Political cultures and transnational social fields:
Chileans, Colombians and Canadian activists
in Toronto

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Abstract  We offer an institutional analysis of Chilean and Colombian transnational politics in Toronto to account for cross-group variation in transnational political practices and the formation of different types of transnational social fields of political action. The article is based on interviews conducted with Chilean and Colombian community activists and Canadian refugee rights and social justice activists. We use the concept of political culture to account for differences in Chilean and Colombian transnational politics and to explain the different kinds of relationships the two groups have developed with non-migrants. We introduce the concept of activist dialogues, understood as patterns of strategic political interaction between groups, to characterize how migrants and non-migrants read and navigate their interlocutors’ ways of doing politics. We argue that variation in the character of activist dialogues results in different types of transnational social fields of political action. Chilean–Canadian activist dialogues reflect a convergence of political cultures and strategies of action; Colombian–Canadian activist dialogues are marked by a relationship in which there is a divergence of strategies of action. Convergent dialogues produce thicker and more stable transnational social fields. Divergent dialogues are associated with a series of ad hoc initiatives, the absence of stable and strongly institutionalized partnerships, and a thinner transnational social field of political action.

Keywords  POLITICAL CULTURE, ACTIVIST DIALOGUES, TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS, REFUGEES, LATIN AMERICANS, CANADA

Migration researchers have established transnational political engagements and their relationship to institutions in sending and receiving countries as a legitimate field of study. Comparative institutional research examines individual and collective participation and focuses on contexts of exit and reception – including state policies,
political opportunity structures and group resources – to explain cross-group variation in transnational politics (for example Goldring 2002; Itzigsohn 2000; Landolt 2008; Smith 2003). Research on secondary institutions confirms the importance of three main factors in determining the possibilities, extent, frequency and modalities of transnational political involvement: (1) migration, citizenship and settlement policies; (2) labour market and public policies; and (3) patterns of social exclusion in contexts of departure and reception. However, findings and causal arguments remain inconsistent. State policies designed to encourage emigrant participation in homeland politics do not produce uniform impacts or modes of involvement. Similarly, the existence of formal political rights does not necessarily guarantee participation. In some cases, violent conflict in regions of origin fuels oppositional transnational politics and long-distance nationalism (Cheran 2007; Lyons 2006). In others, such conflict appears to inhibit these responses (Nolin 2002). In places of settlement, social exclusion is sometimes linked to immigrants’ tendency to orient their political activism toward homeland issues (Koopmans et al. 2001, Østergaard-Nielsen 2001). At other times, inclusionary, pluralistic integration policies are associated with political transnationalism (Faist 2000).

In this article we offer an institutional and comparative analysis of Chilean and Colombian transnational politics in Canada that accounts for cross-group variation in transnational political practices and that explains the formation of transnational social fields of political action. Transnational social fields are defined as sets of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004: 1009).

Broadly similar contexts of departure and reception organized Chilean and Colombian migration to Canada from 1973 to the 2000s. One can regard both situations as cases of forced or reactive migrations from contexts of large-scale political violence (Richmond 1993). In Canada, refugee rights activists mobilized so that the federal government might recognize both Chileans and Colombians coming into the country as refugees. However, each group developed important differences in the transnational political practices and the transnational social fields of political action. As we discovered in our work with Chilean and Colombian groups in Toronto, Chilean transnational politics have drawn on and reflected the ways of doing politics of Chile’s political party system, specifically of its leftist parties. On the other hand, Colombian transnational politics organizes around friendship networks and approximates a horizontal social movement dynamic. Both Chileans and Colombians developed seemingly similar kinds of alliances with non-migrants; yet these resulted in the construction of very different transnational social fields of political action. Chilean relations with non-migrant activists turned into long-term partnerships. Their alliances with non-migrant activists generated a durable, dense and multi-scalar transnational social field, a border-crossing network that included local, national and international arenas of political decision-making. Colombian transnational activists also developed relations with non-state and state actors in Canada and abroad. However, the nature of these relations tended to be sporadic, ad hoc and, at times,
Political cultures and transnational social fields

quite tense. Viewed over a time span of more than three decades, Colombian transnational activism failed to generate institutional overlaps and synergies (whether locally or across borders) or the organizational density found in the Chilean transnational social field (cf. Fox 1996).

We use the concept political culture (cf. Fox 2005; Somers 1993; Swidler 1986) to account for differences in the transnational politics of Chileans and Colombians and to explain the different kinds of relationships the two groups have developed with non-migrants in Canada and the city of Toronto in particular. We can understand political culture as a ‘toolkit’ of ways of doing politics that includes values and actions that frame strategies, narratives and self-representations. The toolkit is constituted through networks and shared political socialization and it is reflected in a group’s mode of doing politics as well as in its established bases for organizing. Both migrants and non-migrants have political cultures. Chilean migrant political culture draws on an established tradition of leftist political parties and organizations. Colombian migrant political culture reflects a reticence to engage in overtly partisan or political activities, as well as a distrust of secondary institutions and non-personal networks. Canadian social justice activist political culture is based on multi-sectoral alliances among NGOs (including human rights, solidarity, labour and faith-based organizations), centre-left political parties that engage with various levels of government and international grassroots organizations.

Different groups apply their toolkit of ways of doing politics, or their political culture, in a flexible fashion depending on the nature of their particular political situations or encounters. Thus, each group’s toolkit may be reconstituted through political learning (cf. Swidler 1986). Posed as an encounter between skill sets, political learning can be specified as a relational and potentially bidirectional process that transforms the civic toolkit of migrants and non-migrants alike (cf. Morawska 2001). We propose the concept of activist dialogues, understood as patterns of strategic political interaction between groups, to characterize how migrants and non-migrants read and navigate both the ways of doing politics of their interlocutors and their contexts of destination. Our findings suggest that Chilean–Canadian activist dialogues reflect a convergence of political cultures and strategies of action with a high degree of mutual intelligibility and an easy translatability of concerns. In contrast, Colombian–Canadian activist dialogues reflect sporadic, project-specific and instrumental collaboration. They are marked by a relationship in which there is a divergence of strategies of action that result in a constant and deepening lack of mutual respect, intelligibility and translatability. In temporal terms, the two types of activist dialogues are associated, respectively, with long-term and sustained versus sporadic and ad hoc collaboration.

