

Demonstrating ethnicity and social class: the Colombian-Lebanese in Bogota

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The Colombian-Lebanese community has existed in Bogota since the turn of the 20th century, a time when many Lebanese and Middle Easterners in general were migrating to the Americas. This group of migrants was not homogenous, and their background, settlement and development in the host countries took them through different paths. Whilst some assimilated into the local societies, losing their connection to their ancestral homeland, others maintained their Lebanese identity, forming a dual home-host sense of belonging. The active Colombian-Lebanese community in Bogota is made up of first to fourth generation individuals, of upper and middle-class families. As seen below, the socio-economic composition of the community is due to the societal structures in Colombia and to the community's own exclusionary practices, and their organisations, events and activities are conducted within the channels provided by their elite position. They have created different types of organisations in order to promote their ethnic identity, strengthen their sense of belonging within the community, and reinforce their social status in the local society, a pattern that is similarly replicated by other Lebanese diasporic communities in Latin America.

This chapter looks into the visible and active Colombian-Lebanese community, their organisations and events, and draws on ethnographic research carried out in Bogota from 2008 to 2013, including interviews conducted with members of the communityⁱ and participant observation of their events. It focuses specifically on the participation of the Colombian-Lebanese community in two public demonstrations – events where these upper and middle-class Colombian-Lebanese were able to play with their ethnic and social class identities, within specific elite spaces. I build on Alfaro-Velcamp's (2013) argument that these elite individuals have used their Lebaneseness as a mark of foreignness to strengthen their position in society. I demonstrate that the Colombian-Lebanese have multiple expressions of citizenship, which they see as complementary to each other. They actively portray their foreignness as a way of maintaining their privileged foreign status in society - the more they connect their ethnicity with aspects of upper-middle class status, the stronger claim the community

has to keep their privileged status; and, in addition, their elite status allows them to make collective demands that benefit the community as a whole. Moreover, by keeping their events and organisations within elite spaces, the Colombian-Lebanese are also restricting the participation of non-elite individuals and effectively creating an obstacle to their potential expressions of citizenship. These arguments can be extrapolated to other Latin American countries where elite Lebanese/Arab diasporas exist.

Foreign citizens and desired immigrants

The Lebanese have migrated to the Americas since the late 1800s, with the largest waves being registered until the 1930s and during the Lebanese Civil War (1970s-80s), and continue to do so in smaller numbers. Large numbers settled in Latin America, with countries like Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Colombia receiving the largest share. The reasons for their migration are varied and include economic hardship, avoidance of military conscription, the search for new opportunities, and the influence of friend and family networks (see Salibi 1965; Hitti 1967; Klich 1992; Issawi 1992; Humphrey 1998; Traboulsi 2007). It is difficult to know the exact number of Lebanese that travelled to Latin America or to Colombia as there are no reliable migration records. Estimates of the current population of Lebanese descendants in Colombia vary from around 50,000 in 1992 (Fawcett 1992) to over one million in 2011 (Carrillo and Cuevas 2011). Regardless of the exact number, they were numerous enough to allow them to sustain local communities, but not to create a minority group in the country.

The authors above, and my own participants, relay similar stories about the settlement and development of these Lebanese migrants, where many were economically successful and upwardly mobile. Friend and family networks made it easier for them to earn money and set up businesses. The profits made allowed them to send their children to university, and a large number of wealthier second-generation Lebanese descendants became lawyers, doctors and engineers. Many of them married into wealthy local families, further influencing their upward social mobility, in some cases reaching the top of the economic and/or political elite. Indeed, examples of their rise and success socially, financially and politically have been documented by several authors in different geographical contexts in Latin America, including Colombia

(Fawcett and Posada-Carbo 1992; Vargas and Suaza 2007), Brazil (Karam 2007), Mexico (Alfaro-Velcamp 2007), Chile (Bray 1962), and Ecuador (Bejarano 1997). An example of this can be seen with the political influence of individuals of Lebanese descent in Colombia, including Gabriel Turbay – a former senator and presidential candidate in 1946; Julio Cesar Turbay – former minister, ambassador and 25th president of Colombia (1978-1982) (Vargas and Suaza 2007); as well as many other city mayors, senators, congressmen and government ministers (Di Ricco 2014). Indeed, Fawcett and Posada-Carbo (1992) estimated that in 1992 at least 11% of Colombian senators had Lebanese ancestry. Individuals of Lebanese, and generally of Arab descent, also reached the highest positions of power in other Latin American countries, including: Carlos Menem in Argentina (1989-1999); Abdala Bucaram and Jamil Mahuad in Ecuador (1996-1997; and 1998-2000); Carlos Flores of Honduras (1998-2002); Antonio Saca of El Salvador (2004-2009); and Michel Temer of Brazil (2016-incumbent). It is important to note, however, that these individuals did not reach these positions by playing on their ethnic heritage, but rather through political, ideological and policy means.

