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Socio-cultural invisibility and belonging: Latin American migrants in the north of England

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Abstract: This paper explores the multiple and simultaneous senses of belonging of Latin Americans in the north of England, a sparse migrant population characterised by a high degree of socio-cultural invisibility, i.e. lack of official recognition and limited cultural/ethnic organisation. It draws on a project conducted with 10 Latin American and Latino British families (totalling 30 adults and dependent children of 8-18 years of age) and 14 other informants and stakeholders in the Yorkshire and Greater Manchester regions. The paper analyses the senses of everyday belonging of the adult participants and the role that conditions of socio-cultural invisibility play in their experiences. Significant here are the lack of ethno-cultural local spaces and reluctance to embrace pan-ethnic identifications, which bring to the fore the relevance of other local social contexts and of transnational ties as sites of everyday belonging. It is argued that by paying attention to the emotions and emotional compromises that constitute migrants' senses of belonging, it is possible to develop nuanced insights into the diversity of ways in which migrants experience processes of incorporation and combine bonds to sending and receiving societies.

Key words: Latin Americans, England, socio-cultural invisibility, belonging, emotion, place attachment.

1. Introduction

Scholars have highlighted the salience of an emotional perspective to develop deeper understandings of processes of migration, settlement and incorporation (e.g. Dunn, 2010; Christou, 2011). The 'emotional turn' in geography has provided important insights into the relationships between people, places and spaces and has attested the importance of developing knowledge which takes into account how the human and social world is lived through emotions (e.g. Anderson and Smith, 2001; Davidson et al., 2005). However, as Antonsich (2010, 654) has pointed out, "although the literature on emotional geographies significantly contributes to exposing, elucidating and engaging the role of emotions in re-producing socio-spatial relations, it does not seem to have so far expressly addressed belonging, both in its meanings and performativity". That is, scholars have developed significant research into the interrelated individual senses of belonging ('place-belongingness') and its social/political sense (politics of belonging) (Mee and Wright, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2006 for overviews), but have paid less attention to the specific and varied emotions which may constitute sentiments of belonging or to the emotional processes which may lead to the development of these sentiments (cf. Waite and Cook, 2011).

This article aims to contribute to understandings of the sentiments of belonging through the case of Latin Americans in the north of England, a sparse migrant group characterised by a relatively recent history of settlement in their receiving localities and little cultural or ethnic organisation. I argue that by paying attention to the emotional ways in which this group of migrants made sense of their belonging(s) and affiliations, it is possible to develop a more nuanced understanding of the diversity of everyday processes through which migrants bond to their receiving societies. Restricting our approaches to full-scale expressions of collective identifications and group articulations of belonging would lead us to disregard the micro-expressions of individual attachment and emotional compromises that are involved in these

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processes. Equally, ignoring the intersection between personal senses of belonging and their social dimensions would restrict our understanding of how power structures and contextual conditions constrain or facilitate individuals' possibilities to belong (cf. Antonsich, 2010).

Next, I situate the present contribution within scholarship on migrant incorporation and belonging and introduce the project on which the article is based. The remainder of the paper discusses the findings of the research focusing firstly on the processes of adaptation and making of sameness described by the adult participants and, secondly, on their narratives around cultural identifications and belonging. I conclude by considering the insights that may be gained from focusing on the emotional geographies of belonging.

2. Migrants' processes of incorporation and senses of belonging

It has been suggested that paying attention to migrants' and ethnic minorities' senses of affiliation and belonging is essential if we are to comprehend processes of incorporation in all their complexity (e.g. Nagel and Staeheli, 2008; Ehrkamp, 2006). A focus on belonging has been considered crucial on at least two fronts. On the one hand, it provides deeper understandings of immigrants' and ethnic minorities' perspectives of their affiliations and notions of membership in their receiving societies; perspectives which are necessary if we are to comprehend the dynamics of social cohesion (inclusion and exclusion experiences) and how common senses of belonging may develop (Antonsich, 2010, 652). On the other, it has also been considered that a focus on belonging can illuminate how processes of incorporation and transnationalism (i.e. maintaining cross-border connections and practices) occur in simultaneous and not contradictory ways and how it can consist of multi-scaled and territorialised/non-territorialised attachments and affiliations (e.g. Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Nagel and Staeheli, 2008).

