over 50 years, and asserts that there are people here from
certain well-known families in Colombia who feel ‘quite superior’ and keep the same customs from
Colombia staying ‘on the top’ of the social scale, and will have nothing to do with those at the bottom,
that is, other Colombians. She goes on to say:

P: esa misma idea que hay en Colombia, ese clasismo aquí se mantiene bastante […] esas
personas tienen su grupo y ellos se reúnen y […] no las vas a ver por ahí.

P: its the same idea as in Colombia, classism here is strongly maintained […] those people have
their own group and they meet up and […] you’re not going to see them around.

P30 Lucia (77, 1964)

For Rebeca, the social class divisions are not only maintained by those in the upper classes mirroring
their status from Colombia in Australia, but also by the broader community of Colombians who

51 English language students need to pay for their tuition fees, between AUD$250 and AUD$340 per week and health cover
for the length of their stay before they are granted a visa.
continue to discriminate here in the same way they would in Colombia: ‘they keep living in Colombia with Australian residency [...] here there are the social spheres, I mean [...] despite being a dentist, a lawyer or a physician not recognised in Australia [...] amongst the community itself they have their status, you can see that!’. But in the same way that Santiago expects that all those who arrive in Australia have the economic means to do so, Jorge, one of the ‘old migrants’, rejects the idea that there are Colombians from higher-classes in Australia. He expects Colombians here to be in a similar or ‘standard’ economic situation, which does not allow for any major social distinctions:

P: somos estándar en realidad, la gente lleva un modo de vida, más o menos, no da lugar a esa distinción social, muy muy poco encontrará uno un colombiano dueño de una fábrica, no es fácil, lo encontrará cuando más por ahí de jefe de una sección, ¿no? No va a ser dueño de una fábrica o una industria ¿no? Todos son trabajadores en diferentes niveles, pero más o menos eso.

P: we are actually standard, people have a certain way of life, more or less, there is no place for that social distinction, very, very rarely will one find a Colombian owner of a factory, it’s not easy, you’ll find him at most round there as chief of a section, right? He is not going to be a factory or industry owner, right? They are all workers at different levels, but more or less like that.

P20 Jorge (84, 1974)

Class distinctions are made by participants based on their own experience in Australia. Santiago arrived as a full-tuition paying university student in 2002 and, like Milena and Nancy, held certain class status back in Colombia, as he reveals in the study. Meanwhile, Jorge arrived on a protection visa in the early 1980s and, for over 20 years, worked as a factory operator. The attitudes and life experiences of these participants are clearly different, adding hues to the prevailing views amongst Colombians, in respect of Colombia and Australia. At a deeper level, their lived experiences as immigrants encourage Colombians to revitalize certain aspects of their symbolic capital. Such capital is understood in
Bourdieu’s terms, as the signs of distinction that individuals and groups recognise and which are perceived in relation to material properties conveying clear positions of prestige and authority, but also ‘unrecognizable forms of positions in relations of force’ (2013: 297). That is, Colombians’ signs of material and non-material positioning within certain logics of power relationships are reconfigured in the new spaces of social symbols they find in Australia. With this, they create a cultural capital that is unique to their migratory experience in the new country. Notwithstanding, following the postulations of Bauder (2008), citizenship is a form of capital working precisely as a sign of distinction between the non-migrant and migrant population (319) and this tends to be endorsed by the labour-market institutions (322). Bauder argues that migrants are faced with labour disadvantages regardless of their citizenship status. Informal citizenship symbols, such as racial markers, language use, and access to ever-evolving cultural and educational resources perpetuate the underlying distinctions that acquiring formal citizenship should erode. This is a process congruent with neoliberal values that posit selective migration for those who can meet the needs of a country’s economy, and in the case of Australia, as Robertson (2011a) explains, there is ‘a model of migration that ranks migrants, largely through the points system, according to their ability to provide effective human capital to power Australian economy, primarily as skilled tradespeople and professionals’ (2196). Therefore, migration works here in favour of a regulating economy which conceives citizenship as ‘a strategy for the accumulation of monetary capital’ (Bauder 2008: 327).

Fieldwork data shows at least three symbolic categories of distinction at work amongst Colombian migrants and which are presented with reflection upon the social class distinctions common in Colombia. These are related to 1) residency status, 2) job mobility and 3) English language proficiency. In the following section, I illustrate how these categories form part of the narratives of lived experience that participants shared, especially during the study’s interviews and focus groups.
Narratives on the Imagining of Residency Status

The first category of distinction, residency status, becomes evident in narratives where migrants refer to the attainment of permanent residency in Australia as one of their aims or achievements. Participants consider moving from a temporary visa status—whether that be via a student or long-stay visa, to the secure and ideal position of holding a resident visa—to be their most significant achievement. Alfredo relates one of the stories that underscores how the dynamics of residency and non-residency status work amongst Colombians in Australia. He reflects on how the legal status gained by those with Australian citizenship is similar to social stratification back in Colombia. Alfredo, like other participants, re-enacts the common questions that can be heard in a group of Colombians when they first meet: ‘Where are you from? How long have you been here for? What visa do you have? How long is your visa?’ For him, the final outcome of the exchange will be an unwelcome question about residency status, which may come accompanied by a contemptuous reference to Colombia, a country which they once shared, but no longer do, since one party have become a resident of Australia:

P: los que ya son citizen se sienten de un estrato, como decimos en Colombia [...] He sentido eso que los que ‘ah ve, tú estás de visa de estudiante, ok, chévere’, al principio normal pero después ‘yo soy australiano si o sea yo ya no soy colombiano’. A veces te preguntan ‘¿y qué?, ¿cómo está la tierrita?’ Pero de una forma despectiva, ¿si?, entonces ‘¿este marica qué?’, si de allá viene (risas). A veces vas a una reunión y lo primero que te preguntan ‘¿y usted qué visa tiene?’ (risas) y uno dice ‘¿y este marica qué?’ [...] a veces creo que el nivel de estatus legal hace [sic], incluso tengo amigos que son ilegales y los tienen allá, o sea, están ilegales acá y como que la gente no se junta con ellos.

P: those who are citizens feel they are from certain stratum, like we say in Colombia [...] I’ve felt that, that those who go ‘oh look, you are on a student visa, ok, cool’ at the beginning they act normal but later say ‘I’m Australian, yeah, I mean, I’m not Colombian anymore’. Sometimes they ask you, ‘so, how’s the little country? But in a contemptuous way, right? so, ‘what’s up with this dickhead?’ If he comes from there (laughter). Sometimes you go to a
gathering and the first thing they ask you is ‘what visa have you got?’ (laughter) and one says ‘what’s up with this dickhead?’ […] sometimes I think the legal status makes [sic], I’ve even got friends who are illegal and they keep them out there, I mean, they are illegally here and people don’t sort of befriend them.

P4 Alfredo (39, 2011)

Certainly, becoming a permanent Australian resident, that is, an official resident of the country, entitled to civil and legal rights and duties with the prospect of becoming an Australian citizen if one fulfils additional criteria, would not be an easy task for many Colombians. This could explain the perceived showing off of their new status. In a number of cases found in the study, those who arrived on student visas were fortunate enough to find a friendly immigration policy that allowed them to stay in Australia based on their occupation or profession. Some of them also had to complete a degree in Australia and obtain a minimum IELTS score while working in different jobs to pay for their ongoing tuition fees and visa applications. The hard work paid off when they were able to obtain permanent residency, by their own means and effort, as in the case of Martha and Andrés, who gained their residence through the skilled migration program and after completing their postgraduate studies in Australia. There is no doubt that gaining permanent residency brings a sense of achievement and even freedom, as one can undertake international travel without worrying about visa requirements, as Santiago describes:

P: la preocupación era más que todo poder sacar la visa [permanente] pa’ poder quedarme, esa era como la meta principal […] si tuviera cómo pagar yo me iría pa’ Colombia seis meses a hacer lo que fuera, a trabajar o lo que sea y volver, venir acá otra vez, o sea legalmente tengo la posibilidad de hacerlo si quiero, y eso es lo que quería, tener la posibilidad, por lo menos tener la posibilidad de poder hacerlo, antes con la visa [temporal] era más difícil.

52 International English Language Testing System.
P: my concern more than anything was to get the [permanent] visa so I could stay, that was sort of the main goal […] if I had the means to pay I would go to Colombia for six months to do whatever, to work or do anything and return, come back here again, I mean, legally I have the option to do it if I want to, that’s what I wanted, to have the possibility, to have at least the possibility of doing it, before with the [temporary] visa it was more difficult.

P11 Santiago (32, 2002)

Santiago would like to have enough money to travel every six months to Colombia and return to Australia and even though he is far from realizing his dream, as he still needs to save more money, with his new residency status he at least ‘has the possibility’. For other Colombians, the process was, or continues to be, aided by finding an Australian partner, and thus being able to apply for a spousal visa. Obtaining a resident visa produces a sense of relief as it ameliorates their economic situation and also brings the benefits of social and health services to which they otherwise do not have access. For example, Sandra, Marcela and Patricia came as ELICOS53 students between 2008 and 2010. They married non-Colombian partners whom they met in Australia and therefore obtained residency status. They all withdrew from their studies, Marcela was added to her boyfriend’s student visa, and the two others became permanent residents as their partners were Australian-born. Marcela and Patricia reflect on the fact that this new status allowed them to save a lot of money as they no longer had to pay tuition fees, which is a real burden for international students. They also increased their prospects of getting a job and become more financially stable:

P: entre los dos uno ahorra más plata, uno tiene más calidad de vida porque no hay=la carga económica, se baja […] aunque yo solamente podía trabajar veinte horas y él solamente podía trabajar veinte horas, en todo caso el hecho de que no hay que pagar otro colegio, pues un colegio entre los dos, cambia totalmente la perspectiva porque se ahorra uno más plata, pues no necesitas, matarse tanto y ahorra más plata.

53 English Intensive Courses for Overseas Students.
P: between the two, one saves more money, one has a better quality of life because there is no economic burden, is less [...] even though I could only work twenty hours and he could only work twenty hours, in any event the fact that we didn’t have to pay for another college, well one college between the two, it totally changes the outlook because one saves more money, well you don’t need to kill yourself and one saves more money.

P3 Marcela (34, 2010)

Similarly, Sandra recognises the burden people on student visas have without the benefits provided by the state (such as social security, and affordable access to education); she only realized her privilege as an Australian citizen when she was hospitalized and felt well treated by hospital staff. This is at odds with her feelings of disgust when other Colombians made judgments on her relationship with an Australian boyfriend. She felt alienated by their suggestion that she was taking advantage in order to obtain residency. Their comments, as she describes, applauding her cleverness to find a pathway through ‘the papers’, her Australian residency, indicate once again the perception of residency as a status so desired that Colombians may seek by various means. The dimensions of the difficulties, not only financial, but also emotional, that Colombians with student visas face, however, may be better drawn by cases such as Nelson’s. In the following excerpt Nelson points out the burdens that non-residents face, not only in regards to the lack of equity and social guarantees that residents have (Medicare, transport concessions, tax benefits, and so on), but also at the social level, when by virtue of their physical appearance as non-Australian, one can be easily assumed to be a ‘refugee’ by Australians. Nelson’s view here helps to accentuate the differences Colombians made on each other based on residence status. These not only bring real repercussions from the Australian state—by limiting access to an array of social services—but a distinction Colombians make of themselves which positions them as either resident or non-resident. At the same time such a dichotomy excludes those labelled as ‘refugees’. In the case of Nelson, he characterizes refugees as people who do not pay school fees and have gained entry to Australia without paying the high costs he has. Nelson makes the point that Australians see foreigners, like him, as refugees who come to take the best of their country. He
stresses his dismay when ‘Australians’ see him in the same way as a refugee even though he and his family are migrants who paid a high cost to come here. He goes on to say that Australians are ignorant and judge without acknowledging that the high tuition fees paid by migrants do indeed cover the education expenses of locals and, thus, foreigners are an asset to the Australian economy.

P: hay que decirle al colombiano, usted corre el riesgo de que en la ignorancia australiana usted sea asumido como un refugiado, porque aquí al común del australiano en su ignorancia, el australiano común no sabe que aquí se viene uno a pagar unos fees de educación internacional, él no sabe que uno a este país le está pagando la educación de sus hijos, cuando yo pago, 4, 5, 6, 8 veces más los fees educativos de mis hijos es porque estoy pagando 5, 6 o 7 fees de 5 o 6 muchachos australianos, es porque yo estoy aportando un capital a esta economía, ellos no saben que nosotros venimos excluidos de concesiones, no tenemos las concesiones ni de transporte, ni de salud ni laboral, más sin embargo en su ignorancia creen que ‘llegaron a quitarme el país’.

P: Colombians need to be told, you are at risk that Australian ignorance will lead to assume you are a refugee because here the common Australian, in his ignorance, the ordinary Australian ignores that one comes here to pay international student fees, he ignores that one here is paying for the education of his children, when I pay 4, 5, 6, 8 times more fees for the education of my children it is because I’m paying 5, 6, or 7 fees for 5 or 6 Australian youths, it’s because I’m contributing capital to this economy, they don’t know that we come here without concessions, we don’t have the transport, health or work concessions, nonetheless in their ignorance they believe ‘[these people] came to take away my country’.

P38 Nelson (52, 2009)

Armando’s, Marcela’s and Nelson’s stories highlight a number of elements that are embedded into a larger narrative of their worthiness as immigrants or newcomers in Australia. These include their experience of having to work in ill-regarded jobs; going through the process of professional downgrading by having to work in completely different industries to their own expertise; having to pay
costly course fees, if on student visas; and not being able to easily have their qualifications recognised, if at all. This falls in line with Bauder’s (2008) argument that the migration population in countries like Canada and Germany, and by the same token Australia, are faced with labour-market disadvantages regardless of their citizenship status (324). That is, there are ‘racial markers’ (315) that put the foreign working force in a position of subordination and even economic exploitation (324). The case of migrant labour disadvantage, however, becomes less obvious with the ever-present belief that Australia is a classless society, as aforementioned. Migrants’ early experience is still different to their expectations of upward social mobility. In light of this, Nelson seeks to warn Colombians of the exclusions they will face here as migrants on a student visa: work restrictions, high taxes, and limited access to health services. In the following excerpt he verbalizes the beliefs of those who plan to migrate, like he once did, and more specifically, he challenges the expectations that Colombians in Colombia have about Australia being an amicable country to migrate to:

*P:* es un negocio desigual y eso deben saberlo las personas que están allá, aquí no van a recibirlos con besitos, va a haber australianos muy queridos, pero eso no hace que Australia se vaya a portar querido [...] porque las políticas para con nosotros NO son amables, tener restricciones laborales NO ES amable, ponerlo a uno en el mismo renglón de taxación incluso un 30% si trabaja en ABN, pero restringiéndolo de horas, no, eso no es amable, permitirle coger un bus o ir a un médico o algo por bolsillo propio eso no es amable [...] con la salud es fatal.

P: it is an unfair deal and this should be known by the people who are over there, here you aren’t going to be welcomed with kisses, there will be very loving Australians, but it doesn’t mean that Australia is going to behave lovingly [...] because the policies are NOT kind, to have labour restrictions IS NOT kind, to put one in the same tax bracket even 30% for those with an ABN, while limiting the number of hours, is not, that is not kind, to allow one to pay

---

54 These initials stand for Australian Business Number, which is different to the TFN or Tax File Number. Contractors under an ABN receive the whole salary with no tax withheld and have to declare tax at the end of the financial year. This may pose both advantages and disadvantages as usually workers on ABN do not have sick leave and holiday pay received under TFN contracts whilst they get higher net payments.
out of one’s own pocket to get on a bus or go to the doctor, that is not kind […] when it comes to health it is fatal.

P38 Nelson (52, 2009)

Permanent residency can be gained through a number of processes, with some paths more difficult than others, but undoubtedly there are Colombian-born residents who present it as a final outcome that many intend to achieve. In the process, non-residents find a diverse set of difficulties that may also be accentuated by the views, real or imagined, of other Colombians and Australians. The study was open to Colombian migrants regardless of residency status, which ultimately helped in capturing the different understandings and social distinctions Colombian migrants make precisely in respect of Australian residence. Yet, other distinctions can be seen to intersect with these constructions of migrant citizenship, including Colombian views on job mobility and the English language abilities of their compatriots.

Narratives of Social Positioning Based on Job Mobility and English Language Proficiency

Sébastian Chauvin and Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas argue that the distinction between citizens and non-citizens ‘rests on a continuous and reversible gradation often connected with ethnoracial and ethnonational hierarchies’ (2012: 242). Colombians expand such a gradation into their upward job and economic mobility in the new country. Even though a Colombian-born person may hold Australian residency or citizenship, regardless of the means by which it was obtained, fellow Colombians will take their occupation in Australia as an additional marker of social positioning. Securing a job in the industry or field in which one was trained and, more specifically, having a well-paid job with a level of responsibility comparable to that which one had in Colombia, is seen as a major achievement for any Colombian immigrant in Australia. This is so because of the well-known factors that dictate that new arrivals must ‘suffer’ and take on jobs that are not only unrelated to their work experience or knowledge,
but would be undesirable back home. If an immigrant is able to overcome that stage they have reached a desired level of social mobility among their fellow migrants. This is notwithstanding, at least momentarily, their residency status.

The second-most desired marker of economic mobility, if the first one is yet difficult to attain, is to be earning a salary that affords a level of comfort that equals or surpasses that which one had in Colombia. Comfort is a subjective notion, however, for many Colombians it is clearly related to the features of their household and economic independence. As noted in many stories included here, one of the first shocks Colombians experience upon arriving in Australia relates to the housing conditions they have to endure compared with their housing in Colombia. The average Colombian migrant arrives to a form of shared accommodation where they are to stay with people they do not know, and in the best cases with people who speak their language. Rent payments are exorbitantly higher than those in Colombia, and even though they would have been advised of this prior to their departure, this is one of the most distressing factors they have to confront until they start earning an income in the local currency.

Overall, living expenses are very high and hence a mounting pressure for those people who come with a limited budget and with the hope of finding a job sooner rather than later. Meanwhile, Colombians either themselves or their next of kin, have to incur personal debt at high interest rates in Colombia. Colombians on student visas, in particular, are economically dependent on these initial borrowings which in many cases are made well in advance in order to support their visa applications. Other Colombians, usually with a lengthier period of work experience in Colombia, are able to show the Australian government that they have sufficient funds to support their trip and are able to finance their stay by selling their properties or taking out hefty mortgages on them. In any case, there is increasing pressure to find a job which would allow them to start paying off their debts as soon as possible. A job can give them back economic independence. After covering their debts, their income can then be distributed between everyday expenses, saving for the short-term renewal of their visas, and, in many cases, paying new course fees.

The attainment of a very much-needed economic mobility is in many cases dependent on one’s level of English proficiency. That is why it is often heard, in the case of Colombians on student visas,
that they are ready to take on any jobs because they do not have ‘good English’. And here is where Colombians’ social status, in the spectrum of their upward job mobility, can be jeopardized. Colombian migrants categorise their fellow country people into a lower undesirable class when they stay in entry-level jobs regardless these have afforded them certain economic mobility. At least 12 of the 31 interviewees in the study make direct comments and tell anecdotes related to what they see as ‘two different types’ of Colombians: those who ‘have progressed’ and have ‘professional’, ‘normal’, ‘dignified’, and ‘satisfactory’ job; and those who ‘work in whatever is on offer’, ‘have very basic English’, and have become ‘stagnant’ and not having ‘progress[ed]’ at professional levels. Following are excerpts from such accounts which appear in multiple parts of the interviews, especially when participants were asked about their early migration experience, their relations with other Colombians, and their working life in Australia.

After giving details of her first job as a waitress in Sydney, where she had to endure an abusive boss, long working hours, low pay and having to eat her meals on the floor, Marcela describes how, after being hired as a childcare worker, she found hope that things could be good in Australia. She now had a ‘normal job’ and could be a ‘normal person’, working daytime hours instead of night shifts:

P: yo creo que me ayudó mucho como a organizarme y a estar un poquito mejor, conseguirme un trabajo diferente a ser mesera, cuando empecé a trabajar en una guardería, cuidando niños porque era un trabajo como entre comillas normal, de ocho y media a cuatro y media, en el día, porque si uno trabaja como mesera generalmente, o yo, trabajaba de noche [...]. Terminaba a las diez, once de la noche, entonces este era un trabajo ya normal de una persona normal de ocho a cuatro.

P: I think it helped me a lot to get myself organised and to be a little better, getting a different job to being a waitress, when I started working at a childcare centre, taking care of children because it was in inverted commas a normal job, from eight thirty to four thirty, during the day,
because if you work as a waitress in general, or I, used to work at night [...]. I finished at ten, eleven at night, so this job was something normal for a normal person from eight to four.

P3 Marcela (34, 2010)

Marcela started as a waitress, a common job for international students in Australia, especially the ‘new migrants’, and certainly among Colombians. There is also a trend for newly arrived migrants to first get jobs as cleaners. This is acknowledged in other accounts and within the data collected in the survey (see Chapter 3). In this regard, Miguel, argues that he would not do just any job because he was able to communicate well in English. He describes how, although he could not find a job for three months and had to pay for university fees and living expenses, he persisted, ‘no, no, no, I’m not going to do just whatever […] I’m not going to clean floors, I’m not going to clean toilets’ and how he eventually found a job as a sales assistant.

Miguel’s argument of ‘having enough English’ suggests that, for him, those who are unable to speak English are the ones taking the kind of jobs he would reject. Therefore, the work type one can get indicates level of English proficiency. But, obviously there are many cases where Colombians who have an acceptable proficiency in English take cleaning jobs, or the like, and remain in them for a long time, even after obtaining residency. Ana and Sandra emphasize that the Colombians staying in those types of jobs lack a sense of life progression. They recognise that what people earn as cleaners might be reason enough to stay in the job, aided by the fact that a basic level of English may impede their moving to other jobs, but, after a while, language proficiency should not be an excuse. It all seems to come down to, according to them, a lack of aspirations.

P: lo que veo es que mucha gente se queda estancada y no progresa, pero hay muchos colombianos que yo sé que están muy bien ubicados, muy verracos, logran ubicarse bien profesionalmente y pues yo veo es dos tipos de personas ¿no?
P: what I see is that many people become stagnated and do not progress, but there are many Colombians that I know are very well placed, [they are] very resilient, they are able to get a good profesional position and, well, I see two types of people, right?

P10 Sandra (27, 2008)

Sandra draws on ‘the cycle’ that takes place when a migrant takes cleaning jobs for years and their highest prospects are to become a cleaners’ supervisor or manager. Meanwhile, there are other Colombians who have been resilient and are well located in terms of employment. Therefore, these are ‘two different types of people’. Her distinction is similar to that offered by Milena, as she describes lack of proficiency in English as inhibiting access to more language-demanding jobs, such as customer service:

\[P: \text{el noventa por ciento viene sin inglés, entonces vienen a estudiar inglés y consiguen trabajo solamente de cleaners porque pues obviamente su inglés no les da para otra cosa de servicio al cliente […] muchas veces se quedan simplemente en el ‘trabajemos de cleaners porque nos da para vivir y mandar a Colombia plata’}.\]

P: ninety per cent come here without English, so they come to study English and only get a job as a cleaners because obviously their English doesn’t give them [enough] for anything related to customer service […] very often they stay simply in the ‘let’s work as cleaners because it is enough to make a living and send money to Colombia’ [frame of mind].

P32 Milena (33, 2005)

For Milena, there are those who came as English language ‘students’ and those, like her and her group of friends who are ‘immigrants’, who have a university degree, came to do a Masters degree (given their language proficiency), and therefore have ‘very good professional job posts, a very good economic position and live a quiet life in Australia’. This can be noted as a reflection of the imagined social class
she brings from Colombia: she had the support of her family during her tertiary studies and became financially independent after some time in Sydney. Her circle of friends share similar stories, therefore, she distinguishes between those like her and other Colombians, the ‘ninety per cent’, who have no English and she does not even acknowledge as immigrants, like her, but merely as students.

Continuing with work type distinctions, these are mentioned in a more positive way by Andrés, who believes that to have real career progression it is necessary to ‘push a little more, even if that means to work almost for free, even if it is far away’. For him, many Colombians do not try hard enough after facing the first obstacles, such as requests of local experience by Australian employers. However, the type of work Colombians enter into in Australia is a category of distinction not only highlighted by those who are no longer, or never were, employed in manual jobs, but also by those who currently work in these. Alfredo and his wife, both started working as part-time gardener and cleaner, respectively. While he later got a job related to his engineering expertise, Paula kept her first job while studying English. They recall a friend of theirs judging Alfredo for not doing what is usually expected of Colombian migrants, that is, for example, cleaning jobs. His story portrays the professional work type as desirable and in opposition to what ‘everyone came here to do’, in his wife’s words.

P: entonces fue=es incómodo [...] amigos que una vez me dicen ‘oiga hermano y usted qué?’
‘no juicioso trabajando’, y el hombre dice ‘ah, verdad que usted no limpia, o ya no limpia’ [...] Y es como decir ‘y este man llegó y está trabajando y, y pues no está pasando penas’ es como lo que la gente quiere ver, pero pues seguro que a muchos les ha tocado y no tienen ningún problema en hacerlo, ¿cierto?
P: and then it was=it is uncomfortable [...] friends that one day tell me ‘hey brother, what’s up with you?’ ‘no, working hard, and then he goes ‘oh that’s right you don’t do cleaning, or you don’t do cleaning anymore’ [...] As if saying ‘and this guy arrived and is working, and he’s not suffering hardship’, it's sort of what people want to see, but for sure it has been the lot of many and don’t have any problem doing it, right?
P4 Alfredo (39, 2011)
The repeated allusion to speaking English as a necessary criterion to obtain a ‘good job’, as opposed to that of a cleaner, or the like, is intertwined with being able to obtain residency in Australia, which will ultimately signify access to social services and different labour and educational opportunities. Rebeca summarizes this relationship again highlighting a social distinction between those with a resident visa, and those who still perform ‘operational jobs’ due to their lack of English and are still on student visas:

P: hay también un colombiano que no ha podido llegar a esa base socio-económica normal entre comillas australiana, donde todavía sigue trabajando en lugares, trabajos no reconocidos, operativos ¿si me entiendes? como clinear [sic], limpiar, estar en una cafetería, qué sé yo, a pesar de que son doctores tienen un nivel de educación muy alto… o sea para mí hay una división grande ahí porque no pueden acceder a los servicios y a las oportunidades que tiene este país como si fueran un residente […] o sea ahí marca una diferencia enorme porque es que una cosa es ganar dinero para poder trabajar solo 20 horas y mantener una familia y otra cosa es tener full-time […] pagar un colegio donde no sea miles de dólares.

P: there is also the Colombian who hasn’t been able to get into that normal, Australian, in inverted commas, socio-economic base, the one still working in places, unrecognised jobs, manual labour, you know what I mean? Like cleaning, cleaning, in a cafeteria, what can I say? Despite being doctors, they have too high an educational level […] I mean for me there exists a great gap there because they can’t obtain the services and opportunities in this country as if they were residents […] I mean, there is a huge difference because one thing is to earn money being able to work only 20 hours and support a family, and another thing is to have [a] full-time [job] […] paying for a college that does not cost thousands of dollars.

P23 Rebeca (33, 2009)
Rebeca tells of her expectations and imaginaries of social class in Australia. She imagines ideal socio-economic positions as only being within reach if one should obtain work other than cleaning or being a coffee shop attendant, and only when one can work without time restrictions, such as those imposed on students on working visas which only allow holders to work twenty hours per week. However, unlike Milena’s earlier imagining, which revealed her situation as different to that of the average student, Rebeca’s idealisation acknowledges the struggle Colombian students face and that she faced herself in order to gain fluency in English. Even though, she married an Australian and gained citizenship rights most students do not enjoy, Rebeca claims ‘people’ saw her as a recently arrived migrant and felt socially diminished because of her English to a campesinita (poor peasant), a label used in Colombia to refer to the lower social economic classes. Her account serves to introduce the third social distinction category at play amongst Colombian migrants in more detail, that is, the category of English proficiency level. Unlike the previous categories, which are constructed by Colombians to refer to fellow migrants, the English proficiency category involves accounts where both non-Colombians and Colombians take a central role in the narrative participants offered:

\[ P: \text{lo que pasa, lo lindo de Australia cuando yo llegué pues la bienvenida, la educación, todo,}\]
\[ \text{lo que me molesta a veces es que te ven como con cara de que no entiendes, te hablan en inglés y entonces te hablan como 'hay esta tonta, de donde vendrá o que campesinita aparecida.} \]

\[ P: \text{what happens is, the beautiful thing about Australia when I arrived, well, the welcome, the education, everything, what bothers me sometimes is that they see you with a face of you don’t understand, they speak to you in English and then they speak to you like ‘oh this silly girl, where did she come from or what a poor little peasant.} \]

P23 Rebeca (33, 2009)

In Rebeca’s account, it is Australians who look down on her for her apparent incomprehension of English. This reflection appears also in Fernando’s account. He has felt singled out by ‘Aussies’ and their generalised view of ‘you don’t speak English’. He recalls telling off a co-worker whose way of addressing him was quite patronizing, as if he had a cognitive problem:
P: una señora con la que estaba trabajando […] por la forma en que me estaba hablando le dije, ‘vea, el hecho de que yo no tenga lengua natal inglés no significa que yo no le entiendo, no me hable como si fuera retardado mental’.

P: a lady I was working with […] because of the way she was talking to me I told her, ‘look, the fact that I don’t have native English language [skills] does not mean that I don’t understand, don’t speak to me as if I was mentally retarded’.

P18 Fernando (39, 2006)

Like Fernando and Rebeca, some other participants represent themselves in their stories as having some level of English and as being capable of understanding it, at least to some degree. However, the reality for other Colombians, as has been presented in the narratives above, is that many arrive with poor English proficiency, and in some cases with none. This presents a challenge when interacting within the host country. Diego feels his almost non-existent knowledge of English places him at the level of an illiterate person, much less capable of performing everyday tasks. Someone who is illiterate cannot read or write, but can communicate verbally, and can understand simple requests, Diego explains, not being able to do that in English is, and has been, a big constraint in his life in Australia.

P: el problema con el idioma es que más que dejarlo a uno incómodo porque no habla o porque no lo entiende es que estás limitado, limitado de acción, entonces uno acá, yo no sé creo que te lo dije una vez, uno acá es menos que un analfabeta, porque […] el analfabeta NO lee NI escribe PERO oye y habla, entiende, no entenderá el alto, el lenguaje técnico […] pero si entiende ‘hola, vaya, venga, suba, baje’, entiende todo,

P: the problem with the language is that besides feeling uneasy because you don’t speak or don’t understand it is that you are limited, limited from action, so one here, I don’t know I think I told you this once, here one is less than an illiterate person because […] the illiterate one DOES NOT read NOR write BUT listens and speaks, understands, won’t understand the
complex, the technical language […] but he does understand ‘hello, go, come, go up, come down’, he understands everything

P16 Diego (60, 1994)

Alfredo also acknowledges that he had no previous training in English, and therefore only had basic notions which were not enough to understand the strong Australian accent he found in the Cronulla area, where he first lived in. He shares a number of anecdotes about receiving meals he did not want or being over-charged at local shops because he did not fully understand and people in that area ‘assume one can speak English well’:

P: llegamos a un sector que es cerca a Cronulla […] y es muy Aussie, entonces todo el mundo habla super Aussie ¿si? [...] cuando iba a ordenar una hamburguesa y no le entendía nada y todo lo que me decía yo le decía que sí, me pasaba que las primeras hamburguesas que me comía eran súper picantes o que a veces resultaba pidiendo lo que no quería […] eso me estresaba, y me frustraba, si me entiendes? A veces resultaba pidiendo algo y me cobraban cuando iba a pagar eran $30 dólares, ‘qué qué?’

P: we arrived to an area close to Cronulla […] and it’s very Aussie, so everybody speaks really Aussie, right? […] when I was ordering a hamburger and I didn’t understand anything and everything I was told I would say yes, it happened that the first hamburgers I ate were really spicy or sometimes I ended up ordering something I didn’t want […] that stressed me out, frustrated me, you get me? Sometimes I ended up ordering something and they’d charged me and when I went to pay it was $30, ‘what? how?’

P4 Alfredo (39, 2011)

Although this is presented as an amusing anecdote, Alfredo emphasizes that it was both frustrating and stressful, more so when he had just arrived in Australia. Later on, he recalls his experience of being
restricted to speaking English among a group of Colombians isolating and somewhat discriminatory. Despite his desire to interact in Spanish, his mother tongue, at a Colombian gathering, other Colombians would reply to him in English. After a few failed attempts at reciprocation, he felt the group moved away from him. He tries to excuse this behavior from Colombians who were born or grew up in Australia and may have different ‘types of parties’ where they only speak English, yet he was still uncomfortable with their attitude.

Nelson expresses similar feelings of dissatisfaction when meeting fellow Colombians. For him, there is an ‘actitud tendenciosa’ (detrimental attitude) when Colombians ask things like ‘and how’s your English doing? Has it improved?’:

*P: hay un momento en que el colombiano se aprovecha del orden social de Australia, se excusa de que en Australia no hay un marcado rango social, ¿no?, a mí me da risa a veces la pregunta noiva de un colombiano a otro, ‘¿y cómo está su inglés? ¿Si ha mejorado?’ […] es tendenciosa, es tendenciosa, es mala, si no es su lengua nativa, pues no va a ser su lengua nativa nunca, y con toda seguridad siempre va a haber alguien que lo hable mejor y alguien que lo hable peor, ¿no?*

*P: there is a moment when the Colombian takes advantage of Australia’s social order, he justifies himself in that there isn’t a marked social rank in Australia, right? it makes me laugh sometimes the nasty question asked by one Colombian to another, ‘and how’s your English? Has it improved?’ […] it is tendentious, it is tendentious, it’s evil, if it’s not your native language, well it’s not going to ever be your native language, and without doubt there will always be someone who speaks it better and someone who speaks it worse, right?*

P38 Nelson (52, 2009)

These types of questions work, according to Nelson, as a negative judgment and a way of diminishing of someone else’s level of English, assuming it is low or insufficient, and as a mechanism by which Colombians make the social distinctions that the social order of Australia apparently lacks,
again attending to the preconceptions that present an image of Australia as an egalitarian country. This can be noted as an example of ‘symbolic violence’ in Bourdieu’s terms (2013: 298), enacted by the fact that after gaining certain form of recognition, such as a desired permanent residency or just some length of stay, settled migrants subject new migrants to a symbolic call of power, whereby the former reproduce forms of oppression and discrimination that they were faced with. On the other hand, Nelson tells he regrets that this lack of proficiency does not affect all migrants equally. It does not mean that a person cannot be a permanent resident of Australia and his regret results from his knowledge of people who do not speak any English at all and have been able to obtain resident status, the one he desires but has been so far unable to secure. Obtaining the permanent residence is a ‘wheel of fortune’, not the result of one’s English skills, he adds. This last example serves to emphasize the intertwined relationship between the emerging social distinctions that Colombians seem to have apprehended in their migration to, and life in, Australia and the ‘common understandings’ of social distinctions that Colombians share in their home country.

Using Peter Wade’s words, these distinctions work in parallel with the more popular cultural traditions that seek to foster acceptance of certain racial groups because of their music, folklore, and arts and crafts being viewed as part of Colombia’s desired culture. This, as Wade puts it, is ‘a characteristic of the contradictory coexistence of ‘mestizaje’ and discrimination in Colombian society’ (1993: 19). In the following I explain how similar contradictions are at work in Australia. Colombians describe themselves and their fellow nationals as holding certain positive traits related to their cultural values and resilience that allow them to have a perceived social and economic success, as opposed to the ever-present negative side of that cleverness they believe other Colombians use to take advantage of the new social system they are in.
In this section, I emphasize the comments and narratives evoked by Colombians when identifying or describing fellow migrants and how such descriptions are continuously shared and claimed amongst participants. Broadly, there are two opposing views that appear recurrently along their narratives on who Colombian migrants in Australia are. The first view is a positive expression of the tenacity and resilience that Colombians display and which mirror their quintessential values back home. The second view, is a less optimistic one, shaping an almost homogenous construction of negative identifications that participants make of their own experience with fellow migrants. Notwithstanding the opposing traits that emerge making up the identifications of ‘other Colombians’ in Australia, these seem to be alleviated when, amid negative experiences with compatriots, participants claim to be from a single country, instead of from different cities or towns. These opposing positionalities, attributing positive and negative traits to Colombians, help construct the multiple identities of the Colombian migrant (these are further discussed in the five key case studies presented in Chapter 7).

Anecdotes abound on how Colombians are ‘chéveres’ (cool people), kind, hard-working, ‘rebuscadores’ (always searching for job opportunities), noisy, drink ‘aguardiente’ (a liquor made from sugar cane), and bring with them elements that embody physical recognition like ‘mochilas’ (backpacks) and ‘maletines Totto’ (a high quality, Colombian backpack brand). Carmen’s description can be used to showcase the positive profiles participants have tailored in the study of their fellow Colombians. Her description specially refers to those ‘new migrants’ who have arrived with a tertiary degree or professional career:

\[P: \text{la mayoría son muy honestos trabajadores, juiciosos, estudiosos [...] las historias son muy bonitas, hay mucha gente trabajando en buenas empresas, muchos también haciendo locuras, pero bueno [...] la mayoría están bien [...] ojalá que esa gente que esté mejor posicionada ayuden [sic] porque está llegando mucha gente preparada de Colombia.}\]
P: the majority are very honest, hard-working, judicious, studious […] the stories are very nice, there’s a lot of people working in good companies, also many doing crazy things, but well, […] the majority is fine […] hopefully these people who are better positioned help because there’s a lot of qualified people coming from Colombia.

