



# MI CASA ACÁ MI PAÍS ALLÁ

PERCEPTIONS OF HOME AND BELONGING  
AMONG COLOMBIAN  
ADOLESCENT (FORCED) MIGRANTS IN COSTA RICA

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# MI CASA ACÁ, MI PAÍS ALLÁ

## Perceptions of Home and Belonging among Colombian Adolescent (Forced) Migrants in Costa Rica

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL  
ANTHROPOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF UTRECHT

2013

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**Map I** (top) Location Colombia in South America

**Map II** (bottom) Location Costa Rica in Central America

Maps adapted from Lonely Planet

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/> (28.06.2013)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*« Plus on a médité, plus on est en état d'affirmer qu'on ne sait rien »<sup>i</sup>*

*Voltaire*

By the end of our fieldwork, we questioned the knowledge we had acquired prior to going into the field. We went into the field, feeling prepared with all the background knowledge about our topic, but not really knowing what was expecting us. Once we were settled in the field, and started to explore what we were looking for, we began to wonder. What, in fact did we really know about the feelings of home and belonging among youth (forced) migrants? Everything we had read and written, re-read and re-written in the weeks, perhaps months before our journey was becoming a blur. And that was the moment where we were able to follow Voltaire's line of thought.

During our fieldwork, our informants, who also became our friends, guided us through their life world. They helped us try to understand, not only what we wanted to know but more importantly they showed us how the realities of young migrants, who were forced to leave their country, can look like. We are very grateful to all our informants for all the time and energy that they spent participating in our research. We very much enjoyed working with the participants of our research, who taught us to look well beyond the taken-for-granted, the common sense and most, beyond the knowledge that comes from books. They taught us the realities of the here and now.

We wish to express many thanks to the Asociación de Consultores y Asesores Internacionales (ACAI) and the Refugee Education Trust (RET), who are dedicated to give voice to and support those, who are often overheard. Our special thanks go to Gloria Makhlouf Weiss, the director of the ACAI, and Jennyfer, whose English classes for refugees we always attended with great pleasure. Many thanks also to Grettel Gamboa and Mónica Fallas, the director and the assistant of the RET, without whom we would have not been able to meet our first informants and thus begin with our research in the field.

Our gratitude also goes to Floortje Toll, our supervisor and guide throughout the whole research project. We wish to thank Floortje for her support in moments of despair and doubt as well as for pushing our ambitions as far as she perceived possible.

We also wish to present our gratitude to our families, who support us in our best and our worst time. They always supported us in moments of joy, of doubt, of sadness and of success and we want to thank them for all their patience and guidance.

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<sup>i</sup> "The more I read, the more I acquire, the more certain I am that I know nothing"

Finally, we also wish to express gratitude to our teamwork, which was only made possible through our friendship. As partners and friends, we were each other's fieldnotes, headnotes and personal diaries.

June 2013

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Chapter 1: The Feeling of Home and Belonging in Times of Migration</b>	6
1.1 Home and Belonging	6
1.2 Transnationalism	9
1.3 Adolescence: Creating Home and Belonging	13
<b>Chapter 2: Colombians in Costa Rica</b>	17
<b>Chapter 3: The Making of Home</b>	21
3.1 Everyday Life and Home	22
3.2 Home and Family	28
3.3 Home and Adolescence	30
3.4 Home and Safety	32
<b>Chapter 4: Colombian Roots and the Feeling of Belonging</b>	37
4.1 The Feeling of Belonging and Everyday Life	37
4.2 The Feeling of Belonging and Community	39
4.3 The Feeling of Belonging and Future Perspectives	44
<b>Conclusion</b>	49
<b>Bibliography</b>	57
<b>Appendix 1: List of Informants</b>	61
<b>Appendix 2: Resumen Español</b>	62

## INTRODUCTION

“What have you been doing in Costa Rica?” the cab driver asks while we drive through the streets of San José, Costa Rica, direction airport on an early Saturday morning. “We have been doing anthropological fieldwork on Colombian adolescent forced migrants”, we tell him. “And what did you find out? Anything interesting?” he wants to know, whereupon we roughly explain what we have learned during our fieldwork. After he listened attentively to our words, he agitatedly starts explaining us his view on Colombians in Costa Rica. “Many of them come to my country, because they know that they are economically better off here than in Colombia. Some of them come as refugees, because they really had to flee their country, but many also just come here, pretending to be refugees and benefit from the fact that life is easier here than in Colombia”. He seems to be very emotional about this topic. He talks about Costa Ricans, who work hard and pay their taxes, while, as he puts many Colombians do not. “You know” he continues, “my mechanic is Colombian, and he does a very good job. He is a hardworking man and I respect that, but those Colombians, who come here and get involved in criminal activities... We do not need that here”

He seems eager to share his opinion while throwing glances at us through the driving mirror, as we both are sitting on the backseat. “When does your flight leave?” he wants to know, and since we have plenty of time, he asks whether he can show us something. A few minutes later we arrive in a neighborhood, which at first seems quite similar to others we have seen. The streets are filled with small shops; most of them are still closed at this early hour. In front of them we see small groups of people, mostly men, standing, talking to each other, hanging out.

“Do you see all those people hanging out on the streets in front of the shops? They are Colombians, and that is what they do all day long... Hanging around on the street” says our taxi driver. For him this district and the people that we just passed by seem to be a perfect example of all the Colombians, who take advantage of the good economic situation of Costa Rica. During the rest of our drive to the airport, he argues that Costa Rica should be stricter in granting refugee status. “They should verify the stories of these Colombians, go to Colombia and check whether they told the truth or not.”

We keep talking all the way to the airport. “It is good that you have been doing research on Colombian forced migrants. Some day you have to come back and try to learn more about the way Costa Ricans think about them”, he says while taking our backpacks out of the boot of the taxi.

This small intermezzo showed us once again how present Colombian (forced) migrants are in the Costa Rican society. This is, Costa Ricans have an opinion about Colombians residing in their country and sometimes can get quite emotional when talking about them.

We were able to meet and talk to many Colombians during the ten weeks of our fieldwork (between February and April 2013), who told us about the other side of the taxi driver’s story. This is, we listened to their stories how and why they came to Costa Rica, how it is to be a (forced) migrant in Costa Rica and how they think about Costa Ricans and the Costa Rican culture. Further, tracks of the Colombian culture can be found everywhere in San José, Heredia and Alajuela. When you walk through the streets of San José, for example, you see signs like “Panadería Colombiana”<sup>ii</sup> or “Salón de Belleza Colombiano”<sup>iii</sup> everywhere. This is, Colombians in Costa Rica are a visible group. Not only visible in the sense that Costa Ricans do actually have an opinion about them, but also visible in the sense that they form part of the cityscape.

Even though it would have been interesting to study the way Costa Ricans consider the Colombians that come to their country, we focused on Colombians themselves, and tried to find out how they perceive home and belonging and if and how they still are connected to their home country. More specifically, we focused on Colombian adolescents between 15 and 25, in order to find out how they experience migration and life in a new country. We chose for this specific target group, because we believe that adolescence is a crucial phase, in which the youngsters strive for independence and reflect on their own identity. The question to which we tried to find an answer is the following:

*How are the feelings of home and belonging expressed in the everyday life of Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants in San José, Heredia and Alajuela, Costa Rica?*

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<sup>ii</sup> Colombian Bakery

<sup>iii</sup> Colombian Beauty Salon

Since there is not much literature on Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants, we consider our study to some extent scientifically relevant. We believe that a focus on adolescent (forced) migrants, or what Sanchez (2009) calls "1.5 generation", immigrants, who were born abroad and migrated to a country of settlement after school age and before adolescence (8), is crucial. This focus enables us to shed light on the experiences adolescents have when they migrate to another country, in contrast to the experiences adults have when migrating. In this way, we are also able to highlight the differences between adolescents and adults in the process of migration. We further argue that our study offers an alternative view on the concepts of home and belonging. Usually, those two concepts are presented as completely interconnected. However, we argue that there are some significant differences between the feeling of home and the feeling of belonging.

The perhaps social relevance of our study implies that the individuals of our target group, namely Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants aged 15 to 25, got the possibility to reflect on their situation as youth (forced) immigrants. Further, the two non-governmental organizations (NGO) we worked with, the Refugee Education Trust (RET) and the Asociación de Consultores y Asesores Internacionales (ACAI), which both work with (forced) migrants from several countries, such as Colombia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, etc., are interested in our findings about the population they work with.

In order to find out more about the feelings of home and belonging among Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants in Costa Rica, we used the following qualitative methods. In order to build up trust with our target group and learn what their everyday lives look like, we tried to hang out with the adolescents as much as possible. We went to concerts, drank coffee together, or went to the park and had ice cream. We used the method of participant observation when we went to the activities organized by the RET and ACAI, where we could observe how the adolescents act in a group. We also participated in everyday life activities of the adolescents such as parties organized by their families, family dinners, etc. In this way we were able to see for instance how transnationalism is present in the adolescents' everyday lives.

We also could observe how our informants behave in the circle of their families and had the opportunity to talk with some of their parents, too. This was crucial to our research, since we are interested in the differences in the perceptions of home and belonging between the adolescents and their parents as well. By having

informal conversations with the adolescents, we got an initial idea of the feelings of home and belonging and transnationalism among our target group. Finally, we tried to get more detailed information about the topics of our research during (semi-) structured interviews with the adolescents, of which we conducted up to three with each participant.

Organized around the theories of home and belonging, transnationalism and the specific focus on adolescents, this thesis will explore the impact that migration can have on the lives of Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants that moved to Costa Rica, with or without their parents. The first chapter begins with an exploration of the concepts of home and belonging. This chapter argues, in contrast to much of the scientific literature, that the feeling of home is not necessarily bound to the feeling of belonging. Drawing on our fieldwork material, we argue that the feeling of home is much more flexible than the feeling of belonging. The next section will review the theory of transnationalism, which can function as an instrument in creating the feelings of home and belonging. We will explore the conceptual development of transnationalism, the different levels it can be lived on, and the importance people, who do not live in their country of origin, ascribe to it. This is followed by a section that focuses on adolescence in general and specifically adolescence in times of migration. Here we will underscore the agency adolescents have in organizing their lives. We will extend the discussion of the adolescents' agency by shedding light on the differences between adolescents and their parents in the perception of the feelings of home and belonging.

The next chapter features the contextual background of our thesis. In this contextual chapter we give a brief overview of the immigrant situation, including asylum seekers and refugees in Costa Rica, with a special focus on Colombians. More specifically it reviews the push and pulls factors for migrating from Colombia to Costa Rica. The chapter then turns to a description of the usual journey Colombians go through from the home to the host country. We continue with a brief overview of the refugee policies in Costa Rica. Finally, we shift our attention to the socioeconomic background of the Colombian immigrant population.

In the two chapters that follow the contextual chapter we present our empirical findings. In the chapter "The Making of Home", we begin with a description of what it means for the adolescents to feel at home. By letting our informants talk, we illustrate how adolescent (forced) migrants construct home in their country of

settlement and what challenges they face on an everyday life basis in doing so. We then turn to the role family plays in the construction of home and to the ways migratory processes can influence family constellations. Next, the chapter explores the differences between adolescents' and adults' experiences in migratory processes. The final part of the chapter sheds light on the adolescents' perception of safety and how feeling of safety can contribute to the construction of home.

The second empirical chapter, "Colombian Roots and the Feeling of Belonging", focuses on the ways the adolescents still feel connected to their country of origin. The chapter first sheds light on how our informants experience their Colombian identity in their everyday lives. This "being Colombian" surfaces in their interactions with Costa Ricans, but also in the ways the adolescents eat or talk. Thereafter we explore the ways how the feeling of belonging is created within the Colombian community/ communities that surround(s) the adolescents. Finally, we turn our attention to the adolescents' future perspectives and the question whether they include their country of origin into their future plans.

We end our thesis by connecting our theoretical background with our empirical findings, joining them together into a concluding discussion.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE FEELING OF HOME AND BELONGING IN TIMES OF MIGRATION

### 1.1. HOME AND BELONGING

The feelings of home and belonging are usually seen as twins that are not to be separated, whereby the feeling of home constantly overshadows the feeling of belonging (e.g. Laoire et al., 2010). We consider however that the feeling of home and the feeling of belonging could and perhaps should be seen as two different matters. The feeling of home takes on a more fluid character, because it is influenced by social interaction. That is, home is created through the social environment. The feeling of belonging, on the other hand, is less compromised, since it is linked to the personal meaning of the individual. Indeed, in academic literature those two concepts often appear as a couple with a special emphasis on home. For instance, Di Stefano (2002) defines home as “a space or structure of activity and beliefs around which we construct a narrative of belonging” (38). That is, a range of regular and familiar activities creates the feeling of home, which in turn creates a sense of belonging (Di Stefano 2002: 38).

In the context of migration this familiar routine in a place called “home” is contested. Di Stefano (2002) points out, however, that migrants have the ability to develop multiple identities in their new setting, through which they swiftly shift depending on the situation (40). Migrants begin to adhere to two different “codes of belonging” simultaneously (Di Stefano 2002: 40). Here, the feeling of home as well as the feeling of belonging are defined as fluid processes in times of migration, since the narrative of belonging to a specific place is creating home. How these two concepts can be viewed as two different pieces of the same cake will be illustrated in the following.

Before we turn to the discussions revolving around each concept respectively, we would like to point out that we are aware that the feeling of home and the feeling of belonging are not to be understood as two loose strings. But we would like to underline the specificity of the context and the target population, which influences the degree to which these concepts are connected. For instance, concerning non- white

immigrants in the United States, Silva's (2009) research revealed that home is not only a "physical presence" (695) but also a "metaphorical place" (695). By this, she means that home is not only a spot on a map, but also a place, where people feel that they belong to.

Let us now turn our attention to the discussions revolving around the feeling of home. Laoire et al. (2010) challenge the western notion of home, which is usually connected to stability and fixity, by saying that home is made in relation to mobility (158). They state that "home is both re- made and re- membered through migration" (Laoire et al. 2010: 158), because home "emerges as a concrete site of social relations and practices" (Laoire et al. 2010: 159).

Also contesting the idea that home is something fix, Lucas and Purkayastha (2007) suggest that home is inspired by different meanings, such as love, comfort, safety, familiarity and belonging (244). Not only are these feelings personal and thus subjective, but they also emerge in relation to the social environment. And because home is a place tied to personal and social meanings, it is "linked to processes of identity formation for individuals and groups" (Lucas and Purkayastha 2007: 244). Thus, the feeling of home plays a crucial role in the process of identity formation, which is a fluid process, notably in times of migration. In general, this reflects the post- modernist theories on identity. In these theories, a person is composed of multiple interacting identities, which are alternately created by the structures surrounding an individual, and his agency (Loaire 2010: 486). All in all, in the frame of migration, while the migrant himself contributes to his identity formation, this same identity is tackled by external challenges, which influence the migrant's feeling of home.

