

CHAIRE QUETELET 2008
**South-North International Migrations. A Comparison
of Policy, Research and NGO Perspectives**

SESSION: Migration departures

TITLE: The influence of family patterns, gendered selectivity and migrant's networks on the migratory strategies of Colombians in Spain

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we aim to present findings on a research project on Colombian transnational migration to Spain. The main objective of this paper is to explore the effect of different variables and processes in the strategies followed by Colombian migrants for their migratory process to Spain. We consider the network theory for explaining migration movements as a starting point in this research, assuming its main hypothesis, which is that the growth and spread of migrant's networks lowers the cost and risk of movements, thus increasing the likelihood of international migration for a larger number of co-nationals (Massey et al. 2005; Massey et al. 1993; Massey 1990; Fussell and Massey 2004; Boyd 1989; Curran et al. 2005). We also want to contrast another effect ascribed to migrant's networks, which consists on reducing the selectivity of migrants profiles, so that migration becomes more representative of the sending society (Massey et al. 2005; Massey et al. 1993; Massey 1990; Fussell and Massey 2004), with the persistent gendered selectivity of the Spanish labour market regarding Colombian migration. We will explore the linkages between this gendered selectivity in destination and the social changes concerning women's position and the transformation of family patterns in Colombian society. We will assess the relevance of a transnational mother profile (as described by Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997) in perpetuating the gendered selectivity of Colombian migration to Spain and inhibiting family

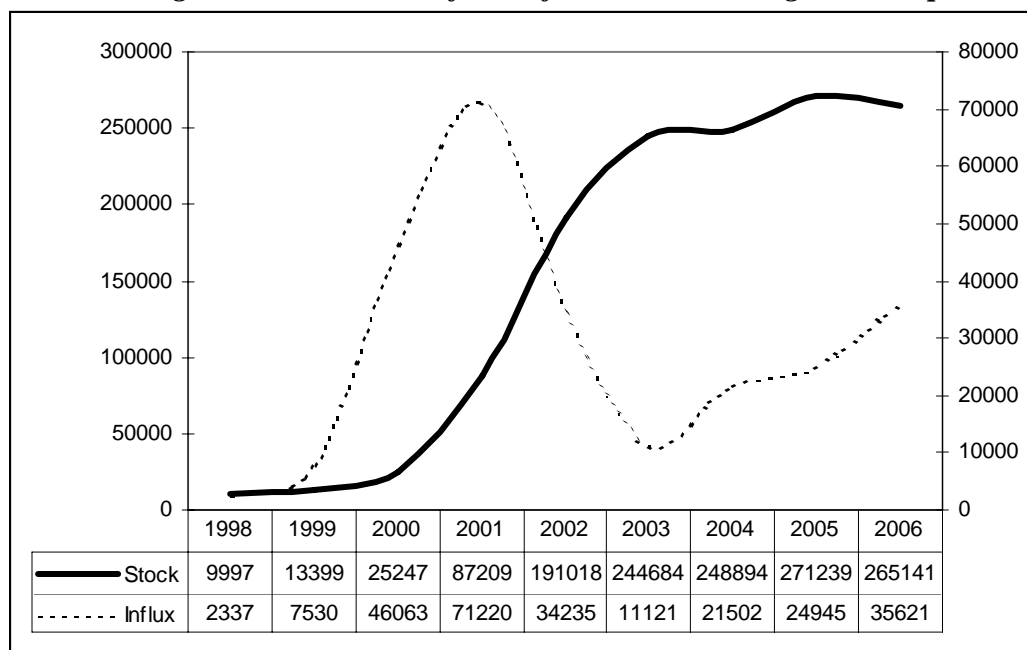
reunification. The transnational character of our object of study implies that our methodology is mainly of anthropological nature. Thus, the techniques of life histories, in-depth interviews and participant observation have been used in this research. We complement our study with a more demographic approach through the analysis of statistical data on Colombian migration to Spain –both inflow and stock- issuing from the National Statistics Institute of Spain (INE) and the National Administrative Statistics Department of Colombia (DANE).

