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# Transnational Habitus and the Formation of a Colombian Community in Toronto

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TRANSNATIONAL HABITUAS AND THE FORMATION OF A COLOMBIAN  
COMMUNITY IN TORONTO

by

Santy Restrepo, BA, Brock University, 2010

A Major Research Paper  
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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in the Program of  
Immigration and Settlement Studies

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Transnational Habitus and the Formation of a Colombian Community in Toronto

Santy Restrepo

Master of Arts 2012

Immigration and Settlement Studies

Ryerson University

ABSTRACT

Colombians are one of the largest Latin American populations in Canada, however academic research on this ethnic group is scarce. Unlike other immigrant groups from Latin America, Colombians demonstrate limited community formation. This study seeks to explore the reasons that impede the formation of a Colombian community in Toronto. Using transnational habitus as a theoretical framework, and using census data analysis as well as field observations in the Toronto CMA, the study suggests that multiple political conflicts in Colombia have been transplanted to Canada, thereby impeding the formation of a solidified community.

Key Words: Colombians, Toronto, transnational habitus, community.

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## **Introduction**

Transnationalism is defined as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc 1999, p.48). Transnational linkages are thus identified as migrant’s daily economic, social and political interactions with more than one society that transcend international and political boundaries. Transnational practices are not uniform and differ by immigrant groups, individuals, as well as the context of the city or country of where they settle (Vertovec, 2009). Through transnational linkages and experiences immigrants create social reproductions in which they operate in the country of settlement, this concept is known as ‘transnational habitus’ (Kelly and Luisis, 2006).

The prolongation of pre-established social and cultural systems according to the immigrant’s place of origin suggests that transnational habitus is a collective phenomenon. However, habitus is also a personal phenomenon according to the prolongation of these systems at the individual level which can be further altered by the settlement location (Kelly and Luisis, 2004). Consequently, transnational habitus can create different experiences in different contexts explaining why transnational communities differ from country to country and from city to city. The contexts of the sending and receiving countries may affect the habitus and therefore have an impact on the social interaction of immigrants from the same group at different stages of the settlement process.

The Colombian community is a rapidly growing immigrant group in Canada and is the second largest Latin American group in Toronto ([www.statscan.gc.ca](http://www.statscan.gc.ca), 2012). According to some scholars, Colombians are amongst the world’s most transnational migrants (Guarnizo, Sanchez and Roach, 1999). There is however a lack of academic research on the Colombian community

in Canada or Toronto, and more specifically on the extent to which transnationalism affects their community building.

Similar to other countries around the world, Colombians tend to settle in similar geographical locations in Canada. Despite this settlement pattern, there seems to be a social fragmentation within the community. The fragmentation within the Colombian community may be a result of the historical conflicts, diverging political opinions and various beliefs and behaviors rooted in the country of origin, which are strongly maintained in the migrant country. The objective of this study is to explore how the transnational habitus affects the social interaction between Colombians in Toronto, which appears to be hindering their social organization and thus the formation of a transnational community.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions: How do transnational linkages affect the social interactions within Colombian migrants? And, to what extent does the transnational habitus facilitate or impede the formation of a Colombian community in Toronto? These questions will be significant to understand the lack of social organization within the Colombian community in the Canadian context. There are various reasons for the investigation of this social issue. As mentioned previously, the Colombian community in Canada is continuously growing, yet there is an evident lack of academic research and literature regarding this community. In addition, it is important to recognize intra-ethnic issues in order to raise consciousness as these might become normalized over time. Lastly, it is important to identify the factors preventing the formation of a cohesive community, which could better the circumstances of marginalized members of this community such as refugees, and create alternatives for the integration of its members through the establishment of an ethnic economy.

I will begin by providing a brief summary of Colombia's political economy history highlighting problematic occurrences which have shaped and significantly influenced the Colombian population since its first settlers. Following the historical account, I will describe the profile of the migration of Colombians placing specific emphasis on the migration to Canada. A literature review regarding the main concept of transnationalism and the relevant subtopics of transnational communities and habitus will follow. Next, I will discuss the factors facilitating and impeding the formation of a Colombian transnational community in Canada. Finally, I will analyze the lack of social organization and the absence of an established Colombian transnational community in the Toronto CMA using my own experiences, observations and informal conversations with Colombians living in Toronto.

## **Background: Political Economic History of Colombia**

It is important to revisit the history of Colombia's political economy as it will help us understand the extent to which the habitus in Colombia influences the processes of community building of Colombian migrants in Toronto. Colombia is located at the northernmost point of the South American continent and its limits are: the Caribbean Sea and Panama to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil to the south and Venezuela to the east. The country's geographical location at the 'entrance' of South America served as a passage for early migrants and nomads travelling from Central America in search of new lands and has played a crucial role in shaping the diversity of the Colombian people. As indigenous groups from different cultures passed through, some settled in isolated terrains due to the complex topography that still identifies Colombia. Early inhabitants were fragmented in four major areas: the highlands in the mountainous regions, the valleys along the basins of multiple rivers, the Caribbean coastal region and the Amazon jungle. This resulted in the formation of multiple organized indigenous cultures such as the Tayronas, the Sinues, the Chibchas, the Caribs, the Muiscas and the Arawaks to name a few (Safford and Palacios, 2002). The landscape however acted as a barrier separating these groups and therefore setting the stage for a diverse population.

The 'habitus' in Colombia is shaped by its history, arguably checkered by numerous internal problems, rooted in the struggle for the state's territorial dominance, political instability and the war over the trafficking of drugs (Safford and Palacios, 2002). As a result, numerous waves of violence and corruption have left long-lasting consequences on the Colombian society. The political and economic history of Colombia may be divided under four major occurrences; The Spanish Conquest, The battle for independence, The emergence of guerrilla groups and The drug conflict.

## **The Spanish Conquest**

The first Europeans came to Colombia in 1499, by the order of the Spanish crown (Safford and Palacios, 2002). These expeditions had three main goals: First, military domination over the indigenous groups; second, the imposition of the Catholic religion as the political doctrine and third, the appropriation of all the riches that belonged to the Aborigines (Safford and Palacios, 2002). In addition to the more advanced weaponry, the fragmentation of the indigenous cultures facilitated the Spanish conquest. In fact, the colonizers strategically maintained these divisions so as to prevent their alliance and a possible large-scale indigenous rebellion (Livingstone, 2004).

After 1509 when the Spanish conquest became official (Simons, 2004), a chain of settlements began to emerge subjugating and enslaving the indigenous societies. The indigenous population was forced to work in the mines in search of gold, emeralds, silver and other valuable gems. Due to the increase in gold production, the need for labour intensified creating a shortage for manual labour. To sustain the mining operation at this time, slaves from Africa were brought into Colombia as a supplement to the diminishing indigenous slaves (Simons, 2004). This economic act not only solved the labour issues temporarily, but it also added a new ethnic group in Colombia; The Afro-Colombians. Inter-marriages between Spaniards, Natives and Blacks diversified the Colombian population. As portrayed in table 1, the ‘racial’ composition from the ‘mix’ between these ethnic groups resulted in diverse ethno-cultural groups.

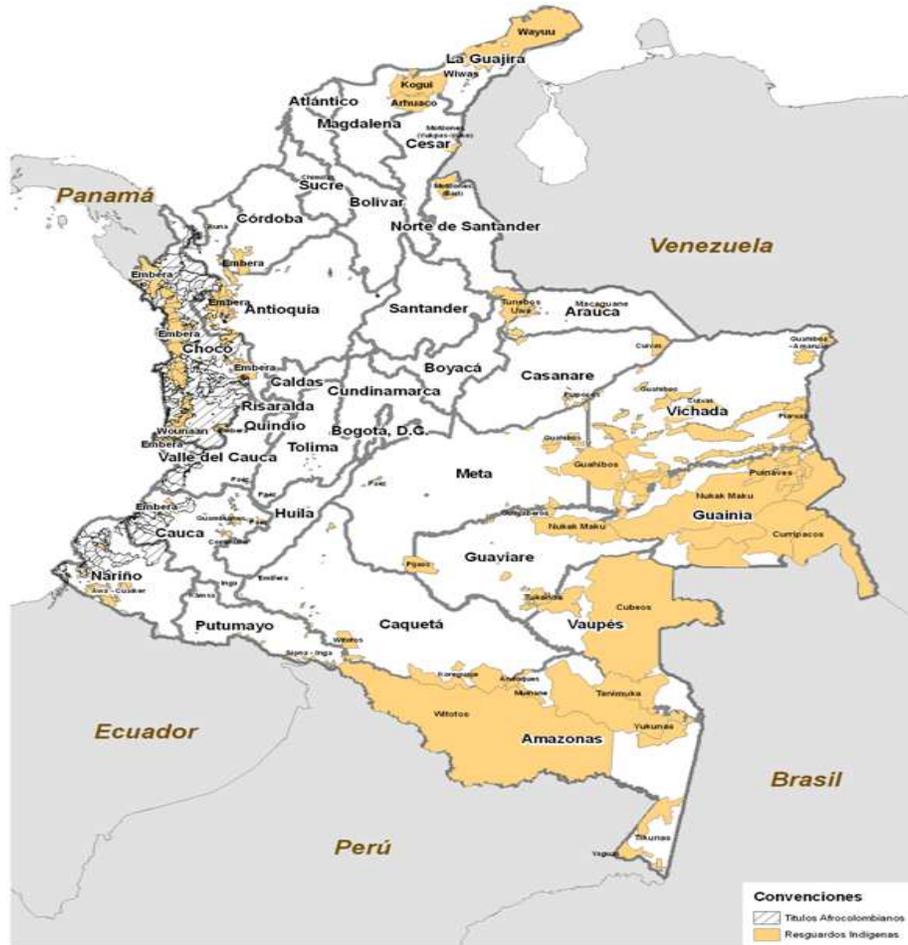
**Table 1: ‘Racial’ Composition of Colombia**

Español Peninsular	Peninsular Spaniard born in Spain
Criollo	Offspring of two Peninsular Spaniards but born in the American continent
Mestizo	Offspring of Spaniard and Indian (Native)
Mulato	Offspring of Spaniard and Black
Zambo	Offspring of Black and Indian (Native)
Cholo	Offspring of Mestizo and Indian (Native)
Castizo	Offspring of Mestizo and Spaniard
Morisco	Offspring of Mulato and Spaniard
Albino	Offspring of Spaniard and Morisca
Zambo Prieto	Offspring of Black and Zambo

Source: Safford and Palacios, 2002.

