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# Social reproduction in onward migration: Colombian mothers and fathers from Spain to London

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## Abstract

This paper examines how social reproductive work—particularly childcare and material provision—is experienced by and distributed between fathers and mothers during onward migration. Onward migration is typically defined as the process whereby people leave their homeland, settle in a second country, and then migrate to a third country. Gendered in nature, social reproductive work refers to the activities involved in maintaining people daily and intergenerationally. Several studies explore how families' social reproductive arrangements are disrupted, reconfigured or maintained following migration. Less is known about the organisation of social reproductive labour in families who migrated multiple times. This paper draws from fieldwork with 32 Colombian mothers and 18 Colombian fathers who onward migrated from Spain to London after the 2008 crisis. Fathers typically onward migrated first to fulfil their breadwinning role, while mothers would stay in Spain to look after their children, following later. These arrangements were not necessarily maintained at the onward destination. To cope with downward mobility and precarity in London, some fathers became more involved in social reproductive work viewed as feminine (e.g., childcare), while mothers began outsourcing social reproductive tasks to better meet their families' needs and to seize the opportunities London offers. This paper suggests that onward migrant families renegotiate their social reproductive arrangements to address the socioeconomic challenges and opportunities its members encounter in the onward destination and proposes an understanding of social reproduction as relational and fluid across space and time.

KEYWORDS

Colombian families, gender, London, onward migration, social reproduction

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Families migrate for many reasons, including to enhance their livelihoods, safety, opportunities, and access to care. Migration can therefore be viewed as a social reproductive strategy (Kilkey et al., 2018). From a feminist perspective, social reproduction refers to 'maintaining and sustaining human beings throughout their life cycle' (Truong, 1996, p. 32). Gendered in nature, social reproductive work includes, for example, domestic work, childcare and material provision (Glenn, 1992). Several studies explore how families' social reproductive arrangements are disrupted, reconfigured or maintained following migration (Choi, 2019; Escriva et al., 2022; McIlwaine, 2010). Less is known about the social reproductive configurations of families who have undergone multiple migrations.

This paper advances the understanding of how families reconfigure their social reproductive arrangements in onward migration—the process whereby people leave their country of origin, settle in a second country and then migrate to a third country when circumstances change (Ahrens et al., 2016). Yet, onward migration is open-ended in nature as migrants may engage in multiple onward migrations (Turcatti, 2022). This paper explores the perspectives and experiences of onward migrant fathers and mothers regarding the material provision, childcare responsibilities and work–family balance, and examines how arrangements concerning these are negotiated during and after onward migration, why and with what implications for gender inequalities among onward migrant parents, their well-being and socioeconomic opportunities.

This paper draws from fieldwork conducted between June 2020 and May 2021 with 32 Colombian mothers and 18 Colombian fathers who had settled in Spain in the early 2000s but then onward migrated to London after the 2008 global financial crisis. The perspectives of *both* fathers and mothers are addressed to capture the gendered processes underpinning onward migrant families' organisation of social reproductive work, while contributing to making visible the social reproductive experiences of migrant men.

In what follows, I first outline feminist conceptualisations of social reproduction and review the literature on how migration shapes and is shaped by families' social reproductive needs and gender practices. After discussing existing studies on onward migration and the methodology, I present how Colombian fathers and mothers respectively described and experienced their material provision, childcare responsibilities and work–family balance.

For most interviewees, onward migration was a response to the 2008 crisis and a social reproductive strategy painfully structured by gender roles: fathers would typically onward migrate first to fulfil their breadwinning role despite the cost of temporarily separating from their families, while mothers would stay in Spain to look after their children on their own and with limited resources, onward migrating once their partners were settled. These gendered social reproductive arrangements were not necessarily maintained in the onward destination. To cope with the downward mobility several families faced in London, some fathers became more involved in social reproductive tasks viewed as feminine, such as childcare, with mixed feelings, while some mothers began outsourcing social reproductive responsibilities to local and transnational actors to seize the educational and career opportunities London offers, which they felt they never had in Spain.

Ultimately, this paper illustrates that onward migrant families renegotiate their social reproductive arrangements over time to address the socioeconomic challenges and opportunities families and their members encounter in the onward destination. The paper concludes by emphasising the fluidity and relationality of social reproduction.

## 2 | FEMINIST CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

From a feminist perspective, social reproduction refers to the process of 'maintaining and sustaining human beings throughout their life cycle' (Truong, 1996, p. 32). Social reproductive work is the 'array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally' (Glenn, 1992, p. 1). Social reproductive labour includes domestic work, care, the socialisation of children and the provision of emotional support and material necessities. Families are therefore a key site of social reproduction.

While focusing on onward migrant parents, this paper recognises the social, rather than the biological and legal, character of family relationships and values the everyday practices through which intimate relationships are established, re-created and challenged within and across borders (Morgan, 2011). Understanding family as a practice is important to avoid reproducing the understanding of the family as the nuclear, heterosexual household which abnormalizes non-heterosexual families or families headed by single parents (Morgan, 2011).

Feminist scholars highlight the gendered nature of social reproductive work (Kofman, 2014). Gender is here defined as 'the meaning people give to the biological reality that there are two sexes [...] a human invention that organises our behaviour and thought, not as a set of static structures or roles but as an ongoing process' (Pessar, 2005, p. 2). Early on, Benston (1969) observed how gender ideologies constructing women as 'natural' carers and men as 'natural' breadwinners legitimise arrangements where women take on devalued, feminised social reproductive tasks (e.g., domestic work, care), while men become breadwinners. This, in turn, further disadvantages women's access to the labour market and occupational mobility (Kofman, 2014).

Social reproductive work is racialised too. Glenn (1992) observed how, in the 20th-century US, social reproduction began being more heavily commodified. Social reproductive work previously taking place in households could now be bought by more wealthy individuals. Racial minority women came to be disproportionately employed in 'lower level' reproductive work, such as domestic work and childcare. This continues to apply today in the Global North, where the participation of women in the labour market, the persistence of gender ideologies exempting men from social

reproductive work, and the failure of the state to provide viable alternatives have created a 'care deficit' disproportionately filled by migrant and racial minority women (Datta et al., 2010).