There is an increasingly rich scholarship focusing on aspects of belonging, illustrating the diversity of ways and scales across which it is possible to belong and the multiplicity of informal and formal expressions which belonging can take (Mee and Wright, 2009 772). Overall, empirical perspectives have helped to illuminate two intertwined analytical dimensions of belonging, which Antonsich (2010, 645) has recently defined as "belonging as a personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness) and belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)". In a simple way, the first dimension relates to the personal emotions of feeling in place and the second to the social aspect of being recognised as being in place or not (formally and informally); dimensions which are often co-dependent. Research which has used a belonging lens to look into the experiences of migrants and ethnic minorities has focused, for example, on transmigrants' homemaking strategies and how they actively develop complex notions of home and belonging which include different geographical locations and scales (e.g. Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Sheringham, 2013). Others have shifted their attention to the politics of belonging, by exploring the relationship between citizenship and belonging in the case of marginalised groups or the contested terrains of national belonging and its tensions between majority and minority perspectives (e.g. Ehrkamp, 2005; Bond, 2006).

Probyn's (1996) definition of belonging, which combines the aspects of *being* in place and *longing* to be in place, has proved highly influential for authors trying to establish the meaning of this concept and how it can be used to illuminate people's relationships and connections with their multiply scaled surroundings and the human and non-human objects that inhabit them (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Mee and Wright, 2009). Factors rooted in individuals' autobiographies, relationships, culture, economic backgrounds, legal status and length of

settlement, have been considered as playing an important role in people's ability to develop attachments to places and feelings of 'being at home' (Antonsich, 2010, 647). Nonetheless, these accounts often do not analyse the particular emotions that these attachments to (and feelings of) being or longing to be in place entail. It is not often considered either how these emotions are nurtured or hindered by wider politics of belonging or by the contextual conditions in which particular migrants live (e.g. significant or sparse presence of migrants with similar cultural or religious background). This article aims to contribute to this under-researched area by considering how a group of migrants, who live in conditions of socio-cultural invisibility, understand their day-to-day ways of belonging and the emotional processes by which they combine present and past senses of self.

As Svašek (2010, 868 italics in the original) has suggested, "it is useful to regard emotions as dynamic processes through which individuals experience and interpret the changing world, position themselves *vis-à-vis* others, and shape their subjectivities (…) The self, in this perspective, is (…) regarded (…) as a multiple, relational being-in-the-world that is captured by his or her surroundings, engaging with past, present and future situations." Therefore, emotional interactions and responses are important avenues of enquiry into processes of human mobility, displacement and emplacement (e.g. Waite and Cook, 2011). Building on this understanding of emotions and following Anthias (2006, 21), in this article I approach belonging as including not only acts of identification (formal or informal) but also as stemming from how someone feels in relation to the social world they inhabit and their experiences of inclusion and exclusion:

"Belonging is not only about membership, rights and duties (as in the case of citizenship), or merely about forms of identification with groups, or with other people. It is also about

the social places constructed by such identifications and memberships, and the ways in which social place has resonances with stability of the self, or with feelings of being part of a larger whole and with the emotional and social bonds that are related to such places" (Anthias, 2006, 21).

This approach to belonging allows for an exploration of the ways in which Latin American migrants in the north of England displayed feelings and notions of belonging in relation to their everyday practices and social spaces, and of the role that conditions of socio-cultural invisibility played in their experiences. Before considering these issues, the next section introduces the project on which the article is based.

3. Latin Americans in the north of England

The Latin American population to the British Isles has increased significantly since the 1970s and particularly in the last two decades (e.g. McIlwaine et al., 2011). A 2011 estimate indicated that there were approximately 186,500 Latin Americans in the UK (including second generation members), of whom 113,500 resided in London (McIlwaine et al., 2011, 15). The 2011 Census recorded a total population of 165,920 people born in Latin American countries living in the UK, 71% of them in London and the South East (National Records of Scotland, 2014; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2013; Office for National Statistics, 2012). The Census also provides an indication of the dimensions of the population in the north of the country (Yorkshire and the Humber, North West and North East of England) where only approximately 7% (11,705) of Latin Americans reside (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Nonetheless, these figures need to be approached with caution as 'Latin American' has not been recognised as an ethnic minority category in the Census (and many other official surveys in the UK), thus excluding later generation individuals (i.e.

descendants of Latin Americans born in the UK or in other countries) from population counts which rely on country of birth information. In addition, community organisations in London have highlighted a range of barriers preventing Latin American residents from participating in the Census, including low command of English, abstention due to lack of knowledge and overcrowded living conditions which make it likely that some families did not complete the forms (Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK, 2014).

