Mistrust, fragmented solidarity, and transnational migration: Colombians in New York City and Los Angeles

Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, Arturo Ignacio Sánchez and Elizabeth M. Roach

Abstract

This article compares the transnational economic, political, and socio-cultural relations of Colombian migrants residing in two different locations in the United States. The vast majority of these migrants are middle class and originally from large urban areas, which differs from the typical rural-origin migrants previously studied by transnational scholars. The analysis is based on theoretical developments from transnational studies and insights advanced by economic sociology. Our findings suggest that transnational relations and activities do not follow a linear path and are not necessarily and inevitably a progressive process. The reach, scope and effects of transnational activities are contingent on the interaction of multiple contextual (state of origin-migrants relations; state of origin relations with country of destination; context of reception of immigrants abroad) and group factors (size, class composition, mode of settlement).

Keywords: Colombia; transnational migration; migration; economic sociology; ethnic relations; transnational nation-state.

Y me desmintió el camino
lo que en la escuela aprendiera
No era cierto que mi patria terminara en la frontera.[1]
(Robert Darwin, Uruguayan poet and composer)

On a sunny Sunday in summer 1997 tens of thousands of people gathered in a large city park to celebrate Colombia's Independence Day. The ten-hour event became a colourful and joyful festival of deep patriotic fervour. The traditional *20 de Julio* discourses abounded, as did expressions of Colombianness accompanied by 'authentic' Colombian food, music and dance. The city mayor, several politicians, a congresswoman, Miss Colombia, a high official from the national government, and numerous local civic leaders all made heartfelt pronouncements exulting in Colombian

Ethnic and Racial Studies Volume 22 Number 2 March 1999
© Routledge 1999 0141-9870

patriotic pride. The mayor took advantage of the occasion to promote his re-election, the other politicians to promote their own candidacies, and the official to reiterate the national government's commitment to watch over the general population's well-being and its support of the mayor's administration. Miss Colombia, invested as the national symbol of beauty and femininity, reminded the multitude that 'all of you are ambassadors of Colombia, so you have to behave as such and remain united to demonstrate what Colombia is all about'. Colombian bands provided a folkloric and joyful atmosphere for the dancing and chanting crowd.

At first glance, this celebration seems to be merely another unremarkable nationalistic event. What makes it special, though, is that it took place in the gigantic Flushing Meadows Corona Park in the heart of Queens County in New York City, some 2,500 miles away from the national territory from where the approximately 250,000 participants originally came (Jiménez 1997). It is a truly transnational celebration and one that has been held every summer since 1985. With the exception of the organizers, the Colombian consul and Miss Colombia, none of the speakers was Colombian. The congresswoman was Puerto Rican, but neither the Italian-American mayor, Rudolph W. Giuliani, nor the mayoral candidates spoke Spanish. For Colombians, indeed, their *patria* does not stop at the border. Migrants have extended it all the way to the United States. And while they recreate their national culture and identity abroad and maintain close ties with their native land, they are being simultaneously courted by both their own country's government and that of the host society. These are just some of the features of the thick web of transnational relations in which migration is enmeshed and which is transforming migration processes and the way they are interpreted by scholars at the end of the twentieth century.

In this article we seek to examine transnational relations at close range, attempting to discern: (1) the types and forms of migrant ties and relations connecting them with the 'old country', and (2) these relations' theoretical and practical implications, especially regarding the migrants' social organization. We want to determine what kind of relations are maintained and by whom, what the state of origin's role in this process is, and how the local context of reception affects the kind and breadth of transnational practices. Specifically, the study focuses on the economic, political and socio-cultural transnational connections established by Colombians residing in New York City and Los Angeles County – homes of the largest and fourth largest Colombian concentrations in the United States, respectively (U.S. Department of Commerce 1993b, 1993c).[2]

The emergent field of transnational migration

Contemporary migrant relations, expectations, opportunities and limitations are now embedded in a world in which capitalism has reached

global dominance and transnational possibilities have been 'popularized', as it were, among ordinary people throughout many cultures and regions of the world. These processes have been facilitated by the 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1990) generated by a technological revolution and cheapening of the means of communication and transportation, the end of colonialism and the ensuing consolidation of a system of independent nation-states, and the universalization of human rights (Sikkink 1993; Soysal 1994; Wilson 1997; Drainville 1998).

Transnational studies have expanded rapidly among both cultural studies and social science scholars in the last decade or so (see, for example, Kearney 1991; Rouse 1991; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992, 1995; Lessinger 1992; Mitchell 1993, 1996; Ong 1993, 1997; Basch *et al.* 1994; Guarnizo 1994, 1997; M.P. Smith 1994; Mahler 1995, 1998; Appadurai 1996; Goldring 1996, 1998; Kyle 1996, forthcoming; Portes 1996; Guarnizo and M. P. Smith 1998; R.C. Smith 1998; Sørensen 1998). Empirical studies have documented the significance of transnational relations for many contemporary immigrant groups in the United States. Findings from these inquiries counter a conventional theoretical framework which assumes that immigrants become settlers who sever their connections with their societies of origin. Rather than forsaking their homelands, immigrants have strengthened their commitments and contributions to them. Transnational relations have become ubiquitous and undeniably significant for the immigrants' incorporation in the United States, since they influence the immigrants' own conception of their relationship with and positionality in their new land. Thus, transnational migrants tend to merge into a single social continuum (that is, transnational social field), rather than separate their settlement 'here' and their communities 'there'.

The field of transnational studies has provided exciting new vistas of the migration processes. Yet its fast growth has also been accompanied by a mounting conceptual ambiguity that threatens to make transnationalism another ephemeral conceptual fad. Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (this issue) trace the roots of this ambiguity to several theoretical and methodological pitfalls. Here, we address several limitations stemming from the research strategies of previous studies, as they relate to our own inquiry.

First, thus far the vast majority of transnational inquiries have been ethnographies of small groups of immigrants coming from the same place of origin (typically a rural locality) and residing in the same place in the United States (see, for example, the works of R.C. Smith, Goldring, Mahler, Levitt). Only a few studies have focused on groups residing in multiple sites (see Massey *et al.* 1987; Sørensen 1998), on non-rural immigrants (see Roberts, Frank and Lozano-Ascencio this issue), or on populations coming from the same country regardless of their place of origin (see Glick Schiller and Fouron 1998).

Second, a lack of consensus exists for the definition and usage of analytical categories. A conflation confuses transnational social relations with the effects of these relations on social organization and regrouping in the nations involved. Often, analytical conceptualizations of how transnational relations are maintained, such as through a transnational social network or by means of a transnational circuit, are mistakenly used as synonymous with other concepts that speak to the social organization emerging from transnational practices, such as transnational communities or binational societies, however defined.

This study aims at testing some of the conclusions put forward by previous studies by looking at a group whose characteristics depart from earlier case-studies, using a methodology that overcomes some of the above limitations. To do so, we compare the transnational relations of Colombian migrants residing in two different locations in the United States. In our inquiry, we do not target any specific community of origin within this national group. The vast majority of these migrants are originally from large urban areas, which differs from populations previously studied. Furthermore, we incorporate in our analysis theoretical developments from transnational studies, as well as insights advanced by economic sociology.

In accordance with economic sociology, we argue that the processes and effects of transnational migration (including the migrants' own social organization) vary widely and are indeterminate because they depend on (1) the different *contexts* that migrants encounter abroad and in their places of origin; (2) the *social capital*[3] they possess; and (3) the *social obligations and ties* they have with (a) their kin, communities and state of origin and (b) the society to which they have migrated (see Portes and Guarnizo 1991; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1991; Portes 1995). We do not consider the effects of transnational migration as purely economic and either positive or negative; instead, using an economic sociology perspective, we expect that the effects of transnational relations are contingent on the contexts in which migration is embedded.

In our probe, we use an inclusive definition of transnationalism. It is understood to be formed by patterned, multifaceted, multilocal processes that include economic, socio-culturals and political practices and discourses that (1) transcend the confines of the territorially bounded jurisdiction of the nation-state; and (2) are an inherent part of the habitual lives of those involved.[4] These relations, undertaken by either collective or individual social actors, involve the exchange of a swirl of both tangible and intangible resources, including people (emigrating, remigrating, making regular 'home' visits), monetary resources (business investments, family remittances, community aid), non-monetary resources (ideas and cultural symbols), and political support and resistance.