Introduction

There are different versions of the history of Colombian foreign migration, but in general terms, the different sources coincide in highlighting (1) the existence of an initial and scarce inflow to Europe, the USA and border countries from the 1960's, (2) the intensification of the inflow to the USA in the 1980's, and (3) the massive migration from the middle 1990's to the USA and to Spain at beginning of the twenty-first century (Cárdenas and Mejía 2006; Guarnizo 2006). Most sources coincide in currently assigning Spain the second position in the ranking as destination country of Colombian emigrants, after USA.

At least since 1998, Colombian citizens have been arriving to Spain in large numbers. According to Spain's official records, 270.000 Colombians resided in the country by 2005. The figure below shows the evolution of these arrivals (inflow) and of the number of Colombians registered in Spain every year (stocks) by the first of January. The very intense growth period, which reached a peak in 2001, substantially decreased until 2003 and started growing again since then, although it has not reached again the levels registered in the years just before 2002.

Figure 1. Stocks and inflows of Colombian immigrants in Spain



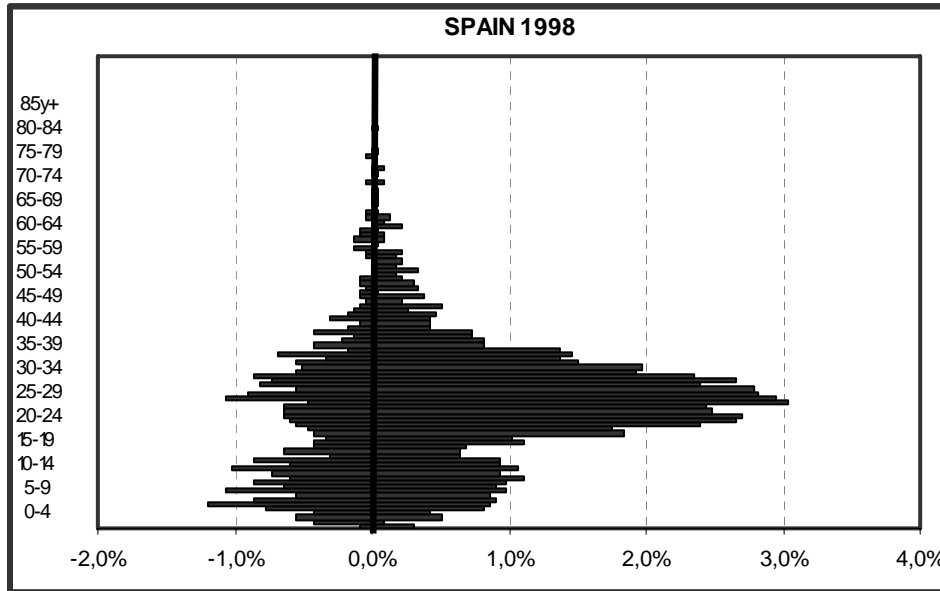
Source: INE, EVR 1998-2006 and PMH 1998-2006.

The implementation of the need for a visa for Colombian nationals to come into Spain is the most plausible explicative factor for the notable inflow fall in 2002. By January of 2002, Colombians were obliged to obtain a visa in order to enter into the Schengen Space, which significantly changed the ease with which they could come into Spain before. Before this date, they could come to Spain and remain here for three months as tourists by demonstrating some required conditions at the airport of arrival. After this date, tourist visas have to be previously obtained at the Spanish consulate, with a high probability of rejection. At present, the most frequently requested way in is through a residence permit with authorization to work, which requires a work contract in Spain, previous to arrival.

The main characteristics of Colombian inflow of immigrants into Spain had also changed over time. The inflow has become more heterogeneous, at least regarding age and sex composition. The remarkable transformation of the sex-age composition of Colombian inflow into Spain between 1998 and 2006 illustrates this fact: male participation has increased significantly and the proportion of population under 18 is