P29 Carmen (56, 2004)

Miguel’s statement that those Colombians who migrate to Australia come here seeking an adventure was a common response offered by participants in the survey, which also stresses the claim that ‘we are ready for everything, whatever is necessary’, as Marcela says. Less positive identifications emerge from this idea of ‘doing whatever it takes’, giving a more complete description of Colombians here. For example, the normalization of rule breaking, known in colloquial terms as ‘malicia indígena’ or Indigenous malice—a trait related to one’s capacity to trick the law and which Colombians are taught to be proud of as a marker of intelligence, exoticizing their Indigenous roots—is pinpointed as a negative behavior when Colombians in Australia attempt to transgress the law (this is thoroughly discussed in the next chapter). Yet, the bending of formal rules is not only seen as an undesirable behavior in relation with the law in Australia and the Australian people broadly, but also in everyday relations with other Colombians. For example, under the guise of ‘providing help’, some Colombians may take advantage of others’ need for a job. This is a common story among participants, Carmen, for instance, tells of how Colombians in the cleaning industry, in which she worked for eight years, are taking on strata contracts, hiring Colombian newcomers, and only paying them between $10 and $12 per hour, while charging double. She believes that many Colombians are like this. Nelson explains in more detail how the business works:

P: tú tienes un ABN y te dicen, ‘mira yo te voy a ayudar, puedes hacerlo a la hora que quieras, y puedes hacerlo de las 6 de la tarde en adelante hasta las 5 de la mañana […] tienes que hacerlo en 4 horas, yo te voy a pagar veinte dólares, ochenta dólares al día […] y lo haces y ya y te ayudo’, pues resulta que indirectamente te están contratando con el mayor tumbado que
P: you have an ABN and they tell you ‘look I’m going to help you, you can do it at the time you want, and you can do it from 6pm onwards until 5 in the morning […] you have to do it in four hours, I’m going to pay you twenty dollars, eighty dollars a day […] and you do it and that’s it, and I help you’, well the thing is that indirectly they’re hiring you with the biggest rip off and that is working at night […] but they don’t pay you night rates […] people are coming to get money here to continue surviving.

P38 Nelson (52, 2009)

Cases like this one, where Colombians are hand-tied to low pay rates, may in part justify the new arrivals’ behavior, condemned by other participants. Guillermo, for instance, criticizes that those on a visa with twenty-hour work per week restrictions want to work ‘fifty hours and make all the money cash-in-hand instead of sticking to the rules’. Then the ambivalence of those Colombians taking advantage of either ‘the Australian system’ or worse, of other Colombians, leads to a confronting view of whether it is worth doing whatever it takes to survive and stay in Australia or not. Nelson offers a deep reflection on this after mentioning a number of ‘markets’ where wrong-doings by Colombians have a stake by taking advantage of newcomers, paying them low hourly-rates, and offering them costly shared-accommodation. Nelson even cites examples from new arrivals begging for help to find a job offering a reward from any future pay. He asks himself, ‘where is their dignity?’ He claims it must have been ‘left back in Bogota’s El Dorado airport’, in limbo, because people are just ‘eager to do something, no matter what’.

A number of participants are critical of attitudes that form part of ‘la cultura colombiana’ and express their regret at seeing them at play in Australia. From their personal relations with other Colombians, participants describe a lengthy list of negative traits, adding to the description of their fellow migrants. Participants describe other Colombians as full of envy, liars, and ‘sobradores’ (that is, hangers on). Francia, for instance, has tried to set up a website where new arrivals can easily access
services offered by Colombians here, like affordable accommodation, jobs, and Colombian products. Yet, her Colombian friends have not responded well to this initiative and she complains they are ‘jealous of information’ and do not want to help the newcomers because they believe they should put up with the same difficulties others have:

P: entre colombianos [...] si somos celosos, hay mucha gente que es envidiosa, digamos ‘a mí me ha tocado voltiar ¿por qué se la voy a poner fácil?’, yo he tenido conversaciones con gente, que yo les digo mire hagamos esto, pongamos una página de información’, y ellos salen ‘pero ¿por qué? [...] ¿por qué tenemos que dárselos todo mascado? ellos también tienen que llegar y buscar, ese es el problema de los colombianos que hay que dárselo todos mascado’, pero si nosotros ya lo hicimos ¿por qué no darle la mano a alguien?

P: among Colombians […] we are jealous, there’s a lot of people who are envious, I mean ‘I’ve had to work around things, why would I make it easy for you?’, I’ve had conversations with people where I tell them ‘look, let’s do this, let’s put up an informative website’, and they go ‘but, why […] why do we have to give it to on a silver platter? they also have to arrive and search, that is the problem with Colombians that you have to give them everything on a silver platter’, but if we already did it, why not offer a helping hand to somebody?

P13 Francia (43, 1997)

Likewise, Nelson describes Colombians here as liars, envious of their fellow nationals. He adds ‘if someone is going to be hurt because you get a diploma that will only be a Colombian’. More concretely, he notes that there is a certain group of Colombians that he prefers not to meet too often because there is too much gossip and envy amongst them:

P: me incomoda mucho el crochet que se hace entre uno y otro, ‘no le cuente a aquel, el cumpleaños es de este pero no va a venir aquella, este otro yo no sé con qué cuento salió, […] es que desde que le dieron la residencia [...] Eh, dijo que tenía [trabajo], pero nooo él está haciendo allá un voluntariado eso no es trabajo, eso no sé qué... ¿Qué hubo?, ¿cómo estás?
¿Sigue JODIDO?’. Ese esquicio, ese mal ambiente, esa misma cosa, entonces yo no estoy para gastar el tiempo hablando mal de fulano o perencejo, estoy más bien para salir adelante

P: I feel uncomfortable with the gossip between one and the other, ‘don’t tell that one, it’s this guy’s birthday but that girl isn’t going to come, this other one I don’t know what story he came up with […] it’s just that since they gave him residency […] Hmm, he said he had [a job] but nooo he’s volunteering there that’s not a job, that’s I don’t know… What’s up? How are you? Are you still BROKE?’ That scene, that bad atmosphere, that same thing, so I’m not going to waste my time speaking badly about so-and-so or such-and-such, rather, I’m here to get ahead.

P38 Nelson (52, 2009)

In spite of the to and fro remarks about the idealized and undesired imaginings of Colombian migrants in Australia, there seems to be a broader consensus uniting them in a more positive identification by virtually erasing any differences, one is deeply imbricated in Colombia’s notions of cultural capital in respect of region of origin. Participants acknowledge the existence of ‘regionalismo’ in Colombia, but concede that such a thing is not seen amongst Colombians in Australia, at least not in the dimensions it exists in Colombia. If regional distinctions appear, it may be a matter of making fun of one or another, but is not a marked factor in the relationships between Colombian migrants in the new country. As Guillermo claims, ‘they already have a little perception of more=unity, and they recognise themselves as Colombians more than regionalist [sic]’. There is, instead, a shared feeling of unity for which Colombians do not present themselves as coming from Colombia rather than from a particular region.

Rebeca explains this feeling in that, regardless of where one comes from, all have a ‘level of ignorance higher or lower and however we are all the same ‘colombianito’, we are all the same’. She notes that she does not believe in regionalism and, therefore, she does not see it. But for other participants there are more factual explanations to such an apparent erasure of regionalism. For Jorge, the fact that in Australia people are dispersed into different towns, and even different sectors, prevents close contact, whereas relations amongst fellow migrants are more relaxed. In a way, thus, Colombians in Australia are less constrained by differences that are present in Colombia. Their new self-
identification as Colombians even transcends the national, leading participants to identify themselves as Latin Americans.

Marcela, Nancy and others illustrate this localised transition, from the regional, through the national, to the Latin American:

\[ P: \text{en la mayoría de los casos yo no soy ni paisa, ni siquiera colombiana, yo soy latina. Entonces ese regionalismo muchas veces se acaba por esa misma cosa […] entonces cuando uno se identifica con los colombianos yo pienso que ese regionalismo se diluye aquí. No importa si usted nació en Bogotá, o Medellín, o Cali, sino que todos somos colombianos y en cierta forma también hacemos parte de un grupo que no importa si usted nació en Chile, Argentina, o Brasil, todos somos latinoamericanos.} \]

P: in most cases I’m not Paisa, not even Colombian, I’m Latina. Therefore many times that regionalism disappears because of the same thing […] thus when one identifies one’s self with Colombians I think that regionalism is diluted, here. It doesn’t matter if you were born in Bogotá, or Medellín, or Cali, but that we are all Colombians and in a way we also form part of a group where it doesn’t matter if you were born in Chile, Argentina, or Brazil, we are all Latin American.

P3 Marcela (34, 2010)

**Identifying Oneself as Colombian vs Identifying Other Colombians**

Chapter 4 has offered a wide range of self and other perceptions that Colombians unveil about how their identification practices in Australia mirror similar practices used to assign social class in Colombia. When providing their views on who Colombians in Australia are, participants mostly narrate themselves outside of the compound they are describing. This seemingly rhetorical tool for imagining themselves through the imagining of others can be better seen as a positioning pane whereby different versions of
one’s self, as Colombian migrant, are portrayed. Colombians present themselves and fellow nationals distinguished by their social status in Australia based on their resident status, occupation, and English language skills. This shows that there are two spheres of common understandings involved in the ways Colombian migrants identify themselves and their compatriots in Australia. First, there is the migration sphere whereby Colombians make recourse to distinction categories that emerge from their particular experiences as immigrants. Second, there is the shared historical sphere which sees normalised practices of social class distinctions in their country of origin.

In each case, bringing forth the commonalities and differences that make up Colombians in Australia, participants have toyed with the characteristics they assign to themselves and to others like them in light of the personal history they share or have at least been familiar with in Colombian territory. Social class distinctions and regionalism are broadly mirrored in their relations with other Colombians in Australia. These constructs have not disappeared but evolved into their migration experience and provide a more specific profile of those who have migrated to Australia from Colombia, beyond social and economic background descriptors. Participants’ stories share elements that portray immigrants as a subordinate labour class be it from their relationships with the Australian labour system, or from their negative experiences with fellow Colombians trying to take advantage of new arrivals. Here, negative descriptions of and anecdotes about fellow Colombians emerge to construct a broader picture of what Colombians in Australia are like and how they behave with fellow Colombian immigrants. In a similar fashion to the also growing Brazilian community in Australia, Colombians have discursively depicted a community due to the redefinition of the social categorisations migrants bring with them and which are reconstituted within the context of the receiving country and the social and economic demands they find here. Just as Brazilians, Colombians can be seen forming different groupings, but these are not viewed as exclusive or static forms of community making, rather, individual perceptions on social distinctions are reformed again given the diversity of factors that influence one’s migration experience. Among those factors, as I have illustrated, there is year of arrival, occupation, language ability and legal status.
The positive transfigurations of the national are recombined when participants bring in narratives that disclose their definitions of the putative Colombian community and their relationships within it. A detailed analysis of such narratives is presented in the following chapter, which explores how participants further construct their individual identities, addressing issues of the collective and the imagined community of Colombian migrants in Australia.
Chapter 5

Imaginaries of a Colombian Community in Australia and Their Intersection with Identifications of the National Back Home

Part of the life experience related by participants in this study has depicted how they view their relationships with fellow Colombians hindered by the emerging distinctions they make, or have been made of, their social positionings as immigrants in Australia. These positionings are found to be shaping forms of belonging and informal citizenship in the new country through discourses related to official residency status in Australia, a proven proficient use of English, as the dominant language, and the job mobility immigrants are able to reach. Colombian narratives around their migrant citizenship in Australia enhance new forms of social distinction amongst this group which assume similar weight in their relations with fellow country people to that conferred to the widely used social class distinctions in Colombia’s territory. The stories that serve to unveil such trans-locality and re-framing of social class are in many ways primarily tailored through accounts of very personal experiences of participants in direct contact with fellow Colombians in Australia as has been explored in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, participants also engage in telling of their experience with the broader community, the ‘imagined community’ of Colombians in Australia, using Benedict Anderson’s (1991) term, upon whom they attach certain identifying features as a collective. Their perceptions of a fragmented community appear influenced by what they see as the sense of community of other groups of migrants in Australia, and among Australians themselves, as well as the sense and lack of communitarian relations Colombians have in their own country.
This chapter illustrates how the elements of ‘sense of community’ defined by David McMillan and David Chavis (1986)—membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection—are articulated in the discursive constructions Colombians make of the real and ideal characteristics of their community in Australia. Such elements describing ‘sense of community’ are at the same time seen in view of the impact of globalisation on the nation states (Appadurai 1996) and the information age we live in (Castells 1996, 1997) which help theorize the sense of fluid and flexible communities we see today. That is, the increased access to information technologies and a highly connected global market economy have facilitated faster and multidirectional social relationships for which national communities are continually reforming themselves. National communities in the diaspora replicate the sense of ‘network society’ explored by Manuel Castells (1996) for whom the social structures that can be found formed through ‘networks of different kinds’ have ‘different logics of value making’ (3-24). What is valued within the network depends on the positionings and positionalities of the network members. Just as the concept of imagined communities (Anderson 1991; Hall 1990, 1995) entices a sense of shared values and expectations, communities seen as networks and groupings invites a sense of commonalities that may change accordingly to the members status, needs and wants. Therefore, the analysis I present here looks closely to how the sense of community is drawn or referred to by virtual members of a ‘community’. By virtual here I mean members who essentially share certain traits that could put them together as unequivocal members of the group of Colombian migrants, say by their shared country of origin. However, as in the network society concept (Castells 1996) the structure of such network is made up of ‘interconnected nodes’ (3) with different weigh or importance in the social structure. In this way, the single marker of ethnicity or place of origin is not sufficient to describe the network or grouping when there appear other traits that contribute to defining the network structure or at least part of it. For example, in the case of migrants, networks are established differently depending on factors such as age, sex, year of arrival, level of use of the local language, occupation, residency status, family support networks, among many other traits. These defining features for Colombians in Australia have been explored in Chapter 3 but are revisited here in view of

55 See also David McMillan 1996 and 2011.
participants own perceptions on how their community and the networks within are formed. The following analysis demonstrates that participants are more likely to tell how they feel distanced or alienated from the overall ‘community’ rather than utterly feeling they belong to it. This chapter is thus a continuation of Chapter 4 which introduced some of the participants’ narratives on who Colombians are in Australia in view of the social categorisations system they use in Colombia and that is re-framed in the new country. It broadens the re-presentations of Colombians to the collective level by asserting the definitions of the community participants offer, in both a semi-private space with the researcher and in the presence of other participants or in public events. Descriptions of the Colombian community work to delineate the migrants’ experience with fellow country people in the new country at the same time that they provide constructions of their national identities and shared identification practices, in particular, how they see Colombians’ civic engagement in tension between both locales. Reflections on the national are also attached to their views on the political; however, these are explored further in the next chapter where I explain in detail how Colombians in Australia engage in various forms of voicing and silencing their political stance.

From the Imagined Community of Colombians in Australia to its Material Aspects

The number of Colombians in Australia is rather small with 11,318 Colombia-born living here in 2011 (DIAC, 2013b: 1) with estimated floating populations of 14,000 in 2012 (Consulate General of Colombia in Sydney) and 19,000 in 2015 (my estimate). Yet, the rapid growth of the community and the circumstances of the settling of Colombians in Australia (for example, with most jobs and schools located in the heart of the major cities), would allow for an easier contact with fellow country people. However, the immigrant community remains necessarily ‘imagined’ based on the little contact one may have with the greatest majority of this group even in concentrated areas like city centres in Melbourne or Sydney. In spite of this, there are common understandings in the way Colombians picture their lives and their migration experience and that of fellow nationals in the new country. This is in line with Ellie
Vasta’s (2004) description of an ethnic community which she sees defined by the common undertakings of ‘migration experiences, language and traditions’ despite the division that class, regional, political and religious differences may pose (6). In effect, those elements are present in the participants’ stories defining ‘the community’, however, they also reflect on the sense of community they attribute to Colombians in Colombian territory, to how they see other migrant groups build their own communities, and to their own expectations of how a community is formed (for example, with an official leadership or considerable attendance to cultural events).

In the context of their Australian migration, participants discussed whether they believed a ‘Colombian community’ existed in the city they live in Australia. The analysis of their discourse referring to such a community unveils four wide elements defining it and which can be seen mirroring the ‘sense of community’ modelled by McMillan and Chavis (1986). A first type of response is given by participants undermining different aspects of a community that may exist but of which they feel they are not a part. A second group of respondents which acknowledges the existence of a community describes it as weak and different to other communities (especially larger migrant communities in Australia) and equated in many cases only to small groups of people or friends. This group of responses exemplify in part how the ‘community’ can scarcely reach certain levels of influence among potential members. Another group of responses tell of the virtual character of the community facilitated by the use of online social networks especially by recent migrants that can compare to McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) fourth element of sense of community integration and fulfilment of needs. Colombians have started informing themselves through these virtual spaces as a result of a range of needs, including finding accommodation, a job, or simply as a way to keep updated on events and services other Colombians organise or offer. Finally, other participants who say there is a community define it by describing their personal involvement with it and telling of what they see as the changes over the years and over the age groups and circumstances that make up such a community. This is a very close

---

56 Hereafter I give priority to the use of the term ‘migrant community’ instead of ‘ethnic community’ due to the negative connotations I see attached to the latter. Ethnic is often matched to a racial category and does not embrace the pluridiversity of cultures, customs, and even language usage and dialects that make up the Colombian population. In the migration context I believe the use of ‘ethnic’ upholds the self-claimed superiority by one national group over others, dismissing any differences amongst immigrants.
realization of the community serving the element identified by McMillan and Chavis of shared emotional connection.

Overall, the community is perceived and described as fragmented, disperse and disunited, whilst the small groups to which participants show certain affiliation or distancing from are precisely the groupings that form an imagined and multifaceted network of Colombian community.

**Acknowledging the Existence of a Community of Which One Is Not Part**

Participants draw on the boundaries they see delimiting a community to which they do not belong. For example, the boundaries related to the social distinction categories discussed in Chapter 4 differentiate Colombians between those who have and do not have a permanent residency status in Australia, between those who have stayed in low-skilled or entry-level jobs as opposed to those who have reached higher job mobility, and between those who are able to publicly demonstrate or display a ‘good English level’. These features of distinction work as internal boundaries within ‘the community’ which make Colombians feel closer or further from a wider number of fellow migrants. McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) subelements of the feeling of membership—emotional safety, the sense of belonging and identification, personal investment and a common symbol system (9)—appear exemplified in the participants’ accounts. They share anecdotes that illustrate how they have distanced themselves from the ‘community’ precisely as a way to preserve their emotional security. An example of this has been discussed earlier when one of the female participants stopped relating with her Colombian classmates at an English school because of their repeated comments on how she could take advantage of her Australian boyfriend to ‘get the papers’ and become resident of Australia. Another example of the risk that mixing with the community poses towards one’s feelings is given by a male participant who narrates how he stopped attending with his family the parties organised by the Asociación Colombia en Australia because his young son was rejected by fellow teenagers on one occasion.
The second sub-element within membership, the sense of belonging and identification with the community, is also notoriously a factor on which participants reflect in adverse ways. One of them, Marcela, tells of her experience with a group of Colombians she joined for dinner, but who did things that replicated the behaviours of Colombians in their country. They smuggled alcohol into the private venue and told nonsense to a female waitress who could not understand Spanish. This was a marking moment in Marcela’s distancing from her fellow country people; since then she started avoiding to be equated with Colombians and the ‘community’ in general.

Instances like the ones above undermine how Colombians see their membership in the community and impede further manifestations of the third sub-element outlined in McMillan and Chavis’s model, that is, personal investment in the community. In most cases participants do not tell of any interest in gaining membership within the broader community, at least not in continuing forging personal relations with more Colombians. Instead, it seems less risky to participate in a virtual community but this is part of the overall making of the further element of ‘shared emotional connections’ rather than material belonging to a national grouping. Still, there is an undeniable element that works as an imagined link amongst Colombians in Australia, that is, their ‘common symbols system’ defined as the social conventions like rites of passage or language that ‘create social distance between members and non-members’ (McMillan & Chavis 1986: 11). Colombians pride themselves on their common symbols related to culture, music, food, football, humour and idiosyncrasy in general. These can be seen as quintessential themes that prompt common understandings and cheering of the ‘Colombian culture’. Notwithstanding, effectively, common symbols also exist in identifying the failures of Colombia’s society, continuous disappointment with national and regional governments, the state and the political system ruling the country. Discourse referring to these more negative symbols also exists but it is hardly made public and comes in tension with the participants’ reluctance to offer more open accounts on the drivers of their migration decision-making and their stance on the social and political conditions of their country, both in the past and present.

In the accounts provided by some interviewees, the community does exist given the large number of Colombians here. Some participants’ knowledge of such a number comes from what they
have seen in Facebook group pages in the different cities of Australia (for example, Colombianos en Melbourne, which has over 2,500 members online, and Colombianos en Brisbane, which has over 4,000 members)\(^{57}\). However, at the same time, participants distance themselves from the community they describe, by implying or admitting they do not take part in any activities related to it. Angela, for example, believes there is a large number of Colombians and thus a community. However, when she elaborates further on the activities within she makes repeated use of third person excluding herself from that group.

\textit{P: Pienso que es bastante grande y me he dado cuenta de ello más que todo por el grupo de Facebook, que no sé si se reúnen de vez en cuando pero por lo menos es una comunidad y hay un apoyo en muchos sentidos, y por lo menos procurar el bien [sic], de los unos y los otros […] y si hay eventos creo que la gente trata de participar y de estar ahí, y si hay marchas pienso que la gente llega como una comunidad a apoyar las causas.}

P: I think it is quite big and I’ve learnt about it especially because of the Facebook group that I don’t know if they meet from time to time, but at least it’s a community and there is some support in many ways, and at least to do good [sic], for one and the other […] and if there are events I think people try to participate and be there, and if there are demonstrations I reckon people come as a community to show support for the causes.

P21 Angela (34, 2007)

In Angela’s view, there are events where ‘people try to participate and be there’ but she is not one of those Colombians. Similarly, Nancy describes the community as an entity she does not engage with by using third person in her discourse, but, differently to Angela, the community is presented as available in the form of small groups of friends who ‘celebrate every birthday, birth or wedding’. For Nancy, the community is less abstract or less distant than the larger community presented by Angela, but, regardless,

\(^{57}\) As of May 2015, over ten different Facebook pages of Colombians in Australia and related groups were found and these are usually managed as closed groups in the five major cities of the country.
she is not part of it. Angela and Nancy’s descriptions illustrate at large the recurrent definition of the Colombian community as both a large group of people they have heard of by third parties and which is not part of their own circles, and as small groups of Colombians they know of and who meet and ‘revive’ their country’s culture. Yet neither of them consider themselves to be partaking of these groupings. This can be understood from their quick integration into the mainstream Australian workforce, which is normally a difficult task for many Colombians. Angela got married to her Australian boyfriend whom she met in Colombia, she was able to get a customer service’s job early after her arrival to Sydney in 2007. Nancy arrived on a work-sponsored visa and did not have much initial contact with Colombians in the small Queensland town where she settled in 2008. Both women were able to carry on independently from any Colombian acquaintances and have only recently started to be more in touch with the ‘community’ through virtual online spaces. Other participants also tell of their distancing from the Colombian community, again, as a result of their own circumstances of immigration and settling in the new country.

Claudia and Fernando acknowledge that they are not part of the community but the reasons they provide are quite different. Claudia starts explaining there are groups of Colombian friends, but these certainly do not make up a community on their own; yet, there is a sense of community in solidarity events and where a larger number of Colombians attend to buy Colombian food and listen to Colombian music, but she is not interested in joining them because she has an Australian husband who does not speak Spanish and she would not like to go there by herself. On the other hand, Fernando’s reasoning over why he does ‘not belong directly to that community’ tells more about his own perception of Colombians in Sydney and the social class distinctions he appreciates amongst them. His own exclusion from the community is presented as a way to protect himself from being identified as a high income earner like people would identify him if he lived in Bogotá around ‘Parque de la 93’, which is a recognised high strata area in Bogota’s north. Fernando transposes his own understanding of class determined by place of residence and social strata in Colombia to fellow Colombians’ suburbs of residence in Sydney.
P: I don’t belong directly to that community because [...] it’s a geographical issue, I live in an area where people look at me as if I lived in Parque de la 93 [in Bogota], they say ‘do you live in the Lower North Shore? Wow, Willoughby?’ ‘Yes’ ‘how much do you make per week? A thousand dollars or what?’ [...] while 80% of Colombians, I’m sure they live in the Bondi area, Randwick, Bankstown, Fairfield, they say in Fairfield there is a rather big Latin [sic] community.

P18 Fernando (39, 2006)

Fernando tried to make the point that he is not part of a community where people are easily categorised into certain socio-economic position based on their suburb of residence. Nonetheless, such framing turns out to be his own classification of the members of the community whose majority, he believes, dwells in areas like Bankstown and Fairfield different to himself who lives in a highly regarded suburb in Sydney’s north. Indeed 2011 Census data shows a richer variety of birth places for dwellers in the Fairfield area, with 22,794 born overseas and 38,212 or 44.8% born in Australia (DIBP 2015b) while in the Northern Beaches only 18,668 people appear as foreign-born compared to 79,019 Australia-born (DIBP 2015b). In a way, Fernando is re-producing a mediated discourse that is available amongst Colombians upon their arrival regarding the usual places where ‘la comunidad Latina’ is more visible in Sydney along with other immigrant groups. But, this is certainly part of the imagining of the community and not something he has seen by himself.
The second element from McMillan and Chavis’s model of sense of community is presented as the bidirectional concept of ‘influence’ for which members of a group need to feel attracted to it—by ‘exerting some influence on what the group does’—and at the same time the group needs to show cohesiveness across its members (1986: 11). This is an obvious competing relation since to be able to attract more members the community should represent to some degree a wide range of personal interests and at the same time, try to conform to all in a cohesive way. In this view, the Colombian community in Australia is seen as rather weak and ambivalent for which its potential members prefer belonging to differentiated small communities where they feel more at ease. For instance, some participants believe Colombians in Australia form small niches of very close friends and when one has reached entry into one of those there is no need to look any further in making new Colombian acquaintances.

Interestingly a number of participants also reproduce discourse attached to geographical location and marital status which helps them differentiate amongst small groups of Colombians. One of the male single participants, Andrés, relates that it has been difficult to keep close ties with former friends after they got married and moved to the Lower North Shore in Sydney. In turn, Andrés’s description of the Colombian community as a ‘nicheos de colombianos’, rather than a single compound entity, is based on the links he makes between job mobility and geographical location of small groups of Colombians in Sydney. He identifies four of those groups in his interview:

\begin{quote}
P: Yo creo que existen nichos de colombianos [...] el grupo de colombianos emparejados con colombianos casados, que llevarán al menos diez, doce años, ellos casi todos viven allá en el Northern beaches, Manly, Milsons Point, por todo ese lado y es un grupo que les está yendo bien, llegaron profesionales y se han metido en su campo [...] los que llevan acá más o menos el mismo tiempo pero que se han quedado como trabajando más o menos las mismas cosas, que viven como por la ciudad que trabajan en restaurantes, en limpieza, todas esas cosas, como que no han buscado otros horizontes, después hay un grupo de parejas nuevas que están todavía como en la lucha, se intercalan para los estudios
\end{quote}
P: I think there are niches of Colombians […] the group of Colombians who are married with Colombians, that will have lived ten, twelve years here, almost all of them live over there in the Northern beaches, Manly, Milsons Point, all that area and it is a group that is doing well, they came as professionals and are involved in their field […] those who have been here for the same length of time but have stayed working more or less on the same things, live around the city and work in restaurants, cleaning, all that stuff, like they are not seeking other horizons, then there is a group of new couples that are still struggling, they take turns for their studies

P26 Andrés (34, 2003)

In contrast with Fernando’s view that refers to class distinctions accompanying geographical location, Andrés offers a more detailed description of Colombians who he believes dwell in certain areas or suburbs depending on their migration path, job mobility and even their marital status. Yet, this is a reflection based on those Colombians he knows in his own circle of friends and those he has heard of from his job position as a manager. In sum, referring to the community as ‘made up of different niches’ Andrés identifies at least four of them: Colombians-only couples who possess a job related to their expertise; Colombians working in entry-level jobs like cleaning or hospitality; those couples who share work and study turns throughout their visas; and those who have lived in Sydney for longer, twenty or thirty years. These groups, however, says Andrés, are not seen as united in a single community. A similar characterization is offered by Milena for whom different couples where both people are Colombian tend to meet more often and more intimately, whereas her Colombian friends married to Australians who are non-Spanish speakers, make up a different group because their partners do not intend to learn the language and will feel eventually excluded when during a party Colombians end up speaking Spanish. Meanwhile, Oscar, one of the older male participants expressed ‘only someone truly interested in the community’, referring to the researcher, ‘would dare’ to meet him in his home in Western Sydney—an area usually charged with stereotypes over the national origin of its inhabitants as mainly Middle Eastern. These participants attend to broader local stereotypes related to the most likely
location of certain types of immigrants, the young working families in the north of Sydney and the older and retired in the west.

The new social and economic values attributed to Colombians tend to prevent the manifestation of any major influence of community and therefore a vision of a ‘community of communities’ (López 2005) is closer to the reality of this migrant group. Following the participants’ assertions they see their community in Australia as only partially formed through different groupings that have more or less relevance in their lives and mobility experience. The relevance depends on the variety of factors that subject their migration, their personal and social needs and in particular their interaction with fellow migrants and their socio-economic positioning in Australia. The significance of such groupings corresponds to that of nodes in the network society structure discerned by Manuel Castells (1996): ‘Nodes may be of varying relevance for the network’ (3) while ‘the network society is a multidimensional social structure in which networks of different kinds have different logics of value making’ (24). Indeed, the networks forming the Colombian community are formed through groups with more or less strength in terms of the number of people involved, like in the Colombian Association; the purpose of affiliation, like the virtual groupings where Colombians seek or offer a range of services and commodities; or their purpose, like fundraising organising or joining national celebrations.

The nodes of the Colombian network or community find resemblance with other emerging Latin American communities like the Brazilian. As Rocha (2006, 2008, 2014) has described, Brazilians in Australia can be seen divided in two waves according to their year and conditions of arrival. A first wave started from the 1970s under the Australian Government assistance scheme and a second group from the late 1990s onwards with a marked flow of ‘young professionals who are highly educated and belong to the upper-middle class’ (Rocha 2008: 147). Again, as in the case of Colombians illustrated here, the ‘old’ and ‘new’ divide undermines the complexity of these emerging communities as different nodes or groupings appear. For Brazilians these relate to social class linked to religiosity and transnational spiritual practices (Rocha 2006, 2009), their multidirectional mobility as in the case of Japanese-Brazilians (Rocha 2014), and their practices of intimate multiculturalism as in the case of the Capoeira phenomena (Wulfhorst, Rocha & Morgan 2014).
The network forming the Colombian community can be defined in terms of how strong or visible it - its interconnected nodes or groupings appears. Rocio tells how at the time her aunt arrived in Sydney, about 30 years ago, there was a rather small population of Colombians and ‘they had a community and they were more united’. Nowadays, according to Rocio, ‘Sydney is quite large and there are so many people coming and leaving that it is difficult to form a community’. Moreover, for her, it is precisely the large number of Colombians in Sydney which impedes the sense of a strong community. Instead, Colombians might be part of an overarching Latin American community:

P: yo me imagino que haya pero no podría decir como la comunidad italiana o la comunidad griega. No creo que sea tan fuerte, pero puedo decir que hay una comunidad latina. Porque además nosotros, o sea colombianos, mexicanos, somos la misma cosa

Rocio, 36, 2007

Rocio’s remark pinpoints one of the features of this growing community of Colombians in Australia; that is, that it has not acquired large numbers or even established compact territorial locales in Sydney, or anywhere else in Australia, as ‘people come and go’. The geographical distance and the costs of travelling to Australia are key to a differentiated set of migration paths for more traditional country destinations like the US or the UK. Rocio and other participants’ mentioning of other communities as bigger or stronger (like the Italian or Greek community) leads her to amalgamate the Colombian people to a wider group, ‘the Latin American community’ which she implies has more chances of being perceived as a strong community. Indeed, the adoption of a pan-Latin American identity could be described as a strategy to exert a political voice, as in the case of Latin Americans joining social and political activism in Australia (Zevallos 2005; Mason 2014) especially from Central America, Chile and Uruguay. Otherwise, attaching to this broader identity can be seen related to what Wulfhorst (2014)
describes for Brazilians in Australia, ‘a way to strategically placing themselves in multicultural Australia, particularly in the labour market’ (485). I argue that for Colombians, given the stereotypes they are continuously referred by, as mentioned earlier, this embracing of their pan-Latin American identity works to revert such stereotyping in view of the positive image of Latin American mediated through symbols of language, culture, beauty, and people’s warmth. At the same time, a pan-Latin American identity works to assuage the lack of sense of community and mistrust participants see amongst fellow Colombians. This reasoning is further consolidated via the positive imaginaries of the pan-Latin American ethnicity in Australia which following Wulfhorst (2014) is very different to that prevailing in countries with greater flows of Latin Americans. In countries like the US and Spain, ‘images of illegality and criminality in the media, discrimination and prejudice against Latin Americans’ have resulted in Brazilians ‘draw[ing] a line of distinction’ between them and their regional neighbours (485), while in Australia such a divide is much less apparent.

In a similar way to Rocio, Jorge, who has been in Sydney for thirty-nine years, believes that if there is a community it has ‘very weak traits’. He has only heard they meet on 20th July but says he is not connected to that. Instead, Jorge participates actively in meetings and events organised by other Latin Americans especially those promoted or advertised in Sydney by the Latin American Social Forum; he is particularly interested in social and political causes and events rather than more ephemeral celebrations like the independence celebrations. Meeting at a club is certainly not a sign of any strong community for him.

The community is also seen to be reduced to participating in events or gatherings where people try to ‘preserve the Colombian culture’. Martha notes this and adds that from her attendance at a solidarity football match she met other Colombians who ‘are working towards creating a community’ by organising similar events in support of people back in Colombia (for example, in reference to the National Farmers’ Strike in 2013). For Martha, there is a community enabled by those kind of events where there is a tangible purpose of helping their country people back in Colombia, yet still she has not engaged with them and this is something ‘they’, ‘the people,’ are doing while she presents herself as a casual spectator.
Integration and fulfilment of needs, the third element of the sense of community composite (McMillan and Chavis 1986), sustains that the ‘individual-group association must be rewarding for all its members’ through a number of reinforcements, for example the status of being part of a group that has gained some sort of success. In the case of ‘older’ Colombians who founded the Asociación Colombia en Australia, they were bounded by the success of their first project in 1991. They were able to raise funds to build a bust of Antonio Nariño in La Plaza Latinoamericana in central Sydney and since then the association has called on rewarding achievements of small projects, which has reinforced the participation of its registered members (Hincapié n/d).

A complimentary concept within the fulfilment of needs is that of ‘shared values’. That is, people come together when ‘they find they have similar needs, priorities, and goals, thus fostering the belief that joining together they might be better able to satisfy these needs’ (McMillan and Chavis, 1986: 13). Amongst Colombians in Australia there are three initial groups that can be identified as sharing certain values. First, there is the group of ‘old migrants’ whose arrival and integration in the country, as explored in Chapter 3, was facilitated by the dismantling of the White Australia policy and the needs of the country for a skilled labour force. Many of these migrants firstly allowed entry on the basis of their technical knowledge or expertise ended up in low-skilled jobs as did other migrants from non-Anglo Celtic countries.

A second group seen sharing values have been labelled here as ‘new migrants’, specifically those who come on student visas and have to fulfil exhaustive requirements to be able to stay in the country as students or to change their visa status to permanent resident. These people share the expectations that they are ready to take on any job that can accommodate their study timetable. International students from Colombia make connections with other students to find long or late working

58 Antonio Nariño was a precursor proponent of the independence of Colombia and president of the former Republic of Cundinamarca between 1811 and 1813.
hours in order to cover the high expenses associated with their migration move. Other subgroups with shared values are also forming, for example, in relation to the migrants’ desire to replicate the ambience of their country. Small businesses of food, retail, and entertainment find appeal amongst younger generations of Colombia-born people living in Australia. A rather close grouping is also found among Colombians trying to organise fundraising events for the people in need in their country after natural disasters, or in view of social mobilizations like the National Farmers’ Strike in 2013.

Notwithstanding the differences noted above, the experience of living in Australia appears to have a common effect on the attitudes and perceptions of participants towards the need to replicate the rules of civic engagement they have found here back in their country. Participants make extensive reference to what they see is failing in their society back home given that the ‘breaking of rules’ culture has permeated almost all corners of life in Colombia. They appraise the desirable traits of civic engagement that they see in their real experience in Australia and express their disdain towards how Colombians behave in their territory, and some Colombians do in Australia.

The virtual character of the community is mentioned in many of the participants’ accounts. For Rebeca, who lived in Melbourne for almost 3 years from 2009 and moved to Sydney in 2012, the community is ‘growing enormously’ but she relates such growth mainly with the appearance of different Colombian group pages online where people seek job opportunities, advertise events or businesses and offer goods for sale in each city. For Andrés, this is the closest thing to a community; however, it is certainly used mainly by people who have been in Australia for a short time, as well as newcomers and people preparing their arrival. Related to this, Nelson’s account exemplifies more practical aspects of the community whereby requests for help, in particular, take place. First, for him, there is a Colombian community all over Australia given the numbers of Colombians in big and small cities, but it is defined on the grounds of a particular ‘need’ which is ‘occasional’ and for which Colombians get in contact with fellow nationals. Only after they have overcome their needs could a different relationship be established, but overall there is no other reason to be in contact with other Colombians unless there is a ‘necessity for help’.

180
P: es una comunidad de presentación circunstancial, ocasional, siempre conoce uno a la gente en una circunstancia, ¿cuál es esa circunstancia? ¡Ne-ce-si-dad!, de trabajo, de vivienda, de comida, pero siempre nos agrupa una necesidad de poder, aquí muy poca gente se conoce para pasarla chévere, la pasan chévere después de que han cubierto la necesidad pero siempre vas a ver un colombiano diciendo, ‘ay ¿usted tiene que me recomiende con alguien? ¿Usted sabe dónde me pueden arrendar una alcoba? ¿Usted sabe quién tiene tal cosa?’ ¡Siempre es una necesidad! Ese es el factor, ese es el imán a la comunidad.

P: It’s a community of circumstantial introductions, occasional, one always meets people under one circumstance, what is the circumstance? NECESSITY!, of work, of housing, of food, but always what brings us together is a necessity for power, here very few people meet up to hang out, they hang out after they have covered their needs, but there will always be a Colombian saying, ‘do you have someone to recommend me to? Do you know where I can rent a room? Do you know if someone has this or that?’ It is always a need! That is the factor that is the magnet to the community.

P38 Nelson (52, 2009)

Indeed, the circumstantial character of the community undermined in Nelson’s account exemplifies common requests for help and offering of services appearing in those Facebook pages mentioned above. Even though he is 52 years old, he is one of the recent migrants with only four years in the country (at the time of his interview) and is very familiar with the Colombian virtual community which new arrivals approach to seek help or information. This seems to work in a similar fashion to the way in which the ‘old migrants’ operated when they arrived and would seek help from fellow nationals. One of the places they would find some support was the Asociación Colombia en Australia. Lucia’s reflection on her own involvement with the association underpins how the community played a major role in helping Colombian migrants in the past, and why there are not as many members today. In her view, ‘la Asociación’ has tried to ‘integrate all Colombians of any social class, students, older people […] unite
the community’. However, she believes many people are cautious of becoming involved with the group given the repeated history of migrant associations and clubs, like the renowned Spanish Club in Sydney, where there were huge money loses after they had reached certain financial stability. But she insists this is something unlikely to happen in the Colombian association. She also explains that younger people do not get involved with the association because they have other forms of facilitating their settlement in Australia with a wider use of the English language, something different to people in her generation who relied on the association because they did not have families or friendships ground for support.

