Heterolocalism: An Alternative Model of the Sociospatial Behaviour of Immigrant Ethnic Communities

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates critically the applicability of the well-known assimilation and pluralist models to the contemporary ethnic landscape of the US. The two models, despite their strengths, fail to account satisfactorily for the sociospatial behaviour of recent immigrants or of previously established minority groups. Their deficiencies lead us to propose a third model which we label heterolocalism, which can supplement and partially replace the older two. A late 20th-century phenomenon, heterolocalism is a function of the profound restructuring of the relationships within a globalising society among people, places, and social and economic entities. The term itself refers to recent populations of shared ethnic identity which enter an area from distant sources, then quickly adopt a dispersed pattern of residential location, all the while managing to remain cohesive through a variety of means. Heterlocal situations are readily observed in metropolitan areas, but such ethnic ‘communities without propinquity’ may exist at the regional scale, within non-metropolitan settings, or – under the designation of ‘transnational’ – as something approaching ‘deteritorialised nations’ that span the boundaries of two or more conventional nation-states. Although the most conspicuous heterolocal communities involve the relatively privileged, the model is also valid for certain lower-status groups whose economic survival relies upon movement and transactions over long distances while retaining or creating a sense of peoplehood. © 1998 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

Developing an adequate understanding of the North American ethnic scene remains a difficult task. Despite the vast body of scholarship on ethnic topics that has accumulated across disciplines, the theories and models most often used to explain the sociospatial experiences of ethnic groups are regularly found to be wanting. Their deficiencies should come as no surprise, given the manner in which circumstances have been transformed by the latest chapter in US immigration history. The distinctiveness of the post-1965 period, and of the last decade in particular, is due to the changing character of the world in general as well as to major
revisions in the immigration laws and regulations of the US (Hannerz, 1992; Buell, 1994). Not only has the absolute volume of legal immigration and refugee intake reached levels rivalling those of the peak years around the turn of the century – 10.6 million admitted from 1980 to 1992 versus 11.0 million admitted from 1900–1912 – but the origins, destinations and compositions of the primary flows are quite different from those of the past (Rumbaut, 1991; US Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1993; Chiswick and Sullivan, 1995).

This current state of flux poses a number of challenges to conventional wisdom. The first of the two basic questions we explore concerns the utility of the standard assimilation model of immigrant ethnic sociospatial behaviour, which continues to be popular among researchers and the public alike. Less often invoked but still of interest is the pluralist model, whose value we also explore. Specifically, is either model viable at century’s end, or, posing our second question, is it time for a totally new formulation? To begin our inquiry, we review the basic principles of assimilationism and pluralism against the backdrop of history, juxtaposing the situation of the new immigrants with that of their predecessors. We then consider an alternative model, labelled heterolocalism, which suggests that members of certain newly arrived groups may be able to sustain their identity as an ethnic community despite immediate or rapid spatial dispersion. The applicability of the heterolocal perspective to non-metropolitan and transnational phenomena is evaluated in subsequent sections of the paper. We conclude on a cautionary note, addressing matters of theoretical scope and generalisation.

ASSIMILATION: PRESENT VERSUS PAST

The assimilation model, first enunciated at the turn of this century, has enjoyed much vitality ever since (Gordon, 1964; Abramson, 1980; Hirschman, 1983; Gleason, 1992; Kantrowicz, 1993; Kazal, 1995). It constitutes a more sophisticated version of the Anglo-conformity doctrine of the 1800s, predicting an eventual blending of immigrant strains into a single novel amalgam. According to Alba and Logan (1991):

‘The most fundamental tenets of the model are (1) that residential mobility follows from the acculturation and the social mobility of individuals, and (2) that residential mobility is an intermediate step on the way to more complete (i.e. structural) assimilation.’

Thus as significant numbers of immigrants from a given origin enter a large city in a nation like the US, they will initially occupy less desirable tracts near its centre. As they acquire higher educational and economic status and some degree of cultural assimilation, they or their descendants will shift upward and outward through social and physical space into the more attractive zones of the metropolis, eventually being absorbed into the dominant community. In doing so, they would replicate the path followed by earlier immigrant groups, and the expectation is that later, ethnically distinct streams of immigrants would follow, repeating the process (Massey, 1985).

Implicit in the assimilation model is a close spatial fit between home and workplace, at least at first. During the 1800s and early 1900s, many immigrants lived and toiled in the same building or were able to walk between the two sites. After streetcar systems developed and private ownership of vehicles became common, the closeness of the connection may have loosened somewhat, but the overlap between employment and residence did not disappear (Stathakis, 1996).