Most of the existing research on Latin Americans in the UK (or particular national groups from Central and South America) has been based in London where, as has been pointed out, the majority of the population resides (e.g. Bermudez, 2010; James, 2005; McIlwaine et al., 2011). In addition, and due to the relative recent history of significant Latin American migration to the UK, there are few studies on the experiences of children and young people from this group (e.g. McIlwaine et al., 2011). The project on which this article is based aimed to start addressing these gaps in research, by considering the experiences of incorporation of Latin Americans and their children in the north of England. The project was conducted in the Yorkshire and Greater Manchester regions in 2009-2010 with five Latin American and five Latino-British family case studies (including all the adults and dependent children between 8-18 years of age), totalling 30 participants. Participants were recruited through non-for-profit and commercial initiatives such as a grass-roots magazine for Spanish speakers, conversation circles, specific cultural groups (e.g. Chilean Community in South Yorkshire - SCDA), and professional enterprises promoting Latin American culture, music and dance. By using purposive sampling and snowballing techniques, I selected a set of families which illustrates a range of national origins, socio-economic backgrounds and migration trajectories.

However, the hard-to-reach character of this sparse population and the focus of the research on the inclusion of second generation participants (over eight years of age who had resided in the UK for some time)[1] meant that I was more successful in recruiting families in longer settled and financially stable situations. Therefore, the research also included additional semi-structured interviews with nine informants and five stakeholders to complement the sample of families. Additional informants (two young single economic migrants, two asylum seekers, one refugee and two young families) helped to develop a more nuanced understanding of the diversity which characterises the Latin American population in Yorkshire and Greater Manchester. The stakeholders (two Latin American business owners interviewed together, two interpreters, a representative of a Chilean association and one evangelical pastor) provided a more detailed account of the existing cultural or support initiatives in these northern regions.

In this article, the focus is on the adult Latin American participants from the case studies: eight women and six men[2] (30 to 55 years of age). These participants had arrived in the UK as asylum seekers, economic migrants, students or as a result of marriage to a British citizen and had regular migration status (acquired British or Spanish citizenship, refugee status or Indefinite Leave to Remain). The sample included both long-term and more recent migrants (from 20+, 10+ to two years); six participants were employed in professional occupations, six in semi-skilled or unskilled jobs and two were family carers (both of whom spoke little English which made obtaining paid employment difficult). Each adult participant took part in several fieldwork activities: an in-depth individual interview (combining narrative and semi-structured approaches) to explore migration and settlement stories; a family diagram and a

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[1] The project was undertaken in collaboration with the Refugee Council UK and there was also an interest in exploring the experiences of Latin Americans who had arrived as asylum seekers.
[2] Participants were born in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras and Mexico.

relationships table to understand their personal (trans)national networks; and a semi-structured group interview with a biographical object which involved all the participant members of the family to explore cultural heritage and family values. Participants were free to choose Spanish or English during the fieldwork and, in this article, I have reproduced in normal font those passages that were spoken in Spanish and which I have translated, and in italics those which were originally spoken in English. All the names used (for adults and young people) are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

4. Incorporation as the making of sameness and everyday belonging

The situation of the Latin American population in the UK has, so far, been characterised by their lack of official recognition as an ethnic minority group, general unawareness of their presence in the country by the public at large and a limited number of cultural or community groups outside of London (e.g. Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK, 2014; McIlwaine et al., 2011). This socio-cultural invisibility is greater in the north of England, where low population numbers, geographical dispersal and a shortage of Latin American associations limit the opportunities that migrants from this region (who wish to do so) have to find and interact with fellow migrants in the localities in which they live. This contrasts with the official recognition (and public awareness) of the presence of longer established and larger migrant and ethnic minority populations from India, Pakistan, Africa and the Caribbean or, more recently, Poland (among others) in many cities of Yorkshire and Greater Manchester (e.g. Krausova and Vargas-Silva, 2013a; Krausova and Vargas-Silva, 2013b).

The controversial character of the pan-ethnicity Latin American also compounds dynamics of identification and misidentification with this construct among migrants born in Central and South American countries (Mas Giralt, 2013). The concept of Latin America has colonial

origins and there is disagreement on its definition (i.e. political, linguistic and ethnic or 'racial' boundaries) and on the external influences which may underpin its creation and that of related terms such as 'Latinos' or 'Hispanos' used mainly in the US (Gracia, 2000). Nonetheless, a sense of Latin American identity (with a diversity of understandings) has continued to exist across the region and among its migrant populations, who often use it strategically to be recognised politically in receiving societies (e.g. Roth, 2009; Larrain, 2000). This is the case in the UK, where community groups and migrants, mainly in London and many currently grouped through the Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK, have for long been campaigning to be recognised as an ethnic minority group in this country (Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK, 2014).

