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The postcolonial practices of international migration:
Latin American migration to London

Introduction

'London is a city of opportunities to work, but at the same time it is very sad. You arrive here like a 'chicken' that doesn't speak English, you look at the houses, the buses driving on the wrong side of the road. For a long time, you feel completely lost, people try and talk to you in the street and you don't understand what they're saying, you're completely out of your orbit'
Mario, Bolivian, a chef, undocumented, living in Brixton, London

Nearly a decade ago it was noted that although immigrants and ethnic minorities were quintessential 'postcolonial subjects', research on migration had yet to engage fully with postcolonial debates (Samers, 1998: 138). While theorising transnationalism has adopted and adapted many dimensions of poststructuralist epistemology in terms of the importance of challenging binary interpretations of movement of capital, firms, labour and people, as well as highlighting the importance of anti-essentialism, plurality, and hybridity (Mitchell, 2003), explicit postcolonial interpretations of mobility drawing on empirically grounded work still remain quite scarce in relation to migration in particular (ibid.; Bailey, 2001; for exceptions see Samers, 1997). For geographers, such a postcolonial perspective can be especially fruitful in relation to migration and the mobility of people because by its very nature it actively encourages 'anti-essentialist conceptualisations of space, place and identity' (Silvey, 2004: 501). Furthermore, while patterns of international migration are hugely diverse in terms of the nature of flows across the globe, there remains a distinct pattern of people moving from countries with fewer socio-economic opportunities to those where there are perceived to be more (IOM, 2005; Li and Teixeira, 2007). These often involve people moving from countries in the Global South, most of which were colonised, to countries of the North, reflecting deep-seated global inequalities. However, while many postcolonial interpretations of mobility tend to focus on identity formation, processes of hybridisation and consciousness, it is important to stress the far-reaching injustices that international migration entails for many people from the Global South. As Adrian Bailey (2001: 424) suggests: '[A]lthough postcolonial geographies may have the ability to question and destabilise dominant Western discourses, efforts should be redoubled to integrate into these accounts the known patterns of prejudice and inequalities that characterise the experience of contemporary international migrants and their communities.'

Therefore, the arguments of this paper revolve around three core issues. First, it argues, along with others before, albeit not in huge numbers (Bailey, 2001; Samers, 1998; Yeoh, 2003) for the utility of using postcolonial perspectives to further understand processes of international migration, especially in relation to flows from the Global South to the North. Second, it proposes that only a postcolonialism that stresses materiality and the everyday (Blunt and McEwan, 2002; Cook and Harrison, 2003; Gibson-Graham, 2005; McEwan, 2003) is helpful in understanding contemporary migration flows that are inherently unequal. Extending this one step further, I also suggest that being sensitive to the intersections between postcolonialism and development (Power et al., 2006; Simon, 2006, 2007; Raghuram and Madge, 2006) is also critical in understanding international mobility patterns. Third, it suggests that only by focusing on the empirical realities of migrants'

experiences is it possible to truly understand the processes of migration and indeed, the nature of postcolonialism in relation to migrants (Mitchell, 2003; Lawson, 2000; Silvey and Lawson, 1999).

A CONCEPTUAL NEXUS FOR UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION TO LONDON: POSTCOLONIALISM, INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, AND EMPIRICAL ENQUIRY

This section addresses how a postcolonial perspective is useful in conducting research on international migration, and why an approach that emphasises the material forms and spaces rather than identity, consciousness and meaning is especially important (King, 1999; Yeoh, 2003). It also outlines how and why grounded empirical enquiry is central to such an understanding.

Somewhat surprisingly, an explicit postcolonial perspective is much more rare in studies of international migration than would perhaps be imagined. As noted above, there have been some calls for a much more explicit consideration of postcolonialism (Bailey, 2001; Samers, 1998; Yeoh, 2003). While the last few years have witnessed increasing calls for recognition of such an approach, there remains little work from this perspective. Having said this, one area that has received some attention from a broad poststructuralist, if not always postcolonial, perspective is transnationalism, and specifically transmigration (Bailey et al., 2002; Basch et al., 1994; Guarnizo, 1997; Samers, 1997). However, while conceptualising transnationalism has been critical in studies of migration over the last decade and a half, it is not only highly contested as a concept (see Kivisto, 2001; Portes, 2003), but it also refers predominantly to the nature of linkages between countries rather than underlying causal processes of why people move in the first place. As Basch et al (1994, 6) note, migrant transnationalism is defined as 'the process by which transmigrants, through their daily activities, forge and sustain multi-stranded social, economic and political relations that link together their societies of origin and settlements, and through which they create transnational social fields that cross national borders'. Developed as an alternative to predominately assimilationist models of migrant settlement, transnationalism not only complemented the need to account for the role of changing nature of global capitalism in the movement of people, but also recognised that migrant identities are constructed in relation to more than one nation-state (Glick-Schiller et al, 1995). Indeed, it is this awareness of the need to rethink homogenous geopolitical categorisations as well as the nature of epistemological enquiry from a poststructural standpoint in relation to identity construction in particular, which makes transnationalism so attractive for those seeking to understand contemporary migration (Mitchell, 2003). So from a cultural perspective, explorations of transnationalism have tended to focus on issues of hybridity, plurality and in-betweeness (with Bhabha 1994 being the most well-known proponent of the latter notion). Or as Bailey (2001: 420) succinctly puts it, 'the poststructural underpinnings of transnational research, its mistrust and deconstruction of binaries, its emphasis upon the production and circulation of meaning through discourse and its attention to how identity is produced through construction of difference, all attracted significant and positive attention'. While these have received considerable attention, understanding transnationalism from a cultural

perspective requires more systematically consideration of the economic and inequality (ibid., Mitchell, 2003, 2005).

This said, when considering international migration, it is also important to remember the huge body of work on the nature of transnationalism within migration studies from a largely sociological and geographical viewpoint and associated with the work of Alejandro Portes and others in relation to Latin American migrant settlement in the US. As well as contributing to debates on conceptualising transnationalism (Portes et al. 1999), this work has explored various dimensions of interconnecting ties among migrants beyond the cultural and the transformations in identities. This has dealt with the nature of social, economic linkages, and more recently political activities (Itzigsohn et al., 1999; Levitt, 2001; Vertovec, 2004a). More specifically, while this work has dealt with a range of family linkages, and entrepreneurial activities (Landolt, 2001; Portes et al., 2002), it has also considered the relationships between peace-building and diasporas (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Bermúdez Torres, 2007), and wider political practices (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). However, while this work has been critically important in elucidating the dimensions of how linkages are maintained and the implications of these for migrants, it does not provide a holistic framework for understanding migration processes. For instance, a transnational perspective cannot adequately account for why people migrate in the first place, although certainly, social, cultural and economic networks have long been recognised as crucial in facilitating migration (Boyd, 1989; Faist, 2000; Massey et al. 1987). Furthermore, it has also been recognised that once migration networks have been established, then 'migration systems' (Massey et al, 1993) or 'migration orders' (Van Hear, 1998) emerge (see also Gardner, 1995). Yet, I would suggest that while interrogating the causes of migration remains incredibly difficult in light of the multidimensionality of causal processes involved (Massey et al. 1993), it is still important to consider why people move from one part of the world to another. In turn, why do they uproot themselves from their families and friends, and why they put themselves through severe hardships in order to settle somewhere?

This, I would argue, in part, is where a postcolonial perspective can be useful. While the same criticisms can be made of postcolonialism as an approach for understanding causal processes of migration as of transnationalism, it does not preclude a consideration of the complex reasons why people migrate in the first place. Indeed, I would contend that a postcolonial perspective (albeit a particular form of 'materialised' postcolonialism – see below) can facilitate an understanding migration processes in a way that appreciates both structure and agency, as well as the complex gendered, racialised and class hierarchies that permeate mobility. Thus, in combination with many of the critically important insights from research on transnationalism, a postcolonial approach to examining the entire migration process rather than just what happens once migrants are settled, can be potentially fruitful.[1]

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[1] King (2003: 392) notes that postcolonialist perspectives can complement other ways of looking a the world but '[T]he dangers are in attempting to use the concept in a totalizing fashion or, indeed, attempting to explain everything from a postcolonial framework or perspective'.

Without rehearsing the complex debates around definitions of postcolonialism or unravelling the 'tangled skein of intellectual threads' (Yeoh, 2001: 456), it refers broadly to the ways in colonisation processes have affected societies and cultures (Blunt and Wills, 2000: 168). The term also facilitates an understanding of how neo-colonialism affects contemporary inequalities, usually concentrating on 'beyond' colonialism rather than 'after' (ibid., 170). In turn, there are a host of different types of postcolonialisms (internal, transnational, imperial) (Sidaway, 2000), with the negotiation of power being centrally important (King, 2003). A geographical, and specifically spatial rather than temporal take on postcolonialism can arguably provide a more accurate picture of global relations (Blunt and McEwan, 2002 citing Loomba 1998). Yet, as numerous critiques have shown, it is essential not to re-draw binary power relations in different ways (colonial and post-colonial) (ibid.; McClintock, 1992). However, perhaps the strongest early critiques of postcolonialism came from those who called for the need to situate issues of identity, meaning and consciousness within a material reality (King, 1999; McEwan, 2003; Yeoh, 2003). In the words of Cheryl McEwan (2003:341), these can be summarised as 'its alleged failure to connect critiques of discourse and representation to the lived experiences of postcoloniality and its apparent inability to define a specific political and ethical project to deal with material problems that demand urgent and clear solutions'. Perhaps not surprisingly, this over-emphasis on the historical, the cultural and theoretical abstraction in postcolonialism has met most criticism from those who are concerned with concrete inequalities and poverty (ibid.; also San Juan, 1998), and especially those coming from a so-called 'mainstream' development perspective (Simon, 2006, 2007) (see below). Indeed, it is now safe to say that a much revised interpretation of postcolonialism that addresses materiality has started to permeate postcolonial geographies (Blunt and McEwan, 2002 [eds]; Cook and Harrison, 2003; Jacobs, 1996). Furthermore, a much more politicised and engaged interpretation has also taken root in research in recent years (Ashcroft, 2001; McEwan, 2003). However, studies of international migration such as revised postcolonial perspective are rare.

