

# The role of Gender, Race, and Class in Transnational Political Movements: Mexican and Colombian Women Engaging in Homeland Politics from Europe's Capital

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# Introduction

- Mexico: over 150,000 people intentionally killed since 2006 (Open Society Foundations 2016).
- Colombia: the conflict resulted in the death of more than 300,000 people, 400,000 refugees and almost 4 million internally displaced persons (UNODC 2012).

The security concern from both countries has triggered the political and social mobilization of Mexican and Colombian migrants from abroad (Gonzalez Villareal, 2015).

General gap in the literature that could explain how individuals' intersectional translocations (Anthias, 2016) affecting their transnational political mobilization.-

Social movement studies:

- highlight the political grievances that motivate people to act collectively (Tarrow 1998; Tilly and Tarrow 2007), and
- the social psychological factors that catalyze political activism (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2010).

# Objectives of the chapter

Unpack the role of Mexican and Colombian women engaging in transnational political activism in Brussels using the theoretical framework developed by Van Hear and Cohen (2016) to study the way migrant women interact and sustain transnational political activism both in public and private spaces.

Introduce an intersectional approach in transnational political studies.

# Methods

- ▶ Ethnographic work including 17 biographical interviews and 34 months of participant observation (Wedeen 2010, Herbert 2000, Bayard De Volo 2009, DeWalt and DeWalt 2011).
  
- ▶ **Ethnography**
  - Useful method for uncovering the processes and meanings that sustain and motivate social groups (Herbert 2000).
  - Useful to discuss delicate subjects such as violence and insecurity
  - Appropriate to study populations whose voices are not well presented in the dominant discourse (Bayard De Volo 2009 :227).

# The household/extended family sphere

*“ I know I’m not getting anything out of this. I help organize parties to help our brothers and sisters in Syria, Irak, wherever they need me. However, I do this mostly for my children so that they would be proud of their momma. This one [her son] helps me out doing all the graphic work for the organization since he is a graphic designer. They often come with me to the meetings and try to do their own things.”*

(Alejandra, Brussels, 21-10-2014)

# The known community sphere

*“ My view is that one can help others with money but that’s not everything. Simply sending money from abroad doesn’t solve problems. I used to be involved in this group that sent money for farmers affected by the armed conflict in Colombia. We got together to raise funds but also to give people a collective consciousness. They needed it to realize that even if they were “economic” migrants they had a connection to those suffering from the conflict. I believe what’s political it’s economic”*

*(Alejandra, Colombian, 21-20-2014)*

# The imagined community

*“ I’m an inhabitant of this planet. I fight for a fair and real socialist society. I can keep fighting from social justice wherever I’m. I also do a lot of work with migrant associations and other associations that work to raise awareness on various issues in Latin American. I also informally help those who are coming from Syria or elsewhere. I make no difference. Here in my organization we are from all corners of the planet. We just want to make a difference.”*

*( Alejandra, 10-05-2017)*

# Theoretical Contributions

- ▶ We present an innovative bottom-up approach to dig into the individual choices and characteristics that trigger transnational activism.
- ▶ Analysis of women initiating and sustaining transnational political activities.
- ▶ Our third theoretical contribution in the field of social movements lies on the incorporation of theoretical elements of intersectionality in the analysis of transnational political movements.



# Conclusions

- ▶ In order to deeply understand the dynamics behind transnational political engagement, it is important to consider and unpack the individual level of analysis.
- ▶ The empirical evidence of this research suggests that the role of migrant women in transnational political activism is shaped by their personal experiences; political values and expectations; and by their personal political opportunities.
- ▶ This chapter highlights the importance to recognize socially constructed categorizations (e.g. race, class, and generation) as key determinants in the consolidation of women's political behaviour, political interests, and thus in their transnational political engagement.

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