As time passed and the diasporic community developed, some families retained close connections to the ethnic community throughout the years, some families kept faint links, and others lost them completely. Alfaro-Velcamp (2013) explains this by theorising that different groups of migrants were considered as more or less desirable by the receiving Latin American countries. As such, white European and North American migrants were considered more desirable than black or East Asian migrants. She argues that the former ‘desirable’ migrants found it easier to maintain their ethnic identity and foreign status, and even share elite spaces with the local middle and upper classes. However, the latter ‘undesired’ migrants were more likely to be discriminated against, found it hard to succeed and were forced to assimilate fully into the local society in order to diminish their undesirability, losing their ties with their ethnic and cultural identities. According to Alfaro-Velcamp, the Lebanese migrants found themselves in an ambiguous position, as their precedence and phenotype did not clearly place them in either category – instead belonging to an ambivalent category which she terms “foreign citizens”, framed by their socio-economic success, and that of their ancestors. She argues that the first generation of Lebanese migrants had to show signs of acculturation into the local society in order to

succeed, and the results of this acculturation affected the later generations. The descendants of those that were financially successful were able to create a hybrid identity between their Lebanese cultural ethnicity and the local identity, felt more comfortable publicly performing their hybridity, and similarly to the ‘desired’ migrants, began sharing spaces with the local elite. However, the descendants of those that were not financially successful had to assimilate into the local society, just as the descendants of the ‘undesired’ migrants had to do, eventually losing their ties and belonging to their Lebanese identity. These ideas of selected acculturation, assimilation and economic success link to the notion that in Latin America ‘whiteness’ is connected with wealth, where the elite centres of power are considered as more ‘white’ (Wade 2000), where whiteness is seen as coming from a “good family” (Chua 2003:69), and where “the poor are often identified as non-white” (Alcantara 2005:1667). Just as the European and North American migrants benefited from the racialisation of socio-economic status due to their phenotype, the descendants of successful Lebanese migrants, whose phenotype was not necessarily white nor non-white, benefited from the wealth their ancestors created, as it made them ‘whiter’ and more ‘desirable’ than their less wealthy counterparts.

As the Lebanese migrants and especially their descendants became part of the local elite, their social circles, the locations of their homes, the schools and universities they attended, and their spaces of socialisation, became the same as those of other members of the elite. They also set up a number of social, economic, political, charitable, and religious organisations that worked alongside, and sometimes rivalled, the already established elite organisations. These Lebanese organisations have helped them reinforce their common identity as well as maintain their elite status, validating their position as “foreign citizens”. As it is explained below, the participation in the Colombian-Lebanese community, its events and activities, including those of a political nature, are tightly connected to their particular socio-economic status. This is the case not only for Colombia, but elsewhere in Latin America too as similar attitudes can be seen in Mexico – where Alfaro-Velcamp’s study was based, as well as in Brazil (Karam 2007), Chile (Agar-Corbinos 2009), Ecuador (Bejarano 1997) and Peru (Bartet 2009), among others. Indeed, by portraying their ethnic identity within elite spaces, these wealthy Colombian-Lebanese are highlighting their ‘desirable foreignness’ to the local society, validating their citizenship from an elite position,

whilst distancing themselves from ‘less desirable’ status and segregating from non-elite individuals.

In Bogota, there are a number of Colombian-Lebanese organisations, including a social club, a political and cultural organisation, a charitable association, a chamber of commerce, and a Christian Maronite Parish. Of importance for this chapter are the former two: the social club, called *Club Colombo-Libanés*, and the political and cultural organisation, called *The World Lebanese Cultural Union – Colombia Chapter* (or ULCM for its acronym in Spanish). They help set the context to explain the political participation of the Colombian-Lebanese in public protests, including the initiatives to meet their collective demands, their exclusionary practices, as well as the importance of the interaction of their socio-economic status and their ethnic identity, for their positioning within Colombian society.