We contend that it is the long-term convergence or divergence of activist dialogues that explains variation in transnational social fields of political action. We argue that convergent dialogues produce thicker and more stable transnational social fields, such that Chilean and Canadian activists engage in long-term initiatives underpinned by increasingly institutionalized relationships. In contrast, divergent dialogues, as represented by the Colombian case, are associated with a series of ad
initiatives, the absence of durable and strongly institutionalized partnerships, and thinner transnational engagements (cf. Fox 1996).

We proceed as follows. After situating our analysis in relevant literatures in section two, we discuss data and methods in section three. Then, in section four, we unpack the contexts of exit – and particularly the role of violence and repression in these contexts – that have framed the migration flows of Chileans and Colombians coming to Canada. The fifth section considers contexts of reception, with a particular focus on Canadian social justice organizations in Toronto. In section six we turn to a dyadic comparison of Chilean–Canadian and Colombian–Canadian activist dialogues and how they constitute transnational social fields. The Chilean case shows that activist dialogues may be convergent, meaning that they are based on fairly widespread agreement with respect to values, strategies and repertoires of political action, or at least a willingness to resolve areas of disagreement through compromise or accommodation. In contrast, the Colombian case captures dialogues between migrants and non-migrants that are divergent because of unresolved tensions and differences in political cultures.

In the last section of the article, we discuss these dialogue patterns in greater detail and offer conclusions about them. We underline the ways in which political socialization and trajectories of activism have led to the constitution of three activist groups with distinct political cultures (Chilean, Colombian and Canadian). We consider how complementary dyads (Chilean–Canadian and Colombian–Canadian) with distinct toolkits of political repertoires and strategies of action come together – dialogue – in different modalities and to different effect on the formation of transnational social fields. Finally, we also consider how a focus on activist dialogues and on political cultures more generally advances the state of institutional comparative research on transnational politics.

Extending the institutional approach: political cultures in transnational social fields

Institutional approaches to transnational immigrant politics tend to be comparative and to rely mainly on qualitative methods. Enquiry focuses on identifying institutional and contextual parameters that shape patterns of migrant transnational politics. Among the types of parameters included are state policies in countries of origin and destination, sub-national or regional contexts (Goldring 2002; Smith 2003), and changing state and institutional responses to transnational migration (Itzigsohn 2000; Koopmans et al. 2001; Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003). Institutional approaches also include quantitative, multi-level studies of institutional determinants of the types of claims (for example, national versus transnational) immigrants make and the level and location of the political institutions to which they direct claims (Koopmans et al. 2001; Landolt 2008).

Research on the role of origin states, political parties and institutions captures the range of strategies through which national membership is respatialized such as the extension of formal political rights to migrant-citizens (Calderón Chelius 2003) and the institutionalization of mechanisms for individual-level membership and
participation in home country political institutions (Itzigsohn and Villares 2008; Smith 2008). The relationship between contexts of departure and the extent, frequency and forms of organized migrant involvement is not always straightforward. State policies may promote extra-territorial participation but they do not guarantee them (Guarnizo et al. 2003). Colombians living abroad have had the right to vote in presidential elections since 1962, and they have had additional political rights since the early 1990s (Serrano Carrasco 2003). In contrast, Chilean authorities only began to contemplate constitutional modifications to permit overseas voting in 1991 (Pereyra 2003). Thus, the opportunity structure in the origin country has been far more open for Colombians than Chileans, suggesting greater extra-territorial participation for Colombians. Such participation is consistent with neither our findings nor with other research that also documents low levels of transnational political participation among Colombians (Guarnizo et al. 1999).

Institutional research on the context of reception examines state policies, political institutions, and immigrant organizations and networks. Research on the impact of multiculturalism and citizenship policies on transnational politics is hotly debated and inconclusive. Some researchers find that social exclusion is associated with active homeland political activism (Koopmans et al. 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001). There is also evidence to suggest that inclusionary policies that allow for cultural pluralism and multiple citizenships can provide resources that enhance transnational organizing (Faist 2000). Despite these competing arguments, an institutional approach would lead us toward certain expectations. For example, despite the different timing of the arrival of Chileans and Colombians migrating to Toronto, the Canadian policy environment that characterized their respective contexts of reception was quite similar. In both cases, lobbying by refugee rights activists led the federal government to grant asylum to the group. Thus, we should expect similarities between the transnational politics of the two groups. However, as our study indicates, this has not turned out to be the case.

Institutional and comparative explanations have undoubtedly advanced our understanding of transnational politics. However, the effort to reconcile competing hypotheses against our findings for the case of Chileans and Colombians in Toronto has pushed us to challenge and extend the institutional approach beyond the established framework. Two limitations are particularly relevant to our project. A first limitation is that the study of transnational migrant politics does not take into account the political actions of non-migrants in places of settlement (cf. Fox 1996). While researchers sometimes discuss non-migrant political actors, studies do not address the character of their relationship to migrants and to migrant organizations (Coutin 1998; Fitzgerald 2003). Scholarship on immigrant political incorporation that does not focus on transnational politics makes a strong argument for analysing the character of immigrants’ engagement and contact with host society secondary institutions, including unions, schools, political parties, neighbourhood associations and churches (for example Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001; Hardy-Fanta 1993; Wong 2006). However, the argument overlooks important particularities of the relationships that unfold from
Patricia Landolt and Luin Goldring

these contacts and it ignores altogether variables stemming from transnational involvement.

A second limitation of the existing framework is that it inadequately theorizes the relationship between contexts and political practice. There is consensus that contexts of departure and settlement set the parameters for transnational political practices (Itzigsohn 2000; Portes et al. 2008). However, broad characterizations of places of origin and settlement that focus on political systems, policies, programmes and public opinion inadequately explain how the meso-level institutional dynamics that make up a context of departure or reception translate into political cultures – that is ways of doing politics – that may vary for apparently similar groups. Broadly speaking, the context of departure and reception for Chileans and Colombians in Canada has been similar. However, the two groups have constructed very different patterns of transnational political engagement. Accounting for this difference requires specification of how premigration experiences translate into political behaviour in a particular place of settlement.

Bloemraad’s (2006) concept of structured mobilization is a step in this direction. She considers incorporation as a social process of network mobilization by friends, family, community organizations and local leaders that is embedded in an institutional context. Here the notion of structured mobilization contributes to the analysis of the link between context and action by emphasizing agency, expanding the range of institutional actors under consideration and drawing attention to organizational dynamics. However, there are some shortcomings. First, structured mobilization does not frame the construction and negotiation of political agendas as an interactive, dynamic process. Second, further specification is required of how particular local institutional actors and members of specific immigrant groups or organizations enter political dialogues (namely how immigrant networks develop particular patterns of social and institutional embeddedness) in a specific (national) context. We believe that politics, understood as modes of organizing and negotiating agendas, ideology, tactics and the like, is essential to understanding both processes of incorporation and transnational engagement because it helps reveal the existence and exercise of power.