This ethnic diversity has significantly influenced the Colombian culture through a variety of customs, traditions, languages, music and folklore. Due to the prevalence of certain groups in certain regions of the country, there are regional distinctions such as types of music, food, slang, accents, etc., which still to date, characterize each region. Figure 1, shows the different locations of various Native groups which are concentrated in the north, south and sections of the western regions of the country. The Black population is mainly concentrated in the west region of Colombia. The rest of the country is occupied by the remainder ethnic groups. The contemporary ethno-cultural composition of Colombia has a major Mestizo population, while Whites, Mulatoes, Blacks, Zambos and Natives are minorities ([www.dane.gov.co](http://www.dane.gov.co)).

**Figure 1: Contemporary Prevalence of Ethnic Groups in Colombia**



Source: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística.

While the mixed ethno-cultural groups continued to grow towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spaniards established a ‘racial’ hierarchy in order to secure their governance (Safford and Palacios, 2002). Peninsular Spaniards and Criollos were considered the superior ethno-cultural group and thus the dominants of society. Members of these ‘privileged’ groups were the only ones allowed to hold positions of honour and attend university. Although Mestizos had some privileges, they could not hold important public positions. Natives and mixes were considered to be inferior ethnic groups and had many restrictions imposed on them such as the inability to own a home and carry weapons in addition to their oppressed status. At the bottom of

the social hierarchy were the Black slaves, who were deprived of all their rights and freedoms (Safford and Palacios, 2002).

### **The Battle for Independence 1810 - 1819**

The independence of Colombia began with the issue that has continually affected the nation; opposing postures and the incapacity to concur. Established Criollos in governmental positions had differing stances; those who remained loyal to the distant Spanish rulers and those who advocated for autonomy and thus the severing of all ties with the European nation. The first internal battles took place between 1810 and 1816. This period is referred to as 'La Patria Boba' (The Foolish Nation) because of the political instability and the failure to unify the nation, which resulted in the Spanish re-conquest (Livingstone, 2004). The final independence of Colombia was led by Simon Bolivar on August 1819<sup>1</sup>. Although the nation gained its sovereignty, political differences continued due to discordances between the Federalists and the Centralists leading to the first civil war (Safford and Palacios, 2002). Shortly after, La Gran Colombia (The Great Colombia) (Figure 2) was established with Simon Bolivar as the country's president. However, due to political disparities Venezuela separated as an independent nation in 1829 and Ecuador soon followed in 1830, resulting in a period called 'Nueva Granada' (New Granada) from 1830 to 1853 (Simons, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> Colombians celebrate Independence Day on July 20, date on which the initial independence movements began in 1810.

**Figure 2: La Gran Colombia**



Source: Encyclopædia Britannica.

This new period was distinguished by the formation of Colombia's traditional parties: the conservatives and the liberals. While conservatives defend a close relationship with the church and are guided by a Bolivarian ideology (a centralized government), Liberals advocate for a secular and federal state (Livingstone, 2004). The remainder of the nineteenth century is laden with conflicts between various interest groups (e.g. the artisans and the merchants, the centralists and the federalists, the clericalists and the radicals, the landowners and the slaves) but most importantly, between the loyalists Conservatives and Liberals leading to six (out of eight) national civil wars. The most violent conflict between the two parties was the War of the Thousand Days (between 1899 and 1903), which culminated with the victory of the conservatives and the loss of Panama<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The independence of Panama was also instigated by the interests of the United States. Approximately 100,000 Colombians died during this war (Livingstone, 2004, p.38).

After over half a century of Conservative hegemony, Liberals took control of Colombia in 1930. However, in 1946 the Conservatives regained control during a time of political turmoil referred to as ‘La Violencia’ (The Violence)<sup>3</sup>. Migration to urban areas augmented during this time<sup>4</sup>. This violent episode ended temporarily in 1958 with the establishment of ‘El Frente Nacional’ (The National Front), which united the Conservative and the Liberal parties and divided the political power between them (Simons, 2004, p.41).

### **The Emergence of Guerrilla Groups**

During the late 1950’s, political and social exclusion, inequitable land distribution and continuous social injustices against the Colombian population (especially the rural populace), led to the emergence of guerrilla groups predominantly in the mountainous regions, remote villages and rural communities. During this time the most notorious guerrilla groups emerged, such as FARC ‘Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia’ (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia) and ELN ‘Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional’ (Army of National Liberation). Rooted in communist and revolutionary ideologies, these groups adopted warfare to gain political participation in a system that was dominated by the Conservatives and Liberals (Simons, 2004). These armed groups terrorized the Colombian citizens through numerous kidnappings, tortures and countless massacres of human life<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> This period began in 1948 when Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, leader of the Liberal party at the time was assassinated (Livingstone, 2004). During this time the nation experienced violent revolts, uprisings, mass protests and riots both in the city and the country side. During these episodes many died in an attempt to defend their political ideology.

<sup>4</sup> The outcomes of these conflicts resulted in the death of 200,000 people between 1948 and 1953 and the complete collapse of the social order which left a permanent trauma for the nation due to the brutality and cruelty utilized during this period.

<sup>5</sup> Even though FARC and ELN have participated in peace processes initiated by the government, NGOs and international organizations such as the Red Cross, these rebel groups claim to not disarm until the country adopts a new social structure where wealth and power are better distributed. They also propose a new democratic system that revolves around social justice and national auto-determination ([www.farc-ep.co](http://www.farc-ep.co)). In addition, the State, who is responsible for the preservation of the social order, has proved to be incapable of eradicating and controlling the acts of these subversive groups whose main victims are often unarmed Colombian citizens.

## The Drug Conflict

Coca (plant from which cocaine is produced) was initially grown and collected by indigenous groups for medicinal purposes. The processing of cocaine began in small scale at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; however it became a large scale industry in the 1970s in response to the international demand for the narcotic (Simons, 2004). The geographical location of Colombia, its soil and climatic conditions, a major propensity of unemployed villagers providing manual labour, facilitated the cultivation as well as the illegal trafficking of cocaine to the major markets in the world (Livingstone, 2004). In these ways Colombia soon became the world's major producer and supplier of cocaine (Simons, 2004).

The majority of cocaine plantations are located in areas controlled by guerrilla groups, which permits the cultivation and processing of illegal narcotics in these 'lawless' territories. In part, the same complex geography (mountains and forests) that facilitated the Spanish conquest and made the unification of the nation difficult also complicated the war against illegal drug production. In the mid 1970s, the drug business became more organized, mafias were created and two major cartels were established<sup>6</sup>. Marginalized citizens were often employed as assassins 'sicarios' and kidnapers by the drug lords to carry out their wrongdoings. The war between these two brought yet another wave of horror and violence to Colombia where the unarmed civilian population was the most affected<sup>7</sup>. Violence in cities became rampant, and in addition to the thousands of innocent victims, hundreds of army men, police officers, judges, government ministers, and three presidential candidates were assassinated (Simons, 2004)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The Medellin and the Cali Cartels.

<sup>7</sup> Many innocent people lost their lives in car bomb explosions, murder attempts and assassinations and those that refused to cooperate or those that reported any criminal activity usually paid with their life.

<sup>8</sup> In part the slaughtering of officials and power figures was due to the fact that both cartels wanted to obtain political power in order to assist their business by retaining territorial control and reduce legislative pressures. For instance, the infamous Pablo Escobar by means of intimidation and extortion was able to be elected as Senator for

The drug business has caused irreparable damages through its warfare, but it also began an era of corruption that involved various political, economic and social public figures. This not only caused mistrust toward the government, but also amongst the population and various levels of society. After being elected as the president of Colombia in 2002, Alvaro Uribe<sup>9</sup> adopted an ‘iron fist’ approach to curb drug warfare<sup>10</sup>. This form of ruling is applauded by some and condemned by others who considered this method to be a prolongation of the armed conflict and a violation of human rights, and would rather a persistence of peace negotiations commenced by previous governments (Livingstone, 2004). Although drastically diminished during Uribe’s rule, conflicts between the Colombian military and the guerrilla groups still continue in certain regions of the country.

Ever since its colonization, political discordances, guerrilla warfare and the battle for the control of the drug business have all affected and transformed the economic and social structure of Colombia. These disputes have placed the country in a state of permanent conflict with the use of different forms of violence as the preferred strategy to achieve political and economic goals. Ultimately, political and economic instability, violence, insecurity and fear have been the main causes for the large exodus of Colombian nationals to foreign nations.

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the Liberal Alternative movement in 1982. Furthermore, the Cali cartel financed the presidential campaign of Ernesto Samper who was eventually elected President of Colombia in 1994 (Simons, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Uribe was the first elected president in over 150 years that belonged neither to the Conservative nor the Liberal party, and was rather the leader of a coalition party.