The Club Colombo-Libanés

Mostly referred to by my participants simply as ‘the Club’, the *Club Colombo-Libanés* is a relatively small, private social club located in a prestigious upper-class neighbourhood in the north of the Bogota. The Club has been the ethnic and social centre of the Colombian-Lebanese since its foundation in the 1950s, and the other Colombian-Lebanese organisations use its facilitiesⁱⁱ for their events. It is a constructed Colombian-Lebanese ethnic and social space, where the Colombian-Lebanese often perform their ethnic and social identities. In theory, the Club is a members-only establishment, however, many its facilities are available to non-members as well, as they can be invited as guests and the spaces can be privately rented for events. In this sense, the Club has a dual capacity, as a social and ethnic space for the Colombian-Lebanese, and as a business space for private hire. Even though its name has an ethnic connotation, its exclusivity makes it practically inaccessible to any working-class Lebanese migrants or descendant, and it is more likely to see middle and upper-class non-Lebanese Colombians visit the Club, as guests of Colombian-Lebanese members or as private renters.

There may be different reasons for the foundation of the Club. Firstly, Wade (2000:68) states that in Colombia “class identity was expressed powerfully through the creation of elite social clubs”, so the Colombian-Lebanese could have been trying to live up to

their “foreign citizen” status by founding a social club. However, Fawcett and Posada-Carbo (1998:27) argue that the Lebanese migrants founded their own social clubs after being denied membership at more established elite social clubs. If they were denied entrance, it means some sectors of society may not have accepted them at the time as part of the elite. At the same time, my participants stated the Club was created to provide a gathering space for the Lebanese migrants and their families, but that its small size is because it has to compete with other elite social clubs in terms of membership. In fact, many Colombian-Lebanese are members of other social clubs in Bogota, country social clubs and city social clubs. Therefore, the reasons for its foundation are likely to combine these sentiments. It is possible the club was founded in a period when the Colombian-Lebanese were still hanging on the balance between being considered ‘desirable’ or ‘undesirable’, so were not accepted into already established elite social clubs. The community then decided to create a place of gathering to foster a sense of belonging and a safe space for ethnic identification, whilst also actively portraying their rising socio-economic status. Then, as time went by and the Colombian-Lebanese climbed the social ladder, they became more ‘desirable’ and as such were able to join those other elite social clubs that their parents or grandparents were not able to join.

The Club relocated to its current premises in 1967, from the socio-economically mixed centre of the city into the wealthier north, a move that further suggest their transition into ‘desirability’. They moved into a large house in the prestigious *Chicó* neighbourhood, surrounded by other large traditional houses and nearby traditional and international schools (the *Lycée Français* less than 200 meters away). From the outside, there are few clues as to the nature of the place: it is surrounded by a white wall and fence, with tall trees peering over from the inside garden, and patrolled by security guards (as most building in the area). The Club looks like a traditional *Chicó* grand house from the 1960s. The only clues to it are a small sign on the entrance that has the club’s name and a cedar tree; and the Colombian and Lebanese flags, which are hoisted high within the walls. Only a careful observer would notice these clues and for the most part, it blends within the neighbourhood. Some of these houses have disappeared from the area, and stylish modern building stand in their place. Therefore, from the outside, the Club stands more as a reminder of the traditional past of the neighbourhood, than as an ethnic Colombian-Lebanese space.

All of these factors suggest that the Club can be described as an “allowed space” (Montero Diaz 2014:53) for the Colombian-Lebanese, where they feel “safe and comfortable, where they can avoid being discriminated against and can distance themselves from people ‘not like them’, who they consider different ethnically, socially, culturally or by class.” Indeed, this “allowed space” is used for both as a sense of security for the group as well as a tool for segregation from others (Montero Diaz 2014). They can meet, behind closed doors and inside high walls, where they are not disturbed or questioned if they perform their ethnicity, and where they can feel safe. At the same time, the club is also an exclusionary space, not easily accessible to those without the socio-economic means or connections, who would be unlikely to access it and could be barred from entering by the security guards. It is both an ‘allowed space’ where the elite Colombian-Lebanese can perform their ethnicity without needing to explain it, whilst it perpetuates the segregation between the classes, as it ensures that participation remains within the elite.