The durability of assimilationism attests to its adequacy in describing and explaining the changing metropolitan scene in the US, during much of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. In fact, the correspondence between theory and reality was as neat as anyone could reasonably desire for such places as Chicago, Cleveland or Philadelphia. In retrospect, however, the model may have been temporally- and country-specific, a creature of a unique period in American history. As Waldinger (1987) has noted, ‘the ethnic neighbourhood is not a timeless feature of American cities but rather the product of a particular moment in the technology of urban economics.’ In any event, the model’s formulators never tested its applicability to metropolises in other settler countries, to Buenos Aires, Montevideo or

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Johannesburg, or, more recently, to Toronto, Sydney or London.

The effectiveness of the assimilation model over the long term can be attributed in part to the fact that most immigrants fell into the broad racial classification of caucasian and were members of the extended Western, or European, cultural community and of various branches of the Judeo-Christian faith (Lieberson and Waters, 1988). It must be granted that such commonalities may not have been visible immediately. Indeed, many old-stock Americans tended to regard the newcomers from eastern and southern Europe as racially alien and inferior and more than a little suspect in religious terms. Nevertheless, dissimilarities in appearance, religion and cultural practice and the animosities among certain immigrant groups, while often obvious and sometimes unsettling, were not absolute. Time and the digestive processes of acculturation would presumably transform them into minor hindrances. As it happened, the great majority of the foreign-born flooding into America were of lower social, educational and occupational status and equipped with little prior knowledge of American conditions or, excepting those from the British Isles or Canada, of the English language. For the purposes of the model, it was both convenient and possible to treat the immigrants as a single, undifferentiated mass to be distinguished only by country or community of origin and period of entry.

In recent years, and most notably since 1965, a massive influx of immigrants, refugees and sojourners into the US, along with a significant restructuring of the world economy and society, obliges us to re-evaluate the spatial scenario as well as other aspects of the assimilationist perspective. Most of the millions of latterday newcomers hail from nations that previously contributed quite modestly, or not at all, to the immigrant stream (Jasso and Rosenzweig, 1990). In ‘racial’ appearance, persons arriving from eastern, southeastern and southern Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America are seldom mistaken for Europeans. Many adhere to such non-European religions as Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Santeria, Vodun, the Bahai faith, or such formerly unfamiliar varieties of Christianity as those practised in Ethiopia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq.

Another departure from the situation of yesteryear is evident in the socio-economic composition of the current wave of immigrants (Rumbaut, 1994; Chiswick and Sullivan, 1995). There are marked differences by country of origin but, overall, a bimodal pattern prevails. Although the US receives a considerable complement of the disadvantaged – in the case of several national sources, a clear majority – many of the new Americans are skilled, well-educated occupants of the higher occupational niches back home, and generally upwardly mobile. Although not all of these privileged individuals, bearing with them substantial human and sometimes financial capital, can immediately claim appropriate positions in their adopted country, a surprising number do just that, and manage to flourish from the outset.

A further distinction between past and present is the amount of prior knowledge of the culture and language of the US. Current immigrants often come from places where English is now the first or second language, and a goodly percentage of the better-schooled individuals from other nations arrive with a degree of comprehension and speaking ability. Despite the social or educational rank of the newcomer, he or she probably will have some idea, however distorted, of what to expect at the destination thanks to the universal penetration of American-made or influenced movies, television, and other popular media of entertainment and information. In a sense, then, the foreign-born person seeking permanent or temporary domicile in the US disembarks with assimilation already in progress.

But what most concerns us here are the locational aspects of the recent stages of immigration and ethnicity or, more broadly, the phenomenon of mobility as it pertains to persons migrating to the US and, inferentially, to other corners of the world. We are in the midst of a profound remaking of the relationships between people and place that is both rapid and radical, a re-ordering of basic perceptions and behaviour. If the technological underpinnings of this spatial quasi-revolution - near-universal access to automotive and airborne transportation as well as to the
telephone and other modes of electronic communication - are clear enough, the social and cultural ramifications are still only sketchily explored. However, if we begin with the rudimentary chore of plotting foreign-born persons and their progeny in geographical space in the late 20th century and do so over time, using census data on residence, we find that the assimilation model holds well for some groups but poorly for others.