To try to counteract the colonial connotations of this term, I recruited participants who self-identified with the idea of Latin America in some way and it has been my aim to foreground their own understandings of the term. These understandings were varied and included perceptions that it was an identity externally imposed by the Western gaze, that it discriminated against indigenous and African American peoples or that, contrarily, it made reference exclusively to these groups. Mainly, though, it was perceived as a geographical origin category with certain cultural commonalities which embraces a multiplicity of national, ethnic and linguistic identities. These diverse perceptions had an impact on the degree of identification that participants had with fellow Latin Americans living in their localities and on their willingness to take part in community initiatives developed under this pan-ethnic term (see also Mas Giralt, 2013).

Furthermore, among many of the participants the 'invisibility' of Latin Americans was perceived as positive and as a signifier of the 'successful incorporation' and greater cultural

closeness (e.g. Christian background) of migrants from this region to British mainstream society (cf. Fortier, 2003). In fact, 'visibility' as a distinctive cultural or ethnic group was perceived as potentially dangerous as it could lead to processes of negative stereotyping of Latin Americans or Latinos, as has taken place in the US or Spain (e.g. Mas Giralt, 2013; Bulmer and Solomos, 2009). An additional concern among some participants, mainly those in more economically affluent situations, was that being considered a 'minority' could be understood as being a cultural and economic outsider (cf. Fortier, 2003; Mas Giralt, 2013). In line with these perceptions, many of the participants' narratives in relation to the ways in which they had found spaces or positions of belonging in their English localities focused on the efforts they had made to 'fit in' or to 'adapt themselves' to their new social environments.

The narratives and expressions that the participants used, therefore, echoed Nagel's (2009, 401 italics in the original) re-conceptualisation of assimilation "not only as a pattern of sameness but as a relational process of making sameness". Within such an approach, understanding assimilation involves considering how dominant groups establish which characteristics are relevant in terms of social membership, but also bringing to the fore "how immigrants are involved in the construction of assimilation – how they understand assimilation, how they perform it by presenting themselves in certain ways, and how, perhaps they contest the terms of assimilation set by dominant groups" (Nagel, 2009, 404). Importantly for the present case, this approach can capture how migrants negotiate sameness and difference through emotional and practical responses in spaces of day-to-day life.

For participants in this project, adaptation (or 'the making of sameness') was seen as a process which required time and conscious negotiation to learn the dominant social norms and conventions of their receiving society and to adjust their senses of selves to their new environments. The emotional dimension of this process found expression in how the participants narrated their senses of "everyday belonging" (Fenster, 2005, 243). Fenster (2005, 243 drawing on De Certeau 1984) defines this type of belonging "as a sentiment, which is built up and grows out of everyday life activities"; accordingly, "[b]elonging and attachment are built (…) on the base of accumulated knowledge, memory, and intimate corporal [everyday] experiences"; sentiments that, therefore, are multifarious and change over time. To a great extent, the processes of incorporation described by the participants involved developing these sentiments of connection, learning to know the places where they had settled, acquiring legal residential status and establishing social networks.

Participants described how, as they experienced their lives in the UK and as time passed, they became more attached to their host society, acquiring attitudes and ways of behaving in relation to those that they encountered in their surroundings. Furthermore, participants who had been living in the country for longer periods explained how they had internalised these everyday behaviours and ways of being, to the extent that they had become part of who they were, part of their memories and therefore their attachments or everyday belongings (cf. Richter, 2011). Karla (30s, Mexican – migration due to marriage to Briton, 10+ years' residence, children's main carer and part-time job in family business) explored this sentiment in the following extract.

> KARLA. (…) I'm living here and little by little you become a bit more English, you
>
> absorb the culture and little by little you give up things from your own culture that
>
> were, well, that were from the day to day.