Another participant who was also involved in the Asociación Colombia en Australia shares Lucia’s views on why there are not many people participating in the group. Carlos relates that at his time as part of the managing committee, in the early 1990s there were 300 people registered as members of the association and that at the time of our interview, in July 2013, the number had dropped considerably to 75. For him, Colombians seem to be afraid of communicating with other Colombians and the young students who are arriving do not register in the association because it is ‘a group of elders’.

For Carlos the association’s main event is the 20th July celebration where around 500 people attend a party held in the Club Marconi every year. However, many of the attendees are not Colombian, but from other countries like Chile and Argentina, who ‘love the Colombian atmosphere and the party’. Then he adds, ‘the old members of the association get together at the party, but not new people! They organise their own dance parties in Sydney’. He believes it is regrettable that the association’s members are mostly older people and therefore it makes it difficult to know whether there is a community of Colombians in Australia.

59 Translated from ‘integrar a todos los colombianos de cualquier clase social, estudiantes, los mayores […] unir a la comunidad’.
Related to the fourth element enabling a sense of community, that is, ‘shared emotional connection’, Colombians tell of anecdotes that bound them into feeling identified with their country people around their decision-making process to travel to Australia, their early experiences in the country and the present and future they envisage. There are strong common points that permit drawing on their experiences as their shared histories of migration and as a bigger or more homogeneous community. Colombians tell of their experience arriving in a country where, for example, trading hours are rather limited; Australians refer to them by using stereotypical images of drug trafficking, music and football; they are initially helped by a relative or an acquaintance referred by someone prior to departure; they live in shared accommodation until they are able to find a more comfortable living arrangements, among other common stories. There is an overwhelming expression of missing Colombia, their family, food, music and in general the ambience of the living style Colombians can afford in their territory.

These shared emotional connections are the binding element that allows for a partial resolution of the segmentation of the community. Colombians in general do not see a strong community being formed, because of the new social divisions they have encountered within, or because there is a lack of leadership and only ephemeral circumstances seem to reunite them with a positive sense of community. Colombians hold onto their memories of a set of cultural and familial symbols that are the best expression of their shared sympathies and connections with their country back home and with their country people in a foreign land.

Interestingly, the descriptions made by those participants who believe there is a community of Colombians in Australia can also be used to illustrate the ways in which the community is seen as not united, and detached from the lives of the migrant participants. The community is seen as ‘weak’ compared to the apparent strength of other communities; it is seen to have changed over time from a small number of people who would gather to seek support or to ‘revive’ their culture towards a community where younger people do not seem interested or in need of relating with the older Colombians; moreover, the presence of a community is deemed temporary only in times of need and
mediated by virtual spaces. These are, among others, the features participants attach to a not very clear, not organised and above all, a not sought after grouping. Thus, the existence of the community of Colombians in Australia is described in many ways in relation to its drawbacks resembling the comments of those who think there is not a community at all. Two main reasons are attributed by at least eleven of the thirty-one interviewees to say there is no such a community. First, for some, there is a ‘lack of sense of community’ because Colombians are ‘selfish’, ‘individualistic’ and ‘cada quien es por su lado’ (that is, everyone is on their own business) without forming ‘a true community’. Second, the lack of official leadership from the consulate is mentioned as a factor that makes even more difficult to see a community forming. Participants complain repeatedly of the lack of effective work and care for the community by the Consulate General of Colombia in Sydney and the Embassy of Colombia in Canberra. For Marcela, for instance, an organised community needs the support of its consular body, but from her experience, the Consulate General offers Colombians a poor service despite their numbers here and their continued arrival:

P: llegan aviones llenos de colombianos todos los días, hay una comunidad pero no una comunidad organizada […] Por ejemplo a mí el Consulado de Colombia no me ha servido para nada, trabajan de 9 a 1, no contestan el teléfono, hay que pedir cita por internet, yo pedí una cita hace por ahí un año y medio y todavía la estoy esperando.

P: here planes arrive crowded with Colombians everyday, there is a community but not an organised community […] for instance the Colombian Consulate hasn’t helped me at all, they work from 9 to 1, they don’t answer the phone you have to make an online appointment, I requested an appointment it may be one and a half years ago and I’m still waiting for it.

P3 Marcela (34, 2010)

The case in Brisbane is far worse, Consulate hours are rather restricted, more than in Sydney, and according to two research participants the service is provided by a private agency with non-Spanish speakers and non-Colombian staff. Carmen, who has been in Sydney for ten years, at the time of her interview, believes that the Consulate was more personalised until they started running online bookings
for appointments a couple of years ago, ‘se volvió muy australiano’ (‘it became too Australian’), she says, and it does not help Colombians here. Stronger claims are offered by Guillermo who believes the Colombian consulate is not doing what other consular offices do, such as making efforts to collect information about their nationals here and ‘build a community’; they are indeed only interested in keeping a job post for themselves.

P: el consulado sirve pa’ tres papas y nada más […] no sirve para nada, no cumple ninguna función, y si hubiera un cuerpo que debería estar generando y construyendo esa comunidad deberían ser ellos, pero no hacen nada, y eso es realmente triste, si no hay=sé que hay palabras que pueden describir mejor, deprimente, pero eso lo quiero dejar como algo que es importante […] ellos no quieren construir nada vienen aquí y es a tener un puestico y no hacer nada y ya!

P: the consulate sirve pa’ tres papas y nada mas […] is is useless, it doesn’t have any function, and if there was a body which should be generating and building that community it should be them, but they don’t do anything and that is really sad, yes there isn’t=I know there are words that can better describe, depressing, but I wanted to mention it as something important […] they don’t want to build anything, they come here to have a job post and do nothing, that’s it!

P33 Guillermo (38, 2004)

One of the major complaints against the Consulate is that the only thing they do is to pass on information about events always warning people these are not sponsored by the Consulate, ‘they are completely on the outer’ says Alfredo:

P: no hay un líder, no hay un grupo que se encargue de promover esas actividades, incluso la misma embajada colombiana, lo máximo que aporta es pasar un dato diciendo cuáles son las reuniones o fiestas que va a tener pero nunca ha tenido la iniciativa como la representación de

---

60 The expression ‘to become too Australian’ or ‘australianizado’ is generally used by Colombians and other Latin Americans meaning to become dry, simple, boring, unfamiliar, distant, and careless. This shows Colombians see their own consular body is unable to respond to their needs mismatching the expected level of service, which in Latin America will be warmer, and much more customer focused.
Colombia, de hacer una reunión, de patrocinar un evento, ¿no? ellos son totalmente al margen de eso.

P: there is no leadership, there’s no group in charge of promoting such activities, even the Colombian embassy itself, the most they contribute is to pass on information saying what are the meetings or parties, but never has had the initiative to represent Colombia, to hold a meeting, to sponsor an event, right? They are completely on the outer in these things.

P4 Alfredo (39, 2011)

The ‘relatively strong sense of community [that] exists among the Australians of migrant background’ described by Ellie Vasta (1999: 12) is at odds with the reflections the majority of Colombian participants make on the lack of such a sense of community. Participants exemplify from their own experience how they take part in or, in most cases, distance themselves from any rendering of the community. Vasta’s study was clearly carried out in an area of high migrant density, in Fairfield, a suburb in Sydney’s west. The groups of Latin Americans in the area are recognizably of Chilean, Argentinian, Uruguayan, Peruvian and Central American origin with reasons of migration especially linked to seeking political asylum. As examined in Chapter 3, the number of Colombians in Australia only started increasing from 2001, therefore it is a fairly recent group of immigrants. Moreover, Colombians in my research do not dwell in a single specific suburb or area which makes it more difficult to assert the formation of localised community activities like those seen in Fairfield. Rather, Colombians meet at different places nearby the city centre and speak of knowing other Colombians living in several different sectors of metropolitan Sydney. The narratives I collected paint the ‘Colombian community’ as an unarticulated group with whom participants do not relate, and where there is not a visible organisation or leadership, and finally where ‘old migrants’ view the younger immigrants as uninterested in participating of their groupings.

The lack of sense of community amongst Colombians in Australia, as it appears in my participants’ narratives, can be explained with Stuart Hall’s (1991) description of the first identity
politics. It pertains that collective ethnic identities and communities, in a migration context, are formed as a response to ‘being blocked out of and refused an identity and identification with the majority nation’ (Hall 1991: 52). That is, if immigrants do not feel fully accepted by people in the receiving country and do not feel attuned to the new social practices there, they will reinforce their new local ties to their own community of birth with whom they share a culture, a language and social values. At the moment where people respond to being left out, they come into their own search for their own roots (Hall 1991: 52). As was detailed in Chapter 3, Colombians embrace in quite positive terms their experience in Australia, their relations with people in the new country, and overall with the Australian people. Colombians also speak of the many ways they have incorporated themselves into the mainstream society (for example, being part of the workforce and following the system of rules) and a majority claims they have not been discriminated against by Anglo-Australians at large, or by people of different origin within Australia. They have, however, in many instances, told of experiencing alienation prompted by fellow Colombian migrants. Thus, not feeling directly ‘blocked’ from the mainstream Australian society has allowed Colombians to integrate more easily and, in a sense, not feel the need to form or participate in a community of Colombians in the new country. This is even more evident when they recall negative anecdotes they have had with fellow Colombians here. From these stories participants justify their distancing from the community. Another way to understand the discourse of participants that speak of a lack of community amongst Colombians can be explored in view of Putnam’s (1983) notion of social capital. Accordingly, social capital is the necessary cooperation between people in the community, facilitated by trust and reciprocity relations:

Social capital here refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions […]. Trust lubricates cooperation. The greater the level of trust within a community, the greater the likelihood of cooperation. And cooperation itself breeds trust […]. Social trust in complex modern settings can arise from two related sources – norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement (Putnam 1993: 167-171).
In line with this, the accumulation of social capital that Vasta (1999:12) attributes to the building of the migrant communities in Fairfield—seen in reciprocal help and co-operation among migrants during their years of the settlement process—is perceived in different ways by Colombians in Australia, more antagonistically than positively as it is discussed in the following section. Relations of trust appear to be ruled out in many of the participants’ accounts and therefore relations with fellow Colombians, and the imagined community, are not easy to be made or maintained. The former relative co-operation perceived amongst migrant communities like those in Farfield, was then aided by the early emergence of multicultural policies and different services especially related to education, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Yet, more recent perceptions of lack of reciprocity and collaboration may be also charged to the fact that Australia has become less social welfare-oriented and more neoliberal. Therefore, since people’s mobility to Australia gives preference to those people who have certain cultural and economic capital, new migrants are directly expected to be independent from most forms of state aid. A clear example is that migrants on temporary visas who bring their children need to pay for their education and have no access to the mainstream tuition fee exemptions applied to permanent residents and citizens. In that view, newer migrants certainly have a distinct liberal or cosmopolitan outlook that makes them less attached to their ethnic groupings. This can evoke fractured social relations within their diaspora and increase feelings of mistrust and disunity. Therefore, the seemingly lack of vigorous sense of a Colombian community here can also be explained by what participants describe as lack of trust in one another, or, better said, in ‘Colombians’. But, how or why will mistrust impede more communitarian relationships amongst people who are only starting to know each other? Individual reflections on the character of ‘malicia indígena’ Colombians grow up with and which is replicated by the State and the political system of the country help understand the ways the common understandings of mistrust work amongst Colombians.
The phrase ‘malicia indígena’, or ‘Indigenous malice’, is commonly used by Colombians when referring to a certain cleverness that they possess that assists in sorting themselves out of difficult, unexpected, dangerous or unwanted situations. For example, when someone is around the congested city centres of Cali or Bogotá, and is able to get through especially high crime areas without being robbed, or through the heavy traffic without major delays, they can be proud to have used their ‘malicia indígena’ to do so. Or, when buying expensive goods, like a second hand car, if the buyer can reach a good deal for himself, he has had sufficient intelligence or ‘malicia indígena’ for not being ripped off.

These may be seen as positive examples of what makes Colombians rather smart people, yet the dimensions of ‘malicia indígena’ can go from individual harmless behaviour to illegal practices that affect all citizens when an individual, a public officer, a politician, the army, to cite some examples, transgress the established norms for their own benefit and get away with it without immediate or any repercussions for themselves. ‘Malicia indígena’ is also a phrase to acknowledge such behaviour where rules are not followed, deadlines are not met, promises are not kept and one can trick the law and other people without consequence.

Not abiding by the ordinary civic rules like offering your seat to an elderly person in public transport, arriving on time to an appointment, keeping your turn in a queue, paying off a small debt in a timely manner, or the legal ones like respecting the red traffic light, or not interfering in people’s voting decisions are broad examples of a generalised practice of bending the rules in Colombia. This has left deep consequences in the ways Colombians engage with each other for which mistrust or ‘desconfianza’ is called upon in most personal and commercial relations. Libardo Ariza (2013) highlights this is necessarily oriented by what ‘common sense’, that is the well-known social local practices in Colombia, reveals about the typical behaviour of Colombians when following rules.
The popular imaginary conceives ‘malicia indigena’ as an attribute which combines creativity, astuteness, prudence and hypocracy to ‘supply the deficiencies of the underdevelopment seen in the precarious education, poverty and state’s abandonment’ according to Jorge Morales (1998, my translation). Yet, the breaking of civic and legal rules is certainly not exclusive to the alienated or oppressed classes in Colombia. It is a behaviour present and acknowledged, not to say encouraged, at all social, economic and political levels in Colombia which has degenerated into a profound problematic of systematic deviant behaviour by the vast majority of Colombians, their State and its governing institutions. Therefore, as Ariza (2013) underlines it, common sense on the ‘typical behaviour of the Colombian subject’ naturally dictates relations of mistrust amongst Colombians. One of the participants in this research, Fernando, offers a reflection on the negative value of this common sense social practice: ‘Colombians are inordinately proud of “Malicia” forgetting that its first three letters, mal, are exactly that, bad, evil’.

Mauricio Garcia Villegas’s book, *Normas de papel: la cultura del incumplimiento de reglas* (2010) illustrates with different case studies the ways that unlawful behaviour and the breaching of the social and legal norms have become a common feature of Colombians and a burden for all actors of society as the individual interests surmount the public one affecting citizenship and democracy relations within the country. A latent consequence is therefore that respecting the norm is ‘seen as a heroic fact that cannot be requested of the public’ in Colombia (García 2010: 40; my translation). This widespread practice of not abiding by the norm has been documented by different authors as originating in the colonial times when Indigenous peoples, and later the oppressed classes, acted in defiance of the Spanish and European settlers, and later, the nobility or anyone with power above that of themselves. The reasons why this behaviour remained an intrinsic part of Colombians after Independence is explained by different Colombianistas as the result of Colombia’s own geography, which has historically seen large areas and regions separated by a vast topography difficult to reach and where a real State has not been able to oversee and control the whole territory. This in turn affected the building of communitarian and solidarity relations, making Colombia a strongly regionally divided society (Gomez Buendía 1999; Puyana 2002; Yunis 2003; Thouni 2007, 2012; García Villegas & Espinoza 2013). Regionalism has therefore pervaded Colombian society, as it has been mentioned in the previous
chapter, along with a weak conception of the national and the inability of the State to enforce the law (Thoumi 2007: 20). Just as some participants have reflected in this study, Colombia is pictured as an individualistic society with ‘less civil solidarity, reciprocity and trust, and a weaker national identity, than other societies in Latin America’ (Thoumi 2007: 20).

The normalisation of deviant behaviour also called ‘cultura del atajo’, ‘cultura de la ilegalidad’ and ‘viveza’ helps explain why relations of mistrust and lack of civic engagement are undermined by the Colombian migrants participating in the study in their own narratives defining the community of Colombians in Australia. That is, how their conceptions of the fellow nationals, based on reflections of undesirable behaviour, are brought into the discourse participants elaborate to describe why there is a lack of sense of community, or what impedes its formation. Second, this systematic breaking of the civic and legal rules, and what it involves in the state of social and political currency of Colombia, is presented here to foresee the relations of mistrust taking place among Colombians when verbalizing their own social and political stance, which are studied further in Chapter 6. At least five of the interviewees made detailed references to how Colombians who have come to Australia try to find information on how to ‘quebrar el sistema’ (that is, break the law) or broadly, try to make use of their ‘malicia indígena’ to take advantage of other people here, a practice they disagree with and have contested or challenged in different ways. For instance, Andrés, notes how disgusted he feels when reading posts online of Colombians who have just arrived or been in Australia for a short time and are trying to find their own way to get over the Australian system which regulates things like contraband, taxation and overseas remittances:

*P: me molesta mucho y soy el primero que salto y digo, ‘no qué pena pero no estamos en Colombia, estamos en Australia y si vas a venir a Australia a vivir como un colombiano y seguir lo que tú crees que son las leyes en Colombia mejor no venirse hasta acá, mejor quedate en Colombia’*
P: it disappoints me a lot and I’m the first one that stands up and says, ‘no, I’m very sorry but we are not in Colombia, we are in Australia and if you are going to come to Australia to live like a Colombian and continue what you believe are the laws in Colombia it’s better not to come here, rather stay in Colombia’.

P26 Andrés (34, 2003)

Andres’s reflection, similar to those of other participants, demonstrates how his migration experience has changed his imagined identities just as Gabriela Coronado, a Mexican migrant to Australia herself, explains one’s past experience is combined with how one becomes Australian (2014: 7). Coronado argues that migrants try to behave in the way they imagine Australians want them to be:

In this new environment we migrants tend to mould our cultural behaviours to fit, going with the flow, even hyper-correcting. We try to look more Australian than the Australians, or at least how we imagine the majority of Australians want us to be (2014: 9).

It is usually ruled out that Australians ever try breaking the rules, and if they did this would be an example of their flexibility rather than an undesirable behaviour (Coronado 2014: 11). Notwithstanding the prelude that within every cultural system or society similar actions of the opposing, breaking or bending of the dominant rules exist, research participants did not seem to recognise what has been conceptualised in relation to cultural folkways elsewhere as versions of the ‘Larrikin Principle’ (Hodge et al 2010; Coronado 2014). In fact, as Gabriela Coronado points out, these migrant narratives perpetuate the imagining of ‘typical behaviours’ as a symbol of ‘their distinctive national cultures’ (2014: 13) ignoring that ‘the larrikin’, the trickster or the outlaw hero are also figures of the Australian deep culture (2014: 12). One could also argue that this fact is not completely ignored but taken in view of the great differences in which the Larrikin principle works similarly among Colombians in Australia. We, Colombian migrants, praise how Australia’s social, economic and even political system works and
runs thanks to the way Australians follow the rules. Even though there will be tricksters these cannot compare to the generalised bending of rules present in Colombia.

Andrés’s response to Colombians who ‘misbehave’ comes from his own experience with the Australian immigration system. Andrés claims that when he arrived here, over ten years ago, Colombia was amongst a certain level or category of countries, for which fewer documents and supporting evidence were required to apply for or extend an Australian visa. Yet, soon after his arrival the ‘bad behaviour’ of Colombians in Australia, according to him, made authorities change the country’s category and more requirements now need to be filled out by those who wish to travel from Colombia. In this case, then, the illegal actions of a few people have repercussions over all fellow nationals in the short and long term:

\[ P: \text{estábamos en un nivel}^{61} \text{ más alto que la mayoría de países de Sudamérica, pero el hecho de que muchos colombianos han llegado a hacer cosas que no es [sic], ahora estamos al mismo nivel de los otros países [...] y ha sido por el hecho de que han cogido colombianos robando, han cogido colombianos traficando, entonces son ese tipo de cosas que a uno le molestan [...] eso ha hecho que las leyes se hayan endurecido con los colombianos y que ahora tengamos una imagen menos favorable} \]

\[ P: \text{we were at a higher level than the majority of South American countries, but the fact that many Colombians have come to do things that aren’t [sic] [correct], now we are at the same level of other countries [...] and it’s been because they have caught Colombians stealing, trafficking, so these are the things that upset you [...] this has made that the laws become tougher with Colombians and now we have a less favourable image.} \]

P26 Andrés (34, 2003)

---

61 This refers to the ‘student visa assessment levels’ assigned to each country ‘based on the calculated immigration risk posed by students from that country studying in that education sector’ according to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Colombians applying for Student visas in the VET sector are in the highest level of assessment 3, while ELICOS, and postgraduate students are level 2. The higher the level the more evidence is required from applicants to demonstrate they wish to study in Australia (DIBP, 2015).
Participants either imply or directly claim that to be in Australia Colombians need to behave otherwise, that is, as part of becoming ‘integrated’ into the ‘Australian culture’ they need to adopt new behaviour patterns which differ at large from those they are used to in their country. Colombians as many Latin American migrants respond to imagined expectations (Coronado 2014) within a logic of ‘cultural embodiment’ (Bauder 2008) which is tied up to the notion of being a recognised citizen. But, this may prove difficult, as Nancy pointed out in one of the group discussions, ‘you can take away the Colombian from Colombia, but not Colombia from the Colombian’.62 The non-abiding to the rules of practice of fellow country people is certainly a reason to distance oneself from the community at large. Guillermo, for example, says he has decided not to establish relationships with people who perpetuate such ‘cultural behaviour’, not only Colombians but Latin Americans, broadly. He uses another common example of what Colombians do in Australia, *‘vienen con una visa de 20 horas y quieren trabajar 50 y quieren hacer toda la plata en cash-in-hand en lugar de atenerse al sistema como es y a las reglas, quieren hacer sus cosas por debajo de cuerda’* (‘They come here with a 20-hour [restriction] visa and they want to work 50 [hours] and make all the money cash-in-hand instead of abiding by the system as such and the rules, they want to do their stuff under the table’). However, one would have to question as well the working conditions Colombians encounter when they come on student visas with limited working hours and high competition—with students from other countries willing to work for even less money—and a heavy taxation system. Regarding this, Fernando recalled a famous blog advising Colombians to be wary of a fellow national who was taking advantage of students paying them less than the minimum rates, or did not pay them at all. He reflects that ‘unfortunately the competition is so high that we have to give ourselves away, we have to, we don’t respect each other’.63

This and similar reflections Colombians elaborate with respect to the lack of true solidarity amongst Colombians signals a special type of migrant capital used by those with lengthier residence in Australia. First, they can be seen as ‘helping’ fellow country people to find a job and get installed in the

---

62 Translated from *‘se puede sacar al colombiano de Colombia, ¡pero no a Colombia del colombiano!’*
63 Translated from *‘por desgracia la competencia es tanta que nos regalamos, nos toca, no nos respetamos los unos a los otros’*. 

194
new country. Yet, those Colombia-born migrants who have either formal (that is, official) citizenship or informal citizenship (that is, practical knowledge of the Australian system by living here over prolonged periods), as in Fernando’s story, take advantage of their new social migrant capital to gain a position of power for themselves which helps reproducing the subordination of their fellow migrants in the labour market as it is argued in migration scholarship (Bauder 2008; Castles 1996, 2005; Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2012).

Bauder claims that ‘when noncitizens receive only conditional labour-market access, the lack of formal citizenship often functions as a mechanism of subordination’ (2008: 322). However, as participants’ reflections show, this diminishing of their employability and as a consequence their low job and social mobility, is not only inflected by the general governmental and economic system of the country, but by fellow immigrants who share a cultural habitus and know of their own country people hard-work—which poses them an advantage over other migrant workers and Australians themselves—and also the socially accepted practices of tricking the weak.

Guillermo makes sense of this saying that it is what Colombians have learned from their own system for over 30 or 50 years and nothing less can be expected from people who come from Colombia. In a way Guillermo’s remark synthesises what authors like Jorge Morales (1998) and Mauricio Garcia Villegas (2010) claim, that is, that the Colombian State is one of the first to trespass the norms it has established. García (2010) cites the case of ‘estado de excepción’ o ‘estado de sitio’ (that is, state of siege) as a paramount example of the Colombian State breaching of the law as it gives legal irregular power for lengthy periods prioritising its own agenda and excluding the rights of its citizens (García Villegas 2010: 276). Therefore, claims García, society perceives the State’s own deviance as a justification of its own contemption, which eventually becomes ‘a reciprocal relation of learning of the illegal between the State and its vassals’ (Ibid, 276).64

64 Such frameworks are inspired by the application of the work of Giorgio Agamben on states of exception to Colombian and other Latin American legal and extralegal workings of power and (para) state formation.
Intersections of the Colombian Community and National Identifications of Colombia through Collective Remembering

The participants’ reflections on what it makes the ‘Colombian community in Australia’ tell at the same time of the characteristics they attach to the nation, to their identifications of the national and in consequence discursive formation of their national identities. Just as Rudolph De Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak write, discourse conveys the construction of different national identities—rather than a unique identity—which vary depending on ‘the social field, the situational setting of the discursive act and the topic being discussed’ (1999: 154). In a semi-private setting, like the interviews, participants initiated reflections on such notions and expanded upon them or showed them in further contexts that were also private like the self-narratives, and more public ones like the group discussions and in a few instances with their participation in events where other Colombians were present as well (for example, demonstrations in Sydney’s Town Hall, elections in the Consulate). Participants appear to be discursively forming national identifications with a set of common histories brought about in their telling from remembrance and memory, although these are inflected by different factors. First of all, at the individual level, there are recollections that may be biased or inaccurate when in an effort to present them coherently we make use of those parts which affected us the most, but comprehensive details are left out (Halbwachs 1985: 183; Wertsch 2002: 8). Certainly, it would prove problematic to try recollecting and describing every aspect of an event when the aim of telling is precisely to advert the ways happenings affect the individual. After all, as James Wertsch summarises, the function of memory is to reorganize pieces of information into a broad ‘scheme’ rather than sustaining accuracy on particular parts of that information (2002: 7).

On the other hand, the social medium in which we are trying to construct the past shapes in many ways what is told and what is left out. Wertsch (2002) explains that in an utterance about the past, the author or speaker is not the only voice involved in such a production, but the voice of the listeners and ‘the textual resources’ that have previously been used to describe the events are also present, that is: ‘narratives that stand in, or mediate, between the events and our understanding of them’ (Wertsch
From this it is tenable that recalling memories is an active process which involves not only the experience of those who narrate them but the sociocultural context into which the accounts are offered, the listeners and the textual resources or knowledge of the world at stake. Wertsch (2002) calls this a collective remembering where there is an active process and by which ‘collective memory emerges in response to the need to create a usable past, and this need varies over time’ (Wertsch 2002: 43). The focus groups sessions were the semi-public space where participants re-created and re-framed their views on the political and the social underpinnings of Colombia and their migration move to Australia. I purport that the presence of other participants, unknown to each other in three of four discussion groups, sparked, in general, a desire of sharing and listening to each other’s experience evoking what De Cilla et al (1999: 152) call the ‘interactive influence of group’.

Discussants were performing in a shared role in the task of taking part of a collective telling exercise. This prompted what Erving Goffman calls the ‘performance team’, that is ‘any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine’ (1959: 69). In the case of the study they were staging a space of telling of their migrant experiences. My job was limited to asking questions that would initiate some thinking on different themes about Colombia and the participants’ lives in Australia. Their constructions of the national are more precisely taken from participants’ responses to how they describe Colombians in Australia, their own friends’ circles and what they have learnt about Colombia during their stay abroad.

In different segments of the group discussions participants gave numerous examples of the mistrust, lack of reciprocity and lack of civic engagement they see at work in today’s Colombia and which eventually have affected their relations with their co-nationals in Australia. These reflections are identified in the participants’ reasoning over Colombia’s present and future and also help understand the ways in which they pictured the Colombian community in Australia during their interviews. The mistrust that the common practice of breaking the rules has been able to permeate in the lives of Colombians is a constitutive part of the national identifications participants evoked within the focus groups. Their stories and reflections, invoked in a collective remembering exercise, give further evidence of the tensions involved in the making of the Colombian community in Australia and the fraught politics of social and cultural capital for migrants.
Mistrust of Fellow Colombians, the Government, and Politicians

In one of our previous meetings, Alfredo had voiced his concerns to what he saw as the ‘lunares’ or undesirable behaviour of some Colombians he had come across with in Colombian gatherings in Sydney. To avoid new ‘upsetting experiences’ Alfredo tells the group of his and his wife’s precaution when meeting Colombians. Instead of opening up to make new acquaintances they rather wait and see ‘how they behave’ in case they make any mistake or they do by trusting them. As the previous section showed, the expected social practices of Colombians are singled out as preventing social relations with Colombian peers. The focus group session enabled a further discussion on the scaling of individual behaviour to the official or governmental one. Responding to the question on the things they have learnt about Colombia while being in Australia, Alfredo pointed ‘corruption’ as one of those things. Marcela another participant there asked him whether he ‘did not know we were so corrupt’ and his response is necessarily connected to the current social and political crisis of the country:

P: yo sabía que éramos corruptos en Colombia, pero acá se han destapado las ollas habidas y por haber, desde el tiempo que llevo acá ¿tres años? Ha habido unos ‘boom’ que uno dice ‘yo no puedo creer eso’, lo que está pasando con el alcalde Petro, muchas vainas y yo veo las noticias directa o indirectamente porque así uno no las quiera ver, pam! en el Facebook las ponen […] uno sabe que en todas partes del mundo hay corrupción e incluso tal vez acá pero, pero que, la verdad que uno se asombra.

P: I knew we were corrupt in Colombia, but here some Pandora’s boxes have been opened since the time I’ve been here, three years? There’s been some ‘boom’ that one says ‘I can’t believe that’, what is happening with Mayor Petro, many things and I see the news directly or indirectly because even if you don’t want to see them, pum! They get posted on Facebook […] one knows there’s corruption everywhere in the world maybe even here, but honestly one gets astonished.

P4 Alfredo (39, 2011)
I thought the other participants in this group would try to support or make additional comments on Alfredo’s reflection; however, this did not happen immediately. The participants’ quite measured interventions, at least in the greater part of the sessions, demonstrates what Goffman alludes to as the differences in the function of the performance: ‘[I]t often happens that the performance serves mainly to express the characteristics of the task that is performed and not the characteristics of the performer’ (1959: 67). In this concrete fashion, the dynamic of the particular activity we were doing at the time was on a turn-taking basis, for which participants may have felt it was okay to let everyone deliver their answer and respect each other’s speaking turn. Yet, the near absence of confrontation or the raising of opposing views in the focus groups is concomitant with what I found in the personal interviews with my migrant participants; they limit themselves to not questioning or overtly exposing their own thinking on political matters even though they may hold well-defined positions. Moreover, the discussion sessions can be framed as a ‘team-performance’ where attendees had the ‘power to give the show away or to disrupt it’, as Goffman writes, and therefore each participant shall rely on ‘the good behaviour’ of the others present (1959: 71). This sort of self-protecting position was described in the second discussion group as a way to avoid clashes and ‘a bad moment’ with other people that they are sharing a conversation with, even with their own families (see Appendix C for relevant transcript). Participants responded to what they believe are the events which have made the history of their country, those they recall the most, and those that have marked the country at social, economic and political levels. Responding to this there were more substantial answers from the first group. For example, Alfredo’s response was more detailed and specific on what he had introduced before as the rampant corruption scandals that had made the overnight news for the last three years:

P: para mí el hecho de que el salario mínimo hubiera aumentado como en 20 mil o 30 mil pesos y a los congresistas le hubieran aumentado casi el 80 por ciento me parece la corrupción más grande de este mundo, solamente buscando aprobar leyes y mantener los líderes políticos callados, ¿si? Solamente para seguir empobreciendo al país, eso me parece triste, la pérdida de la soberanía en San Andrés, también me parece la cagada más grande que ha hecho este presidente.
P: for me the fact that the minimum salary increased twenty or thirty thousand and that of congressmen had increased almost eighty per cent I think is the biggest corruption in the world, only looking to sanction laws and to keep political leaders quiet, right? Only to continue impoverishing the country, I think that is very sad, the lost of sovereignty in San Andrés, it also seems to me the the biggest fuck up this president has made.

P4 Alfredo (39, 2011)

Alfredo’s outlining of a few of the things that have made the news recently in Colombia are indeed examples of the dimensions of the ‘cultura de la ilegalidad’, or illegality culture—the generalised deviant behaviour—which advances in all social classes and inextricably in those holding power or authority positions, namely politicians. Alfredo’s reflection shows how the non-abiding to the rules practice has effectively resulted in widespread corruption in the Colombian State, and this, unavoidably, has repercussions in how the general public, that is, the citizens, view the State and its institutions, and thus replicate similar behaviour in their daily lives. Thus, generalised mistrust in the other, the neighbour, the government, and the other Colombian migrants should not come as a surprise. It does, in fact, affect the other necessary components depicted by Putnam as vital for the forming of a community, namely, reciprocity and civic engagement.

*Lack of Reciprocity amongst Colombian Migrants*

Participants explain how they failed to see relations of reciprocity among Colombians in Australia in their early migration experience. In our first meeting, for example, Oscar, with over forty-years in Sydney, recalled in detail when he brought a parcel for a Colombian family in Sydney when he returned from a short trip to Colombia in the late 1990s. His expectations of reciprocity were discarded when the person who received the package, according to his story, did not thank him, did not invite him in for a coffee and rushed to ‘slam the door’ on his face. From this experience, and a few others, he lost trust in Colombians, he would never bring anything else to anyone, and would not be too much involved
with Colombian acquaintances since then. His aversion towards the Colombian community and regret for the state of affairs in Colombia is even more explicit in the discussion group session. There, he expressed again disdain for the ‘lack of social guarantees’ in Colombia and how different these are to the Australian system.

Paula, a fairly recent migrant compared to Oscar—with only three years in Sydney—also illustrated her failed experience of reciprocity when she was looking for a job as a cleaner. She described the situation in a graphic and fun fashion that made everyone laugh and add their own commentaries, but, notwithstanding, it represents a commonly shared experience amongst recent arrivals. Paula had been told that the best way to find a job was to ask her classmates in the English school. Yet, Colombians there were not willing to give her information; instead they questioned her skills, the ones needed for the job, and she was not sure what to say (see Appendix C).

Paula’s expectations of being helped by her peers to find a job were not met; instead, she realised how Colombians would usually respond when meeting one another. The common question, ‘how long have you been here for?’ will be there every time one gets to know new fellow country people. It seems that, as Paula has put it, the ‘seniority is quite valued’65, or people are worthy of knowing, of talking to, of being helped out, or trusted depending on the length of time they have been in Australia. This is similar to saying that the more time you have been in this ‘lucky country’, the fewer chances there are for you to behave as if you were in Colombia. This points us back to Jorge Morales’s (1998) statement that even though the Colombian ‘Indigenous malice’ (or malicia indígena) is portrayed as an inherited and non-transferable resource to any other nationality, it is ‘prone to diminish amongst those Colombians who stay abroad for long periods of time’66 (Morales 1998: 39). The reflection in the section above by Andrés and Guillermo on their expectations that Colombians in Australia do not to behave like in Colombia are also examples of this undermining of typical behaviours among co-nationals along with dismissing any care for the common good as expressed by Santiago in the third focus group. He responds to Andrés’s comment that he would like to see the ‘collectivist attitude of Colombians’ when organising ‘fiestas’, a sentiment Andrés does not see amongst Australians:

---

65 Translated from ‘la antigüedad vale’.
66 Translated from ‘susceptible de disminuir entre los colombianos que llegan a vivir largo tiempo fuera de su país’.
Andrés: cuando la gente hace como fiestas en Colombia la gente es un poquito más colectiva, como que siente más que uno está en Colombia que si estando aquí en Australia, no siente uno como un sentimiento colectivo.

Liana: ¿sí?

Santiago: ¿sí?

Liana: ¿Tú crees?

 [...] 

Santiago: me parece interesante que digas eso porque es que para mí la gente en Colombia es demasiado egoísta, ¡demasiado egoísta! entonces todo el mundo dice que en Colombia somos súper abiertos, mentiras porque es que si viene alguien a Colombia por primera vez, pues obviamente todo el mundo te ofrece la casa, todo el mundo puede hacer todo lo que quiera, pero si un carro se quiere pasar de carril no lo dejas pasar ni porque [...]

Andrés: [son cosas diferentes, yo también pienso que los colombianos somos egoístas muchas veces

Santiago: ¡demasiado egoístas!

Andrés: pero es un poquito diferente, el sentido colectivista es más por ejemplo, en la época de las novesnas, entonces tiene un montón de gente ahí, y el aguinaldo lo van dando por casas que la fiesta [...] en cambio acá es, las dos familias que se encuentran siempre, todas las pascuas, todas las navidades, todos los años nuevos siempre es los mismos con los mismos.
Andrés: when people organise parties in Colombia people are a bit more collective, it’s like one feels more that one is in Colombia than when is here in Australia, it doesn’t feel like a collective sentiment..

Liana: yes?

Santiago: yes?

Liana: do you think?

[…]

Santiago: it’s interesting you say that because for me people in Colombia are way too selfish, really selfish! So everybody says we are super open [sic], lies, because if someone comes to Colombia for the first time, well obviously everybody offers you their home, you can do anything you want, but if a driver wants to change lanes you don’t give them way no matter[

Andrés: [these are different things, I also think that we Colombians are selfish many times

Santiago: too selfish!

Andrés: but it’s a little different, the collectivist sense is more for example, at the time of the nativity prayers, so you have quite a bunch of people and the Christmas presents are given by each home […] while here it’s the two families that always meet, every Easter and Christmas, each New Years’ it’s always the same with the same.

Focus group 3
Santiago’s and Andrés’s exchange exemplifies the ambivalent character of the so-called ‘Colombian culture’. In many aspects it is labelled as ‘collective’, embracing, warmer and family-centred to say that Colombians enjoy partying and sharing a lot with their family and friends’ circle, and even their neighbours. On the other hand, there is the marked individualistic character introduced before, which is mediated by regional, class and race divisions, and the very personal interest is given priority over the common good. This last feature is emphasised by Santiago at the end of the exchange:

P:  obviamente son las experiencias, para mí fue exactamente lo opuesto, para mí los australianos, y el australiano anglosajón es más querido, y me parece la gente más querida que he conocido […] todos con Colombia celebran el partido, pero a la hora de salir del parqueadero que se joda todo el mundo, esto acá no pasa, aquí tu sales al parqueadero y sales y no te empujas a la salida, no hay estrés en el parqueadero porque la cultura [sic] sigue ahí no más, en Colombia solo pasa en el partido y no más y sales a la calle, el que te roba, el que te quita el puesto, ¿no?