Our approach addresses this gap by demonstrating that as political cultures shape political behaviour and activist dialogues they in turn help to constitute variable transnational social fields. The concept of culture as a toolkit informs our understanding of political behaviour, or what researchers often call ‘ways of doing politics’ (Swidler 1986). We define political culture as political toolkits that include agendas and actions manifested in particular strategies and repertoires of action (cf. Somers 1993). Strategies put agendas and actions together in particular temporal and situational contexts. They refer to ways of achieving ends and ways of doing politics in specific arenas. Repertoires include an array of strategies, symbols and other culturally informed resources that may be mobilized. Repertoires can change over time as well as within and across contexts. We define activist dialogues as patterns of strategic political interaction between groups, in our case migrants and non-migrants. Activist dialogues provide migrant and non-migrant groups with opportunities to
exchange information and resources, share allies and, at times, coordinate strategic actions. Activist dialogues are, then, political cultures in action.

We use the concept of political culture to develop a dynamic approach to contexts of exit and reception and a relational analysis of transnational politics. We argue that premigration social and political experiences and practices shape individual and collective approaches to ways of doing politics, including setting priorities, deciding upon strategies and forming alliances. In our specific case, we focus on the role of political violence and political socialization in countries of origin in shaping the political toolkit with which Chilean and Colombian migrants arrive in Toronto. We also argue that immigrant political cultures have implications for the kinds of relationships immigrants develop with non-migrant activists in a given context of reception. Activist dialogues develop over time as groups interact and develop patterns of interlocution and collaboration. With respect to agendas, strategies and other dimensions of political culture, activist dialogues may be marked by variation in formal linkages, temporal durability or temporal decay, friction and convergence or divergence. The compatibility of these dialogues, that is the ways they converge or diverge along specific dimensions, including the ability of groups to work through tensions and forge durable alliances, gives rise to variable transnational social fields. The political behaviour and learning that takes place between migrants and non-migrants becomes part of the context of reception for both current and subsequent migrants. Political relations between migrants and non-migrants thus constitute an understudied dimension of the context of reception that actually takes form in social relationships and specifically in political practice (cf. Giddens 1984).

Data and methods

Our research on transnational politics and political incorporation maps the numbers and types of organizations Latin American immigrants created in Toronto between the early 1970s and the early 2000s. Primary research for the project includes thematically organized focus groups with approximately 120 participants in the period 2004–5, individual interviews in 2002–3 and 2007–8, a review of archives of the Latin American Working Group (LAWG), and other grey literature, including organization reports and educational material. The focus groups, which brought together previously or currently active community leaders, are the central sources of data for our analysis. Other sources have helped to substantiate claims and patterns and specify names and dates.

In this article we draw particularly on the focus groups that were conducted with Chileans, Colombians and Canadian activists engaged in international solidarity and refugee rights work. Our aim is to characterize specific migrant and non-migrant political cultures and to compare the transnational politics and transnational social fields associated with Chilean and Colombian refugee migration to Toronto. The purpose of focus group discussions was not to capture individual or community narratives. Rather, they helped us to identify and map the different kinds of organizations that characterized the group’s political activism. Focus group participants...
were asked to list all relevant organizations for their given thematic focus, to locate them in time and to locate them in relation to one another. Discussions centred on the following topics: (1) organizational strategies; (2) the agendas of different organizations and entire sectors (for example, solidarity work, refugee rights, Chilean political organizing); (3) how and why agendas and strategies changed over time; and (4) the rise and fall of specific organizations, priorities and strategies. We also probed for alliances and conflicts among organizations within a particular group (for example, relations among Chilean organizations or Colombian organizations) and between these and other groups (for example, relations between Chilean organizations and Canadian solidarity organizations, or between Chilean and other Latin American organizations active in Toronto, particularly the more political Central American organizations).

Unpacking the context of exit: violence, migration and political culture

In this section, we examine elements of the context of departure that shape political culture. Political violence in countries of origin plays a distinct role in framing migration narratives and socially expected durations of involuntary or refugee-like migration processes. The forms of political violence that migrants experienced in Chile and Colombia led them to construct very different narratives of why they were in Canada, for how long, and what their relationship to their country of origin should ideally be in the present and the future. We found that premigration political socialization combined with collective accounts and time horizons of migration, settlement and/or return produced group-specific political cultures and repertoires of political action that have translated into distinct ways of doing politics in Toronto.

Chile

In Chile, the production of refugees was linked to the violence unleashed by the coup d'état of 1973. The military junta’s programme of political transformation sought to cleanse Chile and its institutions of the country’s leftist traditions (Wright and Oñate 1998). The principle targets of state violence were members of political parties and their associated organizations, including women’s groups, youth and student groups, trade unions and neighbourhood associations. The dictatorship also developed an explicit policy of getting rid of the opposition through exile and portrayed this policy as a humane alternative for ‘the enemies of the nation’. In this context, an estimated 500,000 people (approximately 5 per cent of Chile’s population at the time) left the country. There are an estimated 30,000 Chilean immigrants in Canada at present, 10,000 of whom arrived between 1973 and 1978 during the height of political repression (Díaz 1993). This first wave of migrants included working- and middle-class families with direct ties to Chile’s leftist political parties and a history of militancy within them. These newcomers also included a significant cohort of political prisoners.

State violence drew Chilean refugees together and generated a socially expected duration of migration as temporary. Chilean focus group participants linked their
Political cultures and transnational social fields

presence in Canada to the military junta’s policy of forced exile. They recalled how at first they were ‘living out of suitcases’, refusing to accept Canada as their home. Chilean organizing also reflected the group’s premigration experiences in socialist Chile and ongoing ties to political parties in exile and the underground opposition still in the country. Activist strategies of action drew on a set of organizational habits and political-cultural competences that were deeply rooted in Chilean political culture.

Two organizational strategies characterized Chilean activism in Toronto. First, partisan groups created organizations with a dual structure: (1) a closed and semi-clandestine group of party militants with links to a transnational leadership in exile (for example, the Chilean Communist Party) and (2) a more open and public social-cultural organization (for example, the Communist Party affiliated cultural group, Grupo Cultural Victor Jara). This dual structure enabled organizations to maintain an autonomous decision-making structure, while also creating spaces for dialogue with Canadians. Second, Chileans created an inter-party umbrella organization, the Toronto Chilean Association (1974–80), later renamed the Toronto Chilean Society-Popular Unity (TCS-UP, Spanish acronym, 1981–90) that enabled the different parties to work together and present a common political front. The TCS-UP allowed the Chilean exile community to resolve ideological divisions in order to advance their shared agenda, namely defeating the regime of General Augusto Pinochet.