Acquired attachments to the host country, however, were not expressed in terms of feeling complete belonging or identification but through emphasizing states of embodied lived experience, gratitude, contentment, comfort or no regrets in their present lives in the UK. These sentiments are meaningful because they provide a more nuanced picture of emotional ways in which migrants bond to the places where they have settled. For instance, Martina (50s, Spanish-Colombian – migration due to training/work opportunities, divorced mother, 20+ years' residence, professional job) emphasised the gratitude that she felt towards her host country because of the work and life opportunities she had had in the UK, and how this sentiment also expressed itself through her growing attachment to the place which had been her home for the last twenty years.

> MARTINA. (…) I feel a bit from this area, like the north of England [laughs]. It is simply
>
> that when the plane lands I feel like if I'm returning home (…). There are lots of
>
> excellent people, and I have been able to work, and I have been able to progress and
>
> I have been able to provide for my daughter, so in the end I am grateful because, I
>
> must be grateful, and the country little by little seeps into your soul.

Strategies of adaptation were not simply actions to fit in but implied emotional compromises. That is, sentiments of personal or familial need, achievement or fulfilment provided the basis for a compromise between letting go of past values and acquiring new ones. Ernesto (50s, Chilean – political refugee, divorced father, 20+ years' residence,

employed part-time in semi-skilled job) provided an example of this process of adaptation while reflecting on his own life and those of his Latin American acquaintances in the UK.

> *ERNESTO. (...) The kind of life that we've been given us Latin Americans, I think it's quite good actually because we had the time to study here, to work, to live, and we've lost a lot of our values as well and we found new values, so at the same time it's... I'm quite, I'm not, I have no regrets of how we came over here.*

For these participants, adaptation (or making sameness) was understood as becoming a full member of the settlement society; that is, not being classified primarily through an ethnic or migrant lens but through a multi-dimensional sense of social membership. As Anthias (2006, 21-22) has suggested: "Belonging is about experiences of being part of the social fabric and should not be thought of in exclusively ethnic terms. (...) It is important to relate the notion of belonging, therefore, to the different locations and contexts from which belongings are imagined and narrated, in terms of a range of social positions and social divisions/identities such as gender, class, stage in the life cycle and so on." From this basis, sameness, attachment and consequent everyday belongings among participants were negotiated through finding social spaces of belonging in their host society, including religious groups, professional statuses or common life course stages.

For instance, one of the most common locations of belonging discussed was related to a sense of shared Christian culture with the receiving society and, specifically, to its Roman Catholic expressions. When Paula (30s, Ecuadorian – asylum seeker granted Indefinite Leave to Remain one year before participation, married to Ecuadorian, 10+ years' residence, main carer for children) and her family were dispersed to one of the cities in the north by the National Asylum Support Service, they proceeded to utilise their Church support networks to

help them settle and look for a Catholic school for their children. In addition, these Church

support networks were the ones to help them find familiar spaces in their new city.

> PAULA. The Church helped me a lot when I came here [city in the north], because we
>
> use to go to a church in London and the priest knew us (…), and when we got here,
>
> he had called a nun and told me to count on the nuns here. I mean they sent
>
> someone to help me (…) and she showed us [the city] (…) those were the people that
>
> made us feel good and showed us the place…

Professional spaces and careers were also important sites of personal self-definition for

some participants. For instance, Marta (40s, Chilean – onward migration from Spain to marry

Briton, 10+ years' residence, mother, teacher) described herself in terms of her profession

which kept her connected to her language and culture and the related social world in which

she now felt comfortable, where she felt her life belonged.

> MARTA. (…) I like my career a lot, my profession, I say (…) I'm a teacher of Spanish (…)
>
> and after that I talk about my country (…) I like my work very much, and because of
>
> my work I'm in touch with a lot of people (…) I, now, here in England, well in this
>
> area, I feel more comfortable than in Chile; when I go to Chile is, I go visiting (…). And
>
> then I come here and my life is here.

However, participants also provided examples of how their ability to enact or claim certain

social positions had been constrained by the politics of belonging of their host society (cf.

Yuval-Davis, 2006). The following example, provided by Louise (30s, Chilean – temporary

migration for study reasons, married to Chilean, short-term migration – 2 years' residence,

mother, working part-time in retail sector while studying), illustrates how her own

perception as a white person had been disallowed by the 'racial order' into which she had

incorporated when settling in the UK. This disallowance had led her to re-imagine herself as non-white and to establish trans-ethnic affiliations with people from other minority backgrounds. As, at the time of participation, Louise considered her residence in the UK to be a short-term project, this meant that this 'disallowance' did not have significant impacts for her sense of self; instead, she highlighted it as an opportunity to have a different experience of 'being in the world'.