This study combines various research strategies. It is based on a total of 127 structured, unstructured, and focus group interviews carried out

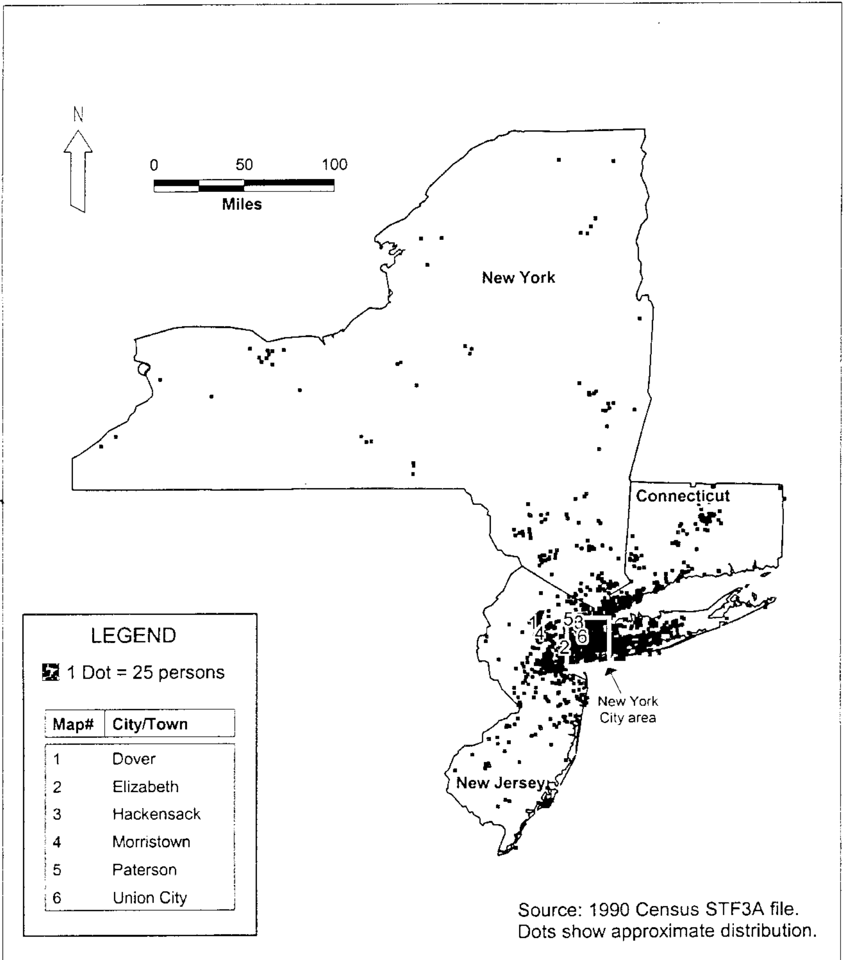
in New York City and Los Angeles between September 1996 and March 1997. We interviewed fifty-six women and seventy-one men. Each interview lasted approximately two hours, with some unstructured, in-depth interviews lasting up to six hours over several sessions. Informants were not randomly selected but were chosen because they currently (or formerly) occupied key positions *vis-à-vis* Colombians (that is, Colombian political, social and cultural leaders, business owners and employees, Colombian consulate officials, non-Colombian leaders and business owners in the same or neighbouring areas where Colombians tend to concentrate, and local county and city government officials). Informants reported not only on their own personal experiences, but also on the general conditions of Colombians in these cities. We sought to capture both factual information and processes of social transformation linking the country of residence and that of origin.

Colombia and its migrants

Literally, Colombia is a country on the move. At least 3-million Colombians (MRE 1996), or 8 per cent of the national population of 37-million (DANE 1996, p. XVI), now reside outside the national territory. An additional one million, or 3 per cent of the total, have been forcibly displaced within the national territory by an acute civil strife that has been ravaging the country for the last decade (see Giraldo *et al.* 1997; Beaumont and Lennard 1998; Meertens 1998). The high proportion of international migrants makes Colombia a high-migration country comparable to migration countries par excellence such as the Dominican Republic and El Salvador. The largest proportion of Colombians who reside outside their country live in the United States, followed by Venezuela and Ecuador.

The Colombian population seems to be less geographically concentrated than any other major Latin American immigrant group in the United States. By 1990, for example, 69 per cent of Dominicans were concentrated in New York, 64 per cent of Cubans were in Florida, and 60 per cent of Salvadorans and 45 per cent of Mexicans were in California. By contrast, just 28 per cent of Colombians were in New York State, followed by Florida (22 per cent), New Jersey (14 per cent), California (11 per cent), and Texas (4 per cent). This initial picture of high spatial dispersion should be qualified. Some two-fifths of the 379,000 people of Colombian origin (U.S.- and foreign-born), reported by the US census, lived in the tri-state (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut) greater New York metropolitan area[5] (see Figure 1; U.S. Department of Commerce 1990). Colombians in the Los Angeles metropolitan area constitute the fourth largest cluster, with 8 per cent of the total. Our analysis focuses only on New York City's five boroughs (Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island) and Los Angeles County.

Figure 1. *Distribution of persons of Colombian origin in the New York–New Jersey–Connecticut area*



The highest concentration is in the Greater New York Metropolitan Area, which includes New York City and a total of twenty-nine counties in the three states.

As the data in Table 1 show, the sociodemographic profile of Colombians in the United States is unlike that of Latin American immigrants in general and puts them closer to mainstream Americans – and affluent Cubans – than to more numerous and poorer Mexicans, Dominicans and Salvadorans (see U.S. Department of Commerce 1993a). Data presented in Table 1 suggest some sort of class selectivity, differentiating Colombian Angelenos from Colombian New Yorkers. Though a group much smaller in size, the former tend to be in a class position that puts them

closer to the mainstream than their counterparts in New York City. Colombians in Los Angeles have not only higher labour force participation, but also a larger proportion of professionals and people with higher levels of formal schooling among their ranks; thus they have a higher per capita income and a lower poverty rate.

Drug trafficking and Colombian migration

In the last two decades the rapid expansion of international drug smuggling under the control of Colombian traffickers has become an important source of foreign exchange and social disarray for the country. International drug trafficking has become synonymous with Colombian identity worldwide. Regardless of its validity, this image has had a tremendous effect on Colombian immigrants in the United States in general. In New York and Los Angeles, Colombians have been seriously stigmatized, and that experience has dramatically transformed the group's social structure and dynamics. The result has been increased levels of social fragmentation and generalized mistrust. According to a 35-year-old man who arrived in Los Angeles in 1995 to set up a shipping company, Colombians

> have to endure the heavy psychological weight of the drug issue. . . . It's like having a contagious disease. When you talk to people with some level of sophistication they might know about [Colombia's] emerald and coffee production. But the general public in Los Angeles [as soon as they learn that you're Colombian] start proposing crooked deals. . . . When you say [that you are] Colombian, immediately people associate you with drugs.

The drug-related stigma makes Colombians 'undesirable people' according to one respondent. Indeed, several informants observed that Colombians tend not to associate with one another – at least not with Colombians they don't know – 'because one doesn't know who the other person is and what they are involved in'. Being seen with someone who might later turn out to be an unsavoury character would be harmful to one's reputation, some said. The man who has the shipping company said: 'Here, many Colombians avoid other Colombians because of the [drug] problem'.

The stereotyping of Colombians has been widely reproduced by mass media through a reporting style on things Colombian that focuses almost exclusively on drug-related issues, such as violence, corruption and the like. The conspicuous presence of a small proportion of the Colombian population in the running of the illicit trade is undeniable; however, the complexity of Colombian society, with its population of 37-million, has largely been reduced to this single issue, which in turn has created a

Table 1. *Colombian immigrants in the United States: New York City, and Los Angeles – 1990*

Group characteristics	Colombians			Latin Americans	Total population
	New York*	Los Angeles*	US	US	US
Population 1990	84,454	21,678	281,000	7,842,650	248,709,873
Median age	28.0	30.4	35.3	32.1	33.0
U.S. labor force participation (%)	73.2	74.3	73.7	69.7	65.3
In professional occupations (%)	10.1**	12.9	16.4	10.2	26.4
High School graduates (%)	58.8	68.2	51.0	26.9	30.0
Completed college or higher (%)	10.7	18.6	15.1	8.2	20.3
Income per capita ($)	10,341	13,094	13,538	10,173	14,420
Poverty rate (%)	16.9	13.8	15.4	25.7	13.1
Naturalization rate (%)	23.6	23.3	29.0	31.0	50.7

*Refers to New York City (Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island); Los Angeles figures include Los Angeles County only.
**Refers to immigrants ages 16 to 64 admitted between 1990 and 1994.
Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census *1990 Census of the Population – Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States 1993a*; U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *1993 Annual Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office 1994; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1993c *1990 Census of the Population – Social and Economic Characteristics – Los Angeles*. Section 1, Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census.

stereotyped picture of all its citizens. What seems paradoxical, though, is that the hostility generated by this stereotyping has fomented social fragmentation instead of group cohesion among Colombian immigrants. This is, in effect, contrary to what one could expect based on the experiences of other immigrants who have also faced a hostile reception. Despite their social fragmentation, Colombian immigrants have not sought to assimilate in the United States or to sever their ties to their country of origin. Their transnational links have persisted, forming a complex web of multidirectional relationships.