According to Silva (2009), home is "a place where no one questions your right to *be*" (694). That is, home is a place where your being is legitimized by your roots and past. This, in turn, gives the individual a sense of familiarity, which is connected to the feeling home. In the same train of thought, Silva (2009) further argues that the feeling of home is deeply connected to the immigrant's bodily comfort (697). By bodily comfort, Silva (2009) refers to the physicality of home, which implies the enactment of our identities in the most natural way without having to fear of being judged (697). Bodily comfort means to feel physically and mentally integrated in the prevalent structures of home (Silva 2009: 696). In the case of migrants, bodily

comfort and thus the feeling of home might be challenged, because of differentials between the structures of their country of settlement and their home country.

We are aware that migrants in particular must shift constantly between their own definition of their identity as well as the one ascribed to them by others. This underlines the fact that the social environment and ultimately social relations that migrants entail with their environment influence their feeling of home. Hence, the feeling of home involves a fluid process.

As mentioned earlier, Lucas and Purkayastha (2007) relate the feeling of safety to the feeling of home. If home is indeed linked to social relations and to a sense of familiarity (Di Stefano 2002: 38), the feeling of safety can also be considered as a major factor contributing to the feeling of home. According to Fabiansson (2007), “personal relationships, acquaintances and trust of accepted people have come to symbolize a safe environment, while strangers and unfamiliar people are perceived with caution and distrust” (32). Accordingly, feeling unsafe can lead to an undermining of social cohesion, due to distrust (Fabiansson 2007: 34). Thus, if we consider that home is related to the feeling of familiarity, and if that sense of familiarity is contested by an unsafe environment, this will ultimately affect the feeling of home.

When it comes to belonging, we argue that the feeling of belonging is less compromised, or a somewhat less ambiguous matter, because unlike home, it is not foremost influenced by the social but rather by the personal meaning. However, we do not exclude the social environment in the process of developing a feeling of belonging. Christou (2009) proposes that belongingness is “a process of identification and contestation generated by migrants’ struggles to understand their sense of self through place- based emotional attachments” (249). In this statement, we stress the process of identification, which requires a social interaction with the group that people feel they belong to.

We argue that the feeling of belonging is being generated in a culturally familiar environment. That is, a person’s feeling of belonging is created during his/her childhood where he/ she learns the cultural codes with which he/she is becoming increasingly familiar as he/she grows up. Eventually, through a process of identification with a group of people sharing the same cultural behaviour, personal ties and meanings are developed to these cultural codes. Since the feeling of belonging implies a personal meaning to a specific cultural environment it is less

malleable than the feeling of home. Concerning this argument, Christou (2009) states that “perceptions of belonging can become reference points of a sense of self and a sense of (dis)connection to people and places that are correlated with ancestral roots and family histories”(250). That is, culture becomes a point of reference for the feeling of belonging with which the individual eventually identifies himself.

## **1.2. TRANSNATIONALISM**

Transnationalism and transnational activities are characteristic for migrants moving to another setting, while staying connected to their country of origin. Di Stefano (2002) calls this process the “deterritorialization of home” (40). According to Eriksen (2007), deterritorialization leads to “processes whereby distance becomes irrelevant” (16) for the relationship between a migrant and his/her country of origin. That is, home is a fluid process, which can be recreated in another setting through reproducing certain aspects of the original culture.

In general, there are four factors, which contribute to the establishment of transnational identities, communities, and organizations. Crucial factors are the local immigrant community, the country of settlement, the ties to the country of origin and the family. Let us explore the importance of these factors in transnational processes in more detail.

The local immigrant community is formed by a group of individuals that organize activities that revolve around the country of origin. These activities result in “border- spanning social formations” (Lucas&Purkayastha 2007: 244). These communities have been described as transnational social spaces (Faist in Lucas&Purkayastha 2007: 245), where people from the same country of origin interact. More specifically, transnational social spaces are bound by “connections, relationships and networks that span international space” (Lucas&Purkayastha 2007: 245). In these social spaces, individuals unite to interact on a cultural, social, political and economic basis. In fact, since transnationalism is a “boundary- breaking process” (Lucas&Purkayastha 2007: 244) by nature, these social spaces do not only restrict themselves to the local immigrant community, but also create social spaces with the home community in the country of origin. If social relations indeed help defining home, these transnational social spaces influence the making of home. Through an extended contact with the local community, the new setting can be rendered a place

one can call home. In addition, the contact kept with the community in the country of origin helps defining that country as still their home.

The second corner pillar of transnational expressions is the impact of the receiving country on the migrant. We would like to emphasize the influence of the local, cultural and social dynamics on the migrant's everyday life. As Espiritu (2003) proposes "the concept of transnationalism [...] highlights [...] the range and depth of migrants' lived experience in multinational social fields" (4). This implies, amongst others the experiences of migrants with their host country. In the same context, Espiritu (2003) uses the term "politics of location" (13) to describe the intense contact between the migrant and his/her ties with the home country as a sort of resistance to practices and places in the country of settlement. Therefore, the new environment affects the migrants in their thinking and actions.

In general, migrants do not have to choose between two cultures as they migrate (Laoire et al. 2010:158). Rather they form the hyphen between two countries. As Basch et al. in Lee (2011) suggest, transnationalism forms "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (296).

This last point brings us to our next factor, which influences transnational activities, namely the country of origin. It is the cultural and social point of reference for migrants. Transnationalism is, as mentioned above, a "boundary-breaking process" (Lucas&Purkayastha 2007: 244), which entails a regular flow of money, ideas and symbols between two countries. The regular contact to their country of origin, as well as with their people in the host country, furnishes migrants with updated cultural and social knowledge, as Di Stefano supports (Di Stefano 2002: 39). Just as the culture of the country of settlement, this information coming from the country of origin has a great impact on the activities of the local immigrant community (Lucas&Purkayastha 2007: 244) and ultimately on the immigrants' behaviour.

These two last corner pillars in particular, the country of origin and settlement, pinpoint the link between transnationalism and the feelings of home and belonging. "I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry "home" on my back" (Anzaldúa in Espiritu 2003: 9). This phrase clearly illustrates our point that "home" is a fluid process. In this context it is fluid because migrants imagine themselves to their original home, as

Espiritu (2003) suggests (11). However, through this quotation we would like to stress the cultural assets of home. In our view, migrants carry their original culture to the new setting. That is, home is recreated in another setting through reproducing certain, perhaps basic aspects of the original culture (Eriksen 2007: 149). Basic cultural aspects can range from the language to the way of cooking. This cultural reproduction is facilitated through transnational activities. In the first chapter of Espiritu's book "Homebound" (2003) the author writes about the impact that transnationalism has on our notion of place. According to her, nowadays we are challenged to think about place "not only as specific geographic and physical sites but also as circuits and networks" (Espiritu 2003: 3). Thus, transnationalism plays a crucial role in the evolvment of the feeling of home through the interaction in these networks and circuits. In that sense, transnational activities can help to grasp the feeling of home and reconstruct it in the present time and place.

Home entails a form of routine (Di Stefano 2002: 38). Since routine entails some sort of normality it falls into the loop of everyday life activities. Thus, home is regenerated through everyday life activities. These everyday life activities entail a form of embeddedness in the local context. To understand embeddedness, it is perhaps useful to look at what Giddens (1990) refers to as the process of disembedding, where the world becomes smaller due to communication technology and capitalism (Giddens in Eriksen 2007: 17). Even further, disembedding processes imply a "'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens in Eriksen 2007: 17). Thus disembeddedness entails a withdrawal from and a restructuring of social relations in specific contexts. Embeddedness, therefore, is linked to social interaction. This is particularly interesting in the case of migrants, because in emigrating from their country, they become in effect disembbded. On the other side of the coin, in immigrating to a country, migrants are compelled to a process of re-embedding (Eriksen 2007: 143). The process of re-embedding implies a recreation or even invention of "local foundations" (Eriksen 2007: 143) in a new setting. In the case of migrants, this entails an adaptation to the new environment, which is often accompanied by a certain kind of reproduction of their original culture (Eriksen 2007: 148).

If we consider that home is indeed linked to social relations, then embeddedness, and the attached processes of dis- and re-embedding, can be a useful

tool to understand the process of making home, since these processes affect social relations. This is especially interesting in the case of migrants, who rely on transnational activities and social contacts to re-embed in their host society.

Moreover, transnationalism helps re-creating the feeling of belonging in a new setting. That is, the new setting is filled with different social and cultural impressions than what the migrants grew up with, and thus with what they are familiar with. Since they interact with socially and culturally different environments, they constantly need to re-invent the narratives of belonging (Di Stefano 2002: 38). These narratives are created in relation to a specific place, in which people understand and are understood by others. In this understanding, based on feelings people have towards a place, a sense of belonging is defined (Di Stefano 2002: 38). In the case of migrants, these narratives need to be re-invented, since they are away from their original cultural environment, in which these narratives are created in the day-to-day interaction where people understand each other.

Di Stefano (2002) argues that migrants make use of media to stay in contact with their original culture to reshape the narrative and the sense of belonging to that culture in a new setting (39). That is, media becomes one of the sources on which migrants base their understanding of belonging to something greater. As Di Stefano (2002) points out, the re-invention of the discourse of belonging is done through an extensive contact with the original culture (39). Through media and the migrant community in the host country, migrants are constantly surrounded by their original culture. They are encouraged to “imagine” their country through the use of media, which evokes an emotional longing for the home country (Di Stefano 2002: 39). As already pointed out above, transnational ties with the country of origin re-invoke the feeling of belonging to something greater. Thus, contact with migrants from the same country of origin in the new setting can help re-inventing the narrative of belonging.

In general, it can be said that both the making of home and the recreation of a sense of belonging, require extended contact with the “old”, or previous home, that is, with the country of origin.

Finally, family also forms a corner stone in transnational expressions among adolescents. Lee (2011) stresses the importance to distinguish between parent’s and youth’s transnational experiences (7). Including the family in transnational activities is relevant when studying youth migration because it sheds light on the relationship between parents and their children when it comes to transnationalism. Faist and

Özveren (2004) include the family as also functioning as an institution that regulates transnational activities (Faist and Özveren 2004: 7). If we consider the family not only on the individual level but also as an institution, it could for instance explain potential conflicts between parents and their adolescent children.

Moreover, family relations can be greatly affected by migration. In some cases, families are separated by migration, and become what Orellana et al. (2010) call transnational families (587). Parents can leave their children behind when migrating, because they do not have a choice, or with the motive of achieving a greater collective good (Orellana et al. 2010: 587). The latter entails, for example that migrating parents send remittances back to increase the opportunities of their children back home. The distance affects these relationships, since the day-to-day interaction is absent. Especially when children are young, the absence of their parents can have a great impact, since they rely on their parents, amongst other on emotional care (Orellana 2010: 587). In sum, the relationships of families that are physically separated rely on transnational activities to sustain these relationships.

### **1.3. ADOLESCENCE: CREATING HOME AND BELONGING**

When talking about migration and the feelings of home and belonging, we drew our attention to adolescents because they are in a critical phase, where they strive for autonomy and control over their own lives. This can eventually lead to conflicting relationships with their parents. Especially in the context of transnationalism and mobility, children and youth build a special relationship to home and belonging, which might or might not converge with their parents' feelings of home and belonging. Either way, transnationalism is a "strategy" used by both, adolescents and adults alike to handle the movement to another country.

In general, little has been written about the role of adolescents in migratory processes. Scientific literature rather sheds light on the experiences adults make when they leave their country and migrate to another. We therefore consider it interesting to explore the ways adolescents experience the process of migration. We further are interested in the ways adolescents reflect on themselves as migrants, leaving their country behind.

Adolescents are considered to have less control over their own lives, than adults do. However, many authors reject this assumption. Bucholtz (2002) for

instance rejects the western notions of adolescence as a universal life stage that understand this phase of life a preparatory step to adulthood (528). She argues that it "frames young people as not-yet-finished human beings" (Bucholtz 2002: 529), which positions adolescents in a state of little control over their lives, since they depend much on the adults' guidance. That is, since they are not adults yet, who can take responsibilities, they depend on the adults to guide them through until the phase of adulthood is reached (Bucholtz 2002: 529).

Departing from the post- modernist view on identity, the agency of adolescents is emphasized, which challenges the scholarly debates discussed earlier about migration where this agency of youths was ignored. In stating that migrant children experience different levels of transnationalism than their parents, Lee (2011) underlines this agency (296). The author explores various patterns of transnational activities that separate youths' from their parents' activities in that domain. She proposes three different types of transnational practices pursued by adolescents. First, intradiasporic transnationalism, which refers to ties kept across the diaspora (Lee 2011: 303). It includes the ties kept, not only across national borders, but also translocal ties between different groups within a nation (Lee 2011: 303). She argues that this can be especially popular among second- generation migrants, since they are more likely to encounter others, who share their experiences. Second, Lee (2011) refers to indirect transnationalism, which entails a passive attitude when it comes to transnational activities (306). It includes a minimum of participation, which ensures the relationship to the community of the people coming from the same country at a lower degree. Finally, forced transnationalism refers to the feeling of obligation towards their parents and the community to engage in transnational activities rather than of own desire (Lee 2011: 308). All in all, these types of transnationalism represent different degrees of maintaining ties with the community and the homeland, which seemed most apparent among youth diaspora.

As Orellana et al. (2001) point out, migratory processes change the family relations, giving young people and children a place as agents in the dynamics that revolve around mobility, such as connections to the homeland or the country of settlement (587). That the agency of adolescents is especially apparent in migratory processes can lead to conflicts between adults and their children, that is, between generations. In general, intergenerational conflicts that may arise within communities, due to rapid social change, can place tradition opposed to innovation (Bucholtz 2002:

529). This is also applicable in times of migration, since it also entails an abrupt social change.

Laoire et al. (2010) emphasize the agency of children and youth in relation to home and belonging. The authors state that children are subjects, involved in the creation of their own social worlds, independently from their parents (Laoire 2010: 158). They argue that the notion of home is one that stems from the western notions of home, encompassing fixity and stability, which, according to western consciousness, are the best conditions for children to grow up (Laoire 2010: 158). Postcolonialists and feminists challenge this notion. They stress the relation between making home and creating a sense of belonging in terms of mobility. Laoire et al. (2010) support the idea that home and belonging among youth migrants are both flexible matters (158). On the one hand there is home, which, they argue is made through social relations (159). The authors describe how children and youths are in life stages, where they build identities in a much quicker way, which renders their "social relations, belongings and relationship to place fluid, contextual and mobile" (158). And as adolescents work as independent social agents (Orellana et al. 2001: 587), they create their own social worlds, which can help them in the process of making home independently from their parents.

Concerning the feeling of belonging, Laoire et al. (2010) state that it is not tied to a geographical place, or an institutionalized group. Rather, the feeling of belonging is "connected to the various spheres of life" (158), which they face in their everyday life. If the feeling of belonging among adolescent migrants is indeed influenced by the different realms of life they encounter daily, the sense of belonging is to a certain extent indeed a personal matter. It is personal in the sense that to whom or what the adolescents belong to depends on how they create and organize their everyday life.