It is clear that social reproductive tasks can be outsourced to other relatives and households, markets (e.g., arranging the provision of food through restaurants or domestic work through paid workers), the welfare state (e.g., welfare benefits or social housing); and NGOs (Kofman, 2014). Importantly, outsourcing social reproduction can be a gendered task. For example, in a study exploring the role of a migrant-led NGO in the lives of Latin American migrants in London, Turcatti (2021) found that the NGO's clients were overwhelmingly women approaching the organisation to receive support with welfare benefits applications to meet their families' material needs or with other social reproductive tasks, such as enrolling their children in schools.

Researching families' social reproductive work can help us better understand the reproduction of wider social inequalities. This was illustrated early on by Colen (1995), whose concept of 'stratified social reproduction' captures the fact that not everyone has access to the resources to socially reproduce their families. In Colen's seminal study on the parenting practices of West Indian mothers working as childcarers for middle-class families in New York, migrant mothers could not provide the same level of security and care to their children due to fragmented local networks, low wages, low-quality housing and insecure legal status. This had detrimental outcomes for their children's opportunities for social mobility, illustrating the intimate connection between stratified social reproduction and the reproduction of wider social inequalities. It also reminds us that migration is both a response to a crisis of social reproduction in migrants' countries of origin and a threat to migrant families' social reproduction (Kilkey et al., 2018). The next section reviews the literature exploring the intersection between migration and families' gender practices concerning social reproductive labour.

## 3 | GENDER, MIGRATION AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Migration shapes and is shaped by families' social reproductive arrangements and their gendered practices concerning social reproductive work (Dreby, 2010). In families with traditional gendered division of labour, men may migrate to fulfil their breadwinning role, while women may stay behind to carry out feminised social reproductive work (e.g., care, domestic work) (Dreby, 2010). Following male migration, left-behind women remain responsible for social reproductive work while at times shouldering new responsibilities, including compensating for the loss of finances when remittances are insufficient or unreliable (Pandey, 2021).

While traditional gendered social reproductive arrangements inform migratory decisions, women are and have been 'birds of passage' (Morokvasic, 1984) too. Women migrate for several reasons, including to transgress gender norms, escape gender violence, or achieve emancipation (Fleur, 2016). Since the late twentieth century, the increasing demand for paid feminised social reproductive labour such as domestic and care work in the Global North created migration opportunities for women (Datta et al., 2010). Hochschild (2000) coined the term 'global care chain' to refer to the process by which women from the Global South migrate to take on paid social reproductive labour in the Global North, leaving a 'care drain' in their families.

This view has been challenged by research showing that, following female migration, social reproductive work is redistributed among left-behind family members, often other women (e.g., grandmothers or aunts) (Dreby, 2010). Yet, left-behind fathers may take responsibility for feminised social reproductive work, redefining notions of masculinity and fatherhood in ways that accommodate these new roles (Choi, 2019). Transnational family studies also show that migrant fathers may continue to care for their left-behind families through remittances, gifts, transnational communications and visits (Kilkey et al., 2014).

Research on gender practices concerning the organisation of social reproductive labour among migrant families abroad provides an equally complex picture. Migration may challenge patriarchal practices in migrants' households. Early on, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) found that Mexican men who migrated to the United States on their own and became accustomed to household tasks would contribute to childcare and domestic work when their wives and children would follow. Furthermore, following migration, women may enter the labour market, accruing higher earnings and decision-making power in their households (Fleur, 2016).

Yet, changes in gender practices should not be equated with changes in gender ideologies, as migrant men may take on feminised social reproductive roles reluctantly (McIlwaine, 2010). Furthermore, migrant women entering feminised, racialised and low-income work may not acquire the earning potential to gain decision-making power within their households (Fleur, 2016). Migration may also lead to 'migrant machismo' (McIlwaine, 2010): migrant men occupying disenfranchised sectors of the labour market may resort to dominant behaviour in the household to make up for the loss of status in the receiving country.

The idea that migration challenges patriarchal practices in migrants' households also assumes that migrants come from cultures upholding traditional gender ideologies, which may not always be the case (Pessar, 2005). It also implicitly conceptualises migrant men as uninvolved fathers and family members and reinforces the construction of male migrants as independent and non-relational (Kilkey et al., 2014; Locke, 2017). Focusing on the experiences of fathers facing deportation in the United States, Das Gupta (2014) remarks how deportation threatens their desire to be good fathers and participate in their families' social reproductive work. Kilkey et al. (2014) note how migrant men may also be refashioning their involvement in feminised social reproductive work in response to shifting cultural norms around fatherhood both in receiving and sending contexts.

## 4 | SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN ONWARD MIGRATION

The literature on the gendered social reproductive arrangements of migrant families is vast. In contrast, we know less about the organisation of social reproductive work in families who have undergone multiple migrations, such as onward migrant families. Onward migration has received increasing attention since the mid-2000s as it challenges 'the simplistic mapping of migrant trajectories restricted to two nodes' (Ahrens et al., 2016, p. 58). Several studies on onward migration have been conducted in the context of the European Union (EU) to question the mainstream assumption that only 'native' EU citizens take advantage of EU freedom of movement. Since the early 2010s, a growing body of literature has explored the mobilities of third-country nationals who naturalised in EU countries and then onward migrated to other EU countries (e.g., Ahrens et al., 2016; Bermudez & Oso, 2019; Bermudez, 2020; Della Puppa et al., 2021; Morad & Sacchetto, 2020).

Onward migration results from the 'dissatisfaction with the outcome of the initial migration process' (Ahrens et al., 2016, p. 96). It can be a strategy to escape social immobility (Della Puppa et al., 2021) or to cope with economic crises (Mas Giralt, 2017). Onward migration is facilitated by 'civic capital' (McIlwaine, 2012) since the acquisition of citizenship rights or immigration status become assets that can be mobilised to onward migration. For example, acquiring European passports allowed African refugees to onward migrate to the United Kingdom from other European countries when the United Kingdom was still part of the EU (Ahrens et al., 2016).