P: obviously it comes from experience, for me it was the exact opposite, for me the Australians, the Anglosaxon Australian is much warmer, and I think the warmest people I’ve met […] everyone with Colombia celebrates the match everyone gets fucked, that doesn’t happen here, here you leave the parking area and you leave and you don’t push at the exit, there is no stress at the parking because the culture[sic] stands over there, in Colombia it is only during the football match and that’s it and you go on the street, the one that robs you, the one that takes your seat, right?

Focus group 3, P11 Santiago (32, 2002)

---

67 Santiago invokes here the sense of culture related to being polite to other people, demonstrating certain civilized and ordered behaviour in public.
Santiago’s example illustrates what he sees as the common behaviour of Colombians in their country, and what he sees impeding the progress of the country as people are selfish and do not care about anyone but themselves, and what is more confronting, only seem to care in moments of joy and when it is over they almost immediately switch to an individualistic and personalised attitude against each other. Then, Santiago associates the attaining of ‘progress’ attached to displaying a more ‘civilized’ behaviour that he also directly links to a notion of whiteness, as he stresses it is the ‘Anglo-Australians’ who are civilized. Santiago’s reasoning on race and class in Australia mimics his other comments on race and class divides he draws about Bogota. Not responding to the new social expectations in the new country limits the chances for people to approach the community, and even worse, can make people reluctant to participate in activities that by its very nature are supposed to bring change and good to the Colombian population, like participating in social causes or movements, voting in elections and engaging in politics more broadly. Regarding this, participants mention examples of lack of civic engagement in both locales.

**Lack of Civic Engagement in Colombia and Australia**

As a form of civic engagement, voting in local or national elections, is not mandatory in Colombia, unlike in Australia. In a segment of the second discussion group, Miguel acknowledges he has never voted, despite of being 29 years of age and legally able to do so wherever he registers his national identity card from the age of 18 years on. This is seen by Marcela as an undesirable but common practice across Colombia, especially within the younger generations who do not engage in knowing about their country’s political system and distance themselves from any form of political action which ends up in consequences for all. Marcela ends her comment by saying she wished voting was compulsory and so people were truly engaged in the issues that matter their country (see Appendix C). Although equating compulsory voting with political engagement may prove to be an idealized view, for Marcela it would be a starting point for Colombians to begin participating in politics more actively.
Marcela: [la gente] dice es que ‘yo no quiero tener nada que ver con eso’, ‘yo voy a trabajar honestamente y voy a tratar de sobrevivir y ya, pero no quiero tener nada que ver con eso’, pero eso es un arma de doble filo, porque cuando uno es apático ellos [los políticos] allá calientan la olla y hacen lo que les dé la gana porque uno no participa (...) los jóvenes, ay qué pena más que todo, mi hermanita tiene 22 años, ¿Uribe? ¿Santos? Pues que, ‘no sé, no entiendo, no me interesa’, nada, nada!, y no saben nada de política [...] 

Miguel: no nos dejan saber

Marcela: [people] say ‘I don’t want to have anything to do with that’, ‘I’m going to work very hard and that’s it I don’t want to have anything to do with that, but that is a double-edged sword because when one is apathetic over there they [politicians] put on a show and they do what they want. My little sister is 22, Uribe? Santos? Well, she says, ‘I don’t know, I don’t understand, I’m not interested’, nothing! They know nothing about politics […] 

Miguel: they don’t let us know.

Focus group 2

The conception of civic engagement and the exercise of citizenship go beyond the following of the formal and informal norms, as these are named by Francisco Thoumi (2012), that allow a smooth functioning of society life in shared public spaces, for example. Civic engagement also involves the role of citizens to provide continuity and improve social justice for all, by demanding and effectively participating, for example, in the decision-making process of the government and its institutions. As Thoumi put it, ‘to establish the rule of law one should not look only for a strong government but also for a stronger civil society to help enforce laws’ (2012: 981). In this light, the reciprocal relation between the deviant behaviour of the State, or better, its incapability to exercise control, and the lack of
engagement of its citizens is implied in Marcela’s reflection on the need that Colombians take action and recognise and use their power to revert and reconcile the inequalities, the corruption and the undesirable unlawful practices of politicians and public officers. Marcela’s implication surrenders the thinking of Colombianistas like Garcia Villegas (2010), Pécaut (2014) and Thoumi (2012), for whom part of the solution of the deep social weaknesses of the country, that is the ingrained generalized deviant practices and wide acceptance of illegal behaviour, need to be addressed through a stronger State, but certainly the State needs to be built by its own citizens.

To conclude, the descriptions participants have plotted on the existence of a Colombian community in Australia concur with the weakness of their own nation state and epitomize their identifications of the national, the ways Colombia and Colombians are conceived in their territory. Historically and widely accepted deviant behaviour or its many other names—‘cultura del atajo’, ‘malicia indigena’, ‘viveza’—has irremediably permeated the ways Colombians picture their own small community in Australia and prevented them from approaching it or trying to build one. The lack of sense of community is explained thoroughly with the participants telling of lack of trust, reciprocity and civic engagement in Colombia and among co-nationals in Australia. Although participants do not directly or explicitly offer any options towards the mobilizing of their community, the need for political and social action is voiced in different ways in their accounts. That is, the fourteen participants in the discussion groups demonstrate Colombians do not actively seek a sense of belonging to the community. More broadly, their discourse is not seen as claiming a sense of national identity through the official channels like the bodies which represent the State, or government elections and political participation. In times where there are apparently more possibilities to establish connections with those power holders through mass media technologies (Garcia Canclini, 2001), Colombian migrants have preferred to embrace their new positions as immigrants rather than advocating for what they may see as injustices or needs in their country. Garcia Canclini estimates this trend arguing that the unstoppable world neoliberal globalisation has determined the fate of forty per cent of Latin Americans who ‘are condemned to barely survive the ups and downs of an informal economy that is also globalized’ (2001: 19), and therefore they see permanent obstacles to be an active part and ‘belonging to a socio-political system’ (21). The publics, therefore, turn to seek a sense of belonging and citizenship through channels
of consumerism like radio and television, and of more recent times, social networking, readily available ‘to receive what citizen institutions could not deliver: services, justice, reparations, or just attention’ (23). In effect, it is with online spaces that Colombians are more likely to feel in touch with their national community and broadly with other Latin Americans in Australia. Despite appearing as a fragmented or dispersed community where no leading organisation is recognised, it is precisely those small groupings and networks which build a multifaceted Colombian community.

In this light, the participants’ political stance appears as a further reference for the understanding of Colombians’ multiple identities forming within the migrant community and on the edge of their individual and collective positioning processes. Identities emerging from the narratives on their political stance are explored in the next chapter.
Chapter 6

Social and Political Questioning over Colombia’s Past and Present

Within Stories of Political Dissent and Silencing

The diverse social, economic and political ties migrants maintain with their countries of origin and the ones they build within their receiving countries have long been part of research studying migrant transnational practices. Even though emphasis has been placed on the economic and social connections immigrants keep with their places of origin, and their working and settlement relations in the new country, light has also been shed on the dynamics surrounding their participation in politics. This has been understood as immigrant politics, defined by Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) as ‘the political activities that migrants or refugees undertake to better their situation in the receiving country’ or translocal politics which refer to immigrants’ relations with their local communities of origin (762). In the case of Colombian migrants abroad a few research projects have explored their transnational connections and transnational politics in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada (Bermúdez, 2008, 2011; Guarnizo, 1999, 1999b, 2008; Landlot and Goldring, 2010; Mas Giralt, 2011; Riaño-Alcalá and Goldring, 2006). As it will be evident at the end of the chapter, I contend that instead of engaging in the practice of transnational politics, Colombians in Australia take on diverse political identities but these do not entail organising for transcending political or social issues either in Colombia or in Australia. Their non-electoral activities are limited to a rather ephemeral space of solidarity demonstrations, within protests, rallies and fundraising events, which are only brought about in times of mounting tension back in Colombia. Their purpose is ‘showing support’ to those in need, but it does not constitute any continued or organised leadership that might take on further initiatives for transnational political participation. What is left to discuss then is the rather small group activities whose intention has been to bring together Colombians in Australia, and their individual reflections on issues of social, economic
and political transcendence. Overall the silencing of political discussion or activism amongst Colombians can be seen having three gradients described here as a preliminary working definitions model of their dissent.

**Political Participation and Identity**

In this chapter I focus on my reading of how Colombians exercise a political identity by describing a number of events organised by and for the community of Colombians in Sydney, and by reflecting on the ways participants approached the theme of politics in the interviews and the group discussions, as well as in the context of public events. The narratives and observations collected here illustrate how political silencing plays a major role in the positionings undertaken by participants. In different cases a lack of verbal narrative engagement of the ‘political’ certainly tells of the participants’ own positioning, even though it is achieved through silencing rather than voicing their views. The discursive elements around the notion of the political that interest us here are the non-official and informal ones which present actions that involve power and its counterpart, ‘resistance’, as Paul Chilton and Christina Schöffner (1997: 212) have put it. However, such resistance is not resistance in the sense of being counter-hegemonic because participants were not requested directly to speak about any political position, partisan membership or ideology, but in the sense that they do not hold organising or leadership roles within the community.

Chilton and Schöffner also define political discourse as a ‘cluster of different types of texts’ which on the one hand ‘discuss political ideas, beliefs, and practices of a society or some part of it’ and, on the other hand, those texts which ‘are crucial in giving rise to a political or ideological community or group’ (1997: 214). Amid this wide range of texts that purportedly possess a political character, I refer to political discourse in my participants’ talk, to all discourse produced in reflection of the social currency of Colombia, their standpoint on the power and counter-power relations they see at work in Colombia and in Australia, be they social, economic or ideological. Therefore participation in politics
is viewed as the interest of Colombians in talking about the political and social currency of their country that could transcend into the forming of action groups that take leadership in organising further spaces of discussion and activism within the community.

Here, the political element embedded in Benedict Anderson’s nation, which was introduced in Chapter 4, acquires more relevance in contradictory ways. The imagined community of Colombians is certainly less political than might be anticipated based on the political history and state of affairs in the country. Political issues are widely presented in mass media but nonetheless remain uncontested in the spaces of narrative construction the study has been upon. The political does not appear as a self-evident feature of Colombians in Australia, and indeed the picture of Colombians in other latitudes can be barely compared given the dearth of political activism and organising within the community.

I argue that the incipient participation in politics amongst Colombians in Australia goes hand in hand with the ‘weak’ character of the community, as discussed in Chapter 5, often imagined as a group of Colombians who meet to evoke and enjoy their cultural symbols, including music and food, as a way to ‘preserve’ their culture, but whose relations with each other do not go beyond sporadic events. The lack of trust and lack of leadership within the community results in an apparent scarcity of interest in political activity and even the simple discussing of social issues in conversation.

The strength of the sense of community rests on the number of people who attend typical get-togethers like the national celebrations (for example, ‘20 de Julio’), elections and solidarity campaigns. Looking at the very conditions of the migration paths and conditions of settlement in Australia allows a further understanding of the ways a rather small and recently emergent population of Colombians reflects on their political positionings and identities. These migrants in most cases did not flee Colombia due to direct threats to their lives, but conceived of economic or educational projects in Australia which meant that their focus was on these life goals rather than a continued or even marked interest in the social issues that affect their country. In this way, it was more difficult for most of research participants to connect any emotional attachments with activist engagement (Mason 2014) with their country when it did not have that relevance before their migration. A large number of Latin Americans in Australia have demonstrated such connections, as Robert Mason describes it, and thus have ‘created spaces
through which coalitions of interest formed with other non-Spanish-speaking communities’ (550). However, these groupings were and are primarily pursued by and composed of immigrants from countries where military and dictatorships and civil wars erupted, like Guatemala, Argentina and Uruguay. Colombia, amid its own internal conflict, has not had massive displacement of its people abroad and hence a lower proportion of those directly affected by the armed conflict and state persecution has ended up in Australia. As a consequence, the political does not appear as a self-evident feature or interest among many Colombians in Australia, and indeed the portrait of Colombians in other countries where they have larger communities and evidently a larger number of political refugees can scarcely be compared with Australia’s given the dearth of political activism and organising here.

**Colombian Migrants’ Participation in Politics Abroad, a Question of (Mis)trust**

Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, Alejandro Portes and William Haller’s (2003) article compares the determinants of transnational political engagement amongst Colombian, Dominican and Salvadorean immigrants to the United States and reconfirms that the ‘perpetuation of ties with the home country’ is stronger when there is a negative context of reception and a downward job mobility (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller, 2003: 1218). Their enquiry sought to measure the predictability of variables that can explain the level of political involvement of immigrants in both electoral and non-electoral activities. They affirm that the spatial dispersion of the Colombian community and their high educational attainment has helped Colombians to overcome any strong discrimination in the United States. However, Colombia’s infamous drug trafficking economy and its ‘convulsed socio-political situation’ were seen

---

68 According to Victor de Rio (2014) between 2001 and 2002 thirteen Colombians were accepted as refugees by the Australian authorities (175).

69 The authors include as ‘transnational electoral participation’, ‘membership in a political party in the country of origin, monetary contributions to these parties, and active involvement in political campaigns in the polity of origin’, and as ‘transnational non-electoral politics’, ‘membership in hometown civic association, monetary contributions to civic projects in the community of origin, and regular membership in charity organizations sponsoring projects in the home country’ (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller, 2003: 1223). Meanwhile, McIlwaine and Bermúdez (2011:1501) offer what they term ‘a heuristic distinction between formal political participation (voting in elections, membership of political parties, participation in political campaigns/events) and participation in informal civic politics or “civic participation” (involvement with migrant community organisations, human-rights groups and networks, and religious organisations)’.
as conditioning the migrants’ participation in politics: ‘Colombians want little to do with their country’s politics, having escaped a situation of profound instability, official corruption, and widespread violence’ (2003: 1232). This suggests some level of similarity with what research participants invoked in the discussion groups. Their particular distancing from national politics is in effect a result of overall mistrust in the role of the State, its institutions, the government and politicians, and also in fellow immigrants especially given additional social referents in the US, where, as Guarnizo and Diaz (1999) detail, small networks of drug trafficking were being formed resulting in very close-knit groups where access was limited to newcomers as people either feared they would be helping someone involved in illegal trade or were not completely trusting of their own organisation. Likewise, Colombians’ engagement with politics in London is also seen facilitated by the conditions of their exit. With an estimated population of 50,000 Colombians living in the UK (McIlwaine, 2005), and as an important receptor country of political refugees from Colombia, it is understandable that the larger political participation there comes from refugee activism. This is further elaborated by Anastasia Bermúdez (2011):

Men and women from working-class and lower-middle-class origins also played a key political role within the community, both in activities oriented toward the home country, and in host country politics. Here, the role of refugee men and women was very evident especially for women community leaders (231).

Anastasia Bermúdez (2011) describes the activities and organisations where Colombians in London engage in politics using a very broad notion of transnational politics which includes ‘voter turnout […] collective informal politics […] annual festivals, cultural activities, business enterprises, sport leagues, media outlets, community services […] refugee activism, diaspora philanthropy […] promoting a specific image of Colombia abroad’ (225-229). As stated above I prefer using a less overarching definition of transnational politics to accentuate the activities that have to do with reflecting

70 According to Guarnizo (2008), ‘between 1996 and 2004, 5,390 Colombians claimed political asylum in the UK’, and in 2004 alone, 37.6% of Colombian immigrants were granted such a status (27).
on the social and political conditions of the country migrants have left and which could lead to some sort of political action although not necessarily. A similar definition is used by Patricia Landolt and Luin Goldring (2010) in their description of the Colombian diaspora arenas of organising in Toronto, Canada: ‘One arena focuses on settlement and includes sports clubs, cultural associations, and business and professional groups’ and without any direct political involvement. Meanwhile, a second arena of organizing is that of transnational politics, but one which has not fully flourished, according to the authors, due to the Colombians’ political culture of ‘distrust of politics and political fragmentation’ (Landolt and Goldring 2010: 452). Political culture is described by these authors as ‘a “toolkit” of ways of doing politics that includes values and actions that frame strategies, narratives and self-representations. The toolkit is constituted through networks and shared political socialization and it is reflected in a group’s mode of doing politics as well as in its established bases for organizing’ (445).

Colombians’ political culture in Canada is marked by ‘a reticence to engage in partisan or political activities’ that, together with a generalised distrust of secondary institutions, impedes them from assuming long-term collaborative relationships with their Canadian counterparts whose political culture gives prevalence to ‘multi-sectoral alliances among NGOs’ (Landolt and Goldring 2010: 445). In contrast to Bermúdez’s findings about Colombians in London, Colombians in Toronto clearly avoid displaying any political attachments: ‘Colombians avoid addressing the political dimensions of the instability that results in their involuntary migration’ (452). Nonetheless such a difference may arise from the different conceptualisation both researchers make of what migrants’ politics activities includes. There is wide agreement that mistrust in home country politics and political fragmentation are the main drivers of Colombians’ low involvement in politics abroad, leaving it only to ‘a small network of committed activists’ (453). Guarnizo, Sánchez and Roach (1999), for example, also found that the limited participation Colombians in New York had in politics resulted from a combination of factors: ‘the political culture they brought from Colombia […], their low levels of naturalization, the social fragmentation of the group as a whole and its leadership in particular and the lack of strong organizations [….] the political affiliation of those who do participate is much more pluralist than that
of larger Latino groups in the city [...] [it] seems to reflect high internal, political, ideological, and class heterogeneity with the group’ (384).

In effect, these factors can be used to understand at large the low engagement Colombians in Australia show with political activities or discussion. Thus, instead of serving to document any sort of informal or formal political practices in this group of migrants, my findings shed light on how immigrants reflect on their own political positionings and how they take on those as identities to explain their migration move, their familiarity and connections with their home country and with some political action initiatives.

Describing the Arena of Colombian Organising in Australia

The arena of Colombian organising in Sydney, using Landlot and Goldring’s (2010) term, focuses primarily on showcasing the cultural symbols of Colombia to the broader Australian community. One of the first and long-lasting groups organised with that purpose has been the Colombia in Australia Cultural Association. It was an initiative established by a small group of Colombians who had been raising funds to build the bust of Antonio Nariño in 1991 in the Plaza Iberoamericana in Sydney’s Central Station. With the success in their first project and with their interest in promoting ‘the union of Colombian residents in Australia and work to share their culture, values and traditions’ (Hincapié, n/d) the group started planning the making of a dedicated organisation for such a purpose. The group of six, Alfredo Quintana, Libia Aboud, Baudelino Acosta, Mariela Díaz, Humberto Hincapié and Marlene Hincapié managed to call together a larger assembly on 1st June 1991, with 43 attendees, and officially formed the organisation which was then named Asociación Colombia en Australia. The Asociación received part of the extra money that had been collected in the Antonio Nariño’s project and which was also partly shared with two Colombian folklore dance groups at the time, ‘Así es Colombia’ and ‘Aires Colombianos’ (Hincapié, n/d).
In the history synopsis offered on their website, the association details the sort of events they have organised for over 24 years which include the ‘20 de Julio’ or Colombia’s Independence Day celebrations, Mother’s day, ‘Día de la Raza’ and extraordinary events where funds have been raised and sent to help victims of natural disasters in Colombia and Latin America (for example, the Mitch hurricane in 1998, and Armenia’s earthquake in 1999). Invitations to their activities and a quarterly bulletin are distributed amongst paying members of the Asociación. Its managing committee was invited to participate in this research but no response was heard from them. This is at odds with the repeated public request by its members, in Latin American academic events held in Australia that researchers should look more at the Colombian community here. Nonetheless, five of the forty-four survey respondents said they were or had been active part of the association in the past. The association was indeed unknown by most of the participants in this study, at the same time that no other organisations are known to be working for similar purposes. The association has played a role in the promotion of cultural symbols of Colombia in Australia although its membership numbers have sharply decreased in the last fifteen years without signs of recovery. There are individual or small businesses especially in the city centres of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane that invite Colombians to revive their music, food and culture and even love for football. However, these are not part of any similar groupings of the association and mostly have a commercial purpose.

During the course of fieldwork, between June 2013 and December 2014, I attended and documented seven different events organised by and for Colombians and also for the wider public. I also attended further events up to the date of the writing of this thesis to enrich my observations. The Colombia in Australia Cultural Association held one of the first events I learnt of, ‘La Fiesta de la Familia’ (that is, the family party), on 15 December 2013. It took place in the Portuguese Club in Marrickville, inner Sydney. The ‘fiesta’ was only publicised among the fee-paying members and therefore it was a closed event, even though it was open to the Colombian community. Most of attendees can be said to hold permanent residency in Australia given the presence of large families with their children, and also many elderly people, the grandparents taking care of the little ones, or on their own. One of the participants who had access to the association’s bulletin inviting people to the event passed
on the information to me, otherwise I would not have had another way to know about it. I estimate the overall attendance on the day was close to 200 people, but there were many non-Colombians amongst those. There was a whole range of typical Colombian dishes for purchase, performances of Colombian artists and small presents for all children attending. Christmas is indeed a very much celebrated occasion for the Colombian families and this event proved the case that Colombians long for the traditional ways of celebrating back in Colombia.

In an earlier event, as a response to the ongoing National Farmers Strike in Colombia that erupted in August 2013, a group of Colombians in Sydney and Melbourne organised themselves to call for a ‘Manifestación de Solidaridad’, that is solidarity protest. In both cities attendance at the rallies was estimated between 100 and 200 people. In Sydney, the manifestation took place at Town Hall on Saturday 31 August 2013 from 2pm to 4pm. I saw Colombians walking past and learning about the event only after seeing their national flag waved and a few other items of Colombian pride. Some of those passers-by joined in but others left. Some of the organisers tried to explain the situation of farmers at the time and how they expected their concentration in Sydney would be reported by the Colombian national media, in a bid to ‘let the government know the farmers are not alone and Colombians in Sydney care’, said one of them to the crowd. One of the picket organisers contacted one of the farmers’ leaders in Caquetá and he spoke about the situation to the crowd by phone. Oscar Jimenez, one of the Colombian singers with a rising career in Australia, performed in the event. A few of the attendees had print flyers in English explaining the situation and the reasons behind the rally. These were distributed to pedestrians who seemed intrigued to see a lively crowd singing and cheering ‘Justice for Colombian Farmers! Vamos Colombia! El pueblo unido por los campesinos!’ Spirits were high at the end of the picket, with group pictures taken and short personal exchanges among participants.

In the effervescence of the national agrarian crisis and after the city gatherings, Colombians in Melbourne, Sydney and Bogotá named their group Unidos por Colombia/United for Colombia and started organising events for the broader community of Colombians and people in Australia. Their first one was a forum titled: ‘Analysis of the Situation of Colombian Farmers, History, Present and Perspectives’. It was held on 30 November 2013. Over 3 hours, and with a delayed start, three university
researchers, Oliver Villar, Nelson Martín and Sara Motta, presented their own views on Colombia’s farming crisis and responded to questions from the audience. There were about 35 attendees including Colombians and other Latin Americans, and also Australian leftist activists who are very close to the Latin American political and Indigenous issues. At the end of the panel there was a round of questions and with the aid of a translator a group of ‘old migrants’ were able to speak to the whole audience. The final discussion turned to be what the necessary forms of engagement are for Colombians to ask the government for serious policy change which benefits local farmers instead of big multinationals. One of the ‘old migrants’ and participants in my research, Jorge, asked the audience not to rest until social justice is reached in Colombia even if that meant to take further elevated action.

With the farmers strike yet unresolved a follow-up event was called to be held in Sydney’s Belmore Park, in Surry Hills. There were two groups organising the rally, one of them were the people of ‘Unidos por Colombia’. However, both groups did not communicate promptly and a last-minute change of venues ended up with two different concentrations, one in Sydney’s CBD and the other in Belmore Park. The end result was to have only six people in the latter location where Oscar Jimenez, this time with accompanying musicians and also a Colombian ‘cumbia’ dancing couple performed a few tunes. Lack of effective promotion was also blamed for the low attendance. However, for one of the participants, Diego, who was there and also at the solidarity gatherings of August 31, Colombians ‘simply lack of knowledge of their own country and lack of interest in talking about the problems over there’. To illustrate this he told me how a couple of people who were willing to be part of the Unidos Por Colombia committee had decided to withdraw from the group arguing it was too much concerned about politics and therefore they did not want to continue being part. At the time, says Diego, these two people were supporting one of the strike’s leaders, César Pachón, who a few weeks later self-proclaimed as the presidential candidate running to represent the peasants’ movement. Diego tries to make the point here that even if people do not intend to, they end up involved in partisan politics. This anecdote illustrates in part the reality of the apathy Colombians have towards politics, but also how personal interests of power in Colombia overrun social leadership. Therefore, distancing oneself from political practices seems the most likely option in the diaspora context.
Forms of Political Dissent and Political Silencing

I present in the following my approach to getting to know my participants’ constructions of the social and political undertakings of Colombia in order to identify how reasoning over politics is intertwined with the ways they see their migration experience in Australia. Talking about one’s own political position is not easy in the context of a rather partisan and polarized country. People in Colombia have learned to wake up to daily news of violence, organised crime, guerrilla attacks, paramilitary massacres, drug trafficking, mafioso vendettas and unthinkable state crimes, leave aside those news reports that have to do with long unfulfilled needs of equal access to education, health services, job opportunities, among many others. The colossal differences migrants find between Australia and their country of origin are a reason for regretting the situation in Colombia and not having plans to return there for good (see Chapter 2). However, the social, economic and political currency of Colombia still affects migrants; after all, they grew up there and their close and extended families still live there. Moreover, the image of their country has shaped in many ways their first-time interactions with people in Australia, where direct comments on their infamous drug trafficking economy are made. I wanted to start a conversation with each participant to find out what they thought were the problems of their country and from there begin to perceive their own positioning and how they represented it in view of their life in Colombia and Australia. The exercise was rather simple, but it unveiled an important feature of my participants I was not expecting at all. A good number of them were not willing to expose themselves and be seen as being opinionated about what is happening in Colombia. The few that did engage in narrating their positionings were those with a strong political interest due to their participation in local politics and leftist groups in Colombia and Australia. Yet, the vast majority of participants, what we would call in Colombia ‘los ciudadanos de a pie’, that is, the general public—represented in the sample of 31 interviewees—was not willing to even recall the history that has made Colombia what it is today, nor the politically contentious period lived during and after Alvaro Uribe’s double presidential term.

In the interviews and the group discussions a specific room was given to participants so that they recalled and told of their memories of the Colombian past in a bid to depict what they believe were
important events in the history of the country, or that had affected Colombia, in either positive or negative ways, their lives or the lives of Colombians and the country broadly speaking. The responses of three of my first participants were both discouraging to my own beliefs and eye-opening in terms of foreseeing the dimensions of the political stances I was about to find. In the first attempt to effectively consolidate a set of memorable events, or those of major recollection by participants, they had apparently nothing to remember as important. I tried to understand their position of not telling anything beyond the boundaries of their present location in Australia as a strategy to keep themselves distanced from their country’s problems while idealizing their memories of Colombia. This distancing will help eclipse any negative shadows that may appear. The three participants take recourse on directing their memories to events upon which Colombians themselves would not have any control, like the natural disaster of Armero, even though after the disaster it was later acknowledged the government was to blame for the lack of effective emergency measures to avoid the catastrophe (Semana, 2010; El Universal, 2010).

The lack of engagement to discuss what I thought were the obvious cleavages of the country, not only socially but economically and politically, led me to think that I was in the midst of a dumbshow where my participants were indeed taking on a migrant identity that idealizes their country of origin and avoids making judgments on the evident social crisis of their nation. With this I have identified three varying forms of silencing social and political questioning in relations of dissent among Colombian migrants. There is first a general invisibility of dissent, then a conscious or deliberate silencing dissent, and finally a selected voiced dissent.
Invisibility of Dissent

I call invisibility of dissent to the approach taken by participants to present both non-engaging narratives when evoking distant past memories, and non-detailed accounts using minimal identifications with the recent past. From my perspective, which may be contested, the fact that some participants did not engage in any sort of contestation or praise of the generalized crisis of the Colombian state or the factors that are believed to take part therein and decided to leave these matters unaccounted for and far from their own reality, was a form of dis-engaging any social and political positioning and therefore silencing any form of dissent. Monica and Carolina barely mention the Armero’s tragedy as one of the breaking news items they recall. There is no further detail, no additional comments in their response when a whole town disappeared after El Nevado del Ruiz erupted in November 1985. It was an appalling tragedy not only for the number of deaths—20,000 people out of 29,000 inhabitants—but the negligence of the local government and national authorities to evacuate the town after numerous warnings had been issued. The question that remains here is whether their lack of narrative engagement and commentary is due to the effect of so called distanced memories for which according to Maurice Halbwachs adults ‘absorbed as they are with everyday preoccupations, are not interested in what from the past is irrelevant to these preoccupations’ (1992: 47), or it is simply that the overwhelming reality of the tragedy is left to speak by itself as a shared memory among Colombians, in this case the researcher and the participants.

Other two participants, Carmen and Rocio, also respond without engaging in details of the past history of Colombia, this time not even a single event is mentioned. However, Rocío’s response seems to validate my previous interpretation that Colombians have shared memories of their past that do not need to be spoken. In Rocío’s words: ‘I’d have to talk about everything that has happened in Colombia, I mean, it’s like one knows what has happened but I couldn’t tell you something specific’. This apparent invisibility of dissent could be explained in many other ways. Yet, I attribute it to three fundamental reasons, which still need to be considered. First, these participants’ narratives exemplify an idealisation of their country whereby negative issues, by tacit agreement, should not be mentioned, at least not with
a new acquaintance, and even less when they may have pictured the researcher as having a certain purpose, ideas, or agenda. Moreover, the researcher is a Colombian herself, and who knows what her own stance is? Therefore, it might be better to wait until safe ground is reached before sharing thoughts with her. However, this is rather questionable. I can say that these participants shared with me very personal and touching anecdotes in our first meeting, even though we had only had short exchanges by phone or email. A more simplified explanation is found in other participants’ narratives telling of how their new geographical location in Australia, which is described as ‘safer’ and ‘tranquility’, makes them avoid being familiar with the social and political currency of Colombia:

P: yo pienso que mi hijo tendría un futuro muchísimo mejor en Australia, él nació aquí y pienso que el futuro respecto a las garantías que tiene él como persona son mucho más grandes aquí, la seguridad, la tranquilidad, y las facilidades que tiene este país, que son muchísimas, son incontables, y que me hace no regresar.

I think my son will have a much better future in Australia, he was born here and I think that the future in the sense of the guarantees he has got as a person are bigger here, security, tranquility, and the convenient things this country’s got, that are too many, uncountable, and make me not to go back.

P21 Angela (34, 2007)

***

P: uno acá tiene una calidad de vida, de seguridad, de tranquilidad, de que tienes tu trabajo estable, de saber que no te van a robar

P: here one has a quality of life, of security, of calmness, that you have yourestable job, knowing the that you aren’t getting robbed

P37 Rocío (36, 2007)
During his interview, Diego offered a reflection that helps question how the political component of Benedict Anderson’s nation is adversely married to the sense of community, in the Colombian case, as it is scarcely mentioned or simply avoided by my participants:

P: *La fiesta de Navidad esta que hizo la asociación ahí se veía un poco el espíritu, ¿no? [...] pero afuera de esos recintos, más compromisos con el país, o con la cultura colombiana, pues no lo hay. Yo no lo veo, por eso me sorprendió tanto cuando la cosa esta de Unidos Por Colombia que salieron a protestar por el paro campesino, yo creo que muchos llegaron de gancho ciego (risas) [...] y el montón se vio grande, yo nunca había visto un montón así aquí, pero luego cuando te pones a hablar con ellos, te das cuenta que esta gente ve al país, como una cosa para presumir [...] el falso orgullo del colombiano, o un orgullo mal formado, yo no diría falso sino mal formado, porque si yo quiero, si yo me siento orgulloso de ser colombiano, es porque entiendo las raíces y entiendo a mi país y quiero mejorar a mi país y lo hago primero que todo por mi país que por ninguno otro, ya, entonces lacho primero que todo por mi país, antes que por cualquier otro, ¿ya? porque ahí está mi papá, porque ahí está mi comida, porque ahí está mi tierrita, lo que fue mi vida, lo primero que yo vi, es mi pueblo, es mi gente, tanto que uno ve al colombiano, allá que viene se distingue al colombiano, es algo diferente! Bueno, pero ese espíritu de hermandad y como de solidaridad hacia el país, no está aquí no es la gran proporción, mejor dicho, es mínimamente cómo se expresa, por ejemplo, nosotros con esto de Unidos por Colombia, ¿qué es lo que quedamos para hacer nuestras reuniones? ¿cinco? ¿Qué es lo que tenemos que hacer? Buscar los argumentos para poder ver más colombianos que lleguen allá a un partido de futbol, o a comerse una empanada, o esto, pero no más, ¿entiende? Llegaron, compraron su empanada, una gaseosa, un chiste, un cuento unas risas y van saliendo, ¿ya? como decir ‘oiga con qué puedo colaborar con esto, tengo la posibilidad de hacer esto y hacer lo otro’, no, la gente ya no va para eso.
P: this party held by the association, over there you could see a bit the spirit, right? […] but outside those spaces, more commitment with the country or with the Colombian culture, well, there isn’t that, right? I don’t see it, that’s why it impressed me to see this stuff of Unidos por Colombia that went to the streets and made a protest for the Peasants Strike, I think many got there just by coincidence (laughter) and the crowd looked big, I had never seen a crowd like that here, but later when you start talking with them, you realize […] these people see the country as something to fancy […] the false Colombian pride, or an ill-formed pride, I wouldn’t say false but ill-formed, because if I want, if I feel proud to be Colombian it’s because I understand the roots and I understand my country and I want the best for my country and I do it first of all for my country and not any other, right? Because my father is there, my food is there, because my little town is there, what my life was, the first thing that I saw, it is my people, my folks, so much that one sees a Colombian, the one coming there can be noted as a Colombina, is something different! Well, but that spirit of brotherhood and solidarity towards the country isn’t here, it isn’t the largest proportion, in other words, it is expressed at the lowest level, for example with United for Colombia, how many are we left to hold our meetings? Five? What do we have to do? To look for the arguments to be able to see more Colombians that come to a football match, or have an empanada, or this but nothing else, you get it? They come, buy their empanada, a soft drink, a joke, a story, laughter and they leave, right? They don’t say ‘hey what can I do, I have the possibility of doing this or that’, no, people don’t go for that anymore.

P16 Diego (60, 1994)

Diego’s reflection shows how the sense of community, or what he calls ‘espíritu,’ is not present beyond the boundaries of those gatherings where Colombians meet while there are not real commitments with the country and not even with the Colombian culture. Certainly, most of Colombians in Australia do not seem to engage in transnational politics, nor do they engage in talking about politics openly. The reasons for this are a combination of factors including their conditions of exit from
Colombia, a geographical dispersion in the new country, the local generalized distrust in politics and, more recently, the media-fuelled polarized climate between those who support Uribismo, or ex-president Alvaro Uribe, and those who do not, or otherwise those who appear to have more centre or leftist positions. The reality of their country of origin is overwhelmingly left aside whilst immigrants are trying to settle in the new country or continue with their ‘better life’ in Australia.

**Overtly Silencing Dissent**

In a very touching anecdote, Oscar was trying to explain why he always felt looked down by people who work in the Consulate General of Colombia in Sydney, and by those who make up part of the small circle of la Asociación Cultural Colombia en Australia. He recalled when a friend of his, Belarmino Sarna, the author of the book *Inmigrante feliz en afortunado país: impresiones ficticias de un machista-inconformista* (1991), asked Oscar to help him bring a box of the recently print edition of the book to showcase it in a public event the Colombian association was holding. The book is a collection of short stories Sarna wrote portraying the experience of the Latin American migrants in Australia in the early 1990s along with strong criticism of both the immigrants and the Australian people. One of the managing members of the association shut them out of the event’s facility and did not allow them to showcase the book arguing the event was a cultural one and the association did not want anything different to that. This is the story that Oscar gave me, and here I endeavour to understand the reasoning of the association’s member action. First, the person who shut the book out of the premises of the association may have known about the political content of the book, as Oscar believes, and argued that the event they were holding was purely cultural. The author was already known for his leftist ideology and would not be allowed to have a voice that was not widely shared by this association member. The book’s content, a critique over Latin Americans migrants and Australians’ social practices, may have been seen to harm the relationships of Colombians with the wider Latin American and Australian communities. Both men left the premises unable to accomplish their purpose; the book could not be advertised because a fellow Colombian was preventing its author from having a chance of speaking
through his readership. Belarmino Sarna was silenced and, so, too, at the same time was his and Oscar’s relation with the Colombian Association and the broad community of fellow ‘old migrants’. Oscar and Sarna have not sought to participate in any of their events since.

Other participants tell of their experience having to deliberately silent their social and political stance or their dissenting positions in order to protect themselves and avoid personal conflict with other Colombians and Latin Americans. This is the case of two political refugees and a former unionist whose experience with the wider community of Colombians in Sydney made them silence themselves and eventually take some distance from other Colombians here. They tell of their experience having to hide their political views in Sydney and how they had to cope with the fact they had to protect themselves from the looks and comments of other Colombians and Latin Americans. They had to keep quiet or simply retreat from the wider community so as not to upset themselves or annoy other Colombians who did not share their views. Diego, one of those political refugees, tells of his early days in Australia upon reflection on his life in Colombia. Back there he used to talk openly to explain ‘who was who, why were there poor and rich people, all from a political position’, he says. But when he tried to do the same in Australia he saw himself rejected by other Colombians and re-enacts their attitude: ‘what’s this guy doing? He’s attacking the country!’ He tells of the situations where he felt those fellow Colombians did not even ask themselves why they came to this country and goes on to make a bold statement, ‘they believe that Uribe is Gaitán’, or better than Gaitán […] What can one do with this type of folks?’ Diego had to get used to ‘that kind of people’ even at work and regrets he cannot find them interested in talking about Colombia, Australia and the world. Diego even told me emphatically of his frustration when at his break times, in his retail cleaning job; his co-workers keep asking him about things like ‘mopping that needs to be done’. ‘The bloody mop’, he grumbles, ‘it’s my break time, I want to talk about important things, not the bloody mop!’ Since his arrival to Australia, over 19 years ago, Diego has tried, unsuccessfully, to continue with the high profile activist work he used to do in Colombia. Yet, the lack

71 Diego refers here to Álvaro Uribe, president of Colombia from 2002 to 2010 and Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, a populist far liberal politician and presidential candidate assassinated on 9 April 1948 in Bogotá. Gaitán’s murder provoked a major social uprising known as El Bogotazo, which conservative forces tried to undermine with La Violencia or the age of violence. During La Violencia over 200,000 people were murdered across the country as result of the state’s persecution of liberals and peasants. Many of those who escaped the violence in the urban and rural centres joined the emerging liberal guerrillas, which later formed the FARC, ELP and ELN guerrilla groups.
of competent English has further limited him. His frustration is even worse after seeing that even in his own language, people around him, like his co-workers, are not interested in following his lead, and he does not have the influence he could otherwise have in his native Colombia. Hence, Diego is eager to find spaces where other Spanish speakers are interested in sharing their social political views, very much in the way he does.