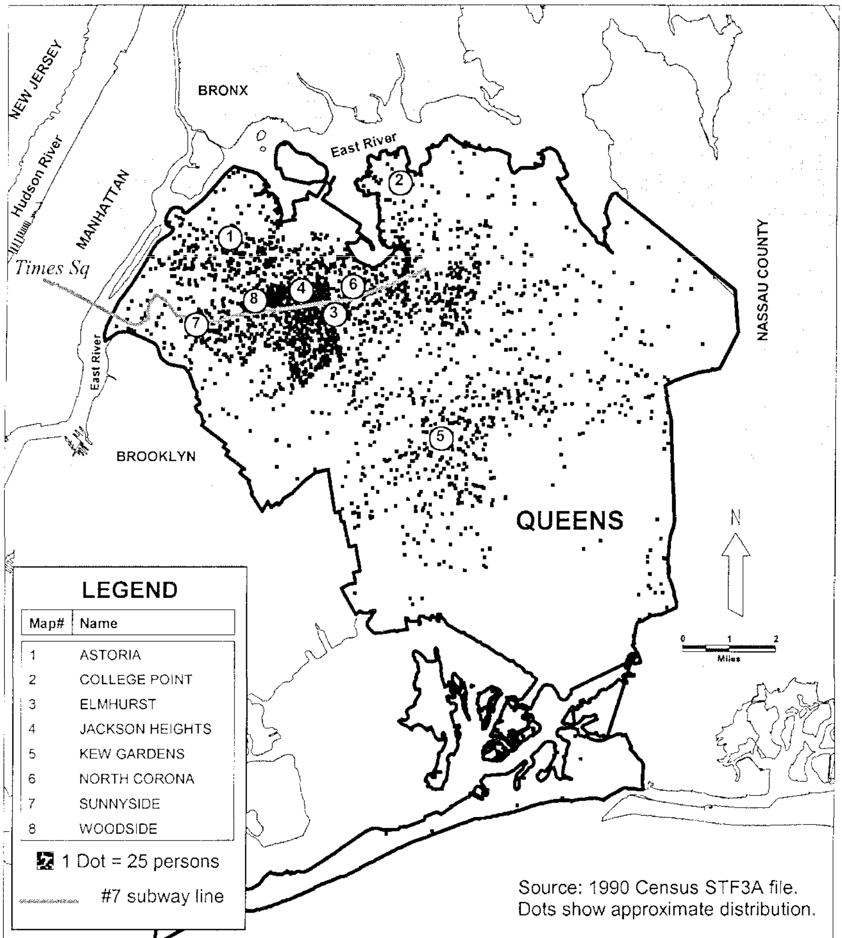
The geography of Colombian migration

According to US Census data in 1994, around one-half of the Colombian population in the greater New York metropolitan area, or one of every five Colombians in the United States, lived in New York City proper. The 1990 Census reported a total of 84,474 Colombians residing in the city, with an overwhelming majority in the borough of Queens (74 per cent). Colombian residential patterns are also spatially concentrated. A total of 63,224 Colombians reside in northern Queens in a few specific neighbourhoods: Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, Corona, Woodside, Sunnyside, and Astoria (see Figure 2). These neighbourhoods are not bounded mono-ethnic immigrant enclaves – Colombians live alongside immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Central America, Mexico, Asia and the Indian subcontinent. This pattern of pluri-ethnic residential propinquity tends to be the norm within the New York City metropolitan region, as recent studies have shown (Alba *et al*. 1995).

Colombian New Yorkers represent a cross-section of Colombian society: expatriated world-class artists and multibillionaires, international drug traffickers and petty drug dealers, underemployed professionals and tenured academics, blue-collar workers and emergent entrepreneurs. Although all Colombian regions are represented in the city, people from highly urbanized and economically developed areas such as *paisas* from the departments of Antioquia (72 per cent urban) and the coffee region (Quindio, 84.5 per cent and Risaralda, 82 per cent urban, respectively), as well as *vallunos* from Valle del Cauca (85.6 per cent urban) and from the nation's capital, Santafé de Bogotá, constitute the majority (DANE 1996).

Since the late 1960s the Jackson Heights district in Queens has been a residential and commercial centre for Colombian New Yorkers (Chaney 1976). Jackson Heights and the surrounding neighbourhoods contain a solid and vibrant ethnic economy that supports a wide range of households, immigrant organizations, and services (Hoffman and Ospina 1995; Ospina and Hoffman 1995). After the so-called cocaine boom in the mid-1980s when drug trafficking skyrocketed, this district became more an area of reception and transition for new arrivals than a place of stable

Figure 2. *Distribution of persons of Colombian origin in Queens, NY*



The number 7 subway forms the axis of the Sunnyside-Woodside-Jackson Heights-Elmhurst-Corona corridor, which houses the highest concentration of Colombians in the county.

settlement (Sánchez 1996). Nevertheless, Jackson Heights remains the Colombian centre. Life here is still pregnant with sounds and images that produce a sense of déjà vu: the daily happenings of *la patria* are reported live through radio, television and print media; the national airline offers daily direct flights to Cali and Bogotá; Colombian foodstuffs, beverages and liquors are readily available; a major Colombian media network, RCN, has a radio station and a cable TV-channel in the city. Colombian social and political issues occupy as much of the public discourse in Jackson Heights as they do in Colombia.

The Colombian situation in Los Angeles contrasts in several ways with that in New York City. In Los Angeles, there is no Jackson Heights, either geographically, commercially, or socially. Colombians are widely dispersed and much fewer in number (the 1990 U.S. Census reported only slightly more than 21,000 in Los Angeles County). It can take an hour or more by car to get from one to another of the small concentrations of Colombians within the greater Los Angeles area. Colombians are also overwhelmed, both numerically and culturally, by a Latino population largely dominated by Mexicans and Central Americans. We found that for Colombians in Los Angeles – a largely middle-class group – the ease and frequency of interaction with co-ethnics is affected by all these factors: lack of population density, lack of numbers and lack of a significant cultural and political presence among fellow Latin Americans. For the most part, Colombians in the Los Angeles area seem to come from the major cities of Santafé de Bogotá, Cali and Medellín; however, there are representatives of many regions in Colombia, though not at the same level of variety as in New York City.

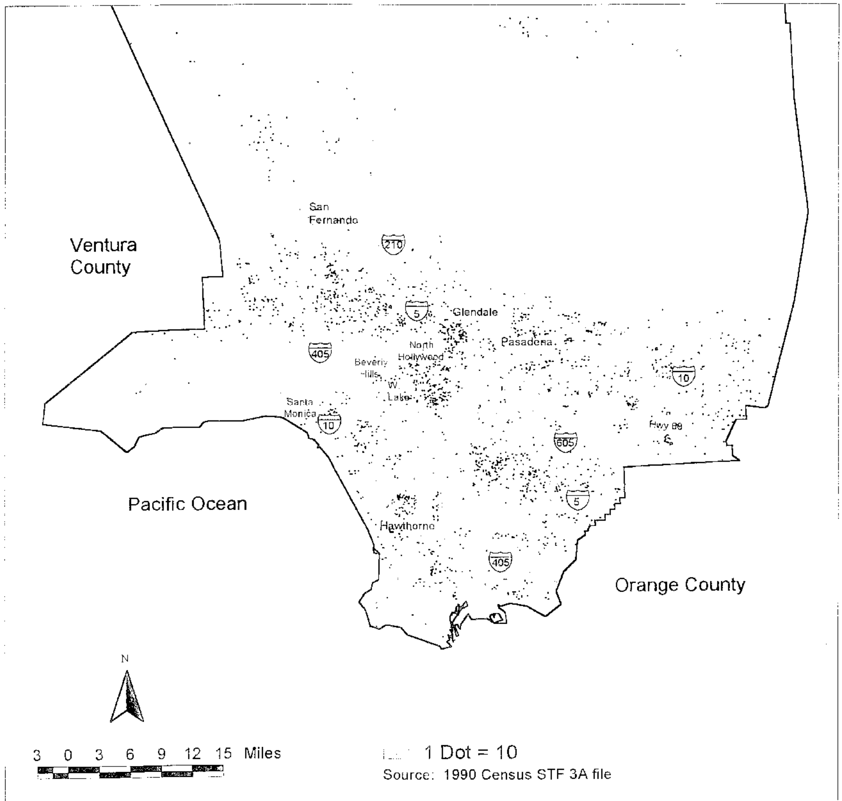
The settlement pattern of Colombians in Los Angeles County is characterized by dispersion as settlement has been along the major freeways (see Figure 3). Our key informants were aware that Colombians were quite scattered in Los Angeles. Most of them also seemed well aware of the much larger, more concentrated Colombian community in Queens, which seems to have a legendary quality even among those who have not lived there. It is described as a place packed with Colombians, where the restaurants are full and entire towns consist of Colombians.

Colombians' transnational connections

Transnational economic links

Transnational economic ties include a gamut of activities that range from those directed from corporate Colombia (from above) to those promoted by Colombian entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in the United States (from below). Some examples can illustrate the significance and variety of transnational economic activities from above. The sizeable Colombian population in the United States now constitutes an important market for processed products and services from Colombia. Large corporations producing soft drinks, beer, processed foodstuffs, and the like, have briskly expanded their market share in New York and Los Angeles. A high and expanding demand for these products has opened up business opportunities for migrant entrepreneurs as well. In the last ten years or so, the number of these items being produced in New York City by Colombian entrepreneurs under licensing agreements with Colombian producers has increased. Colombian corporate interests are active in New York through the Colombian-American Association. This organization

Figure 3. *Distribution of persons of Colombian origin in Los Angeles County*



facilitates informal contacts and arranges meetings of Colombian corporate executives, national politicians and opinion-makers with their US counterparts.