> LOUISE. (…) When we get together the ones who are not white [laughs], we get together to talk about the whites [laughs]. It's funny. Well, this category I've also recreated it here because before coming here, I didn't imagine myself not being white, because in my country I'm white [laughs] but when I'm here I'm not white, then I'm immediately part of the non-white forum.

Another example of the constraints imposed by their social context came from Susana (40s, Colombian – migration for study reasons and subsequent marriage to Briton, 20+ years' residence, divorced mother, professional job). Despite having developed sentiments of belonging to her settlement society and feeling attached to her neighbours, Susana explained having a lasting sense of non-belonging in certain aspects of her life. This seemed to be an internalised feeling of not 'fitting in' produced by the constant social reminder of being a foreigner, of being 'other'.

> SUSANA. (…) You always have a certain level of disagreement or *discomfort* because one does not fit in society's expectations; you are always looked at as an stranger, as a foreigner.

Overall, the process of adaptation (of making sameness) which the participants reported was eased by finding spaces or locations of belonging from which to develop multiple situated

and relational senses of self. However, as Antonsich (2010, 650) has pointed out , "even assuming that one person is willing to assimilate, there might always remain other dimensions (e.g. place of birth or skin color) which would prevent full sameness and, therefore, expose that person to discourses and practices of socio-spatial exclusion". The examples provided above show how efforts to make sameness are constrained by local politics of belonging and its ways of seeing difference. As I explore next, however, the senses of everyday belonging that the participants expressed also included simultaneous affiliations and attachments to cultural identifications, families, past experiences and places left behind.

5. Cultural identifications and belonging in conditions of socio-cultural invisibility

Participants often displayed essentialised notions of national identities in their narratives of adaptation to the receiving society to avoid any potential misunderstanding regarding the enduring recognition of their emotional attachments to family and places left behind. For instance, they continued to describe their national identity in terms of their country of origin or, mainly in the cases where they had acquired British citizenship, as hyphenated combinations of origin and host country. It was a type of personal 'strategic essentialism' used not for the purpose of collective action but in order to defuse potential charges of denying or betraying their origins (e.g. Noble, 2009). Essentialised identities were constructed on notions of having been born, having grown up and having lived most of their formative lives in their countries of origin. Additionally, familial bonds (sometimes articulated as blood ties or roots) also figured prominently in these accounts.

For example, Juanjo (40s, Spanish-Honduran – onward migration from Spain for economic reasons, married to Honduran, father, 2 years' residence, skilled manual job) presented his Honduran national identity in very emphatic way (although he held Spanish citizenship – his

father was Spanish and Juanjo claimed this citizenship after migrating to Spain from

Honduras):

> JUANJO. I am Honduran, I am Honduran, I will be Honduran until the day I die. I was
>
> born in Honduras, I grew up in Honduras, I have made most of my life in Honduras
>
> and… well, definitively yes, I feel Honduran. Yes…

Many of these accounts were also connected to memories of experiences and places where

participants had grown up and/or lived significant parts of their lives. Fenster (2005, 248)

suggests that "[m]emory in fact creates and consists of a sense of belonging". Memory, in

this sense, includes short and long term dimensions with the latter "consist[ing] of an

accumulation of little events from the past, our childhood experiences, our personal

readings and reflections on specific spaces, which are associated with significant events in

our personal history. Such memories build up a sense of belonging to those places where

these events took place" (Fenster, 2005, 248). A great deal of the participants' narratives

included this dimension of memories as being an intrinsic part of their sense of self, as for

instance this description provided by Marta (40s, Chilean – onward migration from Spain to

marry Briton, 10+ years' residence, mother, teacher) when she was talking about her efforts

to keep in touch with events in her native Chile.

> MARTA. (…) I think, more than anything it is because it makes me feel that, although I
>
> live here comfortably, I don't complain, well there is something of me that it is
>
> there… or that makes me feel that I belong to [Chile], that I'm not always, because I
>
> wasn't born here, and it reminds me of my times when I was young and Pinochet was
>
> in power, and the demonstrations, and throwing stones in the street, because I have
>
> that, I have it very present too.

The family diagrams and interviews that I undertook with the participants often illustrated the continued importance of the bonds with family members left behind (or living in third countries); most participants continued to maintain and nurture these relationships through regular communication and visits (cf. Baldassar, 2008). The biographical objects chosen by the participants and their families brought to the fore the relevance of their transnational relationships for their senses of belonging. A clear example came from Honduran household 3 – see Julia below (40s, Honduran married to Spanish-Honduran Juanjo quoted above, 2 years' residence, mother, children's main carer) – who chose a miniature Honduran flag which had been given to the family by the maternal grandmother. This object acted as a material reminder of the family's connection to Honduras and reproduced this location of belonging for the young members in the household.