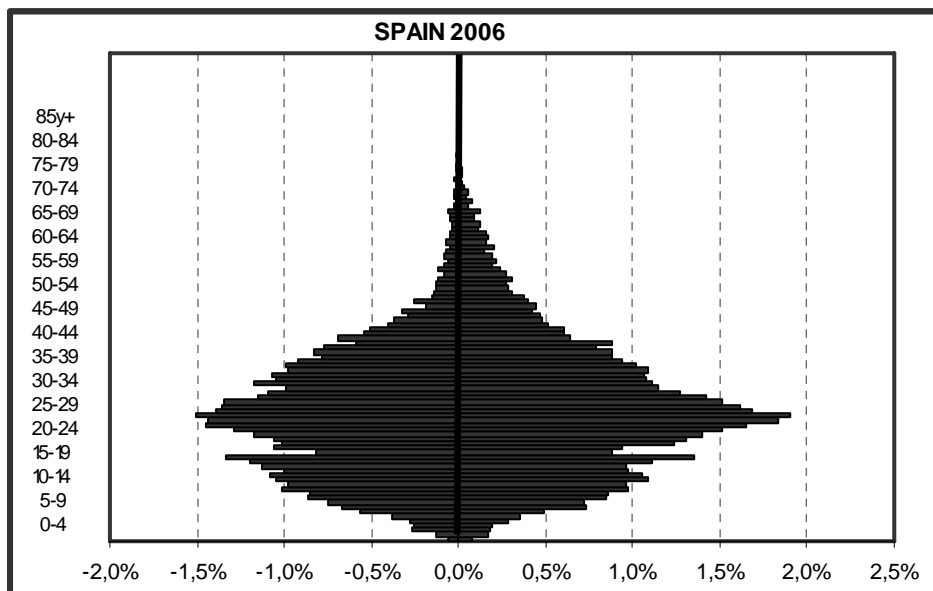
also much higher than at the beginning of the Colombian migratory surge (see Figures 2 and 3¹).

Figure 2. Sex-age distribution of Colombian migratory influx to Spain, 1998 (%)



Source: INE, PMH, 1998.

Figure 3. Sex-age distribution of Colombian migratory influx to Spain, 2006 (%)



Source: INE, PMH, 1998.

¹ We are aware that graphic representation in pyramids is normally used in demography to show the distribution of a population structure by sex and age, i.e. its stock, and the representation of immigration flows could lead to certain misunderstandings. However, we thought it was the best graphic representation to comparatively show and analyse the evolution of changes in the composition by sex and age of the annual Colombian immigration flow for the years 1998 and 2006.

Network theory

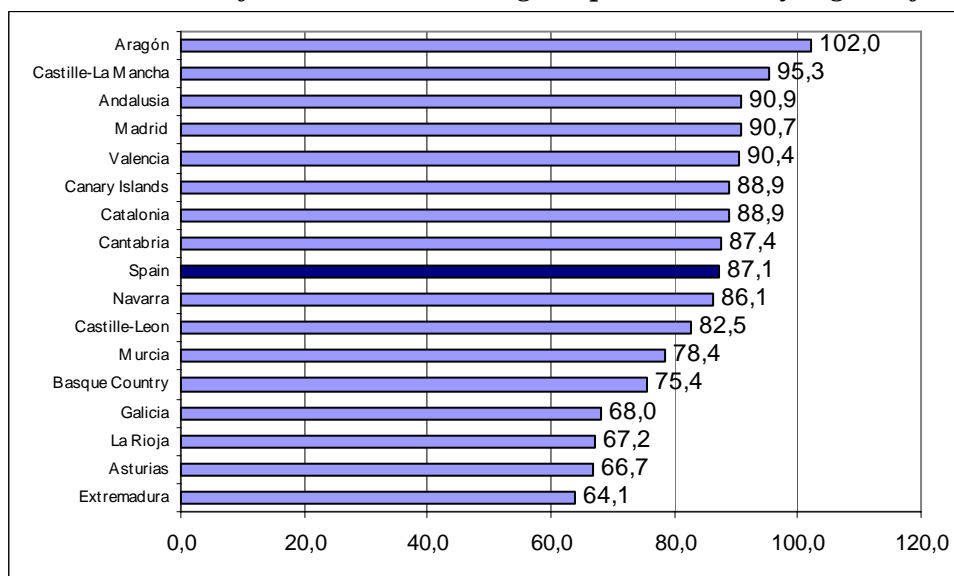
One of the most popular academic explanations for this phenomenon of migratory inflow diversification lies in network theory. According to this theory, by lowering the costs and risks of movement and increasing the expected net returns to migration, migrant networks (1) increase the likelihood of international movement, (2) overshadow the effects of other variables (such as wage differentials or employment rates), and (3) make the inflow of migrants less selective and more representative of the sending society. (Massey et al. 2005; Massey et al. 1993; Massey 1990; Fussell and Massey 2004; Boyd 1989; Curran et al. 2005).