<sup>10</sup> This included the controversial presidential support and collaboration to the Colombian army of ‘paramilitares’ (private militias) to fight guerrilla groups. However, these groups were seen internationally as inhumane due to their social cleansing ideology and the methods employed to instill fear which included torture and brutal murders (Simons, 2004).

## **International Migration of Colombians**

The international migration of Colombians has been part of the nation's history since the 1960s, and has gradually gained importance in the past 15 years. Although the exodus of Colombian citizens is not a novel phenomenon, accurate statistics on this are not easily available. In part, this is due to the fact that there are multiple agencies involved in the task of data collection. Furthermore, families living abroad prefer not to disclose their whereabouts to the government's data collecting machines in the fear of being persecuted (Ramires, Zuluaga and Perilla, 2010).

Colombia's most important news network, Canal Caracol, illustrates that there were approximately 5,673,000 Colombians living abroad in 2010 (www.caracol.com, 2010; Ibernet Media and Consultants, 2010). Considering the population of Colombia was approximately 44,726,000 in 2011, it is safe to estimate that about 14 percent<sup>11</sup> of the total population lives outside of the country (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012).

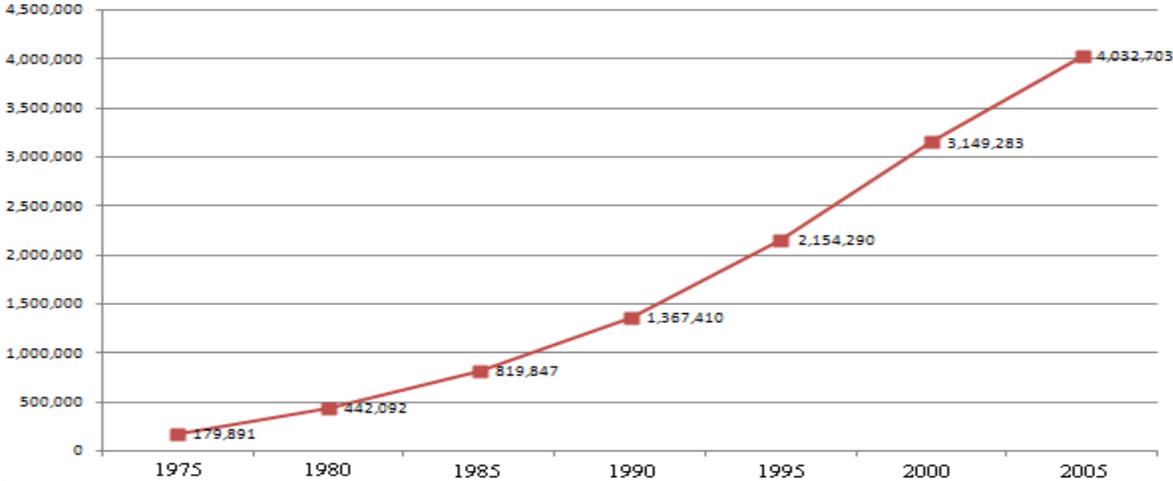
As shown in figure 3, Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE) (Administrative Department of National Statistics) reports an increase in Colombian international migration since 1970, which coincides with the escalation of the armed conflict and the drug wars. More specifically, from 1975 to 1985 an estimated 639,956 people left the country permanently. Between 1985 and 1995, this numbers doubled reaching an estimated 1,334,443. As the internal armed conflict worsened and the control for the drug trafficking continued, between 1995 and 2005, the country reached its pinnacle of insecurity and over 2 million Colombians migrated internationally (Maldonado, 2008). Although it could be argued that

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<sup>11</sup> It is argued that this number is much higher since certain migrants such as naturalized Colombians and immigrants without a legal status are often unaccounted for in official figures. A study by the consultant firm Ibernet Media and Consultants (2010), estimates that actually, over 20 percent of the Colombian population (around nine million) has permanently resettled outside of the country over the last 50 years including the overlooked populations, which places Colombia as one of the countries with the highest migration flows in Latin America.

globalization and technologies have facilitated the movement and resettlement of people over the years, the primary reasons for the augmentation of Colombian migration are political and economic instability, violence, lack of safety, fear and unemployment in their homeland (Ibernet Media and Consultants, 2010).

**Figure 3: Evolution of Colombian Migration 1975 – 2005**



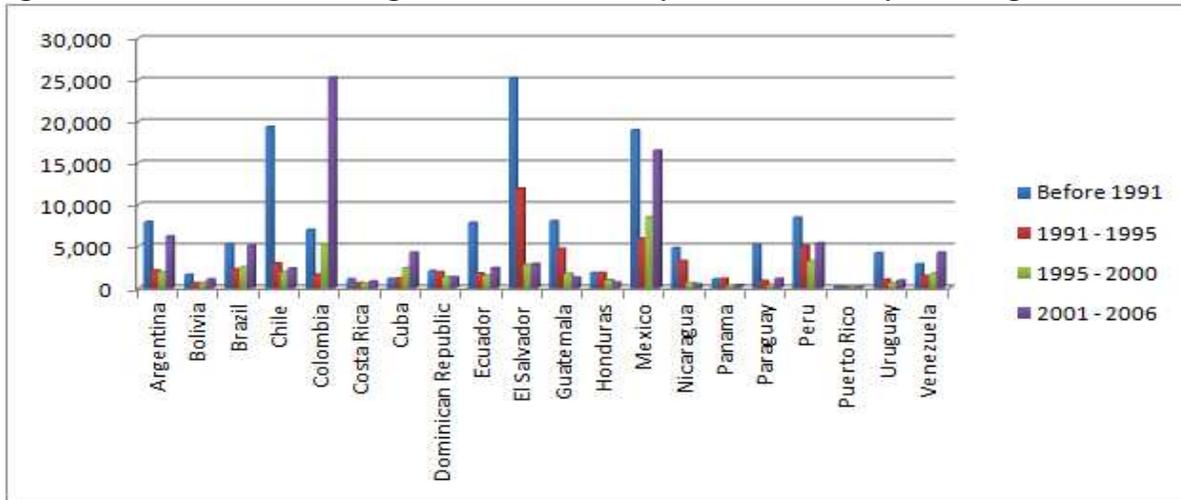
Data source: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, 2008.

**Colombians in Canada**

The resettlement of Colombians in Canada has occurred for the last 60 years. As shown in figure 3, early migrations were sporadic and for the most part in small numbers. More recently, this migration has drastically increased, which establishes Colombians as a fairly new community in Canada. In 2006, over 44,000 Colombians were living in Canada, making them the largest Latin American community (Statistics Canada, 2006). Of all Colombians, about 25,000 are recent immigrants<sup>12</sup>. As shown in Figure 4, Colombian migration from 2001 to 2006 is one of the largest migration waves from Latin America to Canada.

<sup>12</sup> Recent immigrants are people that landed in Canada between 2001 and May 16, 2006 (Census Day), (Statistics Canada, 2006).

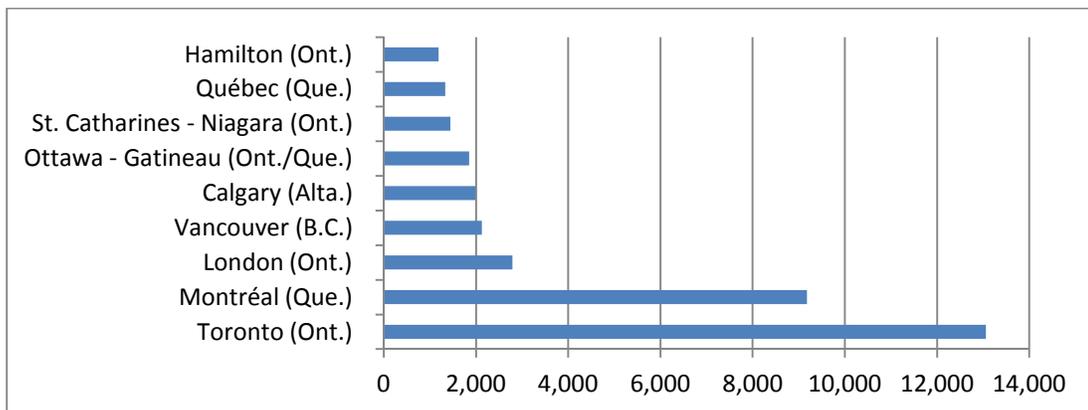
**Figure 4: Latin American Migration to Canada by Source Country and Migration Period**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2006.

According to the 2006 census, Colombians mainly settle in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and approximately half of the total Colombian population in Canada lives in Toronto's and Montreal's CMAs. Although some argue that it is natural for immigrants to settle in larger cities as these can generally provide more services and opportunities (Papillon, 2002), as figure 5 illustrates, much smaller cities such as London (ON), St. Catharines (ON), Quebec City (QC) and Hamilton (ON) also show large Colombian populations in respect to their total populations. This suggests that there are reasons beyond opportunities and economic factors that determine the settlement of Colombians in Canada.

**Figure 5: Largest Colombian Populations in Canadian Urban Areas**



Data source: Statistics Canada, 2006.