In addition, large Colombia-based service corporations have expanded their market up north to capture immigrants' demand. Thousands of migrants travelling frequently to their country constitute the mainstay market segment of Avianca, the largest privately owned Colombian airline. In fact, Avianca has a near monopoly on direct flights from New York to Colombia and holds a significant share of the smaller Colombian-bound air traffic from Los Angeles (U.S. Department of Transportation 1997, 1996). The Colombian private financial sector has also made significant inroads into the New York immigrant market. Since the 1980s, for example, the Banco de Bogotá, known in New York City as First Bank of the Americas, opened a series of branches in Colombian neighbourhoods to penetrate the growing co-ethnic market for commercial and residential loans, financial services and monetary transfers. We

did not find any presence of Colombian financial institutions in the Los Angeles area.

Small monetary transfers are one of the most common transnational ties connecting migrants with Colombia. During the 1978–94 period, on average, the annual volume of remittances from the United States to Colombia was $304 million. In 1990 alone, according to World Bank data, Colombians in New York State remitted US$147.5 million – potentially a serious case of undercounting if one considers that, for example, in a personal interview, the owner of a remitter agency put at $150 million the amount that his firm alone transfers yearly to Colombia. On the other hand, Colombians in the state of California remitted some $55.5 million to their country in 1990, most of it from Los Angeles (De la Garza, Orozco and Baraona 1997, p. 8).

Informants indicated no knowledge of other stable transnational business transactions besides the typical small monetary transfers for immediate family consumption, small-scale investments, and larger money transfers carried out by those avoiding official controls. It has been argued that businesses such as money remitters and long-distance services are fronts for money laundering.[6] Though there have, indeed, been cases of illicit activity, for the most part it seems that this is undertaken by a small fraction of businesses. In New York, the alleged impact of drug trafficking on business start-ups in Jackson Heights remains a highly contested and polemical issue among both Colombians and non-Colombians. In Los Angeles this issue was not perceived to be as significant as in New York.

In the New York metropolitan area, Colombian immigrant businesses have developed in tandem with the growing presence of co-ethnics. These businesses are both concentrated in specific well-defined areas and geographically dispersed across the larger metropolitan area, especially in Queens. In Jackson Heights, Thirty-seventh Avenue and Roosevelt Avenue host a slew of Colombian firms. A significant number of Colombian-owned enterprises are scattered in the neighbourhoods of Corona, Elmhurst, Woodside, Sunnyside and Astoria, which are connected by the Number 7 and N subway lines. These business location patterns reflect the ongoing spatial deconcentration of Colombian residents.[7]

Economic relations between Colombian Angelenos and their country of origin appear to be smaller in scale and less varied than those observed in New York City. Though the level of entrepreneurship in Los Angeles is proportionally as high as in New York City, one does not find any spatial concentration of Colombian-owned businesses. This lack of concentration seems to be associated with both the lack of a substantive and spatially concentrated Colombian clientele (that is, no residential ethnic enclave) and the drug stigma attached to Colombians.

Colombian-owned businesses can be classified as either ethnic-oriented or open market activities. In New York, the former tend to serve

a local, almost exclusively co-national market and have very few, if any, transnational business ties with Colombia. The latter tend to serve both ethnic and non-ethnic clients and concentrate on transnational activities. Ethnic-oriented firms include restaurants, clothing stores, grocery stores and bakeries. Among these, only specialized clothing stores import goods directly from Colombia. The others purchase their Colombian imports and retail products from local producers and distributors.

By contrast, transnational service providers such as travel agencies, *remeseras* (money transfers), and long-distance telephone operations cater to both co-ethnics and the new waves of ethnically diverse Spanish-speaking immigrants. Transnational service providers are larger operations that facilitate the movement of people, capital and information between New York and Colombia. This sector is in flux not only because of stricter official regulations, but also because of the rise of new corporate marketing strategies aimed at controlling the ethnic market. Because of the increasing residential presence of non-Colombian immigrants, transnational services have been diversified to geographical areas such as the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico and Central America. Larger travel agencies and money transfer firms have even expanded their services to some non-Spanish-speaking groups.

Another transnational economic activity is the informal trade undertaken by merchants travelling constantly between the United States and Colombia. These small-scale transnational merchants take advantage of the recent Colombian legislation allowing travellers to bring up to $1,000 in tariff-free merchandise into the country. In contrast to larger transnational service firms, informal merchants serve an exclusively co-national clientele in the tri-state metropolitan area.

The typical ethnic businesses that Colombians own in Los Angeles are food-related. The non-co-ethnic businesses we know of include light manufacturing, retail stores, Mexican food, and professional and business services (physicians, dentists, attorneys, tax consultants, real estate firms, and firms whose products or services are connected in some way to the motion picture industry). Overall, and in contrast to New York, we can say that most prosperous business owners do not find their ethnicity relevant to their business success. The lack of a residential Colombian enclave is, indeed, a significant factor in making Colombian-owned businesses try to appeal to a non-ethnic or a pan-ethnic customer base. When such businesses do not rely completely on a Colombian clientele and have no access to a co-national labour pool, they are forced to diversify and strive to reach out to a broader market, thus making them potentially more competitive.

Most informants were not aware of extensive transnational business connections. A commonly named example was that of Colombian-owned import-export companies, which, of course, must be transnational by definition. However, we have anecdotal evidence that other connections

do exist, at least to an isolated degree. Examples include a carpet exporting firm in Los Angeles, a doctor with an interest in a clinic in Colombia, a man who exports heavy machinery, and people who have heard of individuals taking clothes back to Colombia to sell. Undoubtedly, their small numbers and spatial dispersion made the detection of transnational business transactions a difficult task. At any rate, regardless of how extensive these relations may be, they are not as extensive and intensive as those encountered in New York City.

The Colombians' limited transnational economic activity appeared to be linked to a combination of factors, including fragmented economic networks at the group level, individual migrants' scanty social capital in the country, generalized uncertainty and instability in the country, and what many called *'descomposición social'* in Colombia. In this regard, it was posited that fundamental notions of trust and honourable behaviour are no longer central elements of the Colombian social landscape, especially in larger cities, where most migrants come from. This high level of mistrust and fragmentation of social circuits parallels initial findings in two metropolitan areas in Colombia (see Guarnizo and Díaz this issue).

From our interviews it is apparent that the contemporary Colombian transnational economic milieu is increasingly marked by generalized *desconfianza* (mistrust). For instance, a significant number of respondents stated that they had personally experienced or heard of many cases in which migrants have made investments from New York or had gone back to start a new business in Colombia, only to end up losing their hard-earned money. Some of our informants maintained that in addition to deteriorated social conditions in the country, many of these failures were due to the fact that Colombians who spent extended periods of time in the United States tended to be *'desubicados de la realidad colombiana'*; that is, they lacked the right social capital – they were 'locked out' of commercial informational networks and had simply lost the feel for the local business culture and practices.

This failure cannot be construed as meaning that there is no sense of trust, reciprocity and solidarity among Colombians. Most business people share commercial information and support (informal credit, advice, etc.), but this is done through densely packed, very well-bounded, and highly personal informal networks. In this case, however, it seems as though social fragmentation is manifested not only around small circles of friends and kin, but also along regional and class lines. Many informal business networks are, in large part, facilitated by regional affiliations and social class. For example, some of the most successful business people in both metropolitan areas, the vast majority of whom happen to be from the departments of Antioquia and Valle del Cauca, tend to limit the core of their business relations to people from their region of origin who often occupy a similar class position. In general, existing transnational

economic activity among Colombians in both metropolises is mostly associated with either tightly knitted social networks of migrants or with large corporate interests tapping migrants as a profitable market.

Transnational political participation

As the twentieth century comes to a close, Colombians living abroad have been granted an unprecedented array of rights and access to a series of institutions that facilitate and even promote the transnationalization of their lives. Since 1958 Colombians have had the right to vote in presidential elections, although this remains a marginally used political right.[8] Since the early 1990s, however, things have begun to change. The Colombian state has introduced a series of political and constitutional reforms to formally integrate nationals living abroad, and by so doing has irrevocably altered the 150-year-old meaning of national citizenship and nationality based on national territorial jurisdiction.

Perhaps the most important and long-lasting of these reforms has been the approval in 1991 of dual citizenship, which was the final outcome of a transnational grass-roots movement initiated by migrants in the United States. Migrants, especially from New York and Miami, created a task force to draft a proposal for submission to the National Constituent Assembly, a popularly elected body in charge of reforming the national constitution. This task force was formed by a multiparty coalition led by immigrant leaders of the Liberal Party in New York City, and even included representatives from some guerrilla groups (Sánchez 1996). The dual citizenship reform is a historical watershed in that it liberated migrants from the burden of having to give up their original national membership as the cost of becoming US citizens.