In the framework of adolescence and agency, theories around everyday life and social media play a crucial role. Poster (2002) argues that everyday life "offers a point of resistance" outside the realm of the institutional (744). In that sense, everyday life can be seen as a gap within the system, where the non – institutional is taking place (745). Poster refers to the state and the economy as defining institutions, whereas in our study the family could be seen as an institution, which shapes the adolescents' lives. In other words, everything that adolescent (forced) migrants do outside of the institution "family", during their everyday activities, arises out of their own agency, resisting what has been imposed on them by their family structures.

Further, Poster (2002) describes the role media played during his childhood and adolescence and how they were a tool to create his own life world, helping him to develop his own interests (752). In the case of adolescent (forced) migrants, we believe that (social) media play a crucial role in building up a new life world, connecting the adolescents' two lives, the one in the country of origin and the one in the country of settlement, without having to depend on their parents or families in general.

## CHAPTER 2

### COLOMBIANS IN COSTA RICA

Costa Rica comprises some 4.8 Million inhabitants in total (IOM, 2012) from which 10.5%, or 504 000 people are immigrants (IOM, 2010). The greatest immigrant groups are Nicaraguans and Colombians (INEC, 2005). Of the total immigrant population, 20.449 are refugees (UNHCR, 2013), from which at least 9500 are of Colombian origin (ACAI, 2013). In 2007, according to the UNHCR report, the number of Colombian adolescent refugees encompassed 25% of the entire refugee population (UNHCR, 2008).

Costa Rica presents a typical example of a country concerned with south-south migration. Its steady economy as well as its “relatively high development indicators and a history of promoting human rights and democracy” (IOM, 2010) constitute, amongst others, the pull- factors of the migrants from neighbouring countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it is one of the main receiving countries for Colombian forced migrants (UNHCR, 2008). There are several main reasons why migrants from the neighbouring countries choose for Costa Rica as their country of destination. As most of the informants pointed out during our research, the educational system in Costa Rica is allegedly free and obligatory. In addition to greater educational opportunities, the participants also pinpointed the increased opportunities in employment and a stable future. Finally, a very often-heard reason for moving to Costa Rica is that it is safe and “tranquilo” (calm).

Most of the main reasons why Colombians decided to leave their country of origin, or the push- factors, are conflict- related. That is, some migrants are directly persecuted and threatened by paramilitary groups, guerilla or other gangs. Others are victims of everyday life criminality (e.g. seeking witness protection in Costa Rica). During our research we also encountered cases where the motive for leaving the country was more personal, for instance because of experienced domestic violence. Moreover, we also met migrants, who simply left Colombia to find greater socioeconomic opportunities in Costa Rica, that is, whose motives for emigration were not conflict- related.

In 2002, Costa Rica introduced a visa to regulate the influx of Colombian migrants (Bonnici 2011: 1). Indeed, the largest influx of Colombians took place between 2000 and 2002. Although it is not quite clear why most of the migrants arrived in Costa Rica during that period, we were able to seek out two different possible explanations. First, according to an employee of the UNHCR in Costa Rica with whom we briefly talked, Colombians wanted to enter Costa Rica before the visa was introduced in 2002. Second, as two of our key informants supposed, it was due to increased violence in Colombia during that time span.

The majority of Colombians, with whom we conversed, were forced migrants and a considerable amount entered Costa Rica in an illicit way by land. The typical journey Colombians experience when migrating is flying to Panama, where they catch a bus and eventually enter Costa Rica. Once in their country of settlement, they seek out the “migración”, the migration office, where they start their application for a refugee status. In general, there are different types of documents for Colombians residing in Costa Rica. First, upon their arrival they are asylum seekers. Then, they can acquire the status of refugee, with which they can (but not necessarily do) acquire the right to work. Third, they can become residents and finally, many apply for the Costa Rican citizenship, to acquire more liberties, e.g. for traveling more easily.

All in all, although the refugee rights entail that they are allowed to return to their country of origin (ACAI 2013), Colombians in Costa Rica are not allowed to return to Colombia for security reasons. As was explained to us by the RET, the Costa Rican state sees itself responsible for the refugees, and would take all the responsibility in case something happened to them upon their return to their country of origin (RET, 2013). For that purpose, many Colombian refugees apply for the Costa Rican citizenship in order to be able to travel to Colombia, as the RET explained.

Colombians can have dual citizenship. That is, if they acquire the Costa Rican citizenship they are allowed to keep their Colombian citizenship. Moreover, as one informant explained during our research, some persecuted Colombians prefer to leave South America, and move to Central America for fear of persecution. This is due to the fact that traveling between the countries in the southern part of America is easier than from the southern to the central part. In general, the risk to be further persecuted after having left Colombia is lower if migrants go to Central American countries.

In general, Colombians in Costa Rica are economically stable. Most dispose of higher education. 39.7 % of Colombian (forced) immigrants in San José have tertiary qualifications and 42.7% dispose over a secondary education (Bonnici 2011: 2). During our research it became clear that the majority of the Colombians in Costa Rica are originally from urban areas. Thus when coming to Costa Rica, they encounter less difficulties adapting to the urban life of San José, Alajuela, etc. In fact, many own their businesses, such as hairdressing salons, or other beauty salons, shops, bakeries, etc. in the cities. However, many do not occupy the same employment as they did in Colombia. We witnessed some cases during meetings in the ACAI where Colombians could not find an employment because some Colombian diplomas are not acknowledged in Costa Rica.

In overall, Colombians have the reputation to be ambitious and hard- working. Indeed, many dispose of a range of different diplomas. For instance, the mother of Milena, one of our key informants, who has her own shops, has a degree in at least three different studies. Milena herself is making a degree in fashion design as well as in law.

Our research was focused on Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants between the age 15 and 25. In total we conducted 38 interviews with 18 people, of which 3 were adult family relatives of the adolescents (father, aunts). Our main gatekeepers were two NGOs, namely RET and ACAI. The former was situated in Belén and the latter in San José. Colombians in Costa Rica are spread out in different places. That is, during our research we have not found a specific area, where only Colombians reside and work. Instead, Colombian shops, beauty salons and alike can be found a little bit everywhere. Therefore, our research was concentrated in different localities, namely in San José, Alajuela and Heredia. Many of our informants prefer living in smaller cities, instead of in the capital, because they are smaller, safer and more quiet - for many came from big cities in Colombia. Most of our informants came from Medellín, Cali and Bogotá. As our informants and the RET further pointed out, many Colombians in Costa Rica also come from Buenaventura. This diversity in their origins also indicates a great variation among the Colombian population in Costa Rica. In general there is a slightly greater solidarity among those who stem from the same areas in Colombia. All in all, the Colombian population in Costa Rica is quite heterogeneous. It includes a wide range of legal statuses (il/legal, asylum seekers,

refugees, etc.), different motives for leaving Colombia, different places of residence, etc.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE MAKING OF HOME

The kitchen is spacious. A counter separates the part, where one can cook, and where one can sit to eat. The smell of lasagna, which is cooking in the oven, is hanging in the air. A blond girl is sitting on a bar –stool, drinking a glass of red wine. Standing next to her is a girl with long brown hair and brown eyes. She is lightly dressed, wearing a white blouse, a pair of dark blue jeans and brown sandals. People are walking in and out of the kitchen. “Yo soy Colombiana!” the brown- haired girl proudly says, as she understood that we are here to learn more about Colombians. Without asking her any questions the girl starts telling us her story that brought her to Costa Rica; about how her mother, who used to work as a teacher in Colombia was threatened, where after the whole family had to leave the country. And that is where our curiosity begins and we start asking her questions about her feelings towards Costa Rica. The girl quickly replies that in her opinion Costa Ricans are conservative and closed- up people. “Y los Ticos son individualistas”<sup>iv</sup>, the blond girl adds, who, as it turns out, is from Argentina. The brown- haired girl continues about how Costa Ricans do not go out but rather stay in their houses and how “en Colombia, todos están afuera”<sup>v</sup>. The girl, speaking abundantly in a high tone, seems quite excited, as she goes on naming the things she dislikes in Costa Rica compared to the good sides of Colombia. The lasagna is ready, and people are starting to gather around the dinner table in the room next door. As we are about to get ready to join the dinner table, the brown- haired girl finishes the conversation by saying despite the fact that she misses Colombia, “mi casa ahora, es aquí”<sup>vi</sup>, and she would not want to go back to live “allá”<sup>vii</sup>.

This was the first time we met Milena (the brown- haired girl) at a party organized by a Costa Rican fellow. It was during the first days of our fieldwork and we were somewhat confused about her statement. She disliked Costa Rica in many respects, while admiring Colombia, and yet she did not want to return to her home country. We

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<sup>iv</sup> “And the Costa Ricans are individualistic”

<sup>v</sup> “In Colombia, everybody is outside”

<sup>vi</sup> “My home is here now”

<sup>vii</sup> “There”

could not help but wonder why and how this was possible. If you like and miss a country, why would you not want to go back?

Milena became one of our key informants. In the course of our research it became clear that she did not want to return to Colombia, for quite a few reasons. Her closest family, her mother and siblings, are with her in Costa Rica, as are her closest friends, mostly Costa Ricans. She left Colombia at the age of twelve and does not have any considerable friendships or other contacts in Colombia anymore. But more importantly, she was afraid of going back to her country of origin because of the violence she had witnessed in the streets of Colombia and her mother's history. Her mother worked as a teacher, sometimes in schools in marginalized areas. In one of them, she was threatened that she had to let the pupils pass the school year, or else she would be killed. These incidents distanced Milena from her home country. Nonetheless, she feels that Colombia is greatly present in her life. When I asked if the political and economic happenings in Colombia affected her, she nodded. "Si, claro. *Es mi país.*"<sup>viii</sup>

Milena, as many others that we have met during our fieldwork, presents one case of the complicated construction of home in times of migration. This case also depicts the most important aspects that are, for some, crucial in constructing home. Those aspects include foremost family and the feeling of safety. In addition, we wish to illustrate how living one's everyday life in a country that is culturally different to what one is used to, can also have a great impact in the formation of home. Thus, we will start this chapter by zooming in on some everyday life experiences of our informants. In the following, we wish to shed light on how the aspects family and safety shape the feeling of home of the Colombian adolescents in Costa Rica.

### **3.1. EVERYDAY LIFE AND HOME**

It's Saturday evening. The air is fresh. Yet, people are dressed lightly. Women put on their dresses and high heels, while men wear shirts and suits. The guests, smiling, laughing and talking, are enjoying themselves at the party, which is taking place in the inner courtyard of a Colombian household. At the bar, some adult men, about forty years old, are drinking Aguardiente, smoking cigarettes and laughing. On the

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<sup>viii</sup> Interview #2 with Milena, 22.03.2013

other side of the courtyard, people are moving their bodies to the rhythm of some salsa music. Although it is a Colombian party, Costa Rican friends of the family and of the Colombian guests are joining the festive occasion. Three Tico boys, one Nicaraguan boy, and two Colombians, Vivianna and Fidel, are sitting at our table. All are drinking beer and Aguardiente, except Vivianna. There are parallel small conversations going on between the adolescents. Every now and then, between the laughs and conversations, Vivianna tries to motivate the group to go to the dance floor. But the boys, exchanging jokes and laughing, simply reply “ahorita”, in a moment. But “ahorita” never comes.

It is about midnight. Vivianna’s father, who, together with his wife organized the party, approaches the table and calmly tells us to quiet down a little. Indeed the music that was resonating from the dance floor also had stopped some while ago, but the adolescents had not paid much attention. The atmosphere is dimming down, getting somewhat more serious as the adolescents are exchanging some words in a lower voice. It turns out that some Costa Rican neighbors complained about the noise of the party and called the police. The adolescents, disappointed about this incident, exchange their discontent with the situation. Fidel only comments that “aquí es normal”<sup>ix</sup>.

This situation illustrates what Fidel, one of our key informants has been pointing out at several occasions during our research. By “aquí es normal”, Fidel means that in Costa Rica it is normal that parties do not go longer than midnight. Partying in Costa Rica is not the same as in Colombia. He had pointed out this fact at several occasions, during informal conversations. The parties in his country of settlement are calmer compared to the long nights he spent celebrating in Colombia. In general, our adolescent informants often highlighted these small differences in the popular culture. Juanita, Fidel’s step- sister as well as Vivianna also commented that the fashion in Costa Rica is backward compared to Colombian fashion. These small differences constitute aspects of everyday life. In those day-to-day differences, the Colombian adolescents clearly perceive how it is “aquí” (here) and how it is “allá” (there). Yet, to define what constitutes “here” and what constitutes “there” does not necessarily indicate what signifies “home”.

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<sup>ix</sup> “Here it’s normal”

On an everyday life basis, making a difference between “here” and “there” also implies a form of differentiation between “our” culture and “their” culture. This, in turn, evokes a sense of otherness among the Colombian adolescents in Costa Rica, as will portray the following fragment of an interview with Fidel. In this interview, we spoke about the feeling of home from Fidel’s perspective.

***Fidel:** Sí, mi familia, sí o cuando estoy con la gente extranjera, como por ejemplo con ustedes. Sí, cuando hablo con ustedes no me siento como tan lejos. Sí, porque yo sé que ustedes son extranjeros y yo también, igual. En cambio cuando estoy con personas que son Ticas, sí se ve que son... ya son diferentes. Sí, sí. Por la cultura más que todo.<sup>2x</sup>*

Here, it becomes clear that Fidel feels at home with his family, and friends, which he pointed out earlier in that interview. But the most striking part is that he also feels at home when he is around foreigners.

Juliana, another informant, also feels the sense of otherness in the Costa Rican society. However, unlike Fidel, Juliana experienced direct discrimination, which contributed to her feeling of being “other”. Juliana changed schools because her previous schoolteacher called her a “narcotraficante”<sup>3</sup>. Although we have not encountered many cases like Juliana’s, we have been told that it is not uncommon that Colombians in Costa Rica are sometimes stigmatized as drug dealers and criminals. Discrimination against Colombian adolescents in Costa Rica takes place in the realms of everyday life activities, such as in school premises or at work.

As Lene asked Juliana if the discrimination she experienced made her feel less at home in Costa Rica, she replied “Sí, un poco. Uno se siente mal cuando lo discriminan a uno”<sup>xi4</sup>. For Juliana, to be at home means, amongst other, to feel good. And being discriminated against made her feel bad. If we recall Silva’s (2009) idea that home is also a place, where the “right to *be*” is not questioned (694), then the impact of this discrimination on Juliana’s feeling of home makes sense. As her right to be (there) was questioned by some locals, her bodily comfort (Silva 2009: 967) is at stake in her new environment. That is, in her previous school, Juliana could not be herself, a Colombian, without being judged. During the interviews she repeatedly

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<sup>x</sup> Interview #2 with Fidel, 20.03.2013

<sup>xi</sup> Interview #1 with Juliana, 21.03.2013

mentioned how Costa Ricans discriminate much against Colombians and also Nicaraguans. Her experience with the local population might have distanced her from Costa Rica, which, in turn reduced her sense of familiarity. Thus, because her “being” there was questioned, her sense of familiarity and ultimately her feeling of home were affected.