The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada revealed that between 1999 and 2011 a total of 25,286 refugees from Colombia have entered Canada, i.e., over half of them entered under the refugee class (Human Rights and Education Centre, 2012). About 57% of the refugees came as protected persons sponsored by the government and 43% claimed refugee status in Canada<sup>13</sup>. In addition, a recent survey by Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (2012), demonstrates the predominance of refugees from Colombia in Ontario. 74 percent of the Colombian respondents were either refugees or refugee claimants, thus demonstrating that perhaps the most important reason for Colombians to come to Canada was to flee the political and economic condition of Colombia (Colorado, Diaz and Osorio 2008). Even though by migrating to a more politically and economically stable nation such as Canada provides Colombian immigrants an opportunity to escape these conditions, the collective prolongation of certain social systems in the receiving nation creates a transnational habitus that impacts the formation of a transnational community. The replication of these conditions may be unconsciously adopted and assisted through transnational linkages which are often utilized as strategies for adaptation (Guarnizo, 1997; Kelly and Lysis, 2006; Vertovec, 2009). Given the lack of studies on Colombians in the Canadian context, the following section will present a brief literature review based on peer reviewed articles and books from 1998 to 2011, which explore concepts of transnationalism in the context of Latin American communities (including Colombians) in the United States.

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<sup>13</sup> It is also important to note that Colombia has continuously ranked amongst the top ten refugee source countries to Canada for the past twelve years, and ranked as the top refugee source country in 2004 (Human Rights Research and Education Centre, 2012).

## **Literature Review**

There is a vast body of literature attempting to define the concept of transnationalism. However, what seems to be consistent is that there must be a connection of some kind between two different nations. While some scholars argue that transnationalism is entirely dependent on the type and frequency of practices, others suggest that as long as there are linkages regardless of the regularity or the degree of these they should be considered transnational. This has resulted in extensive academic debates which appear to have divided this concept into three categories according to the nature of the linkages connecting migrants to two or more locations; economic, political and socio-cultural linkages. This discussion will examine significant authors which I deem relevant to my study.

For instance, Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999) indicate that there are clear differences between the economic, political and socio-cultural fields of transnationalism and further argue that while some immigrants are involved in all transnational categories, some might only engage in one of these. Furthermore, Guarnizo et al., (1999), state that transnational economic, political and socio-cultural practices and discourses, rather than being uncommon are natural to the everyday life of immigrants. Although these scholars discuss the establishment of transnational practices and more importantly, recognize the influence of these in the migrant's everyday life, they fail to discuss the relationship between transnational linkages and community formation in the receiving country, which is an important factor in many migrant's daily experiences.

### **Transnational Economic Linkages**

In the economic context, the study by Landolt et al., (1999), highlights the importance of migrants' remittances and investments to El Salvador as ways of maintaining economic transnational ties. According to the authors, a self imposed perception of temporary migration

combined with a social obligation to deal with issues such as poverty and violence in the country of origin, explain the strong tendency for the establishment of economic transnational linkages between El Salvador and the United States. In addition, the authors also identify the often-negative reception, fear of deportation and economic insecurity in the receiving country as further reasons to invest and maintain economic ties in the home country as a safety measure. This form of transnationalism however could limit social interactions between community members and therefore the establishments of organized communities as these are limited by the uncertainty of permanent settlement, as well as the prioritization of immigrants concerns in their country over issues in the receiving country.

Perhaps the most important information that Landolt et al., (1999) discuss in their article is the recognition of different transnational enterprises and their transnational dimensions. The multiple scales of economic transnational linkages proposed by the authors is very significant as ethnic businesses are crucial for the formation of a well established community in the migrant country and a very useful indicator of the extent of a community's institutional completeness (Breton, 1964). Furthermore, contrary to Portes' argument that not all immigrants are transnational since occasional linkages cannot be considered as such, Landolt et al., (1999) recognize various degrees of linkages which suggest that these do not necessarily have to occur on a regular basis.

These scholars highlight the positive effects resulting from these linkages. Portes (1999) indicates that transnational businesses offer alternatives to immigrants from precarious employment and sometimes even a way into middle class status. Similarly Landolt et al., (1999) recognize that while economic transnational linkages are essential for El Salvador, they are

equally as crucial for its immigrants residing in the United States as these provide opportunities for community building through dialogue and collaboration.

The quantitative data gathered in the Comparative Immigrant Entrepreneur Project serves as evidence for the disinterest of Colombians to become transnational entrepreneurs. The data revealed that less than 10 percent of the businesses were owned by Colombians compared to nearly 25 percent owned by Dominicans and more than two thirds owned by Salvadorians (Guarnizo et al., 2002). The authors suggest that this difference lies in the lack of social support, therefore discouraging Colombian immigrants with higher possibilities to establish transnational businesses to rather rely on the security of salaried employment. This argument is of significance since the lack of community support may cause a lack of businesses, which as mentioned previously, are crucial for the development of social interaction and the eventual formation of networks and cohesive communities.

### **Transnational Political Linkages**

Some scholars recognize the significance of transnational political practices. Guarnizo et al., (2003) suggest that transnational political action is not evenly distributed throughout immigrants, indicating that the number of immigrants that engage regularly in transnational politics is rather small. However, that number usually increases during significant governmental elections or natural disasters. The authors further suggest that the engagement in political transnationalism is determined by the experience within the receiving society and the migrant's social networks. This suggests that communities and affiliates, with whom immigrants associate with, play a crucial role in their political transnational practices.

Baubock (2003) argues that political transnationalism is not exclusive to political participation, but also means being able to belong to political communities both in the migrant

country and in the country of origin. The author further argues that although transnational political practices involve principally first generation immigrants, second generation immigrants might be involved as long as they acquire dual nationality as this will provide “political membership and rights” (p.706). However, Baubock points out that with time transnational political membership will fade away as subsequent generations become more distant from their origins. This suggests that transnational political linkages will be more likely relevant to first generation adults and less relevant for younger or second generation immigrants. Therefore transnational political linkages could affect social interactions within different generational groups.

Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003) exposes an important type of transnational political involvement which concerns homeland politics, where immigrants’ political activity is defined by their feelings about the political regime of their country of origin. However, transnational political practices are often highlighted as a positive phenomenon. Portes (1999) suggests that political transnational practices are inclusive as these provide political participation to migrants that might otherwise not have it. Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003) suggests that these practices can contribute to democratization in the home country and promote a multicultural democracy in the receiving nation.

### **Transnational Socio-cultural Linkages**

Despite having multiple transnational benefits such as the right to dual citizenship, the right to vote in presidential and congressional elections from abroad, the right of representation in congress and the “transterritorialization of several assistance programs” (Guarnizo et al., 1999 p.390), the influence of these transnational benefits in the formation of transnational communities outside of Colombia is questioned. The authors suggests that there is rather an

evident lack of “common conscience” (Durkheim, in Guarnizo et al., 1999, P. 391) or shared values and sentiments within the Colombian community, which usually tends to facilitate the unification of members from the same nation despite their individual differences.

Guarnizo and Diaz (1999) also expose that demographic differences among immigrants can result in the absence of cohesive communities. The authors argue that the Colombian community in the United States is fragmented by particular regionalisms such as ethnicity, class and reasons for migration. Therefore, proposing that transnationalism does not necessarily eliminate existent antagonisms amongst migrants with a common background and might even help in maintaining these differences in the receiving nation. This is important to mention as there might be individuals with attitudes and beliefs deeply grass rooted in the country of origin, which are also expressed in the receiving country.

Lastly, Soto (2005) recognizes that trust is a key element in community building. Soto argues that there are various issues which hinder trustworthiness within Colombians living abroad. The main issue appears to be the bad reputation and stigma generated by delinquent activities of a minority, which in turn has an effect on Colombians trusting other countrymen. As Guarnizo et al., (1999) imply, the only Colombians that appear to have an extensive social cohesiveness are those involved in the drug trafficking business. Soto also argues that due to the lack of Colombian businesses and in turn an ethnic economy, the competition in the formal and informal labour markets generates individualist and egoistic attitudes within the same community, which limits the possibility of creating social organization and communities.

## **Synopsis**

The context of this research will consider the three main transnational categories which appear to affect social interactions within members of a community in the receiving country;

economic, political and socio-cultural. Although the majority of the literature is concerned with the practices of transnationalism, I will be focusing on the linkages that develop from these in order to address the research problem. Itzigsohn's et al., (1999) concept of transnationalism will be the main idea utilized in this study. Aside from encompassing economic, political and socio-cultural linkages between two or more nations, it also proposes that these linkages have created a field of action in both the migrant country and the country of origin and are independent from the frequency or degree of its practice. Therefore only very few immigrants could be considered as uninvolved. It is important to remark that the engagement in transnational practices and the maintenance of transnational linkages might vary depending on the reasons for migration and the receiving conditions in the migrant country, thus circumstances between Colombians in Canada and the United States as well as individual experiences might vary greatly. This is important to consider as the political instability of Colombia has resulted in various waves of immigrants, however others have also migrated due to more personal reasons such as bettering their economic status or family reunification.

### **Transnational Communities**

When studying migration in the context of transnationalism, it is not only important to examine individuals but also groups. In the literature, this concept is often referred to as 'Transnational Communities'. According to Alejandro Portes (1997), transnational communities are created in a dense system of social networks that transcend frontiers which emerge through trustworthiness, reciprocity and solidarity. The formation of these networks relies on family relations, friendships and the sharing of a collective identity (language, culture, religion, etc.). Therefore, in order to consider the concept of transnational communities, it is implied that migrant social networks composed of individuals or groups with shared commonalities exist.

Furthermore, the transnational character of this social arrangement is the fact that activities, practices, customs and relationships transcend geographic and political frontiers and therefore do not completely separate the migrants' community of origin and the receiving community.

Through this form of transnationalism, immigrants create new social spaces that allow their communities of origin as well as the receiving communities to exist simultaneously (Schiller et al., 1999).