In addition to dual citizenship, the 1991 Constituent Assembly approved the political representation of Colombians abroad in the national Congress by creating a global extraterritorial electoral district that includes all countries outside the national territory. Lastly, in December 1997, the Colombian Congress passed a law granting Colombians residing abroad the right to vote for congressional candidates representing electoral districts in Colombia, which gives migrants the power to elect from afar the legislative representatives of their own regions of origin.

Besides these constitutional reforms, the state for the first time is implementing policies to address the needs of nationals living abroad. In 1996, as part of the president's *Colombia para todos* (Colombia for Everyone) programme, the Ministry of Foreign Relations established the *Programa para la Promoción de las Comunidades Colombianas en el Exterior* [PPCCE] (Program for the Promotion of Colombian Communities Abroad) (Samper 1996). Components of the PPCCE include a formal outreach programme for Colombian nationals living abroad, legal assistance for those incarcerated in foreign jails,[9] professionalization of

consular officials, and efforts at surveying the needs and characteristics of the Colombian diaspora.[10] More recently, the Colombian Department of Planning launched a series of studies about Colombian-US relations, including migration and the implications of recent changes in US immigration laws (see Restrepo 1998). Together, these reforms and policies represent part of a process of institutionalization of Colombia as a transnational social formation, a process that is reconfiguring the state's relationship with its migrant population and that represents a shift in the perception of this population by the Colombian dominant classes. Evidently, at least from the state's point of view, migrants are no longer regarded as merely those living in *'el exterior'*, but as integral and active members of the nation-state.

Like economic activities, transnational political relations from above (that is, from the Colombian state and parties) and below (from Colombian political activists in the United States) are related and interact closely. The traditionally dominant Liberal and Conservative parties, as well as opposition parties and movements, including guerrilla groups, all have representatives in New York City. During the past thirty years, Jackson Heights has emerged as a place for Colombian transnational élite politics. Campaign visits and fundraising efforts by presidential candidates from the Liberal and Conservative parties have become institutionalized practices. Despite the migrants' low turnout in Colombian elections, the electoral process in New York City is filled with symbolic nationalist sentiments that connect Colombians with *la patria*. Transnational political events are heavily covered by the co-ethnic and Colombia-based media and provide symbolic capital,[11] social status, and, eventually, material capital for local political leaders. Although political parties have not been successful in thwarting the ordinary immigrants' electoral apathy, which is as prevalent as among the general electorate in Colombia, they have been quite effective in raising financial support for their political campaigns in Colombia from among well-off immigrants with transnational political aspirations. Meanwhile, mass transnational political participation remains episodic and intermittent, although it has increased in the last few years.

As might be expected in a highly fragmented and segregated population, the Colombians' transnational political practices, and the benefits derived from them, are heterogeneous and unevenly distributed. In Los Angeles, Colombians have become 'invisible' due to their spatial dispersion, small size, and avoidance of stereotyping. Regarding their involvement in local politics, one informant stated that local US politicians would probably not even be aware of having any Colombian constituents. In New York, on the other hand, their political leadership is dominated by a select group of migrants who have succeeded in climbing the social ladder, who have 'made it' in the city either as entrepreneurs or as independent professionals, commonly lawyers.

Colombian involvement in New York politics has also been minimal so far. In part, this results from a combination of factors, including the political culture they brought from Colombia, which makes them suspicious of politics in general, their low levels of naturalization, the social fragmentation of the group as a whole and its leadership in particular, and the lack of strong organizations. Although their overall political participation is low, the political affiliation of those who do participate is much more pluralist than that of larger Latino groups in the city, who tend to be overwhelmingly militants of the Democratic Party (see Falcón and Hanson-Sánchez 1996). This kind of political affiliation seems to reflect high internal political, ideological, and class heterogeneity within the group. Generalized mistrust, stigmatization, a hands-off political culture, and pluralist political affiliations have become major stumbling blocks for the political organization of Colombians as a group. Every aspiring political leader has to deal not only with the usual tensions of the political struggle, but also with the phantom of drug trafficking imagery attached to Colombians. Interestingly enough, recently passed exclusionist laws that curtail immigrants' rights and benefits seem to have helped to reduce generalized mistrust by encouraging coordination among organizations.

Since 1994, following President Samper's new policies towards migrants, the consulate in Los Angeles has been supporting several initiatives to promote organization by Colombians. At the time of this study, however, no evidence of success was detected. In New York, meanwhile, the Colombian consulate has actively promoted the transnationalization of migrant participation in both local and Colombian politics by working closely with immigrant leaders. These incursions into the US political arena suggest an informal tutelage by the Colombian state of local Colombian activists. Colombia-linked activities such as lobbying before US legislators for recertification are significant for many Colombian New Yorkers and have affected the way Colombian political activists do politics in the city. For example, some activists who until recently proclaimed a pan-Latino political identity and kept their distance from Colombian-related issues have had to reverse this stance and incorporate such issues into their own agendas to maintain the support of their co-nationals.[12]

In general, Colombian political interests are now shifting from an almost exclusive focus on Colombia to an inclusive, translocal orientation and from traditional rigid Colombian bipartisanship to a fluid US multiparty affiliation. Several factors point in this direction. First, there is the Colombian state's influence in encouraging migrants to seek political empowerment so that they can defend their own interests and those of their country of origin. Second, there are the worsening conditions in Colombia, which make the possibilities of a definitive return less likely. Third, there are the declining employment opportunities because of the

restructuring of the city's economy – a situation that has affected important segments of the Colombian population. The fourth factor relates to the emergence of a small group of young politicians, most of whom were born in Colombia, completed their university education in the United States, and are bicultural. The fifth factor is the rapid increase in the naturalization rate of Colombians since the approval of dual citizenship in Colombia in 1991. Organizations such as the Latin American Integration Center [LAIC], founded in 1991 in the wake of dual citizenship reform by a group of professionals, have become important promoters of naturalization, voter registration, and the political integration of Colombians in New York City.

Evidently, Colombians in New York are in transit from their pervasive fragmentation and electoral apathy to political activism at the local and transnational levels. Some examples illustrate this trend. In the March 1998 congressional elections in which migrants were allowed to participate for the first time, José A. López, an immigrant who arrived in the mid-1970s from the Quindio department and later graduated as a physician, was elected to the Colombian Senate. He is the first dual citizen who, while residing abroad, has been elected to represent a Colombian region in the national congress (see Guarnizo and Sánchez 1998, pp. 318–19). Another immigrant, Jesús Galvis, an immigrant from Bogotá who arrived in 1976, also ran, albeit unsuccessfully, for a congressional seat in the same elections. At the time, he had been an elected official (a county councilman and commissioner for Hispanic affairs) in Bergen County, New Jersey, for several years. Simultaneously, as of now, several young politicians have announced their candidacy for various positions in the city council and state assembly.

Meanwhile, negotiations were going on and alliances being brokered among traditional leaders to nominate a candidate for a Colombian Congress seat to represent Colombians residing outside the country. For some young politicians, the election of such a representative could create a unique opportunity for them to break the political inertia and mobilize the Colombian population in mass to participate in local politics. Other young leaders who are less optimistic and more locally rather than transnationally focused, like Democrat Arthur Rojas, dismiss this argument as nonsensical. For them, 'it's more valuable to elect one Colombian to the New York City Council, than ten to the Colombian Congress as representatives of the Colombians abroad'.

Transnational socio-cultural activities

In the United States, transnational socio-cultural activities are either sponsored from above by the Colombian state or from below by an array of immigrant organizations. Unlike economic activities, in which corporate interests have opened up business opportunities for migrant

entrepreneurs, socio-cultural ties from above and below appear to be separated along class lines. Colcultura, the official agency in charge of promoting the national culture, has traditionally sponsored high-culture events in New York (for example, concerts, national classic and folkloric ballet performances, and art exhibitions by acclaimed Colombian artists), but very few in Los Angeles. These cultural events are aimed at improving the national image abroad and, thus, are explicitly directed at a US audience.

One of the most efficient and successful initiatives started by the Colombian state so far has been the Red Caldas [RC], an electronic network created in 1993 and initially coordinated by Colciencias (Colombia's National Science Foundation) and aimed at facilitating communication and cooperative work among Colombian scientists and scholars abroad and in the country (see Charum and Meyer 1998). The RC now connects hundreds of Colombian scientists throughout the world. According to Meyer and Granés (1998), almost 900 people have been connected to the RC and by 1996, it linked Colombian scientists in twenty-six countries (pp. 87–89).

Parallel to the expansion of transnational economic developments, large Colombian corporate concerns have expanded the importation of Colombian informational products. In New York, the largest national newspapers, magazines, and television and radio networks have established a stable and solid presence. The introduction and expansion of informational businesses has also been mediated by migrant entrepreneurs. Television and radio news programmes daily greet Colombians during their morning commute and evening return in what seems to be a well-orchestrated simulation of life in Colombia, as though nobody had ever left the country. This is not the case in Los Angeles, where national newspapers can be found only weekly and in a few places, and no other Colombian media are present.