Onward migration can be a family affair. Weine et al. (2011) found that African refugees in the United States would onward migrate to other states to improve the livelihoods of their households. Morad and Sacchetto (2020) show that the onward migration of Bangladeshi parents from Italy to the United Kingdom was motivated by the desire to improve their career prospects and their children's educational opportunities. Yet, onward migration can pose new challenges for families and lead to disillusionment (Della Puppa & King, 2018). In the study by Weine et al. (2011), onward Burundi and Liberian refugees' families in the United States faced poverty, crowded housing, and the loss of support from left-behind communities. Furthermore, onward migration may result in family separation. Focusing on Latin American families who onward migrated from Spain to London, McCarthy (2020) found they were not able to onward migrate all together due to some of its members lacking the required documentation.

These studies do not explicitly adopt a social reproductive lens. Yet, they do suggest that onward migration can be a social reproductive strategy as families onward migrate to enhance their livelihoods, quality of life and opportunities. Less is known about how families distribute their social reproductive work during and following onward migration (exceptions include Bermudez & Oso, 2019; Bermudez, 2020). This paper sheds light on these dynamics by exploring how Colombian fathers and mothers who onward migrated from Spain to London after the 2008 crisis experienced material provision, childcare responsibilities and work–family balance during and following onward migration.

In the early 2000s, Spain was experiencing economic growth and the country became a major destination for migrants escaping Colombia's prolonged armed conflict and the economic downturn of the 1990s (Bermudez, 2020). In Spain, Colombians settled mostly in large cities and began reunifying or forming new families (Bermudez, 2020). However, their livelihoods deteriorated following the 2008 global financial crisis. Colombians, along other Latin American groups, residing in Spain began moving to London using the European passports they acquired in Spain (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016). At the time, the United Kingdom was still part of the EU and EU/EEA citizens still held the right to enter and reside in Britain. This paper focuses specifically on Colombians as they constitute one of the largest groups among the Latin American population who onward migrated from Southern Europe to London following the 2008 crisis (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016).

## 5 | METHODOLOGY

This paper draws from fieldwork conducted between July 2020 and May 2021 as part of a doctoral study examining how families shape and are shaped by onward migration. This paper relies on life history interviews conducted with 32 onward Colombian mothers and 18 onward Colombian fathers who settled in Spain in the early 2000s and now live in London (see Appendices A and B for key demographic details about the fathers and mothers interviewed). Of the mothers interviewed, 19 were cohabiting with their husbands, 10 had separated from their partners and 1 was a widow. Of the fathers interviewed, 15 were cohabiting with their wives, 2 had separated from their partners and 1 was a single father responsible for his adolescent daughter. In terms of children, 14 fathers had children below the age of 18 living in the United Kingdom, 3 fathers had adult children in the United Kingdom and 3 fathers had adult children living in other countries, typically Spain or Colombia. Among mothers, 23 had children below the age of 18 living in the United Kingdom, 4 had adult children in the United Kingdom, and 9 had adult children living in other countries. Only four fathers and four mothers interviewed reported having relatives living in London. In contrast, 18 mothers and nine fathers reported having relatives in Spain.

At the time of the interviews, 15 fathers and 21 mothers had lived in London for more than 5 years, whereas 3 fathers and 11 mothers had lived in London for less than 5 years. In terms of occupation, 10 fathers worked as cleaner, four in hospitality, two owned a cleaning company, one had an office job and one interviewee did not provide this information. Among mothers, 18 worked as cleaners, three as carers, four combined cleaning and childcare work and one worked in hospitality as a cook. There were also two mothers who were not working due to health conditions, one nurse and one working as a shop assistant. One mother did not provide information about her job.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 meant that to access interviewees, I predominantly relied on London-based NGOs led by and for Latin American migrants with whom I have been volunteering and carrying out research since 2019. The NGOs' staff would put me in touch with their clients. I would then use snowballing sampling to identify additional interviewees. These NGOs typically support low-income Latin American migrants, explaining why most of the interviewees were employed in low-paid sectors of the labour market. The fact that I am a young Italian woman and that the NGOs' clients tend to be mostly women partially explains why I interviewed more women than men. Furthermore, the mothers interviewed who lived in London with their partners would more commonly introduce me to their female friends who, like them, would combine work with childcare. Their flexible work arrangements meant they could spare some time during the day for the interview, while their husbands typically worked full time and long hours.

Life histories focused on participants' migration stories. Though relatively unstructured, follow-up questions concerning how social reproductive work—particularly childcare and material provision—was experienced by the interviewees and distributed within their families were asked. Life histories seemed appropriate because they encourage participants to tell stories that matter to them (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). They also provided insights on how the interviewees' families social reproductive needs were met *during* the process of relocating their family in the onward destination as well as *after* they had settled in London.

All the interviews were conducted in Spanish and lasted between 60 and 180 min. Interviewed individually, mothers and fathers were typically not related to each other. However, I conducted nine mother–father interviews as some participants wanted to share their onward migration story with their partners. Of all the interviews, 26 took place online to accommodate the interviewees' health concerns and to deal with the COVID-19 mobility restrictions, while 17 were conducted face-to-face in Summer 2020 when lockdown restrictions were eased. Online interviews were not as rich in detail as face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviews took place in the interviewees' homes or public spaces that were meaningful to them, such as parks where they spend free time with their families or in cafes next to the churches they attend. This prompted conversations about everyday practices concerning social reproductive work that would have otherwise not been addressed through online interviews.

I also conducted participant observation in the weekly online meetings of a Latin American parent group led by community organisers involved in the London-based Latin American NGOs with whom I collaborated throughout the doctoral research. Attended predominantly by onward Latin American mothers, these meetings offer a space for parents to share experiences, seek advice from peers, and learn about their rights from invited speakers. As participants would often discuss the challenges they face as parents in London, they provided me with additional insights on how onward migrant families organise social reproductive work and address the social reproductive challenges families face.