Although Itzigsohn (1999) utilizes the term 'transnational fields', this approach also recognizes the individual socio-cultural, economic and political transnational linkages which allows for the formation of a community in a foreign environment. Itzigsohn defines these as a "web of linkages that affects the lives of Dominicans in their places of residence in every social field" (P. 316). The author notes that these linkages shape not only their economic and political behaviors but also their individual and group identities in the receiving country. Therefore, transnational communities aid in the formation of social networks in a new setting, which enables members of the community to interact and reenact their particular economical, political and socio-cultural activities. At the same time, these networks often serve as support systems that facilitate processes such as the migration and immigration of further members, settling, finding a job and isolation (Sassen in Portes, 1995).

The concept of transnational community then, attempts to analyze and explain how immigrants organize and create a collective identity in the receiving country altering the perception of migration as a simple change of residence of individuals, to the relocation of shared cultural characteristics and practices (Faist, 1999). In other words, transnational communities create a migration condition which enables immigrants to preserve their collective identity and customs outside of their own nation.

Thomas Faist (1999) discusses the idea of ‘transnational social spaces’. According to the author, these spaces are defined as “sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across the borders of multiple nation-states... covering diverse phenomena such as small groups, transnational circuits and transnational communities” (p.3). This suggests that in order to create transnational social spaces, interactions between migrants and/or institutions are required. Nevertheless, Faist (1999) emphasizes the importance of differentiating between types of transnational social spaces. This is due to the fact that the sole presence of a group of immigrants with a shared country of origin does not guarantee the formation of a transnational social space. Faist argues that in order to consider a transnational social space as a ‘transnational community’, the relationships between its members must be rooted on solidarity and a set of shared beliefs and ideas which creates a collective identity. In order to maintain these transnational communities it is not only important to have collective ties across space but also sustain these over time (Faist, 1999).

The literature also suggests that there are certain factors that enable or impede the formation of transnational communities by immigrant groups in other nations. Landolt, Autler and Baires (1999) argue that the reasons for migration and the circumstances in the receiving country are key determinants in the formation of transnational associations. Depending on the reasons for migrating, the possibility of returning or not returning can lead to the establishment of communal ties. The country of origin’s economic, political and social situation at the time of migration and after migration is also another determinant factor. As Landolt et al., (1999) demonstrate in their study, the social chaos, violence and poverty left behind by Salvadorian migrants, generated a communal sense of responsibility towards their native country. In contrast, Portes’ (2003) study demonstrates that immigrants that have no desire to return to their country

of origin due the prevalence of violence tend to integrate into the receiving society faster and sever all ties with their natal country including relationships with co-nationals.

The circumstances in the receiving society are also important. As proposed by Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001) and Vertovec (2009), the sense of safety and protection is vital for the participation of immigrants in transnational communities. Therefore immigrants without a legal status or refugees might prefer to avoid any type of activity that might jeopardize their condition or put them at risk of exposure or deportation. At the same time, discrimination and social exclusion seem to promote the formation of transnational communities as well. As exposed by Landolt et al., (1999), the negative attitude encountered by Salvadorians in the receiving society in the United States, encouraged not only the maintenance of strong transnational ties with their country of origin but also the formation of social connections between many of the members of this community. Immigration policies and government attitudes towards immigrants in the receiving countries are also a factor. Faist (1999, p.14), states that “the propensity for community formation around multiculturalism claims is more likely, the more liberal or tolerant the political regime”, arguing that the formal political posture of the receiving country also plays a key role.

Other scholars suggest that the geographic location and spatial distances between countries and migrants are also significant. Pries (1999), suggests that the geographical proximity of immigrants in the receiving country who share a collective identity, facilitates the creation of social transnational spaces and communities. Along the same line, Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999) suggest that the more distant the two countries and the more dispersed the immigrants within the receiving country, the more difficult the creation of transnational communities it becomes. Therefore, it is suggested that different immigrant communities

develop their own forms of transnationalism according to their migratory experience and/or their current circumstances.

The reproductions of social networks in transnational communities tend to also replicate the social structures of the original community. Therefore, power relations, social conflicts and social inequalities such as race, class and gender are also usually transplanted from the country of origin to the country of settlement, creating a transnational habitus (Smith, 1995).

### **Habitus**

As mentioned earlier, transnationalism can be regarded as a strategy for adaptation as immigrants tend to duplicate their condition in the receiving country by maintaining connections and traits embedded to their country of origin (Guarnizo, 1997; Vertovec, 2009). This often leads to the reproduction of socio-cultural conditions in the new social system, guided by the customs of the immigrants' place of origin. Scholars such as Kelly and Lusi (2006) and Vertovec (2009), cite Bourdeau's notion of 'habitus', to explain the transnational relocation of social norms, traditions and ways of life. More specifically, habitus is explained as "a socially and culturally conditioned set of durable dispositions or propensities for certain kinds of social action", which are adopted by individuals, shaped by their life experiences and practiced in their everyday lives (Bourdeau 1990, in Vertovec, 2009, p.66).

As suggested by Guarnizo (1997), habitus in a transnational context integrates the migrant's social and territorial circumstances in which the migration process takes place, therefore generating transnational linkages and causing similarities in the lifestyle of migrants between their place of origin and their place of settlement. Therefore, the concept of habitus explains the continuation of practices and attitudes created through the history and experiences of a society, which are then translated into the new habitat despite the geographical disjointing

caused by migrating. By using the concepts of transnationalism, transnational community and habitus, I will explore A) how transnational linkages affect the social interactions within Colombian migrants, and B) how does the habitus facilitate or impede the formation of a Colombian transnational community in Toronto?

## **Methodology**

Based on the research questions, a primarily qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate for this research project. A quantitative census analysis was performed with data gathered from Statistics Canada, which provided information on the location of Colombians in Canada and their concentrations in Toronto's CMA. The information was used to map the residential location of Colombians in Toronto using GIS techniques. Further statistics and field research data were gathered in order to provide a more accurate description and analysis of the physical locations in which Colombians are spatially concentrated.

Given the sensitivity of the topics that this study addresses and the limited amount of time and resources available to conduct interviews that could provide data related to the topic in question, personal observations were employed as the qualitative approach. Janet Gun (1982), advises of the importance of self reflexive research as it allows for the "relationship between experience and knowledge and between the individual and culture to be best revealed" (in Ghosh and Wang, 2003, p.270). This type of approach requires the researcher to act as a participant and therefore, I utilized my condition as an immigrant from Colombia living in Canada in order to reflect on the situation of the community in Toronto and provide a personal account from an insider's perspective.

As exposed by Gilgun, "our own experiences and perspectives influence every aspect of the research we do" (2010, p.2), therefore I am aware that everything I know is biased by my own experiences and therefore preconceptions were anticipated as a possible problem for this study. In order to increase its reliability, I remained as reflexive as possible throughout the study. Before I began writing, I reflected on my migratory journey from the day I arrived to Canada until the present, as well as the settlement processes of other Colombians in Toronto (family,

friends and acquaintances) according to my observations and information through informal conversations. I then commenced by recognizing my personal bias in a different document so as to minimize their impact. I also made efforts to remain reflexive about my own experiences and the way I interpreted the experiences of others. I placed specific emphasis on the factors that produced or inhibited the development of networks between members of the community during the different stages of the settlement process.

The data were recorded in the form of memos and analyzed by dividing the content into two major themes: A) Factors facilitating the formation of Colombian networks in Canada and B) factors impeding the formation of a Colombian transnational community. The information was then divided into sub-themes under the two major themes. In the next sections of the paper, I will provide an analysis and a discussion based on primary data (personal observations and field photos) and secondary data (census analysis and video footage) arguing the factors resulting in the lack of an established transnational Colombian community in Toronto.

## Analysis

This analysis will expose the information found from the following four data sources: 1) census tract analysis, 2) field photos of the highest concentrated locations of Colombians in the Toronto CMA, 3) personal observations and 4) online videos.

According to the data in the 2006 census, the Greater Toronto Area is the place with the largest Colombian population in Canada with 13,060 Colombians residing within its boundaries (Statistics Canada, 2006). As shown in table 2, the largest ten census tracts were identified in Toronto's CMA with more than 110 Colombians. Statistical information on their census tracts were collected and further analyzed.

**Table 2: Census Tracts with largest Concentration of Colombians in Toronto's CMA and Selected Statistical Information.**