While the approach take here reflects this need to 'rematerialise' and 're-politicise' postcoloniality as McEwan (2003) suggests, it is also pertinent to think about the intersections with broader studies of development, not least because I am examining international migration where many of the flows originate in the Global South. In assessing the relationships between development, post-development and postcolonialism, David Simon (2006) argues, first, for greater care when post-developmentalists and postcolonialists talk in globalising, normative ways about the world while claiming to be concerned with the subaltern, the local and the marginalised. But second, he suggests that there is much 'common ground' between postcolonial viewpoints and the work of more development scholars more recently who have sought to challenge hegemonic modes of thinking and doing (Crush [ed], 1995). Indeed, there has long been a tradition within more mainstream development seek to work in engaged, participatory and ethical ways (see Chambers, 1995). In particular, the recent moves towards participatory methodologies to explore issues of poverty and conflict have been indicative of such a shift (Moser and McIlwaine, 1999, 2004;

McEwan, 2001). Some of these are explicitly postcolonial or post-development in interpretation (Gibson-Graham, 2003; 2005; Kapoor, 2005; Kothari, 2002), while others are implicitly sympathetic to postcolonial ways of doing and seeing the world. Having said this, there has also been a recent surge of interest within Development Geography to engage with postcolonialism. This has been both in terms of re-conceptualising this dimension of the discipline (Power et al, 2006), and in relation to methodological consideration (Raghuram and Madge, 2006; see also Noxolo, 2006). However, to reiterate, I would suggest that much of this engagement with postcolonialism and post-development within development geography and development studies more broadly is really highlighting what many researchers and scholars have been doing for years (see Corbridge, 1993, 1998; 2007; Smith, 2002). However, the arguably abstract and obscurantism standpoint of much postcolonial writing has antagonised many concerned with the urgency of poverty and inequality (Jacobs, 1996; McEwan, 2001). At the same time, as Sidaway (2007: 355) notes, there has also been a 'shift in emphasis towards new inscriptions of (post)development, involving categories and articulations of citizens and subjects and places and spaces of accumulation, inclusion and exclusion'.

So, what can a postcolonial perspective bring to the examination of international migration? As noted above, postcolonialism cannot explain all the dimensions of the international migration process. However, it can assist in understanding many of these processes more clearly. If we accept that postcolonialism is concerned with reducing the spatial and temporal distance between the Global South and Global North and these parts of the world are integrally linked, albeit in unequal ways (McEwan, 2003), it can be argued that predominant patterns of international migration reflect these broad linkages. Indeed, this is hardly a new idea, being noted in 1996 by Stuart Hall in his claim that the world comprises a series of linkages between cultures and economies revolving around the 'metropole' of Europe as a colonial power and the powerless 'peripheries' of the world. Colonialism itself was imbued with movement and generating 'a multitude of mobilities across borders' (Yeoh, 2003: 373) as well as a plethora of different diasporas, be they imperial, labour, trade and/or cultural (ibid.). These mobilities and diasporas have multiplied since with today's forces of globalisation and the arguably concomitant increases in inequality between the North and South. Many diasporas or movements of people are associated directly with colonial linkages such as Samers, 1997) 'automobile diaspora' in France comprising Algerian migrants working in a Renault factory. Others have much more complex colonial legacies and postcolonial histories (Yeoh, 2003), as will be discussed here in relation to Latin American migration to the UK.

Thus, a postcolonial perspective can provide a historicised and contextualised interpretation as to why people migrate. As Samers (1997: 59) points out in relation to Algerian migrants in France, we need to focus on the 'production of emigration' rather than the 'problems of integration in the society of immigration', and to look at why people moved in the first place. Thus, the socio-economic, cultural and historical situation of the country of origin of migrants is critical in understanding migration flows across the globe and especially from countries in the South to the North. In

particular, and in line with a materalised version of postcolonialism, migration must be understood as part of wider processes of global inequalities and uneven development. Reflecting this, Walton-Roberts 2004 (cited in Blunt, 2007: 6) argues that understanding transnational networks (in this case among Punjabi Indians in Canada) requires an analysis of both rural development in India and the process of immigrant settlement in Canada.

A postcolonial interpretation also allows for much greater recognition of migrant agency. In postcolonial terms, this viewpoint allows us to 'recover the lost historical and contemporary voices of the marginalized, the oppressed and the dominated' (McEwan, 2002: 128) who have been subjugated by colonial and neo-colonial forces. Although international migrants from the Global South are rarely the poorest members of their societies (Datta et al., 2007a), they come from countries that are marginalised globally, and are often suffering from high levels of poverty and inequality and low levels of economic and social development. Ethnographic accounts that capture voices and viewpoints of those who move are critical and provide an important counterpoint to grand narratives of mobility (Silvey and Lawson, 1999; Lawson, 2000). These stories can reveal the everyday practices that reflect complex constructions of migrant subjectivities that are variously influenced by gender, class, and racial subject positions (ibid.; see also Dyck, 2005).[2] Thus, the importance of exploring the lives of migrants empirically in terms of actually asking why they moved and what happened to them when they did, although apparently obvious, is sometimes neglected by postcolonial scholars in particular. Yet, it is fundamental to reaching even an approximation of why people take such risks and make such huge sacrifices in their lives in order to move elsewhere.

However, as noted above, it is also important to stress that many of these arguments have already been made by those working within transnational frameworks who have been keen to highlight migrant agency. For example, while Victoria Lawson (2000: 176) does not suggest an explicit postcolonial position in her work on rural-urban migration in Ecuador, she argues that transnational research examines:

> 'migrant subjectivity and processes of belonging and alienation as postcolonial migrants cross borders into the west. Transnational research also interrogates dominant narratives of citizens and the nation as these are produced and challenged in particular political-economic contexts. However, the discourses and practices of globalization have also penetrated deeply inside postcolonial nations, reworking mobility through impacts on local economies in rural and urban places'.

In focusing on the need to emphasise the 'social situatedness that differentiates migrants experiences' (ibid., 186), research from a gender perspective in particular has been fundamental in recognising how migrant agency intersects with structural factors in influencing migrant processes (Silvey, 2000, 2003; Lawson, 2000). As Silvey and Lawson (1999:129) point out: 'This [can] …

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[2] Although it is important to remember that giving voice to migrants conceptually does not necessarily mean that migrants are agents themselves.

return the subjects of development to the center of the production of theory about them'. Undoubtedly, these sentiments are profoundly sympathetic to a postcolonial perspective (see McEwan, 2001). However, just as in the recent shifts in thinking about development have reflected many dimensions of a postcolonial viewpoint, so too has work in population geography and especially transnationalism (Bailey, 2001; Silvey, 2000).

An important issue to be aware of however, in relation to transnational and postcolonial interpretations of migration is what Bailey (2001: 421) refers to as 'agency-heavy' and 'structure-light' conceptions (although he refers to post-structuralism). Echoing those who argue for a structuration approach to international migration (for example, Goss and Lindquist, 1995), Bailey (2001) and others have stressed the importance of combining agency with other factors such as cumulative causation and chain migration as well as the role of the state in influencing international migration patterns (Bailey et al., 2000). Thus, reflecting the calls for a materialised postcolonialism, an approach to migration that foregrounds migrants experiences and 'stories' is incredibly valuable, but it must be offset by a consideration of economic processes and structural inequalities that prompt and reproduce migration flows. Furthermore, it is also important not to romanticise the role of international and transnational migrants; they are rarely the 'transnational warriors' (Bailey et al., 2000) that they are often depicted to be. Instead, they occupy a host of different subject positions and often experience extreme hardships both in their countries of origin and in the places they move to (Datta et al., 2007b). As Silvey (2006: 35) noted with reference to Indonesian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia they can be: 'global consumers, devoted mothers, victimized labourers, pious pilgrims and heroines of local and national economic development'.

Therefore, to sum up, a sensitivity to postcolonial perspectives in understanding international and transnational migration is important, not because it presents anything spectacularly new, but that it brings together a range of contemporary shifts in thinking in a range of fields – within migration and development studies in particular. Thus, it can be seen that international and transnational migration can over turn prevalent patterns of distance between the North and South, it can challenge and reinforce existing colonial orders, and it can show how history and patterns of development can be partially re-written in a quotidian sense by migrants. However, we must also be careful not to lose sight of the material realities of many migrants who can often only exercise their agency within huge sets of constraints imposed personally, by national and global economies, and by nation-states. Indeed, I would suggest that there is a huge neglect of empirical studies of international migration that draw on a materialised postcolonial perspective that situates such movement within the inequalities of the global system, and which stresses the exploitation of migrants as they move around the world in search of a better life. The remainder of the paper focuses on an empirical exploration of these issues drawing on a research project conducted with Latin American migrants in London.