> JULIA. (…) Well yes, obviously, the fact of remembering the country, and then you recall familial things, things that one left there, and all that, don't we? (…) and mainly because of the fact that she gave it to us, don't you think? (…) To tell us not to forget our roots ever, because when time goes by, mainly for them who are younger, so that they don't forget (…).

However, the effectiveness of memories and transnational bonds to nurture senses of everyday belonging to the places left behind sometimes proved insufficient to counteract the effects of spatial and temporal dislocation brought about by migration. In this sense, the invisibility of Latin Americans and scarcity of cultural groups in the north of England can be understood as limiting the local opportunities that migrants, who wish to find and interact with fellow Latin Americans, have to nurture senses of everyday belonging to places of origin or to reproduce them for their children. For instance, participants highlighted that it was

difficult to celebrate national or cultural festivities locally because of the lack of fellow

migrants with whom to 'get together' (in contrast to religious festivities which were

considered very similar to those marked by the Anglican Christian calendar). Mauricio (30s,

Mexican, married to Mexican, 5 years' residence, father, professional job) explained this

situation:

> MAURICIO. (…) Well, celebrations such as [Mexican] Independence Day and similar
>
> things; you don't have anyone with whom to celebrate them, so then it is difficult
>
> (…). I think that if we could, we would do it, if there was a little community, but us
>
> alone…

In his study of the times of migration, Cwerner (2001) explores several temporal dimensions

which characterise the lives and experiences of migrants. One of these dimensions is what

he calls "asynchronous times" (Cwerner, 2001, 22) which refers to the time differentials (in

relation to time zones but also calendar events) between migrants' sending and receiving

societies. Transnational communications, he continues, have allowed contemporary

immigrants to be able to "extend the temporality of the nation to their communities

abroad" in a fashion not possible before (Cwerner, 2001 22). An additional "strategy of

resynchronisation" relies on local migrant organisations and groups, which by bringing

together fellow immigrants may be able to "insert their own highlights into the calendar of

the host society" (Cwerner, 2001, 22).

Overall, Latin Americans in the north of England have limited opportunities to develop these

types of collective celebratory practices. Although longer-term residents highlighted that

these types of celebrations became less significant as years went by, they did see the lack of

opportunities to mark these occasions collectively as a shortcoming when trying to pass their

cultural heritage and customs onto their children. Karla (30s, Mexican – migration due to marriage to Briton, 10+ years' residence, children's main carer and part-time job in family business) emphasised this difficulty:

> KARLA. (...) How can you tell your son, your children that this is your culture? Because this is your culture, part the cooking, part the sitting all around the table to eat, part of, all this is your culture. It is not only about history, it is very difficult to pass all this on in a place where it is not the custom.

The scarcity of opportunities of interaction among Latin Americans in the north can also be understood as a limitation for migrants and their children to undertake "collective performances of belonging" (Fortier, 2000, 6). Fortier has suggested that "[c]onceiving identity as performative means that identities are not reducible to what is visible, to what is seen on the body, but, rather, that they are constructed by the 'very "expressions" that are said to be [their] results'" (Butler 1990, 45 quoted in Fortier, 2000, 6). Despite Latin American migrants engaging to a greater or lesser extent with notions of ethnicity or panethnicity once in Western countries; so far and in the case of the north of England, there have not been the conditions (number of people and political will) to appropriate and construct collective understandings of this identity. In addition, the small numerical size of specific national groups has also undermined collective expressions of belonging which rely on particular national or other imaginaries.

Although most participants expressed ambivalent sentiments towards the prospect of having local Latin American (or nationality based) cultural groups and associations, related to how they perceived being 'too visible' as a minority ethnic group; for a few, this invisibility limited their ability to develop stronger senses of local belonging. For instance, those

households which had settled more recently or found themselves in more precarious situations (financially or due to their recent asylum seeking background) experienced the lack of the presence of support groups and informal shared spaces more intensely. This was the case of the members of household 4 – see Pablo below (30s, Ecuadorian, married to Ecuadorian Paula, 10+ years' residence, father, working part-time in an unskilled job) – who had lived for a few years in London before being dispersed to the north. Despite having received their leave to remain status and having decided not to return to London (which the parents considered less safe for their children and a more expensive place in which to live), the memories of a sense of Latin American presence in the capital figured strongly in the shortcomings which they saw in their current place of residence.