Jorge tells of a similar experience when he found himself among other Colombians who he believes were economic migrants and had a ‘very reactionary political stance’ and were ‘ambitious, wanting to buy not only one house but different ones, wanting to have the best job’. He felt hurt and uncomfortable and acknowledges that it was more than likely that those he talks about did not feel at ease with him either for not sharing their interests. As a former leftist activist in Colombia, Jorge found that other Colombian immigrants were pursuing economic ends and individual interests rather than more collective ones. He did not share their economic aspirations for ‘owing one or two houses’ and saw them reacting negatively to his overt political positioning. This affected his relations with those he calls ‘economic migrants’ and narrowed his own circle of friends to those who shared similar political views. Jorge had eventually distanced himself from Colombians and come closer to other immigrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, who had come to Australia fleeing political regimes and dictatorships. His voice was thus silenced among fellow Colombians while he tried to find a less harming place for him within a more understanding Latin American community of social activists.

Silencing is deliberate also in more familiar and personal circumstances, like Nelson’s case. He migrated at 48 years old, five years prior to our interview. He is one of the few Colombians who migrated at a mature age. He relates that he followed the news about Bogotá’s administrative corruption in 2009 and says: ‘I can’t do anything against [sic] that, right? I don’t have my fellow friends with whom one could talk politics and my wife doesn’t find it very fun’. This last element reveals a lot about his dissenting positioning. For him, being able to talk with his friends back in Colombia, discuss, share his thoughts with other people, his friends, was the way to feel empowered to dissent. But he cannot do that here in Australia as an immigrant, his friends are not here, and he cannot even talk about it with his
wife, so he remains silent and probably powerless, as he says, he ‘cannot do anything about that’. Nelson claims himself against the political clientelism that prevails in Colombian politics. As an upper-middle class senior civil engineer in Colombia, he misses the circle of friends he had there to reflect on the political problems of the country. In Australia, he says, he barely has a few Colombian acquaintances because he prefers to avoid them, and finds himself not having a proper companion to discuss Colombian politics face-to-face. Nelson relies on communication with a few of his friends back in Bucaramanga, so overall, his dissenting voice is kept silent in Australia. From this example one could question whether Colombians discuss politics within their small circle of friends in Australia. My fieldwork did not look thoroughly at this issue because data was primarily collected at the individual level, and the group discussions were held among participants who did not know each other, with only one exception. Even if the answer was affirmative and Colombians did engage in talking politics with their small groups of friends in Australia, what I call close groups, it would be a selected voice of dissent, a very private discourse with a limited audience. I explore this kind of dissent in the following section.

**Selected Voiced Dissent**

Selected voiced dissent is yet another type of silencing dissent that I found from my observations of community events organised by Colombians in Sydney, like those mentioned above, and also in the literary production of Colombians in Australia. Dissent appears to be manifested and supported only when ‘coyunturas’ or the political havoc spark national pride. Attendance at community events is widely differentiated between social partying and meetings with a socio-political purpose. More people attend the social partying contexts, and still there is no sufficient projection of the events to the wider community as either invitations are selective, as in the case of the Colombian association, or financial and human resources are limited, as in the case of United for Colombia. For the latter, organisers believed only party or gathering-like events would attract more people. The ‘manifestaciones’ and gatherings may be enacted as dissenting spaces, but they remain selected voiced dissent as their acceptance, relevance or continuity is left to languish in the hands of a very few people and for a very
narrow selection of Colombians in Australia, for instance, between 100 and 300, out of the 14,000 estimated to live here in 2012, who attended the farmers’ solidarity rallies in 2013.

The solidarity events described above are examples of this selected voiced dissent in that a very small group of people organised them, and a small group of people participated, even though they were open to the general public. The organisers did not have any support from other groups as might be expected from the Colombians association, yet they were able to bring together an important number of Colombians which one of the ‘old migrants’ present there, Diego, believes to be the biggest concentration of Colombians he has ever seen protesting in Sydney. Nonetheless it was an ephemeral concentration as commitments for further demonstrations or participation in the organisation were not made. This is in part explained by the political locus some Colombians see transcending this type of events. A Colombian student, for instance, told me he preferred not to attend because the concentration would be in reality a rally against the current government of Santos, instead of a true call of support for the farmers’ strike: ‘there will be a crowd of Uribistas there’. The low attendance and seeming lack of interest in this type of events is thus a symptom of the aversion Colombians in Australia have against politicised events and at the same time helps explain why there are not any organisations representing Colombians’ political interest in Australia. With a good number of ‘old migrants’ having exited Colombia and arrived in Australia in fairly good socio-economic positions, by finding a skilled job or one related to their expertise, it has not been viewed as necessary to start any social or political movement in the new country. But more than this social positioning of the early arrivals from Colombia, their political stance needs to be located in the context of their exit from a conflict-ridden Colombia, in the wake of the drug cartels wars in the 1980s or in the midst of the paramilitary and guerrilla incursions in rural Colombia in the late 1990s. Taking a social and political positionality in the new country would certainly epitomize the internal conflict they had just left behind.

A final example that I will use to describe the selected voiced dissent of Colombians in Australia includes two samples of literary production I came across, the books by Belarmino Sarna Inmigrante feliz enafortunado país (1991), mentioned above, and Humberto Hincapie, Palabras- y algo más (2005) and El tren de las ilusiones (2013). These are two widely differing forms of contesting
the social background of these Colombian migrants and the shared memories and histories of Colombians and Latin Americans in Australia. Sarna’s book narrates in crude realistic terms and colloquial language what not only Colombians but the ‘mestizoamericanos’ or Latin Americans live in Australia as immigrants. In various segments the behaviour of Latin Americans is subject to sparkling criticism, in others stronger political views are drawn in terms of the reasons that have made his fellow migrants leave their continent:

En los países receptores de emigrantes, como Australia, se tiene la errónea impresión de que nuestros países de origen son absolutamente pobres, la totalidad de su población padece miseria, toda la gente ‘quisiera’ venirse. Ignoran que allí los ricachones dueños del poder, viven un lujo insultante como los mejores de aquí, que de ninguna manera están interesados en emigrar, sino en perpetuar su dominio.

In the immigrant receiving countries, like Australia, there is the wrong assumption that our countries of origin are absolutely poor, that the totality of their population are in poverty, that all people would like to come here. They ignore that over there the richest holders of power live in an insulting luxury like the best from here, that they aren’t interested at all in migrating but in perpetuating their dominance.

Sarna (1991:34; my translation)

Throughout over 164 short stories and anecdotes, Sarna explicitly narrates the experiences that many migrants share upon arrival in Australia, and I found myself reading stories I lived or heard of other Colombians even though I migrated 16 years after the book was published. Sarna’s book is a rendition of the early migration experiences of Colombians and other Latin Americans here, yet, it was not widely publicised in Australia, and less so in Colombia, and has remained only known in a very small circle of people who seemingly share the author’s political views.

The literary production of the second author, Humberto Hincapié, has been much more known amongst the broader Latin American migrant community. Yet, his books are product of his interest in
literature, prose and eroticism. Many of Hincapié’s stories, although fictional, are located back and forth in far away Colombia and in Australia, and for this reason the author cannot escape bringing to action the social and political reality of Colombia in his writing. Expressing dissent towards the reckless actions of the FARC guerrillas, for instance, one of his short stories, ‘Tribulaciones de una pareja afortunada’, narrates the story of a couple in Cali, Colombia, who were lucky enough to find half a million dollars in a suitcase handed over by a man, who was later assassinated at the local airport exit. The couple’s excitement turned to anguish soon after, because they did not know how to keep the money safe without being robbed themselves. The reader is led to believe the money comes from the drug trafficking mafias and that these will eventually chase and kill the couple. At the end, however, it is a guerrilla commando who appears to claim their money back: ‘the money was the guerrilla’s and it was vey hard to find out who had taken it, therefore now you’re gonna be judged by a county head for taking our money. We never forget, never forgive those who attack us or harm us’ \(^{72}\) (Hincapié 2005: 124).

Both authors have sections of their books imprinting their own positions on the social and political endeavours of their country though with different intensity. Yet, their dissenting voice is again left selective as they have a rather limited audience amongst the wider community of Colombians and Australians in general.

The semi-private spaces where participants interacted with me were only openly used by four of them to tell about the ways they see social and political endeavours of Colombia. The rest of the interviewees spoke about their positionings but only partially and without being willing to go into further details or discussion. A good number of the 44 survey respondents did not make any reference at all to these subjects. Responding to my second research question, in what ways do Colombian migrants in Australia reflect on the socio-political events and currency of their country is synthesised though the analysis of the personal interviews, but also the focus group discussions where a total of fourteen people participated. In the group sessions some informants seemed more open to talk of their positionings, but again without engaging in assuming an overt political stance; rather, such a positioning

\(^{72}\) Translated from ‘esos dineros eran de la guerrilla y nos costó mucho trabajo averiguar quién se los había llevado y por consiguiente, ahora ustedes van a ser juzgados por un tribunal del pueblo por apropiarse de nuestros fondos. Nosotros no olvidamos, jamás perdonamos a quienes nos atacan o nos hacen daño’. 

231
became articulated as a vehicle via which they could express their worries and desires for the present and future of their country.

**Collective Social and Political Questioning over Colombia’s Past and Present**

Fourteen Colombian migrants attended the group discussions or focus groups organised during fieldwork. In the first three groups, participants were between 27 and 39 years of age, whilst in the last group two elderly people participated aged 84 and 87. One of the biggest expectations was that the senior participants would take prolonged speaking turns to give their own insights around the questions posed, that is, in the way that Halbwachs (1992) describes that the elderly usually present their narratives about the past:

> These men and women are tired of action and hence turn away from the present so that they are in a most favourable position to evoke events of the past as they really appeared […]. In short, old people are more interested in the past than are adults: but it does not follow from this that the old person can evoke more memories of this past than when he [sic] was an adult (Halbwachs 1992: 47).

Having interviewed and met them various times before the focus group, I thought Oscar and Jorge would therefore narrate with special detail their lives as young people in Colombia and the ways the historical past of the country had marked their own lives and had irremediably contributed to their exit from Colombia. But, as I will examine below, this was not the case; indeed, the elderly migrants remembering exercise differs substantially from the one presented by younger, and more recent, migrants in that specific past events about the history of their country do not trigger detailed narrative constructions. In general, I believed participants would be incisive in their comments about the everlasting social crisis of their country and in particular I was expecting them to voice their views on the current political polarization there. Instead, participants mentioned the state of current affairs but did
not elaborate further on any particular political stance. Only four out of fourteen made specific remarks that can be categorised as revealing their political standpoint. Prevalence was given to the ever-growing social dynamics of safety concerns, widespread corruption and inequalities Colombians endure and this may have to do with the individualisation of the sense of risk and problems in Colombia. That is, the closeness a large part of the population has with real instances of crime and which becomes a generalised factor of fear.

The exercise of collective remembering did not attract a deep discussion on a distant past, but rather close-experience related memories that have to do with the multiple challenges Colombia has suffered especially with its drug economy. Participants narrate the history of their country very much through remembering their own and their family’s experience in specific events. However, it is not easy to re-group the type of stories they offer given the different ways in which discussion developed within each session. In the first group with participants Marcela, Nancy, Alfredo and Paula, whose arrivals took place between 2008 and 2011, a mixture of fairly recent events and well-known events that have made up the history of Colombia were mentioned in their accounts. Yet, their emphasis on certain aspects of such history is seen as very attached to their own life experience both in Colombia and in Australia. For example, for Marcela, one of the things that has affected her country the most is drug trafficking. She says Pablo Escobar was ‘an incredibly negative leader’ able to expand the business of narcotics throughout Colombia. She regrets this because since she arrived in Sydney in 2008 she has been target of remarks related to the usual stereotypes attached to Colombia as a drug-producing country and more harmful for her has been that such comments come from her Australian husband’s friends and family. Similarly and more recently, Marcela told of how, in the weeks ahead of the National Farmers’ Strike in 2013, she was touched by pictures showing Colombians farmers throwing away their milk produce because they simply could not afford its transportation to the urban centres for sale. Marcela joined one of the solidarity protests held in Sydney and says the strike is one of the events that she recalls the most from the history of Colombia, even though it was only recent.

In a different way, Alfredo’s remembrances are about the state of rampant corruption in Bogotá and broadly in the government of Juan Manuel Santos. Alfredo, as referred to earlier, mentions four
events that illustrate this: first, the exaggerated salary increases approved for congressmen immediately after Santos took position of his second term as President in contrast to the basic salary increase applicable to the rest of Colombians; the loss of sovereignty in San Andres Islas after a legal dispute with Nicaragua against the International Court of Justice, The Hague, Netherlands; the situation of Bogota’s Mayor Gustavo Petro for which his mandate would be revoked; and finally, the murder case of Luis Andrés Colmenares, a young black student found dead in suspicious circumstances after partying with his university classmates. Even after Alfredo expands on his position regarding Petro’s destitution other participants prefer to focus on other breaking news he mentions:

Alfredo: Sí, estoy totalmente de acuerdo que lo destituyan a él, pero, ahorita en estos días, hace tres o cuatro días, pararon la investigación, ehm, de la destitución de él, porque él salió a decir otras vainas, que él [sic] era, inconstitucional que no sé qué y son exactamente las mismas causas por las que destituyeron a otros políticos en otras ocasiones, y que Petro ayudó a destituir, con el mismo procurador que lo está destituyendo ahora, ¿sí? Entonces uno dice, esto es un carrusel de mentiras, me parece que muy bien que lo hayan hecho, pero todavía no hay un veredicto [...] está un proceso andando y se empiezan a ver cosas como el caso este, de este muchacho []

Paula: [de Colmenares!]

Nancy: Eso era lo que yo iba a decir.

Alfredo: de Colmenares, ese también yo lo estuve siguiendo desde que llegué, no sé quién ni cuando = no sé quién sea el culpable pero me parece que habían pruebas suficientes para mantener todavía medida de precaución con esas niñas

[...]

Marcela: Ni idea de eso

Liana: ¿Mencionabas algo relacionado?
Nancy: No, yo =porque lo único que se me venía a la cabeza era el caso de Colmenares, y es que no es el único, ha habido varios [casos] que=fue el tipo que atropelló a dos peladas, ha habido varios casos de accidentes por alcohol.

Alfredo y Paula: Ajá

Nancy: No uno, varios! Y todos se han salvado, y porque son ricachones y no sé qué.

Alfredo: la ley de poner preso al conductor ebrio, la tumbaron!, eso me parece absurdo [...] hace 20 días habían pasado en primera estancia la ley del senado, la ley de poner al conductor ebrio preso, como puede suceder perfectamente acá.

Nancy: como sucede acá, de una.

Alfredo: y que es lo más objetivo que puede suceder porque es un homicida potencial, entonces dijeron que no que eso era extre, pero que es más extre, que siga dejando paralítico a gente y que solamente y resulta que esos son los yukis, hijos del senador, hijos del primo, hijos de no sé quién, y esa gente sale como si nada.

Alfredo: Yes, I absolutely agree that he gets revoked, but just now, three or four days ago they stopped the investigation, ehm, of his destitution because he went about saying other things, that is was unconstitutional and I don’t know what else and these are exactly the same reasons why other politicians were deposed too and that Petro helped to depose with the same.

Paula: [Colmenares!]

Nancy: that’s what I was going to say!

Alfredo: Colmenares, that one I also followed since I got here, I don’t know who or when = I don’t know who is responsible but I believe there was enough evidence to keep those girls in custody
Marcela: I have no idea!

Liana: Did you mention something related?

Nancy: No, I = because the only thing that comes to my mind was the Colmenares case and it is not the only one, there have been a few [cases] = it was the guy who ran off with two girlies, there have been other cases related to alcohol.

Alfredo y Paula: aha

Nancy: not one, several! And they all get away with it because they are ricachones and that stuff.

Alfredo: the law of imprisoning drink drivers got demounted! That’s absurd […] 20 days ago the law had been approved in the senate, the law of prison for drink drivers, in the same way it can happen here.

Nancy: like it happens here, all at once.

Alfredo: and that is the most objective thing that can happen because it’s a potential killer, so they said it was too extreme, but what is more extreme? That they still leave people paraplegic and that it is only the children of those yukis, the senators, children of the cousin of I don’t know who the only ones that get away with it as if nothing happened.

Focus group 1

In this segment of focus group 1, a few elements of the ways in which Colombians engage and dis-engage politically are devised. Alfredo touches on the eminent revoking of Gustavo Petro as mayor of Bogotá. The rest of the group did not make further comments on the issue. Alfredo was in favour of Petro’s destitution but his reasons were only made clear later. He is against any leftist guerrilla groups because his own family was victim of their actions and made them sell their properties at a very low
price, almost giving them away, in order to escape the guerrilla threats. Gustavo Petro’s active participation in the M-19 guerrilla organisation has led him to being known in Colombia as a ‘guerrillero’ and he is still labelled as such especially by his detractors although supporters as well. None of the other three participants, all women, followed up a discussion in the group session. I knew of one of them who may have had a different view to Alfredo’s and effectively she tried to elaborate on her own views yet with caution and without referring to Petro’s case directly; instead, she talked about ‘la izquierda’ or left partisan groups in general.

P: por otro lado cuando la guerrilla ha sido todo lo malo que sabemos pero cuando la guerrilla, hizo=ha hecho lo peor cuando empezó [...] cuando se metió con el narcotráfico, se volvió narco guerrilla, ahí fue cuando todo se volvió una locura, porque digamos que ser de izquierda no necesariamente era malo, y de hecho yo=no es tan malo

P: on the other hand when the guerrilla has been all the evil we know but when the guerrilla did=has done the worst when it started […] when it got involved with narcotics, when it became narco-guerrilla, right there it was when everything turned crazy, because let’s say that being from the left is not necessarily bad, and indeed I=it isn’t that bad.

Focus Group 1, P7 Marcela (37, 2008)

Marcela deflects a direct leftist identification even as she started speaking in the first person. This suggest she is aware that by her response, after what Alfredo has noted against the guerrillas, in case of personalizing her position she could be seen as supporting what another group member entirely rejects. She then turned into explaining how she ended up questioning her own political positioning which supported the right-wing views of Alvaro Uribe. She travelled for some fieldwork from Cali to Medellin and worked there in the ‘comunas’. There, she says, she started to hear another reality, the stories of victims of self-defence forces, known as ‘paramilitares’, and whose early groups called CONVIVIR, were widely sponsored by Alvaro Uribe especially during his term as governor of the department of Antioquia. From the testimonies of those people she worked with, she understood those
para-legal armed forces were confined to illegal activities and since then, she says, she stopped being Uribista and started seeing herself more attuned with the left (see Appendix D for relevant transcript).

Marcela does support the left partisan initiatives, but her statement does not intend to justify overtly Gustavo Petro nor to go against Alfredo’s standpoint. This is responded to by Alfredo trying to assert that regardless of his feelings of distrust towards the left, he has known people with a leftist position and these are ‘good people’, that is, they can be good people even though they are leftist. Thus Marcela did not try to challenge directly Alfredo’s views and in turn he responded trying to make the point that he is not indifferent to leftist positions, but he would prefer that the public opinion moved on from ‘the guerrilla issue’ to focus on the real problems of the country.

P: cuando no tengamos guerrilla en realidad nos vamos a concientizar de los reales problemas que nosotros tenemos, o sea, la gente va a estar más pendiente de escoger bien a los políticos, porque incluso esa gente ha afectado las elecciones, las votaciones, ha hecho que mucha gente salga del país.

P: when we don’t have guerrillas we are going to be conscious of the real problems we have, because those people have even affected the elections, have made many people to leave the country.

Focus Group 1 Alfredo (39, 2010)

For Paula, the news about insecurity all across Colombia touched her family too closely when two years ago her aunt was killed in a street robbery. She also makes a reflection on the reasons why Colombians come to Australia, it all comes down, accordingly, to the high unemployment and insecurity back home (see Appendix D).

For Paula the social problem of insecurity is even worse than the political corruption, but she does not make any connection between both issues and does not devise a further political position whereby a social problem should be on the agenda of politicians and policymakers in Colombia. This
view is in fact reflective of a common sentiment of pinpointing insecurity as the greatest problem in the urban centres and not contesting it on the grounds of the lack of justice, political leadership, and government and state institutions in the national territory. As Garcia Villegas (2014) explains, in view of the peace talks between the FARC and the Santos government, los pre-acuerdos de paz, and by force, the longed for resolution of the armed conflict and the materialization of peace in Colombia are at eminent risk of failure in over fifty per cent of Colombia’s territory given the limited capability of the state institutions. Garcia Villegas and Espinosa (2013) show that 229 Colombian municipalities or townships, which represent 62% of the national territory and are home of 6 million people, are in a ‘state of abandonment and vulnerability’ which they call an institutional apartheid (119; emphasis in original). Garcia Villegas and Espinosa’s study mimics the call for these territories and their inhabitants to demand the attention of the state and the exercise of their citizenship rights. Thus, political engagement is called upon to have an effect on the reinstalling of state and government, but the general public, and specifically this group of Colombian migrants in Australia, as shown in my data, do not acknowledge this is the case or do not seem interested in participating in such an enterprise.

The discussion in the second focus group had a different dynamic. Participants were aged between 27 and 34 and had been in Australia for similar periods to the first group arriving in 2008, 2009 and 2010. However, their remembering of Colombia looks more specifically to sound out historical or news breaking events rather than their personal experiences. What they recall is both more detached from their own lives, with a few exceptions, and more related to the shared knowledge by the public. I believe a key factor in this was the early intervention of a journalism graduate, Patricia, who listed a number of events that made or have made overnight news in Colombia, and the other participants ended up replicating her mode of response.
Patricia: La bomba del Nogal [...] la masacre de Mapiripán, el palacio, la toma del palacio, el suicidio de Lina Marulanda, me pareció terrible, el asesinato de Colmenares, eh, la destitución de Petro, y no es que esté de acuerdo o en desacuerdo, pero que mierdero, eh, que más, la reelección de Uribe, lo negativo [...] Quisiera de pronto decir algo positivo, la última, la cuestión de que nos estén abriendo visa para Europa, pues, la noticia me parece genial

Patricia: the Nogal bombing\textsuperscript{73} [...] the Mapiripán massacre, the palace, the siege of the Justice Palace, the suicide of Lina Marulanda, I thought it was horrible, the murder of Colmenares, eh, Petro’s revoking, and it is not about that I am for or against, but what a bullshit, eh, what else, the re-election of Uribe, the negative [...] I’d like to say something positive, the latest one, the thing that they are opening the visa for Europe, well, I think the news is great

Focus Group 2

Miguel went further in the history of Colombia, trying to marry all the events already mentioned to their very origin, that is, to their social and political foundations:

\textit{Miguel: pues uno de los [eventos] más impactantes de Colombia es el comienzo de la guerra, en el 42=en el 52 dependiendo del punto de vista, cuando los liberales comenzaron=ehm cuando comenzó la guerrilla, eh, aparte de eso ahorita me ha gustado que ha habido movimientos en Colombia, para pedir cosas que estamos buscando todos, el movimiento de los agricultores recientemente, la protesta cuando yo estaba en Colombia, el día=para=contra las FARC, fue en el qué? ¿Dos mil cuatro?}

\textsuperscript{73} Refers to the bomb exploded in a well-known club in Bogotá’s North attributed to the FARC guerrillas.
Miguel: well one of the most shocking [events] in Colombia is the start of the war in 1942 = 1952 depending on your point of view, when the liberals started = ehm when the guerrilla started, eh, apart from that right now I’ve like the fact that there have been movements in Colombia, to demand things that we all are looking for, the recent agrarian movement, the protest when I was in Colombia, the day=for=against the FARC, when was it? Two thousand and four?

Focus Group 2

However, Miguel’s initial comment is not contested or followed up by the participants; he then goes on to describe more positive happenings, especially the increase in tourism in Colombia. From this, again, it can be noted that for some Colombians the socio-political history is there in the background, but is not explored deeply and much less in a group that is meeting for the first time. Marcela, in turn, mentions a number of events she recalls the most as making history in Colombia, but there is no initiative from her or other participants to question those events. When Marcela is given a second chance she expands her own view on the political system and the need for civic engagement (as explored in Chapter 4), she relates, in a very similar way to Marcela from the first group, how her own experience with social work in Medellin made her change her political stance which moved from a strong support of Alvaro Uribe to a different view of him and the politics he instilled in the country after the creation of the Convivir groups.74

P: yo pienso que cambió cuando empecé a escuchar opiniones de otras personas, tal vez como abrir los ojos un poquito no, cierto, porque en esa época, tal vez yo no tenía pues como la madurez política para analizar objetivamente, mi familia es Uribista, entonces como que yo era Uribista porque mi familia era Uribista, pero ya escuchando otras opiniones, leyendo mucho y yo me acuerdo que tal vez por esa época dejé de ver noticias, decidí no ver noticias

74 Oliver Villar and Drew Cottle (2011) explain that The Convivir was an experiment supported by Alvaro Uribe when he was governor of the department of Antioquia. It ‘allowed armed civilians to patrol and gather intelligence under local military command’ (126).
nunca más, y entonces como que uno se aleja de esa manipulación de los medios y me fui para el otro lado completamente, anti-Uribista 100 por ciento [... ] entonces yo pienso que es más como una cosa de ricos=los ricos apoyan, y yo lo he visto que la gente que tiene más dinero se vamos para el lado de Uribe, pero es como por eso, porque nos devolvió la seguridad porque ya podemos volver a la finca, ya podemos ir a La Costa, pero el resto de la población, que es el noventa por ciento de Colombia, no tiene finca, que no va a La costa, que está en la miseria, pues está PEOR!

P3 Marcela (34, 2010)

P: I think it changed when I started hearing opinion from other people, maybe like opening your eyes a bit right? Because at that time, maybe I didn’t have the political maturity to make objective analyses, my family is Uribista, so it was like I was Uribista because my family was, but listening to other points of view, reading a lot I remember that maybe around that time I stopped watching news, I decided not to watch the news any more, and it’s like you take distance from the media manipulation and I went to the other side completely, one hundred per cent anti-Uribista […] so I think it is more a thing for the rich = the rich support [him], and I’ve seen it, that the people who have more money go more to Uribe’s side, but it is because of that, because they gave us back security, we can go back to the farm, we can go to La Costa, but the rest of the population, who are the ninety per cent of Colombia don’t have a farm, don’t go to La Costa, are in misery, well they are WORSE OFF!

P3 Marcela (34, 2010)
In the third group, with Martha, Santiago, and Andrés, a similar process to the first group took place by which participants’ own personal experience with acts of crime or insecurity is the core of the rendition of their political stance rather than global and distanced breaking news. Andrés took a longer turn to narrate how close was his family to the Bogotá bombings in the 1990s and to the wave of kidnappings that was quite spread across Colombia in the early 2000s:

Andrés: para mí la época de las bombas fue

Santiago: [mm

Liana: ¿te tocó? ¿La época en Bogotá? ¿Tú eres de Bogotá cierto?

Andrés: yo tuve (. ) dos bombas por lo menos que explotaron cerca donde yo estaba y otras dos que prácticamente =vivió en un edificio alto las alcanzé =las alcanzé a ver=mi papá como trabajaba en el centro siempre preocupado porque hubo varias bombas en el centro también.

Santiago: jum

Martha: mm

Andrés: y obviamente la época de los secuestros (( )) estuvo una persona de la familia secuestrada

Martha: con eso se va uno de Colombia rapidito! (risa)

Andrés: antes quiere volver!

Martha: pero ahora no está tan tenaz, ¿cierto? ¿En ese sentido?

Andrés: bombas por lo menos no= claro que la bomba que pusieron en Lourdes el otro día, mí papa ahora trabaja en Chapinero como a dos cuadras de Lourdes (risas)

Martha: ahh

Andrés: hace como un mes pusieron una bomba en Lourdes, cuatro o seis semanas.
Andrés: for me the age of the bombs was [

Santiago: [mm

Liana: did you live that? That time in Bogotá, you are from Bogota, aren’t you?

Andrés: I had (.) two bombs at least that exploded near where I was and other two that practically=I lived in a tall building=I saw them=my dad worked in downtown always worried because there were several bombings downtown too

Santiago: hum

Martha: mm

Andrés: and obviously the time of the kidnappings, there was someone from the family kidnapped

Martha: with that you leave Colombia real soon (laughter)

Santiago: he wants to go back!

Martha: but now it isn’t that bad, is it? In that sense?

Andrés: at least not bombs=well the bomb they put in Lourdes the other day, my father now works in Chapinero, about two blocks from Lourdes

Martha: ahh

Andrés: about a month ago they put a bomb in Lourdes, four or six weeks ago

Focus Group 3

Regarding these circumstances of widespread-armed conflict, Andrés introduced his own political views saying he would rather prefer negotiating with the FARC guerrillas now than perpetuating the conflict for other 50 years. He says it was the reasoning he gave to his father to persuade him not to vote in the 2014 elections for Alvaro Uribe’s candidate, Óscar Iván Zuluaga, because electing him, according to Andrés, would mean the peace talks with the guerrillas would be called off.
P: y yo decía que yo quería votar por Santos, yo le decía a papá ‘ustedes nacieron en un país donde ustedes sí conocieron la paz, yo nací en un país donde prácticamente todas las memorias que tengo del país creciendo son memorias de guerra’ y yo dije así sea que ninguno de los dos candidatos me guste, porque ninguno de los dos me ha gustado, yo prefiero votar por Santos por el sueño de que de pronto llegue la paz en lugar de que sea más guerra [...] como decía Mockus, prefiero equivocarme persiguiendo la paz que acertar persiguiendo la guerra, entonces como que, como que decía yo=aspiro de pronto algún día poder ver el país en paz.

P: I said I wanted to vote for Santos, I told my dad ‘you were born in a country where you have known peace, I was born in a country where almost all the memories I have from the country when growing up are memories of war’ and I said even if I don’t like any of the candidates, because I don’t like neither of them, I prefer voting for Santos for the dream that maybe peace may come instead of more war […] like Mockus used to say, I prefer to make a mistake seeking peace than to be right seeking war, so it’s like, I said=I aspire to the idea that maybe one day I can see the country in peace.

P26 Andrés (34, 2003)

Just like in the first group discussion on this issue was non-confrontational. Santiago, who in former meetings with me had devised his positioning praising Alvaro Uribe’s government results that improved security across the country, decided to occlude his own position and not making any direct comment to contradict Andrés’s view. Santiago limits himself to saying that he believes security had improved by the time he left Colombia in 2002, that is, during Uribe’s government, yet without mentioning any particular names to attribute such a change. Santiago does not intend to contest Andrés’s call for boycotting Zuluaga’s aspirations. Instead, he turns the discussion into what the current government should be doing for the country, which does not have to do with the peace talks, at least not directly for him:
P: la desigualdad uno va a Colombia y es que consigue uno las cosas tan caras como se consiguen acá y que uno dice con razón, o sea, antes la gente no se ha venido al norte de Bogotá a matarlo a uno, porque es que uno dice ¿cuánto es salario mínimo ahoritica en Colombia? Son que ¿quinientos? (…) yo creo que la gente no quiere = no espera que le den todo gratis sino que para mejorar la economía hay que hacer parte de la economía, o sea hay que empezar a generar empleo, capacitación, educación, eso es lo que genera la paz.

P: the inequality when one goes to Colombia is that one gets so many things as expensive as one gets them here and one says with all reason, I mean, luckily people haven’t come to the North to kill themselves, because one says, ‘how much is the basic salary in Colombia? Five hundred? […] I think people don’t want = don’t wait to have everything for free but to improve the economy you have to be part of the economy, I mean it is needed to start generating employment, education, that’s what produces peace.

P11: Santiago (32, 2002)

The rather non-confrontational exchanges of my participants exemplify the norms that seem to operate amongst Colombians in Australia when the political appears in conversation. Avoiding conflict, at least on political matters, seems to be at work in their relations with Colombian acquaintances and the community in general. Those who have certainly strong ideological views on the political, like the political refugees, have had to keep their views away from confrontation by only discussing them with a selected and close group of people who share similar stories of migration. But given the small number of Colombian political refugees, they have had to find those people within the Latin American community of social and political advocacy in Sydney.

For Jorge and Oscar, the last discussion group, La Violencia was the event that they both remember the most in the history of Colombia and the event that marked their own lives. Oscar had previously explained in his interview what La Violencia meant for him, how his family was displaced for it and his father murdered and his whole life turned upside-down since then. Jorge, however, did not
give specific details on how he or his family was affected by this period, but it is known to the researcher that he joined the civilian liberal armed forces at the time and later had to flee the country as a political refugee. For both men La Violencia was the reason to flee their hometowns and later in life their country. Yet, they did not want to offer any further details in the group session and I attribute this to two facts. First, they know each other fairly well and may have discussed these events and their stories many times before over their 20 years or so of friendship. Secondly, they are talking to one Colombian that may be seen as an outsider, first, because of her age, and second because of their own migration path to Australia. The researcher may indeed be seen as one of those Colombians both men described in their interviews as ignorant of the real problematic of the country. Even though I had gained their trust after a number of meetings I was probably still not be able to understand the reality they endured during La Violencia. Both men have spent most of their lives fighting for social causes, one of them was a political refugee and the other did not have such a status but, as explained before, his conditions of exit from Colombia could locate him into the same category. Plus, Oscar’s social activism led him to being a union leader for over twenty years in Australia. Their social commitment can be seen as alive today when they are both retired and still, in their late eighties, they are keen to attend social and political events, especially Jorge. They are very much concerned with issues of social justice and the problems that have not been resolved in Colombia, like the provision of the basic social guarantees to all of its population. They know first-hand what the fundamental issues of the civil armed conflict have been for over five decades. Yet, unfortunately not much has changed since they left Colombia and the social and political situation is even worse. Therefore, turning to a hurtful past does not change things, they prefer, from their political view, to concentrate on a reflection of the present and the future of Colombia. Thus, my counter argument to Halbwachs’s (1992) view that the elderly tend to over idealize their past, is to say that one’s political dissenting views seem to overrun any form of ideal past. The political identities of these two participants transcend any idealized past, because there has not been one. Those political refugees who were victims or even perpetrators of the civil conflict do not stagnate in a discussion over the past and look forward to stay active in the search of a different reality for their country. Yet, unfortunately, as elaborated in the previous section, such reflections seem to stay silent or rather within a very small circle of people. Thus Jorge’s and Oscar’s views represent a selected voiced dissent especially when
even their families do not seem to be interested in knowing what is beyond the borders of Colombia. Oscar tells us that in his more than six visits to Colombia people are not willing to ask him or know about the social system in Australia and therefore he is very pessimistic about the idea that his experience and that of Colombian migrants in Australia can help somehow boost the social action needed to improve the conditions of all in Colombia. He regrets that Colombians over there and here do not truly unite and engage civically and politically. Responding to a comment by Jorge that he had not heard lately for a while about the ‘people of Unidos por Colombia’, Oscar interpolates, ‘eso, eso es lo que yo llamo desunión, se ven una vez y sí, mucho ánimo, mucho aguardiente y mucho bailoteo, vamos a hacer esto, esto hay que hacerlo adelante, sale usted y no se vuelve a saber [nada]’.

**A Limited Political Identity amongst Colombian Migrants in Australia**

The data explored in this chapter illustrates the dynamic of low political engagement amongst the broad community of Colombians in Australia. At the individual level, Colombians are seemingly confronted and willing to express themselves politically, within semi-private and semi-public spaces like those reviewed in my fieldwork. My participants have preferred, at large, to keep their reflections on the social and the political state of affairs in both Colombia and Australia to themselves. Only a few of those who dared to share in part their political positionings and positionalities attended public demonstrations that contest the social political crisis of Colombia. The absence of active and visible groups that embrace similar causes leads to the conclusion that there is no transnational political organising among Colombians in Australia. There are transnational practices of other purposes like the ‘revitalizing’ and ‘preserving’ of the country’s culture and the celebration of traditional festivities. However, beyond that, the voicing of individual dissident positions is rather limited and scarce, at least publicly. The number of Colombians in Australia and at the same time the very low number of political refugees appear to be an additional factor for the dearth of social and political activism of the community in comparison with the Colombian organising in the US, Canada and the UK. The conditions of exit and reception of Colombians migrants in Australia are rather different to those in the other countries.
mentioned. Therefore, these are seen as a contributing factor to the absence of a real need not only for community making, but, to participate in organised activism in a country that has been more ‘benevolent’ than others and where migrants have, in general, since the early arrivals, had the support of a ‘fair social system’ embracing their migration.

Distrust and lack of civic engagement are all but the major reasons to distance oneself from their fellow country people and the problems of their country and eventually from any initiative that seems to praise or challenge Colombia at the social and political levels. If participants withhold any political view it has been hard to underscore it, and mostly in a collective remembering exercise some participants have shown only faded positionings always in cautionary fashion, not only in front of other participants but the researcher. This means that in many cases, if not all, an ideology, a political view, has been either silenced or voiced selectively, and only in three cases voiced overtly with the researcher. The social political positionalities have proved to change in the spaces of interaction I have found my participants in. But as it has been shown throughout the thesis, participants offer different views that invite a form of political reasoning, even though not directly. Therefore, my approach to study such a stance from their reflections on different subjects rather than those only politically-oriented, gives me wider room for understanding the heterogeneity of positions and identities Colombians in Australia take on. In the following chapter I explore more deeply how such heterogeneity works discursively and agentially in five of my participants. The multiplicity of the identities they have spoken of in their narratives showcases the variety of identity and positioning processes of the group of participants and works as a projection of the case for the broader community of Colombians in Australia.
Chapter 7

Multiple Identities, Positionings and Positionalities:

Five Case Studies of Colombians in Australia

In the last four chapters a thorough description of Colombians in Australia has been proposed tailored within different prisms of analysis. In Chapter 3 a narrow characterization of the group of participants that can be viewed portraying an initial profile of Colombians in Australia is discussed based on a work-in-progress demographic analysis. In Chapter 4 a different consideration was given to the participants’ individual identities exploring their social positionings and positionalities by virtue of the ways they imagine themselves, their fellow country people, and fellow migrants. In Chapter 5 a wider construction of the national emerged, drawing upon an individual and collective remembering exercise participants engaged with and revealing further aspects of their social identities brought from Colombia and how these are re-framed in connection with their new migrant capital in Australia. The salient descriptions of lack of trust and lack of civic engagement among Colombians in both locales are explored in depth from the angle of political dissent in Chapter 5. There, the identities of Colombians in Australia are again proposed as based on the mirroring of the national identities back in their home country. The political voice of participants and their political silencing are indeed very much related to the political identities that Colombians have assumed in their national territory and abroad in other countries of reception. Yet, principally working definitions have been drawn on how these are materialized or not in the very own context of Australia. The social and political identities described so far give an account of the multiple identities that Colombians take on not only in reference to their experience, but their relationship with Colombia itself. This multiplicity of identities, however, needs to be explored in more

75 These terms are used in the sense proposed by Rosaura Sanchez, referring to positioning as one’s location within a social structure be it related to class, race, or gender; and to positionality as one’s reflexivity or subjective understanding in view of social location (2006:38).
detail from the individual level to address the fundamental questions that this research proposes. That is, to explore how the migration experience has changed the lives of those who moved from Colombia to Australia, how their identities, whether they be social or political, have changed over the course of their migration process and settlement, and how these changes are verbalized in the participants’ narratives of lived and imagined experiences. This chapter explores the elements that underline the multiplicity of identities of Colombian migrants by presenting the case studies of five participants whose narrativity performance\textsuperscript{76} and life stories help visualize the ever-changing positionings and positionalities Colombians assume in their migration process. Here, key elements of the Dialogical Self Theory are called upon in order to situate the framework of analysis of the participants’ life stories and draw on their array of multiple identities. Starting from a recognition of the dialogicality of the self, its partibility, and its functioning as a ‘society of mind’ (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Hermans and Gieser, 2012), the analysis will then centre on the concept of ambiguous third positions which facilitate the appearance of a variety of positioning processes and a multiplicity of identities.