In New York, socio-cultural activities from below have been promoted by many popular organizations, most of which were established during the 1980s, when the concentration of Colombians in and around Jackson Heights reached critical mass. Although there is a significant degree of overlap, most organizations can be classified as socio-cultural and socio-civic associations (Sassen-Koob 1979; see Pe a Salas 1997). Unlike most Latin American immigrants in the United States, Colombians in New York City have not established home town associations. A majority of the existing organizations are informal and do not have legal non-profit status or full-time salaried staff. Colombian leaders are predominantly male high school or college graduates and tend to be self-employed. Although, in general, the leadership's cultural capital[13] is relatively high, factionalism (along class and regional lines) and caudillo attitudes dominate in these organizations. The majority of these organizations have either formal or informal transnational linkages with Colombia. The

kinds of activities and linkages that they maintain tend to vary according to the class composition and mission of the organization.

The *Centro Cívico Colombiano* [CCC] is the pre-eminent popular socio-civic Colombian organization in New York. It organizes the massive annual *20 de Julio* Independence Festival which is often transmitted live to Colombia by satellite television. As a preamble to the festival, the CCC's leadership travels to Bogotá to promote the celebration, present formal invitations and distribute honorary proclamations to important politicians. The political and social capital accumulated by these leaders through the performance of these rituals among the Colombian political and military élites is enormous. It produces high returns back in New York in the form of increased legitimacy and ascendancy among the Colombian population at large. For this very reason, control of the CCC has become the object of bitter struggles.

Corazón-a-Corazón [CaC] is one of the best known and most respected charitable Colombian organizations. CaC has centred its mission on providing monetary and medical support to bring needy Colombian children to the United States for heart operations and other sophisticated treatments. CaC also donates expensive and hard-to-find medical equipment to its Colombian counterparts. In addition, CaC has facilitated the establishment of scientific relations between specialized US medical and research centres and a select group of Colombian counterparts. Through this relationship, American and Colombian cardiologists coordinate treatment for seriously ill patients and regularly exchange expertise on pediatric cardiac surgery. As of mid-1997, CaC was collaborating with thirteen Colombian health institutions in ten cities and four health and health-related organizations in the New York metropolitan area.

Professional organizations such as Profesionales y Estudiantes Colombianos en el Exterior [PECX] (the Colciencias' sponsored local Red Caldas node of scholars and scientists) and La Asociación de Profesionales Colombianos [APC] (founded and run by immigrant college graduates) provide a forum for visiting Colombian scientists and dignitaries, and often sponsor cultural activities by co-national artists. APC gives informal support and guidance to new immigrant professionals to facilitate their entry into the local labour market. Meanwhile, the Consejo Cultural Colombiano [COLCUC], a non-profit organization created and directed by immigrant artists and writers, facilitates exchanges among and between Colombian writers and artists in New York and Colombia.

Institutional boundaries among New York Colombian organizations are marked by strong class distinctions, institutional jealousies, and competition that prevent stable and solid interorganizational communication and coordination. Organizations, with a few exceptions, tend to be based on small and closed cliques of friends and acquaintances, who volunteer

their own time and often contribute monetarily to the organization. Usually these organizations are led by economic entrepreneurs or independent professionals, who are often also political activists. In brief, cooperative or joint venture activities are rare, and turf-building is endemic. This has resulted in a high degree of intra- and inter-organizational strife.

However, as mentioned earlier, conjunctural episodes of solidarity dot the Colombian experience in New York. Indeed, lack of cooperation is rarely evident when Colombians organize in response to natural tragedies in Colombia, or in the face of a perceived common cause (such as supporting a *paisano* or helping to defray the cost of transporting a deceased compatriot back to Colombia), or to face threats common to the group (for example, police brutality), or to celebrate Colombia's Independence Day.

In contrast to the numerous Colombian organizations in New York, we found a dearth in Los Angeles. Today, cultural and civic organizations are hard to find, let alone those with connections to Colombia. However, several informants talked about many individual activities – a singer, a guitar player, an actor, a woman who leads a Latin American poetry group, and so forth.

Colombians in Los Angeles have not always suffered from such fragmentation and lack of socio-cultural organizations. According to old-time residents, until the mid-1980s Colombians in Los Angeles celebrated four annual festivals to which orchestras and performing artists from Colombia were customarily invited. Other high cultural events were not uncommon in Los Angeles; at the time, Colombian doctors, engineers and other professionals often promoted these kinds of events. The growth of drug-trafficking, along with the harassment of Colombians as a result of the US government's war on drugs were powerful factors in scaring people away from organizations and precipitating the demise of Colombian cultural and civic organizations. Drug-related factors were not the only ones conspiring against Colombian organizing. Determinants such as deep-seated classism, the ageing of the initial leadership and internal personal feuds seem to have helped the process along. As an old-time resident put it, referring in disparaging terms to the 'low class' of the newcomers, 'We're depleting the stock, and nothing much is coming in'.

As in New York, the mobilization of national symbols at certain junctures, however, does generate sporadic expressions of group pride, solidarity, and unity, and, of course, commercial gain. Colombian Angelenos also overcome their social and spatial fragmentation and gather together to celebrate their nationalism on *20 de Julio.* Here, however, the celebration, which congregates some 10,000 participants every year at a local park, is organized not by a well-structured organization as in New York, but singlehandedly by one person.

In sum, spatial dispersion, along with what seems to be an automatic mistrust of co-ethnics in Los Angeles, means that even key informants are not as informed as they might otherwise be. No one person knows it all: an immigrant baker, dealing with customers all day in Huntington Park, has a totally different perspective from an attorney in Beverly Hills who grew up in California, or from a downtown chiropractor whose patients are not co-ethnics. We argue that, for Colombians in Los Angeles, transnational connections are more often constructed on an individual basis – by people connecting with individuals they already knew and trusted in Colombia – rather than through organizations.

Discussion

Transnational relations maintained and reproduced by contemporary immigrants settled in the United States represent processes that are crucial for the present and future of US society and its institutions. Territorially bound institutions such as citizenship, national identity and state sovereignty, on the one hand, and inter-state relations, on the other, are being questioned and rekindled by these processes. Received theoretical approaches to immigrant incorporation, namely the cultural assimilationist and the ethnic pluralistic models, seem unable to accommodate the plurality of transterritorial affiliations that transnational migrants seem to possess. Meanwhile, some analysts have invested transnational activities and processes with a progressive and even liberatory character, which empowers ordinary people to resist state and corporate capital control.

Our findings present an ambiguous and less sanguine picture than that provided by existing accounts of transnationalism. To be sure, the potential liberatory power of transnationalism was rather limited, whereas its potential to help reproduce social asymmetries was more apparent. The experience of Colombians departs sharply from that of other immigrant groups, in part because of the stigma attached to them as drug traffickers. More important, however, seems to be their middle-class position, urban background, and the role that the Colombian state and corporations have played in the process.

Transnational relations have grown out of pressures by migrants themselves (from below), trying to maintain their connections and relations with their places of origin, and from the Colombian state and corporate interests (from above), seeking to capture the political support and potential demand of migrants for things Colombian, respectively. Migrants had pressured for over a decade for dual citizenship, which would allow them a legitimate dual membership in the United States and Colombia without losing their Colombian rights. However, the final approval of this reform in 1991, and the ensuing constitutional and political reforms granting migrants a wide array of transnational political

rights, did not occur only because of migrant pressures from below. The changing positionality of the country in the restructuring global political economy also played a crucial role in these reforms. In particular, the deterioration of relations with the United States, Colombia's most important economic, political and military partner, greatly helped to trigger the changes – a situation that closely resembled similar steps that the Mexican state took to co-opt its migrants' support of the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] and other neo-liberal reforms by the state (see Guarnizo 1998).

Colombian transnational economic connections tend to be limited mostly to traditional remittances, investments in real estate and small businesses, and informal international trade. In New York City, they tend to concentrate their businesses in certain metropolitan areas, where they have formed small shopping areas reminiscent of commercial Colombian strips and stores; they are much less conspicuous than Dominican-owned businesses. In Los Angeles, on the other hand, their businesses tend to be imperceptible and dispersed across the metropolitan region; many of these operations are not ethnic and cater to a mainstream market. Large corporations have found in the migrant population an expanding market with more disposable income than that of average Colombians in the struggling national economy. Service, financial and manufacturing corporations use a nationalistic pitch to secure the loyalty of their clients in the United States. Flying the national airline, drinking *Colombiana* (a soft drink) and national beers: these are advertised as symbols *de hacer patria,* of nation-making. To expand their market, several corporations have created forward and backward linkages with immigrant entrepreneurs, thus generating a new 'community' of transnational economic interests with local élites in the process. In brief, instead of creating alternatives to corporate capital, Colombian migrants become their customers and potential business partners.

In the last ten years, Colombia has become one of the world's most transnational societies: its citizens have the right to dual nationality and citizenship; they can vote in presidential and congressional elections from abroad; they have the right to direct representation in the national congress as residents of a special global electoral district. Moreover, the government has transterritorialized several assistance programmes to incorporate overseas Colombians in the national project. However, these transnationalizing incentives, regardless of their empowering potential, have up to now found little echo among the vast majority of migrants. Migrants' relations with the country are still maintained as mostly private relations between kin and acquaintances. Only a small élite and a few organizations have capitalized on these new opportunities.