The Chilean political agenda was coherent and consistent. The group’s transnational political priorities served as an overarching framework out of which grew other more incorporationist concerns (cf. Karpathakis 1999; Portes et al. 2008). One arena of activism focused on fundraising for home country political organizations and public education around human rights violations using public forums, arts festivals and street protests. Another arena wove the exile agenda into the refugee settlement process. For example, the Toronto Chilean Society created the President Salvador Allende School (EPSA, Spanish acronym) to encourage the healthy participation of Chilean children and youth in the Canadian educational system, while also preparing them, using history lessons and Spanish language classes, for an eventual return home (CH1-2). Likewise, the Barrabases sports and cultural club developed a programme of fundraising for the underground resistance in Chile at the same time that it sponsored soccer teams for different city leagues (CH3). The experience of both of these organizations reflects a simultaneity of transnational and incorporationist political practice and organizational agendas.

Colombia

The arrival of Colombian refugees is linked to protracted, multi-polar violence. Colombia has experienced half a century of political violence by state and non-state actors. In the 1980s, a 40-year insurgent campaign against the state led by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, Spanish acronym) escalated. In the early 1990s, the FARC increasingly funded its guerrilla war effort through kidnapping, extortion and drug trafficking. The state responded by expanding its counter-insurgency strategy, including the covert use of paramilitary organizations. A
decade later the state cracked down on paramilitary organizations and attempted to bury its own links to these death-squad style operations. Paramilitary organizations have continued to function independently, as well as maintaining links with important sectors of the state. Competing politico-military actors have partitioned the country into distinct regions of political and economic control. In rural and urban areas, autonomous social movements have emerged to advocate for the security and the economic, political and cultural survival of the populations most directly affected by the violence: Afro-Colombian communities, indigenous groups and the internally displaced (Hristov 2009).

It is in this context that Colombians migrated to Canada in large numbers. Between 1990 and 2004, 29,236 Colombians became permanent residents in Canada, with close to 50 per cent of them recognized as refugees (Riaño-Alcalá and Goldring 2006). Prolonged political instability and the multi-polarity of the conflict have produced a generalized climate of insecurity and distrust in Colombia itself, and among Colombian refugees and migrants settled abroad (Escobar 2004; Guarnizo et al. 1999). Colombians do not sustain a coherent narrative about the situation in Colombia and have no clear expectations for an eventual return. The majority of Colombians avoid addressing the political dimensions of the instability that results in their involuntary migration; if pushed, there is often disagreement. Once in Canada, many try to distance themselves from the refugee category because of its negative and political connotations (Díaz Barrero 2007). They do not envision and cannot imagine an end to the current situation of insecurity and violence; thus, they do not link their fate in Canada to any particular kind of regime change in Colombia (C1-6, C1-7). The fact that the majority of Colombians can travel back to their country freely once they have secured their immigration status in Canada also obfuscates the refugee-like conditions that underlie Colombian population movements.

The Colombian organizational landscape in Toronto reflects the tensions that exist within the community, as well as the group’s general reticence toward party-oriented affiliations and activities. A broad set of social, cultural and political issues animate Colombian organizing in Toronto. However, there is little formal collaboration or informal overlap across agendas or organizations. Friendship and pragmatic issue-based affinities serve as the glue that holds together collective projects. Two sharply divided arenas of organizing are discernible. One arena focuses on settlement and includes sports clubs, cultural associations, and business and professional groups. Of these groups, some carry out short-term transnational charitable initiatives (for example, fundraising for orphanages or for victims of natural disasters). These transnational activities do not raise questions about Colombian politics and the national consulate often sponsors them. Thus, when Colombia is on the agenda, it is in relation to trade, leisure activities and ethno-national celebrations, topics that can be easily addressed without political discussions.

A second arena of Colombian organizing is transnational politics. For the period starting in the mid-1980s through the first years of this millennium, Colombian social justice activism occurred through a single and relatively small network of individuals who carried out transnational political activities through different organizational
Political cultures and transnational social fields

initiatives. The Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Colombia was formed in the early 1980s. In 1985 some members of the committee formed the Colombian Canadian Association (ACC, Spanish acronym). In 1988, to make its work more visible, it adopted the new name of the Canadian Colombian Association (CCA). The group’s main objective has been to denounce human rights violations in Colombia as a way of informing and influencing Canadian public opinion. The CCA conducted research, lobbied Canadian parliamentarians and participated in organizing events with Canadian civil society groups, mainly from faith-based organizations and unions. In 2003, the CCA changed its name once more to become the Colombian Action Solidarity Alliance (CASA). This organization has continued to the present, though with considerably reduced capacity.

Colombian transnational social justice activists have never been explicitly aligned with any political party or opposition group in Colombia, preferring to work with a range of social movement organizations located in different sectors, both in Canada and Colombia. Over the years, the group’s projects, strategies of action and even its name have changed in accordance with its resource capacities, the priorities of its membership and their reading of the political situation in Colombia and Canada. The group itself has worked amicably and successfully from project to project without creating a more permanent organizational structure. Not guided by a pre-existing partisan structure and grounded in a fairly loose-knit and informal circle of close friendships, the group’s political culture has been characterized by horizontal dialogue and consensus-based decision-making. This arrangement has enabled the group to maintain a fairly flexible agenda over the years and has facilitated innovations in repertoires and strategies of activism. The group also never put in place a formal mechanism for resolving internal conflicts or differences of opinion about priorities or effective strategies of activism.

Chileans and Colombians both left behind national contexts marked by violence and repression. However, the forms and impacts of violence have differed, thus producing divergent expectations and narratives about remaining in Canada, as well as distinct bases, agendas and patterns of organizing. Chileans arrived with a political culture that prized activism, organizing and engagement. The centrality of parties as a basis for organizing reflected the group’s political culture repertoires. It also provided an organizational framework for their encounter with Canada – framed as temporary – until the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. In contrast, Colombians came to Canada to stay. They arrived with a political culture characterized by distrust of politics and political fragmentation. Most Colombians avoided political organizing and focused on settlement issues. For this group, transnational political activism was the purview of a small network of committed activists.