Research on social networks takes sex composition of migration inflows into consideration basically through the analysis of family reunification process. Family reunification (legal or not, provisional or definitive) is one basic mechanisms by which migration-selectivity decreases in time. That is, through networks action, labor migration becomes family migration (Boyd 1989; Kandell and Massey 2002; cfr. Fussell and Massey 2004). Significant differences in the age-sex distribution between first and new migrants, should show the effect of family reunification (Gordon 2005).

However, other explanations to the diversification of inflow are possible. For instance, the evolution observed at a national level may be hiding the arrival of different labour-specific profiles. That is, diversification may be reflecting the superposition of different economic sectors' needs; each sector having its own distinctive demanded profile. So it may be that there is an increase of labour demand for very different types of immigrants, and not so much that already settled immigrants are making it easier for others to arrive. In other words, the segmented labour market may be becoming more heterogeneous.

We believe that important differences in the characteristics of the migrants arriving to the different regions of the receiving country can be considered evidence supportive of the labour market hypothesis and contrary to the network theory. And, indeed, there are remarkable regional differences in the Colombian inflow sex ratio, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 4. Sex ratios of Colombians arriving to Spain in 2006 by region of arrival



Source: INE, EVR, 2006. Authors' own elaboration of Micro-data archive.

Understanding profiles: the transnational mother

The more singular and homogeneous is a migration chain, the more it challenges network theory corollary that falling costs and risks of movement, stemming from the growth of migrant networks, overshadow other structural variables' influence on migratory flows. In our research on Colombian migration in Galicia, a relatively undeveloped region of Spain with a severely aged population and a very weak labour market, we came across a very common and specific profile of Colombian migrant – a woman at the head of a household with children and other dependent relatives back home. Given the costs and risks of the migratory strategy in such cases, these women represent the most tangible evidence of the strong desire to migrate, and posit an important challenge to all migration theories heavily reliant on the analysis of migration costs. They are known as “transnational mothers” in academic literature (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Erel, 2002; Schmalzbauer, 2004).

In Spain, single Colombian women are frequently associated with prostitution. Several of our informants have looked after the children of fellow countrywomen who work as travelling prostitutes throughout the country. We know that prostitution can be considered a market niche for Latin American immigrants and that some transnational mothers also work in this sector. However, in our compilation of life histories, a much

larger occupational niche was more outstanding --domestic service and looking after children and the elderly.

Basically, what our cases had in common was the working situation in destination and the family situation in origin. Their social status back home and their qualifications varied substantially, but our informants did not manage to overcome working in domestic service. Besides, they might have had one or various stable relationships in Colombia or in destination; but, for the most part, they were single parent heads of household. There were also some significant similarities in their migratory strategies and costs. Having someone to look after the children was the first condition necessary for undertaking the migratory project. The children were, at the same time, the main reason for emigrating and the main beneficiaries of the economic performance from the emigration of their mothers. It was almost always undertaken as a limited project in time, from between two to five years; but our informants pointed out that this timeframe was not enough to make profitable the decision to migrate. The desire to see one's children was hard to reconcile with the cost of the trip and the implicit legal problems as they were often illegal immigrants in Spain. But family reunification of children was not easy either. In Spain, only under 18's can be regrouped and the migrant has to provide a residence permit that has been valid for at least one year, a worthy home, and the economic means to provide for the children. In the case of Colombian legislation, regrouping children requires the permission of the father, which in many cases is not forthcoming. Together with slow bureaucratic processes this leads to the lengthening and consolidation of transnational families.