With regard to ethics, this research complied with the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent. Importantly, I strived to adopt an ethic of care while conducting fieldwork, which emphasises the need 'to develop more 'care-ful' (i.e., care-informed) research relationships' (Herron & Skinner, 2013, p. 1697). I strived to validate participants' perspectives and values, while being *sensitive and sensible* to not probe further when the process of sharing experiences became uncomfortable for interviewees. Adopting care ethics also meant that I strived to not endanger participants' family relationships by sharing what family members told me in confidentiality when interviewing members of the same family. Similarly, whenever I would interview parents referred to me by Latin American NGOs, I would not share interviewees' information with NGO staff members.

Once transcribed, thematic analysis—the process whereby the researcher identifies substantive sub-themes and themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006)—was used to identify in the fieldnotes and interview transcripts the social reproductive tasks onward Colombian mothers and fathers reported being responsible for during onward migrating and after settling in London as well as how they experienced, explained, and felt about these roles. Data were transcribed and analysed in Spanish. The next two sections present the accounts of onward Colombian fathers and mothers concerning their material provision and childcare responsibilities. The quotes featured in the next sections were translated from Spanish to English by the author. All the names appearing in this paper are pseudonyms and identity markers were altered to preserve anonymity.

## 6 | ONWARD COLOMBIAN FATHERS: FROM BREADWINNING TO CARE?

### 6.1 | Reclaiming breadwinning through onward migration

The 2008 crisis had severe effects on migrants' unemployment rates in Western countries. Between 2008 and 2011, the unemployment rate for Latin Americans reached 28.5%, while the unemployment rate for Spanish nationals was 18.4% (Colectivo Ioé, 2012). At the time of the crisis, almost all the fathers interviewed were living in Spain with their partners and children. Fathers would often describe how in Spain, their partners would combine part-time work with childcare while they acted as their families' main breadwinner. The 2008 crisis impacted their ability to fulfil their breadwinning role as described by Nodier, who has been living in London with his wife and children for almost 10 years:

> *I left [Spain] because at that time I was working as a taxi driver, and we were earning very little money [...]. My wife was working... but we weren't earning as much as before... a salary of 700, 800 euro. I, for example, used to earn 1600, 1800, 2000 euro.*

Through migration, men may come to fulfil their gendered social reproductive role as financial providers (Dreby, 2010). Similarly, most fathers interviewed viewed onward migration as a means to reclaim their status as main breadwinner following the crisis. This was commonly viewed as key to their role as fathers along with providing better opportunities to their children and disciplining. As put by one interviewee:

> *I need to provide for them [his children] […] As a father… it is discipline, give them a good education […] The main responsibility I have as a father, as a husband, as a man is… to pay for the rent, the bills, the Internet, the phone.*

The fathers interviewed were often the pioneers of onward migration, which can be explained by the fact that the 2008 crisis affected particularly male-dominated employment sectors (e.g., construction). This meant they had to temporarily separate from their families. For some fathers, this caused great pain and preoccupation. Oscar had his wife and daughter move to London 3 months after onward migrating as he 'could not stand living without them'. Armando was particularly worried about the impact his absence would have on his children's behaviour. Filipe worried about the consequences of family separation on his relationship with his child:

> *If you have a child… you come to save money, but money doesn't buy the* cariño (love) *of your children […] if your dad is not with you, it hurts […] There are times when my wife tells me: 'if you hadn't brought us [herself and their child] here [in London], we would have more money saved by now'. I tell her: 'yes, but I wouldn't have all the* cariño (love) *that my daughter has for me now'.*

The emotional pain interviewees experienced when onward migrating reminds us that even when migrant fathers see breadwinning as central to their parenting role and may not necessarily engage in feminised social reproductive work such as childcare and domestic work, they do play an active role in the socialisation and education of their children (Locke, 2017). Second, it confirms previous research highlighting the tension migrant fathers can experience when the need to comply with socially ascribed breadwinning roles is at odds with their desire for parenting (Kilkey et al., 2014).

## 6.2 | Challenges to breadwinning: Documents, downward mobility and feminised labour

Fathers' ability to reclaim their breadwinning role through onward migration was contingent upon them holding 'civic capital' (McIlwaine, 2012) in the form of Spanish passports. While the UK officially withdrew from the EU on the 31st of January 2020, EU citizens maintained the right to move to and reside in the United Kingdom up until the 31st of December 2020. Virtually all fathers interviewed held Spanish passports. In Spain, Latin Americans can apply for Spanish passports after only 2 years of regularised residence (Bermudez & Oso, 2019; Ramos, Lauzardo, et al., 2018). All fathers interviewed could therefore easily move to the United Kingdom in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis except for Daniel, who did not hold Spanish nationality. His wife, who did hold Spanish nationality, moved first to London with their daughters. There she applied for a family visa for her husband.

More commonly, fathers struggled to reclaim their breadwinning role due to downward mobility. Onward Latin American migrants in London are typically incorporated in low-income, feminised industries, such as cleaning, caring, and hospitality (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016). Most of the fathers interviewed worked as cleaners, often with zero-hour contracts, or in the hospitality sector as waiters or cooks. They ascribed this to not speaking English fluently and the need to provide for their families. McIlwaine and Bunge (2019) coined the term 'onward precarity' to indicate how onward migration may not necessarily allow individuals to uplift their livelihoods and quality of life. For Bermudez and Cuberos-Gallardo (2021), this downward mobility reflects the diverse impacts of onward migration on the integration of onward Colombian migrants in London.