Non-state actors in the context of reception: Canadian social justice organizations

Canadian solidarity with Latin America drew on earlier experiences of refugee advocacy, but it came of age and developed a more explicitly transnational orientation in the context of what our focus group participants referred to as ‘the Chilean
Movement’. One can trace Canadian activists’ institutional involvement in immigrant and refugee issues back to early work with Mennonite refugees and later with Southeast Asian refugees. In both cases, Canadian faith-based groups played an important role in advocacy, accompaniment and settlement assistance. They lobbied the Canadian government for refugee admission, sponsored refugees and offered ongoing support for them in Canada, but their work generally did not take international or transnational forms. Many Canadian activists who became involved in Latin American solidarity had had personal or institutional experience with earlier refugees. Such experience helped to constitute their political culture and informed their subsequent work with Chile and Chilean refugees (RR-1, RR-2).

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, grassroots solidarity and development was developing transnational strategies. Energized by the victory of Salvador Allende as president in Chile, Canadian activists formed the Committee in Solidarity with Democratic Chile (CSDC). At its peak, the network had 15 affiliates from Halifax to Vancouver. During the Allende years (1970–73), Canadians organized student exchanges with Chile, inter-church dialogues and other activities. With the overthrow of the Allende government in 1973, the CSDC, along with the Latin American Working Group (LAWG) and church-based refugee settlement organizations led a multi-sectoral response. They lobbied the federal government to respond to the refugee crisis in Chile by admitting refugees. Public shaming in Canada, storming of the Canadian embassy by Chileans in Santiago, and lobbying by a range of social justice organizations forced the federal government to begin to accept refugees.

Given the federal government’s lack of experience in Latin America as well as its weak contacts on the ground, it invited social justice activists to play a role in managing the refugee selection and settlement process. A leading voice in the Canadian refugee rights movement described the situation:

One thing that happened in Chile – partly as a result of visits by Canadians – was the creation of special programmes for political prisoners. [Visiting] jails to select people – 100 political prisoners were allowed to come to Canada, only as a result of embarrassment over the original lack of response, and churches played a role in that. The churches pushed to create precedents. The embassy logic was first-come-first-served, but we said ‘No, it has to be a “most in need” situation.’ [The] RCMP got into it. We argued, ‘If you want our cooperation it must be needs-based if a prisoner is in jail, the number of people dependent on this person, length of sentence in jail.’ The embassy did not like that we had changed their order of priority.

Despite misgivings about letting ‘Marxists’ settle in Canada, the federal government was forced to bend to the public pressure that refugee rights activists generated. The political moment entailed a series of unintended political consequences, including formalizing an uneasy dialogue between the government and social justice organizations.
The Chilean Movement also had important organizational consequences. In the context of the coup, Canadian activists created the Inter-Church Committee on Chile (ICCC) in 1974–75. In 1976, given the diversification of its geographic and thematic focus, the ICCC disbanded and reorganized into two church coalitions – the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA 1976–2001) and the Taskforce on Churches and Corporate Responsibility (TCCR 1976–2001). For close to 30 years, the ICCHRLA served as a national policy watchdog on Latin America. It produced annual country reports, organized educational tours for regional leaders and facilitated conversations between and among Latin American organizations, Canadian elected officials and relevant ministerial portfolios.

Refugee rights activists carried the lessons of the Chilean Movement to their work on Central America and Colombia. In the 1980s, activists organized a lobby to convince the Canadian government to recognize the refugee crises emerging in El Salvador and Guatemala. Eventually, the federal government placed both countries on its watch list. However, the depth of involvement seen in the Chilean Movement did not take place. As one focus group member explained, ‘When it came to Central America, the government refused to allow the churches to help in the selection process. They insisted they would do it themselves and would not allow the churches to push’ (RR-2).

In the 1990s, Canadian solidarity and refugee rights work began to focus on Colombia as indicated by the following focus group participant:

> We [ICCHRLA members] visited [Colombia] in 1988 … without telling the board of directors. We just made a stop on the way to Peru. That’s when we realized we had to get people out. … Colombia was not on the list of refugee producing countries at that time. We worked on individual cases but [we also] worked to get the Canadian government to recognize Colombia.

(SOL1-1).

The targeted persecution of trade unionists prompted the formation of an *ad hoc* committee that worked to put Colombia on the government’s radar. The committee included Canadian and Colombian–Canadian social justice organizations. However, once Colombia was on the government watch list, activists were largely cut off from the selection process, with the exception of some local church-based settlement groups. The lack of contact with the refugees was made worse by Colombians’ own distrust of partisan and collective action and their reluctance to be identified as refugees. Parallel to the refugee lobby, the ICCHRLA dedicated considerable resources to work on Colombia, including refugee support for political activists seeking to leave the country, as well as support for advocacy work in Canada. The ICCHRLA also produced policy briefs and funded a film critical of the role of Canadian corporations in Colombia (Price 2001).

Canadian international solidarity and refugee rights work was based on a distinct political culture. Despite differences across sectors (for example, faith-based and non-religious), these civil society groups shared a vision of Canada as a multicultural
nation with a strong left-liberal welfare state. The cornerstones of this agenda were refugee rights advocacy, international solidarity and grassroots development (Anderson 2003). A preference for cross-sectoral alliances that included labour, faith-groups, academics and political parties, dialogue and information sharing with government, and the institutionalizing of activist networks into formally structured coalitions characterized the refugee rights and solidarity work.

Activist dialogues and the constitution of transnational social fields

In this section we analyse the key organizations involved in activist dialogues and the constitution of transnational social fields. We examine two distinct political dynamics – namely the organizational arrangements through which migrant and non-migrant activists identify and carry out shared political agendas, and the organizational mechanisms through which migrants and non-migrants address differences of agenda and strategies. Our analysis indicates that migrant and non-migrant activist dialogues that are able to resolve or address differences of agenda and strategies can help to establish long-term partnerships and convergent dialogues. In contrast, when differences recur and cannot be resolved, dialogues become ad hoc and instrumental. These two patterns are associated with the formation of distinct transnational social fields.

Chilean–Canadian convergent dialogues and strategies to end the Chilean dictatorship

Considerable convergence, in terms of both personal and organizational relations, has characterized dialogues between Chilean and Canadian social justice activists. Long-term convergence was possible not only because Chilean and Canadian organizations shared a political agenda of ending the dictatorship and were able to collaborate on strategies, but also because they developed mechanisms to overcome tensions. This compatibility allowed them to strengthen their collaboration, scale up, and produce dense and durable transnational social fields.