LONDON AS A POSTCOLONIAL CITY

As well as being the quintessential 'global city' (Sassen, 2001), London is also the classic postcolonial and post imperial city as well (Eade, 2000; Hall, 1996). Without entering into the conceptual debates on what actually constitutes a postcolonial city beyond one that is influenced materially, socially and culturally by its colonial and imperial past (see Yeoh, 2001 for a summary of the debates; also Henry et al., 2002on Birmingham), London is clearly one of the premier postcolonial cities in the UK and the world. This section briefly outlines the multicultural nature of the city, focusing on the nature of the population and their role in the functioning of the city especially the urban economy.

As Jane Jacobs (1996: 71) notes: 'Many of the new labour arrangements of global cities like London (produced by postcolonial migrations) quite literally re-work people already categorised as available for exploitation under colonial economies' (referring to Bangladeshis in Spitalfields in East London). For centuries, London has been a major centre of both emigration and immigration (Eade, 2001). Since the beginning of the century London has witnessed the arrival of a huge range and volume of foreign born people to its shores. In particular, the most notable have been the Jews, the Irish, Afro-Caribbeans, people from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan not to mention Nigeria and Ghana (Kershen, 2003).

However, in the last three decades, migration has been integrally linked with the structuring of the London economy in very important ways as the city has become more 'global'. Indeed, as labour markets have been deregulated, welfare systems been reformed and new immigration policies introduced, so a distinct 'migrant division of labour' has emerged, especially in the last decade (May et al., 2007). Concomitant with these shifts was a move from manufacturing to service sector employment. This involved both an expansion in managerial and professional employment as well as a growth at the bottom end of the labour market and a 'falling out' of the middle (Goos and Manning, 2005). More specifically, despite high levels of growth and rising demand from employers for both highly skilled and low skilled workers, there were high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity (especially amongst British Minority Ethic communities) (GLA, 2002). Although successive British governments had implemented restrictive immigration policies throughout the 1970s and 1980s, in the 1990s, employers began to call for easing of restrictions on the use of foreign labour to meet Labour demand (Flynn, 2005). This was at the same time that migration increased partly as a result of the expansion of the EU but also because of the growth in refugees and asylum seekers, with a marked concentration in London (Rees and Boden, 2006).[3] Thus, the proportion of foreign-born residents in London rose dramatically during the 1990s, to account for approximately 29% of the city's total population by 2001 (Spence, 2005: 35). Linked with the introduction of a 'managed migration' policy that aimed to reduce the number of asylum seekers and increase legal migrant workers, those entering the UK to work rose from 40,000 a year in the mid-1990s to over 200,000 a year in 2004 (Flynn, 2005). However, this policy also facilitated

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[3] Two thirds of those entering Britain since 1994 have located in London.

migration for the highly skilled and limited it for the low-skilled. In turn, this meant that those coming from the Global South and Eastern Europe were more likely either to find no work at all, or – even if arriving with tertiary level qualifications - only low-wage employment (May et al., 2007; Spence, 2005).

This said, London's population (both resident and working) remains hugely diverse. Whereas in the past, international migration flows to London were dominated by people from the New Commonwealth Countries, there has been a much greater variety of foreign nationals coming to the capital in recent years, adding to what has been described as the 'super-diversity' of the city's foreign born population (Vertovec 2007). Spence (2005) has traced the labour market position of that population, demonstrating important variations across London's migrant communities. She shows that those coming to Britain from high-income countries have been crucial in helping meet a still growing demand for high-skilled workers, with around a third (36%) of those coming from Japan and a little under a quarter (23.1%) of migrants from Germany living in London finding employment in managerial positions: far higher than the figure for British born Londoners (17.6%) (see also Beaverstock and Smith 1996). At the other end of the spectrum, those coming to London from the Global South, and East and Central Europe have emerged as a major new source of labour for London's expanding low-wage economy. Thus, even as a number of London's more established BME groups (notably Bangladeshis and Afro-Caribbeans) continue to suffer disproportionately high levels of unemployment, more recent arrivals would appear to be concentrating in London's emerging low-wage economy, with 46% of London's elementary positions now filled by foreign-born workers (Spence 2005). Among the newly arrived groups, levels of unemployment and economic inactivity are highest amongst those from countries with large numbers of applications for asylum. Others have found work but mainly in the lowest paying jobs, with, for instance, 50.3% of those born in Ghana, and 59.5% of those born in Ecuador working in elementary positions (ibid.). There are other marked concentrations of migrants - Lithuanians are heavily concentrated in construction (with 21% of the working age Lithuanian population found here), Bangladeshis in hotels and restaurants (31% of the population), and migrants from the Philippines in health and social care (31%) (ibid.).

These patterns have been reflected in a recent empirical survey of low-wage workers in corporate cleaning, cleaning on the London Underground, hotels and hospitality, and domestic care work conducted in 2005 that I have been involved in. This revealed that between 58% (in care) and 95% of such workers (on the London Underground) had been born abroad: the majority (over half) came to London within the previous five years (Evans et al, 2005). These workers hailed from a very wide variety of countries, though with concentrations from West Africa (over 50% especially from Ghana and Nigeria), and Latin America and the Caribbean (13.6% especially from Brazil and Colombia) (May et al, 2007). Though currently engaged in low-skilled work, a significant proportion (49%) of the workers contacted in these surveys arrived in London with higher level (tertiary) qualifications

(ibid.). Yet all currently suffer extremely low rates of pay and poor working conditions: with 92% earning less than the Greater London Authority's London Living Wage (of £6.70 an hour in 2005), and over half working unsociable hours (the early, late or night shift) (Evans et al, 2005).

Thus, London is a remarkably diverse city in terms of its migrant population and BME population, with its attraction as a destination not diminishing over the years. The following section will outline the background to one of the least well-known migrant groups to the capital. Indeed, this is a particularly interesting group, not only as one of the new migrant groups to the city, but also because there are no direct colonial ties between the UK and Latin America. However, as will be shown here, there are some interesting linkages that have been forged over the years in terms of trade and exile.

LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATION TO LONDON IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT[4]

Although Latin America has no direct colonial ties with the UK, there is a long relationship with the continent in terms of trading and in terms of London in particular providing a home for political exiles (something that has permeated the nature of contemporary migration as well – see below). London has been home to many founders of Latin American independence, together with diplomats, writers, artists, political activists and business people. Evidence of the first visitors from Latin America date back to the 1780s when exiles from the Spanish colonial regime came to London not only to flee persecution, but also to lobby for independence in the New World (and included such figures as Bernardo O'Higgins) (Miller, 1998). As the independence movements gathered pace in the early nineteenth century, more exiles migrated to London in search of political freedom. At the same time, economic ties were being forged between London and Latin America as the first loans for new countries were negotiated in the City of London. Once independence was established, diplomats began to arrive in London, many of whom were also writers. Commercial links with Latin America flourished in the 1860s as merchants began to specialise in particular businesses such as Peruvian guano and Chilean nitrate. British companies increasingly invested in Latin America with estimates in 1913 suggesting that Britain invested between £750 million and £1,000 million primarily in Brazil and Argentina, but also in Chile, Uruguay, and Mexico (ibid: 6). Official statistics of this time also illustrated that the numbers of Latin Americans in London was small. For instance, the 1861 census recorded 541 Latin Americans, increasing to 778 in 1871 and declining to 638 in 1901 (Decho and Diamond, 1998: 126).

After reaching a peak in 1914, the economic relationships between London and Latin American declined with the First World War, the Great Depression and the Second World War. However, London remained a safe haven for Latin American exiles, reflected in the increasing Latin American born population appearing in the census of 1951 (over 4,000) to over 17,000 in 1991 (Miller, 1998: 8). As more Latin Americans arrived in London, so interest in Latin American culture increased especially in terms of literature and music. The repression of the military governments in Brazil,

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[4] This section draws closely from McIlwaine (2007).

Chile and Argentina in particular in the 1960s and 1970s, led to the creation of important exile communities in London (together with Uruguayans and Bolivians). However, only since the 1970s has there been significant migration from Latin America to the UK.[5] In addition, migration before this time had primarily been of the elites rather than more 'ordinary people'. At this time, it was Colombians in particular who arrived as a result of the work permit system to take-up jobs in domestic service, as au pairs and in catering. After 1980 more arrived to join relatives and friends despite the end of the work permit system. After 1986 there was an increase in Colombians seeking asylum as the conflict in their home country worsened. Once visa requirements were introduced in 1997, asylum applications decreased despite another rise in 1999 (Bermúdez Torres, 2003; Cock, 2007; Román-Velázquez, 1999). Since the 1980s, increasing numbers of Ecuadorians, especially in the 1990s, Peruvians, Brazilians, Argentineans and more recently, Bolivians have begun to arrive in London, moving mainly because of the economic crises in their home countries (Carlisle, 2006: 236).

The growing numbers of exiles and economic migrants was reflected in the establishment of migrant organisations in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While the oldest organisations were established with the aim of campaigning against military dictatorships in Latin America, they gradually became more concerned with the socio-economic realities of Latin Americans residing in London. For example, Carila began as the Campaign Against Repression in Latin America in 1977, later becoming the Latin American Welfare Group in 1983. Similarly, the Indo-American Migrant and Refugee Organisation (IRMO) was established from the Chile Democrático group in the early 1990s once democracy was returned to the country. Also formed in 1977 was the Latin American Advisory Committee which was instrumental in the creation of Latin American House in Kilburn which provided a home for most of the Latin American community organisations of the time (Cock, 2007)

As for how many Latin Americans there are in London today, the simple answer is that no one knows. Official estimates are usually based on the 2001 Census which notes the combined population of Colombians, Ecuadorians, and Bolivians in London as only 11,863, with Latin American nationalities together making-up 46,325. Arguably more accurate is the Office of National Statistics Labour Force Survey that in June 2006 estimated that there were 18,000 Colombians (an increase from 8,000 in 1997), 25,000 Brazilians (an increase from 4,000), 4,000 Argentineans (an increase from 3,000), 1,000 Chileans (a decline from 2,000), and 16,000 Guyanese (19,000).[6],[7] However, these official statistics are widely believed to be gross under-estimates mainly because of the high proportion of undocumented Latin Americans and their invisibility as a population in

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[5] From 'Workers, Liberators And Exiles: Latin Americans In London'21/09/2006, retrieved on 3 June 2008 from: http://www.untoldlondon.org.uk/news/ART40466.html
[6] Retrieved on 2 June 2008 from http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Source.asp?vlnk=358&More=Y
[7] It is important to note that the situation of Guyana is different to other Latin American nationalities; as a former colony called British Guiana, its people speak English and have Commonwealth status in the UK.