As mentioned above, other Colombian-Lebanese organisations also use the Club for their activities, either as a base or as the main centre for their events. One such organisation is the ULCMⁱⁱⁱ, a worldwide organisation with a set of specific rules surrounding the promotion of Lebanese culture and the defence of Lebanese political sovereignty. Their events are of interest for this chapter and are here discussed – all of which have a strong connection to the Club.

The July War of 2006

During the summer of 2006, the Lebanese group Hezbollah – a long-time foe of Israel and labelled as a terrorist organisation by numerous countries – attacked some Israeli border towns and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. Israel retaliated by attacking Hezbollah positions in Lebanon and bombing several towns and cities, including the Lebanese capital, Beirut. The war lasted just over a month and resulted in the deaths of more than 1,100 Lebanese people, mostly civilians (Ruys 2007: 266; and Hamieh and Mac Ginty 2009). At that time, a large number of Colombian-Lebanese were in Lebanon, visiting friends and family, claiming they were “reconnecting with their roots” or simply visiting the country as tourists. They were caught in the middle of this conflict and, with a shutdown airport, were unable to leave. As a result, the

Colombian-Lebanese community in Bogota mobilised, calling the international community for an immediate cease-fire and the Colombian government for a rescue operation. The calls for a cease-fire involved the production of anti-war materials, including stickers, pins, and posters with the slogan “*Cese al fuego en el Medio Oriente*” [Cease Fire in the Middle East], and organising a public demonstration. These actions gathered a large number of Colombian-Lebanese individuals and led to the revival of the ULCM.

At the time of the events, Colombian national newspaper *El Tiempo* ran a number of stories highlighting the plight of the Colombian-Lebanese stranded in Lebanon and even quoted prominent Colombian-Lebanese individuals in their newspaper. One of them was a participant of mine, a first generation Colombian-Lebanese male in his 80s who was in Beirut at the time:

[the Israelis] are savagely destroying the country. I ask to God that they have a consciousness and that they stop this. It's not fair. I hope the killing stops.

(Quote of the Day, *El Tiempo* 2006)

The newspaper published at least five different articles focusing on the impact the conflict was having on the Colombian-Lebanese community in Lebanon and Colombia, with quotes and pictures, suggesting the community was seen as significant enough to have time and space dedicated to them in an important national publication. This was not surprising, as not only several prominent journalists are Colombian-Lebanese, but also as the community is composed of upper and middle-class individuals, it has connections with important media outlets.

As mentioned above, the community also organised a demonstration calling for a cease-fire. One of my participants explained:

...it was an apolitical march... the philosophy was to ask for support to cease the bombardment because it was an almost unilateral attack – because a group such as Hezbollah, regardless of how well-armed they are, cannot counter a regular army. [The march] was done firstly, in order not to stain with politics that opposition to the bombing, so the march would not lose strength; secondly, to not exclude the Lebanese Muslims; thirdly, to get as much support as possible. That was the criteria... [it went] well, because many people went and

it had certain echo, as it was reported in the national media - briefly but it was reported... we gathered outside [the area of the protest] and then walked back to the Club... – (second generation Colombian-Lebanese, male, 40s).

His account is somewhat contradictory, as the demonstration and his own words do seem to have a political motive, i.e. just protesting against the conflict is a political statement, and my participant's argument that the conflict was "almost a unilateral attack" is already taking sides. Rather than apolitical, the demonstration was planned to be as inclusive as possible, to include those supporting Arab causes in the Middle East, as well as peace activists in general, and Lebanese nationalists in particular.