The initial kinds of alliances Chilean organizations developed with Canadians reflected the dictates of home country political parties and the possibilities afforded by the local context. Strategic, partisan and instrumental considerations determined contact with Canadians. As a Chilean focus-group member explained:

We made links with personalities in the academic world, politicians, with those who were in solidarity with our struggle. … We socialists had a list of people that we thought would be sympathetic toward us. It was a list of members of provincial and federal parliament. We were the only ones who approached and worked with the New Democratic Party because we understood that in this arena we had to work with the NDP.5 … we never approached the Liberals or the Conservatives because the party order was to work with the NDP.

(CH2-11)

However, as a Chilean Communist Party activist noted, Chilean engagement strategies varied:
There has always been an appreciation of specific Canadian members of parliament. Some figures in the NDP played a very important role in the solidarity work with Chile. What’s more, on multiple occasions there have been public recognitions of the Canadians because, thanks to them, a lot of lives were saved and we have no problem recognizing that. ... Now the difference [between the socialists and the communists] basically lies in the fact that there has not been a policy in the party to align more closely with the NDP because of contradictions of a political nature.

CH2-13

Chilean activists thus emphasized both the importance of ideological convictions for guiding strategic action and the strength of their internal political compass for organizing relations with Canadians.

The Toronto Chilean Society-Popular Unity (TCS-UP) was an important arena within which Canadian and Chilean activists worked together. In its first incarnation, the TCS-UP excluded Canadians from the central decision-making structure. Canadians grew frustrated with the verticalism of the TCS-UP and with what they perceived as unnecessary ideological squabbling and a paralysis generated by diasporic party orders. Canadians also resented what they saw as unreasonable tests of their commitment. For instance, they were required to learn Chilean history and to celebrate the birthday of the Chilean hero of independence, Bernardo O’Higgins.

The frustrations of this first organizational encounter prompted Canadians and a small group of Chileans, who also wished to distance themselves from the traditional party structure, to create an independent solidarity organization, Toronto Action for Chile (TACH), which lasted from approximately 1975 to 1996. Toronto Action for Chile had a sectorally diverse membership and a network of supporters that included academics, lawyers, and union and church leaders, as well as provincial and federal members of parliament. The organization also had independent contacts with opposition organizations in Chile and coordinated much of its work with Canadian transnational advocacy groups such as the ICCHRILA and local OXFAM chapters.

With the establishment of a Canadian-run, mixed membership solidarity organization, Chilean–Canadian activist dialogues were reconstituted as an encounter between the TCS-UP and TACH. Thus, a fairly flexible dialogue between political equals emerged. A long-time president of TACH recalled that the two organizations maintained strong ties and a relationship of respect and collaboration for many years. Important events with considerable long-term political impact resulted from this collaboration. In 1977, TACH and the TCS-UP organized a national conference – the Canadian Inquiry into Human Rights in Chile. The event marked the first time that members of the Association of Families of the Detained and Disappeared were able to leave Chile to denounce publicly the junta’s human rights violations and its impunity. In 1980 the two groups organized the Canadian Conference for Justice in Chile at the Faculty of Law of the University of Toronto. These two conferences provided the basis for a legal challenge to the Chilean Constitution of 1980. The findings of the two events were sent to the United Nations (Sol3; SOL1-3).
The success of the Chilean Refugee Movement and the subsequent arrival of Chilean exiles had a significant impact on Canadian activists’ ways of doing politics. A long-time activist explained, ‘The Chilean coup intensified a process that had begun earlier and the whole community that was involved in the social mission of the church came together around the Chilean coup and never went back. And everything built from there’ (RR-2). Canadian activists also linked the arrival of Chilean refugees with their own political learning, thus illustrating the multi-directionality of political learning and the dynamic quality of political cultures. In the words of one such activist: ‘In the 1970s, I participated in the Dovercourt Riding association of the NDP. … The NDP lacked ongoing political work; it was just election to election. Chileans taught me the notion of being consecuente … [namely] that political work had to be all the time and everywhere’ (CPE, 2007).

Chilean and Canadian activist organizations conducted their political work in parallel and complementary fashion. They based their joint work on partnerships, with Chileans seen as political equals. Chileans’ demand for political autonomy, while at times disconcerting to Canadian activists, was seen as a powerful demonstration of the legitimacy of the Chilean exile project. The establishment of the TCS-UP and TACH gave Chileans and Canadians many opportunities to interact and develop close working relationships. This organizational partnership helped to construct a dense network of social contact and interlocution between the various types of Chilean organizations and a wide range of institutions in Canadian civil society. It was also leveraged up to connect Toronto-based Chilean and Canadian activists with federal and international institutions such as the United Nations human rights court.

This interaction continued over time, through the fall of the Pinochet dictatorship. In the current early 2000s Chilean initiatives continue to draw support from Canadian activists and political authorities. Canadian activists see themselves as having played a progressive role in Chilean solidarity while Chileans, in turn, recognize Canadians’ contributions to their lobbying, public education and transnational initiatives. The scaling-up of this dialogue to include interlocutors in many sectors and organizations, at various levels of government and in international institutions, confirms the scalar and institutional complexity of this dialogue.

Colombia-Canadian divergent dialogues and strategies of action

For the period from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, activist dialogues between Canadian and Colombian social justice activists were, in contrast to the convergent Chilean case, characterized by a pattern of divergence between Canadian and Colombian ways of doing politics. While over the years there was considerable collaboration in the organization of specific events and education campaigns, these did not generate stable partnerships. Instead, there was serious discord between Canadian-controlled and Colombian-run solidarity organizations. This dissonance reflected disagreements about how and why to develop transnational activism in Colombia. These divergent ways of doing politics produced activist dialogues marked by tension and a thin, intermittent transnational social field of political action.
The Colombian and Canadian activists we interviewed for our study agreed that in the early 1980s the Canadian Colombian Association (ACC) pushed the ICCHRLA, and by extension its union-based partners, to expand its international human rights work to include Colombia. The ACC helped the ICCHRLA to establish contacts in Colombia, to provide a reading of the country’s political landscape, and to give logistical support when the ICCHRLA organized public education tours for social movement leaders from Colombia in Canada. While apparently collaborative, in hindsight, the Colombian activists we interviewed questioned the nature of relations with their Canadian allies:

The organizations that organized the educational tours never gave the ACC the chance to be more representative. They got support from an organization [the ACC] that was recognized in Colombia but not here … because we weren’t legally constituted and didn’t have money. They didn’t trust us and they didn’t give us responsibilities.