Indeed, it would be surprising to discover the new immigrants moving automatically through the familiar spatial ruts of assimilation, given not only their own unprecedented attributes but also the much-altered morphology of the American metropolis. With the passage of time, the spatial configuration of economic and residential districts has undergone a good deal of shifting and revision. Moreover, for some groups ‘racial’ blockage is frustrating any replay of the traditional assimilation scenario. In particular, the substantial African-American and Latino populations which have so often filled the gaps left by the onward-moving European ethnics have only weakly succeeded in emulating the upward-and-outward trajectory of their predecessors (Massey and Denton, 1988; Frey, 1994).

THE PLURALIST VISION

The perception of assimilation as a smooth, unimpeded process was called into question as early as the 1910s, when another approach to coping with the diversity of immigrants began to take shape: the notion of pluralism (Kallen, 1924; Ratner, 1987). In lieu of fusion into a single sociocultural community within the ‘melting pot’, pluralists envision a mosaic of self-sustaining ethnic communities, each firmly engaged in the larger polity, economy and society (i.e. Americanised to a notable degree) but still retaining a traditional identity and complex of cultural practices in perpetuity (Abramson, 1980; Fuchs, 1990; Walzer, 1980).

The term ‘mosaic’ is more metaphorical than literal since the location of these hyphenated entities is not well specified. To the extent that the mosaic has a geographical counterpart, it presumably takes the form of a patchwork of ethnic enclaves that persist over time. At the metropolitan level, pluralism leads us to expect a population both highly diverse and highly segregated ethnically (Klaff, 1980). At the group level, we infer spatial overlap among residential, economic and social spheres to be strong, influenced in only a minor fashion (if at all) by upward mobility, English language acquisition, and other forces antecedent to dispersion in the assimilation model. Unlike the carefully spelled-out ecological principles associated with assimilation, there has been little effort by the pluralist school to offer an explicit locational statement. Generally, it seems to have been offered as a lofty ideal rather than as a reflection of existing realities or practical possibilities. However, a recent study of immigrant groups in London does test the two standard models within a geographic framework by applying data on residential location and rates of intermarriage (Peach, 1997). The results indicate that assimilation, being played out by the Caribbeans, and pluralism, the path being followed by Bangladeshis and, to a lesser extent, by a diversified East Indian population, can coexist in the same metropolis during the same period.

Aside from an occasional semipopular treatment (e.g. Adamic, 1940), pluralism failed to attract much public interest or serious academic attention in our own society before the 1960s. The reasons seem clear in retrospect. The idea of assimilation and conformity to national norms is deeply imbedded in the American ethos and is implicit in the notion of American exceptionalism, of the role of the US in the ‘grand march of humanity’. Thus pluralism runs decidedly against the American grain. In addition, with its recognition of group claims and rights, the role of the individual is downplayed, and nothing lies closer to the core of Americanism than individualism.

But the changing nature of the world has put matters in a new light. Simultaneously with developments in other Western nations, by mid-century the various downtrodden or subordinate American groups began to assert their grievances. In the vanguard was the ‘Black Pride’ movement among African-Americans which was joined subsequently by a ‘Red Power’ campaign among Native Americans and stirrings among Chicanos, Puerto Ricans,
Cajuns, and some Asians. The limited applicability of the melting-pot model to these groups caused academics to take heed (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963; Newman, 1973; Gordon, 1978: 181–208). So did the rise in the 1970s of the so-called ‘European ethnics’ who sought acknowledgment of their persistent identity, most stridently in the work of Novak (1972; also see Schrag, 1971; Mann, 1979).

Although the Euro-American ethnic revival of the 1970s seems to have run its course, the cause of pluralism has taken on fresh life with the massive influx of post-1965 immigrants. Despite the inherent fuzziness of the pluralist perspective, it refuses to go away, and ongoing debates over ‘multiculturalism’, ‘diversity’ and kindred concepts afford ample evidence of the essential vitality of the idea. To date, however, it has not been particularly helpful for sorting out the spatial issues involved.

AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL

Given the serious shortcomings of the traditional assimilationist and pluralist models in describing or explaining the sociospatial behaviour of recent immigrant groups in the US, we wish to propose an alternative model more closely in accord with the new set of circumstances faced by such groups. In lieu of any pre-existing word that captures the essence of this model, we have coined the term *heterolocal*. Rooted in the Greek ‘heteros’, meaning ‘other’ or ‘different’, and the Latin ‘locus’, meaning ‘place’, this term is intended to convey the possibility that an ethnic community can exist without any significant clustering, i.e. when the members of a particular group are scattered throughout a city, metropolitan area, or some larger spatial domain (Velikonja, 1993).