Interestingly, the demonstration did not take place near any embassy or local governmental building, but in front of the UN mission to Colombia. The mission has its offices in the wealthy Northern neighbourhoods in Bogota, and this particular one was only 2.1km away from the Club. In fact, the demonstration started at the social club and participants walked the 2km to the UN offices. By comparison, the Israeli Embassy is over 8km away from the Club, the main Colombian governmental buildings are over 9km away, and neither is situated in wealthy areas. The Colombian-Lebanese decided to keep their protest within the comfort of the wealthy neighbourhoods of Bogota, and near the social club. In this sense, they made a deliberate choice regarding the space to stage their demonstration and display their discontent with the events in Lebanon. The location of the demonstration was also an 'allowed space', this time not physical behind walls, but a wider wealthier area that not only reflected their socio-economic status and granted opportunities for social interaction, but also reinforced that elite status by making a statement about their social standing. According to a Colombian newspaper article, around 600 people participated in the demonstration (El País 2006), including several of my participants. One of them recounted their experience in this way:

I went to the demonstration and I kept the [cease-fire] pins and everything. I got my friends involved as well, told them to buy the pins and support me. I explained that it was a really serious situation for my community... I was there in front [of the UN offices] and there were people who were not Lebanese, people that one would say to them come and support us. And I love the solidarity in those kinds of things. It was, like, to make the Lebanese

community be felt, even though we weren't there [in Lebanon] it affects us that the country one can identify with is in such a conflict... it is something incredible... I said wow there's a lot of solidarity for those kinds of things, and I liked that it wasn't only us but that people here also felt affected, as it was terrible... my uncle asked me to go and I said yes, and then we could go to the club for lunch. The club is the meeting point – (fourth-generation Colombian-Lebanese, female, late teens).

My participant's words stress the significance of the event in terms of increasing solidarity both within and for the community, and highlight the importance of the Club, socially and practically. Even though a large number of individuals attended the event, only those Club members and guests of members were able to meet up at the Club afterwards to "have lunch". The wider public was not invited to participate in this social activity, and those that did were "friends" that had middle and upper-class backgrounds (whether they were Lebanese or not). Access to their "allowed space" was conditional on their socio-economic status, not on their expression of solidarity or their ethnicity.

My participant's words underline how the social aspect influences other objectives the events may have. Something similar happened with the 20th of July march in 2008, which I discuss below, when a number of Colombian-Lebanese set off from the Club to join the march, and many of them returned there again after it finished in order to have lunch. Performing their ethnic identity was made even more attractive by the social activities connected to it, even as an excuse to meet up socially and, at least in my participant's case, the lunch seems to have been an expectation connected to the participation.

These activities also heightened the visibility of the Colombian-Lebanese community as it was making itself felt. Indeed, the conflict led many Colombian-Lebanese to make their ethnicity more visible, either by attending the demonstrations, carrying Lebanese flags, or portraying the anti-war merchandise. The July War awoke a sense of solidarity among some Colombian-Lebanese, and this led them to take action. Another one of my participants, a second-generation Colombian-Lebanese in her mid-50s, saw the event as a "beautiful" memory to be remembered, with large

congregation of Colombian-Lebanese carrying Lebanese flags and displaying their ethnic identity. My participant connects her memories of the protest not with the suffering of those caught up in the conflict, or with the urgency of rescuing those in Lebanon unable to leave, but with the imagery it created in Bogota and the sense of belonging it generated amongst the participants. The demonstration was a kind of “in-between” space (Bhabha 1994) for the Colombian-Lebanese, created by the encounter of their identities (Colombian socio-economic status identity and their Colombian-Lebanese ethnic identity) where factors such as political goals, convenience of location and a social gathering, combined together to generate a common feeling of belonging.

The heightened feelings of belonging generated by the demonstration and the conflict in general had longer lasting repercussions for the community, as they led to the revival of the cultural and political organisation, ULCM. My participants retell this process as a tale of reencountering old friends and old feelings of belonging:

Unfortunately the [July] war comes... and has an effect on those people who felt Lebanese before and had left that feeling to the side... that moment renewed/stirred that love and that pain, that complete rejection [to the war]. A lot of feelings that above everything made people come together to see what could be done... from that we started to remember things we had forgotten, we started to sign, started to dance, we began the meetings amongst the Lebanese... and as someone said – a phrase that I love: the (blood) cells find each other again... – (second generation Colombian-Lebanese, female, early 50s)

...we understood that we loved each other very much, that we had met again and that we wanted to stay together. So we thought of the possibility of creating something... and someone mentioned to me, why don't we think again about the ULCM? – (third generation Colombian-Lebanese, female, early 50s)

My perception is that because of the July war in 2006 people started getting back together. People didn't use to go to the Club much... We [her family]

weren't members... after the war people started to unite again, to look for one another and went to the Club to an event thanking those that helped during the war, including the Colombian government... I think that because of the war a lot of cool things have been developing – (fourth generation Colombian-Lebanese, female, mid-20s)