(C3 2005)

In the late 1990s, the para-militarization of Colombia, the arrival of a new wave of Colombian refugees, and growing interest in Colombia among Canadian activists prompted a renewal of Canadian and Colombian collaboration in relation to Colombia. Although activist dialogues were renewed at the time, Colombians developed new initiatives and ways of doing politics that were not always consistent with the approaches Canadian activists favoured.

First, in 1999 the ACC and more than 300 Colombian churches and human rights and grassroots organizations pushed the ICCHRLA and the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW) to spearhead a quasi-judicial public inquiry into a massacre that had occurred in the city of Barrancabermeja in May 1998. The 1999 tribunal held hearings in Toronto, Montreal and Barrancabermeja, Colombia, each presided over by a panel of notable Canadian ‘judges’ and survivors of the massacre. They timed the tribunal’s verdict to coincide with the first state visit by the then Colombian president Andres Pastrana to Canada. The tribunal had considerable political impact at several levels. According to an ICCHRLA report, immediately following the verdict:

… the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade announced it had decided to ‘conduct hearings on the current situation in Colombia as soon as possible’. A news release stated the decision was ‘as a result’ of the findings of the tribunal, which called for parliamentary hearings as one of 12 recommendations.

(ICCHRLA 1999)

Briefings were produced for this and other Canadian government committees, and for presentation at UN human rights committees. The tribunal was extremely effective in terms of drawing attention to atrocities and impunity in Colombia and generating responses from Canadian government authorities. It also received press coverage in Colombia.
Second, re-energized by the success of the tribunal, a sub-group of the ACC and a select group of Canadian activists developed a new working group, Research and International Solidarity with Colombia (RISC). For the ACC, RISC was designed as a space of dialogue and collective learning to generate a more informed and updated reading of Colombian politics that would stimulate a new approach to solidarity work. Out of RISC, Colombian activists developed two new initiatives. The RISC network organized the Invisible Struggles Tour in which six Colombian social movement leaders representing labour, indigenous and Afro-Colombian organizations, and women’s groups came to Canada for a national speaking tour. RISC also organized the Minga or Mobilization for Colombia, which the Canadian Council for International Cooperation funded. The Minga was designed as an educational tour of Colombia for Canadian activist and political leaders. Approximately 30 notable Canadians, including NDP parliamentarians, academics, CAW members, religious leaders, indigenous leaders, human rights workers, lawyers and students travelled to Colombia to meet social movement leaders. RISC and the Minga organizers used their contacts in Colombia to set up meetings in different parts of the country with unionists, human rights commissioners, NGOs, witnesses of acts of terror and violence and activists in women’s indigenous and human rights organizations. The tour was successful in generating long-term awareness, interest and follow-up activities among a broad spectrum of Canadians in a position to shape national opinion regarding Colombia.

The political learning process initiated within RISC generated important innovations in the repertoires and strategies of action of Colombian activist transnational politics. The Colombians in RISC maintained that the links between violence and politics that existed in Colombia were unlike those in Chile in the 1970s or in Central America in the 1980s. In response, RISC proposed a new approach to analysing political violence. It also called for a new approach to transnational solidarity work, specifically a diversification of Canadian contacts in Colombia to include non-aligned social movement organizations trying to carve out a living in zones of conflict (for example, Afro-Colombians, peace communities and indigenous groups). RISC wanted to encourage freestanding partnerships between Canadian and Colombian social movement organizations. In this way, solidarity work would become a sort of hands-off bridging initiative to facilitate transnational relationships between social movements. Once these links were made, solidarity organizations would presumably remove themselves from the conversation and no longer mediate transnational political discussions. The Invisible Struggles Tour and the Minga were an effort to put these innovations into practice.

Canadian activists met the innovations the Colombian social justice activists proposed with considerable scepticism. As one Colombian RISC participant explained, ‘The problem was that the ICCHRLA didn’t go beyond human rights work and there are other forms of impunity that we had to deal with and work on’ (Col3 2005). RISC challenged Canadian organizations such as the ICCHRLA to question their guiding assumptions about Latin American politics and necessarily the nature of their strategies of action. The ICCHRLA considered the Invisible Struggles tour particularly misguided.
When they organized the Invisible Struggles campaigns, there were things that people disagreed with, such as that the struggles of trade unionists aren’t invisible. The things the campaign said, like all the illegal groups and armed actors, are all crap, all the same, and we’re working for peace. When the guerrillas do things, you denounce it, but it is not the same as the paramilitary. I don’t think it was helpful to lump everyone into one bag, which has been the position of the Colombian government. It’s like lumping the FMLN and the death squads. They used language of ‘illegal armed groups’.

Relations between Colombian and Canadian activists reached a breaking point when a leading figure in the Colombian activist community began to make presentations before federal government officials in Ottawa – presentations that neither key Canadian solidarity activists nor the organizations they represented sanctioned. Although collaboration has continued to take place, it has been under strained and more limited conditions.

In the period from the 1980s to the early 2000s, Colombian activist networks and Canadian activist organizations collaborated on a number of initiatives, but failed to develop peer-based partnerships. Colombian–Canadian activist dialogues reflected a continual divergence of priorities and strategies. Colombians retained a flexible network structure with horizontal decision-making that did not fit the Canadian activists’ institutional framework. The Colombian activist reading of political violence went beyond a concern with human rights violations, painting a variety of perpetrators of violence with the same accusatory brush. This interpretation challenged the Canadian activist reading of Latin American politics and political violence as well as their established ways of doing international solidarity work. Finally, Colombians introduced a new approach to transnational politics that borrowed from the political repertoire of grassroots development, namely twinning and sistering projects. This pattern of political action also challenged the established Canadian activist political culture.

To summarize, Chilean–Canadian political transnational engagements have been built on the overlapping political repertoires of Chileans organized along party-based lines and Canadians organized along faith-based, solidarity and human rights work, and on the resulting convergent dialogues that developed between Canadian and Chilean activists. These dialogues generated durable relationships among peers and allies, which in turn contributed to generating dense and durable transnational social fields. In contrast, Colombian–Canadian dialogues have been built on divergent dialogues between a vertical and bureaucratic Canadian activist network and a much smaller and a horizontal network of Colombians organized along friendship lines and shared political affinities, but not party membership. Colombian activism has drawn on social movement repertoires and produced innovative strategies that appear as ad hoc. While Canadian and Colombian transnational solidarity activists have collaborated on every important project that has been developed in Toronto over the years, their partnership has not generated dense, durable and/or overlapping transnational networks, initiatives or spaces.
Discussion and conclusions

Our study of Chilean, Colombian, and Canadian activist politics refines institutional analyses of political transnationalism. It does so by introducing the concepts of political culture and activist dialogues to analyse the constitution of variable transnational social fields. We used a longitudinal, process-oriented account of group-level variation in the character, intensity, scale and temporality of transnational political participation that includes an analysis of migrant and non-migrant border-crossing practices and their interrelationships. The comparison explains variation in transnational political practices, as reflected in modes, bases and agendas of organizing. In addition, it expands the scope of established comparative enquiry by offering a relational account of differences in the constitution and character of transnational social fields of political action. Indeed, we draw on the transnational social fields approach to emphasize the simultaneity of transnational politics and develop a set of conceptual categories that explain how institutions and contexts can generate variable transnational political practices and social fields.