The case studies presented allow us to draw on how the migration process of my participants has enhanced and also hindered certain positions, and therefore boosted a number of identities they unveil in their telling of life stories. At the same time the wide repertoire of positions in their narratives shows the myriad of national identities Colombians in Australia seemingly take on. This variety of identities, following De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999), relates to the ‘not completely consistent, stable and immutable’ character of national identities at work in everyday or informal discourses, by everyday people (154). The five cases studied here were selected among the thirty-one interviewees of the research on the basis of how they seemed to represent a number of other cases as well as the continued interaction these participants maintained with the researcher throughout and after fieldwork, in ‘community’ activities, and in further contacts by email and telephone. A synopsis of the lives of my participants before and after migrating to Australia is presented as they related it in their own narratives. Also details on the relationship developed with the researcher are described with the aim of embracing

\textsuperscript{76} As introduced in Chapter 1, the concept of narrative performance relates to Goffman’s (1959) notion of performance as ‘the activity of a given participant’ in a given interaction which exercises some influence on other people involved (14).
the reflexivity introduced in chapter 1 with specific examples from the researcher-participant interaction and the researcher/insider positions I held and which may have had an effect on my reading of their storylines. Focus is then given to the discursively emerging positions and identities in each case study and which serve to better illustrate the continuous positioning process of my participants. Thus this approach can be indicative of the potential positions of the broader community of Colombians in Australia.

**Positioning Processes in the Multiplicity of Identities of the Migrant Selves**

As underlined in Chapter 1, this research has approached the study of the multiple identities displayed by Colombian migrants in Australia based, in part, on the concepts found in positioning theory and the Dialogical Self Theory or DST. Before presenting the five case studies, I outline here the very specific elements from the social-psychology approaches that are brought into my analysis. The elements of critical realist theory that conceptualise identity and positioning processes, as propounded by Rosaura Sánchez (2006), and the re-framing of the self and its multiplicity of identities accounted by Dialogical Self Theory literature are the two main theoretical approaches orientating this study and the views on the participants’ discourse about their lives and relations. Sánchez proposes examining identity in view of the social structures that ‘configure, condition, limit and constrain agency’ pertaining that it is precisely agency which ‘has the potential to transform social structures’ (2006: 32). The main tenet for Sánchez is that, even though identity is discursively formed, it is grounded in social reality. That is, it is shaped by the social structures which serve to condition the social experiences that generate specific social, political and cultural identities (34). Yet, clearly, this social reality is not equally embraced by all, a fact which conditions identity formation to a ‘conjunction of external and internal, contingent and necessary, processes that interconnect and emerge within specific historical conditions’ (2006: 34).

This conception of how identity is shaped by social and structural conditions is concomitant with the view from social psychology and Dialogical Self Theory scholars in that identities are in production through the dialogue ‘between collective voices of the groups, communities, and cultures to
which the individual person belongs’ (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 6). This dialogue which itself constitutes a minimal sort of interaction (that is, addressing and responding), ‘implies a learning process that confirms, innovates, or further develops existing positions’ (6). Yet, going back to Sánchez, such positions are based on social structures and influence one’s knowledge and one’s identities. She explores this influence by making a conceptual distinction between what she terms positioning and positionality.

Sánchez (2006) refers to positioning as ‘one’s location within a set or conjuncture of economic, political and cultural structures’ (35). She dismisses the idea of having class as the only positioning that matters since gender, racial/ethnic and sexual positions are also at play in social structural relations. Notwithstanding, Sánchez recognises the seemingly overriding consideration given to class over gender or race:

Issues of gender, racial/ethnic and sexual orientation are, as previously mentioned, too often contained within a framework of difference that masks the structural grounding of these relations. Class, on the other hand, is first and foremost a structural positioning; class relations are, moreover, implicitly problematic and not easily naturalized. Class can function, then, as a heuristic construct that invites the exploration of varied social problems on the basis of social positioning and social structures’ (Sánchez 2006: 37).

One’s social position, be it within the frames of class, race, or gender, bears a relation to one’s potential reflexivity in view of these realities and disjunctures (Sánchez 2006: 38). Sánchez refers to this reflexivity as positionality and describes it as ‘one’s imagined relation or standpoint relative to that positioning’ (Ibid, 38). Positionality is highly discursive as it goes beyond the structural relations pertaining positioning and ‘may be contingent upon other factors, other complementary or competing discourses, not specifically implicated by one’s social location’ (Sánchez 2006: 38).

In sum, even though one’s positionality may be conditioned by one’s social positioning, ‘positionality is always at variance with other positionalities including one’s own on other issues, as one’s perspectives are always mutable, contradictory, and, again, constantly in a state of flux, renegotiating themselves in the face of changing realities’ (Ibid, 38). In Dialogical Self Theory,
positioning works as a verb indicating process in which ‘people place each other and themselves in terms of ‘here’ and ‘there’ (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 8; emphasis in original). The process of positioning oneself somewhere implicates, according to the authors, ‘other positions involved that are located in the outer space around us or in the inner metaphorical space of the self’ (8). Therefore, there is an intrinsic mobility of the self, a multiplicity of positions that go along with its unity and continuity (9).

Just as in real life social interactions where struggles over dominance are observable, the self is described in Dialogical Self Theory literature as ‘emerging from social, historical, and societal processes that transcend any individual-society dichotomy or separation’ (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 1). The ‘dialogical self’ is conceptualised as a combination of the internal sense attributed to the ‘self’, as something happening only in the mind of a person, and the external attained through ‘dialogue’ which takes place between two people. The exchanges or dialogues are not only between ‘the voices of the individuals’ but also between ‘the collective voices of the groups, communities, and cultures to which the individual person belongs’ (6) and result in a populated set of positions in the self which then is referred to as a ‘mini society’ (Raggatt 2012: 29). The dialogical self allows therefore both multiplicity and unity in that exchanges between the internal and external domains of the self create a ‘dialogical space’ whereby existing positions are reframed or ‘further developed’ and new positions emerge (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010: 6).

The self is positioned within domains of internal and external positions which Hermans (2001) defines respectively as part of oneself and as part of the environment (252). That is, the interface between the internal and the external as proposed in DST and the psychological and the social—with the latter being more central to Sánchez’s positioning approach—pitches processes of identity formation dependent on the internal positionings of individuals and those positions emerging or attributed in dialogue with external positions.

Ambivalent third positions—or positions that can stabilize, destabilize and organise or structure identities in situations of contradiction and conflict—are of particular relevance in the literature. These are referred as counter-positions, meta-positions and promoter positions (Raggatt 2012). In the migration context this polyvalence of positions is crucial to understand the articulation of identity in a
more flexible paradigm than the described in the literature of migrations including assimilation, acculturation, and marginalisation. The multiplicity of positions, and therefore of identities approached from DST, attends to experiences of inclusion, exclusion and integration that take place within the same time span as immigrants and their social conditions are continuously charged with expectations and relations within the new location and also vis-à-vis their past positioning in their country of origin.

The analysis of three of the following five cases demonstrate, third positions in the form of counter-positions are sometimes overshadowed by the strength of core or meta-positions participants are able to narrate about, specially pertaining their upbringing and professional background in Colombia. That is, even though some participants construct in their discourse a wide range of third positions, their lived experience back in Colombia is posed as the point of suture, using Hall’s (1995: 65) term, that prevails upon new or ambiguous third positions. Instead of finding clear cut examples similar to the dialogical triads’ model illustrated by Raggatt (2012), the following cases show the process of identity formation that participants tell off and perform in their life stories and which constitute a set of varied models of positioning.

I consider the contribution of the elements outlined in DST in view of the positioning processes immigrants are faced with not only after their migration move upon encountering a number of external factors—including but not limited to a new language use, new cultural practices and other collective positions that may affect them differently – but also in reflection of their own positionings in the past, in their own country, a reflection that is inevitably permeated by their own particular experiences of migration.

Diego, 60, 1994

Diego is one of the four political refugees taking part in the study. Diego had to flee Colombia in the midst of the executions of left activists of the late 80s and which put at risk his own life after two murder attempts. We had three meetings before our formal interview and continued in contact by phone as he would let me know of events that were organised especially in the wake of the National Farmers Strike
in Colombia in 2013. His commitment to his political ideology is such that even after living in Australia for more than 20 years he longs to return to Colombia and continue ‘to contribute to the peace building’ process there. For security reasons he has not returned over this time and his only hope to do so is that the current peace talks between the Santos government and the FARC guerrillas will open the door for him and many other political refugees to go back ‘through the front door.’

Three major stages of Diego’s life are modelled in Figure 2 to illustrate how the core position of leftist thought is seen functioning throughout his multiplicity of positions. These stages are framed through events he recalls from his childhood and adolescence, and then his political life in Colombia, his asylum in Venezuela and finally his life in Australia for the last 20 years. In contrast to the other case studies cited in this chapter, Diego’s case does not seem to tell of opposing positions but of an omnipresent position which is said to have been shaped from his early childhood. In this way, his multiple identities appear tightly embedded into each other, therefore a scaffolding-like diagram is used rather than an oppositional, or mirrored-diagram, to illustrate the scope of his positionings.

Figure 2. Diego's Positioning Process Inflected by a Meta-Position

---

Raggatt (2012: 32) explains that ‘a position is a core position when a large number of other positions are affected by its functioning. Presumably, core positions assemble a large domain of other positions linked by important events, persons, objects and life narratives’.
Early Childhood and Adolescence

Diego relates how his life in the ‘revolutionary cause’ was the result of his questioning as a child about things that seemed unjust to him and that could not be explained by his parents. He reflects on those events as having an eventual result of leading him to join one of the left parties in Colombia. His appropriation of a strong left political position was indeed inflected by the inequalities he lived with during his early childhood years. One of the first things he speaks of is hearing bullets from the shootings between liberals and communist guerrillas in his town during ‘La Violencia’:

P: I was born in 1953, in the midst of the violence, the first big events I heard of were shootings over here and there […] amongst the liberal guerrillas and sometimes communists, but at times amongst the guerrillas themselves, amongst the liberal gangs they will fight, and then they will go past our home and for me that was the big event. There was no television nor radio, nor transistor radio, there were only coffee crops, chickens, pigs and mum and dad and dogs to follow you but you don’t have a telephone, a computer, anything at all therefore the great event was that, to see them over there.

He started to question himself for these people he knew were holding the shootings, but his parents would not explain anything to him, and only later when he was at school age, would he make the connections to understand what he had heard from those ‘bandoleros’ who stayed close to his home and what the communists, as he calls them, would share with him.
P: yo comencé a preguntarme, ¿por qué esta gente? ¿no?, y mi mamá y mi papá no me podían decir, no sabían decirme a mí nada de eso, lo vine a escuchar después de los comunistas, por ahí, así poquito a poco cuando yo llego a la escuela primaria yo no escuchaba nada de eso, pero había problemas pero yo entendía que era lo mismo de aquellos que yo había escuchado de los comunistas diciendo ¿no? Entonces me interesó el tema. Por eso tengo el antecedente, todo ese antecedente, por eso llegué hasta aquí, por eso me quiero regresar al país.

P: I started to question myself, why these people? Right?, and my mum and my dad couldn’t tell me, they didn’t know how to tell me anything about it, then I heard about it from the communists, round there, little by little when I get into primary school I didn’t hear anything about that, but there were problems but i understood it was the same thing I’ve heard from the communists, right? So I got interested in the subject. That’s why I have the background, all that antecedent, that’s why I’ve come to this point, that’s why I want to return to the country.

Having lived those images of La Violencia gave him the first precedent to enter into political activism, and this has taken him to where he is now, a restless political mind awaiting the moment to return to his country and finally be able to do his political work without worrying about his personal security. In the same statement and many others in our meetings, he criticises what he explains as the fact that Colombians in Australia do not know anything about the history of their country and therefore cannot understand the real motives that led them to migrate.

P: pero hay gente que vive toda la vida y no se da cuenta donde vivió, el régimen político, son víctimas, a veces actores inconscientes del medio ambiente en que convive la sociedad.

P: but there are people who live all their lives and they don’t realise where they lived, the political regime, they are victims, sometimes they are unconscious actors of the environment in which society stands.
A memorable event for him was ‘el plebiscito del 57’ (that is, the plebiscite in 1957) when he was about four years old. After the erratic civil war between conservatives and liberal guerrillas across the country, the time was set for people to vote in a plebiscite for the endorsement of the agreement reached by ‘El Frente Nacional’, or the National Front. The pact established that both political parties, Liberal and Conservative would take equal turns in the presidency terms as a solution to stop the widespread violence. From this Diego recalls his parents would take him and his siblings to sleep rough in the bush fearing that the ‘godos’ (that is, gun-armed conservatives) would come to kill his father who was liberal. Yet, hiding at night did not leave the same lasting impression as the day he saw all the people from his town getting ready for a ride to the city of Neiva where they would vote the plebiscite.

Diego continues explaining how at this stage of his life he started being baffled by things that were beyond his comprehension. He fell ill when he was about 11 years old, but he was not taken to a doctor, because the doctor who could help, according to his dad, was over three hours away from his town and they did not have the money to transport him there. Time later Diego was awarded a bursary for his secondary studies but he could not take it, again, because of the travel time to the new school and because ultimately, he believes, his parents did not know what a bursary was. When he was finally going to be enrolled in the local school, he was rejected because his parents were not married and he was ‘hijo natural’ or an unrecognised child. He had his mother’s last name and this was unacceptable in the eyes of the church. His parents had to rush and get married so that he could go to school. From there, undoubtedly, comes his questioning of the role of the Catholic Church in the everyday lives of Colombians and the social regime.

P: Para mí yo era un hijo legítimo yo sabía que tenía mi papá y ya. Pero, ¿por qué el sistema me discrimina a mí? Por el hecho de que mi mamá y mi papá no fueron a una ceremonia y todo eso a casarse y tal cosa, total que les tocó ir a casarse en alpargatas y todo pero fueron y se casaron y todo para que yo pudiera ingresar al colegio, eso, eso lo va dejando a uno como enemistado a uno con el régimen, ¿no? ¿Por qué? Si yo soy un niño y necesito mi escuela y me

78 Expression to identify a child who has not been legally recognised by his father and has been registered with his mother’s last name.
van a discriminar por eso. Cuando le cambiaron en el 91 a la Constitución colombiana, lo de que la soberanía le pertenece al pueblo y no a Dios, yo fui de la gente más feliz, ¿si? Porque [...] la iglesia se metía en todo.

P: to me I was a legitimate child, I knew I had a father and that’s it. But, why does the system discriminate against me? Just because my mum and my dad didn’t go to a ceremony and all that stuff about getting married, anyway, they had to get married in their alpargatas, but they went to get married so I could enter to school, that, that starts to leave you at odds with the regime, right? Why? If I’m a child and I need my school and they are going to discriminate me because of that. When the 91 Colombian Constitution got changed about the sovereignty belongs to the people and not God I was one of the happiest people, right? Because [...] the church intervened everywhere.

This sum of early events in Diego’s life necessarily instilled in him the need to look for answers to what he saw as unjust. Later in his life more events widen his perceptions and made him eventually change his career and become involved in political activism.

_Asylum in Venezuela_

Fearing for his own life Diego had to leave Colombia and stayed in Venezuela for almost a year waiting for a third country to accept him as a political exile. His plans were initially to stay in Venezuela, but after he received the unexpected visit of a Colombian military attaché in his hotel lobby to persuade him to sell information he may have, he decided it was not safe to be there. Even though he knew he would not be killed in that meeting, his whereabouts could be easily available to the paramilitary. In Venezuela, while Diego and his partner were waiting for his refugee status to be accepted in a third country, Diego was still an active part of his party in Colombia, and used to write editorials in a local
paper in Caracas. He met other political exiles there and kept talking about the problems of his country and Latin America. He was given background information about Australia, its economy, its people, and he recalls seeing on a TV screen ‘big demonstrations’, but regrets he has not really seen that in real life in Australia. The United Nations started to liaise with the Australian government, and he went into medical exams and a long process to finally be flown to Australia as a refugee. The following statement was given in response to what he has countlessly seen from people who do not know him and who start challenging his status as a migrant in Australia, as if he was hiding something from the government:

P: Australia supo, mucho antes de yo estar aquí, quién era yo y quién era mi compañera, o quién es, entonces aquí no tenemos nosotros nada escondido, nada tapado, por eso puedo pararme en cualquier parte, hacer apología del partido de lo que sea [...] a mí no me han dicho que yo no hable, yo tengo todos mis derechos, yo me hice ciudadano australiano.

P: Australia knew, a long time before I came here, who I was and who my partner was or who is, we haven’t got anything hidden, nothing concealed, that’s why I can stand up anywhere and make allusion to the party whatever it is […] no one has told me not to talk, I’ve got all my rights, I became an Australian citizen.

Fleeing to Australia and Diego’s Last 20 years here

Diego considers himself as a ‘legitimate exile’ who truly lived for the political cause in Colombia and from this positioning he maintains the hope to return to his country with a certain political status. He speaks of how this may work after the conditions of a peace agreement guarantee his life and that of other political refugees will be protected there. When he arrived in Australia, he was given accommodation and all sorts of social services support, he and his partner agreed to take advantage of the free English training so that she would study first and he will start work and complete his allocated English hours later on. This did not work in the end when they split and he was left with a mortgage to pay for, and could not follow up the English course. Not being able to speak the language has been a
burden ever since. For the twenty years he has lived in Australia he has felt like somebody ‘less capable than an illiterate person’ because he is not able to communicate what he wants, and understand the ‘noise’ he hears when people speaks to him in English. To make things worse, from his early days in Australia, he realised it would not be easy to find people who were willing to talk with him about politics and keep his political essence alive using his own language.

Diego’s only escape for his personal worries—having separated from his partner and have found resistance to his opinionated views—was to work as many hours as he could to ‘keep his mind busy’. As he insists he did not come to Australia, on holidays, for a job, or to study, so he thinks different to the rest of Colombians who came under other circumstances:

P: yo llegué aquí por ninguna de esas razones, yo llegué aquí solamente porque se me ofrecía salvar mi vida entonces yo no pienso en dinero, yo solamente pienso, yo sigo pensando en la paz del país, y en que dondequiera que yo esté siempre estaré con la paz, por eso me ves con todos los grupitos por ahí metido, porque eso es lo que yo pienso.

P: I didn’t come here for any of those reasons, I only came here because they offered me to save my life thus I don’t think about money, I only think, I keep thinking of the peace of the country, in that wherever I am I’ll always be for peace, that’s why you see I’m amongst all those little groups, because that’s what I think.

He has had to deal with this solitude at work as well, because even though he works with other Spanish speakers there, they are preoccupied with their job at all times and he is unable to even have a chat with them on his break time, not even about football. Although Diego does not talk about this with regret, he reflects on how his political activism was flourishing in Australia, but his limited use of English prevented him from going further despite his connections with the Australian Labor Party. This speaks of how his life as an immigrant is entirely connected to his political refugee status and background, and has been influenced by this in that he is outspoken about the social problems of his

79 These ‘grupitos’ are the small groups of Latin Americans like the Foro Social Latino Americano and Unidos Por Colombia.
country, and also Australia, but he has had the limitation of not being able to find a reciprocal audience in his own language nor in English, because he does not speak it. He has not even had the appreciation of a family he formed here. He remarried and had three children with a Latin American, but she was only interested in his money, according to him, and did not support Diego to go back to the English school. Instead he had to work double time to make up for the demands of his new partner. Diego separated again and this time is left with the ‘bittersweetness’ of having children who do not love him, and being left out by his own family. So, Diego’s political positioning assumes a major force and a primary role in his self. He is overtly a political subject and invests all his energy in keeping on studying and reflecting on his country with the hope of a return there to be what he truly is.

P: en este momento yo creo que yo pongo mis ojos más hacia Colombia porque pues eso es lo que siempre más he querido ¿no?, y el inglés yo no cumplí con las horas que me correspondían, me hice un plan tonto, fracasé en ese plan […] entonces pienso que no me voy a esforzar, no me voy a matar la cabeza con esto del inglés igual ya he pasado 20 años aquí así, entonces más bien tengo la cabecita allá puesta en Colombia, además por lo que me pasa aquí, como te digo, vivo completamente solo, aburrido

P: at this moment I think I have my sights on Colombia because that’s what I’ve always wanted, right? And the English I didn’t fulfil the allocated hours, I followed a stupid plan […] and I think I’m not going to make an effort, I’m not going to scratch my head with this about [learning] English, anyhow I’ve been 20 years like this, and I’ve got my head stuck in Colombia, besides because of what happens here, as I tell you, I live completely alone, bored.

Failing to exercise political action and failing to have supporting people around, Diego asserts it will not be difficult to leave Australia and leave his children behind, ‘I’ll continue loving them, anyway I’m already without them’\(^80\), he says. Since he committed in his early adulthood to the left activism, he has left many important people behind, his own parents and siblings after so many years

\(^80\) Translated from ‘los seguiré queriendo igual, igual estoy sin ellos ya’.
of being committed he cannot take a ‘step backwards’ because Colombia is the most important thing for him he has to continue for his cause.

\[P: \text{para mí es más importante el país, yo estuve muchos años cargando la maleta y eso era todo lo que yo llevaba pensando en el país, he pasado toda la vida pensando en el país, entonces ahora ya después de viejo no me puedo echar para atrás ¿no? Además que no me provoca echar me pa’ tras, no hay reversa! [...]}\]

P: to me it is more important the country, I was carrying my backpack for many years and that was all what I had on me thinking about the country, I’ve been all my life thinking of the country, so now after growing older I can’t go backwards, can I? Besides it doesn’t appeal to me to go backwards, there’s no backpedalling.

In virtue of those people that, like him, did activist and political work and were murdered, Diego states, ‘uno no se va a morir por aquí detrás de una puta escoba! No!’ in reference to his job as a cleaner: ‘one is not going to die here behind a broom! No!’ This phrase reflects the strength of Diego’s political identity, he is in a position where after 20 years he has not been able to go back to Colombia, and still invokes this as his ultimate purpose; he is patiently awaiting the moment to go there and work at what he does best. He prefers to have this hope than being resigned to die in Australia as a cleaner, alone, with no family and no comrades to take real political action. Everything depends on the materialization of the peace talks but this may still take a long while.
Nelson is one of the participants I call ‘mature immigrants’ amongst the larger group of recent Colombian migrants in Australia. He arrived in 2009 at the age of 48 years old with a brilliant career as a civil engineer in Bucaramanga. His main reason to take part in this research was to have the opportunity to tell people in Colombia about his experience as he feels he was in many ways ‘engañado’, that is, fooled by the students’ agency in Colombia, and not sufficiently informed on what he was going to find in Australia. He wants to warn future newcomers about the difficulties they are likely to face and which are not really disclosed by the intermediaries in Colombia. His level of distrust was such at the time of our first meeting that he repeatedly asked me to reassure him his name would not be used in any way, and that I sent him unedited copies of fieldwork material and interviews I had with him. There, Nelson’s identity positions were more related to his post-migration experience rather than his life in Colombia. This, I believe, is due to the strong feeling of dissatisfaction he shows on the way his dreams and projects in Australia were scrapped soon after his arrival. During our interview and continued contact through email and by phone I have identified three primary ‘ambiguous thirds’ which contribute in his display of opposing positions relating to his migratory experience and life in Australia are drawn connected to each other in a continuous line path. The first ambiguous third is the ‘Australian system of immigration’, which has inhibited him to work as a professional and led him to a downgrading of his person and self-esteem. The next ambiguous third is represented by ‘his life in Australia’, or more specifically, his interpersonal relations in Australia. Thirdly there is his family and how his relationship with his wife and children places him in the undesirable position of sacrificing his own self, to stop being what he ‘is’ and make the decision to continue in Australia waiting better opportunities after so much has been taken from him. Figure 3 emphasises the transcendence of Nelson’s problematic integration and acceptance of his new condition as immigrant. However, there are not strong opposing positions since his narrative performance mainly goes around the challenges he has been faced with and continues to encounter. As he notes, his migration has meant to stop being himself in a rather concrete section apart from the rest of his life.
Nelson regrets having trusted in the service of an education agency in Colombia who were not honest enough with him and did not have any ‘binding contract’ with him to bring him to Australia. That is, he paid for the expenses of his family visa, and studies here, but he was only given shallow ‘indications’ without a commitment for what he had requested beforehand, for example, safe accommodation upon arrival. His criticism of the way the student agencies do business and thereafter the international education of Australia work are understandable in that he paid extremely costly enrolment fees for his children and wife to study in Australia and still he is not allowed to study himself, and worse, he is not able to utilize his prominent expertise as a civil engineer in Australia.

Nelson’s first disillusionment came from dealing with Colombians in Australia: first the agency that was not able to arrange appropriate accommodation making them stay in a backpackers hostel for his first week in Queensland, with his young children, a shocking start which made him feel impotent seeing how his standards of comfort in Colombia had disappeared without notice and leaving him
feeding his family out of sandwiches and soft drinks. Then a very picturesque Colombian man incarnating one of those soap opera characters, a man with a set of golden rings and bracelets Colombians are used to watch on their TV screens, was here, in Australia, trying to rip Nelson off making him pay for a whole house rent’s besides asking him to spare a bedroom for himself and another for his friend who would occasionally come home. This was the ‘trusted man’ the student agency referred to. Then, another Colombian appears in the scene, promising to help him find a shelter for a small price, ‘I can help you to find something but you’ll have to pay me $100 bucks’, Nelson recalls being told. At this point he is desperate, he needs to get out of the backpackers, and is on the edge of distress. To his relief he made a new acquaintance by chance, because he was able to speak French to a real estate agent at an inspection visit. From there hope returned for Nelson, but now the problem was he did not have any personal references who could support a lease application, plus, there were no places available before a month.

Meanwhile, the ambience at the backpackers’ accommodation showed him and his family ‘a very dark side of people’, he says, something they could barely grasp even though they are from a ‘third world country’ like Colombia, as he explains:

\[
P: \text{empieza uno a darse cuenta que a cambio de llegar uno al primer mundo como que llego al tercer mundo, empieza uno a ver que gente descalza, sucia, empieza a ver uno niñas en la calle botadas entonces es normal y al principio uno llega montañero y le cuesta a uno ver una niña mona bonita y todo ahhh en la city toda botada.}
\]

\[
P: \text{one starts to realise that instead of arriving to the third world you’ve gotten into a first world, you start seeing people with bear foot, dirty, you start seeing girls left out on the street drunk and then it’s normal and at the beginning one is montañero and it’s hard to see a pretty blonde girl and all of that, ahhh over there, drunken in the city.}
\]

These were a few weeks of unpleasant circumstances that without doubt shaped Nelson’s view of his own Australian journey to date. To his fortune another Colombian appears, this time to offer the sought
after support. Through this Colombian and her partner, Nelson is able to gain a lease contract and move to a new home.

P: empiezo yo a ver que pasan los días que bajo la calidad de vida, que esto de aventura= tal vez no soy de la edad, entonces empiezo ya a razonar a ver las cosas, pero no empiezo a perder, pero no pierdo la voluntad y seguí, quedarme en este país finalmente, entonces como quiera que sea hago las cosas, pero hay un desespero y en ese desespero aparece esta colombiana.

P: I start to see how the days go past and the quality of life drops, that this of adventure=maybe I’m not in the age, and then I start to reason to see the things, but I don’t start to lose, but I don’t lose the willingness and I went on (sic), to stay in this country after all, so anyhow I do the things, but there is desperation and in that desperation this Colombian appears.

Moving to a secure place was an incommensurable relief for Nelson, but more stories were to come. His retelling of how he managed to bring into his home the neighbours around his house who had lived on the same street for decades but did not even know each other’s names, tells of his uptaking of an identity he withholds from the normal practice in his country, his new neighbours, ‘were sitting first looking odd to each other and later on they started to loosen up and it’s like the typical moment in Colombia’.81 This empowering position by which Nelson is able to make new acquaintances expands to the re-emergence of his own creative persona. His children and wife leave every day for school, and he is at home, with the urge of finding a job, and something to do meanwhile, because he is ‘thinking too much’. He buys an old car and repairs it, fixing everything he can around the house and when there was the opportunity, mending things for his new friends, and going places looking for a job. Yet, beyond his need for an income, there is a continual number of events that do not stop showing him an undesirable side of his family condition of ‘recent arrivals’ who were not used to the local distances and bus timetables, for example. One of those was his desperation of not knowing of his 13-year-old son’s

---

81 Translated from ‘se sientan y al principio se miran como raro, y ya empiezan a soltar entonces se vuelve el típico momento de encuentro como en Colombia’.
whereabouts. Nelson’s son had been playing a football match at school, but no one offered him a lift home, and they were both unaware buses were not available till late, as he relates, ‘he went back home by foot, I felt my soul was being taken away, I said, ‘my son! Where is he? What can I do?’ Early anecdotes like this give migrants a new perspective on how different Australia is from Colombia especially in terms of social expectations and access to public transport, for example.

_Becoming a Migrant Facing the Australian System_

In another story Nelson relates that one of his neighbours saw a great potential in his good mending jobs and offered to help him set up his own handyman business. Unfortunately, Nelson only ended up working for his neighbour and paying for a van, insurance and materials out of his daily pay:

_P:_ entonces aprendo que aquí se cambian las reglas de juego, por el vecino que ya el negocio que empieza a ir bien entonces ya no era para mí sino era de él, entonces él deja de ser un contratista en el city council por dedicarse a eso y empieza a cobrarme a mí todas las responsabilidades, un seguro de $5,000 contra daños a terceros que yo tenía que pagar, me compró una camioneta, en mi casa guardo material […] créame que Colombia está muy lejos, y con lo lejos que está en muchas cosas tiene más desarrollo que Australia, y en esto de negocios le puedo decir que tiene un desarrollo mejor que el de Australia, no tendrá los mismos esquemas de microempresario, o de ABN, contratante o de subcontratante, no pero tiene cosas distintas, no yo no trabajo más’.

_P:_ then I start to learn that over here the game rules get changed, because of the neighbour that sees the business is going well and then it is not for me anymore but his, and he quits his contractors’ job in the city council to focus on this one and starts charging me all the responsibilities, a $5000 insurance to third parties that I had to pay, he buys me a van, I got to store supplies in my home […] believe me Colombia is far away, and with that distance in many things is much more developed than Australia and in this business stuff it has a better
development than Australia, it won’t have the same schemes of small businesses or ABN, contractors or subcontractors, but has got different things, no, I don’t work anymore’.

The change of mind pretty much accepted within personal and commercial interactions in Australia is seen by Nelson as an external factor he has been unable to manage and that goes beyond his reach when the Australian migration system allows for such changes as well. He argues he has struggled finding the ways to stay permanently in the country precisely due to the continuous changes he perceives in the Australian system:

P: Australia es un país con muchísimo interés en uno pero con muy pocas garantías para uno, [...] porque aquí está establecido culturalmente el que aquí puedes estar cansada y mañana yo le digo, sabe qué? Me conseguí otra amiga porque change my mind [sic] [...] y esa es la gran excusa, esta es una cultura en que así políticamente también lo hace, establece normas, si tú miras a inmigración [...] cada rato estás (sic) cambiando las reglas del juego, y es muy jodido jugar parqués cuando el dueño del tablero cada vez que tú vas a tirar cambia las reglas, ¿no?

P: Australia is a country with a lot of interest on you but with very few guarantees for you […] and here you have a contract with fine letter in case there is a ‘sorry I change my mind’ [sic] right? […] because here it is culturally established that you can be tired tomorrow and I tell you, ‘you know what? I got myself another girlfriend because change my mind [sic] […] and that is the biggest excuse, this is a culture that also does it politically, establishes norms, if you look at immigration […] every time they’re changing the game rules, and it is very screwed up to play cross and circle when the owner of the rules book changes the rules everytime you’re throwing the dice, do you think?
A final example showing Nelson’s perseverance, amid the bad experiences he endured upon his arrival, is based on his recollections of working with a young Australian who did not stop praising Nelson’s quality work, and would annoy him by repeatedly questioning the source for his energy amid the long shift hours, asking him ‘what he did’ and where he drew his strength from. After being fed up with so much work pressure, whereby his co-workers were relying too much on him to do the job, he told the young fellow ‘to behave’, that is to do his own job, so that he would tell him his ‘secret’. Nelson understood this fellow was making the wrong connections thinking he was using some illicit drugs, because after all he was Colombian. The moment arrived and Nelson revealed his ‘trick’:

P: le digo, ‘¿usted quiere saber? ahh en algún momento usted lo va a poder hacer y es cuando la vida lo ponga a usted a hacer algo con menor valor de lo que usted sabe hacer, una, dos, cuando usted, el hambre de su esposa o sus hijos, o la comodidad de su esposa y sus hijos dependa de usted. ¿okay? Usted está demasiado joven para eso, ese es el secreto, eso es lo que yo consumo, NECESIDAD, needs [sic], es lo que me hace a mí trabajar así, mi formación, yo no voy a hacer las cosas mal cuando las puedo hacer bien’, mas sin embargo le dije, ‘y si estaba pensando o conectaba algunas cosas, Dave léase dónde es Colombia, qué es Colombia y qué produce Colombia, y luego caiga en las facilidades de la rumba la diversión que usted quiera encontrar como la droga o por el estilo

P: I tell him, ‘do you want to know? Ahh one day you are going to do it and it is when life asks you to do something of less value than what you are capable of, that’s one [sic], second, when you, the hunger of your wife and your children, or the comfort of your wife and your children depend on you, okay? You are too young to get that, that is the secret, that’s what I take, NECESSITY, needs, that’s what makes me work this way, my upbringing, I’m not going to do things wrong when I can do them right’. Nonetheless I told him, ‘if you were thinking or connecting some things, Dave read where Colombia is, what is Colombia, what it produces and then you turn the easy way of parties and entertainment that you want to find like drugs and the like’.
Waiting for a Chance to Obtain Permanent Residency

In a more settled period of his stay, after over four years of living in Queensland, but still waiting for his opportunity to come to make use of all his expertise and knowledge, Nelson reflects on a number of positionings he has taken along his life here. First, having to deal with the prominent Australian culture which his children came to know at a secondary school age has led Nelson to try to reinforce his own family values. He has to assume an ambiguous position of a father who foresees danger and negative things in this country. For example, having a tattoo or piercing your body is very common in Australia, but Nelson sees it in a more negative way and needs to refer to this cautiously to avoid appearing challenging to one of his sons who simply loves Australia. From his position as a parent, as the head of his family, another orienting position appears, which is the one related to holding onto his adverse situation in Australia to keep his family united, despite his own regret and on two occasions despite his deteriorating health. It is precisely to keep his family united, as he says, that he has had to let time and his own self go, as he reflects in the following extract. He is highly identity conscious and believes he has had to stop being himself for pursuing a dream that he does not even attempt to enunciate.

P: indudablemente lo más duro que hice ha sido renunciar a lo que yo soy como persona. Yo creo que aquí he renunciado a lo que soy como persona, dejé sueños, dejé actividades, dejé muchas cosas cambié muchas cosas que tenía todo por expectativas, cambié tangibles por intangibles [...] lo más duro que he hecho fue transformar realmente la voluntad de persona, lo que he sido en persona para creer en la esperanza y en el país, estar aquí, es lo más grande, haber durado cinco años superar todas las dificultades, porque insisto, han sido más dificultades que facilidades las que he tenido, entonces lo más duro es haber cambiado por completo, entregarme en disposición total a este país.

P: undoubtedly the toughest thing I did was to stop being what I was as a person. I think over here I’ve resigned to everything I am as a person, I left dreams, I left activities, I left many things, changed many things that I had for expectations, I changed tangible things for intangible ones [...] the toughest I’ve done was to transform the will of the person to believe in the hope
and in the country, to be here, is the greatest thing, to have stayed five years and overcome all the difficulties, because I insist it’s been more difficulties than easy things what I’ve had, thus the toughest thing is having changed completely, to give myself over in total disposition to this country.

In that regard, he praises his own past life as the ‘bulwark’ that has kept him on board despite the difficulties. He ‘was somebody’ before coming to Australia, he already was, and believes many Colombians come to Australia ‘to try to become somebody without being’ it prior to their migration. This is exemplified in the common expectations that Colombians are ready to do whatever it takes, and Nelson criticizes this position some fellow people undertake but at the same time praises the honesty of those Colombians whom he has met and who acknowledge their purpose is to stay and make a life here, even if that means leaving behind their own selves.

P: el tema de venir a hacer lo que sea y no hacer lo que se debe hacer, es porque aquí hay mucha gente que viene en esa teoría de hacer lo que sea, viene sin ser, y es muy fácil que empieces a hacer en algún lado algo o alguien (sic), lo jodido es cuando vienes de cero, […] hay un momento en el que uno dice, ¿pero ¿qué está pasando? ¿A qué horas me metí yo en esto de venir a dejar de ser lo que soy o lo que puedo ser? la cantidad de sueños’ […] fijate que piensas en cada año, yo llegué aquí de 48 años, 47 años, y lo que básicamente he ganado es vejez

P: the thing of coming to do whatever and not to do what has to be done, it’s because here there are a lot of people who comes with that theory of doing whatever, they come without being and it is very easy that you start somewhere to do something or somebody [sic], the fucking thing is when you come from zilch […] there is a moment that one says, ‘but, what’s going on?’ when did I decide this thing of coming to stop being what I am or what I can be? All those dreams’ […] just look that you think of every year, I arrived here at 48, 47, and basically what I have won is ageing.
Nelson is still hopeful that Australia will appreciate his capacities and return in kind somehow his personal sacrifice, yet, he acknowledges, ‘the clock is ticking’ against him to solve his residency status or make the decision to go back to Colombia.