It is plausible that, in addition to the negative stigmatization, migrants' apathy in supporting mass organizing efforts across borders is related to their urban and mostly middle-class origin. Some elements hint in this

direction. For example, home town associations, identified by previous research as the main agents connecting immigrants with their places of origin, are not found among Colombians. Similarly, the locality of origin – usually a small rural village in existing studies – has been identified as a crucial referent that bounds, gives meaning and creates a sense of 'community'. This referent has a very different meaning among Colombians because most come from large urban centres where anomie and social isolation are not uncommon. In sum, among Colombians we did not find either a defined sense of *Gemeinschaft,* or of what Durkheim (1964[1933], pp. 79–80) calls a 'common conscience', that is, a 'totality of belief and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society . . . independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed'. This has been identified as the principle that supports the idea of 'transnational communities' (see Goldring 1998).

Overall, our findings suggest that transnational relations and activities do not follow a linear path and are not necessarily and inevitably a progressive process. Our findings suggest that the reach, scope and effects of transnational activities are contingent on the interaction of multiple contextual and group factors. Accordingly, the interaction among these factors might induce the expansion, stagnation, or reversal of transnational activities and relations over time. In Los Angeles, for example, we found that steady cultural transnational connections, ensconced until a decade ago in organizations of well-to-do professionals, no longer exist. Meanwhile, a limited set of transnational ties maintained by some immigrant organizations and an emergent élite in New York have been expanding into a multifarious web of economic, cultural and political relations since the early 1990s. The effects on transnational processes of class, gender, urban origin, and other categories of exclusion such as race and regionalism, should be the focus of further research.

Acknowledgments

This article is based on preliminary results from an ongoing multiyear research project comparing the transnational relations established by Colombian, Dominican and Salvadoran migrants in the United States. The project has been partly funded by grants from the National Science Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. We thank Martin Bulmer, Krystyna von Henneberg, Patricia Landolt-Marticorena, Alejandro Portes, and the *ERS* reviewers for their helpful comments and recommendations on an earlier version of this article.

Notes

1. *And my journey negated*
   What at school I learned

It was not true that at the border my patria would end.
(From the poem 'Fronteras')

2. The second and third largest concentrations of Colombians are in Dade County, Florida and northern New Jersey.

3. Pierre Bourdieu, one of the pioneers of the concept, has defined social capital as 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 119). Portes and Sensenbrenner (1991, p. 1323) specify the definition of social capital as 'those expectations for action within a collectivity that affect the economic goals and goal-seeking behavior of its members'.

4. By patterned relations we mean a social action or set of actions whose occurrence is regular and follows a consistent, more or less predictable sequence. This excludes sporadic, single actions by individuals (for example, an occasional visit to the homeland, infrequent monetary transfers), but not one-time mass actions resulting from collective, grass-roots processes based on social responsibility and loyalty (for example, solidarity assistance by migrants in cases of disasters, political protests). Transnational relations are considered to be part of the habitual life of individuals when their absence will impede or drastically disrupt their habitual or customary pattern of activities, whether social, economic, cultural, or political.

5. The greater New York metropolitan area refers to the New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island-Connecticut Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area [CMSA], as defined by the Census Bureau. It is the largest CMSA in the country and contained 17.9 million people living in twenty-nine counties in 1990. New York City proper includes only five counties: Bronx, Kings (Brooklyn), New York (Manhattan), Queens, and Richmond (Staten Island) (see Alba *et al.* 1995, p. 625; U.S. Department of Commerce 1991).

6. In fact, in August 1996 the New York Bank Commission, as part of a Department of the Treasury pilot project, established harsh controls for money transfers to Colombia by way of a selected list of remitters. Incidentally, the US corporations Moneygram and Western Union were not included. According to the new regulations, any transfer of over $750 to Colombia must be reported immediately to the commission, and the sender must fill out a form with detailed personal information, which includes workplace and residential address, income and spouse's name. This threshold amount has evolved over time. In the early 1980s it was $10,000 and $3,000 until July 1996. The previous threshold, however, was a generic concept that was applied to all movements and countries. Colombia is the only country with a $750 money transfer limit.

7. Both Colombian residents and businesses are being displaced in part due to local contextual changes. For example, the Jackson Heights Beautification Group, a group controlled by European Americans, has used the anti-drug trope in support of the successful designation of a large section of Jackson Heights as a historical district. The historical preservation provisions granted local officials land-use regulations that were used effectively to displace Colombians and other immigrants.

8. The potential power of the migrant vote was recently summed up by a high official, who said that 'the migrant vote, if fully exercised, can define any national election in Colombia'. This is particularly true if one takes into account the strikingly high rate of voter abstention prevalent in the country.

9. The Colombian government's efforts to provide protection and legal assistance to the more than 12,000 Colombians currently incarcerated for drug-related crimes around the world has produced a negative reaction among the migrant population. One informant wondered 'why the [Colombian] government has to spend so much money on the criminals that have given us such a bad reputation? It should help hard-working Colombians instead'.

10. As part of the PPCCE, the Colombian Consulate in New York City has contracted out several research projects. One surveyed the size and demographic characteristics of Colombian prisoners in the New York metropolitan region. The other report identified the

needs and aspirations of Colombian youth. A third research project, *Quiénes Somos y Hacia Dónde Vamos?*, surveys the size and needs of the Colombian population in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut area. In Los Angeles, the consulate also has contracted out a sociodemographic study of Colombians in Los Angeles County.

11. Symbolic capital is used here in the Bourdieunian sense; that is, it represents the 'acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability that are easily converted into political positions as a local or national notable' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 291).

12. Colombian leaders have denounced the demonization and discriminatory practices against Colombians and have used these issues as focal points for organizing drives for political empowerment. Citizenship campaigns, voter registration drives, and grass-roots mobilizations are largely presented as part of a bi-national political strategy. In general, organizational techniques and transnational political practices are based on highly concentrated local social and political capital (that is, highly personalized relationships), the instrumental use of Colombianness (that is, claims to Colombian 'authenticity'), and the mobilization of personal political capital with the political establishment back in Colombia.

13. Cultural capital concerns forms of cultural knowledge, which equips persons with empathy towards, appreciation for, or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts. Cultural capital is accumulated through a long process of acquisition or inculcation, which includes the pedagogical action of the family, educated members of the social formation, and social institutions (see Bourdieu 1984, p. 2).

References

ALBA, RICHARD D., DENTON, NANCY A., LEUNG, SHU-YIN J. and LOGAN, JOHN R. 1995 'Neighborhood change under conditions of mass immigration: the New York City region, 1970–1990', *International Migration Review*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 625–56

APPADURAI, ARJUN 1996 *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

BASCH, LINDA, GLICK SCHILLER, NINA, and SZANTON BLANC, CRISTINA 1994 *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and the Deterritorialized Nation-State.* New York: Gordon and Breach Publishers

BEAUMONT, PETER and LENNARD, JEREMY 1998 'Land where "headcutters" rule', *The Observer,* 21 June, p. 15

BOURDIEU, PIERRE 1984 *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

BOURDIEU, PIERRE and WACQUANT, LOÏC J. D. 1992 *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology,* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press

CHANEY, ELSA M. 1976 'Colombian Migration to the United States (Part 2)', in *The Dynamics of Migration: International Migration,* Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, pp. 87–141

CHARUM, JORGE and MEYER, JEAN-BAPTISTE (eds) 1998 *Hacer ciencia en un mundo globalizado: La diaspora científica colombiana en perspectiva*, Santafé de Bogotá: Colciencia, Universidad Nacional, Tercer Mundo Editores

DANE, DEPARTAMENTO ADMINISTRATIVO NACIONAL DE ESTADISTICA 1996 *Censo 1993, XVI Censo Nacional de Población y V de Vivienda, Resumen Nacional,* Santafé de Bogotá: DANE

DE LA GARZA, RODOLFO, OROZCO, MANUEL and BARAONA, MIGUEL 1997 *Binational Impact of Latino Remittances,* Policy Brief, Claremont, CA: The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute

DRAINVILLE, ANDRÉ C. 1998 'The fetishism of global civil society: global governance, transnational urbanism and sustainable capitalism in the world economy', in *Transnationalism from Below,* Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds),