If we look at the experiences of Fidel and Juliana, it becomes clear how being the “other” on an everyday life basis influences the feeling of home. It is being even more affected if the person experienced direct hostility, and his/her right to *be* is questioned. Still, just to perceive on a daily basis how different one is from the environment, can already have a great impact on the feeling of being at home, as showed Fidel’s case. When comparing these two cases, it is worth noting that in Fidel’s case, the feeling of being different is created, not only by the (culturally) different environment, but also much by his own perception. That is, he differentiates *himself* from the local population. Juliana’s feeling of home, on the other hand, might to a certain degree be influenced by how she is *being* perceived as different. Therefore, the feeling of home depends on a “two-way” social interaction. In more general terms, the feeling of home not only depends on how the self perceives the other and how the other perceives the self but also how the self perceives the self in relation to the other.

The sense of otherness can also trigger a longing for old times, as has shown the case of Sofia, an informant who arrived in Costa Rica alone, six months ago. She does not feel at home in Costa Rica, and during interviews she constantly pointed to the small cultural differences between Colombia and Costa Rica, which make her miss certain aspects of Colombia. In an interview, Sofia revealed how she sometimes sits with her Colombian friend, reminiscing about times in Colombia.

*Lisa: ¿Sobre que hablas cuando estás con otros colombianos?*

*Sofía: Nos hablamos, mi amiga y yo, que es de Colombia, ay vacano era cuando estuvimos en Colombia, cuando salimos para las discotecas, y la música. Que chévere era cuando estuvimos con la familia, y cocinamos el San Cocho, o sea uno se acuerda de esas cosas y uno empieza a comentarlas con su amiga.<sup>xii5</sup>*

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<sup>xii</sup> Interview #1 with Sofia, 21.03.2013

Similarly, Maria, as well as other informants, such as Vivianna and Fidel, even go further in *imagining* their lives back in Colombia. More specifically, Maria expressed in an interview how she talks with her brother about what they would do in that moment if they were in Colombia.

*Lene: ¿Y con tu hermano hablas sobre Colombia?*

*María: Del poco rato que nos vemos, si a veces.*

*Lene: ¿Y de qué hablan?*

*María: De que estaríamos haciendo en este momento si estuviéramos allá. Más o menos eso... De pronto me dice 'ahora estaría con mi novia o estaría estudiando' cosas así<sup>xiii6</sup>.*

These interview extracts suggest how some Colombian adolescents imagine and miss their daily lives in Colombia, things they would do they feel they cannot do in Costa Rica. In fact, when asking these informants if they experienced the coming to Costa Rica as a rupture from their daily lives in Colombia, we got a positive reply. Most of these informants, who sit with their friends and imagine their lives in Colombia, cannot fully feel at home in Costa Rica. It could be suggested that indeed, imagining their lives in Colombia, can help them returning home through their imagination (Espiritu 2003: 11), maybe in times in which they feel most foreign in Costa Rica. That is, in times when Costa Rica seems not to be offering a place they can call home.

On the other side of the imagination of home lies the real everyday life in Costa Rica. For some, having a routine on an everyday life basis makes a contribution to the making of home, as Maria's case suggests:

*Lene: ¿Te sientes en casa aquí en Costa Rica?*

*María: No, creo que me falta mucho adaptarme a Costa Rica para poder sentirme bien.*

*Lene: Entonces quieres conocer más el país para..*

*María: Para poder decirle casa.*

*Lene: ¿Y en qué manera?*

*María: En todo. Estudiando, de pronto conocer más gente...*

*Lene: ¿Entonces como tener una vida arreglada?*

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<sup>xiii</sup> Interview #1 with Maria, 09.04.2013

*María: Si, más o menos.*

*Lene: ¿Entonces para ti es importante tener una vida arreglada para sentirte en casa?*

*María: Claro, sí.*<sup>xiii7</sup>

Having a routine implies going to school, having a job, having friends, and the list goes on. Maria is still waiting for a working permit and her family does not have much contact with other people in Costa Rica. Moreover, the social contacts they entail with Colombia are rather limited. In other words Maria's family is not yet fully (re-) embedded in their new environment.

On the other side is Lilia, another informant, who came to Costa Rica three and a half years ago, with her father, and without her mother. In general, Lilia has a regular life in Costa Rica. She just finished high school and is getting ready to start studying ontology in San José. When she arrived in Costa Rica, she had difficulties. "Llegué y no conocía a absolutamente nadie. Al principio fue muy duro"<sup>xiv8</sup>. Lilia pointed out that at the present time it is different because she has her friends she knows from RET, who are for the most part Colombians. In general, Lilia considers Costa Rica her home, albeit only to a certain extent, since her mother is still in Colombia. If we re-call the process of re-embeddedness, it is linked to contact with the community in the country of origin as well as an extended contact with the local immigrant community. In that sense, Lilia, unlike Maria is re-embedded to a certain extent, which gives her a feeling that is comparable to the feeling of home.

Although in these cases the feeling of home is not directly defined by the embeddedness in Costa Rica, but also by other factors such as family, it can appear as a tool, which facilitates the making of home. However, we are cautious not to say that (re-) embeddedness in any given society is a pre-requisite to create a feeling of home.

In this part we looked a little bit into the daily life of the Colombian adolescents in Costa Rica. We discussed the challenges these adolescents face on an everyday life basis in the process of creating home. As we could see, social relations of any kind have a finger in the pie. In the following parts we will turn our attention to other aspects, which the adolescents consider important when defining home. These aspects also very much imply the importance of social relations.

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<sup>xiv</sup> Interview #2 with Lilia, 20.03.2013

### 3.2. HOME AND FAMILY

“Estar en casa no es el lugar; es estar con las personas que lo apoyen a uno, que lo quieren a uno”<sup>xv9</sup>. This was one of the various definitions of “home” we acquired during our interviews. Pedro explained that he feels at home in Costa Rica because he lives there with his aunts and mother. Moreover, he pointed out that Colombia is still his home, because his grandmother, with whom he has a good relationship, still resides there. In general, when asking our informants to define “home”, all of them mentioned family. Factors that were referred to by our informants when defining home in relation to family were the feeling of well-being, comprehension and love. These feelings occur in relation to other people, that is, through social relations. Some adolescents like Fidel and Milena, highlighted the importance of their Colombian and Costa Rican friends to feel at home. But the majority of the adolescents made clear that the attributes of home namely love, comprehension and the feeling of well-being are mostly shaped within the family. If specific family members stayed behind in Colombia, while the adolescents moved to Costa Rica, home in the new environment is more difficult to create. Lilia, who came three years ago with her father, while her mother stayed behind, suffers greatly from this situation. For that matter, Lilia stated that “Sí, puedo decir que mi lugar está aquí, pero no está completo”<sup>xvi10</sup>. The absence of her mother renders her new home incomplete. Her home is where her mother is, Lilia insisted.

The feeling of home is not only defined by the mere presence of the family in a new environment, but also by the kind of relationship between the family members. In general, family relations can change in times of migration, as we have shown in our theoretical chapter above. This can have a great impact on the feeling and the creation of home. To exemplify how migration can affect the family constellation and ultimately the feeling of home, let us take a look at Juanita’s case. She arrived in Costa Rica a year ago, because her mother lives there with her new husband, who is not Juanita’s father. But this man himself has , who are about Juanita’s age. Juanita and her step- siblings are involved in a problematic relationship. Due to this fact, Juanita affirmed that she could not feel at home. As a contrast, Juanita often told us how she missed Colombia, where she used to live with her grandmother. When she

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<sup>xv</sup> Interview #1 with Pedro, 21.03.2013

<sup>xvi</sup> Interview #1 with Lilia, 22.02.2013

emigrated, not only was she going to face a new country, with new customs, but also a new kind of family constellation to which she had/has to adapt.

Migration does not only affect the family relations among the family members in the new setting, but also among the family members, who stayed behind in the country of origin. They also have to undergo an adaptation process. Sofia, for instance, came to Costa Rica by herself, leaving her daughter, who is three years old, and her mother in Colombia. In an interview, Sofia revealed one of the ways in which the change affected her family.

*Lisa: ¿No estás usando Facebook o Skype para ver cómo va la vida en Colombia?*

*Sofía: El Facebook yo siempre lo tengo activo pero es que en Colombia es difícil porque mi mamá no sabe nada de eso y mi hermano nunca jamás tiene Facebook. Nunca.<sup>xviii</sup>*

Not only does her mother not know how to use Facebook, but she also does not understand how to use the Internet in general, as Sofia explained. Moreover, her brother refuses to use Facebook. Therefore it is difficult for Sofia to stay in contact with her family back in Colombia. This case shows that the migration of Sofia to another place would entail an adaptation process to the circumstances, which her family is not ready to embrace.

Later during that interview it also became clear how much this change affects her relation to her child. One time, Sofia's daughter was sick and needed to be transferred to the clinic. Sofia expressed how difficult it was for her not to be there to be able to care for her child. During an informal conversation with Lisa, Sofia revealed that sometimes her daughter refuses to speak with her on the phone. And when talking to Sofia, her daughter asks her "¿Mamá, cuando vuelves?"<sup>12</sup> Sofia's case highlights the impact of migration not only on the migrant him-/herself but also on the family as a whole.

Thus, in more general terms, migration always entails a process of adaptation. But as migration of entire families often also implies a change in the family relations, individual family members also have to adapt to those. However, this can become problematic if the family relations undergo a radical change, since it can greatly affect the feeling of home of each family member, respectively.

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<sup>xviii</sup> Interview #1 with Sofia, 21.03.2013

### 3.3. HOME AND ADOLESCENCE

“*Yo creo que para mi papá era más fácil venir para Costa Rica que para mí*”<sup>13</sup>, was the answer we got during an informal conversation when we asked Fidel whether he thinks that the experience of migration was easier or more difficult for his father than for him. We asked this question because we wondered whether there is an intergenerational difference between adolescents and their parents in the experience of the migration process. When we met Javier, Fidel’s father, we wanted to know whether he believes that the act of migrating from Costa Rica to Colombia was more difficult for his children than for himself. He replied the following:

*Lisa: ¿Usted qué cree, era más difícil para sus hijos venir a Costa Rica o para usted?*

*Javier: Yo creo que para ellos. Porque uno ya es adulto y uno asimila más las cosas. Y entonces para ellos venirse y adaptarse creo que les cuesta más.*<sup>xviii14</sup>

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Thus, for Javier the fact that he was an adult when he migrated to Costa Rica made it less difficult to leave Colombia for him than for his children. According to him, being an adult means that he can adapt more easily to a new environment. This is, he believes that adolescents have more difficulties in arriving in a new environment and in building up a new life in a place, where they are unfamiliar with common norms and customs.

Vivianna too, believes that migrating was easier for her parents than for her, because her parents migrated as a couple and could manage the experience of migration together. In this case the migration process of Vivianna’s parents was facilitated due to the fact that they travelled not only with their family, but also with each other. This is, by migrating together they are able to support each other in the process of leaving their country of origin, travelling to a foreign country and building up a new life. Since adolescents do not decided by themselves to leave their country of origin, their process of re- building the feeling of home could be more difficult, because they leave all their social relations, their boy/ girlfriends, and friends behind.

This was further illustrated when we talked with Vivianna about the Colombian parties her family organizes. We asked her whether the people that come

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<sup>xviii</sup> Interview #1 with Javier, 17.04.2013

to those parties talk about their country of origin and whether most of them want to return to Colombia:

*“Los adultos más que todo dicen que de volver a Colombia irían solamente a visitar, a visitar la familia, y ya, y conocer otras ciudades de Colombia. Y los jóvenes algunos dicen que quieren volver a Colombia, porque extrañan sus amistades, otros porque tienen novio y quieren volver, y extrañan como la calle, sí. Porque... El ambiente es más alegre, no es tan sólo como aquí. Que aquí es como muy sólo.... Extrañan muchas cosas así.”<sup>xix15</sup>*

Thus, according to Vivianna’s experience, most of the adults she knows only want to return to Colombia to travel and visit their families. Those adolescents, who wish to return to Colombia, on the other hand, want to go back, because they actually miss persons and things from the life they lived in Colombia. They miss friends, boy/girlfriends and “*la calle*”, the street, where their everyday lives took place. Once they arrived in Costa Rica, they have to reconstruct their everyday lives, which in turn might facilitate the making of home in their new environment. We suggest that statements like Vivianna’s indicate that adolescents are more emotional about their country of origin. The fact that they were not the ones, who actively took the decision to leave Colombia, might have an influence on the way they feel about Colombia and Costa Rica. Many others of our informants explained how difficult it has been for them to leave their friends and family behind, to arrive in Costa Rica and to get used to the way life is lived in their country of settlement. In contrast to their parents, many of the adolescents did not really know and/ or understand why they had to leave Colombia. This puts them in a position, in which they are less able to think rationally about why they had to leave their Colombian life, friends and other persons/ things they are attached to behind. Those adults we talked to all explained that they left Colombia because they were in search of a life in security and better opportunities for themselves and their children. This rational understanding of why they left everything behind might enable them to experience the process of migration and adaptation to a new life in a more pragmatic way.

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<sup>xix</sup> Interview #1 with Vivianna, 28.02.2013

This discrepancy between the adolescents and their adult family members also indicates that the adolescents have a connection with Colombia independently from their parents, aunts, etc. The adolescents themselves decide about the degree to which they feel or act Colombian and stay in contact with Colombia. Some of the adolescents for instance plan to go back to Colombia after they finished high school, even though their parents want to stay in Costa Rica. Others perceive Costa Rica and its culture (food, fashion, language, etc.) as fundamentally different to Colombia and its culture, although their parents perceive it as not really distinct to what they know and are used to from Colombia. Since they are able to control their own actions and develop independent feelings, they act as independent agents.

### **3.4. HOME AND SAFETY**

Almost all our informants appreciated the safety in Costa Rica, and many named home and safety in the same train of thought. One of them was Milena. “Aquí tengo seguridad, tengo la libertad de hacer muchas cosas, yo puedo salir con mis amigos y no tener este miedo. En Colombia no tengo esa seguridad”<sup>xx16</sup>, was one of Milena’s answers when Lene asked why she felt at home in Costa Rica. When Milena was a child, she witnessed everyday violence in Colombia, which made her feel unsafe in her country of origin. Although she returned to Colombia ever since, for her to return there to live is unthinkable, since her home now is Costa Rica. There, she has her family and friends, mostly Costa Ricans, who present a familiar environment to Milena. In Colombia, the people she used to know have a different life at the time being, that is, different to Milena’s, one which she cannot identify with. She also has family in Colombia, but to her, they do not play an important role in her life, as she put it. “Sí, es mi tío o es mi prima, porque son de la misma sangre, pero no compartimos mucho tiempo por el hecho que yo estaba fuera del país”<sup>xx17</sup>. Since she has very few social connections to Colombia, her sense of familiarity might be dimmed. In contrast, her sense of familiarity due to her relationships with her friends and family in Costa Rica might contribute to her feeling of safety and ultimately her feeling of home.