Working in feminised occupations in London was a new experience for virtually all fathers interviewed. Colombians who migrated to Spain in the late 1990s and early 2000s were incorporated in gendered sectors of the labour market, with men taking on jobs socially viewed as masculine (Bermudez, 2016). McIlwaine (2010) found that among Latin American migrants in London working in feminised occupations, male migrants had a harder time than women to adjust to 'women's work', particularly middle-class men. This was also the case for some onward Colombian fathers interviewed who felt these jobs were demeaning. Miguel, who comes from a middle-class family and was a successful entrepreneur in Spain but now works as a cleaner, felt particularly bitter about it:

> *When you have a low quality of life… Even though you say you get used to it… it's not easy. In Spain, I owned a restaurant. I would have aperitivo for breakfast. The food we offered at the restaurant… It was refined Spanish cuisine. You know? Obviously, if you don't have any other option, you have to get used to it [referring to his life in London and his new job as a cleaner] […] In London… Even though they tell you there's lots of work, you come here to have a salary to survive and nothing else.*

Others took pride in 'doing whatever it takes', including feminised paid work, to provide for their families and enhance the educational opportunities of their children. While this narrative was particularly common among fathers with more modest backgrounds, there were some fathers who studied in a university in Colombia or held professional jobs in Spain, like Pier, who did appeal to similar narratives to cope with feminised labour and downward mobility:

*Right now our priority is Marisa [his daughter]. For a father, it always comes the moment when our interests slide in the background and now everything that happens to us as a family needs to benefit her.*

### 6.3 | From breadwinning to caring?

The precarious nature of the feminised jobs migrants may be engaged in coupled with the loss of extended family networks following migration has consequences for migrant families' gender practices regarding social reproductive work (McIlwaine, 2010). For example, during the interview, Patty and Pablo explained they both work and share childcare. Patty works early in the morning and late at night, while Pablo works during the day. When she is at work, Pablo stays with the children and prepares them breakfast and gets them ready to go to school. When Patty returns from work, she takes them to school while he sets off to work.

Fathers had diverse feelings about these changes in gender practices. At times, they complied with reluctancy, confirming that changes in families' gender practices do not necessarily lead to a change in gender ideologies (McIlwaine, 2010). For example, one father explicitly claimed that the domestic sphere is the 'natural place' of women:

*Women biologically have a specific function and men have another. If you follow biology, the family will work. But if the men care for the children, that is not biological […] the home is the space for women, it is where they have power. If women are happy, then the family is happy. I will give you an example. If in a family the mother dies, that family is over. If the father dies, then the family keeps going. This is biological.*

Others viewed their involvement in domestic work and childcare as opportunities to engage with their families and be involved with their children. For example, Cristina and Pier explained how doing groceries and cooking together on Sunday become important family moments during which they get to spend time with their daughter and teach her about Colombian culture by showing her how to recognise the best avocados and plantain to cook Colombian recipes.

Yet these changes in gendered social reproductive arrangements may not be permanent. As onward Colombian families settle and adjust to life in London, fathers may find more stable employment at times achieving social mobility. For example, Paco moved out of cleaning and became a full-time chef for a renowned restaurant in London, while Armando became an entrepreneur and set up his own cleaning business. Their wives could reduce their work hours and dedicate themselves to the running of the household.

In other cases, fathers would draw from their transnational networks to outsource their newly acquired feminised social reproductive roles to other women in their families—a phenomenon described by Baldassar and Merla (2014) as 'circulation of care' (p. 35). For example, I came across cases where grandmothers living in Spain moved in with their adult daughters or sons in London to help them with childcare and domestic work, lifting the burden of feminised social reproductive tasks from fathers who could dedicate themselves to working more hours.

For some interviewees, the return to a more traditional gendered division of social reproductive labour meant that the 'biological order' was restored. Others felt saddened by the loss of time to spend with their families. Fathers who did not manage to achieve social mobility but continued working extended and unsociable hours in low-income, feminised jobs leaving little time for family life often remarked how they missed Spain, where they had time to 'enjoy family and life'. This aligns with the findings from the study by King and Della Puppa (2021) on the experiences of Bangladeshi men who onward migrated from Northern Italy to London, who observed how downward mobility in the onward destitution can disrupt the temporalities and rhythms of migrants' everyday lives.

## 7 | ONWARD COLOMBIAN MOTHERS: BEYOND STRATIFIED SOCIAL REPRODUCTIVE LABOUR?

### 7.1 | Social reproductive labour during onward migration

When asked about why they onward migrated to London, mothers discussed the impact the 2008 crisis had on their family's income. They also felt that Spain was not a good place to raise their children anymore due to the lack of educational and working opportunities, confirming how onward migration is both a response to economic crises (Mas Giralt, 2017) and part of family strategies (Morad & Sacchetto, 2020; Ramos, 2018). Cristina, for example, explained how she did not want her daughter to be raised among the 'ninis' of Spain—youths that 'ni estudian, ni trabajan' (neither study nor work):

*The generation in which Marisa would have been raised… They are poorly educated. […] They are 30 years old and are not studying […] During summer, they work a few months to travel, their parents give them money for petrol, or they work to buy cigarettes. They are allowed to drop out of school […]. They don't care about learning a new language.*

Some mothers took credit for the decision to relocate their families in London, even when they would follow later once their husbands would settle. The previous section showed that fathers suffered family separation when onward migrating. For mothers, remaining in Spain was equally hard, particularly for those who had to combine work with childcare:

> *I stayed in Spain for a year and 3 months alone with my youngest child [...] I had a bad time because I was alone. Everything depended on me [...] When my husband was here at least he helped me take him to school or with the homework. But then, I had to do it all myself. Because, of course, I had to wait until he settled and decided whether to stay in London or not. That year, I had a really bad time.*

While most mothers interviewed followed, I came across women with Spanish passports who onward migrated first, defying gender norms. For some this was not the first time as Colombian migration to Spain in the early 2000s was highly feminised (Bermudez & Oso, 2019; Bermudez, 2020). Some women took the initiative because their partners were reluctant to endure downward mobility and worse living conditions in the onward destination. As explained by Rosario:

> *I said: 'No, I have to work, I have to find a way for my son'. He [her husband] said: 'I am not going anywhere'. I liked it because here [in London] I knew it was big, there was work and everything is in English [...] He did not like it here because he did not like living in a single room [.] I didn't care. I get used to it because you've got to do what you've got to do to* seguir adelante *(keep going).*

Women's migration requires the reorganisation of social reproductive labour but does not necessarily lead to a change in gender practices and ideologies within families (Dreby, 2010). Only one of the mothers interviewed who pioneered onward migration left her children in Spain under the care of her husband. More commonly, pioneer mothers would temporarily leave their children under the care of their mothers, sisters, or adult daughters in Spain, as their husbands or ex-partners were reluctant to assume childcare roles. Mothers who did not manage to outsource childcare to other female relatives in Spain, particularly single mothers, would either onward migrate with their children or send them to Colombia under the care of their grandmothers, as in the case of Adriana, who had recently separated from her husband when the crisis hit Spain. This confirms that gendered transnational family networks can be invaluable spaces where women can outsource social reproductive work when crossing borders (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Dreby, 2010).