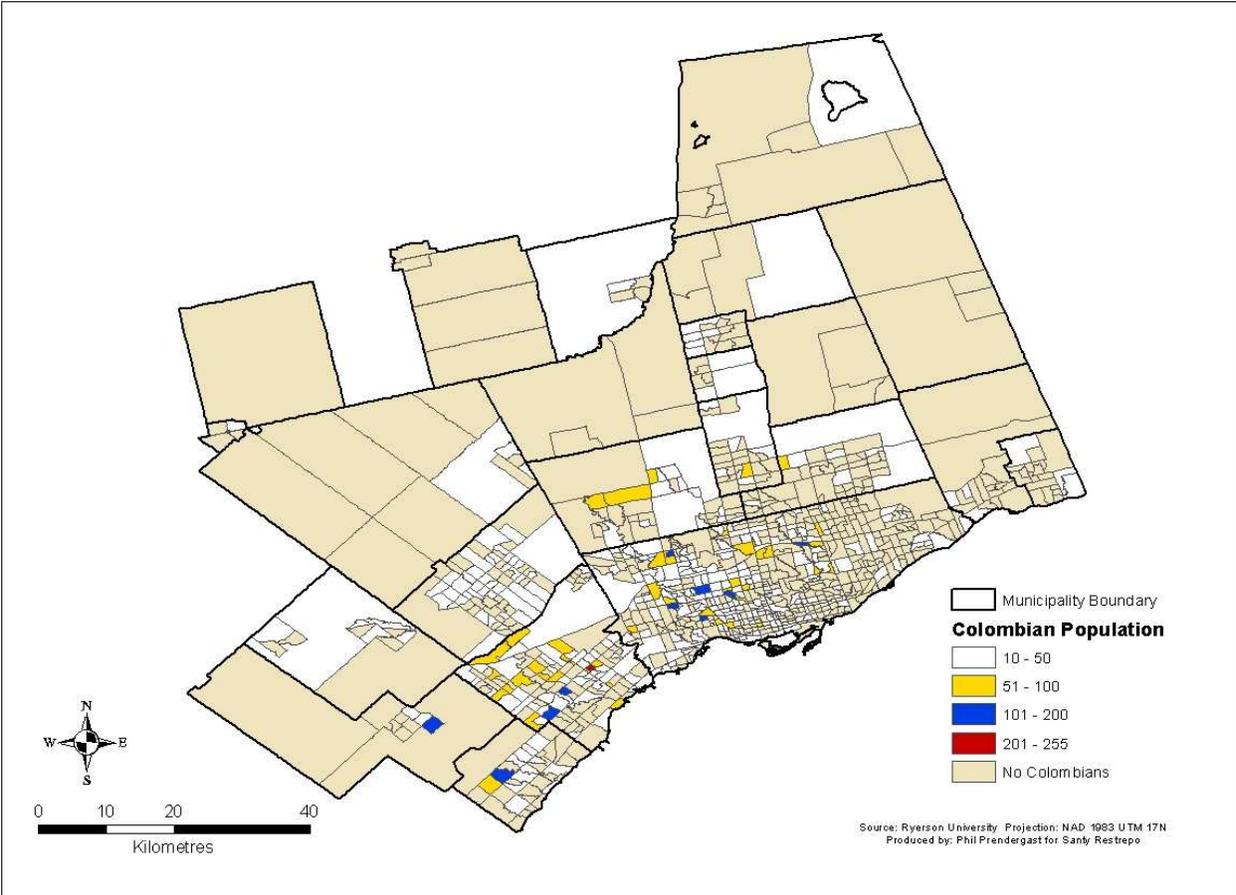
Assigned Number	Census Tract	Number of Colombians (2006)	% of Colombians in CMA	% of Immigrants in Census Tract	% of Immigrants that are Colombian	Median Household Income
1	5350521.06	255	1.95	66	7.72	52,400
2	5350280.00	160	1.25	56	3.94	41,411
3	5350168.00	135	1.05	61	4.02	43,431
4	5350169.01	135	1.05	62	6.17	54,975
5	5350620.03	135	1.05	35	3.27	92,375
6	5350519.00	130	1.00	55	6.18	61,067
7	5350612.17	130	1.00	34	3.11	101,852
8	5350312.04	115	0.88	67	2.90	36,233
9	5350105.00	115	0.88	33	7.74	80,096
10	5350230.02	110	0.84	59	3.22	61,945

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006.

After determining the physical location of the census tracts as illustrated in figure 6, it was concluded that the settlement pattern of Colombians in the Toronto CMA is on the western region. Even though Colombians represent a small population and are considered to be a recent immigrant group, as shown in table 2, there were no census tracts with a significant number (30%) of the entire Colombian population in Toronto. This suggests that they are a highly

dispersed immigrant group. A large Colombian population is located in Mississauga which accounts for approximately 11% of the total Colombian population in the Toronto CMA. Mississauga also contains the census tract with the largest concentration (255 persons). Other Colombians live in the inner suburbs of York, North York, Etobicoke, Milton and Oakville. Few Colombians live in downtown Toronto and almost none in East York and Scarborough. As shown in table 2, the majority of the census tracts with concentration of Colombians are immigrant receptor areas<sup>14</sup> with the exception of Milton, Oakville and the inner suburb of Runnymede in Toronto.

**Figure 6: Spatial Distribution of Colombians in Toronto’s CMA**



Data Source: Statistics Canada, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> More than half of the population is immigrant.

The housing of the selected census tracts is primarily owner occupied, especially in Mississauga. Although the average cost of the dwellings are more inexpensive compared to the Toronto average. As shown in images 1 and 2, the census tracts in Mississauga, North York and York appear to have predominantly high rise dwellings and older detached houses. These areas have median household incomes from \$30,000 to \$60,000, which places them in the middle-low and middle income groups (Toronto Urban Development Services Policy and Research, 2004).

**Image 1:**



**Eglinton Ave / Duffering St (Toronto)**

**Image 2:**



**Ellengale Dr. (Mississauga)**

The regions of Milton and Oakville show higher levels of median household income (\$90,000 +). This in turn is also reflected on the types of housing found. As shown in images 3 and 4, these two areas were predominantly occupied by larger and what appeared to be more recently built houses. There were also no high rises within the census tract boundaries of these areas.

**Image 3:**



**Mara Circle (Milton)**

**Image 4:**



**Westoak Trails Blvd. and 4 Line (Oakville)**

Despite the presence of Colombians in these areas and in most cases the existence of a commercial strip in close proximity (i.e. Keele Street, Eglinton Avenue West, Dundas Street, Hurontario Street), there is an evident lack of ‘community hubs’ such as organizations, businesses and institutions which camouflages the presence of this ethno-cultural group. After exploring commercial areas within and near the census tracts, only one business (image 5) was found with clear relation to Colombia. The rest of the commercial areas explored had mainstream establishments and ethnic businesses offering predominantly Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern and European goods.

**Image 5**



**Rancho Latino Restaurant, Keel St (Toronto)**

**Image 6**



**Commercial Strip, Thompson Rd (Milton)**

Despite census data showing significant numbers of Colombians in these areas, their presence was almost unnoticeable. I personally observed no evidence of institutional completeness in any of the census tracts examined. The exception was one Colombian restaurant (Rancho Latino) and one store (Toronto Latino) offering products from a variety of Latin American countries (including Colombia). Although Colombians are very religious and for the most part Catholic, no evidence of Colombian churches or masses offered in Spanish were found. However, some Catholic churches were found near the census tracts explored. After analyzing the demographic composition of the census tracts, it was found that in some cases European Catholics such as Italians, Portuguese and Ukrainians tend to live in similar locations.

This suggests that perhaps Colombians do not require separate churches and thus may not be needed for their institutional completeness. Lastly, a lack of patriotism was also observed. Although these areas were visited purposely on Colombia's Independence Day, no flags, posters or celebrations were witnessed in these residential areas.

Videos footage of the marches 'Un Millon de Voces Contra las FARC' (One Million Voices against FARC), which took place on February 4, 2008, were analyzed so as to demonstrate the translocation of diverging political positions to other nations. This campaign was a civic movement that condemned the crimes and violations of human rights by the FARC guerrilla group for more than 40 years and exposed the disapproval and distress of Colombian citizens around the globe. The march took place in 193 cities in Colombia and around the world with an estimated six million participants across six continents, surpassing the goal of one million marchers ([www.eltiempo.com](http://www.eltiempo.com)). Although the march's main purpose was to claim for a halt of kidnappings, disappearances and violence in Colombia, it also provided an unintentional opportunity for Colombians to defend their political opinion, which caused many confrontations. The video of the march in Paris shows attendees strongly arguing the over emphasis of the FARC and the disregard of other groups such as 'paramilitares' (private militias) known to be supported by the government. The footage from New York shows supporters of Uribe physically assaulting other demonstrators that were holding a sign that read "Uribe is the real terrorist"<sup>15</sup>. The video from the central location of the march, in front of the Palace of Justice in Bogota, depicts a similar environment. The supposedly not-politically-associated march that called for peace, tolerance and respect, quickly became polarized between those in support and those

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<sup>15</sup> Uribe's government was often associated with supporting private militias as these often fought along the Colombian Army against the guerillas. However, these groups were seen internationally as inhumane due to their social cleansing ideology and the methods employed to instill fear which included torture and brutal murders (Simons, 2004).

opposing Uribe. The transnational habitus of Colombians is exposed as political confrontations in Colombia are transplanted into migrant countries, which cause tensions and ultimately contributes to the fragmentation of these communities.

## **Discussion**

Statistical and GIS data shows that Colombians tend to settle in similar geographical areas in Canada. Similarly, Colombians live in concentration pockets on the northern and western sections of Toronto's CMA. Although geographical proximity facilitates the formation of transnational communities as argued by Pries (1999), a closer exploration of the areas inhabited by Colombians in Toronto's CMAs, suggests that there is a fragmentation within the community. This division extends power relations and social systems to Toronto and thus, exposes the existence of a transnational habitus within the Colombian community.

This segment aims to explore the relations between Colombians settled in Canada and the influence of the transnational habitus in the formation of a transnational community in Toronto. In my 10 years as an immigrant in Canada, I have been able to experience first-hand the complexity of issues surrounding the formation of networks between Colombians. This analysis will be based on the reflection of personal experiences as a Colombian immigrant settled in Canada, my individual observations and numerous informal conversations with acquaintances, friends and family members of Colombian origin also residing in Canada. This analysis will ultimately expose the factors affecting the formation of a Colombian transnational community in Toronto by linking these arguments to the background, literature and analysis previously discussed. The discussion will be divided into three parts. Firstly, I will explore the factors that facilitate the formation of networks between Colombians settled in Canada. Secondly, I will discuss the factors that impede the development of these networks necessary to form a transnational community. Lastly, I will discuss the situation of the Colombian community in Toronto in more detail.