Indeed, what my participants explain is that the events of the July War not only led to the revival of the ULCM, but they also allowed them a space where they could display both their socio-economic and their ethnic identity. Many of these individuals had been members of the ULCM in their youth, and remembered its social gatherings and events, with other Colombian-Lebanese families of similar socio-economic standing – and they also wanted their own children to experience this. The revival therefore, was not just political or cultural, but also significantly an agency for the maintenance of their community through social events. Most of my participants focused heavily on the importance of social events, not just for the community but in general. In a sense, the political agenda seems to take a back seat to the opportunities to socialise and strengthen their ethnic identity through their elite channels.

In political terms, the demonstration did not achieve much – which is not surprising seeing that it only took place once and was geographically removed from most actors who were directly involved. However, the community was successful in pressuring the Colombian government through their personal and network contacts into sending a military plane to rescue the Colombian-Lebanese who were accidentally stranded in Lebanon. One of my participants who was evacuated from Lebanon at the time, the same individual that was quoted by the newspaper, commented that a group of Colombian-Lebanese in Colombia worked as a network to organise their rescue, using their influence and contacts:

...the community here, my family, and people I know [got together]. And I specially thank Minister Juan Manuel Santos for his concern to pick up the Colombians that were there [in Lebanon]... the Colombian government and its Embassy in Lebanon helped getting out of Lebanon a group of over 100 Colombian people and the Colombian Air Force sent a big military plane and got us out from the north of Lebanon and took us to Zaragoza. It was a very

sad and painful odyssey for me... (first generation Colombia-Lebanese, male, 80s).

After the successful rescue operation, the community leaders organised a reception at the Club to welcome back the Colombian-Lebanese who had been stranded in Lebanon and to thank those officially involved with the rescue, including the military commanders who led the mission and the then Defence Minister Santos, who later became President. It is unsurprising that the way to celebrate the achievement of their collective demand was through a social event in the Club, with members of the political elite.

In this sense, the Colombian-Lebanese used their connections and political influence to ensure their collective demands were met – even if that meant leaving a country they professed to feel a belonging to. It was their social and political connections that allowed them to achieve their aims connected to their ethnic identity. The success of their collective pressure to the Colombian authorities demonstrates they are seen, and see themselves, as worthy citizens of the nation - and of course as part of a community that is powerful enough to get their way when organised. Fittingly, the success of the mission was celebrated at the Club, where the Colombian-Lebanese were able to thank those involved, whilst simultaneously portraying their socio-economic status. The July War was, therefore, a catalyst for the community as it increased the active participation of Colombian-Lebanese within the community, both by providing spaces to re-engage their dormant feelings of belonging to their ethnic identity, and by the revival of a cultural and political association. It re-connected members of the community and allowed for future events and activities to take place – one of which is explored below.

Peace March against the FARC

A significant political event in Colombia took place two years later, on the 20th July 2008, with a march against the now mostly disbanded Colombian left-wing terrorist organisation, the FARC. There were protests in different cities in Colombia and around the world, which focused especially on the kidnappings of both civilians and members of the armed forces by the FARC. The most common slogan was “*No Más Farc*” [No More Farc]. The event was also a display of Colombian patriotism by the

general Colombian public and supported by the government, both to raise patriotism and increase its political support – coinciding with Colombia’s National Independence Day. The day, usually celebrated by the government with military parades and taken as a holiday by most Colombians, was this time celebrated with ‘peace’ marches and concerts across Colombia: “millions of people” attended in over 1,000 towns and cities (El Universal 2008). The event had a detailed organisation of logistics, with demarcated routes, timetables of the events at the different locations, concerts by famous Colombian artists, video screening of other events around the country, and an active participation from the government and the military, as well as politicians from different political parties. The government was able to capitalise on the previous efforts and get millions of Colombians to wave flags in a patriotic atmosphere.