We argue strongly that comparative research on transnational politics cannot simply examine ‘groups’ in different ‘contexts’. Instead, it must examine the character of activist dialogues or patterns of interlocution with other relevant non-migrant institutional actors, as these patterns are associated with variable transnational social fields. In the cases under consideration, the convergent dialogues of Chileans and Canadians produced dense, durable, multi-level and multi-dimensional transnational social fields that have left tangible relationships and outcomes as well as ongoing collaboration. The sporadic and divergent dialogues between Colombians and Canadians have proceeded in a more ad hoc and uneven manner. For their part, Colombians have achieved important goals and deeds, but their transnational social field of political action is thinner, in some ways less complex and less continuous.

Analysing activist dialogues reveals a process of political learning that takes place between the two dyads, Chilean–Canadian and Colombian–Canadian relationships. In this process, activists draw on their repertoires and learn from each other. The convergent dialogue between Chileans and Canadians was possible among groups with congruent repertoires and agendas that underwent a certain amount of modification based on mutual learning. A dense network of interlocution also provided a platform for a rich, multiplex and long-lasting range of transnational engagements. While the divergent dialogue between Canadians and Colombians also involved social and political learning, it did not lead to the same outcome. Instead of a dense network of multilayered and multi-focused engagement, Colombians learnt from Canadian activists and institutions, but they developed innovative organizational strategies that over time were increasingly at odds with the normative strategies of Canadian non-governmental, union and faith-based organizations. Canadian activists and organizations remained attached to what had become routinized strategies and ways of doing politics forged during the Chilean Movement and later consolidated in encounters with refugees from Central America. This process contributed to the tensions in activist dialogues with Colombians. While able to work together for
project specific initiatives, Colombian–Canadian activist dialogues were not conducive to the formation of durable relations and transnational social fields.

In our study, different patterns of activist dialogues between migrant and non-migrant activists played a critical role in shaping variable transnational social fields. In other temporal or geographic contexts, dialogues with other institutional actors, including migrant activists from other ethno-national communities as well as non-migrant interlocutors, may also play a significant role in shaping migrant politics – transnational and otherwise. Examining the relationship between political cultures, dialogues and migrant politics will continue to be a relevant research area for several reasons. One is the seeming continuity of migrations, despite renewed efforts to regulate and limit mobility across borders. A second is the ethno-national super-diversity that increasingly characterizes the urban destinations with high concentrations of newcomers (cf. Vertovec 2007). In these settings, migrants are highly likely to find themselves engaged in dialogues with interlocutors other than co-nationals or state authorities of either the sending or receiving country. Depending on their political culture and whether they have limited or extensive social networks and institutions upon arrival, these inter-group dialogues will be important determinants of migrant politics, both incorporationist and transnational.

Having established transnational engagements as a legitimate field of study, contemporary scholarship has taken on the challenge of systematically analysing the causes and consequences of migrant transnationalism, including political engagements and their relationship to old or new or emerging political subjectivities. Scholars are now turning to comparative studies to address variation in migrant political engagement. We challenge comparative institutional research to work towards the development of comparative frameworks and conceptual categories that are attentive to the simultaneity of transnational lives. For us this means using concepts – particularly, political culture and activist dialogues – that capture how contexts and institutions become social relations and social formations. It also means paying attention to relations between migrants and non-migrants, investigating the relationship between the quality of dialogues between migrants and non-migrants, and tracing the relationship between these and variable aspects of transnational social fields such as density and scale. Methodologically, it means developing a comparison of spatially non-contiguous, multi-scalar, dynamic and potentially non-discrete units, such as global flows, transnational social fields or border-crossing social spaces.

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Notes

1. A second approach to studying transnational immigrant politics attends to the importance of contexts of departure and reception. The specific focus of this approach, however, is the collection of individual-level data. See for example Guarnizo et al. (2003), Koopmans et al. (2001) and Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo (2001). Dependent variables are specified as individual-level outcomes such as organizational membership, voting and dual citizenship. This type of research produces valuable inter-group comparisons by analysing data organized by national origin. For our purposes, however, we focus on institutional analyses as they are of greater relevance to this article.

2. The project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Grant #829-2001-1010.

3. We use abbreviations to identify the data source from which information and direct quotes are drawn. The abbreviations are as follows: RR – Refugee Rights; SOL1 = Canadian Solidarity Group 1; SOL2 = Canadian Solidarity Group 2; SOL3 = Solidarity individual interview; CH1 – Chileans Group 1; CH2 – Chileans Group 2; CH3 = Chilean activist individual interview; CPE = Chilean Public Event; C1 = Colombians Group 1; C2 = Colombians Group 2; C3 = Colombian activist individual interview. In the text, focus group abbreviations include a number that corresponds to the individual focus group speaker.

4. Canadian social justice activists formed the Latin American Working Group (LAWG 1965–1991) in response to the 1965 US invasion of the Dominican Republic. For almost three decades thereafter, the LAWG mandate was to maintain a reference library of grey literature and to produce well-documented, critical political analyses of events in Latin America. Social justice activists funded by government, unions and faith-based organizations used LAWG material to influence Canadian government policy on aid and trade with the region. In the 1980s, LAWG sponsored Canada-wide tours of Central American social movement leaders, and used these visits as catalysts for ongoing sectorally-targeted education work.

5. Founded in 1961, the New Democratic Party is the only contemporary left-wing social democratic party in Canada. It was established through an alliance between the Canadian Labour Congress and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the first social democratic party. The CCF’s leader, Tommy Douglas, was a Baptist minister who served as premier of Saskatchewan and first federal leader of the NDP.

6. Minga is an indigenous word for mobilization or a gathering of all peoples.

7. This is a reference to the guerrilla movement of El Salvador.

References


Political cultures and transnational social fields


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