When we did the anthropological fieldwork for this research, we had no statistics about the prevalence of Colombian transnational mothers in Spain and we could not guess the relative weight of transnational motherhood in the observed inflow of women migrants. Since then, the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE) has given public access to a major survey on foreign immigrants in Spain. The data available allowed us to identify the "transnational mother" as the immigrant woman with at least one child 16 years or younger living in another country. In the next table we can see the approximate weight of Colombian transnational mothers in Spain by year 2007. They represent 17% of the total population of Colombian immigrant mothers in Spain. Of course, many others have been transnational mothers in their lifetime as immigrants, but these are not

detected by our variable. As the sample size by nationality seems to small to allow us to explore in detail the distinctive behaviour of Colombian transnational mothers, we prefer to show some results on transnational mothers in general, regardless of their national origin.

Table 1. Colombian immigrants in Spain by family situation

	Total (N=1031)	Women (N=691)
Percentage with living offspring	70,6	74,4
Percentage of transnational parents of total with living offspring	20,7	17,3
Percentage with no living offspring	29,4	25,6

Source: INE, ENI, 2007. Authors' own elaboration of Micro-data archive.

Like all immigrants arriving after 1990, the big majority of transnational mothers left their country with social networks established in Spain; but they stand out for the importance of friends in their network (see Table 2). Besides, significantly more than other immigrants, transnational mothers recognize the influence of others in their decision to migrate; but then, again, they stand out for the recognized influence of friends and neighbours (see Table 3). In other words, transnational motherhood shows to be, in large degree, a migration project beyond the traditional family project, and more dependent on social capital outside the family. If so, it may work through networks that perpetuate the profile instead of diversifying the inflow.

Table 2. Did you have someone to turn to when you arrived?

	Yes	Percentages of the total who declared having someone to turn to		
		Had family	Had friends	Had acquaintances
Immigrants with living offspring	80,0	70,4	28,8	7,7
Immigrants with no living offspring	81,7	67,4	32,3	8,5
Transnational parents	79,9	65,1	34,5	9,2
Transnational mothers	83,6	61,4	35,9	9,4
Total immigrants	80,6	69,3	30,1	8,0

Source: INE, EVR, 2006. Authors' own elaboration of Micro-data archive.

Note: This question was asked only to immigrants who arrived after 1990.

Table 3. Where you influenced by someone else in your decision to come to Spain?

	Yes	Percentages of the total who declared to be influenced	
		By a family member	By a friend or a neighbor
Immigrants with living offspring	49,0	75,5	24,4
Immigrants with no living offspring	49,4	74,3	26,1
Transnational parents	62,1	67,4	33,4
Transnational mothers	66,1	70,0	28,7
Total immigrants	49,1	75,1	25,0

Source: INE, EVR, 2006. Authors' own elaboration of Micro-data archive.

We also have some hints about transnational motherhood relevance in Colombian society. According to Colombian official statistics, the percentage of homes led by women increased from 22% in 1985 to 30% in 2005. On this last date, up to 26.6% of homes with a head of family aged between 15 and 29 are led by women; and 35.5% of women of this same age group, widows or separated, are heads of their homes (DANE, 2005). What could be considered the population base of our transnational mothers is a growing minority in Colombian society. Other studies reveal that the female headship in Colombia is essentially an urban phenomenon and is not strictly linked to the feminization of poverty (Fuentes Vásquez 2002; Buvinic 1991), which is perfectly compatible with Colombian migratory dynamics and with the associated costs of the migratory strategy in general.

Conclusion

Transnational motherhood challenges the analysis of migration networks' dynamics since it is about the family reunification that does NOT happen while it refers to very high migration costs that evidence the strong motivation to migrate as a starting point. Not much has been advanced about causes of this migration. The structural explanation usually focuses on the demand for female workers in destination, but that does not explain why do women with dependant children answer this call so frequently. We believe significant changes must be taking place in the social and family structure of the country of origin that make migration both possible and desirable for women in this phase of their life cycle.

Our ethnographic work, as well as our first exploration of the Spanish national survey on immigrants, drive us to the same general conclusions. Transnational mothers are a

persistent profile, within the inflow of Colombian immigrants in Spain, not necessarily associated with family network that may decrease migration costs. The profile responds, in large degree, to social networks linked to labour demand in destination –networks that are conveniently activated despite the high costs of this migration project.

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