Heterolocalism is characterised by four attributes, listed below, that set it apart from the other models. There is also a fifth attribute that it shares with them.

1. There is immediate or prompt spatial dispersion of heterolocal immigrants within the host country.
2. Residence and workplace are usually widely separated, and there is also a frequent lack of spatial overlap between residence on the one hand and shopping districts and sites of social activity on the other.
3. Despite the absence of spatial propinquity, strong ethnic community ties are maintained via telecommunications, visits, and other methods at the metropolitan, regional, national, and even international scale.
4. Heterolocalism is a time-dependent phenomenon. Although we can detect some partial manifestations in earlier periods, its full development is conceivable only under the socio-economic and technological conditions of the late 20th century.
5. As is the case with the other models, heterolocalism can be observed in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan settings.

We take up each of these propositions in turn.

Spatial Dispersion

Heterolocally inclined individuals and families currently enjoy a much greater range of locational options in terms of residence and also economic and social activity than anything known in the past. They become heterolocal by virtue of choosing spatial dispersion, or at most a modest degree of clustering, immediately or shortly after arrival instead of huddling together in spatial enclaves. It would, of course, be naïve to assert that their locational decision-making is completely unencumbered. The tightness of the local housing market, the availability of appropriate economic niches, and the diversity of the local ethnic context all impose some degree of constraint. Nevertheless, it is useful to think of heterolocalism as dispersion and variety in contrast to localisation and homogeneity. Such relative freedom of spatial choice has been noticed by previous observers, but usually only in passing with reference to particular places or particular ethnic groups (e.g. Waldinger, 1987; Dinnerstein and Reimers, 1988: 170–71; Modarres, 1992: 105; O’Hare et al., 1994).

The broadened range of residential possibilities exploited by heterolocals reflects more than the affluence of many of these foreign-
born newcomers (although income does explain a great deal), or even the liberalising effect of modern communications and transportation. The new territorial regime would not have been feasible without certain types of policy changes (e.g. the enactment of fair housing legislation) and significant shifts in social attitudes and perceptions, which have served to reduce locational barriers. Would it have been thinkable in the 1890s for a Brahmin scholar, a black Haitian merchant, a Japanese physician, or a Chinese banker to acquire a residence, and then survive, in one of Philadelphia’s or San Francisco’s upscale neighbourhoods? The question answers itself.

In the US, the residential dispersion noted by heterolocalism varies considerably from one group to another. Even within a given group, it may be affected by the social history and geography of the specific metropolis in which group members settle. Thus extreme and instant dispersion characterises the recently arriving Asian Indians (Carlson, 1978; Dasgupta, 1989: 61–2; Helweg and Helweg, 1990: 163–9; Jyoti, 1990; Sheth, 1995; Smith, 1995) and Iranians (Ansari, 1992: 61; Modarres, 1992). Their residences are scattered throughout the suburban reaches of the metropolitan area (and widely throughout non-metropolitan America) with only a slight tendency toward a loose sort of clustering. Equally striking is the spatial dispersion of the new influx of Filipinos who have failed to create any recognisable neighbourhood, just as was the case with the smaller influx before the Second World War (Archipelago, 1974; Smith, 1995). Similarly, the Vietnamese have suburbanised quite quickly in Washington, DC and other areas (Wood, 1996). An intriguing example is that of recent Japanese immigrants and sojourners. They have sought out the most attractive suburbs while holding themselves spatially aloof from the already widely dispersed native-born Japanese-Americans (Handelman, 1991).

The case of the Koreans is more complicated, prompting questions for which we have no ready answers. Hurh and Kim’s (1984: 63) statement that ‘[t]here is no sign yet that the Koreans will develop an ethnic neighborhood of their own as Italians and Poles did in the early stages of their immigration’ seems valid enough for New York City (Kim, 1981: 184–5; Sakong, 1990: 23; Zhou, 1992: 195–6) and Washington (F.D. Lee, 1980; Myers, 1994), and probably Atlanta. Yet one can observe the coalescence of Korean residential and commercial neighbourhoods in Chicago (Park, 1994) and Los Angeles (Sakong, 1990: 23; Min, 1993). They hardly qualify, however, as classic (i.e. early 20th century) ethnic ghettos.