Marcela, 34, 2010

At the time of our first interview Marcela was 34 years old and had been in Australia for three years. Marcela decided to travel to Australia after the insistence of one of her girlfriends who had been in Sydney for a year. It was not an immediate decision but the combined result of an emotional crisis she had after splitting from her partner and leaving the tiring job she had been working non-stop for seven years. Relating her work conditions she tells of a situation that can be described as common in Colombia and especially amongst recent graduates there: they are given short-term contracts without any stability and are required to do unremunerated extra hours. Marcela was a committed social worker despite the mounting limitations she had to work with like the endless bureaucracy that impedes effectively helping people in need in Colombia. For seven years she had given everything to her job and was left with scarce time to enjoy herself.

P: yo le había dado todo a mi trabajo, o sea mi vida entera era mi trabajo, y no había tenido tiempo como para mí misma, no estaba estudiando una maestría, no había hecho nunca un viaje en mi vida después de estar trabajando siete años como trabajadora social, no tenía una familia, no tenía un hijo, no tenía nada

P: I had given everything to my job, I mean my whole life was my job and I hadn’t had time for myself, I wasn’t studying a masters, I had never made a trip in my life after working for seven years as a social worker, I didn’t have a family, I didn’t have a child, I didn't have anything
She was sure she would not like to go abroad to follow the ‘American Dream’ and eventually change her life for worst. She recalles she ‘preferred to be poor’ rather than go washing dishes in a country like the US. However, her friend in Sydney, who had two jobs, as a cleaner and as a waiter, and was studying English, reassured her that Australia was a life-changing experience and after her failed relationship and pressing work life, Australia appeared as a good opportunity to take a break.

The diagram I use to illustrate Marcela’s positioning processes and life story mirrors Raggatt’s (2012) model of analysis of ambiguous thirds. Marcela’s narrative as a social worker back in Colombia reflects on her personal desire to help others even though it was a demanding and unrecognised job. Her narrative describes two opposing I-positions. One as a person devoted to her job, and to social work, and the other as a young woman struggling to find a working life balance and be happier. I have called those positions ‘Hard worker’ and ‘Seeking work-life balance’ respectively. The diagram shows how both positions are mediated by internal positions that become ambiguous third positions as they mediate vertically, showing immediate contrast between the I-positions, but horizontally, in the long term of Marcela’s migration experience positioning and reflections. For instance from her early decision-making stage towards being a more established immigrant in Australia. In Figure 4, the vertical arrows suggest there are opposing positions mediated by the ambiguous thirds signalled in bold along Marcela’s life before, during and after migration. The diagonal arrows show a continual inflection of those ambiguous thirds in strengthening Marcela’s I-positions.
Figure 4. Marcela's Dialogical Triads Model of Positioning

Confronting New Life in Australia

Upon arrival Marcela recalls being confronted by the physical image she keeps of her friend’s accommodation as a purview of what it meant to live in Sydney, even for people like her friend who she pictures as coming from a clearly different socio-economic class to hers, from a high income family in Medellin.

_P: llegamos a un cuartico, a una pieza que tenía cocina dentro (.) y era una cama, un closet viejo, sucio, y la cocina dentro (.) o sea ella vivía en un cuarto con cocina adentro y era viejo, sucio, maloliente y compartía el baño con todo el mundo en el edificio [...] como con otras cinco personas. Compartía el baño y la cocina para ella sola, pero la cocina allí en el mismo cuarto, yo nunca en mi vida había visto algo así [...] yo llegué y era como, como un lugar horrible._
P: we got into a small room, to a bunkroom that had a kitchen inside, and there was a bed, an old wardrobe, filthy, the kitchen inside (. ) I mean she lived in a room with internal kitchen and it was old, filthy, stinky and she shared the toilet with everybody in the building […] like five other people. She shared the toilet and the kitchen was for herself, but the kitchen right there in the bedroom, I’d never seen something like that in my life […] it was like, like a horrible place.

Marcela could not believe she would have to live in such conditions not having the minimum comfort she was used to. Soon after, the shock worsened when she got her first job as a waiter. Marcela struggled to do a ‘rather physical and tiring job’ where she earned AUD$10 per hour and finished at 2 am. She recalls having an abusive boss who yelled at her male co-workers and was rather intimidating. She felt fear and physical pain. Yet, things changed soon when she met a new boyfriend in Australia, a Uruguayan national who had been here for five years. Marcela believes it was this person who showed her ‘one could obtain in Australia what one wants if one does what one has to do’. She found a new job as a child care worker, a job she recalls as ‘normal’ with normal day hours as opposed to the late shifts she had at the restaurant. After working in childcare Marcela was able to get a job even closer to her own expertise as a community worker. She offers important reflections on her own positionings in the three job posts she has had in her migration journey.

Marcela relates that because of her English, which ‘is still not perfect’ according to her, and her position as a waiter, people she had to serve at the restaurant would take advantage and ‘burlarse’ because of her accent, for example. As a childcare worker she felt at least she could visualize herself staying in Australia ‘in that job for good’, because interpersonal relationships within that job allowed her to learn and to practice more English and take care of children, something that was very close to her own passion for taking care of other people’s problems as a social worker in Colombia. Finally, as a community worker Marcela believes she embodies a different social position and this is why people avoid making any detrimental comments about her language use or the common stereotypes she will be approached with before for being Colombian and as a waitress.
Changing Jobs Facilitates Recognition

Marcela’s move to ‘a better job’ helped her to settle and adapt more easily in Australia. Her overall experience here has allowed her to do things she would not even think of when in Colombia like going away for short trips or simply enjoying public spaces with a walk at night. Her early experience as an immigrant was bound by a change of social status where recognition of her job as a waitress was nil and where she had to cope with that change in order to eventually succeed. She has done so by gaining a position as a community worker. Here the help from external factors like his new boyfriend’s support and her new job as childcare worker were crucial to come to the next position as a more settled immigrant. She positions herself with a satisfying job and life style, nonetheless respect from others is only apparent and may only be due to her new job at an office where people see her differently to a waitress. Becoming a more settled migrant is an ambiguous third position which has given Marcela both the satisfying job opportunities she was long seeking in Colombia and the apparent respect from other people due to her new job position. Yet, this settlement sketches a dialogical triad in that looking for those new opportunities permeated her relationships with other Colombians in Australia and with her own country. Marcela, as other participants, regrets, for example, that Colombian migrants are too attached to their own culture and this does not let them appreciate the richness of cultures available in Australia:

P: el inmigrante colombiano se queda allí en su circuito de colombianos y en su círculo de amigos y eso no deja integrarse realmente a la cultura australiana y no vivir, pues entonces se viene uno de [Colombia], va solamente a restaurantes de comida colombiana, solo anda con colombianos, solo escucha música colombiana, yo tenía una amiga que se veía las telenovelas colombianas aquí en Australia.

P: the Colombian immigrant stays there in his circuit of Colombians and his circuit of frinds and that doesn’t let you truly integrate into the Australian culture and to live, so one comes from [Colombia], only goes to Colombian food restaurants, hangs out only with colombians,
only listens to Colombian music, I had a girlfriend that would watch Colombian soap operas here in Australia.

*Regaining Interest in Colombia and Latin America*

In her interviews and participation in one of the focus groups Marcela admitted to have lost interest in Colombian politics before migrating. She also tells of her negative experiences with fellow country people for which she was not interested in meeting other Colombians for a while. It was only until she started working with Spanish speakers that she regained interest in her own community here to the point that she started participating more actively and even organising social events related to Colombia. We can add another position to the dialogical triad here, shaping her identity as a Colombian activist. Marcela reflects on her identity as Colombian where she is very proud of as she says ‘Colombians in Australia are ready and able to do anything upon arrival’ but at the same time regrets the constant negative remarks people make about her country and struggles to get used to them. This position of national/cultural pride has made her become an activist in solidarity campaigns for the farmers’ movement developing in Colombia from late 2013. Despite her discourse of pride and patriotism she holds an ambivalent position stating she has no desire to return to Colombia. She is expecting to ‘gain the right to stay in Australia’, as she puts it, but rules out the possibility for going back to Colombia for anything different than holidays.

This does not mean she does not love Colombia and she will always love her ‘patria’. Yet, only plans to go there for holidays because her immediate goals are to obtain a permanent residence in Australia. In the meantime Marcela has been enthusiastically organising community gatherings as part of her job in Sydney and has certainly increased her contact and interest in the Latin American community has she has gained a more stable work position. Thus, her upward job mobility has brought her back to social agency from the professional and personal levels.
Rebeca had been in Australia for almost five years to the time of the research. She stayed with her sister and brother-in-law who had arrived to Melbourne just weeks before her in 2009. She had been the first of the three to start making enquiries to study English in Australia. However, her initial plans changed shortly after her arrival. She met her now husband, a Latin American with Australian citizenship, and fell pregnant without having finished her English course. Ten months after her son was born Rebeca and her partner moved to Sydney leaving behind the very small social network she had started to build and her own family. As she says, Rebeca has been through a lot of changes in a very short time and has not had a break to think about all of them. She found in the interview for this research a space to try to do so:

\[ P: \text{ yo me enfermé de las tiroides cuando estaba embarazada por ejemplo entonces toda bajo droga médicamente porque bueno, sí, tal vez no sé, ese ‘no sé’ exacto, sin haber llegado ya está embarazada, ya está viviendo con alguien, blim blim [sic], entonces qué pasa con eso, al vivir tan aceleradamente también llega un momento también te tienes que sentar a analizar con calma, qué está pasando, probablemente ahora este es mi proceso. } \]

Learning English in a foreign country is something Rebeca had in mind since she was 15 years old, as she relates, and her reasoning over this reveals that she is quite conscious of how she has taken on different identities. She is able to give accounts of how her own self and her personality have been shaped by a number of external factors embodied in the strong figure of her father, her upbringing in
an especially chaotic township in Colombia, and the new limits imposed by another external figure in her life, her husband. These factors can be seen as ambiguous third positions in Rebeca’s life story shaping different sets of dialogical triads in that they inflect her into opposing positionalities.

Figure 5 shows how Rebeca narrates having a rather consistent desire to study and become independent, but the external position embodied by her father was an early impediment. Rebeca’s migration opened up her space of identity being faced with rapid changes in her short stay. Her positioning process continues to widen when she reflects on the conflict she has had with her husband as a new figure of power that limits her own self. Rebeca’s discourse on her plans for the future also indicates the positions she is willing to regain such as her short-lived economic independence.

![Figure 5. Rebeca's Repositioning Process Fighting Ambiguous Thirds](image)

*Life in Colombia*

Rebeca relates in different segments of her interview the constraints that her father imposed onto her since she was a young girl and until his death. She recalls him being ‘overprotective’ when she was a teenager and throughout her early adulthood. Rebeca implies in the following segment that her father was too strict and did not give her the freedom she wanted to follow up her university studies and her
dreams of going abroad. Her father fell seriously ill and she had to abandon university at 20 years of age to be in charge of the family business. Her plans to graduate were put on hold for a while. She returned to university and got a job but kept very close to her father. Amid his illness she had started to find options to go abroad in 2005, but only until her father passed away in 2008 did she take the decision to come to Australia.

In Rebeca’s narrative her father appears as an ambiguous third in her framing of identity positions in that he raised her showing no distinctions of class, for example, sitting at the same dinner table with his labourers at the family farmhouse, and at the same time, because of his restrictions, he instilled in her the curiosity for learning about the world, study and ‘superarse’. She recalls that in a bid to protect her, Rebeca’s father would restrict information by not giving her straight answers about the mounting violence in the 1980s. She displays a marked I-position as a resilient and stubborn woman, looking for her personal improvement by reflecting on her social upbringing and family values which took her to decide looking for better opportunities. These are later reframed into the new positionings she has taken on after her migration experience like a wife and a mother. Yet, her recount could also be interpreted as an idealized construction on why she came to Australia which she is able to make only after living her experience here instead of only telling what her goals or dreams were before migrating:

P: yo salí porque algún día mi sueño es volver, tener la oportunidad de educar a la gente en inglés, en el medio ambiente, montar una fundación que se den cuenta que el mundo no es así de chiquito, el mundo es más grande, y existe gente que valora cosas que nosotros botamos por ejemplo, eso es muy importante, si el colombiano viene aquí y puede llevar para Colombia no solo lo bonito que me veo y cuantos millones me gasto, o cuanto no tengo y cuanto si tengo, es llévale cultura.

P: I left because one day my dream is to go back, to have the opportunity of educating people in English, in the open environment, to open a foundation that they learn that is world is not that tiny, the world is bigger, and there are people who value things that we throw away for
example, that is very important, if the Colombian comes here and can take back to Colombia not only the beautiful I look and the millions I spend, or how much I do and do not have, it is to bring culture.

From this extract another I-position emerges, her desire for personal achievement related to her wish to go beyond the boundaries imposed by her family and also the education system in Colombia. I have drawn on Rebeca’s case, her life in Australia as an ambiguous third on its own, even though her husband, whom she met here, represents another ambiguous position. She paints her life in Australia as the opportunity she has given herself to be, and to be free. That is, free of the restrictions imposed by her father and free to find a voice she had to keep aside for long when she had to be complaisant with what her father wanted her to do. However, in opposition to her new freedom, there are the responsibilities Rebeca has been faced with after getting married and having a child. She seems to have found in her husband another opposing figure in her life in Australia, similar to her father, in that he wants to exercise control over her, not allowing her to work, for instance, and also assessing and correcting the way she speaks in English way too often, especially when she needed more positive language support during her doctor appointments and delivery of her child.

P: el hombre no es malo, pero es muy controlador digámoslo así, y pues obviamente con una cultura machista enorme, y pues imaginése que usted quede ahí como una gotita en la mitad de toda esa historia y pues sin familia […] además con tus miedos personales con tus miedos de hablar y que el otro te diga ‘estás pronunciando mal’ o sea fuera de que tienes tus propios miedos de hablar, tienes tus dolores no eres capaz de expresar lo que sientes […] Yo mejor, me quedaba callada. Entonces imaginése, es un proceso doloroso […] y claro que es difícil adaptarse.

P: the guy is not bad, but is very dominant, let’s put it this way, and obviously with a strong macho culture, and imagine that you stay there like a drop in the middle of this story without family […] moreover with your personal fears, with your fears of speaking and that the other
one tells you ‘you are mispronouncing’ I mean besides having your own fears and your pain you are unable to express what you feel […] I better kept quiet. Thus imagine, it’s a painful process […] and of course it is difficult to adapt yourself.

Her frustrations, as she tells in the segment, were worse for not having her own family around at this stage. She says she had a very difficult pregnancy causing her to develop an eating disorder and depression. She relates she was seen as ‘an immigrant mum’ and was not given the attention she needed, even though this is at odds with her own telling of being offered all support services at the Women’s Hospital in Melbourne which included translators for her check-up appointments and occupational therapists.

I understand that she sees her expectations were not met in that the medical practices in Colombia are different to those of Australia. I have lived this in my personal experience of motherhood. For example, a mother-to-be in Colombia usually has several check-ups with an obstetrician or gynaecologist physician while the work of the registered midwife, common in Australia for the same purpose, is not popular in Colombia. Even though the health services in Colombia have been in a state of decline since the Law 100, 1993, and the privatization of health providers has spread making the public health system collapse, Colombians expect their general practitioner to state something regarding their condition in more substantive terms than the usual phrase ‘it’s normal’ they will often hear in Australia:

Rebeca’s own expectations on how she should be treated as a pregnant woman were not reached according to her own social capital. She relates how she could not believe doctors would not assess her for a caesarean and that the nurses did not use what she thought were the protection implements for the birth of a baby for example. Jokingly she recalls thinking she was almost having her baby under a tree with people in bare hands and without mouth covers.

The figure of her husband also made Rebeca feel she was looked down as an ‘immigrant mum’ different to the rest of pregnant women. She was offered support options such as a translator but these
were declined, not by her, but by her husband, who would translate for her at the same time that he would affect Rebeca’s self-esteem by underestimating her English language skills in public. One of the most colourful anecdotes telling of Rebeca’s husband exercising a position of power over her own will comes from a critical moment when she was given epidural anaesthesia during her labour; as it did not work, the anaesthesiologist asked her whether she wanted a second try. She was not able to respond by herself unopposed by her husband:

P: hubo un momento bastante difícil, que me pusieron la anestesia, la epidural, y mi cuerpo no la tomó, es decir reaccioné, la mitad sí, la mitad no, bueno entonces el anestesiólogo, con ese afán de que yo no sufra, la mamá que no sé qué, me dice, ‘yo te vuelvo a poner otra’, entonces el marido llega y brinca, como si fuera su cuerpo, ‘NOOO!! NI SE LE OCURRA!’ y entonces llega el anestesiólogo y le dice, ‘un momento señor, aquí la que está sufriendo es ella, y la que está pujando es ella’.

P: there was a very difficult moment, they injected me anesthetics, the epidural, and my body didn’t take it, I mean I reacted, half did, half didn’t, well the anesthesiologist with the urge that I don’t suffer, the mother and that stuff, tells me, ‘I’m putting you another one’, so the husband comes and jumps over, like it was his own body, ‘NOOO, DON’T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT!’ and then the anesthesiologist goes, ‘one moment sir, she is the one suffering, she is the one pushing’.
Reflecting on the Changes That Migration Has Brought

The numerous changes Rebeca has been faced with in only five years have also made her draw big question marks over herself an over the life she has had in Australia in contrast to what her plans were.

P: bueno cómo era Rebeca, pues obviamente una mujer soñadora, trabajadora, luchadora con muchas expectativas profesionales, personales, y por supuesto de madre [sic], pero es un proceso así, ‘chun’ y pues claro yo estoy en un proceso ahora de mi vida en el que estoy diciendo, un momentico, sí yo tengo esto, sí, yo soy madre, sí, yo soy esposa, sí, yo soy una ciudadana inmigrante, pero ¿dónde está Rebeca? ¿Qué paso con sus sueños? Porque [a] esta muchachita en cinco años, le cambian la vida, se la transforman.

P: well, how was Rebeca? Obviously a dreamful woman, hard-working, a fighter with many professional and personal expectations and of course of mother [sic], but it is a process like this ‘chin’ and of course I’m in a process now in my life where I say, hold on a second, yes, I have this, yes, I’m a mother, yes I’m a wife, yes, I’m a migrant citizen, but where is Rebeca? What happened with her dreams? Because in five years this girl got her life changed, transformed.

Rebeca expects to find her own answers to those questions by going back to her country for the first time in five years. At the same time, she highlights her wish that her daughter be there to know her own family roots and to live first-hand the culture, the nature she relates to her own childhood, amid the ‘social contradictions’ her daughter is likely to find between Australia and Colombia.

P: Rebeca quiere ver qué pasó en cinco años, yo no he vuelto, no me he encontrado con mis raíces, este país es lindo pero no es el mío, o sea lo adoro con toda mi vida y por supuesto que ojalá mi hija crezca aquí y tenga las posibilidades de crecer en un mundo diferente del que yo nací, pero ella también tiene que encontrarse con mi familia, es decir con sus raíces.
P: Rebeca wants to see what has happened in five years, I haven’t been back, I haven’t reunited with my roots, this country is beautiful but is not mine, I mean I love it with all my life, and of course hopefully my daughter is raised here and has the possibilities of growing up in a different world to the one I was born in, but she also has to reunite with her family, I mean with her roots.

_{Plans of Social and Political Agency}_

Rebeca’s narrative also shows she is leaving a door wide open for the work and social opportunities she sees ahead of her at the time she is starting to return to be herself. She has a new goal to become financially independent from her husband. Meanwhile, she feels satisfied she can at least have an impact in her family by giving them the chance to change their mindsets to be more ‘tolerant’ of difference. For example she praises herself for having shown her mum and aunt in a visit to Australia other cultures and behaviours that appear strange to their own values and beliefs, like women wearing hijabs, and ‘homosexualism’.

In the long term she hopes to have an impact in her own township sharing her knowledge of the world she now has got. She emphasises that many people there, and in Colombia, need to ‘reset their mind’ to have a ‘different vision of the world’. She is keen to be a model of a woman that ‘doesn’t need any cosmetic surgery’ to be a woman. Instead, what she did, going abroad, should be the goal for young people and schoolies. With her new job at a studies agency she is trying to help other Colombians plan their experience in Australia.

Responding to what she still wants to achieve in Australia Rebeca offered a quite detailed reflection where memories of her father appear again to influence her this time in view of her political positioning. She claims to ‘love politics’ but not only her lack of English impedes her to seek any partisan participation here, but the voice of her father who would warn her of the danger of doing politics in Colombia and urged her to stay behind the scenes of public politics. Rebeca tries to elaborate in that she would like to be closer to the Latin American and Colombian community, something she was starting to do in Melbourne but has found difficult to do in Sydney because there are ‘less cultural
activities related to the community here’, as she believes is the case. She says she believes in politics and that she would like to ‘form a Latin American force to conquer Australia’,\(^*\) so that ‘we have a voice in the Parliament’.\(^*\) Yet, the kind of policies she would like to see working in favour of Latin Americans are very much related to her own difficulties as a non-English proficient woman and mother:

_P: poder mostrarle a Australia que obviamente=mi sueño es poder tener una fuerza latina claro, pero no hay que que tan chévere y que somos latinos, noo, por defender obviamente los derechos del latino, del inmigrante, esa mujer que está embarazada y no puede hablar inglés, esa posibilidad de que así no tenga trabajo y esta hace dos años aquí tiene derechos, y no está espichada._

P: being able to show Australia that clearly=my dream is to be able to have a Latin force of course, but not only because it’s cool and that we are latinos, noo, to stand up for the rights of latinos, those of the immigrant, that woman that is pregnant and can’t speak English, that possibility that even though [she] doesn’t have a job and has been here for two years isn’t annihilated.

Another reading of Rebeca’s wish for participating in politics leaves the impression she may have tried to do political work in Colombia but her father did not support her and even made her change her mind amid the serious situation of corruption in her town and the national and political crisis there and in Colombia as she highlights in different parts of her interview.

---

\(^*\) Translated from ‘hacer una fuerza latinoamericana para conquistar a Australia’.

\(^*\) Translated from ‘que tengamos una voz en el Parlamento’.
Andrés, 34, 2003

Andrés was 24 years old when he arrived in Australia in 2003. Eleven years on I find his case brings to light the personal drive, tenacity, perseverance, and good luck, that a large number of Colombians in Australia, be they ‘old’ or ‘new’, have had allowing them to tell quite positive stories of migration. Andrés, in his own words, had found by chance information about undertaking studies in Australia, and had in mind, like many newcomers, that he would complete his postgraduate studies in Australia and then go back to Colombia. Andrés had never thought of establishing himself abroad, and simply wanted to do a master’s degree in an English-speaking country. Yet, he found himself influenced by fellow students and people in Australia to take advantage of a change announced for skilled migration applications effective in 2004.

Andrés’s achievements in Australia have been possible, as I read it, not only to the proficient level of English he came with, the engineering degree he held from Colombia that could be credited in one of the occupations in demand at the time in Australia, but also his strong sense of perseverance to find a first job, after sending over a hundred resumes, which gave him the ultimate chance to apply for and become an Australian resident only three years after his arrival. He continued being a studious and hard worker person in Australia juggling between lectures and part-time jobs he could get as a waiter. His narrative does not seem to draw on great opposing or contradictory positions he has ever taken. Figure 6 shows Andrés’s wide open identity spaces before acquiring his Australian identity, as he puts it. Yet, there is a space, the very situation of social dismay in Colombia which seems to have had, at least indirectly, an effect on his strong positioning as an ‘ethical’ person, a label I would like to use based on his narratives. It is precisely his personal ethics which has marked a dialogical triad positioning. Nonetheless his different identities seem to be moving or positioning only slightly towards preserving the values that have worked for him ever since he came to Australia, and probably from a young age. It does not mean that his identities are static and without change, because as he reflects, he takes on different identities in the different familial and professional contexts he is likely to be in.
P: en el grupo en que yo estaba metido, era un grupo de danza en el que casi todos eran colombianos y unos poquitos latinos, entonces la identidad que se manejaba más era la identidad colombiana […] pero a veces me gusta ir a eventos latinos más bien entonces ahí manejaba uno como la identidad latina, yo creo que yo me siento cómodo transfiriendo mi identidad dependiendo del lugar en el que me encuentre, y por ejemplo estar en algún evento y de pronto mi identidad es la del trabajador de ONG por ejemplo, que es una identidad bastante fuerte.

P: the group I was involved with was a dancing group where most of people were Colombian and a few Latinos, thus the most prominent identity was the Colombian one […] but sometimes I like going to Latin American events so over there you take more on your Latin [American] identity, I think I feel comfortable transferring my identity depending on the place I am, for example, to be in some event and maybe my identity is that of the NGO employee, for example, that is a rather strong identity.

Figure 6. Andres’ Performing of Meta-Positions and Awareness of Multiplicity of Identities
Andrés’s stories show a consistent telling of hard work and resilience—even though he does not ever use these words to present himself—and how these have given him the opportunities he has sought and also facilitated a rather smooth settlement in Australia. A salient positioning of ‘perseverance’ can be drawn from his early days in Australia to date. An example of this is how he kept a night-shift job for over two years and continued studying and preparing himself to get the job he truly wanted later on.

A second positioning has been his steep integration in Australia, which at the same time appears as an ambiguous third in that being an immigrant with a high level of job mobility makes him reflect he would not be able to return to Colombia. He praises the ‘comfort’ he has in Australia and acknowledges that even though his Australian partner would like to travel and live in Colombia to improve her own Spanish, he is not willing to go back in the mid-term. The same ambiguous positioning of being seemingly fully integrated into the Australian system brings about a reflection on certain ‘Colombian cultural behaviours’ that Andrés has been able to challenge, precisely from his own ‘Australian identity’, as he says. For example, from his ‘power holding’ position as a manager in an Australian company, he challenges the expectations that other Colombians put on him to help them find a job simply because he is Colombian. He relates that in the many cases when he has been asked this he will direct people to send their resumé to the human resources unit. Even when he feels someone has the sufficient drive, experience and qualifications for a job he would not try to influence the human resources decision. Examples like these tell of Andrés’s work ethics and positioning of being fair with other people. It is this position which prevails in his narratives of lived and imagined experience in Australia.

A more illustrative example comes from his story of quitting the job he had dreamed for years, since he was in Colombia, and how he had been able to get into a big multinational in Sydney. Andrés had been accumulating the necessary job experience required for a job as a project manager in a soft drinks production company. He had previously applied for the same job three times and continued
working in other companies until he gained the experience he was missing. When Andrés got his dream job he was assigned different projects travelling overseas. At the same time he had been following his voluntary job advising social projects in impoverished communities in Africa and South America. When his own company assigned him a similar social project he started to investigate further and found the company’s final goal with such initiatives was to gain access to long term cheap labour through short term aids to the communities in need. His grim discovery led him not only to decline the new project but quit the company.

**Work Ethics and Politics**

Andrés’s strong personal ethics have permeated his work ethics and led him to give primacy to his long acquired commitment with the communities in situation of need over his own professional career; his expertise in social projects allowed him to continue doing social work for two years until he got his actual job as a general manager of a not-for-profit organisation in Melbourne.

P: *lo que yo pienso ahora es que viniendo de Colombia como que tú vienes con el ideal cual crees que es el trabajo que te va a dar lo que tu quieres […] pero yo me di cuenta que lo que quería buscar, lo que quería directamente sin pensar en qué clase de trabajo era.*

P: what I think now is that coming from Colombia as you come with an ideal what you believe is the job that is going to give you what you want […] but I realized what I wanted to look for, what I wanted without thinking what type of job it was.

His strong beliefs of doing good to others without harming them appears as a consistent positioning that has accompanied him along his migration process and continues as a rather stable positioning space for which, for example, his political views as expressed in the focus groups are not supporting a particular party or candidate, but a politics that allows the peace he has never seen in Colombia. In many ways his work ethics permeates his social and political views. A sample of that is
when he told participants in one of our focus groups that even though he works in social projects doing them is not as easy as sending money to a bank account. He was trying to explain that it is a form of work that requires serious planning and it is not as people see it, a matter of sending remittances back to Colombia. He made the point that things require orderly planning and execution. This obviously comes from his own work experience, yet, what I note here is that these are the skills he has used in different aspects of his life and they have paid off in his personal achievements. Of course, Andrés has had different circumstances which facilitated his positive and stable work insertion, while other participants and Colombian migrants have taken more time to work through things like their English level, or demonstrating relevant work experience in Australia. This case serves to illustrate how the potentialities of young educated Colombians, who do not necessarily come from high-middle class families, have arrived in the last 10 to 15 years and have had very positive experiences of migration. This seems to be a common feature of many Colombians in Australia and across my participants’ stories.

Not Willing to Return to Colombia

Andrés’s story is one of successful social and job mobility. She has found an Australian partner who is willing to experience life in Colombia, but Andrés is not ready for such a change and prefers to postpone any plans for a long term stay there. He certainly hopes that the peace talks with the guerrillas in Colombia can change the future of the country. His experience working in remote Australia decipher once again his desire to work for the communities in need. Andrés is working in a safe environment and under the conditions he desires after gaining sufficient job mobility not only to stay in Australia, but to have the capacity of choosing the kind of job he wants to do.

Andrés’s case study is reflective of the experience of many Colombians abroad who have achieved a social and economic mobility, have strong ties in the new country, and do not plan to go back to Colombia. The lack of work opportunities along with the insecurity, corruption and violence that live up the country are amongst the various impediments to even think about going back. That is why Andrés keeps calling on new fellow migrants to abide the rules they find in Australia. In that way
other migrants will not only be able to continue coming here, but Colombians will reproduce better social practices related to respect for the law and reproduce them when they are back in their country.

Colombians Multiple Migrant Identities, Positionings and Positionalities

The case studies above show not only the variety of migration paths and migration histories of Colombian participants, but also the myriad ways they have sorted out the presumed common situations migrants face. In regards to the specific individual analysis presented on the participants’ multiple identities it can be noted how the repertoire of positions previewed by Raggatt (2012: 31) are at work in rather discernible ways. First, there is the case of migrants like Diego who carry a strong personal history and ideological baggage and whose interpersonal relations, and readings of their life in Australia are tightly constituted and dependent on that personal history. Diego has constructed his perception of Australia in view of his lack of capacity to continue with his political activism. He could not easily find reciprocal relations with people who were ‘like him’ or ‘authentic or legitimate’ political refugees, nor open spaces for deliberations without being criticised for his views or being looked down upon. These are some of the factors that made him take on a stronger positionality on his role as a political exile, and claim, without any doubt, that his only goal is to return to his political activism role in Colombia. He has waited for this over 20 years, and will wait as long as necessary. So to draw on his positionings, be they social, political, or more personal, requires to necessarily paint his life positions on the pane of his political subjectivity. This is a core position so strongly constructed in his narrative accounts, from the early childhood to adolescence and adulthood, until his life today, at 64 years of age. This core political positioning has evolved in every state of his life, but it has evolved into a massive understanding of himself as a person whose only raison d’être is his country, its problems, and the work he can contribute to the solutions needed. An immigrant like him, may be seen holding a wide and strong space of positionality which is built ‘brick by brick’ into the same positioning, rather than showing up opposing or contradictory positions. Diego’s narrative performance is an incomparable
robust identity founded on a strong political ideology that was not changed because of the migration move but reinforced and tremendously strengthened.

The case of Nelson could also be accorded into the sort of strong core identity seen in Diego as he seems to construct his identities on the belief that his persona, his sacrifice, will be worth something after all and he will be able to accomplish his ‘romantic’ dream as he explains, of being of use, from his profession and experience, to Australia. However, I have drawn Nelson’s case as a less unitary set of identities and more flexible one bearing in mind he has indeed given accounts more proximate to his life change post-immigration, rather than to his past life in Colombia. There is more evidence in his narratives to say that there are a number of ambiguous third positions operating especially in his critique of the ‘Australian system’ and his experience of having to abandon his own self ‘to be another person’ in Australia. Although he does mention and longs for certain aspects of his life in Colombia, like the possibility of dissenting with his friends, having access to a range of medical services and being a renowned professional there, the dialogical triads identified inextricably originate in his migration move. Hence, the illustration offered for Nelson’s case in Figure 3 is certainly a tight set of third positions embedded in the conflicts that have arisen in his migration experience.

Another type of identities model has been drawn from Marcela’s case where there is indeed a multiplicity of identities arising from a number of ambiguous thirds which she reflects on in her narratives including the back and forth stories of her past life in Colombia, her job, her family and even her political standpoint, and then telling of her life in Australia, in her early days here and then as a more settled immigrant. Her narrativity provides a richness of positions that she has taken up and keeps on hold. I argue that the array of dialogical triads at hand in her life accounts have been facilitated by her job mobility within Australia. Marcela had similar experiences to both Diego and Nelson in not being able to speak with a proficiency in English that allowed her to be fully understood. Improving her English and beyond that, finding a job related to her own expertise in Colombia, gave her back a social positioning different to that a low skilled worker. She was able to appropriate herself again, be herself again after trying to disconnect from her past experiences as a social worker in Colombia where resources were scarce and where she lived for her job, virtually without rest. Her refreshed social
positioning as a migrant who finds herself a place in the job market constituted for her the opportunity to set herself free of the conditioning parameters carried by her own self of being a Colombian. To go further, without the worries of a limiting political environment in Colombia, where she has turned against her own family as she disagrees with their party preferences, Marcela became a social activist in Australia, as organiser of a number of events where her political identity was unveiled, for example, the solidarity picket for the Colombians Farmers’ strike in 2013 and also the fundraising activities for the town of Salgar, Antioquia, where thousands of families had to be evacuated after a landslide. Marcela has undoubtedly been able to move from one to another identity after she was able to empower herself and reach the job mobility which allowed her to work in what she truly loves, that is social work, and at the same time be able to ‘have a life’, to live her own life after she finishes her work shift, as she explains.

The case of Rebeca can be seen representing the case of more recent arrivals who are still trying to find their own way within the Australian system. In this light, Rebeca’s positionings have been illustrated as a growing continuum that makes reference to a personal past and history where two primary ambiguous thirds appear, her father and her spouse. Yet, she presents her life positioning as an open unfinished and still wide frame of opportunities to come, desires she has held onto since she fell pregnant soon after arriving to Melbourne, and an economic independence she is willing to reach. Lots of changes came with motherhood, she got married and then had to postpone her plans of studying and working, and only until her daughter was three years old she was able to bring herself back to the possibilities to achieve what she had planned for before migrating. Only now she has been able to look back at what her life has been in Australia and how she plans to redirect herself. Her case is similar to other participants like Miguel, Nancy and Patricia whose initial plans to move to Australia to follow up a degree or a career were delayed by different circumstances, like official citizenship status, unemployment and marriage.

Rebeca’s personal instability and unaccomplished goals have laid out the open frame to take on positionalities that she had left behind for a while. For instance, her desire to become a local leader in her hometown is revisited in her wish to help ‘open the eyes’ of her family, and then her town to
realize that ‘other things are possible’, and they do not have to keep themselves in a ‘blind culture’ believing that ‘only their ways of acting are the correct ones’. She praises her close family to ‘respect difference’, for example, the difference she has found amongst a multitude of cultures, languages and even sexual preferences of people she has met in Australia. Yet, an important third position in her life, her father, impeded her from doing this before, to get out of her own home to ‘meet the world’. She implies that only after her father died she was able to leave the country, otherwise she would remain to manage her family business in the small town, isolated from the rest of the world, staying with a narrow mind like much of her fellow country people. But she left Colombia to find restraints of a different nature in Australia and as she is fighting against those, such as a possessive and challenging husband. She is trying to get her own place and positioning back again, back from where she started her migration journey.

The last case presented, Andrés’s, can be seen exemplifying the case of many of my participants who found a friendly migration policy and were able to become Australian residents with relative ease, given their profession or by the sponsorship of a third party. Andrés arrived as a young graduate from Bogotá. His plans were basically to undertake a master’s degree to have better prospects for a job back in Colombia. At the time he arrived he met other graduates like him who were processing their Australian residency. He was lucky enough to find a skilled job which facilitated his own application. His job mobility was very rapid and he was able to move from his first entry-level job as a waiter, to the skilled one as a food production line manager and a few other jobs in the food industry to his current job as a general manager in a not-for-profit organisation. From his life story I have drawn a set of dialogical triads where his perseverance as a dedicated worker pursing a dream job in Australia is affected by his personal ethics, something that evolved and stayed with him in the social projects he carried out overseas through his expertise in Australia. Very much like Diego’s case, Andrés’s displays a meta position of ethical commitment, to do what is right, even if that means to quit a job he had found in Australia and which he dreamed for since he was at university in Colombia. It is this strong sense of ethics which leads Andrés to position himself as a different subject to his Colombian fellow migrants.
He criticises and openly challenges any attempt of Colombians in Australia to break the law or to behave in the ways people are used to in Colombia.

The figure illustrating Andrés’s identity positionings goes from a wide open space of positions to a narrower and more compacted space where the not so ambiguous third position of ethical commitment encloses a more stable and tight set of positions which do not contradict each other but work towards the enhancing of his personal and political ethics. Thus, different to cases like Rebeca’s who is still trying to find a more stable space of positioning, Andrés seems to have found his own way aided by an early and longer independent reflection on his own life in Australia, certainly facilitated, as in Marcela’s case, by his rapid and successful job mobility.