London (and the UK more generally). As noted above, this also relates to the fact that Latin Americans are not a separate category in ethnic group classifications, being designated instead as 'other', and thus making it difficult to build-up a profile of their situation.

Having said this, in recent years, there has been some attempt by researchers and activists to try and make more accurate predictions about the size of the Latin American population. From the UK government perspective, the recent strategy paper by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Latin America (FCO, 2007: 5) suggested that there are between 700,000 and 1,000,000 Latin Americans visiting or living in the UK, including 200,000 Brazilians, 140,000 Colombians, 70-90,000 Ecuadorians and 10-15,000 Peruvians (see also Buchuck, 2006).[8] The majority of this population resides in London. Unofficial estimates put these numbers higher. Among the few studies of specific Latin American national groups in London, James (2005: 3-4) estimates that there are between 30,000 – 75,000 Ecuadorians, Sveinsson (2007) suggests that there are between 15,000 – 20,000 Bolivians, while Guarnizo (2006: 8) estimates that there were between 50,000 – 70,000 Colombians (although McIlwaine, 2005 suggests that there could be as many as 150,000). What is less contested is that the proportion of Latin Americans living in London is increasing and has been growing recently. While official figures show this in terms of both census data (Decho and Diamond, 1998) and passenger survey data (Mitchell and Pain, 2003: 7), this is also reflected in commentaries of migrants themselves and the demand for services identified by migrant organisations.

While most recent Latin American migrants to London have migrated for economic reasons, there is also a sizeable refugee population. Because of the armed conflict, it has mainly been Colombians who have claimed asylum in the UK. Having said this, asylum has become much more difficult to claim over time, especially since 1997 when visas were introduced, with the application and success rate declining rapidly since the beginning of the century. Between 2002 and 2004 asylum applications from Colombians declined by 45% from 420 applications in 2002 to 120 in 2004 with the refusal rate being extremely high (McIlwaine, 2005: 11). This has continued; for 2006, there were 50 applications from Colombians, 10 from Ecuadorians (the only 2 countries mentioned) and 60 from 'other Americas'. Only 5 from Colombia were recognised as refugees, with a further 5 from 'other Americas' granted discretionary leave. Overall, between 2004 and 2006 there has been a decline in applications with 120 from Colombians, 35 from Ecuadorians, and 130 from 'other Americas'.[9] Not surprisingly, the rate of claiming asylum has dropped dramatically.

METHODOLOGY

The research on which this paper is based draws on qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with 70 Latin American migrants in London together with 3 focus group discussions with

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[8] Indeed, these figures appear to be taken directly from Buchuck's online article.
[9] Asylum Statistics, First Quarter 2007 United Kingdom, Home Office. Retrieved on 25 June 2007 from http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/asylumq107.pdf

a further 17 migrants and 10 interviews with people linked with the Latin American community such as workers in migrant organisations and embassy staff. Participant observation with a migrant organisation was also conducted for 2 years between July 2006 and October 2008. The interviews was carried out between November 2006 and May 2007.

The sample for the in-depth interviews was constructed using non-purposive sampling techniques; 20 were conducted through a migrant welfare organisation (Carila Latin American Welfare Group) with a further 50 conducted through a range of people identified through a range of snowballing techniques and different networks. As a result, there is a wide diversity of migrants included in terms of residence, background and experience. Interviews lasted anywhere between 1 and 3 hours and covered a range of different issues related to life in home country, migration experiences, arrival in London, work histories and current employment conditions, social networks and perceptions of problems faced by the community. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed and then analysed using a range of coding mechanisms. The focus groups were conducted with people associated with Carila, and mainly beneficiaries. Each discussion lasted for at least an hour and a half, and involved open-ended discussion as well as the use of some participatory appraisal techniques such as listing, participatory diagramming, causal flow diagrams, and institutional mapping.

In terms of the general characteristics of the migrants 28 were Colombian, 22 were Ecuadorian and 20 were Bolivian. Of these, 26 were men and 44 were women, which broadly correlates with the fact that officially, there are thought to be more women than men. Most interviewees were aged between 21 and 30 years; no one over 55 was interviewed, nor anyone under 16 years. The majority of migrants were also well-educated, with most having been educated in their country of origin. Almost a quarter had completed their university education (24%), while a fifth had attended university for some time (20%), with only 3 migrants having either primary level or no education at all. Despite these high levels, migrants were concentrated in elementary occupations, with over half working in the cleaning sector (51%) in banks, offices, houses or the retail sector. A further 8 (11%) people worked in cafes or restaurants, with 3 people looking after children. 3 were hairdressers, and 5 had their own businesses (usually a restaurant, café or small hairdressing salon). A further 5 worked in a range of different jobs such as newspaper seller, laundry workers, or factory worker. Three women were housewives, while 4 were unemployed and survived on benefits. Finally, 16 (22%) were also studying English as their main occupation, although all the students also worked as well, usually in cleaning or in cafes.

Although the nature of migrants' legal status must be explored with caution because some people were unwilling to disclose whether they were undocumented, the vast majority reported that they were living in the country legally (60), with only 10 reportedly undocumented. 22 people had student visas (31%), with a further 22 stating they had residence acquired either through securing asylum, by marrying someone who was documented, or by having Spanish passports (legally or illegally).

The majority of migrants had arrived in the previous 10 years, with one-fifth arriving since 2006 (21.5%); these were mainly students and mainly Bolivians. Finally, Latin Americans lived throughout London although there were distinct concentrations in Lambeth, Stockwell, Camberwell and Brixton in the South, and in Holloway, Finsbury Park and Seven Sisters in the North. Most lived in private rented houses, or most commonly, rooms in rented houses with other Latin Americans, often in over-crowded circumstances (whole families living in 1 room).

POSTCOLONIAL INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION TRAJECTORIES: EXPERIENCES OF LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANTS IN LONDON

This section explores the process of migration among Latin Americans migrants to London drawing on the experiences of migrants themselves (Lawson, 2000). It is divided into three themes: moving to the North focusing on why people move in the first place; living in the North, considering how migrants cope with life in London, both economically and socially; and finally, linking North and South dealing with the nature of ties developed by migrants in London with their home countries in Latin America.

Moving to the North: the everyday realities of migrating from Latin America to London

An assessment of why people move from one country to another is highly complex, with decades of research showing that movement is influenced by a host of economic, social, cultural, and political reasons. However, it can be argued that while a postcolonial perspective is central to understanding the multiple reasons why people move, it is here that a material interpretation is perhaps most pertinent. Indeed, as noted above, the dimension of postcolonialism perhaps most consonant with migration is transnationalism. Yet transnationalism cannot provide anywhere near a comprehensive interpretation as to why people move in the first place beyond the utilisation and embeddedness of social, cultural and economic networks. Four broad themes are discussed here, all of which interrelate: first, economic factors prompting movement; second, political factors; third, social factors; and finally, the role of the state in terms of immigration legislation. In each case, a specific migrant will be discussed in order to foreground explicitly the importance of examining the everyday realities and experiences of migrants (Bailey, 2001; Bailey et al., 2002; Conradson and Latham, 2005).

Migration to the UK and to London in particular represented an escape from some form of hardship and oppression. The vast majority of Latin American migrants in the current research were fleeing or leaving some form of unsatisfactory situation rather than migrating as an 'adventure' or rite of passage, with the exception of some of the students. However, there were important differences according to country of origin. Reflecting the ongoing armed conflict in their homeland Colombian migrants were much more likely than Ecuadorians and Bolivians to have left their home country for reasons associated with the civil war. Although some Ecuadorians and Bolivians had left because of political persecution, these were a minority. Instead, economic factors were more important for them, especially for Bolivians.

The most common reason for leaving Latin America was the lack of economic opportunities. In terms of the socio-economic situation in the three Latin American countries included here, there has been a broad deterioration or stagnation, with Bolivia the hardest hit with growth rates of GDP of only 1.3% (ECLAC, 2006a: 61). In terms of poverty, Bolivia had among the highest poverty rates in the continent with over 63.9% of the population living below the poverty line in 2004 (an increase from 52.6% in 1989). Rates were also high in Colombia (46.8% in 2005) and in Ecuador (48.3% in 2005) (ibid.: 64). In light of this situation, it is hardly surprising that people are leaving their homeland in search of better opportunities. Indeed, in Bolivia, in 2000, 4.1% of the population had migrated, in Colombia, 3.4% had emigrated, while in Ecuador, 4.8% had left (ECLAC, 2006b: 15).