## 7.2 | Stratified social reproductive labour following onward migration

Mothers often felt they bore responsibility for most social reproductive work in London. As put by one interviewee:

> *My husband, look, he doesn't have issues with time, or limitations, nothing. He has always been working full time [...] because he doesn't have any obligations with his children, with the house, or anything. [...] For me it's been hard because I have to take care of my child who is young [...] I had to find a job and adapt to the time, take him to school, pick him up from school, and try to spend time with him.*

Like several fathers who participated in this study, most mothers interviewed entered low-income, feminised industries, particularly cleaning (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2019). They identified English barriers and the need to augment their family's income while caring for their children as important factors that pushed them into these jobs. Working a couple of hours in the early morning and late evening as cleaners allow them to combine work with their childcare and domestic responsibilities. For some, working in feminised industries was not a new experience. Colombian migration to Spain in the late 1990s and early 2000s was indeed highly feminised (Bermudez, 2016). Colombian migrant women contributed to fill Spain's 'care deficit' (Datta et al., 2010). Nonetheless, working as cleaners represented a significant downward move. As remarked by one interviewee:

> *I spoke with many people who in Spain were working, who have much experience in many sectors, they have many qualities and skills [...] and they say: 'I am happy with my 4 h of cleaning'. I say: but you have your degree, your profession [...] I would be happier if I went back to work in homes, in elderly care!*

Colen (1995) coined the term *stratified social reproduction* to refer to how social reproductive labour 'is differentially experienced, valued, and rewarded according to inequalities of access to material and social resources in particular historical and cultural contexts' (p. 78). Mothers felt that working in low-paid feminised industries in London prevented them from adequately ensuring the social reproduction of their families. Low wages make it harder to provide for material everyday necessities, such as adequate accommodation or educational resources for their children. Mothers in the cleaning sector often worked unsociable hours early in the morning and late in the evening, resulting in them having less energy and time to be fully present for their children or fulfil childcare duties at the standard they wish. They also felt they had little opportunities to learn English in these jobs where interaction with English native-speaking co-workers is minimal. Yet, mothers considered English fundamental to support their children in their educational journey.

## 7.3 | Beyond stratified social reproductive labour?

Some mothers began outsourcing social reproductive work to other actors to ensure their families' needs were better met. When they could not rely on their husbands' or ex-partners' support, mothers would reach out to their female relatives in London. Indeed, Colombians onward migrated to London attracted not only by labour opportunities but also by the fact that some already had Colombian relatives and friends living

there (Bermudez & Oso, 2019). These were particularly salient for mothers who pioneered onward migration and single mothers. For example, Sofia, who spent the first couple of years in London on her own with her two daughters while she waited for her husband's family visa to be issued, was supported by her sister-in-law, who had moved to London in the 1990s. She welcomed Sofia and her daughters into her home, helped her with childcare, and supported her daughters' transition to a new school.

In exploring the role of a London-based Latin American NGO in the lives of Latin American migrants, Turcatti (2021) showed that migrant-led NGOs can be key in supporting migrant women to access adequate resources to socially reproduce their families. The mothers I met through Latin American NGOs and the Latin American parent group where I carried out participant observation would often express their gratitude to these organisations who supported them to access welfare benefits, housing, and the healthcare system in addition to helping them find a school place for their children and offering educational support to their children or free English classes.

Some mothers identified the opportunity of outsourcing social reproductive work to relatives, NGOs, or the state (e.g., in the form of welfare benefits) as key to seize the educational and career opportunities London offers to migrant women. It is indeed well established that women's social reproductive responsibilities in their families can be an obstacle to their social mobility (Kofman, 2014). Several mothers felt that in Spain, their career and educational options were limited by ageism, gender inequality, and discrimination, as powerfully captured by one mother:

> *There [in Spain] women older than forty… Well, they tell them no! If you don't have a profession, you end up working in cleaning or caring for the elderly. I mean, you don't have the option to improve your life, to find a better job, you don't have option. No, no, no. […] here, on the other hand […] I like it here because here people respect you […] here, a girl has the same mental capacity as a boy. […] In Spain they are very* machista *in the sense that they think men are more intelligent than women.*

In contrast, in London mothers often perceived greater gender equality and opportunities for adult education in addition to less discrimination towards migrants. This sentiment was often expressed by mothers who remarked that 'in Spain you don't see a Latino or Black person working in a bank'.

Carolina's case best exemplifies how mothers would outsource social reproductive work motivated to access these opportunities for social mobility too. At the time of the interview, Carolina was working as a nurse. Upon arrival in London, she entered the cleaning sector but wanted more for herself and her family. After studying English, she enrolled in a course for nurses. Carolina was proud to have been one of those nurses on the frontline of the pandemic. She explained she was able to combine her apprenticeship with part-time work thanks to her husband:

> *When I started my studies, my son was in secondary school and I was absent […] My husband was cooking, caring for our child, and attending the house while I was studying. The most difficult part of becoming a nurse was not studying but having to do the training and you need to follow the time of the hospital […] My husband did everything possible to make my life easier.*

In their study of childcare arrangements among Spanish parents in Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom, Escriva et al. (2022) found that mothers' ability to balance work and family life depended not only on the receiving social, institutional and family support, but also on gender expectations around the sharing of roles and responsibilities in their families. It has been already highlighted how not all interviewees could rely on the support of their partners, either because they were separated, their partners would work long hours to support their families, or because their partners had a 'machista' mindset, as reported by one interviewee. Furthermore, not all mothers had extensive family networks in London. As a result, I came across mothers who would outsource some of their social reproductive tasks to their adolescent children who, for example, would help with the care of their younger siblings to undertake training or educational opportunities. This was the case of Adriana, a Colombian single mother, who was undertaking a university course on Criminology at the time of the interview and recounted how she would work on her university assignments while her children would complete their high school homework. If most fathers interviewed struggled to achieve social mobility and often wanted to return to Spain, mothers who were able to access support to ensure the social reproduction of their families as well as potential opportunities to achieve social mobility would more often express the desire to remain in London.