The ULCM participated in this demonstration and encouraged Colombian-Lebanese individuals to join them under the ULCM banners, with flyers and announcements posted at the Club and emails sent to all members. A group of around 30-40 Colombian-Lebanese met at the Club for this purpose. There were a number of arranged routes and centres of congregation in Bogota for this protest, and the Colombian-Lebanese chose to march to one just under 2km away from the Club. Once again, convenience and pragmatism prevailed, as they stayed in the wealthy north of Bogota marching to the congregation centre that was closest to the Club. It is likely that many would have taken this route anyway, even if they had not been part of the group leaving from the Club, as some live near that area; however, others also travelled from further away in order to join the group. Indeed, this was also the same route taken by many other Colombians of similar socio-economic characteristics. Once again, an ‘allowed space’ was chosen for participation, in this case a specific route that allowed them to mingle with individuals of similar socio-economic status and segregated them from others.

My participants left the club wearing white t-shirts, as the event demanded, as well as carrying a large ULCM banner, and Colombian and Lebanese flags. As the group joined the march from a side street, they were received with applause from other participants, and as the march progressed, my participants often greeted friends or colleagues, and welcomed other Colombian-Lebanese who joined the group. Under the ULCM banner the Colombian-Lebanese were proactively presenting themselves

to the general public as Colombian-Lebanese, i.e. as Colombians of Lebanese descent who had joined in a portrayal of Colombian solidarity with a combination of Colombian and Lebanese national symbols. They were sharing a space where Colombianness was being performed and appropriating it to perform their dual Colombian-Lebanese identity. This was a fluid deterritorialised space, not bound to a particular location but rather to the performance of their ethnicity (De Certeau 1984; Faist 1998). The Colombian-Lebanese ethnic space moved along the streets of the wealthy North of Bogota, permeating the Colombian space, making their ethnic community more visible and reproducing it within a context, as a specific ‘niche’ within the upper and middle-classes of Bogota.

Some of the slogans used during the demonstration by the public evoked the coming together of all Colombians to reject of the FARC and call for the freedom of the kidnap victims. Others, such as “Colombia soy yo” [I am Colombia], aimed at increasing feelings of patriotism towards Colombia at an individual level whilst expressing that the FARC were in this case ‘the other’ and not representing Colombia. Some Colombian-Lebanese wore t-shirts with the slogan “*Colombia soy yo*”, whilst at the same time carrying Lebanese flags and ULCM banners. Their actions suggested the Colombian-Lebanese were at ease with the performance of their dual ethnic identities which allowed them to simultaneously claim to be the embodiment of Colombia and carry Lebanese symbols. This demonstrates the multiplicity and fluidity of their identities (Hall 1996) which are able to switch and mould into the particular contexts. Indeed, their ease with the dual portrayal of Colombian and Lebanese symbols suggests that they do not see their ethnic identities as contradictory and that they ‘are’ also Colombia. This is connected to Alfaro-Velcamp’s (2013) idea of “foreign citizens”, where they identify as being born in the local country whilst portraying their Lebanese heritage. The fact the Colombian-Lebanese are able to actively demonstrate their dual identity within elite “allowed spaces” further confirms and reinforces their own elite position, both to themselves and to the public around them.

It is worth noting, however, that as soon as the march ended and people began dispersing, the leaders of the ULCM group were keen to have the flags and banners folded before walking the 2km back to the Club. It is unclear why this decision was

taken, maybe to speed up the walk and get faster to the Club to have lunch, but regardless of the reason, during the way back my participants were simply another group of Colombians wearing white t-shirts, dispersing after having protested against the FARC. They were indistinct from those around them. By doing so the Colombian-Lebanese demonstrated that they are able to decide when to perform their Lebaneseness and, just as easily, when to stop performing it. In this sense, the Colombian-Lebanese can easily switch from being Colombian to being Colombian-Lebanese, and vice versa. After the demonstration, a large number of participants went once again to socialise and eat at the Club, just as after the July War protest.