While the vast majority of people had some form of employment or business in their home countries, these were often precarious or badly paid or involved working extremely long hours. Esperanza was 43 years old and migrated to London from Colombia in 2000. She lives in Old Street, in North Central London and works as a cleaner in a block of flats 5 hours a day. In Colombia, she was a single parent living with her mother and her one daughter. She owned and ran a restaurant in her home town of Palmira in the Valle de Cauca. Although Esperanza admitted that

she was better off economically than most people in that she earned the equivalent of 3 minimum wages, she was exhausted by the work: 'I lived so stressed out because I was alone and in order to earn these 3 minimum wages, I worked Sunday to Sunday for 6 years and in this time I only had 3 days off … my decision was to look for better opportunities in my life'. However, the case of Esperanza also highlights the difficulties in disentangling the reasons for migration. Her husband had been killed in the ongoing armed conflict in Colombia and she was left with sole charge of her daughter who was studying at college and who wanted to become a doctor. Esperanza knew that she wouldn't be able to pay university fees from the restaurant: 'Since she as a little girl, she wanted to study medicine, and I was wracking my brains trying to think how I would pay for it'. So she realised that she would have to migrate abroad, leaving her daughter behind to study and living for the first two years of her life in London as a transnational mother. The reason she moved to London rather than elsewhere was because she already had a brother living there and he encouraged her to move saying: 'Here you'll earn more by working less', thus illustrating the importance of social and family networks. However, her brother had come to London for political reasons in search of asylum because he had been the leader of a Leftist political group in Colombia; two of his friends had been killed and he was told he would be next. He had heard that the UK was an 'upholder of human rights' and so he moved. Esperanza, despite moving for economic reasons and arriving on a tourist visa, also claimed asylum because of the death of her husband and her brothers' situation. Her case was rejected although she did finally secure Indefinite Leave to Remain through the Family Amnesty programme (and by then she had met her second husband and had another daughter).[10]

The economics of migration can also be seen in another important trend among Latin American migrants from a European perspective. Many migrants moved first to Spain, and then to the UK. Partly reflecting former colonial ties, migrants often felt that moving to Spain would be easier because of language and cultural similarities. In turn, Spanish immigration legislation was much more relaxed than the UK case resulting in very large-scale migration of Latin Americans there in recent years, especially of Colombians and Ecuadorians (Bermúdez Torres, 2007; Catarino y Oso, 2000). However, despite the greater ease with which people moved to Spain, many reported to be disillusioned when they got there, not only by the limited nature of economic opportunities, but also by racism. Mario was 24 years old and came from Santa Cruz in Bolivia. He arrived in London in 2003 after living in Valencia in Spain for 3 years. He lives in Brixton and works as a chef in a restaurant despite being undocumented. In Bolivia his family was poor; his father had a small shop which went bankrupt. His parents decided to leave to try and find a way to pay back their debts, his father moving first and working washing dishes for year in Valencia in Spain after which he could afford for Mario's mother to move who then worked as a cleaner. They chose Spain because of the language, the promise of work and because they didn't need a visa to enter. After another year living on his own with his brothers and sisters, Mario himself decided to move to Spain. He had

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[10] The Family Amnesty programme gave those who had at least one dependent child in the UK and had claimed asylum before 2 October 2002 the right to apply for Indefinite Leave to

been working in a factory plucking chickens, but he only earned $100 per month. He went to Spain, but was disillusioned because he couldn't get work:

> 'But it's not the paradise that people say. There's no work there, most people work in agriculture, you have to harvest and you have to be really strong, also when it rains there's no work. You can't work in cleaning like here in London. Not everyone has the patience to look after the elderly. There's some work in construction, but you need papers and in my case, I didn't have them'.

He had some friends in London who told him that it was easy to get work in cleaning. He entered the UK on a tourist visa after being detained at Heathrow airport for a day; he knew someone in Spain who could sell him a Spanish passport for $1500 but he couldn't afford it. It is also important to remember that this differential in labour demand between the UK and Spain was also strongly gendered; it was easier for women to find work in Spain in domestic, care and cleaning work, while in the UK, many of these jobs, especially cleaning were open to men instead. Indeed, in two cases, women migrated from Spain to London because their husbands were desperate for work, despite the fact that they were happier in Spain.

While economic and social networks dominated Mario's decision to move to Spain and then to the UK, it is important to highlight the particular situation of those fleeing conflict and political persecution. Although Colombians were fleeing an active armed conflict, as shown in the case of Esperanza, others were forced to flee because of their political activity. Manuela was 51 years old and from La Paz in Bolivia. She arrived in London in 2000 with her 2 children fleeing persecution because of her trade union activity. In La Paz she worked in the Mayor's office as an inspector within the technical administration department. After getting involved with a trade union at local, then regional and national level, she began to campaign against corruption. She they got involved in protests against privatisation of oil reserves in Bolivia. However, she was arrested and imprisoned for a week without charge. On her release (with no help from the union) she returned to her house to find all her papers stolen. On her way to the police station to report it she was attacked and hit and told not to get involved with the union again. After this, she decided that it was unsafe for her stay in Bolivia: 'there was no justice, I received no help, so I decided to leave, I didn't want to keep on struggling'. London wasn't her first choice: 'First I wanted to the to the USA, but they told me that the corruption was even worse there. I thought about Spain but I know that they are really racist. I read a lot, and so I thought London. I had read that here they respect human rights, here they follow the law'.

Finally, the case of Juana, who was 38 years old and from Santo Domingo de los Colorados in Ecuador illustrates how social and economic factors can intersect in prompting migration. Juana left Ecuador in an attempt to escape an abusive relationship with her partner against her and her son. She said that initially they had lived together well although she never worked as he gave her everything she needed. However, he began to see another woman and the problems started and

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Remain. This gave them full rights to remain in the UK and to work.

so they separated. Not only had she lost her source of economic support but her former partner was also abusing their son: 'what really made me come here was that my son had problems with my partner, violence, my son was traumatised. I wasn't in a good economic situation so I decided to leave, to try and get something better, to improve my life, to not have to depend on a man'. At first leaving her son behind with her mother, Juana went first to Spain on a tourist visa because she had some friends there and because of the language. However, she couldn't find work and so she contacted another friend who lived in London who suggested she went there. She lent her $1000 to buy a false Spanish passport and so she arrived in the UK in 1999 and got a job straight away as a cleaner. After more than a year, her son went first to Spain with his grandmother and then to the UK using the Spanish passport of a friend's son who looked similar.

Through this discussion of the lives of Esperanza, Mario, Manuela and Juana, it is possible to see how behind a primary economic force making people seek a better life abroad either for themselves or for their children, are a host of political, family, social and cultural reasons as to why people move. Networks were also critical in influencing where people move (although not always why), but so were perceptions of particular places and countries. Repeatedly, people talked about it being too difficult to get into the US especially after 9/11, while Spain was thought to be racist although it was easier to get in there because of legislation, while the UK was viewed as an upholder of human rights and as a place where it was easy to find relatively well-paying work. People displayed considerable agency in their decisions to move, although this was always within a set of constraints either at a structural level of high levels of poverty and low levels of economic development in their home countries, or personal circumstances such as receiving threats against their well-being.

Immigration controls and legislation
One crucially important theme to emerge from the migrants themselves was the issue of immigration controls and legislation. Indeed, many accounts of transactional migration, especially from a cultural perspective presented a picture of freedom of movement around the globe (Bailey et al., 2000; Mountz et al., 2002). However, the reality of international migration has been a shift towards much greater regulation and restriction (Li and Teixeira, 2007; Neumayer 2006; Varsanyi and Nevins, 2007). In the UK, this has been noted in terms of how particular changes in immigration legislation has affected the nature of immigration flows and especially the postcolonial nature of many of these flows (Blunt, 2005; see McDowell, 2005 on Latvians in the). As noted above, the characteristics of migration to the UK and to London in particular have been strongly influenced by immigration legislation. Thus, although the Latin American population in the UK has been a relatively recent arrival to the shores, the nature of their flows has been strongly influenced by legislation.

The case of Colombian migration to the UK illustrates these changes very clearly. The legal provision of asylum through a series of immigration and asylum acts over the years has created a strong reputation for the UK as a safe haven (both past and present). As noted in the cases above,

this has led to some migration, albeit forced in some way, to the UK. Many Colombians have been beneficiaries of this, such as Esperanza and her brother and many others in the research, at least in the 1980s and 1990s, and certainly, this has been a major factor in the creation of a Colombian diaspora in the UK. However, it is also important to look slightly further back to the 1970s when Colombians benefited from the work permit system.

Indeed, from a postcolonial perspective, it is interesting that Colombians were one of the first groups to benefit from changes in UK immigration legislation that had traditionally favoured former colonies. The 1971 Immigration Act abolished the voucher scheme that had been in force since 1962 whereby Commonwealth citizens could move to the UK, and replaced it with a work permit system. This was the first time that non-Commonwealth citizens had been given access to the UK on a more equal basis. Work permits were supposed to be limited to semi-skilled jobs, exceptions were made for certain industries such as hotels, catering, and domestic work. The mid-70s were the beginning of the UK and especially London's shift towards a post-industrial economy with a high demand for service sector jobs (see above). According to Cock (2007), the early waves of Colombian immigration to the UK focused on two employment agencies near Piccadilly Circus and run by Italians. Acting as the main port of entry for Colombians, a man from a particular region of the country (Armenia, in the province of Quindío), established a link between the Italians and Colombians from his home area. He would sell contracts to those looking to migrate abroad for work. The agencies would allocate jobs to Colombian migrants mainly in restaurants (mainly Italian), in hotels, and in cleaning. However, by 1980 permits for migrants were withdrawn for low-skilled jobs. Yet, by then Colombian migration networks had already been established. This small group who had arrived in the mid-1970s then provided the social network foundations for those who followed. This has many important legacies, including the fact that many Colombians in London currently in London hail from this part of Colombia (McIlwaine, 2005).