Overall, although the purpose has been to explore the different identity positionings that Colombian migrants take on as influenced by their migration path and histories in Australia, without intending to classify them as idealizing positioning or representing the whole community, the case studies reported here portray a number of positions and positioning processes that can be certainly found common amongst many Colombians in Australia. As has been discussed throughout the examples, an upward job mobility appears to be the triggering space whereby participants are able to take stronger positions—either to reaffirm their personal convictions of what is right or what needs to be done or to liberate themselves from past limitations or external positions. Participants without such desired job mobility aim at having a better insertion into the ‘Australian system’, but their success is seen as dependent on external factors like their proficient use of English, or their capacity to be at the level of the system’s demands, such as being able to cope with increasing restriction in the Australian migration policies for which they are tied to certain visas or visa entitlements. In the very special case of people with strong political convictions, ambiguous third positions are more diffused and it seems a core ideological positioning prevails and instead of contrasting or opposing identities, there is more stable and scaffolding process of identity positioning always attending to that core identity. The highlight of this myriad of positioning processes analysis is to be able to establish a few elements that make immigrants present more or less positive stories in reflection on their own past and their lives after migration. In this way, an understanding is laid out on how social positionings in the past enhance the
positionalities taken by migrants in the new country. That is, in light of Sánchez (2006) definitions, Colombians narrate their reflexivity on past positions taken by them or given by them according to certain social structures and transform them to new positions and identities produced during and after their migration to a country that poses them with new social structures, even though many of them seem unaware of the latter.
Conclusion

The globalised market economy we live in today, in which Australia is positioned as a developed country, and new and widespread technologies, have not only seen an increased mobility of ‘elite’ populations to travel and study but also low-skilled labour force through increasingly diverse pathways (Castles 2005, 2014; Robertson 2008, 2013, 2014). The mobility of migrants to Australia under the skilled migration schemes impulsed from the 1990s onwards alongside the growth of the education sector have certainly facilitated the surge in immigrant arrivals to this country including Latin Americans and Colombians. Australia is often pictured by migrants as a multiculturally diverse country, where ‘all people have equal rights’, Australians are reasonably ‘tolerant’ towards difference, and where racism and discrimination are rare. Such characteristics are indeed highly disputed and I have drawn here that equality and tolerance are untenable when the first inhabitants of this country, Aboriginal Australians, are still faced with discriminatory and exclusive policies which have disallowed them to play a key role in the making of modern Australia. I have also argued that immigrants, Latin Americans, and in particular, Colombians, are unable to recognise the relationship between such practices of alienation against Aboriginal people and the relative equality they see available to them in Australia. Certainly, my insights on the nexus between the history of oppression against Aboriginal people in Australia, and that against Indigenous peoples in Colombia—and broadly the oppression to more deprived goups there—are based on the critique to multiculturalism offered by Ghassan Hage (1998) and the Global South theory by Raewyn Connell (2013, 2014). Australia can be positioned as a southern country where migrants are selected for what they can offer to the country whilst Aborigenes have been historically alienated and silenced. Immigrants are to abide to strict entry conditions that provide only those who fulfil certain requirements are able to stay in the country mostly to undergo long periods of social and economic downward mobility.
Migrants, however, insist on asserting that their new position or location is preferable than that they had in their country, given the social, economic or political turmoils they left behind and despite going through substantial de-skilling in Australia. As many other migrant groups, Colombians sustain their desire for obtaining a permanent residency status here in spite of the economic and personal cost this entails. Hefty school fees to become ‘student-migrants’ (Robertson 2011, 2014), continued job de-skilling, and silencing dissent are some of these costs. Although the case may prove different for refugees who came to Australia looking for protection, most of Colombians interviewed in this research state their intention of living here permanently while ruling out any short term plans of returning to Colombia. This, however, has been explored in the context of transnational mobility whereby migrants go through different stages of settling and may go back and forth not only to their country of origin, but also to other locations while gaining further cultural and economic capital (Rocha 2014). Furthermore, the ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec 2007) of profiles migrants bring with them makes it more complex to classify them into a single category relative to their ethnicity or place of origin. Migrant profiles today are much more multifaceted and have to do with different factors such as visa status, length of stay in the host country, whether they are old or new migrants, their social and job mobility, political agency, and civic engagement in sending and receiving countries. This thesis has collated part of such diversity as a preliminary ethnography on a group of 44 Colombians in Australia. It has focused on unveiling broad elements of the ‘Colombian community’ in Sydney and in the intersectionality between the participants’ migration stories and the display of multiple identities and positionalities that are recreated between narratives of lived and imagined experiences in Colombia and Australia.

Amongst the diverse traits that help describe the Latin American and Colombian communities in Australia, I have identified year of arrival as a marking element to frame the forming of the Colombian migrant groupings. ‘Old’ and ‘new’ migrants have contributed to this study and are referred here as such for the ease of recognizing the social, economic and political elements that accompanied their exit from Colombia and arrival to Australia. However, as it has become apparent throughout the thesis and especially in the five case studies, such a category proves insufficient to give justice to individual stories of migration and to the diversity of anecdotes and experiences that people from one
or another wave of settlement have shared. For instance, while there are ‘new’ migrants with certain qualifications or English language skills and who have to go through a difficult journey of low entry level jobs, there are ‘old’ migrants who tell of their rather smooth integration in the labour market despite the language barriers and their limited education profiles. Likewise, contrary to the expectations of ‘new’ migrants, Colombian female participants have had to cope with gender based structures within the family unit that inhibit them to fully embrace their migration experience as a positive one. These women have to respond to their expected roles as mothers and carers in addition to being new bread-winners in Australia.

The stories of decision-making, early experiences in the new country and future endeavours that Colombians related in this study also work to demonstrate how their country’s social ambiguities are extrapolated and recreated in the context of Australia perceived as a ‘classless country’ and as part of the southern tier of colonised countries. Colombians not only have to deal with the overcharged stereotypes of their country but with an effective occupational downgrading that concords with the Australian economic neoliberal model. The migrant labour disadvantage Colombians are faced with, especially those with low or very basic proficiency in English, is masked in their own narratives by an apparent lack of class distinctions in Australia which arise from the prevailing national myths or ideology.

The socio-demographic composition of the Colombian population in Australia unveils a rich contrast not only between older and younger generations of immigrants but amongst people with similar traits related to age, year of arrival, occupation and legal status. Notwithstanding such differentiated features, Colombian migrants share high levels of education attainment and the means by which they were able to enter the country, which run the gamut from part-sponsorship of the Australian government in the late 70s to the efforts of the commercial education promoters who have found in Colombia a fertile terrain to expand their growing industry. Colombians with tertiary studies have also been able to stay in the country permanently despite the continual changes imposed on Australian immigration policy responding to economic market production and security factors.
New arrivals bring with them high expectations of fast track jobs and economic mobility compared to those found in their country of origin. However, the usual pathway through such opportunities involves taking on jobs that are ill-regarded back home and normally taken by immigrants in Australia. In this light, participants offer narratives that paint ambiguous perceptions of their own life and desired success in Australia. On the one hand, they believe they have a ‘better quality life’ with more safety and tranquility, even if this means being excluded from the Australian qualified work sectors despite their own qualifications. The ambiguity lies in the new position migrants take in the effort to acquire an economic advantage at the expense of their own personal career or professional goals and projects which were part of their motivations to migrate in the first place. New questions emerge from this to understand how immigrants negotiate their social positionings and positionalities back in Colombia during their stay in Australia. That is, compelling issues arise in reference to what narratives they construct in relation to people in their country, their families and friends, for example, and whether or not these are discursively similar to what they relate in Australia.

Of course, as shown in this thesis, there are many stories of Colombians who have taken on high paying jobs and even opened their own business. These can be noted as signs of certain social and economic mobility and therefore part of a successful migration experience. However, what I argue and what participant narratives show is that reaching such levels of success requires investing in family and professional changes that migrants were not prepared for especially in the early stages of settlement in the country and that for many, circumstances have not changed substantially afterwards. Colombians’ expectations of economic mobility are to be materialized without having family networks in the new country in most cases and taking on entry-level jobs with long shifts that they would not take in Colombia. Australia appears to offer immigrants higher paying rates even in the most low-skilled positions, compared to their country. Yet, Australia’s high living costs mean that migrants work long or late working hours to commensurate their expenses. For those who arrive on student visas, which amount to the largest proportion of new Colombian migrants, the situation is more complex due to the additional study and visa related fees they need to cover. Those Colombians who decide to stay in Australia and pursue a permanent residency make even larger investments, as they have to lodge costly
applications and fulfil specific language, qualifications and work experience requirements to be granted further stay in the country.

This context suggests many Colombians in the early stages of settlement in Australia are focused on reaching the work stability and residency status that allow them to stay longer here and compensate for the cumbersome financial cost of their migration. One is left wondering whether this might be an additional factor to explain the widespread perception of lack of community ties in the diaspora. As several participants noted, Colombians ‘part on their own ways’, or ‘form their own niches’ according to their own interest or their own ‘circumstantial needs’. That is, as Robertson’s (2008, 2011, 2014) studies suggest, a large part of those who visit Australia as students, turn out to be migrants and in the first years of their stay are more preoccupied with consolidating the right pathway to become permanent residents. Everyone seems to be following their own private race to the goal of legal and permanent belonging to Australia, therefore attending or participating of community events is not seen as a priority.

Despite some persistent examples of being subject to stereotyping related to the well-known social issues of Colombia, Colombian immigrants in Australia share a feeling of positive reception in the country. For many of them this sense of being welcome has facilitated their process of adapting to their new social positionings in Australia even though these might not be the desired or expected ones. Examples of such new positionings are performing on jobs they were not trained for before, being unable to claim certain work rights or allowances fearing that they will lose a stable income, and finding limited interaction with fellow workers due to language barriers or the requirements of their job position. Colombian migrants picture themselves and their fellow country people as ‘ready to do anything’ or whatever it takes and this proves to be the case when participants like Nelson and Carmen reflect on how they had to let their selves go and turn to be another person to continue pursuing their goals in Australia.

Especially in the case of older immigrants, the lack of cohesiveness with younger generations is due to the latter’s better preparation in terms of knowledge of the English language and their access to varied forms of support through virtual technologies. New migrants have grown independent of any
support groups like the Colombian Association since they rely on personal connections and information readily available online. These small networks are indeed available but are not linked to each other or bound by any bigger entity. In this regard, other participants believe there is a profound lack of leadership, and regret that the Consulate of Colombia in Sydney is not willing to take such a role and does not truly engage with community activities and organising.

The stories relating to how welcome Colombians have felt in Australia extend to Hall’s (1991) claim that migrant communities take place where they feel threatened or unwelcome by the host society. It is precisely the perceived positive reception in the new country that makes participants believe their community is ‘weak’ and fragmented, or simply not of their own interest. They have related to three main factors that inhibit a stronger sense of community. First, the geographical dispersion of Colombians who, in spite of being concentrated mainly in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, do not recognise areas of strong settlement. Second, there is a generalized rejection of the touted undesirable behaviour of some Colombians. Stories of negative experiences with fellow migrants are signalled as the main reason to distance oneself from the community, or from other Colombians. And third, the increased migration from Colombia since 2002 has been accompanied by the use of technologies and intermediaries which disengage further links between younger generations, or recent arrivals, and the older migrants groupings already settled in the country.

Regardless of their motivations to migrate to Australia, whether they be to pursue further studies, take on jobs or seek protection, research participants tell of clearly shared sentiments of frustration over their first experiences with fellow Colombians and with the new social and labour-market system they find in Australia. Colombians prefer to stay acquainted to small groups of Colombians to avoid situations where their fellow people upset them somehow. This not only has to do with specific undesirable behaviour like Colombians not abiding to the civic rules in the new country or making conscious efforts to avoid them but the migration and settlement paths followed by fellow migrants. It is precisely through the imagining of small networks and groupings that the ‘community’ is broadly conceived. Most of participants recognise the existence of a ‘community’ while at the same time draw on their distancing from it. In different accounts participants seem to idealize cultural and social
expectations they bring from Colombia, like the sense of collectivity, solidarity, resilience, and desire to help new arrivals. Yet, those idealized feelings or sense of community are combined with new expectations acquired through the migration experience in Australia and related to civic culture and strong respect for the formal and informal rules that appear to contribute to the smoothness of everyday transactions in the new country. In this regard, this thesis has been able to identify three categories of social distinction emerging from interpersonal relations amongst Colombians and which are discursively tied upon imaginaries and structural relations of social class in their own country. These categories, labelled residency status, job mobility and English language proficiency, encompass forms of informal citizenship (Bauder 2008) that are reframed by migrants to respond to the demands of their new social position in the secondary labour market in Australia.

The first category of social distinction, residency status, is drawn in participant narratives marking a bold difference amongst those who have reached a compelling goal, such as obtaining official residency, and those who are still in the process attending schools, undertaking degrees or working in low-skilled jobs while their application process is being resolved. Some of those participants who hold a permanent residency reflected on the different conditions faced by those who have not such a status as having to continue paying for their own health services and having restricted access to study and work opportunities. On the other hand, those who were still on temporary visas criticised either the extensive and variable requirements to permanent residency acquisition, or how fellow Colombians have been able to obtain it without even having demonstrated strong English language skills. Discrimination based on residency status is part of a ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu 2013; Hage 1998) some Colombians inflect on fellow migrants as their effort towards gaining permanent residency in Australia is rendered as insufficient, belated or worthless.

For the category of job mobility Colombians repeatedly reflect on what kind of ‘progress’ is desirable and how it is to be reached. Some of them highlight the strong value given to gain a job different to the usual entry-level ones recent arrivals are forced to take. Participants describe fellow migrants who have stayed in cleaning, delivery or hospitality jobs as lacking ‘aspirations’, unable to attain ‘progress’ and becoming ‘stagnant’. The category works as a form of social distinction in that
even those who were once involved in these types of menial or low-skilled jobs do recognise the transcendence job mobility has had in their migration experience and draw on the disadvantages they see in their former work positions. Many of the participants who had or continue in jobs as cleaners or trades people, for example, narrate they regret not feeling as productive economically or intellectually as they were in their own countries. However, a contradiction arises when these participants praise their life has changed in Australia, they have become financially independent, have a better quality life, and do not intend to return to their country.

The third category of distinction, English language proficiency, is presented working to differentiate those migrants who are able to ‘progress’ and integrate more easily to the new country and form new social networks with non-Spanish speakers from those who have to continue in jobs that require less second language use. Being unable to speak fluently and understand the language was and has been a deterrent for some participants for a major sense of satisfaction with their stay in the country especially in the first years of their settlement. This has been a major burden for immigrants who arrived to the country with extensive professional work experience but could not be hired in their occupational fields as they were seen unable to respond to language demands. This has resulted in many participants having to stay in jobs they do not want at the expense of their life projects before migrating.

In addition to these social distinction categories, many research participants make strong criticisms around the so-called deviant behaviour said to characterize Colombians in their country. The perception of undesirable behaviour is outlined as a factor hindering the participants’ relationships with their country people. Narratives of distrust in other Colombians coat their interpersonal relationships permeating also their imaginaries of the community in Australia. As Coronado (2014) convincingly argues, the migration experience makes migrants want to behave how they imagine Australians want them to be (9). This imagining ignores the existence of ruling breaking or bending behavioural codes like larrikinism in all countries and even more in Australia where what could otherwise be labelled as deviant or outlaw behaviour is endorsed as flexible one. I argue, as participants with political affiliations describe, that Colombians in Australia fail to recognise both the underlying reasons for their emigration, independently of what they depict as their motivations, and also ignore or dismiss the
realities of Australia as a country with an ambiguous treatment to its Aboriginal people and immigrant population. Most of participants believe they have been lucky to stay here and praise their ‘higher quality of life’ and economic mobility forgetting that Australia is also part of the peripheral countries where labour and social divides persist. In this sense, their perceived improved economic position is idealized to the point of preferring adjusting themselves to the requirements of their new positions as immigrants rather than starting a more public dialogue on what needs to be resolved in their own country to prevent others live the strenuous social, economic and even psychological circumstances they have dealt with here.

Such a dialogue could be started through some sort of political agency or action. However, this thesis shares with studies of the Colombian diaspora elsewhere that Colombians do not overtly engage in political participation. As Mason (2014) elaborates, this apparent lack of interest in political agency maybe the result of ‘Australia’s multicultural model’ which ‘supported public displays of “folklore” [but] discouraged migrants’ political lobbying within Australia and overseas’ (552). Indeed, the Colombian organisational arena in the Australian diaspora, borrowing Goldring and Landlot’s (2010: 452) term, is more related to cultural sharing, solidarity events and national celebrations rather than politically engaging activities. A quite limited number of participants, three out of forty-four, give details of their participation in social political activism in Australia and only a very few of them offer glimpses on their political positions or dissent. They agree that it is difficult to find echo within the wider Colombian community, and also back in Colombia, so they prefer liaising with other Latin American groupings rather than only Colombians to be involved in any sort of social activism.

Despite this panorama a few solidarity protests organised by Colombians in 2013, supporting the National Farmers strike give a more positive forecast on how Colombian migrants’ political agency may be mobilized in the near future in their new location. However, further elements will condition such engaging in community activism. The five case studies that I have examined here give an account of the varying positioning processes Colombian migrants sustain towards certain engaging of their migrant positionalities. The models I propose for the analysis of their multiple identities illustrate the influence of their past experiences and upbringing in Colombia, early experiences upon arrival, and
experiences of longer periods of stay in the new country—including the acquisition of an official Australia permanent residency and citizenship. These elements not only permeate the scope of the identity positions undertaken by migrants but their prospects of their future engagement with the Colombian community in Australia and their country of origin.

The cases illustrated show at least three identity positioning processes. The first one is discursively formed via strong relations and reflections on one’s past life, that is, before migration. It is this past history which influences the subjects’ perception of themselves in the present time and their narrative performance about their migration process. Regardless of including positive or negative accounts about their upbringing and their past in Colombia, it is the ideological, and even ethical positions that are formed there which influence how participants express having a rather strong underlying identity. Diego’s identities, for instance, are strongly inflected by a political ideology formed in his childhood and while not possessing the language abilities he might require, he has been able to maintain his sense of political activism. Andrés, on the other hand, maintains a strong influence of resilience and perseverance inflected at the same time by his work ethics. These were formed, according to him, in Colombia and have given him the courage to turn down a dream job in a multinational company attending to his interest in helping disadvantaged communities.

In a different positioning process participants show a clear transition they have made from a turbulent process before migration, like Marcela, or during their early stages of settlement in Australia like Nelson, into a more desirable stage where certain social mobility has been reached and is presented as crucial to position themselves in a more positive reflection about their migration.

The case of Rebeca revealed the identity forming process of those who have lived strenuous changes during their early years in Australia and tell of being unsatisfied or not having fulfilled yet their expectations or those of their families. Nelson’s case could be seen represented in this group as well given his reflexive process as a mature immigrant, who ‘was someone’ in Colombia, but has had to let his self undergo a transformation in order to become another person that can respond to the challenges posed by the Australian immigration regime (Robertson 2008, 2014). However, he differentiates his experience from those of younger immigrants who venture into exiting Colombia without having
formed their selves first and without clear objectives to achieve in Australia which may lead them to a longer or more difficult process of settlement. That is, for Nelson, despite his precarity (Goldring & Landlot 2011) as an immigrant with a clear downward mobility, it is his own education, personal values and knowledge which have kept him afloat amid the economic and social downturn he has faced while trying to become a permanent resident of this country.

The younger generation of migrants appear to be attending to the labour-market of Australia that requires them to pay hefty tuition fees in exchange for a restricted work permit where they can have the economic independence they were trying to get in Colombia. However, as I have argued, their lack of recognizing the reasons why they migrated and how the social system works in Australia places them, at least in the first years of their stay, into a vulnerable position which reproduces the fragile position of disenfranchised sectors in Colombia.

The multiplicity of identities and positioning processes amongst Colombians in Australia has been exposed in this thesis in view of the links to the various kinds of capital in the migrants’ positionalities. The cultural and symbolic capital that has historically allowed Colombians to have a positive reception abroad is described by participants in this research as a key element in their insertion to the labour-market, doing ‘whatever it takes’, as they say, to reach a desired success. This is reflected in their new migrant capital that stems from their want to accomplish ideals of social and economic mobility, they bring from their country, and the tensions arising in their insertion to the political economy of migration of a southern tier nation. Hence, Colombians in Australia need to respond to the ambiguities of a country that requires them to integrate to a socio-economic model at the same time that their fellow immigrants transpose their Colombian national identifications and social divides into the new country. This takes me back to the events described in the introduction to this thesis. The Colombian National Farmers Strike support picket held in Sydney’s Town Hall and the launch of a book by Colombian author Humberto Hincapié, both in 2013. It was argued that both events were broadly exclusive to each other; however, similar transnational relations were at stake within each space. To be sure, Colombian protesters were continually communicating with the strike organisers in Colombia and had a live intervention from one of the campesinos in Caqueta, therefore they were
effectively producing a back and forth dialogue with people in their country and in Australia. Meanwhile, the book’s launch was not only attended by Colombians but people from other Latin American communities which gave even more transcendence to the purpose of the meeting. At their own pace both events demonstrate the practicality of migrant mobility. The very element facilitating increasing migration worldwide, the highly flexible technologies—mainly through social media—made possible the convergence of an important number of people to voice their disagreement with Colombia’s detrimental social policies. Virtual networks and small groupings succeeded in ‘visibilizing’ not only the Colombian community but the Latin American one in the heart of Sydney. Likewise, the small networks around the Asociación Cultural Colombia in Australia and his co-founder Humberto Hincapié, facilitated another less political gathering that brought about another sector of the Colombian community. The launch master of ceremony, Soraya Caicedo—a journalist of SBS radio—the presence of the consular body representatives and special guests of other nationalities stressed the outreach of the event, within the Latin American migrant community and also the Australian one. This is how two apparently unrelated and exclusive events are able to materialize the multifaceted Colombian migrant community in Australia.

Although the particular situatedness of Colombia-born in Australia has been narrated in this thesis as the key element orientating the emergence of their multiple identities, further narratives need to be explored in the continuous process of positioning of the migration journey of Colombians and Latin Americans. For example, in a similar vein to findings on the Brazilian community in Australia, this research has demonstrated how the understanding of a Colombian community goes beyond the representation of an ethnicity and necessitates a wider view on the different factors that have accompanied and continue to influence the migration of Colombians in Australia. Markers such as age, length of stay and circumstances of exit upon migration, and later on the new roles and positionalities undertaken by these migrants in regards to job mobility, residency status, language use, civic engagement and political dissent are some of the super-diversity of factors (Vertovec 2007) that condition the forming of distinct groupings and networks that in turn make up the Colombian community at large.
I have also pointed out that Colombians not only live with fluctuating relations towards their ‘community’ in Australia, but that their attachment to as well as their distancing from it bears a strong link to elements of the social and political history of their origin and receiving countries. Furthermore, I have shown how political dissent, and its counterpart, silent dissent, appear as distinctive markers of a fractured national identity and have an additional effect in the forming of social networks around the transnational community of Colombians in Australia. Colombians have shunned those migrants who would be more likely to take on organising roles or political agency within the community in varied ways and social spaces. This has put some political refugees, as illustrated in Diego and Jorge’s case, for example, in a position of marginalisation from community making and participation and has led them to look for other groupings within their pan-Latin American networks. Further research may look at these relations of ‘political switching’ from a national community to broader communities in which migrants find different lines of affinity.

The life experiences of these migrants demonstrate the need for the further construction of transnational citizenship where equal and broad participation in decision making policies at local and global levels can be exercised. As Stephen Castles (2005) has explained, the very citizens ought to participate at the nation state level, and their interests need to be represented in international bodies and global institutions. It is therefore in that sense that Colombians in Colombia and in Australia ought to take the lead in addressing more complex and articulated reflections on their own history, and their social and political currency, to see their conditions improved in their country and the diaspora.
References


313


329


Zevallos, Z. (2004). ‘You Have to be Anglo and Not Look Like Me’: Identity Constructions of Second Generation Migrant-Australian Women. (PhD), Swinburne University of Technology.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Interviewed Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year of Arrival</th>
<th>Age in 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Marcela</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Alfredo</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Alexa</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Santiago</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Francia</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Fernando</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Viviana</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Rebeca</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Andrés</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Milena</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Guillermo</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Ramiro</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Camilo</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Rocio</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Tables in Original Spanish Versions

Table 1. Reasons to come to Australia (First choice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Razones para venir a Australia (Primera elección)</th>
<th>Respuestas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacer un postgrado</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aprender o mejorar su inglés</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poder trabajar y ahorrar dinero</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivir una experiencia nueva/diferente</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conocer otra cultura/s</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buscar un futuro para su familia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por la inseguridad en Colombia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por la situación social/económica de Colombia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independizarse de su familia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenía familia a donde llegar</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por persecución política</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otro</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tabla 1. Razones para venir a Australia (Primera elección)
Table 2. Further reasons to migrate to Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Razones adicionales para migrar a Australia</th>
<th>Respuestas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Porcentaje</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podía trabajar aquí</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quería una oportunidad para quedarse (Ej. Encontrar una pareja)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo veía como una aventura para su vida</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quería aprender inglés</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quería un título universitario en el exterior</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiene familia aquí y por tanto se facilitaban las cosas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quería viajar</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buscaba protección (política)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otro</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tabla 2. Razones adicionales para migrar a Australia
Table 3. Colombians’ comments on situations where they have felt unwelcome in Australia.

| Comentarios de participantes sobre cuando se han sentido no bienvenidos en Australia |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| **Hablando inglés:**            | **Buscando trabajo:**           |
| Cuando algunas personas no entienden “el acento” y no piden repetir lo dicho de una manera educada. | Falta de mejor aceptación como capital de trabajo. |
| Cuando mi inglés no era el mejor sentí un poco de racismo, porque mi comunicación no era fácil. | La discriminación para ubicarse en puestos altos o con grandes responsabilidades. |
| En algunas ocasiones discriminada por no desenvolverme bien con el idioma. | Cuando las opciones de trabajo para los colombianos son limitadas. |
| Al principio cuando no entendía lo que me decían. | La dificultad de crecer profesionalmente. Así mismo es difícil ampliar el círculo social. |
| Cuando hablaba español cerca a gente que no le entendía. | Es difícil demostrar que tu experiencia y conocimientos son válidos en un país de habla inglesa. |
| **Respondiendo a estereotipos:** | **Procesos con la migración Australiana:** |
| La mayoría de la gente bromea con relación a Colombia y las drogas o la corrupción. | Política migratoria muy compleja y excluyente en general para colombianos. |
| A veces, al decir que se es colombiano, la gente trae a colación la droga y la violencia. | Cuando tuve que esperar 4 años para sacar mi residencia. |
| Hay discriminación en cosas pequeñas o simples, especialmente para los colombianos, cuando la gente no ve más allá del estereotipo del narcotráfico. | He intentado buscar trabajo en mi área y me he sentido discriminado por mi estatus de visa. |
| Cuando me preguntan que si tengo cocaína. | A veces siento algo de incomodidad con las políticas de migración. |
| Humor sarcástico de los australianos no educados y su ignorancia sobre cultura general y la realidad de otros países. | |

Tabla 3: Comentarios de participantes sobre cuando se han sentido no bienvenidos en Australia
Table 4. Things Colombians miss from their country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cosas que los colombianos extrañan de su país</th>
<th>Respuestas</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Porcentaje</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Energía de la gente</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variedad de ambientes sociales/opciones de entretenimiento</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amigos</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familia</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comida y/o variedad de alimentos</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La rumba/ ambiente nocturno</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variedad y/o bajo costo de servicios (Ej. tiendas, peluquería)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otro (por favor especificar)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>114</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C : Focus Groups Transcript Extracts (Chapter 5)

Miguel: los puntos de vista eso son, puntos de vistas, y se tratan de respetar, de cierta manera, entonces si uno está compartiendo pues precisamente entre colombianos y nosotros tenemos toda esa historia tan horrible desde hace 60 años que ha pasado, todo lo que hemos dicho, y ya uno no puede decir que esa persona hizo bien o que esa otra persona hizo mal porque ya son puntos que pueden afectar la conversación de grupo de para dónde se va y puede crear choques [...] uno no quiere hablar de eso porque no se quiere dañar el rato.

Laura: ¡como la regla general! no hablar de política, no hablar de religión, de pronto en este momento que estamos en un proceso investigativo, ya, pero no, realmente es la primera vez que hablo de estos temas desde que llegué acá, pero cuando estoy con personas que no son colombianas, y preguntan [sic] a mí no me gusta tocar esos temas, tema social, temas negativos pues están alrededor del mundo, están en las noticias, realmente no me gusta eso.

Marcela: y uno, tal vez tratando de evitar como la polémica, que se forme una discusión fuerte, por ejemplo (.) el tema de Uribe

Patricia: [um, eso es delicado

Marcela: pues acaba con familias

Todos: (risas)

Miguel: those are points of view, points of view, you try to respect them, in a certain way, so if one is sharing precisely amongst Colombians and we have all that horrible history for 60 years, all we have said, and one can’t say such a person did good or another did bad because those are points of view that can affect the group conversation in terms of where it goes and create clashes […] one doesn’t want to talk about it because one doesn’t want to ruin the moment.

Laura: [it’s] like the general rule! Do not speak about politics, not about religion, maybe right now that we are in a research process, ok, but no, actually it’s the first time I’ve talked about these topics since I came here, but when I’m with people who aren’t Colombian and they ask [sic] I don’t like to touch on those topics, social theme, well there are negative subjects around the world, they are on the news, actually I don’t like that.

Marcela: and one, maybe trying to avoid controversy […] that a strong argument emerges, for example (.) the subject Uribe

Patricia: [um, that is sensitive

Marcela: well it destroys families

All: (laughter)

Focus group 2
P: ¿sabes qué he visto?, que la gente defiende mucho la antigüedad acá […] en el college y las viejas eran, ¿hace cuánto llegó?
Todos: (risas)

[...] 
P: a mí me dijeron en el college que uno consigue trabajo con los amigos, los que ya tienen [trabajo], y la vieja, ‘usted sabe hacer vacuum?’
Todos: (risas/carcajadas)
P: entonces no, yo no sé vacuum, ¡porque yo no sabía! […] yo le ayudaba a mi mamá en la casa.
Todos: (risas)
P: en Barranquilla no se aspira nada porque ¡un calor del verraco!
T: (risas)
P: y la niña esta era como así=y todas las del college, ‘¿usted hace cuánto está?’, ‘no, acabe de llegar’, ‘¡ay no! O sea como que yo era la de los que vienen a pedir trabajo, que no sé que. […]
P: no importa, o sea para mí no importa, pero es la pregunta básica de todos los colombianos, saber cuándo llegó uno y en qué trabaja

P: you know what I’ve seen? That people defend a lot their seniority […] at the college the gals were, when did you come here?
All: (laughter)

[…]
P: I was told at the college one can find a job with friends, those who have got [work], and this gal goes, ‘do you know how to vacuum? [sic]’
All: (strong laughter)
P: so no, I don’t know to vacuum [sic], because I didn’t know! […] I helped my mom at home
All: (laughter)
P: in Barranquilla you never vacuum anything because of the bloody heat!
All: (laughter)
P: and this girlie was like=and all of them from the college, ‘how long have you been here?’ ‘no, I just arrived’, ‘oh no!’ I mean like I was one of those who come to ask for a job, I don’t know what.
[…]
P: it doesn’t matter, I mean for me it doesn’t, but it is the basic question of all Colombians, to know when you got here and what you do for a job.

Focus group 1, P40 Paula (27, 2011)
Miguel: no tengo mucha opinión por la parte política, porque yo no me meto, leo pero nunca he participado, yo nunca he votado, no puedo, no sé, no me siento con un derecho para expresarme por un bien o mal [sic].
Liana: pero, te podemos preguntar ¿por qué?
Miguel: porque todavía no creo en lo que ellos están presentando.
Liana: ya
Miguel: lo que ellos quieren hacer ver no me parece entonces no, no quiero saber si uno hace una cosa o hace la otra, yo mantengo pendiente de que quieren hacer, no he inscrito la cédula, ahorita hay elecciones.
Patricia: ajá
Miguel: me imagino que ya lo cerraron (risas).
Marcela: ay eso debería hacer en Colombia, hacer voto obligatorio porque
Patricia: [de acuerdo! De acuerdo!]
Marcela: en Uruguay también es obligatorio
Liana: ¿sí?
Patricia: yo estoy 100 por ciento de acuerdo
(...)
Marcela: lo que decía Miguel [...] es lo que escucho, no ‘es que a mí no me gusta la política’ o ‘yo no entiendo la política’, y eso pienso que afecta mucho también al país porque la gente no participa, porque la gente piensa que la política [sic] son los que están allá sentados y todavía no tenemos esa noción de que los que tenemos el poder somos nosotros y podríamos hacer lo que quisiéramos con ellos allá, si elegirlos o no elegirlos o montar un recurso participativo que nos lo dio la constitución del 91 [...] no sé pero eso que tú dices es eso porque como es tanta corrupción la gente se vuelve apática [...] y dice es que ‘yo no quiero tener nada que ver con eso’, ‘yo voy a trabajar honestamente y voy a tratar de sobrevivir y ya, pero no quiero tener nada que ver con eso’, pero eso es un arma de doble filo, porque cuando uno es apático ellos allá calientan la olla y hacen lo que les dé la gana porque uno no participa (...) los jóvenes, ay qué pena más que todo, mi hermanita tiene 22 años, ¿Uribe? ¿Santos? Pues que, ‘no sé, no entiendo, no me interesa’, nada, nada!, y no saben nada de política [...]
Miguel: ‘I’m not very opinionated about the political part, because I don’t get involved, I read but I’ve never participated, I’ve never voted, I can’t, I don’t know, I don’t feel I have the right to express myself for a good or a bad [sic].

Liana: but, can we ask you why?

Miguel: because I still don’t believe in what they are presenting

Liana: right

Miguel: what they want to be seen as I don’t agree, so, I don’t want to know if they do this or that, I keep up to date on what they want to do, I haven’t registered my identity card, elections will be on very soon.

Patricia: aha

Miguel: I guess they already closed (laughter)

Marcela: that should be done in Colombia, to have mandatory voting because[ Patricia: [agreed! Agreed! ]

Marcela: it’s mandatory in Uruguay too

Liana: really?

Patricia: I agree a hundred per cent

(…)

Marcela: what Miguel was saying […] that’s what I hear, no, ‘I don’t like politics’ or ‘I don’t understand politics’, and I think that also affects a lot the country because people don’t participate because people think that politics [sic] are those who are over there sitting and we still don’t have that notion that we are the ones who have the power and we could do whatever we wanted with them, electing them or not electing them or to establish a participatory resource that we were given in the 1991 constitution […] and they say ‘I don’t want to have anything to do with that’, ‘I’m going to work very hard and that’s it I don’t want to have anything to do with that, but that is a double-edged sword because when one is apathetic over there they [politicians] put on a show and they do what they want. My little sister is 22, Uribe? Santos? Well, she says, ‘I don’t know, I don’t understand, I’m not interested’, nothing! They know nothing about politics […]

Miguel: they don’t let us know.

Focus group 2
Appendix D: Focus Groups Transcript Extracts (Chapter 6)

Marcela: claro, es que esa es la cosa, como cada cual de acuerdo a lo que vive, como lo que dices tú que la seguridad, lo que le pasó a tu tía=a mí ninguno [sic] me ha pasado, pero yo sí hice trabajo social, dos años en Medellín y en Cali y en Medellín tuve mucho contacto con familias que vivían allá pues en el metro cable pues, allá arriba, en las comunas, y los que quedaron con todos esos traumas que no pueden estar en un lugar abierto, verde, porque vienen todos esos recuerdos, ellos estaban en la época en lo de ‘las mesas’ que los de arriba tirando acá, y los de abajo tirando acá entre paramilitares y guerrilleros, y ellos quedaron = también conoci, trabajé con personas que vivían en el barrio Pablo Escobar, entonces para ellos Pablo Escobar era el salvador.

Alfredo: exacto

Marcela: sí porque les ayudó entonces, entonces por eso era el cuento, eso fue lo que yo conocí, yo antes adoraba a Uribe, cuando me fui de Cali, y llegué a Medellín, que fue cuando hice ese trabajo social, y empecé, y conocí muchas cosas porque estaba en ese trabajo, cosas que uno no se entera en las noticias porque nunca se las van a contar, y me enteré entonces yo ya no lo quería entonces ya con mi papá, ya habían muchas cosas que no hablábamos porque yo ya me había vuelto de izquierda, ¿no?, era porque no tenemos información ¿sí?

Focus Group 1

Marcela: of course, that is the matter, like everyone according to what you live, like you say about the security, what happened to your auntie=none has happened to me [sic] but I did social work, two years in Medellín and Cali, and in Medellín I had a lot of contact with with families who lived there, well in the metro cable, up there, in the comunas and those who were left with those traumas that can’t be in open areas, green ones because all those memories come back, they were in the time of ‘the tables’, that those on top of the tables were shooting over here, and those at the bottom shooting among paramilitary and guerrillas and they stayed=also I met, I worked with people who lived in the Pablo Escobar neighbourhood, for them Pablo Escobar was the saviour.

Alfredo: exactly

Marcela: yes, because he helped them, so that’s why the story, that’s what I met, before I loved Uribe, when I left Cali and I arrived to Medellín, that was ehn I did that social work and I started, I got to know many things because I was in that job, things that you don’t hear about in the news because they are never going to tell you, and I got to know them and since then I didn’t like him, so with my father there were now many things that we didn’t talk about because I had turned myself to the left, right? It was because we don’t have information, right?

Focus Group 1
Paula: todo lo que está sucediendo ahora cuando uno se va de la casa porque los papás joden tanto que uno a veces llega a tomar malas decisiones, como irse, bueno llegué tarde que no sé qué, una cosa, presionan, presionan y uno se va, en Colombia está tan difícil conseguir trabajo así seas profesional, está tan difícil el tema de seguridad y todo eso que uno termina viendo y yo estoy segura que la mayoría de colombianos que están acá es por mejorar la situación, y no estaban tan bien allá=porque créeme que si yo hubiera estado allá pues, en una muy buena oficina, con muy buenas condiciones yo no me hubiese venido, y es que esa vaina allá es un paraíso, pero me vine a buscar mejores

Marcela: [oportunidades

Paula: oportunidades! Eh, en cuanto a lo social, la inseguridad para mí me ha marcado terrible, no quisiera regresar por eso […] Este febrero cumple dos años de muerta mi tía, la mataron por robarle el bolso, entonces esa cosa yo dije la seguridad allá está bárbara y pa’ que regresa uno?

Marcela: no pues lógico.

Paula: [y quisiera uno, no sé, y piensa uno en querer traerse a toda la familia y como que resguardarlos a todos, que no le vaya pasar nada a nadie, que=ya no piensa uno en regresar porque no va a ser lo mismo.

Focus Group 1

Paula: everything that is happening now when one leaves the family home because parents are too unbearable, so much that one can make the wrong decisions, like leaving, well I got home late, that stuff, one thing, they put pressure, they put pressure and one leaves, in Colombia it is so difficult to find a job even if you are a professional, it is so difficult the topic of security and all of that that one ends up coming here and I’m sure the majority of Colombians are here to improve the situation, and they weren’t that well over there=because believe me that if I had been there in a good office, with very good conditions I wouldn’t have come here, and over there it’s a paradise, but I came to look for better [  

Marcela: [oportunities

Paula: opportunities! Eh, in regards to the social, the insecurity has marked me terribly, I wouldn’t like to go back because of that […] this February is my aunt’s second anniversary, they killed her to take her handbag, so that thing, I said, security over there is terrible and why going back?

Marcela: of course, it’s logical

Paula: and one would like, I don’t know, and one thinks about wanting to bring all the family and to keep them safe, that nothing happens to nobody, that=one doesn’t think of returning because it is not going to be the same

Focus Group 1