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<sup>xx</sup> Interview #2 with Milena 22.03.2013

Maria as well highlighted the importance of safety when speaking about home, even if the connection between these two feelings is less direct. For María, a structured everyday life is important to feel at home. She needs to be (re-) embedded in her new environment as it seems, which is difficult in her situation. Her life and that of her family is disturbed by the incidents that happened in their home country and by the change of environment. They left Colombia because they were threatened by the Guerilla. Thinking they were safe in Costa Rica, they were in fact followed and still are threatened in their country of refuge. For safety reasons, they cannot leave the house frequently, nor can they go out on the street alone. Where it is impossible to create an everyday life, where safety is lacking, home might not be created just yet. That Maria's everyday life in Costa Rica is messed up by her experiences in Colombia that render her actual environment unsafe shows how, for some, the feeling of safety can be connected to the feeling of being at home.

Maria's case is also an example for how safety issues can affect social cohesion (Fabiansson 2007: 34). Maria and her family do not seek out much contact to other Colombians in Costa Rica - "por el temor"<sup>xxi</sup>, out of fear. The family does not trust other Colombians easily, since they are being followed and threatened. Another case, which might indicate how safety can affect the social cohesion, is Juliana. As described above, she experienced discrimination in Costa Rica, based on her Colombian origins. Just as Maria's family, Juliana's family does not seek much contact to other Colombians. According to Juliana, her family fears stigmatization by the Costa Rican society as "narcotraficantes", if they hang out too much with other Colombians. Given Juliana's experience, distancing herself from Colombians could be a kind of protection, or safety shield not to experience xenophobia again by the Costa Rican society. Thus, distancing oneself from people for safety reasons, due to distrust, can indeed lead to a decrease in social contact.

While hanging out with our informants, we were able to actively see how the statements of the adolescents differ from their actual behaviour. During an interview with Pedro, we asked him whether he thinks that his past, and the violence he and his family experienced in Colombia still influence his present life in Costa Rica, he answered the following:

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<sup>xxi</sup> Interview #1 with Maria, 09.04.2013

*“Yo creo que el pasado uno lo tiene que dejar atrás para poder vivir en el presente. Él que vive en el pasado se niega vivir en el presente y nunca va a tener un futuro bueno”<sup>xxii18</sup>*

After this interview took place, we wandered with Pedro through the Avenida Central in San José. While walking, Pedro’s behaviour did not converge with his statement in the interview illustrated above, as will show the following narrative.

“A cien! A cien! A cien! Los mangos a cien!” a female street vendor is shouting in an insistent tone. She is not the only one that is trying to sell her goods. Others are selling onions, plastic toys or socks. You get the impression that you can buy everything you want and can imagine in San José’s main shopping street, the *Avenida Central*. There are so many voices, one louder than the other, and you do not know to whom or what you should pay more attention, the people talking and shouting on the street or the music that is playing in the shops.

It is a weekday, sometime during the early afternoon. The *Avenida Central* is filled with people, and it is difficult to find a way through the masses, without running into all the people that do not really care about those, who are in their way. Pedro, Lene and I are walking through the crowd to our bus stops. We are talking, but Pedro seems distracted and nervous. He is constantly looking back, watching the people that are walking behind us. When I look back, I do not notice anything special or alarming; there is nobody that is walking too close to us, nor are there any suspicious looking persons. “What are you looking for?” I ask him. “I do not like walking in crowds. You never know who is walking behind you” he replies and critically eyeballs the man that is just passing us.

Just like Pedro, Vivianna behaved in the same manner. Both of them argued that their experiences in Colombia do not have any impact on their lives and behaviour in Costa Rica. However, unconsciously, both of them acted in a different way than they described in the conversations we had with them. Vivianna too expressed that she feels much safer in Costa Rica than in Colombia, and that she therefore dares much more, such as travelling alone in a bus, or walking through a mall with her little sister.

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<sup>xxii</sup> Interview #2 with Pedro, 02.04.2013

Nonetheless, when we met in San José for a concert to which she had to travel from her hometown, Santa Barbara de Heredia, to the capital she told me that she always feels insecure. The same discrepancy between what has been said and how the person acts in “real life” occurred with another informant, Milena. Even though we cannot know for sure that their behaviour is related to their experiences in the past, to their lives in Colombia, we figure that it might be connected to the fact that Colombia is a less secure country. There, people develop their own ways of dealing with security issues, for instance by not walking through certain neighbourhoods during night or avoiding other areas altogether.

Some of the adolescents also stated that they do think that the (negative) experiences, which they had in Colombia, influence their way of acting in moments such as walking through a street or encountering a street fight. However, in some cases, the correlation between the experience of violence and the way the adolescents *perceive* the impact of their past on their present lives is fairly low. Vivianna, for instance, did not have any experiences with serious violence in Colombia and still she feels insecure in buses and public spaces like parks. Pedro’s family, on the other hand, experienced violence and he still claims that he left those experiences behind, or as Maria described it “se hace una línea y aquí es el presente”<sup>xxiii19</sup>.

The conversations we had with the adolescents and the observations we were able to make while spending time with them, indicate how the adolescents still are affected by their past in Colombia, even if their migration lies several years behind (as in the case of Milena, who left Colombia twelve years ago). And since their past has an impact on their present lives, it also affects their lives in Costa Rica, where many are forced to build a home. Subsequently, the question of safety, in many of our informants’ view, forms a key pillar to build home in their new setting.

This chapter was dedicated to present what Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants deem important in the making of home. Clearly, social relations are the common denominator of all the factors named by our informants. To them, making home is something that occurs on an everyday life basis, through meeting up with their friends, having dinner with their families, or simply feeling safe in their environment, in which most of them are embedded. But as we have seen, while contributing to the *making* of home, contact with the social environment can also lead

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<sup>xxiii</sup> Interview #1 with Maria, 09.04.2013

to a kind of *unmaking* of the feeling of home. This is particularly true when the Colombian adolescents consciously perceive themselves as being other, or foreign. That feeling is enhanced if the social environment not only sees them as other, but also treats them accordingly. This renders the feeling of home situational. Needless to say, building home in any given place is not an easy task, but, as have shown the adolescents, it is not impossible.

## CHAPTER 4

### COLOMBIAN ROOTS AND THE FEELING OF BELONGING

#### 4.1. THE FEELING OF BELONGING AND EVERYDAY LIFE

“Do you like beans?” Vivianna’s mother asks, while she is preparing a dish with rice, beans and salad. “I prepared them in the Colombian way, they taste much better than Costa Rican beans”, she adds quickly in a semi serious tone. We are sitting in the low- lit kitchen that is an extension of the living room, where pictures of the family are covering every available spot of the shelves and the TV table. Vivianna, her mother, father and grandmother are curiously looking at me, waiting for my response; her two little sisters are sitting on the couch, giving their best attention to the TV, where the Beauty and the Beast are dancing in pirouettes over the floor of their castle. “Yes, I do like beans” I reply, nodding into the direction of both the mother and the grandmother. “And what is the difference between Colombian and Costa Rican beans?” I ask, whereupon Vivianna’s mother explains “Costa Ricans simply cook them without adding any other ingredients; we in Colombia put some flavour into them, by preparing them with carrots, tomatoes and onions”. Everybody in the kitchen seems satisfied with this additional information over Colombian beans as well as with the taste of them. Vivianna’s little sisters still are caught in a world, where teapots and cups are talking and dancing, and where the difference between the Colombian and the Costa Rican preparation of beans does not play any role. In the real world, we keep on talking about the beauty of the family’s home country, while enjoying the taste of Colombia on our dishes filled with rice, Colombian beans and salad.

Colombia plays a central role in the lives of all the adolescents we talked to during our fieldwork. Their country of origin is present in their everyday lives in Costa Rica in some way or another; be it in their way to prepare beans, rice or breakfast, in their way to dress themselves, in their way to talk or in their way to party. In fact, they all are aware of their Colombian roots and when they are asked to describe the ways Colombia influences their daily lives, they do not have to think a lot, but rather immediately name a list of realms, in which they sense their Colombian roots and the impact they have on them and their decisions. Even those, who live in Costa Rica for

quite a while already, are conscious and, most of the time, proud of being Colombian. This is, the time the adolescents spend in Costa Rica does not have any impact on the way they feel attached to their Colombian roots.

The adolescents very often simply *feel* Colombian, and hence distinct to their Costa Rican fellows. When Alicia, a girl that feels quite good in Costa Rica and in general does not make a big difference between Colombians and Costa Ricans, told us that she soon is going to receive the Costa Rican nationality, the following dialogue took place:

*Lisa: ¿Cuándo tendrás el papel de la nacionalidad tica en tus manos, qué piensas que vas a pensar?*

*Alicia: Que ya tengo los papeles para viajar. Jaja. ... Que todo va a ser más fácil. No me voy a sentir mal, pero nunca me sentiría tica. Yo soy colombiana.*

*Lisa: Y si sólo podrías tener la nacionalidad tica sin tener la nacionalidad Colombiana. ¿Lo harías?*

*Alicia: No lo haría. Jamás. Es mi país... ¿Tú lo harías?*<sup>xxiv20</sup>

In this conversation Alicia went on explaining that Costa Rica is an important country for her, that she likes the Costa Ricans and that in her future she wants to bridge her two lives, her Colombian life and her Costa Rican life, but that she still likes Colombian lifestyle more. Why? Because it is *her* country, the country she grew up in and where her personality was influenced the most. “La vida allá (en Colombia) me gusta más, porque allá me acostumbré a vivir. Es mi país, allá viví, lo conozco muy bien”<sup>xxiv21</sup>. Not only Alicia feels connected to Colombia in such a strong way, but all of the adolescents consider themselves belonging to Colombia, not to their country of settlement, even if they claim to feel at home in Costa Rica.

To begin with, most of the Colombian adolescents regard Costa Ricans as very different to themselves and to what they are used to from Colombia. They perceive Costa Ricans more closed and individualistic and less hard- working than Colombians are. Those perceptions, in turn, influence the adolescents in their awareness and experience of their daily lives in Costa Rica. Sofia, for instance, feels that Costa

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<sup>xxiv</sup> Interview #3 with Alicia, 27.03.2013

Ricans are not as interested or open as the people in Colombia. When she described her Costa Rican daily life, she put much emphasis on the way people approach her:

*“Aquí uno es como muy aparte, o sea uno no habla con la vecina al frente, con la vecina del lado... Pero en Colombia sí lo hacen”<sup>xxv22</sup>*

This is, many adolescents expressed that they often get the impression that they belong somewhere else, that their behaviour, their way to treat others and their ideals are different to those of the Costa Ricans. Many times they did not describe these differences neutrally, but they rather pointed out that they definitively prefer the “Colombian style”.

#### **4.2. THE FEELING OF BELONGING AND COMMUNITY**

As described earlier, Colombia is present in the daily lives of the adolescents in many different ways. By eating Colombian food, watching Colombian TV or speaking a Colombian Spanish dialect, the adolescents manage to relive some parts of their Colombian life, from which some of the adolescents not only are separated by several thousand kilometres, but also by several years. This “reliving” their Colombian lives is something all adolescents talked in much detail about; those, who came with their family, are able to live their Colombian roots among their parents, brothers and sisters. Those, who came alone to Costa Rica, do it by themselves or with Colombian friends and/ or acquaintances.

The adolescents (and their families) all are in contact with other Colombians. They meet them at the festivities around the “Día de la Independencia” (Independence Day) on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, or during the activities organized by NGOs such as the RET and the ACAI. However, none of the adolescents indicated that they actively look for other Colombians. When they do meet people that come from Colombia, they are glad to get a chance to talk about their country of origin, but these encounters rather happen casually, as Milena described in one of our interviews:

**Lene:** *¿Cómo conoce tu familia los otros colombianos de aquí?*

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<sup>xxv</sup> Interview #1with Sofia, 21.03.2013

**Milena:** *Por amistades, conocen... Más que todo cuando uno es colombiano y encuentra otra persona que es de Colombia, más bien se hace muy amigos. Si usted es del mismo país, más bien comparte. “Ay usted es Colombiano!”. Y siempre se hace como muy amigos. (...) Yo siento que se conocen así, no es que uno va a la Embajada de Colombia... Es como muy eventual<sup>xxvi23</sup>.*

Some of the Colombian families organize Colombian parties or play in a Colombian soccer team. We noticed that especially the parents of the adolescents are interested in organizing events, where Colombians get together. The adolescents too enjoy being surrounded by people from their country of origin; however, they are not actively looking for events that are exclusively Colombian. For instance Vivianna’s family regularly organizes parties with the extended family, Juanita’s mother sometimes invites her Colombian friends and acquaintances for lunch/ dinner on Sundays, and Javier, the father of Fidel, Carolina and Alicia organizes a Colombian soccer team. He enjoys being with other Colombians only and doing something where his Colombian identity is emphasized:

**Lene:** *¿Organiza muchas actividades con otros Colombianos?*

**Javier:** *Sí, nosotros tenemos un equipo de fútbol. Cuando lo invitan a uno a un partido, uno siempre trata de ir y jugar un partido.*

**Lisa:** *¿Es un equipo Colombiano?*

**Javier:** *Sí. Claro que también van Costa Ricenses pero muy poco. Uno siempre trata de que los que vayan sean como colombianos.<sup>xxvii24</sup>*

Very often it is not only the nuclear family of the adolescents that migrated to Costa Rica, but rather many members of the extended family, too (uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, etc.). In those circles of acquaintances, friends and family members the adolescents expressed that they feel connected to the people, due to the sheer fact that all are Colombians. Some of our informants also indicated that they feel more Colombian when being with other Colombians, than when being with Costa Ricans. One such example is Alicia:

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<sup>xxvi</sup> Interview #1 with Milena, 08.03.2013

<sup>xxvii</sup> Interview #1 with Javier, 17.04.2013

*Lisa: ¿Cómo te sientes cuando estás con otros colombianos?*

*Alicia: Muy colombiana.*

*Lisa: ¿Muy colombiana? ¿O sea te sientes más colombiana cuando estás con otros colombianos que cuando estás con Ticos?*

*Alicia: No. Igual me siento... Bueno, es que en todo momento me siento colombiana, porque yo soy colombiana, pero me siento como... En realidad es un ambiente muy divertido...*<sup>xxviii25</sup>

During our conversations and interviews Alicia always highlighted that for her it does not make any difference whether she is with Colombians or with Costa Ricans, and that she feels fine with everyone, whatever the person's nationality is. Just like most of the other adolescents, she has Colombian as well as Costa Rican friends, with whom she chats, goes to school or spends her free time. However, when we asked her how she feels when she actually *is* with other Colombians, she said right away that she feels “muy colombiana”, very Colombian. This means that the moment she actually is surrounded by people from her country of origin, her Colombian identity comes to the fore, although she feels Colombian at any time. Moreover, she considers the time she spends with other Colombians very enjoyable and entertaining, that is “es un ambiente muy divertido”, as she puts it, because Colombians know how to have fun. For instance, in the course of an interview Alicia expressed how much she enjoys parties with other Colombians, while partying with Costa Ricans is most of the time boring: “Una fiesta allá (en Colombia) es música, bailan... Salsa. Si, en cambio aquí no. Hacen fiestas sin música. ¡Es una fiesta!”<sup>xxix26</sup>

Anyhow, the adolescents do not only enjoy the time they spend with Colombians, because they know how to party. It is much more about the way they feel they do not have to explain themselves, the way they feel they belong to the other Colombians, because they have something in common. For Juanita this having something in common becomes especially apparent when she knows that everybody around her understands what she is trying to say:

*Lisa: ¿Cómo te parecen las actividades con los otros colombianos? ¿Las comidas, las fiestas, el día de la independencia?*

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<sup>xxviii</sup> Interview #3 with Alicia, 27.03.2013

<sup>xxix</sup> Interview #3 with Alicia, 27.03.2013

*Juanita: ¡Súper chéveres! Si... Lo más de rico es porque uno está como... como con su gente y se siente uno cómodo y uno dice algo y todo el mundo lo entiende.*<sup>xxx27</sup>

Thus, Juanita experiences the difference in her language and the language of the Costa Ricans as something that makes it impossible for her to feel the same way in the company of Costa Ricans as she does with Colombian people. This is, when Juanita has to explain what she wants to say, when she is using specific Colombian expressions, she does not have the impression that she belongs to those, who do not understand her. Those difficulties in turn make her feel uncomfortable, in contrast to the feeling she has when she is “con su gente”, with her people.