In another instance of the salience of the specific metropolitan setting, there are those Cuban immigrants living in the Washington area who, unlike their brethren in Miami, have failed to form any sort of distinct geographical enclave but are widely scattered in a number of neighbourhoods (Boone, 1989: 17). The same pattern of dispersion holds for upper middle-class and professional Armenians (O’Grady, 1981) and Sephardic Jews (Fredman, 1981) who have gravitated to the nation’s capital in recent decades. Rather surprisingly, the notion of heterolocalism seems to apply to the Haitian residents of the Chicago metropolitan area (Woldemikael, 1989: 160). Equally counter-intuitive are the spatial choices of recent Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants of relatively advanced socio-economic status. Many have bypassed pre-existing Chinatowns to become immediate suburbanites, most notably in the Los Angeles area (Li, 1994, 1996; Tseng, 1995) but also elsewhere (Zhou and Logen, 1991; Zhou, 1992: 84).

Not all heterolocal groups are situated within the upper or middle levels of the socio-economic spectrum. An estimated 40,000 recent Bolivian immigrants of working-class status in Washington, DC and environs have not formed or joined any spatial enclave but instead are spread widely throughout the Virginia suburbs, while sustaining a lively sense of community by means of personal networking and a variety of formal and informal associations (Price, 1996). We have other instances of disadvantaged communities that are decidedly dispersed in their spatial pattern but just as decidedly pluralistic in the tenacity with which most members cling to their unique social identity. For example, in Los Angeles, Seattle, and other metropolises to which Native Americans have migrated in substantial numbers since the Second World War – and where, incidentally, the process of

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ethnogenesis, i.e. the formation of a supra-tribal or pan-Indian consciousness, has developed apace - residences are widely scattered and no distinct neighbourhoods have formed (Nagel, 1996: 202-4; Weibel-Orlando, 1991: 23-31). The same sort of dispersion typifies the US urban gypsy population, a group which falls into a twilight zone between the pluralist and heterolocal models. Although they do not relish the attention of census-takers or social scientists, it is clear enough that the gypsies fiercely resist assimilation (Silverman, 1991).

Despite its growing relevance, the heterolocal model obviously does not apply well to all ethnic groups, including a couple of the largest. In a manner reminiscent of times past, we can see the formation or enlargement of solidly Latino districts in a number of cities as well as the persistence of African-American ghettos which have been expanding via natural increase, internal migration, and the acquisition and acculturation of West Indian and African immigrants. But even in these cases there are departures from various earlier patterns of localisation. Blacks, both native and foreign-born, have managed to filter into various suburbs in modest numbers. Similarly, less affluent persons arriving from southeast and southwest Asia and the Caribbean frequently find homes in neighbourhoods beyond the innermost residential core, with some outstanding examples being those polyglot tracts in Queens and Brooklyn in New York (Dinnerstein and Reimers, 1988: 171; Smith, 1995), Washington’s Takoma Park, and Chicago’s Uptown area.

Aside from such isolated cases as Miami’s Little Havana and the latterday Latino barrios of Los Angeles and Chicago, however, we are not witnessing any latterday replication of ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods in the manner of the various Chinatowns, Boston’s intensely Italian North End or its equivalent in South Philadelphia, or the many classic examples (Polish, Jewish, German, Greek, etc.) in the Chicago of yesteryear. Moreover, where new Chinatowns have sprouted, as in Los Angeles and New York, they are not exclusively mono-ethnic as in the past, since the Chinese may account for only a plurality of the population (Chen, 1992: ix). The more general point, as Denton and Massey (1991) amply document with census tract data, is that we have entered a new golden age of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. Indeed, future comparative research may reveal a greater degree of intermixing at the present time than ever before known.

Spatial Disjuncture Between Home and Work

Not readily apparent in the census data is another important attribute of heterolocalism: the spatial disjuncture between residence and workplace, and also, quite frequently, between residence and loci of social activity. Few more striking examples can be cited than that of the Korean-American action-space in greater Washington. We and others (F.D. Lee, 1980: 50-51; Myers, 1994) have noted that, while Koreans operate hundreds of retail businesses within the District of Columbia, virtually all of these recent immigrants live, worship, and socialise in the suburban counties, in the absence of any distinct clusters.