Ximena's migration to London was based on one of these work permits. Arriving in 1977 at the age of 29, she was currently 59 years old and was working as a cleaner for 3 large cleaning firms (cleaning the Department of Trade and Industry Offices in Victoria, City Hall and a commercial premises in Curzon Street). Although she was born in Bogotá, she had moved in 1969 to Cali and then to Palmira in the Valle de Cauca, bordering the Quindío province. She recounted how a man who lived in London came to Palmira and sold work permits for 2000 pesos which she said: 'But then, 2000 pesos was a lot, I'm talking about 25 years ago, it was a lot of money for us and us'. Her husband bought one and after 6 months he received a letter and the permit giving them 15 days to present themselves at a restaurant in Piccadilly. After gathering together the money for the passage from various family members, her husband left in June 1977. In December the same year, Ximena went to join him leaving behind her 8 year old son in the care of her mother. Ximena describes her shock at arriving in London: 'nothing was as he told me. It wasn't what I thought, imagined. I had never thought it could be dark at 3 in the afternoon, and even less at 8 or 9 in the morning when it

was still dark. And it was so cold, horribly cold, for us it is so difficult to cope with the cold. In all my knowledge and experience, I didn't imagine that this was a reality – this is what I had seen on the films on television - when I talked steam came from my mouth'. She lived in a room in a large house with lots of other people, and after 3 days she began working loading dishes into a dishwasher at the Statehouse restaurant.

While Ximena's case shows how migration was facilitated by immigration legislation, the issue of immigration status tended to dominate the lives of Latin Americans in London in very restrictive ways. Echoing research by Bailey et al. (2000) among Salvadoran migrants in the US, it is important not to be too optimistic about migrant agency because of immigration controls (also Duvell, 2003). Although only 10 people in the study were officially undocumented, others were in various stages of documentation, or what is called 'semi-compliance' and/or knew lots of people who were undocumented. In addition, many had experienced living without papers in the past or had waited for years to hear about asylum claims, thinking they could be deported at any time. Box 1 is from one of the focus group discussions and highlights how, together with language (English), status is one the main problems affecting the community. As one of the participants in this focus group reported: 'legal status affects everything, the work you get, access to services and your state of mind'. Repeatedly, migrants reported that it was getting much harder to enter the UK and to get papers legally; instead, they felt that Eastern Europeans were being given preferential treatment and effectively 'pushing them out'.

Box 1: Prioritisation of problems facing the Latin American community (discussed by a group of 2 male and 4 female adults aged between 18 and 44 of Colombian, Brazilian, Bolivian, Peruvian and Ecuadorian origin)

Language = 1 (joint)
Status = 1 (joint)
Lack of health services
Lack of decent work
Lack of affordable, quality housing
Mental health problems – stress and depression
Pressure from a consumer society

'legal status affects everything, the work you get, access to services and your state of mind'

Alba was 34 years old and lived in room a hotel in Finsbury Park in North London with her two small children and her husband. She was from Santa Cruz in Bolivia and she arrived in London with her children in 2006 to join her husband who had moved 2 years previously. Although her husband had British nationality through a paternal grandfather, Alba arrived on a tourist visa that had since expired. Although she had contacted various organisations to try and regularise her situation, it was impossible. Such was her anxiety that it was affecting her health, exacerbated by the fact that she couldn't access health services: 'I am ill from nerves, I'm very stressed, everything gets to me, and unfortunately I can't go to the doctor because I'm illegal … I'm so scared that I'll be caught and

arrested and deported'. She couldn't work because of her status beyond a few odd sewing jobs, and she felt completely dependant on her husband with whom she had a conflictive relationship. However, despite her anxiety she was determined to stay in London because of the opportunities for her children educationally, and because Bolivia was in such an insecure economic and political state. Interestingly, she also cited racism as a factor preventing her from returning; she was of *mestizo* rather than indigenous origin, and said that with the coming to power of the indigenous Evo Morales*, mestizos* were being driven from the country.

Therefore, moving to the North, and in this case London, is about individuals trying to address severe economic and political problems that affected their lives in their home countries. Simultaneously, their desire to improve their circumstances because they had to or they wanted to, intersected closely with the structuring of a global system where economic growth tends to be concentrated in Northern countries where labour demand in services in particular provided jobs for those who were willing to work. However, moving to London was not just about finding work, but also about supporting people back home as in the case of Esperanza, as well as fleeing family, political and even racial problems as in the case of Alba. Yet people's ability to move was also strongly influenced by the role of the British state. In the case of Colombians, the work permit system encouraged them to migrate and work in the service sector, as one of the first non-Commonwealth groups to arrive in the 1970s. Yet by 2007, the state no longer required Latin Americans, instead re-orienting their demand for foreign labour to Eastern Europe and especially Poland and Lithuania. Legal status imbued the daily lives of Latin Americans, being more than just a structural constraint. As Bailey et al. (2000: 128) note, 'legal status both animates and, simultaneously, immobilizes daily life, yet itself becomes a force for action, reaction, and movement'.

Living in the North: the everyday practices of survival among Latin American migrants in London

While much work on transnational migration highlights the importance of coping with changes in identity and consciousness as the result of moving from one culture to another and the hybridisation process that occurs, the reality of life for migrants is invariably the need to make some form of living in order to ensure basic survival. The creation of a cultural and social life is a secondary consideration, certainly in the early years of settlement. Thus, from a postcolonial perspective, the economic again emerges as central in understanding migrant trajectories. Having said this, this is not say that people did not talk about their experiences of trying to live in a different culture. However, this was invariably framed by migrants as another challenge, along with trying to secure a job or somewhere to live rather than an celebration of their roots or the sense of belonging, at least in the short term. Furthermore, their identities as workers in London were dominated by cleaning. Everyone had worked in cleaning at some part of their lives in the city, and there was an assumption among all migrants that cleaning was an integral aspect of being a Latin American in London. Yet, social networks were also important in migrant survival although significantly, these

networks were found to be rather limited and shallow in nature (see also Bailey et al., 2000; Guarnizo et al. 1999; Menjívar, 2000 on Latin Americans in the US).

Economic survival practices

Edgar arrived from Pereira, a city in the coffee zone of Colombia, in 1997 as a political refugee at the age of 32. He had been a member of the Conservative Party, along with many members of his family who had a history of political involvement at the local and national level. His family began receiving death threats from the FARC (guerrilla group) and after several cousins had been killed, he decided he need to leave. He eloquently described his feelings of disorientation on arrival:

> 'It's like being born again, it's to begin again, you don't know the language, the language is the most difficult, no, it is the system that is totally different, the addresses are totally different. The truth is that when you come here you return to birth, it's like a small child that you have to tell everything to, do this, do that. But eventually you learn and every day you realise that this is a very organised country that provides a lot of opportunities and you can learn a lot, a lot, a lot'.

However, once Edgar had secured asylum his main preoccupation was to find a source of income. He ended up cleaning like many of compatriots before and since. Also like many of his countryfolk, Edgar was not used to this type of work, being educated to university level in Colombia and owned a string of different businesses, including a department store, a book distribution company and a restaurant. This made it very difficult emotionally to cope with cleaning:

> 'Unfortunately, because I didn't speak the language, I had to clean, yes, that was the worst thing. In my life, I tell you, I had never done any housework in my home, but to arrive and to have to dust, to wipe, to brush-up, it affects your self-esteem, you feel really, really bad, bad because you come with the idea of improving your life … not that the work is dishonourable, it's fine, it's a job, but the truth is, it's very difficult when you have a certain status in life, a good standard of living, and having to clean is very difficult'.

After 2-3 years working there, Edgar had saved enough money to establish a small Colombian shop.

However, Edgar was in the minority in terms of being able to establish a business, although settled Colombians (rather than Ecuadorians and Bolivians) were the most likely to set up businesses, mainly servicing their own communities in remittance shops, shops and restaurants selling Latin goods and in some case, founding small cleaning companies. Instead, the majority worked in cleaning and care. Indeed, most Latin Americans felt that cleaning was integral to their identity as a group, and that it was incredibly hard to break free from this. Even if people had managed to find alternatives to this, everyone had some experience of the cleaning sector. Most cleaners worked for large, often multinational cleaning companies who worked on a sub-contracted basis. Most also working on a part-time basis, usually from 4-7am or 5-7am in one job, and then again between 8-10pm or 7-11pm. While most had 2-3 jobs, others had 4-5 and worked extremely long hours (up 16

and 20 in some cases). As a result, many reported being exhausted by their work. Regardless of their immigration status, the vast majority of migrant workers paid tax and National Insurance contributions.

Ximena's working trajectory was not unusual. Starting out working in a restaurant under the work permit scheme, she then began to work in a series of cleaning jobs over the last 30 years. Her need to find a source of income was even more pertinent when she had another daughter, and she split up from her husband: 'I have lived from cleaning jobs, it's the work that I have raised my children with because in the end I was left alone'. As well as being relatively easy to secure, cleaning also allowed her to look balance childcare. Although she had to pay for a childminder when her daughter was very small, when she went to school she was able to work flexibly. She resented the fact that she was never able to work in an office but she was also proud that she never left her daughter alone. Her daughter had now grown up, and at the time of interview she had 3 cleaning jobs. She worked for 2 hours in the morning between 5 and 7am in the Department for Trade and Industry, then another 2 hours at City Hall, and then another in a shop in Mayfair. She was earning the minimum wage of £5-35 per hour. She also worked 'extras' every week including 8 hours every other Saturday. The work was exhausting as she had to get up at 3-30 am and then get two buses from her flat in Stockwell, South London to her first job. She has secured most of her jobs through other Latin American friends, and all her supervisors were other Colombians.