Solidarity was something else that most adolescents expressed when we asked them about “the Colombian community”. This is, all of them expressed a feeling of relatedness when we asked them how they feel towards other Colombians. When they meet other Colombians, e.g. in the church or at the activities organized by the NGOs (RET and ACAI), then they immediately feel that they have something in common and start to talk about Colombia, things that they miss and what they perceive strange about Costa Ricans. That is why many adolescents described the relationship between Colombians in Costa Rica as good, united and solidary.

In addition, some informants went further and described how they help each other out when having problems. Milena and Javier, the father of Fidel, Carolina and Alicia, both expressed that they themselves try to help other Colombians or experienced how they have been helped by people coming from their country of origin. In one of our interviews with Milena she pointed out how she perceives the relationship between Colombians in Costa Rica as united and solidary: “La relación es como muy unida, muy solidaria. O sea si alguno tiene un problema uno ayuda”<sup>xxxi28</sup>. Mutual help is thus something that defines the relationship between Colombians in Costa Rica. In the case of Javier, his wife could not find any job in Costa Rica, but at a Colombian company. When we asked Javier about his opinion on the life in Costa Rica, the following dialogue took place:

*Lisa: ¿Qué piensa usted de la vida aquí en Costa Rica?*

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<sup>xxx</sup> Interview #3 with Juanita, 04.04.2013

<sup>xxxi</sup> Interview #3 with Milena, 19.04.2013

**Javier:** *Pues, sobre la tranquilidad si... Comparado con Colombia es mejor. Pero respeto a la forma de trabajar y la economía yo pienso que es... igual, sí. Porque no sé por que razón pero aquí... no sé... Aquí cuesta conseguir un trabajo. [...]Por ejemplo por el caso de mi esposa, llevamos tantos años aquí y la única parte donde ella trabajaba era porque le dieron trabajo en una empresa colombiana.*<sup>xxxii29</sup>

However, we also heard quite often that there is some kind of distrust among the Colombian community members. Amongst others, this distrust comes from most Colombians' will to achieve something in Costa Rica and the envy that some are economically better off than others. Milena, who has her own little shop in a mall, explained that Colombians, as hardworking as they are, sometimes do not look for contact with other Colombians, because they prefer to stay focused on their own work and business:

**Lene:** *¿Buscan los colombianos aquí en Costa Rica el contacto con otros colombianos?*

**Milena:** *La verdad, sí sé que cuando escuchan un colombiano, o sea por su acento sí sé que... son como muy amigo, pero no sé si realmente van a buscar amigos. O sea, yo siento que vienen acá por un objetivo que es o tener trabajo o luchar por lo que ellos quieren. Y si cuando ya lo tienen, (vienen por) tener una vida mejor una vida más tranquila. (...) El Colombiano que viene acá es como por un objetivo y el objetivo es tener su propia empresa, más que todo su vida económica estable.*<sup>xxxiii30</sup>

Others explained that they do not want to be in contact with Colombians, because they are afraid of being stigmatized. One of the employees of the RET explained that the stereotypes of Colombians that exist among the Costa Rican population can trigger a feeling of fear to hang out with other Colombians. This is, they are afraid that hanging out with other Colombians makes people think in a negative way about them. Such stereotypes are for instance that all Colombians are criminals or drug dealers, as highlighted Juliana's case described in the previous chapter. The employee of the RET further explained that some Colombians that had trouble building a new life in Costa Rica, think about newly arrived Colombians that they have to manage

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<sup>xxxii</sup> Interview #1 with Javier, 17.04.2013

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Interview #3 with Milena, 19.04.2013

arriving in Costa Rica and adapting to Costa Rican lifestyle by themselves, too. This last statement corresponds with the feelings of envy that we have described above.

Further, many adolescents expressed that they have more friends that come from Costa Rica or other countries such as Nicaragua, Mexico or Honduras. They met most their Colombian friends at either one of the two NGOs (RET or ACAI). Other Colombians, the adolescents are in contact with, are family members and friends of their families. That is to say that the adolescents enjoy being surrounded by Colombians, because they can live their Colombian identity together, however, they do not seek having only Colombian friendships, but rather appreciate having international friendships, too.

### 4.3. THE FEELING OF BELONGING AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

“¿Para qué nos fijamos metas? ¿Qué quieres para tu vida?”<sup>xxxiv</sup> you can read on the PowerPoint slide that is being projected on the wall. It is around noon and quite hot in one of the rooms at the office of the RET in Belén. It is the second part of the educative activity “*Proyecto de Vida*” (Life Project) organized by the RET for the adolescents. Six youngsters from Colombia, Mexico and Honduras are sitting at the oval table that is standing in the middle of the room. Lorena a girl from Mexico is gazing at the nails of the Honduran girl, Lady, who is sitting next to her. “When did you get them painted?” Lorena asks, still looking at the nails of her friend, which look like a piece of art in miniature format. Their conversation is being interrupted by Bruno, one of the employees of the RET, who wants to welcome them. During the next fifteen minutes more and more adolescents are arriving, extending the list of nationalities that are present in the room. As they enter, they greet those, who already are sitting at the table, waving into their direction or giving them kisses on their cheeks as they sit down next to them. As there are almost no free chairs left, Bruno stands in front of the group, welcoming everybody, starting with the first activity of the day’s schedule. After a small introduction, he is giving all the adolescents little cards. On each of those cards there a hypothetical future situation is described: What would you do if you only had a certain time to live? How would you spend the last years, months or weeks of your life? Everybody is reading what is written on their

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> “Why do we have goals? What do you want for your life?”

cards and they begin to talk with each other about things they really want to do before dying. Bruno asks Isabella, a girl from Colombia, to read out loud what is written on her card and to tell the group what she would do if the hypothetical situation arose. “If I would be sick and only had a month to live I first would be frustrated. But I know that I definitively would go to Colombia, to spend some time with my family and die there”. Many of the answers given by the other adolescents resemble the one of Isabella, including, in some way or another, the country of origin of the youngsters. Many things are happening at the oval table, nails are being filed, and pictures on mobile phones of the last parties are being showed. The next question the adolescents have to think about is how their lives are going to look like in five and in ten years. It is Carolina’s turn to tell the group about her thoughts: “What would I like to do in five years? In five years I want to be in Bogotá, Colombia, going to a drama school”.

This situation illustrates how Colombia plays a role in the adolescents’ future perspectives- be it in the way how they imagine their lives in ten years or in the way how they imagine a hypothetical situation. This is, in an extreme situation that would seriously interrupt their lives, such as becoming sick without having the hope to get better again, many of them would go back to their countries of origin and spend their remaining time with their family and loved ones. However, many of the adolescents would not only return to Colombia in such extreme situations, but also seek to spend their near future in their country of origin. Just as the RET asked the adolescents during the activity “Proyecto de Vida” how they imagine their future lives, we asked them the same question again during our interviews.

Not all of our informants were clear about where they want to be living in ten years. Some of them could imagine both, living in Costa Rica and/ or in Colombia. Those, who do not yet know where they want to be in the near future, most of the time, think rationally about the advantages and disadvantages of both countries. Vivianna’s decision where she wants to live in ten years, for instance, depends on the possibilities she has entering a good university: “Si tengo más posibilidades aquí, entro aquí, y si tengo más posibilidades allá, entonces entro allá”<sup>xxxv31</sup>. This is, even though Vivianna feels Colombian, she does not exclude the option of staying in Costa Rica, if it is where she has more prospects for personal growth. Alicia is another

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<sup>xxxv</sup> Interview #3 with Vivianna, 07.04.2013

informant that sees both countries in her future; however she goes one step further and wants to connect her Colombian life with her Costa Rican life. This is how she imagines her life in ten years:

*Lisa: ¿En dónde quieres vivir en diez años? ¿En Colombia o en Costa Rica?*

*Alicia: No sé. Donde sea.*

*Lisa: ¿Te da igual?*

*Alicia: En Costa Rica o en Colombia, o trabajando allá y acá. Donde sea.*

*Lisa: ¿Pero que te gustaría más?*

*Alicia: ¿Qué?*

*Lisa: ¿Te gustaría más vivir y trabajar en Colombia o en Costa Rica?*

*Alicia: En las dos. Me gustaría trabajar en las dos.*

*Lisa: ¿Viajando?*

*Alicia: Sí, es que yo quiero ser empresaria y me gustaría tener fundaciones aquí y allá.<sup>xxxvi32</sup>*

Those adolescents, who experienced direct violence in Colombia, do not want to return to their country of origin, even if they feel that they belong to Colombia. For them it is more important to live a life in security. Milena for instance experienced everyday violence in Colombia, which terrified her and ultimately distanced her from her country of origin. After her migration, it took ten years until she returned to Colombia for a visit. During her stay she started to re- appreciate Colombia as she had learned to love and live it. Still, for her to return to Colombia to *live* is not an option, since her home now is Costa Rica.

Still others see themselves in Colombia in their near future and totally exclude the option of staying in Costa Rica. This is, when we asked them how they imagine their lives in ten years, they did not hesitate and replied that living in Costa Rica would not be any option for them. Carolina for instance would like to be a professional actress. However, she does not want to stay in Costa Rica at all, but rather wants to return to her country of origin:

*Lene: ¿Cómo te ves en diez años?*

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<sup>xxxvi</sup> Interview #3 with Alicia, 27.03.2013

**Carolina:** *En diez años tengo 27 años. Me veo... No sé, en diez años... Ya con una carrera profesional, actuando en Telemundo o en Colombia, porque eso es lo que yo quiero, verdad? Y entonces tal vez... Así me veo, verdad, actuando.*

**Lene:** *¿Y en dónde?*

**Carolina:** *Si en Colombia (...).*

**Lene:** *¿Y también te puedes imaginar quedarte aquí?*

**Carolina:** *¿En Costa Rica? ¿Toda una vida? ¡Ay no, no, no! No, en realidad no.*

**Lene:** *¿Porqué?*

**Carolina:** *Porque... No sé. No me gustaría. Bueno, no me gustaría, pero no sé la verdad, no sé mi destino, no sé mi futuro, no sé más adelante... Pero en realidad no me gustaría para nada.*<sup>xxxvii33</sup>

Another question that we asked when we talked with the adolescents about their future perspectives was whether they would pass on the Colombian culture to their future children. If they still would be living in Costa Rica, what would they like their children to know about Colombian lifestyle, about the way people eat and talk? Almost all of our informants replied that they would teach their children certain aspects of the Colombian culture. Colombian food, fashion, dancing, attitude to work and morals were components of the Colombian culture that the adolescents would like to show and teach their future children. Pedro, for instance, attaches great importance to Colombian history and wants to tell his future children about the history of his country of origin. Further, it is important for him to pass the pride of being Colombian to his future children, because for him his roots and the place he comes from ultimately define his identity:

**Lene:** *¿Crees que vas a pasar la cultura colombiana a tus hijos?*

**Pedro:** *Bueno, no sabría decirle, pero sí de la historia, contar la historia.*

**Lene:** *¿Y el orgullo de ser colombiano?*

**Pedro:** *Claro. Creo que sí. Creo que uno tiene que ser orgulloso de donde nace y de donde es. Sus raíces, creo que uno no las puede olvidar, porque si uno olvida de donde viene, olvida quien es. Y si uno olvida quien es, no es nadie.*<sup>xxxviii34</sup>

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<sup>xxxvii</sup> Interview #3 with Carolina, 24.03.2013

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Interview #2 with Pedro, 02.04.2013

All in all, there is no general connection between the feeling of belonging to Colombia and the wish to return to live in Colombia. Regardless of feeling Colombian, some of the adolescents do not want to go back to where they come from. Most of the time, this is due to the violence experienced by some of them. Those, who can imagine both, staying in Costa Rica and returning to their country of origin, rationally consider where they have more and better opportunities. The last category of adolescents entails those, who want to return to their country of origin, come what may. What almost all of the adolescents had in common, however, was the wish to include the Colombian culture in the upbringing of their future children.

## CONCLUSION

Our fieldwork was an attempt to understand the complexities that lie behind the feeling of home and the feeling of belonging of adolescent migrants. As we were hanging out and speaking with our informants, it became clear that for them, there is no contradiction in feeling at home in one place while still belonging to another. The fact that the feeling of home and the feeling of belonging do not always go hand in hand is perhaps one of the most stimulating findings in our research. In academic literature these two concepts are only seen as loose from each other to a certain extent (e.g. Espiritu; Di Stefano). Therefore, we find it important to consider them separately. In fact, belonging is often put as synonymous to home (e.g. Laoire et al.). To grasp the feeling of home and belonging through an adolescent's eye helped us to perceive these concepts through different lenses. While speaking with them about their view on the feeling of home and belonging in times of migration, many emphasized the small details that contribute to both feelings on an everyday life basis. As we have mentioned at the beginning, the question that guided and intrigued us throughout our fieldwork is *how are the feelings of home and belonging expressed in the everyday life of Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants in San José, Heredia and Alajuela, Costa Rica?*

Spending time with our informants permitted us to take a closer look at their everyday life. We were always looking out for hints that indicated a close relationship to Colombia, may it be emotional and/or physical. Indeed, we did not have to look far to find Colombia in the adolescents' daily lives. They cook and eat Colombian food, speak the Colombian dialect, listen to Colombian music, dress according to the Colombian fashion ideals and are in contact with their family and friends in Colombia. In addition, they enjoy the presence of other Colombian fellows in their new setting, Costa Rica, which is, for many, their new home. Home, as we noted in our theoretical chapter cannot be seen as fix and stable (Laoire et al. 2010) as some scholars suggested. The empirical data we gathered supports this fact. After leaving their home called Colombia, many Colombians could call Costa Rica their home to some extent, or at least recognize the potential of Costa Rica to become their home.