## 8 | CONCLUSION

By exploring how Colombian fathers and mothers who onward migrated from Spain to London described their social reproductive roles, this paper shed light on how social reproductive arrangements are negotiated during and after onward migration, why and with what implications for gender inequalities among onward migrant parents, their well-being and socioeconomic opportunities. Importantly, the perspectives of *both* fathers and mothers were addressed to challenge hegemonic representations of migrant fathers as uninvolved fathers and the construction of male migrants as independent and non-relational (Kilkey et al., 2014; Locke, 2017).

First, this paper showed that gendered social reproductive arrangements where fathers are the primary breadwinners while mothers remain responsible for childcare can be structured and maintained in the process of onward migration. In line with the findings of previous studies with Latin Americans who onward migrated from Spain (e.g., Bermudez & Oso, 2019), the fathers interviewed typically onward migrated first to fulfil their breadwinning role provided they held the 'civic capital' (McIlwaine, 2012) necessary to onward migrate (e.g., EU passport), while mothers would stay in Spain to look after their children, onward migrating

once their husbands were settled. Gender practices concerning social reproductive work were not necessarily challenged when women would take the initiative to onward migrate as mothers would more commonly remain responsible for childcare or would entrust their female relatives in Spain to temporarily look after their children while they settled in London. This aligns with the existing literature showing that women's migration often requires the reorganisation of social reproductive labour but does not necessarily lead to a change in gender practices and ideologies within families (Dreby, 2010; McIlwaine, 2010).

Secondly, this paper contributes to the existing literature on onward migration by showing that onward migrant families renegotiate their social reproductive arrangements to deal with the socioeconomic challenges they encounter in the onward destination. In line with existing studies on the labour market experiences of Latin American migrants who onward migrated from Southern Europe to London (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016, 2019), many onward Colombian fathers and mothers interviewed experienced downward mobility and entered precarious, feminised sectors of the labour market such as cleaning, which required both mothers and fathers to work long hours for low wages. This study showed that in some cases, these new material conditions can lead to more gender-equal social reproductive arrangements as fathers may take up feminised roles to help meet their families' needs. At the same time, mothers working long hours in feminised, low-paid sectors of the labour market began to outsource some of their social reproductive tasks to various actors in different sites (e.g., female relatives, Latin American NGOs, or the state in the form of welfare benefits) to ensure the social reproductive needs of their families and children are met, particularly when they cannot rely on their partners.

Finally, it was shown that onward migrant families renegotiate their social reproductive arrangements in response to the socio-economic opportunities the new destination offers. The findings highlighted that as onward Colombian families settle and adjust to life in London, fathers may find more stable employment at times achieving social mobility, resulting in more traditional gendered division of labour to be re-established. At the same time, the desire of mothers to seize the educational and labour opportunities London offers drove the redistribution of social reproductive tasks among family members. For mothers who could not rely on the involvement of their partners, outsourcing their social reproductive work to female relatives or their children became fundamental for them to seize the educational and work opportunities London offers, which they felt they never had in Spain, because of their age, gender, and migration background.

While this paper focused on the experiences of parents in low-paid sectors and as such does not capture the full heterogeneity of onward Colombian families in London, it contributes to the under-standing of the social reproductive experiences of *both* onward migrant fathers and mothers and illustrates that onward migrant families renegotiate their social reproductive arrangements over time to address the socioeconomic challenges and opportunities families and its members encounter in the onward destination. Ultimately, this paper highlights the relational and fluid nature of social reproduction across time and space.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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## APPENDIX A

The table below provides information about the onward Colombian mothers who participated in the research. Their names have been replaced by an identifier (M stands for Mother). The table indicates whether their partners have been interviewed, with their details outlined in Appendix B.

| M # | Age | Years in London | Family—Key info | Job in London | Partners interviewed? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M #1 | 40–45 | Less than 5 | Living in London with her husband and two children (8 and 16 years old). Her relatives are all in her home country. | Cleaner | No |
| M #2 | 50–55 | Less than 5 | Living in London with husband and grandson. She has two daughters who are now in their twenties. One lives in Spain, the other one in Colombia. Rest of the family is in Colombia. | Cleaner | No |
| M #3 | 40–45 | Less than 5 | Living in London with husband and two children (below the age of 12). Oldest son is 18 years old and lives in the United States. Relatives in the United States and in Colombia. | Cleaner | No |
| M #4 | 40–45 | Less than 5 | Living in London with husband and her 12-year-old child. Her oldest child (older than 18) moved to the United States. Her sister lives in Spain and the rest of her relatives are in Colombia. | cleaner | No |
| M #5 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London alone. She is divorced. She has two children who are now adults and live in Colombia. | Cleaner | No |
| M #6 | 35–40 | Less than 5 | She is divorced and her husband lives in Colombia. She has three adolescent children who have moved from Colombia to London during the pandemic. | Cleaner | No |
| M #7 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with her husband and her adolescent son. Rest of her relatives are in Colombia. | Nurse | No |
| M #8 | 35–40 | Less than 5 | Living in London with husband and her teenage daughter. Relatives in Colombia. | Cook | Husband F#6 |
| M #9 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with husband, and her two daughters (one is an adolescent, and the other one is in primary school). Her brother-in-law lives in London with his family. Rest of her family is in Colombia. | Kindergarten teacher and babysitter | Husband F#8 |
| M #10 | 40-45 | Less than 5 | Living in London with husband and two sons. Her family is in Colombia, her husband's family is in Spain, since he is Spanish. | Cleaner | No |
| M #11 | 35–40 | More than 5 | Living in London with husband and her three children. Rest of her relatives are in Colombia. | Shop assistant | Husband F#9 |
| M #12 | 35–40 | More than 5 | Living in London with her adolescent son, recently separated from her husband. | Cleaner and childcare | No |
| M #13 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London alone. She has two daughters in their late 20s and early 30s who live in Spain. | Cleaner | No |
| M #14 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London alone, divorced. She has two children who are now adults. One lives in Colombia and the other lives in Italy. | Carer | No |
| M #15 | 35–40 | More than 5 | Living in London with daughter and husband. In London, she has also two brothers and her mother. The other brother is in Madrid. Her husband's family is mostly in Colombia. | Cleaner | No |
| M #16 | 40–45 | Less than 5 | Living in London alone. Youngest son (now married) lives in Colombia. Her oldest son remained in Valencia. | Cleaner | No |
| M #17 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with husband and her adolescent daughter. She has brothers in Spain but the rest of the family in Colombia. | Cleaner | Husband F#11 |
| M #18 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with her two adolescent daughters. Her ex-husband lives in Spain. Rest of the family in Colombia | Cleaner and carer | No |
| M #19 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London. She is a widow. She has three children who are now in their 20s. Two children live in London with her and the other child is in Germany. Her sister lives in Spain. | Not working due to health reasons, used to work as cleaner | No |