## **Factors Facilitating the Formation of Colombian Networks in Canada**

The presence of already established Colombians in Canada appears to be a favorable factor. As already established, Colombians migrating to Canada usually select locations where other Colombians have already settled such as Toronto, Montreal, London, Hamilton and St. Catharines. In this context, socio-cultural transnational networks act as facilitating factors for chain migration. The presence of a family member, friend, acquaintance or even strangers who might have experienced similar circumstances and therefore familiarize with the situations faced by newer members, serve as initial support systems. Having contacts upon arrival is used as a strategy for adaptation to the new environment through companionship and the sharing of information (MacDonald and MacDonald, 1964). As Sassen suggests, (in Portes, 1995) in many instances initial networks are based on convenience as newer immigrants often seek support systems from acquaintances regarding the immigration process, the labor and housing markets or personal favors such as guidance, babysitting or rides.

For many Colombian immigrants, the presence of other Colombians represents a sense of security in the event of an emergency or need. This sense of familiarity causes Colombians in many cases to have the perception that their compatriots are more approachable and willing to help than other immigrants or members of the receiving society. Naturally, arriving to a foreign country under unfamiliar circumstances places immigrants in a vulnerable position. In many instances, Colombian immigrants counter this situation by forming fleeting dependencies with other Colombian immigrants, resulting in the formation of transitory social networks.

There also exists a common objective that unifies Colombians which is to change the negative stigma associated with Colombia and the 'Colombian immigrant' embellished and disseminated by mass media. Colombians seem to agree in promoting a more optimistic image of

the nation emphasizing positive characteristics such as its natural beauty, the quality of its people, the amount of natural resources etc. This collective commitment towards portraying a different nation has created a collective sense of emotional unity and pride amongst Colombian immigrants; however in Toronto, this does not seem to have materialized into community organization or activist movements.

Lastly, the Colombian Government through the Ministry of Foreign Relations has implemented the program ‘Colombia Nos Une’ (Colombia Unites Us), under the new migratory reform. The objective of this program is to facilitate and encourage continuous linkages between Colombians residing outside of the country and their families, their region of origin and Colombia in general.

The program recognizes transnationalism as the fundamental bond that links Colombian communities abroad to the nation and therefore, initiatives to foment transnational practices within these communities have been designed ([www.cancilleria.gov.co](http://www.cancilleria.gov.co)). For instance, the program promotes the inclusion of Colombians living abroad in politics by supporting the current legislation that allows Colombians to vote while living abroad, to have double nationality and to have a representative in congress. The program also intends to increase the economic transnational practices by creating a branch that provides information and support about importing and exporting goods and also by facilitating the remittance transaction process in the local financial system. In addition, through the electronic networks ‘RedesColombia’ and ‘Red de Estudiantes y Profesionales Colombianos en el Exterior’ (Network of Colombian Students and Professionals Abroad), the program seeks to promote the identification and unification of Colombian immigrants settled in other countries ([www.cancilleria.gov.co](http://www.cancilleria.gov.co)).

## **Factors Impeding the Formation of a Colombian Transnational Community**

Although Colombians tend to form intra-group networks at the beginning of their migration process, these seem to be provisional. Factors such as mistrust, opposing political views, regionalisms, attitudes and behaviors and Colombia's negative reputation in receiving societies, affect the prolongation of these networks. This ultimately affects the social interaction between Colombians and therefore the formation of a transnational community as relationships between its members are not sustained over time (Faist, 1999). The main obstacles seem to originate from the social issues arising from the armed conflicts and drug wars and the political and economic issues that Colombia has experienced since its Colonization.

### **Mistrust**

As exposed by Soto (2005), trust is a key element in community building outside of Colombia. As it appears, one of the most prominent factors impeding the formation of an established community amongst Colombians in Toronto is the mistrust between compatriots. Unfortunately the armed conflict and drug business in Colombia have involved people from all regions and social classes. This has often caused concerns because as relationships develop, the uncertainties of what others have done and/or who they were involved with in Colombia as well as who their family might be, creates a constant state of skepticism. This becomes even more distinguished in Canada since over half of the Colombian population entered as refugees. This is significant due to the fact that most refugees were forced into exile and have traumas caused by the violence, kidnapping and persecution or have experienced deaths in their families, extortions or other abuses that result in the reluctance to associate with Colombian strangers. Furthermore, there have been instances where the Canadian government has granted refugee protection to ex-guerrilla and paramilitary members and thus increasing the distrust towards members of the

community (Elizondo, 2006). Although the Canadian government perceives these immigrants as refugees in fear of their lives due to the abandonment of the armed conflict, the idea of forming relationships with someone that might have been involved with or might still have linkages to the armed conflict or the drug business frightens many Colombians. For many migrants Colombia represents an unsafe reference, often resulting in the preference of forming ties with other immigrants or members of the receiving society.

### **Opposing Political Views**

There is also a significant division between Colombian immigrants caused by opposing political opinions and the current conflict in Colombia. Due to the difficult political history of Colombia previously mentioned, immigrants from different regions and different social classes tend to have preferences for particular political parties or ideologies which have resulted in antagonisms and disagreements. In addition, the election of Alvaro Uribe as president of Colombia in 2002 caused much discordance, particularly between Colombians living abroad. On one hand many Colombians applauded the courage of a president whose main political goal was to eradicate guerrilla groups with an ‘iron fist’ doctrine fueled by the assassination of his father 19 years earlier (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). On the other hand, other Colombians and human rights activists disagreed with this type of ruling opposing the idea of ending this conflict with more violence. As a result, there are Colombians that defend the ex-president’s mandate and argue that Colombia saw an increase in security and a reduction in violence. Others condemn his acts and argue that despite all his efforts Colombians continued to migrate because the state is still unable to ensure the safety of the general population. In addition, some criticize his presumed association with the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self Defense Forces of Colombia), a paramilitary group that is responsible for multiple “massacres, forced

displacements and disappearances” (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). This has resulted in public accusations of the ex-president as a fascist and terrorist due to the utilization of political violence during his govern and consequently caused many confrontations between supporters and accusers in Colombia as well as in other countries as exposed in the content of the videos. Political instability in Colombia has been crucial for the exodus of many citizens and their homeland political views in the migrant country are creating tensions amongst members of this community in receiving societies. Colombian political transnationalism is being determined by the migrant’s experiences and the circumstances in Colombia and not by the experience within the receiving society and the migrant’s social networks as suggested by Guarnizo et al., (2003). Therefore as suggested by Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003), political transnationalism in this case is being defined by the feelings towards the political regime in the country of origin, which in turn is furthering the fragmentation of this community.

### **Regionalisms**

Colombians living abroad are for the most part proud of their nationality. Many of them are also very proud of their particular region and/or city of origin. Although not necessarily linked to ‘race’, in some cases regionalism plays a factor in creating animosities between members of the community even though regionalist feelings in Colombia are minimal and are not an issue of concern or threat to the nation. Similar to the United States as exposed by Guarnizo and Diaz (1999), the Colombian community in Canada appears to also be fragmented by particular regionalisms. For instance, political discordances regarding Uribe’s presidency were not only politically rooted, but were also guided by some regionalist feelings. Many Colombians believed that Alvaro Uribe benefited his home region of Antioquia economically and politically which resulted in further bitterness. However, this political episode was not the

beginning of regionalisms in Colombia. In fact, due to the diversity of the Colombian population and the cultural differentiations amongst these regions, particular groups have gained negative stereotypes. People are characterized as deceiving, pretentious, indolent and naïve to name a few, simply based on the region where they come from. This is very significant as the maintenance of these stereotypes outside of Colombia simply based on their place of origin affects the formation of relationships, organizations and business associations within the community.

Furthermore, census tract data shows a certain level of class division between Colombians residing in Oakville, Milton and Toronto's inner suburb Runnymede and Colombians residing in the northern Toronto area. The continuation of the division between the 'upper', 'middle' and 'lower' classes is also a factor of fragmentation. There have been occasions where Colombians avoid relationships with individuals of lower or higher social classes, to the point that some Colombians have felt discriminated by some compatriots. In some instances, Colombian immigrants have been judged and associated with a certain social class due to particular ways of talking, the jargon used as well as particular customs such as home decorations, ways of dressing and choice of foods.

### **Attitudes and Behaviors**

Although mistrust and diverging political views are the main obstacles affecting the development of networks amongst Colombians, there are also attitudinal and behavioral issues that challenge the eventual formation of transnational communities. Unfortunately, there have been incidents where some Colombians have been involved in making false refugee claims, 'cutting corners', cheating the system or caught in delinquent activities. This dishonesty has caused indignity and disappointment for many Colombian immigrants, and thus increased the disinterest of forming close ties or associations with other co-nationals.

Another attitudinal problem that tends to discourage the formation of strong networks is the pre-conceived notion that ‘gossip’ tends to surface amongst groups of Colombians. Therefore some Colombians feel that there is a lack of privacy within the Colombian community which causes many to be more reserved towards others in fear of the ‘broadcasting’ and/or alteration of their life events or information they might have shared. This results in the lack of confidentiality within co-nationals which deters the possibilities of developing stronger and more profound relationships and networks. In addition, an economic and material competition within the community driven by the difficult economic situation encountered by newcomers and the desire for some Colombians to feel economically superior than others is an additional attitudinal issue that affects the formation of networks. This has created the same negative attitudes such as jealousy, envy and egoism found by Soto (2005), which have caused many limitations in the labour market as job opportunities and referrals are often unshared. Similarly to Landolt et al., (1999) and Portes’ (1999) studies, a lack of support for Colombian businesses has impeded the development of institutional completeness and economic alternatives such as a Colombian ethnic economy.