The feeling of home among the Colombian adolescents we spoke to is indeed shaped on an everyday life basis, as it is to a great extent defined by social relations.

For most, what lies at the heart of their feeling of home is the presence of and the relation to their family. Those adolescents, who were in Costa Rica with family members they deem important, had a tendency to feel slightly more at home than those, who had close family members in Colombia and came alone to Costa Rica. Either way, the adolescents we conversed with interact on a daily basis with their family members that are present. They cook with their families, organize “paseos” (excursions) to the beach and talk with their family members about their personal feelings and sometimes about Colombia. Noteworthy is also that those, who have their close family in Colombia and with whom they interact virtually on an everyday life basis, still feel to a certain degree that Colombia is their home, as is the case for Pedro, Fidel and Lilia, for example.

Moreover, the quality of the family relations is deemed important in the making of home, since family members rely on each other to generate feelings of love, familiarity and well-being. Especially during times of migration family relations often change, and not always for the better. This can greatly affect the making of home, and the family members’ identity alike, because adolescents can act as independent social agents (Orellana et al. 2001: 587). In that sense, if the primary source that helps making home in a new country, namely family, is not available because of changed family relations, or simply because they are not present, the adolescents will rely on other (social) sources that will help make themselves feel at home, at least to a certain extent. These findings accurately illustrate how home is created through a subjective lens, and hence linked to personal and social meanings (Lucas & Purkasthaya 2007).

When looking at family relations in migration, adolescents and their parents experience and understand the migratory process in different ways. Those parents or adults we talked to, said that they appreciated Costa Rica because of the great educational and employment opportunities, for them and foremost for their children. Similarly, when we asked the adolescents why their parents came to Costa Rica, we heard the same answer- for the opportunities. The adolescents, on the other hand, when we spoke over Costa Rica, put much emphasis on the cultural differences, and how these differences affect them. That is, while the adults perceived the emigration from their home country in a pragmatic way, the adolescents emphasized the emotional impact the change had on them. Further, when we asked the adolescents and the parents alike, for whom the change was more difficult, all answered that it

was more difficult for the youngsters. It could be suggested that viewing the act of migration in a pragmatic way, as did the adults, helps to understand the reasons for it, and thus it might be easier to deal with it. This in turn might have an impact on the making of home. However, we do not wish to make any rash conclusions, since we did not have the time to further follow this path during our fieldwork.

The feeling of home is also based on a range of personal life experiences. In our case, these experiences refer to happenings where the safety of a person was at stake. Due to these experiences, many of whom we met, linked home and safety in the same stream of thought. However, also some few, who did not experience violence in Colombia, associate the feeling of safety to the feeling of home. As we saw in our theoretical analysis, Fabiansson (2007) emphasizes the sense of familiarity to the feeling of being secure (32). This view is interesting if we apply it to our migrant adolescents, who (forcefully) left their country of origin. A consideration could be that a culturally different environment might render the place unfamiliar to the migrants, which could eventually lead to a low feeling of safety. However, in our case, the familiarity is not specifically defined by the cultural environment, but rather by the social relations that make a person feel safe, and eventually at home.

Social relations affect the perception of the environment a person has. Juliana's case, for instance, exemplifies how her hostile social environment made her perceive Costa Ricans as ultimately discriminating, and thus she does not feel safe. It made her feel "foreign" to her surrounding. She is afraid that an increased contact with other Colombians will lead to further stigmatization of her and her family as drug dealers. In this sense, safety and the bodily comfort (Silva 2009) stand in relation to each other. As Juliana's *being there* was questioned by the host society, and her bodily comfort was at stake, she avoids other Colombians out of fear of further stigmatization and thus to a larger extent for safety reasons. The feeling of being safe is intrinsically a subjective matter, since it depends not only on personal life experiences but also on the awareness of the environment a person has.

Being in contact with the family and friends in the country of origin and the extended contact with the local immigrant community, transnational social spaces, as we discussed them in our theoretical chapter, are indeed created. These help the adolescents to create a feeling of home in the host community, as well as sustaining the feeling of home in the original country. However, as have shown our findings, the feeling of home is situational and does not solely rely on contact with the local

immigrant community, but also on friendships with the local population, since home depends on with whom they are. In that sense, migration does not only create room for transnational social spaces that are tied to the country of origin, but it also permits a creation of social spaces in interaction with the host society. This is crucial to underline, since some adolescents, such as Fidel pointed out that they not only feel at home with fellow Colombians, but also when hanging out with their Costa Rican friends. An extended social network, which also includes contact to the local population, while still reproducing one's own culture, might suggest (re-) embeddedness into the Costa Rican society to a certain degree (Eriksen 2007: 143). That is not to say that all adolescents feel at home in Costa Rica for the sheer fact of being embedded. Neither is it to say that those, who are embedded feel at home. But for some, being embedded could work as a tool to create home. Maria, for instance highlighted the importance of a routine, and having friends in order to be able to call Costa Rica her home.

In the frame of embeddedness and everyday life, we emphasized the importance of migrants "carrying their homes on their backs" (Anzaldúa in Espiritu 2003: 9), in the sense that they carry their original culture to the new setting. As showed the presence of the Colombian culture in the everyday life of our informants, this is indeed the case. However, not only did they carry their homes on their backs through simply reproducing their original culture in the host country. They also carried it in the sense that they reproduce their lives they once had in Colombia through their imagination. More specifically, some informants, such as Sofia and Maria, have revealed that they actively talk about and imagine their lives in Colombia with other Colombians. This finding is particularly interesting, since it does not only highlight the fluidity in the making of home. But it also underlines the fact that although the feeling of home can be re-made in other settings, it is different to the feeling of home that is created in the country of origin. Thus, home is fluid not only in its process of making, that is, it is not only tied to one physical place. It is also fluid in the sense that home is carried by migrants in their memories to different places (Espiritu 2003: 11). Needless to say, as have shown our findings, one does not exclude the other. Vivianna, for instance feels at home in Costa Rica most of the time, still she visits Colombia through her imagination from time to time. This may suggest that adolescent migrants are able to use these memories as a sort of refuge in those moments, in which they do not feel at home. However, this suggestion would require

further research to understand what triggers migrant adolescents or migrants in general for that matter, to return to their country of origin through imagination.

The imagination of home, amongst others, renders home a fluid matter. But if we consider that imagining home can also generate the feeling of belonging (Di Stefano 2002: 38) we could look at the imagination of “home” through the lens of the feeling of belonging. In general terms, imagining home entails not only a physical but also an emotional longing for the country of origin (Di Stefano 2002: 39). However, we believe that in the case of Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants imagining Colombia also helps to recreate a narrative around the emotional longing for Colombia, and ultimately the sense of belonging. The fact that many do not perceive Colombia as their (physical) home anymore, or do not wish to return, but still reminisce about the lives they had there, as well as about the people and the culture, supports this view.

The feeling of belonging is not only re-invented through imagining Colombia, but also through a general interaction between members of the local Colombian community. That is, because they are connected to people from the same country of origin (Christou 2009: 250), they understand each other. In this understanding the narrative of belonging to the same group is recreated (Di Stefano 2002: 39). For instance Juanita specifically related to the fact that Colombians understand each other. That is, they share the same vocabulary in Spanish, and therefore understand what the other is trying to express. This gives Juanita a feeling of being Colombian. Similarly, Alicia always feels Colombian, but around Colombians she feels “muy colombiana”. The recreation of the feeling of belonging among Colombians is further expressed through solidarity and mutual help. The Colombian adolescents we conversed with explained that they do not engage in transnational activities on a daily basis. Rather it is a casual happening. In fact, many also have friends that are not Colombian and with whom they hang out on an everyday life basis. However, when being around Colombians, the relationship is quite intense, as have described our informants. They described the Colombians as “unidos” and “solidarios”. That is, they help each other, not only because they are friends, but more for the fact of being Colombian. In other words, when a Colombian employer gives a job to another Colombian, it can be seen as an act of re-inventing the narrative of the Colombian identity as ultimately united and solidary.

In more general terms, transnational social spaces are crucial in recreating the narrative of belonging. In these social spaces, people with the same origins and thus the same cultural assets meet and reproduce these cultural assets collectively, and act accordingly by living their life the “Colombian way”. Since the sense of belongingness is a result of a process of identification (Christou 2009: 249) to something greater, the interaction between migrant members within the community affects the individual identity. The individual can relate to the thinking and acting of someone, who grew up in the same cultural environment. Therefore, the individual identifies with the group. In these social spaces, through understanding each other, and the collective identity, each individual understands his/her identity.

The feeling of belonging is not only generated through shared cultural understandings but also through an understanding based on shared experiences. Some of our informants expressed how they can identify with foreigners, simply because they are foreigners, who share the same feeling of otherness. In this process of identification, we argue, a kind of transnational social space is created through what Lee (2011) calls translocal ties (303). This implies ties between different groups that share the same experiences as migrants. In these translocal social spaces a certain narrative of belonging is created as well, because it is based on mutual understanding in certain realms of life. In those moments for example, where each migrant reveals his/her experiences with the local community respectively and these experiences resemble each other, a process of identification to a greater group is created. The process of identification evolves because one can relate to the experience of the other. This was particularly visible during a meeting organized by the UNHCR and the ACAI, where immigrants from all over the Central American region gathered to discuss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>xxxix</sup>. During that meeting, they all shared their stories. While these stories were told, others in the group replied by nodding of comprehension, giving advice and showing compassion.

The feeling of belonging is also reflected in the future perspectives of the Colombian adolescents we spoke to. Many wish to pass on the Colombian culture to their children. The cultural assets that were named by the adolescents ranged from the kind of food to the Colombian morals. Even more striking is the transmitting of the

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<sup>xxxix</sup> 14.03.2013- The MDG- project was organized by the UNHCR for the refugees of different nationalities and took place in the office of the ACAI. During this seminar, the refugees learned some details about the MDG. After, they were to sit in groups, and discuss what they wish for their home countries in the context of the MDGs.

Colombian national pride. All of the adolescents are proud to be Colombian, thus of their identity, and wish to pass this pride on to their children, because, as Pedro said, “you have to be proud of where you were born and where you come from”. In a sense, in *imagining* how they will pass on their Colombian roots to their children, the adolescents create yet another space where their sense of belongingness is expressed. If we look at the adolescents’ future plans, it seems that they are not willing to give up their Colombian identity, regardless of where they will live. Rather, they plan on expanding it over at least another generation.

The difference between the feeling of belonging and the feeling of home among Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants is perhaps best understood if we look at the adolescents’ future perspectives. On the one hand, many do not wish to go back to live in Colombia. Although many miss their lives in Colombia, for various reasons they cannot call it their home anymore. On the other hand, they intend to hand down their Colombian identity to their children. What does that tell us? In general, it portrays how intrinsically ambiguous the relationship is between home and belonging. It further shows that under specific circumstances, for instance being a forced migrant, or having had to leave, what once used to be home is not available anymore. However what remain are the memories of this place as well as the collective and eventually the individual identity, which wander along to the new setting(s). In order to keep these identity ongoing, migrants need to re-invent their feeling of belonging related to that one specific place, once called home. Especially in the case of forced migrants, who had to leave their country for existential reasons, “carrying home on their backs” is most apparent.

In general the feelings of home and belonging among Colombian adolescent (forced) migrants are expressed in an intense way. The feeling of home is made and re-made in their daily lives, as they eat, talk, and dress Colombian. Further, the feeling of home is generated through the family. If the family is not present, or the relationship is problematic, making home is somewhat more difficult. But the feeling of home is also created through friendships. Often these friendships were not only with other Colombians, but also with Costa Ricans or other nationalities. That is, these transnational social spaces exist within the Colombian community, but the adolescents we spoke to, do not interact with the community on a daily basis. Thus, for many the feeling of home, which is made and re-made in the everyday life, is mostly generated outside the Colombian community.

Still, the relationship between the Colombians in Costa Rica was described as united and solidary for the most part, although there can be some exceptions. However, the adolescents we spoke to portrayed the moments they spend with Colombians as quite intense. That is, many feel united as Colombians. They understand each other not only because of the language but also because of a shared culture and similar experiences. In these moments, a process of identification among Colombian adolescents (forced) migrants takes place, which ultimately results in a shared sense of belongingness.

We are aware that this ambiguous matter about the feelings of home and belonging we sought to highlight through this research is quite contextual and circumstantial. By this, we simply wish to raise awareness about the intrinsically complex relationship between the feeling of home and the feeling of belonging. Further, the connection between these two feelings is not only dependent on the context and the circumstances in which they are created. More importantly, they are deeply personal matters, and therefore we are cautious in making generalizations about the feelings of home and belonging among youth (forced) migrants. In this research we revealed some patterns that grabbed our attention and we hope to have given sufficient insight into the complexities surrounding these concepts to encourage further research in that realm.

**(20.849 words)**

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## APPENDIX 1

### LIST OF INFORMANTS

Informant	Name	Age	Gender	City of Origin	Time of Arrival in Costa Rica	Function	City of Residence in Costa Rica
1	Alicia	15	Female	Cali	December 2009	Informant	Alajuela
2	Juliana	15	Female	Medellin	April 2011	Interviewee	Heredia
3	Vivianna	16	Female	Cali	February 2010	Informant	Santa Barbara de Heredia
4	Carolina	17	Female	Cali	December 2009	Key Informant	Alajuela
5	Juanita	17	Female	Cali	January 2012	Informant	Alajuela
6	Maria	17	Female	Bogotá	October 2012	Informant	San José
7	Rafael	17	Male	Medellin	April 2011	Interviewee	Heredia
8	Lilia	18	Female	Cali	February 2010	Informant	Santa Barbara de Heredia
9	Pedro	18	Male	Pereira	October 2012	Informant	San José
10	Alejandro	19	Male	Medellin	July 2005	Interviewee	San Rafael de Heredia
11	Fidel	19	Male	Cali	December 2009	Key Informant	Alajuela
12	Sofia	21	Female	Cali	October 2012	Informant	San José
13	Milena	24	Female	Medellin	2001	Key Informant	San José
14	Adilia	25	Female	Cali	April 2012	Informant	San José
15	Diana	25	Female	Cali	August 2012	Interviewee	Heredia
16	Javier	37	Male	Cali	2005	Interviewee	Alajuela
17	Marta	46	Female	Pereira	1993	Interviewee	San José
18	Emilia	52	Female	Pereira	2012	Interviewee	San José

## APPENDIX 2

### RESUMEN ESPAÑOL

“¿Cómo expresan adolescentes refugiados Colombianos en San José, Heredia y Alajuela sus sentimientos de estar en casa y de pertenencia en sus vidas cotidianas?”, con esa pregunta en nuestras mentes y el deseo de encontrar por lo menos el principio de una respuesta nos fuimos a Costa Rica. O sea, queríamos saber cuáles son los diferentes factores que influyen, por un lado, el sentimiento de estar en casa y, por otro lado, el sentimiento de pertenencia.