> PABLO. Erm, I don't like it much really because, I mean… we like it, we like it, the town and the whole city, all but, it's only that we feel a bit… like… alone, because of the fact that there isn't that same, that, Latin warmth, that… (…) in London there is lots of food, a lot of people that… a lot of Latin restaurants (…) It is a contrast, and there, they sell Latin things in London that other Latinos bring, but here there is nothing like that…

This household's position foregrounds the significance that local 'places of belonging' may acquire for some migrants to be able to 'perform' collective understandings of their cultural identities as well as to recognise their presence in the social landscapes of their host society (e.g. Ehrkamp, 2005; Gowricharn, 2009; Fortier, 2000). However, this lack of local ethnified sense of community did not play a role in the majority of participants' accounts, as they had always resided (or had chosen to live) in localities with extremely sparse fellow national or Latin American networks. Thus, many participants expressed much more relativistic

attitudes towards their multiple senses of belonging and made use of "fluid spatial and temporal imaginaries" to negotiate their circuits of identification and nurture feelings of everyday belonging both to local and transnational people and places (Mas Giralt and Bailey, 2010, 392). Martina (50s, Spanish-Colombian – migration due to training/work opportunities, divorced mother, 20+ years' residence, professional job) summarised this approach:

> MARTINA. (...) *I'm less attached to things somewhat, and I think that there is a bit of sense of freedom in that and I like my brother that he says, he studied, he wanted to be an astronomer so he did study the stars for some time and he, he says that as long as he looks at the stars he knows where he is, so it's, it's something like that, it's just we found ways of relating to the place where we are and to feeling part of it and not losing the dimension of where we come from (...) and that's it.*

For Martina and most participants, incorporating to their localities has involved a relational and emotional process of becoming 'part' of a place/society while continuing to sustain multiply scaled attachments to social locations, memories, people and places left behind.

6. Conclusion

This article has focused on the ways in which Latin American migrants in the north of England narrated and constructed notions of belonging within the conditions of socio-cultural invisibility which characterise the places where they live. As has been shown, in the case of these participants, incorporating to their receiving society involved not only the practical negotiations of "making sameness" (Nagel, 2009, 403) but also a range of emotional compromises. These processes of adaptation, in turn, were helped by finding 'familiar' contexts and social locations from which to develop multiply situated senses of

self, including Catholic networks, professional roles or life course related contexts. These accounts also uncovered the ways in which the politics of belonging of the host society constrained migrants' ability to join or claim certain social locations (e.g. whiteness).

These findings illuminate the significance of Anthias' (2006, 21-22) suggestion to consider notions of belonging as not only being related to forms of identifications and memberships but also to experiences and sentiments associated with other locations and contexts of the social fabric. For example, the expressions of contentment, gratitude, comfort and compromise of the participants provided a window into the everyday emotional ways in which migrants bond to their society of settlement. These emotional bonds may be related to a diversity of social locations and life experiences, including ethnic or cultural affiliations but not limited to them.

In addition, participants' accounts of the ways in which they continued to feel attached to transnational places and people highlighted that simultaneous senses of belonging are fluid and multiply scaled. Participants' opportunities to nurture simultaneous everyday senses of belonging to cultural identifications and to transfer them to their children were potentially curtailed by conditions of socio-cultural invisibility. For a minority, the lack of a local ethnified sense of community undermined their ability to recognise their presence in their social surroundings. Many others, however, faced this situation with more relativistic attitudes finding ways to feel part of the places where they lived while continuing to engage with past and transnational bonds.

The findings of this project strongly indicate that there are important insights to be gained from paying further attention to the emotional geographies of belonging (cf. Anthias, 2006; Waite and Cook, 2011). Simultaneous incorporation (combining local and translocal lives,

Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004) is a process which involves a great range of emotions related, for example, to dislocation, separation, mobility, emplacement and incorporation (cf. Svašek, 2010). Developing more nuanced understandings of these diverse emotions can provide insights into how migrants and their descendants combine emotional attachments and affiliations to local and transnational locations which are fluid, complex and yet not necessarily incompatible. These understandings can underpin policy responses which recognise the diversity of expressions that belonging can take and the relational dimensions which nurture or undermine migrants' efforts to belong.

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