### **Nation’s Bad Reputation in Receiving Societies**

Although Colombia has experienced a complex history marked by multiple atrocious eras, the international exaggeration and over representation of Colombia’s darkest moments in addition to the continuous portrayal of Colombian citizens as criminals, have resulted in a socially constructed ‘mala fama’ (bad reputation). Main stream media including news networks and newspapers tend to be sensationalist about the content depicted, often reporting unfortunate events and rarely exposing the nation as a country rich in natural resources with quality export goods (coffee, emeralds, flowers and tropical fruits) and diverse environments which makes the

country ideal as a tourist destination. Additionally, popular culture through television shows such as Family Guy, Modern Family and The Sopranos in addition to many Hollywood films such as Collateral Damage, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Bedazzled and Colombiana to name a few, repeatedly depict a negative image of Colombia based on cruel historical realities and turn it into fiction as part of their agenda. These media outlets continually report and display Colombia as a country where violence, kidnappings and drugs are routine and Colombian citizens are often labeled as guerrilla members, drug lords, traffickers, and terrorists.

The constant portrayal of negative stereotypes plays a key role in establishing and perpetuating the negative depiction of Colombia and Colombians within the receiving societies. This has a tremendous impact on the overall knowledge of societies that have never been exposed to positive representations of the country. Furthermore, it creates a false contemporary state of the nation and its citizens based on these reproductions that only represent adverse episodes that do not necessarily align with the current situation of the nation. Contrary to Salvadorian immigrants in the United States (Landlot et al., 1999), this bad reputation appears to hinder the formation of networks in Toronto, as some Colombians avoid interacting with other Colombians in order to avoid generalizations and minimize societal prejudice and discrimination.

As it has been exposed, many circumstances and conditions experienced in Colombia have been transferred to Canada and are affecting the formation of networks between Colombians. These conditions have created a tense atmosphere between Colombian immigrants regardless of their involvement in such issues. In this context, some Colombian immigrants opt to limit their association with other Colombians as these relationships are perceived as a source of conflict and problems. As stated previously, trust, strong networks and solidarity are the fundamental factors for the formation of transnational communities. However, by re-establishing

customs and social inequalities in Canada, Colombians have created a transnational habitus that is evidently impeding their association as a group and thus impeding the formation of a Colombian transnational community.

### **Colombian Community Building in Toronto**

The polarization between leaders or persons in charge and amongst community members in Toronto has resulted in an institutionalization scarcity (Ramos, Nemes, and Rubio, 2006). Faist's theory of transnational social spaces suggests that interactions between migrants and/or institutions are required in order to form transnational communities. The lack of Colombian institutions therefore is hindering the formation of an established community in Toronto. Furthermore, there have been occasions where Colombian businesses particularly restaurants and night clubs have closed due to the lack of support from the targeted community. Aside from limiting dialogue and collaboration between its members as Landlot et al., (1999) suggest, it also reinforces the disinterest of Colombians to become transnational entrepreneurs as the study by Guanizo et al., (2002) found. It is interesting to note that the few Colombian restaurants found in Toronto such as 'Rancho Latino' and 'Mi Tierra' advertise both 'Colombian' and 'Latin American' cuisine in order to appeal and rely on a wider audience.

Although the absence of businesses and institutions affect the community as a whole, as exposed by Breton (1964), it particularly has an impact on the most vulnerable members, since the alternative to function within their own community is nonexistent. Furthermore, the deficiency in community organizations creates a lack of support and services geared specifically toward the members of the Colombian community. There is no formal entity that aims to unify and support the different needs of this particular community, and therefore they may have to rely on main stream organizations or services provided by other immigrant groups such as European

Catholic Churches. In fact, according to a study by OCASI (2012), Colombians ranked as the most likely immigrant group to use general settlement and integration services, which may be caused by the absence of their own services and institutions.

This expands the fragmentation of the Colombian community in Toronto which becomes relevant in the celebration or participation of communal events. A good example of this is the Colombian Independence Day Celebration. Instead of being a celebration about Colombia's history, culture and a shared sentiment of patriotism, it becomes more of a competition. Although this event intends to bring a significant amount of Colombians together, multiple celebrations in different locations divides the population and prevents the festivity from becoming a community event. In 2011 for example, the Colombian independence celebrations in Toronto took place in at least 6 different locations: Harbourfront Centre, Earlscourt Park, Club 2ninety2, Vida Lounge, Lula Lounge and even a Cruise on Lake Ontario. Organizers are typically looking to capitalize on the event and make a profit selling Colombian goods to others benefiting from their temporary nationalistic emotions. However, there is no attempt to bring the community to one location nor any apparent effort to encourage commitment for future participation in other matters past this day, most will just simply wait to attend one of the events the following year.

These events may be utilized as vehicles of information and increased involvement and participation of community members in transnational issues through the sharing of a collective identity, sentiments and obligations regarding Colombia (Guarnizo et al., 1999). For instance, although reports showed that vote participation from Colombians living abroad during the 2006 elections was significantly low (De Acosta, 2012), during the celebrations that took place in 2009 prior to the presidential elections of 2010, there was no information provided or

encouragement to vote during the 2010 presidential elections. Additionally, in the 2011 Colombian Independence Day celebrations, there were no noticeable efforts to help relieve the extensive damages caused by numerous floods and frequent landslides during 2010 – 2011, even though Colombia was declared in a state of national emergency and the government requested international assistance ([www.lavanguardia.com](http://www.lavanguardia.com)).

Although the situation in Colombia regarding the armed and drug conflicts have improved in recent years, there are still incidents that violate human rights such as kidnappings, assassinations, guerrilla recruitment of child soldiers and forced displacements. Even though the majority of Colombians residing in Canada fled the nation due to fear, violence and insecurity, the Colombian community in Toronto seems to be idle and unresponsive towards these matters. As illustrated in images 7 and 8, the exception was the large support from the Colombian community in Toronto to the protest ‘Un Millon de Voces Contra las FARC’ on February 4, 2008. Luis Orellano, who was one of the organizers of this international manifestation was unconfident about the solidarity of the Colombian community before the event. Nevertheless after the event, Mr. Orellano was astonished by the immense response in Toronto where an estimated 1500 Colombians supported the cause ([www.torontohispano.com](http://www.torontohispano.com)).

**Image 7:**



**Demonstration at Dundas Square (Toronto)**

Source: [www.torontohispano.com](http://www.torontohispano.com)

**Image 8:**



**March on Yonge Street (Toronto)**

Although this number is small compared to the 13,060 Colombians living in the Greater Toronto Area, it demonstrates that Colombians in Toronto are capable of unifying and participating in events as a community. However, no further demonstrations or support have been made since, suggesting that this type of support was isolated. The sporadic and passive involvement in transnational issues further suggests the lack of community commitment and organization of the Colombian community in Toronto.

## **Conclusion**

This paper had two main tasks: to understand how transnational linkages affect the social interactions within Colombian migrants and to what extent does the transnational habitus facilitate or impede the formation of a Colombian community in Toronto? This study is of significance as it provides insight concerning a large immigrant community in Toronto which has not been the focus of much academic research in the Canadian context.

Initially the settlement location pattern of Colombians in selected Canadian urban centers suggested a high concentration of Colombians. However, after analyzing statistical data it was found that although Colombians tend to reside in selected locations within the Toronto CMA, they are spatially dispersed. Following Bourdeau's notion of 'habitus' as explained by Kelly and Lusia (2006) and Vertovec (2009), It was argued that Colombians in Toronto have adopted a transnational habitus which has resulted in the translocation of social systems, characteristics and opposing opinions that are hindering the formation of a transnational community.

The political history and conflicts in Colombia plays an important role in creating barriers for their unification in the context of Toronto. The majority of the Colombian community in Canada is composed of immigrants that fled the country mainly due to violence, persecution as well as political and economic instability. It has been argued that the reproduction of the tensions created by the different conflicts is very palpable in Toronto and the dynamic between Colombian immigrants appears to be prolonging past experiences rather than producing a radical change in a new setting. More specifically, the conflicts and divergent political views are encumbering the possibility of forming a community based on trustworthiness, reciprocity and solidarity which shares a common identity and objectives (Portes, 1999).

Many Colombians appear to be intentionally opting to dissociate from other co-nationals which results in the absence of communal transnational engagement. The mistrust within community members indubitably is hindering social interactions between Colombian immigrants in Toronto and therefore affects the possibilities of forming networks, businesses, and institutions which are fundamental for the formation of a transnational community (Faist, 1999). The lack of businesses and institutions representative of the Colombian population causes the community to remain in a permanent state of uncertainty regarding the conditions currently experienced. Among the factors that impede the development and maintenance of networks between Colombian immigrants are also negative attitudes that tend to surface. Although these can be regarded as more personal and therefore have a less significant influence, they are indeed detrimental.

As previously discussed, transnational habitus can create different experiences in different contexts therefore this paper only intends to provide an insight to the particular Colombian community in Toronto and not to elaborate a generalization of Colombian immigrant communities. Although concerns regarding the methodological approach utilized are acknowledged, it was deemed appropriate to be used for this study given the lack of academic research of this community in a Canadian context, the limited time and resources and the sensitive nature of some topics. Additionally, this research may lead to further research regarding Colombians in other Canadian urban locations or expand on the development of Colombian transnational communities relating to generational differences and time factors for example.

### **Recommendations**

The process of building transnational communities can be assisted by the involvement of both the sending and the receiving countries. Colombia Nos Une, the program created by the

Colombian Government proposes the augmentation of transnational practices through its various programs. However, it is necessary for the Colombian government to directly support the creation of Colombian transnational organizations and businesses in order to facilitate the establishment of communities in other countries. In addition, Embassies and Councils should be utilized as avenues for the development of transnational communities.

As for the receiving society, it is important to provide the best conditions in order for immigrant communities to feel tolerated and equal. Although it might be a difficult task to achieve, regulating television and film content that perpetuates stereotypes may reduce prejudice and discrimination and encourage members of ethnic communities to express their collective identity.

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