Being a cleaner in London also entailed widespread exploitation, especially for the undocumented. Most common and incredibly frequent was people not being paid for the work they had done. This happened when people worked on probation without a contract, and after the probationary period they were dismissed without pay, or when people were undocumented or didn't have the right to work, and so were dismissed without pay in the knowledge that there would be no legal comeback. Manuela recalled a job she had at a university when she was in the process of making her asylum claim which meant that she couldn't' legally work:

> 'after working there 2 months of going out in the early morning they asked me for my
> work permit and my bank account, I only had a National Insurance number, they got
> me like that. I cried with anger. I made allegations, but I got tired and they won'.

Unfortunately, a lot of this exploitation was at the hands of other Latin Americans in their roles as supervisors.

Another dimension of Latin American's identity as cleaners in London was having to cope with a lack of respect. People complained not only that working in cleaning was often very humiliating for them in terms of dealing with a decline in status, as Edgar pointed out, but also in having to cope with being disrespected in the workplace. Many complained of being treated badly by employees in the offices where they cleaned. Alvaro, a Bolivian cleaner noted:

> 'In these countries, rich people think that someone who cleans is the worst, the
> lowest because we deal with dirt. Some might speak to you in the office but outside

they don't know you. We Latins always want to say hello to people when we see
them, but they don't do it because were are cleaners'.

Yet, it was often the only option for migrants; they could earn the minimum wage, work long hours, save some money and not need to speak English.

Social survival practices

As with migrant groups everywhere in the world, social networks both facilitate migration and assist in settlement and survival once people arrive. These are primarily co-ethnic and are critically important in helping people to settle when they first arrive. However, the depth of these networks beyond assistance with housing and jobs was limited (see also Kelly and Lusis, 2006; Landolt, 2001; Nolin, 2001).

Friends and family were crucial in providing people with initial lodging until they found their own place, as was the case with Mario and Juana discussed above. Also, everyone recounted how they obtained their jobs through Latin American friends and contacts as Ximena reported. However, these networks were very limited in size in that people reported having very small friendship circles, with few having any friends beyond their own nationality or other Latin Americans. One of the most common comments people made about friends was '*yo no soy muy amiguera/o*' (I'm not a very friendly person). Most people said they had only 2, 3 or 4 friends whom they trusted and saw on a regular basis; beyond that, people were very wary about extending their friendships. Ximena's views reflected this broad pattern:
'I'm not very friendly, I like to be alone, I don't have people knocking on my door. I have three other ladies the same age as me and we see each other for baptisms of grandchildren or birthday parties .. I like to be alone. I like to prevent any gossip. I don't want people to look at me and whether my house is clean or not, what I'm eating. I want to stay away from the envy that affects Latins here in the London'.

Indeed, the notion of '*envidia*' or envy permeated the population with most people identifying it as a problem. This was reportedly rooted in the fear that some people would progress further than others in their jobs, in terms of how much they earned, or in securing legal status. People were also terrified of people deported in cases when they were undocumented. People also complained that this mistrust was associated with people being 'two-faced', especially in the workplace and in relation to money. Certain places were also associated with gossip and fear. Somewhat ironically, places such as the Elephant and Castle shopping centre (Elefan) and Seven Sisters market (El Pueblito Paisa) where the main Latin American shops, cafes and remittances agencies were located, were also identified as places full of gossip and where it was thought that people were more likely to be caught by the immigration services. Colombians in particular had to deal with stereotyping over drugs among themselves and between other groups. Esperanza noted 'such is the level of envy among Colombians, that if you have something nice, people will say that you are involved with drugs'.

None the less, Colombians were very sensitive to these unfair stereotypes and as a result, were often reluctant to mix with anyone other than Colombians (see also Guarnizo and Diaz, 1999; Guarnizo et al., 1999; McIlwaine, 2005). Having said this, Colombians were thought to be the most united in London, although this perception was often made on the part of other Latin Americans. Libia, an Ecuadorian said:

> 'I think that the Colombian people are more united ... for us in general there is selfishness which sometimes also includes getting jobs. For example, when you try and help someone, people won't collaborate, the Ecuadorian doesn't help much'.

However, Colombians themselves saw other nationalities as more united. Many Bolivians also complained that the mistrust among them was linked with historical divisions in their home country rather than the difficulties associated with being a migrant in London.

While the reasons for the very shallow nature of social networks and high levels of mistrust can be explained by envy, ultimately, it was about migrants trying to cope in a large city and competing more or less for the same resources. People worked all the time and had little freedom for leisure pursuits. Many also lived in a state of constant anxiety and in fear of deportation. As Esperanza noted:

> 'People live a very stressed life, more now than before because it's much harder. I have a friend who is illegal and she lives completely stressed, she can't even look at a police officer. Migrants constantly think in saving money, because they know that at whatever moment they could be deported and so they have to make the most of time that they have here to make as much as possible'.

This said, migrants were not passive victims of economic and social hardship. They displayed some level of agency and of resistance in the face of the sacrifices and difficulties they experiences in living in London. The church provided an important source of support for Latin Americans, both the Catholic and Protestant churches. In particular, the Evangelical churches were becoming incredibly popular with migrants, with many people who had been practising Catholics in their home countries becoming Evangelicals in London. This was mainly because these churches actively sought out migrants and oriented their services and activities towards issues of loneliness, family break-up, exclusion and so on. According to a Colombian evangelical pastor who ran a church in North London, they were one of the most necessary sources of support for migrants; they provided one-one counselling care in people's homes, as well as general services as well as family activities, all linked with Bible teaching. Many migrants reported how the church had saved them from depression and loneliness and that they now feel they can cope with life in London.

The other important source for migrants were specific welfare organisations that provided assistance with immigration advice, welfare benefits, housing and interpretation. In many cases, these provided a lifeline for migrants. As Eduardo, an Ecuadorian noted about Carila:

'they have helped me for 5 years now and they are still helping me. They are very professional, Susana, Alba, Myriam are people who fight for you, like a lawyer fights for their client, or a father fights for his son. They are strong women, fighters who are very successful. They have helped me in everything, including when I have had problems and they have got on the phone and sorted it out for me. They have authority and control over the processes and because of this they get what they want. I have been to many organisations but they have never helped me. What there isn't in other institutions, there is here'.

However, many migrants either didn't know about these organisations, or refused to get involved with them. Indeed, of the 50 migrants not related to Carila, only 5 had consistently used the services of a migrant organisation. The reasons for this were, first, lack of information; second, fear that they would be reported to the authorities; third, the general lack of trust within the community. People often said that they didn't need help and did not want to get involved with anyone; Alvaro, an undocumented migrant from Bolivia said:

'I don't like organisations, you always have to give lots of information about yourself, I suppose that I've never gone nor would I think of going, I don't like to get involved in this, I'm fine how I am'.

Therefore, this discussion has shown how important an analysis of the everyday experiences of migrants is in understanding their lives in the North. Latin Americans form part of this so-called 'under-belly' of low-paid labour in London where the shift towards the service economy had produced increased labour demand for low-skilled service workers. Yet, working in these service sectors are not without costs. Latin American cleaners are not one big happy family working together and helping each other out. Instead, they are working long hours, are exploited in their jobs, rarely earning more than the minimum wage, and they are very unlikely to trust their fellow country people who are likely to take advantage of them in some way. Yet, they are still active agents in the migration process. The seeking out ways of coping with these hardships through the church or through migrant organisations, and they maintain links with their family and friends in their home countries. Latin Americans are very much integrated into London's low-paid economy; whether they are documented or not, they pay tax and National Insurance. Yet, besides the few who had residency or citizenship, the majority had no political rights and no rights to make any claims on the British state (see also Duvell, 2003).

LINKING THE NORTH AND SOUTH: TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT LINKAGES BETWEEN LONDON AND LATIN AMERICA

An examination of the linkages that are created, maintained and reproduced among migrants between their homes and the countries where they reside is the natural arena of analysis for a transnational perspective on international migration. As noted above, it is also where most

poststuctural, if not postcolonial, analyses have concentrated. While the formation of diasporic identities is obviously important and affects how migrants survive away from home, such a focus neglects some of the harsh everyday realities of life for those living and working abroad, and which can only be explored through examining the life stories of migrants themselves. As Katharyn Mitchell notes (2003: 82) 'without 'literal' empirical data related to the actual movements of things and people across space, theories of anti-essentialism, mobility, plurality and hybridity can quickly devolve into terms emptied of any potential political efficacy.' Thus, it is important to explore what types of linkages are maintained and implications of these for the well-being of migrants.

Regardless of their circumstances, all the migrants in this research maintained some communication with their families and friends in their home countries. Everyone made phone calls to parents, friends and other family members using cheap phone cards and mobile phones, the latter certainly forming what Vertovec (2004b) calls the 'social glue of transnationalism' (see also Horst, 2006 on mobile phones). The majority phoned once a week to every 15 days depending on who it was. In some cases of transnational mothers, women made calls every day. However, it wasn't always like this as Ximena recalled. When she first arrived in 1977 she remembered having to go to a telephone exchange in Trafalgar Square at 6am to queue up to make a call to her son in Colombia via an operator. She recalled how difficult it was to get the call through because she wasn't phoning Bogotá, but rather a small city. When she did get through, 'All I could say was hello sweetheart, I love you very much and then bye, bye and he would be crying. Ah. No, it was horrible, it was really, really difficult.' However, technology had really revolutionised communication, mainly for the better as Ximena's case shows, but also for the worse in a minority of cases when people resented the ability of people to phone and put pressure on especially to send money home (ibid.). Many people used the internet, especially email and messaging services either through home computers or internet cafes. Computer ownership was high, with even people in precarious of circumstances having access to the internet. Alba, from Bolivia who lived in the hotel, managed to run a computer, which allowed her to 'chat' to her sister in Bolivia almost every day.