Comparative Urban and Community Research, New Brunswick,NJ: Transaction Publishers, vol. 6, pp. 35–63
DURKHEIM, EMILE 1964[1933] *The Division of Labor in Society.* New York: The Free Press
FALCON, ANGELO and HANSON-SANCHEZ, CHRISTOPHER 1996 *Latino Immigrants and Electoral Participation: Puerto Rican, Dominicans, and South Americans in the New York City Political System.* New York: Institute for Puerto Rican Policy
GIRALDO, CARLOS ALBERTO, ABAD COLORADO, JESUS and PEREZ, DIEGO 1997 *Relatos e imágenes: El desplazamiento en Colombia.* Santafé de Bogotá: Cinep
GLICK SCHILLER, NINA, BASCH, LINDA and BLANC-SZANTON, CRISTINA (eds) 1992 *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered,* New York: The New York Academy of Sciences
GLICK SCHILLER, NINA, BASCH, LINDA and SZANTON BLANC, CRISTINA 1995 'From immigrant to transmigrant: theorizing transnational migration', *Anthropological Quarterly,* vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 48–63
GLICK SCHILLER, NINA and FOURON, GEORGES 1998 'Transnational Lives and National Identities: The Identity Politics of Haitian Immigrants,' in *Transnationalism from Below,* Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds), *Comparative Urban and Community Research*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, vol. 6, pp. 130–161
GOLDRING, LUIN 1996 'Blurring borders: constructing transnational community in the process of U.S.-Mexico migration', *Research in Community Sociology,* vol. 6, pp. 69–104
—— 1998 'The power of status in transnational social fields' in *Transnationalism from Below,* Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds), *Comparative Urban and Community Research,* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, vol. 6, pp. 165–95
GUARNIZO, LUIS E. 1994 '*Los Dominicanyorks:* The Making of a Binational Society', *The Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Science,* vol. 533, May, pp. 70–86
—— 1997 'The emergence of a transnational social formation and the mirage of return migration among Dominican transmigrants', *Identities,* vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 281–322
—— 1998 'The rise of transnational social formations: Mexican and Dominican State responses to transnational migration.' *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 12, pp. 45–94
GUARNIZO, LUIS EDUARDO and SANCHEZ, ARTURO IGNACIO 1998 'Emigración colombiana a los Estados Unidos: Trans-territorialización de la participación política y socioeconómica', in Luis Alberto Restrepo M. (ed.), *Estados Unidos: Potencia y prepotencia,* Santafé de Bogotá: IEPRI, PNUD, Tercer Mundo Editores, pp. 293–334
GUARNIZO, LUIS EDUARDO and SMITH, MICHAEL PETER 1998 'The locations of transnationalism', in Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds), *Transnationalism from Below, Comparative Urban and Community Research*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, vol. 6, pp. 3–34
HARVEY, DAVID 1990 *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change.* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell
HOFFMAN, AMPARO and OSPINA, SONIA 1995 'Investigación sobre la comunidad colombiana en Nueva York y New Jersey. Reporte sobre la etapa "Apoyo a la Comunidad"', New York: New York University
JIMENEZ, YOLANDA 1997 Deputy Commissioner for Community Affairs, New York City Police Department. Personal interview. July 28
KEARNEY, MICHAEL 1991 'Borders and boundaries of State and self at the end of empire', *Journal of Historical Sociology,* vol. 4, March
KYLE, DAVID 1996 'Me voy al "YONY": A Comparison of Two Transcommunities Spanning the Rural Andes and New York City', presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, New York City, August 16
—— forthcoming *The Transnational Peasant in Ecuador, Europe, and America: A Comparative Study of Migration and Development,* Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press
LESSINGER, JOHANNA 1992 'Investing or going home? A transnational strategy among

Indian immigrants in the United States', in Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (eds), *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered,* New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, pp.53–80

LEVITT, PEGGY 1998 'Social remittances: migration-driven, local-level forms of cultural diffusion', *International Migration Review,* forthcoming

MAHLER, SARAH J. 1995 *America Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

—— 1998 'Theoretical and empirical contributions toward a research agenda for transnationalism,' in *Transnationalism from Below,* Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds), *Comparative Urban and Community Research,* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, vol. 6, pp. 64–102

MASSEY, DOUGLAS S., ALARCON, RAFAEL, DURAND, JORGE and GONZALEZ, HUMBERTO 1987 *Return to Aztlán: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press

MEERTENS, DONNY 1998 'Víctimas y sobrevivientes de la guerra: tres miradas de género', *Revista Foro,* no. 34, June

MEYER, JEAN-BAPTISTE and GRANES, JOSE 1998 'Internet y la globalización de la comunidad científica nacional. Un estudio empírico', in Jorge Charum and Jean-Baptiste Meyer (eds), *Hacer ciencia en un mundo globalizado: La diaspora científica colombiana en perspectiva,* Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia: Colciencia, Universidad Nacional, Tercer Mundo Editores, pp. 85–108

MITCHELL, KATHARYNE 1993 'Multiculturalism, or the united colors of capitalism?' *Antipode,* vol. 25, pp. 263–94

——1996 'In whose interest? Transnational capital and the production of multiculturalism in Canada'. in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (eds), *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 219–54

MRE – MINISTERIO DE RELACIONES EXTERIORES 1996 Personal group interview with three high officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bogotá D.C., Colombia, 8 October

ONG, AIHWA 1993 'On the edge of empires: flexible citizenship among Chinese in diaspora', *Positions,* vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 745–78

——1997 'Chinese modernities: narratives of nation and of capitalism', in Aihwa Ong & Donald M. Nonini (eds) *Ungrounded Empires: the Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* , New York: Routledge, pp. 171–203

OSPINA, SONIA and HOFFMAN, AMPARO 1995 'America's Emerging Latinos: Dominicans and Colombians in New York – The New York Community Leadership Study, Research Report, New York University

PE A SALAS, YOLANDA 1997 *Las asociaciones colombianas en Nueva York: 1958–1993,* Cali: Universidad del Valle, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Económicas, Sociología

PORTES, ALEJANDRO 1995 'Economic sociology and the sociology of immigration: a conceptual overview', in Alejandro Portes (ed.), *The Economic Sociology of Immigration*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 1–41

—— 1996 'Transnational communities: their emergence and significance in the contemporary world system', in R. P. Korzeniewicz and W.C. Smith (eds), *Latin America in the World Economy*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, pp. 151–68

PORTES, ALEJANDRO and GUARNIZO, LUIS E. 1991 'Tropical capitalists: U.S.-bound immigration and small-enterprise development in the Dominican Republic', in Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Sidney Weintraub (eds), *Migration, Remittances, and Small Business Development: Mexico and Caribbean Basin Countries*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp. 101–31

PORTES, ALEJANDRO and SENSENBRENNER, JULIA 1991 'Embeddedness and immigration: notes on the social determinants of economic action', *American Journal of Sociology,* vol. 98, no. 6, pp. 1320–50

RESTREPO M., LUIS ALBERTO (ed.) 1998 *Estados Unidos: Potencia y prepotencia,* Santafé de Bogotá: IEPRI, PNUD, Tercer Mundo Editores

ROUSE, ROGER 1991 'Mexican migration and the social space of postmodernism', *Diaspora* vol. 1, pp. 8–23
SAMPER PIZANO, ERNESTO 1996 'Campa a Colombia para todos', *La política exterior del Salto Social,* Bogotá, DC: Presidencia de la República, pp. 130–33
SANCHEZ, ARTURO IGNACIO 1996 'Colombian Dual Nationality and Immigrant Agency', paper presented at the Meeting of the American Ethnological Society. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 18–20 April
SASSEN-KOOB, SASKIA 1979 'Formal and informal associations: Dominicans and Colombians in New York,' *International Migration Review,* 13(2): 314–32
SIKKINK, KATHRYN 1993 'Human rights, principle issue networks, and sovereignty in Latin America', *International Organization,* vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 411–41
SMITH, MICHAEL P. 1994 'Can you imagine? Transnational migration and the globalization of grassroots politics', *Social Text*, vol. 39, pp. 15–33
SMITH, ROBERT C. 1998 'Transnational localities: community, technology and the politics of membership within the context of Mexico-U.S. migration', in *Transnationalism from Below,* Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds), *Comparative Urban and Community Research*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, vol. 6, pp. 192–240
SØRENSEN, NINNA NYBERG 1998 'Narrating identity across Dominican worlds', in *Transnationalism from Below,* Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds), *Comparative Urban and Community Research*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, vol. 6, pp. 241–269
SOYSAL, YASEMIN NUHOĞLU 1994 *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press
US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, BUREAU OF THE CENSUS 1990 *Persons of Hispanic Origin for the United States: 1990.* Washington, DC: Internal Report of the Ethnic and Hispanic Branch
——1991 *News*, Release CB91-100, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 11 March
——1993a *1990 Census of the Population – Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States,* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office
—— 1993b *1990 Census of the Population – Social and Economic Characteristics – New York.* Section 1, Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census
—— 1993c *1990 Census of the Population – Social and Economic Characteristics – Los Angeles.* Section 1, Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census
US DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION 1997, *1996 US International Air Travel Statistics,* Cambridge, MA: Center for Transportation Information
U.S. IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE 1994 *1993 Annual Report,* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office
WILSON, RICHARD A. (ed.) 1997 *Human Rights, Culture and Context: Anthropological Perspectives.* London: Pluto Press

LUIS EDUARDO GUARNIZO is Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Department of Human and Community Development, University of California, Davis.
ARTURO IGNACIO SANCHEZ is PhD candidate at the Department of Urban Planning, Columbia University, New York.
ELIZABETH M. ROACH is PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles.
ADDRESS: Professor Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, Department of Human and Community Development, University of California, Davis, CA 95616, leguarnizo@ucdavis.edu.