Durante nuestra investigación nos reunimos con adolescentes entre 15 y 25 años de edad que venían de diferentes partes de Colombia (Cali, Medellín y Bogotá). Nuestros informantes vinieron a Costa Rica por varias razones distintas; algunos se habían ido de Colombia por razones económicas, otros por razones de seguridad. Los adolescentes también se diferencian en que algunos llegaron solos a Costa Rica, y otros, de hecho la mayoría de nuestros informantes, en compañía de sus familias.

Dos organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONGs), la Refugee Education Trust (RET) y la Asociación de Consultores y Asesores Internacionales (ACAI), nos ayudaron en el proceso de realizar entrevistas con adolescentes dispuestos a participar en nuestro proyecto de investigación. Ambas organizaciones trabajan con refugiados de Centro- y Latinoamérica, la RET enfocándose en el trabajo con adolescentes.

¿Porqué hemos seleccionado este grupo de migrantes (forzados)? Primero, nos centramos en migrantes (forzados) *colombianos* porque de todos los grupos de inmigrantes en Costa Rica, el grupo de inmigrantes colombianos es el más grande. Segundo, hemos enfocado en adolescentes porque estamos convencidas que la adolescencia es una época crucial, en la que la identidad está formada y negociada. Además es el momento en que los adolescentes desarrollan una identidad independiente de la influencia paterna. Sin embargo no sólo examinamos como los adolescentes mismos perciben el proceso de migración y la vida en Costa Rica, pero también nos interesaron las diferencias de percepción que existen entre adolescentes y adultos.

Para hacernos una imagen de la vida cotidiana de los adolescentes, y también para ver como Colombia está presente en lo que hacen día tras día, tratamos de pasar

lo más tiempo posible con ellos. Es decir, no sólo comunicamos con los jóvenes sobre las experiencias de su migración y de su vida en Costa Rica durante conversaciones informales y entrevistas (semi-) estructuradas, pero también tratamos de ver con nuestros propios ojos como ellos se comportan en la calle, con sus amigos, con su familia, etc.

Nos dimos cuenta desde el principio que Colombia está presente en la vida de todos los adolescentes con quienes hablamos. A veces se les notan las raíces colombianas en su manera de hablar, a veces en su manera de vestir, o en la forma de preparar comida. En general los adolescentes se sienten colombianos y dan importancia a sus raíces. Por eso también siempre tienen presentes que hay una diferencia entre ellos y la gente costarricense.

A menudo académicos mencionan los conceptos *home* y *belonging* (casa y pertenencia) al mismo tiempo. Sin embargo según nuestros resultados *home* no significa necesariamente lo mismo que *belonging*, especialmente en tiempos de migración. O sea, el lugar en donde uno se siente en casa (*home*) no tiene que ser el lugar en donde uno se siente también perteneciente (*belonging*). En el caso de los adolescentes con los que hablamos, muchas veces Costa Rica se convirtió con el tiempo en la casa de ellos. Sin embargo muchos todavía se sienten colombianos. En otras palabras, Costa Rica es, en la mayoría de los casos, el lugar en donde ellos se sienten en casa, mientras que Colombia es el lugar en donde ellos se sienten pertenecientes.

Cuando preguntamos a los adolescentes de aclarar lo que significa para ellos 'casa', la mayoría respondió que lo más importante para sentirse en casa es la familia. Por eso también muchos de los adolescentes que se fueron de Colombia con su familia expresaron que se sienten en casa en Costa Rica. Además algunos informantes mencionaron amigos, de cualquier nacionalidad, como personas que contribuyen al sentimiento de estar en casa. En general aparece la importancia de las relaciones sociales para poder sentirse en casa.

Otro factor crucial para muchos jóvenes para poder sentirse en casa es la seguridad. Para los adolescentes colombianos que vienen de un país en que la violencia influye la vida de la mayor parte de los habitantes, una de las ventajas de estar viviendo en Costa Rica es la tranquilidad. Dado que los adolescentes no tienen que tener miedo de que les vaya a pasar algo cuando están en la calle, en un bus o en un centro comercial, se sienten bien y por lo tanto en casa.

Muchos de nuestros informantes explicaron que para ellos el proceso de migración era bastante difícil porque tenían que dejar todo atrás. Dejando sus amigos, en algunos casos sus familias, y su vida cotidiana en Colombia, cuando llegaron a Costa Rica tuvieron que construir una red social de nuevo. Además muchos informantes también no sabían exactamente porque tuvieron que salir de Colombia. No saber o entender la razón porque uno tiene que dejar toda una vida atrás no facilita el proceso de migración, porque uno no es capaz de explicar racionalmente lo que esta viviendo. Por eso pensamos que emigrar (forzadamente) en general puede ser más fácil para adultos que para adolescentes, porque para adultos a veces es más fácil reflexionar pragmáticamente sobre su situación, mientras que jóvenes son más emocionales sobre su situación.

Este punto de vista más emocional de los adolescentes podría ser la razón por la cual ellos enfatizan las diferencias entre la cultura colombiana y la cultura costarricense, mientras los adultos con quienes hablamos destacaron más las similitudes entre las dos culturas. O sea, los adolescentes tienen una relación con Colombia que difiere de la relación que tienen sus padres, y construyen una relación y un contacto con Colombia independientemente de sus padres.

Tal como se ha explicado anteriormente el sentimiento de ser colombiano, o de pertenecer a Colombia, influye los adolescentes en varias maneras. En la forma de hablar, de vestirse o de cocinar. O sea, los adolescentes viven su identidad colombiana en diferentes áreas de su vida cotidiana. Muy a menudo también lo hacen entre amigos o la familia. Algunos de los padres de nuestros informantes, por ejemplo, organizan fiestas o comidas donde colombianos se encuentran y viven su cultura colombiana para un rato. En esas ocasiones los adolescentes, y los colombianos en general, reinventan su identidad colombiana imaginando como era la vida en Colombia, comiendo comida colombiana, escuchando música colombiana, etc.

Muchos de nuestros informantes también incluyen Colombia en sus planes de futuro. Algunos quieren regresar a su país de origen para estudiar y vivir. Los que han tenido experiencias violentas en Colombia sin embargo prefieren quedarse en Costa Rica, donde la vida es más tranquila. Otros todavía no saben donde quieren vivir en el futuro y reflexionan más sobre las ventajas y desventajas de cada país, de los cuales dependerá su decisión de donde querrán vivir. Sin embargo, todos nuestros informantes tienen en común de querer transmitir su cultura colombiana a sus hijos.

O sea, les quieren enseñar como se baila, cocina y habla en Colombia. Además, para todos los jóvenes es importante que sus hijos no sólo sean conscientes de sus raíces colombianas, pero también que se sientan orgullosos de serlo.

**(1234 palabras)**

<sup>1</sup> “Yes, sure, it’s *my country*”

<sup>2</sup> “Yes, my family, or when I’m with foreigners, for example with you. When I’m with you, I don’t feel so “far away”, because you are foreigners, and me, too, the same. But when I’m with Costa Ricans I can see that there different... Mostly because of the culture.”

<sup>3</sup> Drug dealer

<sup>4</sup> “Yes, a little bit. One feels bad when one is being discriminated against.”

<sup>5</sup> Lisa: “When you’re talking to other Colombians, what are you talking about? Sofia: “We talk about how great it was back in Colombia, how we went out to the club. How awesome it was when we were with our families, celebrating San Cocho. You just start thinking about these things and you start talking about it with your friend.”

<sup>6</sup> Lene: “And with your brother, you talk about Colombia?”- Maria: “In the few moments we see each other, yes, sometimes.”-Lene: “And what are you talking about?”-Maria: “More or less about what we would do in this moment if we were there... He would tell me that right now he would be with his girlfriend, or studying...things like that.”

<sup>7</sup> Lene: “Do you feel at home in Costa Rica?”-Maria: “No, I think I still need some time to adapt myself to Costa Rica in order to feel good.”- Lene: “So you want to know more about the country to...”- Maria: “To be able to call it my home”- Lene: “And in what sense?”-Maria: “In everything. Studying, maybe know more people...”-Lene: “You mean to have a structured life?”-Maria: “Yes, more or less.”- Lene: “So you need a structured life in order to feel at home?”-Maria: “Yes, sure.”

<sup>8</sup> “I came here and I knew absolutely nobody. In the beginning it was very hard”

<sup>9</sup> “To be at home does not depend on the place; it’s to be with people who support you, who love you.”

<sup>10</sup> “Yes, I could say that this is my home [referring to Costa Rica], but it’s not complete

<sup>11</sup> Lisa: “Don’t you use Facebook or Skype to see how life goes in Colombia?”-Sofia: “I always use Facebook, but the problem is in Colombia, my mom doesn’t know anything about it, and my brother never uses Facebook. Never.”

<sup>12</sup> “Mom, when are you coming back?”

<sup>13</sup> “I think it was easier for my father than for me to come to Costa Rica.”

<sup>14</sup> Lisa: “You think that coming to Costa Rica was more difficult for your children or for you?”-

Javier: “I think for them. Because adults assimilate better to things. So I think coming here and adapting themselves was more difficult.”

<sup>15</sup> “Adults usually say that they only would return to Colombia to visit, visit the family, and knowing other cities in Colombia. And some youngsters want to return because they miss their friends, others because they have girlfriends or boyfriends there. And they miss the streets... Yes, because the ambience is much happier there, not that lonely as here. They miss a lot these things.”

<sup>16</sup> “Here it’s safe, I have the freedom to do many things, I can go out with friends without being afraid. In Colombia I don’t have this security.”

<sup>17</sup> “Yes, it’s my uncle and my cousin, but just because we have the same blood, but we didn’t spend much time together, because I was out of the country.”

<sup>18</sup> “I think one should leave the past behind to be able to live in the present. Those who live in the past restrain themselves from living in the present and will never have a good future.”

<sup>19</sup> “You draw a line, and here is the present.”

<sup>20</sup> Lisa: “As soon as you will have the Costa Rican nationality, what will you think?”-Alicia: “That I have the documents to travel.. haha... That everything will be easier. I won’t feel bad, but I will never feel Costa Rican. I’m Colombian.”-Lisa: “And if you could only have the Costa Rican nationality without having the Colombian nationality, would you do it?”-Alicia: “I wouldn’t do it. Never. Would you?”

<sup>21</sup> “I prefer the life there in Colombia, because I’m used to the life there. It’s my country, I lived there, and I know it very well.”

<sup>22</sup> “Here, it’s really different, I mean you don’t talk with your neighbor next door. But in Colombia they do it.”

<sup>23</sup> Lene: “How does your family know other Colombians here?”-Milena: “Through friends... Most of the time, when Colombians meet other Colombians, they become good friends. If you’re from the same country, you share. ‘Ah you’re from Colombian!’. And you always become like friends. I think that’s how Colombians meet, it’s not that they go to the Colombian embassy and meet people there. It’s very casual.”

<sup>24</sup> Lene: “Do you organize many activities with other Colombians?”-Javier: “Yes, we have a soccer team. When people are invited to a game, they try to come and participate in a game.”-Lisa: “Is it a Colombian team?”-Javier: “Yes. Of course Costa Ricans come, too, but not so much. We always try to invite Colombians to the game.”

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<sup>25</sup> Lisa: "How do you feel when you're around Colombians?"-Alicia: "Very Colombian"-Lisa: "Very Colombian? Do you mean you feel more Colombian when you're with Colombians, than when you're with Costa Ricans?"-Alicia: "No, the same... Well, I always feel Colombian, because I am Colombian, but I feel... It's just a good atmosphere."

<sup>26</sup> "A party there in Colombia means music and dancing... Salsa. But here no. They party without music. And that's what they call a party!"

<sup>27</sup> Lisa: "How do you like the activities organized with other Colombians? The food, the parties, Independence Day?"-Junaita: "Really great! Yes, the best part is you're with your people and you just feel good, you say something and everybody understands."

<sup>28</sup> "The relationship is very united, very solidary. When somebody has a problem, you help each other."

<sup>29</sup> Lisa: "What do you think about life in Costa Rica?"-Javier: "Well, when it comes to tranquility, yes... compared to Colombia it's better. But what concerns the way of working and the economy, it's the same. Here it's difficult to find a job. For example although we came here many years ago, the only job my wife could find was in a Colombian company."

<sup>30</sup> Lene: "Do Colombians here in Costa Rica seek contact to other Colombians?"-Milena: "The truth is, when you a Colombian, because of his accent... you're like good friends. But I don't know if they're really looking for friends. It's just I think that Colombians come here with the objective to have a job, or fight for whatever they want. And if they already have it, they come here for a better life, a calmer life. The Colombians, who come here come with a goal and the goal is to own a business, to have a stable economic life."

<sup>31</sup> "If I have more possibilities here, I will enter here, and I have more possibilities there, I will enter there."

<sup>32</sup> Lisa: "Where do you want to live in ten years? In Colombia or Costa Rica?"-Alicia: "I don't know. Where ever it may be."-Lisa: "You don't care?"-Alicia: "In Costa Rica or Colombia, or working in both. Where ever."-Lisa: "But what would you prefer more?"-Alicia: "What?"-Lisa: "Would you prefer living and working in Colombia or Costa Rica?"-Alicia: "In both. I would like to work in both."-Lisa: "Travelling back and forth?"-Alicia: "Yes, I would like to be a business woman, and I would like to have foundations here and there."

<sup>33</sup> Lene: "How do you see yourself in ten years?"-Carolina: "In ten years I will be 27 years old. I see myself... I don't know, in ten years... with a diploma, acting in Telemundo or in Colombia, because that's what I want, right? So, maybe... that's how I see myself, acting."-Lene: "And where?"-Carolina: "Yes, in Colombia."-Lene: "And can you imagine staying here?"-Carolina: "In Costa Rica? My whole life? No, no, no... really not."-Lene: "Why?"-Carolina: "Because... I don't know. I wouldn't like that. Well, I wouldn't like it, but the truth is, I don't know my destiny, I don't know my future, I don't know further... But actually I wouldn't like it."

<sup>34</sup> Lene: "Do you think you will pass on the Colombian culture to your children?"-Pedro: "Well, I couldn't tell you, but yes I would teach them the (Colombian) history."-Lene: "And the Colombian pride?"-Pedro: "Sure. I think yes. I think you have to be proud of where you come from, and where you were born. I think you can't forget your roots, because if you forget where you came from, you forget who you are. If you forget it, you're nobody."