The main form of maintaining ties was through sending money home. As Esperanza noted above, this is often the main reason why people migrate, in order to be able to help a particular person, or to generate savings, or to make an investment. Thus, the vast majority of migrants sent money home. Sending money was both a necessity and an obligation that was an integral part of being a migrant in the UK, as Edgar pointed out: 'we have a noble heart, because everyone, the vast majority, 90% of people help our families back home'. Indeed, he himself sent money to his parents of between £200 and £250 per month. However, while there were obviously variations, with some sending as much as £1500 per month, but most people sent on average around £100. Most sent money to their parents, but there were also

cases of people supporting children or spouses in home countries and in these instances the amounts were usually much higher. Generally this money was used for general living and subsistence expenses, but frequently it also paid for medical bills, school and university fees, and the repayment of debts. Esperanza was supporting her daughter through medical school in Colombia, and sent £300 per month for her living expenses as well as £1000 every 6 months to pay for the fees. Others sending money as investments especially in housing and for setting up a small business. Lida who arrived in London in 1999 from Ecuador had managed to buy a house and an apartment in Quito, as well as a shared plot of land with her sister. She said that this was her insurance for the future even though she planned to stay in the UK.

However, while people derived satisfaction from sending money home it is also essential to recognise the precarious and exploitative conditions under which migrants live and work in London in order to be able to send this money. Post-structural and postcolonial interpretations of remittances often overlook the levels of hardship involved (McEwan, 2003). Moreover, more generally there is also a tendency to view remittances as the new 'development mantra' in terms of solving development concerns (Datta et al. 2007a). Rarely is it acknowledged that these huge flows of money, usually from the North to the South are made on the backs of migrants making huge sacrifices and working in low-paid, low-skilled jobs. People also made huge emotional sacrifices as Esperanza reported: 'I miss my daughter, but like everything in life, the wounds heal and you get accustomed to it. Sometimes I cry for her and for myself but I have made a life here'. Family relations often became strained as well, with many people reporting conflict over spending remittances, or money going missing. Lida for example, told how she and her sister had sent their eldest brother £15,000 to buy a house for them in Quito. However, due to some wrangling over their father's will and legacy, the brother lost all the money. Finally, even when people couldn't send money, everyone sent gifts at special times (sending goods are very expensive and so people tried to limit this to birthdays and Christmas).

Thus, while people talked about going to Latin American events such as the annual Carnival, or going to Latin American shopping areas to buy food or to send their money home, they discussed their ties with home as being either through communication or materially. When talking about cultural ties, most said that they didn't have time to think about culture or the changes in their lives. Having said this, this doesn't mean that processes of hybridisation, for instance, are not taking place. The Latin American population in London does have a specific identity, however, fragmented people say that it is. For instance, there are several newspapers for the community, Saturday schools teaching Spanish, cafes and restaurants, as well as Latin football leagues, not to mention the burgeoning carnival scene in the summer months. As the population grows and matures, these are likely to take on greater importance. Indeed, Ximena's daughter (who sat in on the interview), and who was born in London, said

that it was very difficult for young Latin Americans who felt both British and Latin American at the same time. Their parents were often very strict with them, yet they wanted to do the same things as everyone else at school. It is likely that identity issues and consciousness are likely to become major issues for second generation Latin Americans in London.

Latin American migrants lead transnational lives in London. While, as noted above, their daily economic lives are firmly entrenched in the London economy, their social and cultural lives are more liminal. This said, Latin Americans are far from the hyper-mobile migrants that have been described in some cases of movement to the US (Duany, 2002; Mahler, 1999). Travelling home is rare because of expense and because of fear about not getting back into the UK (see Bailey et al., 2000). Yet, most work and socialise with other Latin Americans, with most seeking out cultural experiences, however limited, that help them to cope with life as a migrant. The reality for this relatively new migrant group, however, is that their primary concerns lie in economic survival. Analysis of the migration trajectories and experiences of migration show that material considerations often dominate why they move and how they cope within living in the city. Too often, analyses of transnational migration emphasise cultural transformations while neglecting the material; while people remain in London because they can earn more than in their home countries, most have made or continue to make huge sacrifices in order to do so. While some more established members of the population have begun to fight for the rights of Latin Americans, such as getting them established as an ethnic group and extending political rights from home countries for migrants (Bermudez Torres, 2006), for most, migrating to London is about economic and educational betterment, if not for themselves, then for their children. Many are prepared to accept a lack of access to rights in order to improve their lives.

ACTIVISM AND RESEARCHING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN LONDON
While the discussion so far has focused on re-telling the stories of Latin American migrants in London from a perspective that emphasises their everyday coping practices that are intersected by gender, class, nationality and legal status among other things, it is also important to consider the actual process of conducting research with migrants in London. Again, there are many dimensions of a postcolonial interpretation that highlights the importance of the ethics of research. In particular, practising postcolonial research needs to be about engaging with the researched (Raghuram and Madge, 2006: 273). It is about a willingness to recognise the effectiveness of knowledge (McEwan, 2003), but also about linking the research process with political projects and desires (Gibson-Graham, 2003). I would suggest that the issue of researching international migration exemplifies this need for an ethical and politically engaged approach, even more so than when considering other issues from a much more obvious historical or cultural perspective such as analysis of the postcoloniality of heritage or some such.

Carrying out research with migrants from a postcolonial or indeed any perspective requires what Raghuram and Madge, 2006: 283) refer to as 'our way of being in the world'. As someone coming from a feminist and a development background, I would reiterate that an ethical stance is nothing new is geographical research and certainly not the preserve of postcolonialism. Indeed, arguably some postcolonial research is inherently unethical in some of the claims it makes and the often over-theorised approach to knowledge creation (see earlier; Simon, 2006). However, the renewed interested in the politicisation of postcoloniality can provide many opportunities for those working with migrants. I would suggest that working with migrants in one's own home city actually makes it a lot easier to be ethical and engaged than it is when conducting research abroad. I have found that it is much less likely that I will be taking what Raghuram and Madge (2006:273) call the '"package tours" into the life of others' that many development geographers inevitably end up doing albeit usually unconsciously.

Indeed, it appears that people working on international migration issues seem to be among the most ethically engaged of all geographers. There are numerous examples of geographers working with migrant organisations as part of their research, not just to ensure access, but in order to give back something to their constituencies (Mountz and Walton-Roberts, 2006; Pratt in collaboration with the Philippine Women's Resource Center of Vancouver, 2003). The reasons for this are obviously about people's personal politics, but also, I would argue, because it is relatively easy to get involved, notwithstanding time constraints. Thus, in my own case, I was the Chair of the Management Committee of Carila Latin American Welfare Group. After spending the previous 15 years working on development and gender issues in Latin America and South East Asia when I wasn't involved with any type of organisation, it was a revelation that I was able to get involved so easily. Not only are migrant organisations usually desperate for people to come and volunteer for them, but because of their often precarious finances and lack of particular skills, it's rare that they are able to generate any research. Also, because this organisation is relatively close to where I live, it is possible for me to go to meetings after work or at weekends. This is in direct contrast with the situation when I was working in the South. One leaving the country, the distance makes it more difficult to remain engaged. It is all too easy to let the exigencies of daily life and work take over. Yet, this is not the case with working here.

It is also important, as Mountz and Walton-Roberts (2006) note following Martin (2001) that geographers also engage with policy. Again, this is much easier to achieve when working on migrant issues. This is because migration is a politically important issue that governments are inherently interested in, but also because direct engagement with ones own government rather than a foreign one tends to be more straight forward. Thus, in my own case, I am involved with the Metropolitan Police's current attempt to engage with migrant communities (mainly with Latin American and the African to date), as well as engaging with London

Citizens, who run awareness campaigns on a host of issues, including migrant rights (for example, the currently have a campaign called Strangers into Citizens calling for the regularisation of undocumented migrants). I am also involved with a migration network in Colombia run by one of the universities and the Colombian Ministry of External Relations.

Therefore, in terms of activism and engagement, an ethical perspective is almost a natural part of conducting research on international migration. It is not really about being conscious of taking a so-called 'postcolonial stance' but rather about being aware of the politics and the political implications of research, something, which arguably postcolonial has neglected in the past, yet which has always been a concern for feminists and development geographers. This doesn't mean that a postcolonial perspective is not useful in some aspects of conducting research and being cognisant of issues such as negotiating power.

Conclusions

This paper has sought to explore the extent to which a postcolonial perspective can be useful for understanding international migration processes. This has been done through an exploration of Latin Americans in London who are a new migrant group with no direct colonial ties with the UK. The discussion suggests that although an explicitly postcolonial perspective is rare in relation to international movement, there is scope to adopt and adapt such an approach. However, this is only possible as long as the materiality as well as injustices and inequalities of such movement from the Global South to Global North are foregrounded (Blunt and McEwan, 2002; Cook and Harrison, 2003; Gibson-Graham, 2005; McEwan, 2003). This should also entail considerations of the intersections between postcolonialism and development (Power et al., 2006; Simon, 2006, 2007) in light of the nature of such movement which is often rooted in geographically uneven patterns of development. Finally, the paper suggests that only by focusing on the everyday empirical experiences of migrants can the processes of migration be properly understood. In turn, only then can the nature of postcolonialism in relation to migration be fully comprehended as well (Mitchell, 2003; Lawson, 2000; Silvey and Lawson, 1999).

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