It must be noted that not all Colombian-Lebanese that marched and are active in the community did so with the ULCM group and under its banner. Some marched only carrying Colombian symbols, portraying only their Colombian identity. A number of reasons may have contributed to this: the group was led by the ULCM and not all Colombian-Lebanese are involved in the organisation or share its beliefs; a few may have chosen to march through a different route if it was more convenient to them; and others may have chosen to march with their non-Lebanese Colombian friends. Significantly, the fact the Colombian-Lebanese have this choice of when to portray certain aspects of their ethnicity suggests a high level of flexibility within their identity. Moreover, they are also able to choose how to perform their identities (Colombian or Colombian-Lebanese), and are able to switch between them with ease – even at political events promoting Colombian identification. This level of flexibility is closely connected to their upper and middle-class status in society, and several authors have suggested that individuals must be in a privileged position in society, be upwardly mobile, and not suffering from discrimination in order to be able to choose how and when to perform their ethnic identities (Gans 1979; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Sullivan 2012). For example, Gans (1979, 8) introduced the idea of “symbolic ethnicity” which helps explain how newer generations “have some choice about when and how to play ethnic roles”. He argues that symbolic ethnicity is about the individual’s sense of belonging. The Colombian-Lebanese are part of the Colombian elite and their ethnicity is enhanced by the different activities and events they participate in. More importantly, they have a choice of when to portray it and are not obliged to assimilate, making their “symbolic ethnicity” also about practicing and expressing their socio-economic and their “foreign citizen” statuses.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have analysed the Colombian-Lebanese community in Bogota, and specifically their participation in public demonstrations. The similarities between the marches must be highlighted: they were for common causes, in the same wealthy areas of the city, and projecting a Colombian-Lebanese identity. They combined politics, convenience and the promise of a social gathering with similarly upper and middle-class individuals to make them more appealing. They have, simultaneously created “in-between” spaces (Bhabha 1994) where a sense of belonging to an ethnic identification can be performed and recreated. These performances suggest that the Colombian-Lebanese are able to choose when to display their Colombian-Lebanese identity and when not to. They can decide whether to join in a particular activity, to wear clothing or carry items that can identify them as Colombian-Lebanese, and even the location of these performances. In addition, they can also manage the visibility of their performances and are able to portray their dual identity with Colombia and Lebanon seemingly without discomfort. What allows them this flexibility is their elite socio-economic status: it vindicates their Colombian citizenship as they simultaneously claim identity to another nation, whilst letting them confidently portray their dual ethnic identity and pursue their collective demands. As “foreign citizens” the Colombian-Lebanese play with both of these identities, socio-economic and ethnic, in order to maximise the perceived needs of their collective.

At the same time, by setting their organisations and marches within elite spaces the Colombian-Lebanese are reinforcing their belonging to the upper and middle-classes, whilst creating a barrier for the vindication of citizenship of those that do not fit with the ideals of that perceived status. In this way, Colombian-Lebanese individuals who are not middle or upper-class will find it more difficult to access the spaces the community uses to portray their ethnic identity and duality of belonging. Therefore, they simultaneously create avenues of vindication of citizenship for upper and middle-class Colombian-Lebanese, whilst creating barriers for those non-elite individuals.

Finally, their practices and expressions of citizenship, through the participation in public demonstrations, helps them establish their position within the socio-economic

elite and afforded them a special 'niche', based around their ethnicity and "foreign citizen" status. These marches, which combine their ethnic and political agendas, reproduce the community in "allowed spaces" within the wider elite social sphere of the city. They are public statements and portrayals that display the strength of the ethnic community, and its socio-economic status, within the already-established elite. Their participation in these two protests further strengthened their voice as a community, both to make demands and to reinforce their social standing, but also made it more difficult for less wealthy individuals to participate. The Colombian-Lebanese have managed to use both their ethnic and socio-economic statuses to complement and balance one another, making the most out of them for the benefit of the community, whilst simultaneously keeping their 'allowed spaces' exclusive for the elite.

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ⁱ I conducted over 50 interviews with members of the Colombian-Lebanese community, the youngest being in their late teens, and the eldest in their 80s. My data includes individuals from every age group, however, the most common ages were 40s to 60s – who in general were more active in the community. This was due to a variety of reasons, from wanting their children to have a belonging to the community to having the time to participate actively due to retirement, among others. All of the names of my participants have been omitted and are presented as anonymous following the ethics approval forms signed by them. Their gender and generation are given, but only their approximate age, as an exact age would make them more recognisable.

ⁱⁱ The Club's facilities include a large restaurant, a bar, several meeting rooms, squash courts, a multipurpose salon, a children's playground and an activity room.

ⁱⁱⁱ The ULCM has 'chapters' in many countries, including Colombia, where it operates mainly from within the Club. It has been greatly affected by Lebanese politics – including its hiatus starting with the Lebanese Civil War until the early 2000s, and its revival during the 2006 July War in Lebanon.