| M # | Age | Years in London | Family—Key info | Job in London | Partners interviewed? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M #20 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with her husband and two daughters in primary school. | Information missing | Husband F#14 |
| M #21 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London with youngest son, separated from husband who also lives in London with oldest son. | Cleaner | No |
| M #22 | 45–50 | Less than 5 | Living in London with her husband and a new-born. In London, there are also her relatives. | Not working | No |
| M #23 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London with her husband. Two adult children in Colombia and one adult child in Spain. | Childcarer | Husband F#13 |
| M #24 | 50–55 | Less than 5 | Living in London with her youngest daughter who is now in her 20s. She has two adult children who live in Spain. | Cleaner | No |
| M #25 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London with husband and a teenage daughter. Rest of the family is in Colombia. | Cleaner | No |
| M #26 | 45–50 | More than 5 | Living in London with her daughter who is 19. Oldest son lives in London with his partner. | Cleaner and childcarer | No |
| M #27 | 30–35 | More than 5 | Living in London with her newborn, her husband, and her mother. | Cleaner and carer | Husband F#15 |
| M #28 | 55–60 | Less than 5 | Living in London with daughter, her daughter's husband, and her granddaughter. | Cleaner | No |
| M #29 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with her two adolescent children. Her ex-husband is in Spain. Her mother and relatives are in Colombia. | Packaging worker | |
| M #30 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with her husband and two children in their adolescence. Some family members are in Spain, rest of her relatives are in Colombia. | Cleaner | Husband F#16 |
| M #31 | 50–55 | More than 5 | Living in London with husband, her son (who is in his 20s) and her adolescent daughter. | Cleaner | Husband F#17 |
| M #32 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with her husband and four children below the age of 18. | Cleaner | Husband F#18 |

## APPENDIX B

The table below provides information about the onward Colombian fathers who participated in the research. Their names have been replaced by an identifier (F stands for Father). The table indicates whether their partners have been interviewed, with their details outlined in Appendix A.

| F # | Age | Years in London | Family ties | Job | Partners interviewed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F #1 | 40–45 | More than 5 | He lives in London with his two sons and wife. However, he recently separated and therefore he does not cohabit with them. His cousins live in Spain, rest of his relatives are in Colombian and the United States. | Cleaner | No |
| F #2 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London with his wife and his two sons who are now adults. One son lives in London in another house with his partner and child. Armando has two siblings in Spain and his parents in Colombia. | Owner of a cleaning business | No |
| F #3 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London alone. His two adult children live in Colombia. The rest of their relatives are in Colombia. | Cleaner | No |
| F #4 | 40–45 | Less than 5 | Living in London with his wife and 15-year-old daughter. Two daughters (ages 18 and 21) have stayed in Spain. In London, he has some family members (uncles). In Spain, there's his mother and sisters. | Cleaner | No |

(Continues)

| F # | Age | Years in London | Family ties | Job | Partners interviewed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F #5 | 35–40 | More than 5 | Living in London with his Dominican wife and 1-year-old son. Mother, father and brother live in Spain. His wife's family also lives in Spain. | Cook | No |
| F #6 | 40–45 | Less than 5 | Living in London with wife and his teenage daughter. Rest of the family are in Colombia. | Cook | Wife M#8 |
| F #7 | 45–50 | More than 5 | Living in London with teenage daughter. Separated from his ex-wife who stayed in Spain. He has relatives in Spain and Colombia. | Waiter | No |
| F #8 | 55–60 | More than 5 | Living in London with wife, and two daughters (one is an adolescent, and the other one is in primary school). In London, he has a brother who lives with his family. Rest of his family lives in Colombia. | Cleaner | Wife M#9 |
| F #9 | 45–50 | More than 5 | Living in London with wife and his three children (one adolescent, two in kindergarten). Most of his relatives are in Spain. | Cleaner | Wife M#11 |
| F #10 | 45–50 | More than 5 | Living in London with his wife and his two daughters who are now in their early 20s. Rest of the family are in Colombia. | Cook | No |
| F #11 | 45–50 | More than 5 | Living in London with his wife and their adolescent daughter. In Spain, he has three brothers, but all his other relatives live in Colombia. | Cleaner | Wife M#17 |
| F #12 | 45–50 | Less than 5 | Living in London with his wife and a newborn. In London there are also the relatives of his wife. Rest of the family are in Colombia. | Cleaner | Wife M#22 |
| F #13 | 65–70 | More than 5 | Living in London with his wife. He has two adult children living in Colombia and one adult child in Spain. | Cleaner | Wife M#23 |
| F #14 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with his wife and two daughters who are in primary school. His brother lives in Spain with his f amily and the rest of his family in Colombia. | Cleaner | Wife M#20 |
| F #15 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with newborn, his wife, and his mother-in -law (cohabiting). | Missing info | Wife M#27 |
| F #16 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with his wife and two children who are adolescents. He has some family members in Spain, with most of his family in Colombia. | Owner of cleaning company | Wife M#30 |
| F #17 | 50 | More than 5 | Living in London with his wife and two children (one adolescent, the other is 25 years old). | Skilled occupation | Wife M#31 |
| F #18 | 40–45 | More than 5 | Living in London with his wife and four children who are school age. He had family members in Germany and in Colombia. | Cleaner | Wife M#32 |