Asian Indians further illustrate this point. Although they have also failed to produce noticeable residential concentrations in either suburban or central city locales (unlike the Koreans who have done so in at least two instances), they have created no fewer than three thoroughly Indian shopping districts: one in Chicago and a pair in New York City. But none of these, including a diversified set of shops in Jackson Heights and a string of restaurants on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, bear any relationship to the places the proprietors call home (Williams, 1988: 193; Myers, 1993). There is reason to expect similar findings for Iranians, Armenians, Japanese, Vietnamese, Filipinos, and other heterolocally inclined groups.

In all such cases one can discern little or no overlap between residence and workplace. It is likely that field investigations will confirm a similar disjuncture between home and places of worship, ethnic shopping areas, and sites of social activity. Among the least advantaged segments of the urban population, such as working-class African-Americans or Latinos, we find a situation quite unlike that of Asian Indians and other heterolocal groups. The former may be clustered within well-defined...
neighbourhoods, but a large percentage of full or part-time employees, especially domestic workers, gardeners and casual labourers, earn wages by the day or hour almost anywhere within the metropolitan area, using whatever mode of transport is available to reach the job site. This phenomenon, which has received little systematic attention, is a distinct departure from the intra-metropolitan circulation patterns of earlier generations of European immigrants.

**Ethnic Community Without Propinquity**

‘Liberated’ social networks (i.e. those that transcend narrow spatial boundaries) constitute a defining characteristic of what might be considered the ‘pure’ or ‘strong’ version of the heterolocal model, for they preclude the meaning attributed to dispersion – a severing of ethnic attachments – by assimilation theorists. Indeed, the durability of such attachments in the face of dispersion, coupled with the pace at which a particular group disperses, is what enables us to distinguish between heterolocalism on the one hand and assimilation on the other. In broad outline, the ultimate ethnic settlement patterns predicted by the two models are otherwise rather similar.

Quite a few ethnic populations appear capable of maintaining lively, interactive communities without the aid of territorial clustering. The basic notion of ‘community without propinquity’ was proposed by Webber (1964) in a seminal essay more than 30 years ago, one that was not specifically concerned with ethnic matters. Now much empirical support exists for the vigour of the phenomenon as applied to a variety of ethnically-based social and economic networks. Among the contemporary examples of aspatial ethnic communities in the US, we have the suburbanised Japanese (Kendis, 1989; Fugita and O’Brien, 1991), Cubans in Washington (Boone, 1989: 17), Koreans (Sakong, 1990: 107), recent Lithuanian and Jewish immigrants in Chicago (DeSantis and Benkin, 1980), Estonians in suburban New Jersey (Walko, 1989: 72-3), Haitians in suburban New York City (Shokeid, 1988: 100). For the many groups that do exhibit some degree of solidarity, a question arises about means: how is the deterritorialised ethnic community possible? Modern technology is a necessary if not sufficient factor in its genesis and operation. The specific agents include the telephone, the now universally available personal automobile, ethnic radio and television programmes, and the newer modes of electronic communication (Agocs, 1981; Boone, 1989: 17). Personal mobility and instant electronic access to co-ethnics are only part of the story, however, because a thriving ethnic community is not entirely divorced from specific sites. Much of the glue that holds it together exists in the shape of ethnic churches, business associations, athletic leagues, social and service clubs, bars, cultural centres, festivals, and other...
institutions, which may or may not be situated in neighbourhoods where some modest degree of clustering can be detected. But a sense of community can be constructed and maintained even in the absence of formal organisations and activities if personal networks come into play. That is what has been observed in the case of the Soviet Jews in New York City, who tend to hold themselves rather aloof from the older Jewish population with their quite different value system (Markowitz, 1993).

The advent and explosive growth of the Internet in the 1990s has added new potenti-
alities for the heterolocal vigour of ethnicity both within and well beyond the individual metropolitan area, embracing as it does the entire national, and even global, clientele. What has developed among the Iranian-American elite is being duplicated by scores of other ethnic interests:

`Since March 1990 a group of Iranian scientists, engineers, and students residing in the US have created their own electronic [Internet] community, called Social, Culture Iranian... The Iranian electronic community in the US consists of those Iranian-Americans who are self-conscious of their ethnic identity but know each other only electronically... This is a new kind of non-spatial community that is unlimited by geography.' (Ansari, 1992: 139±40).

A preliminary report by Estaville (1996) indicated that as of March 1996 the number of ethnic-related Internet pages and Web sites, both commercial and non-profit, within the US had already climbed into the hundreds and that growth was occurring at an exponential rate. Such activity is also thriving at the global scale (Brunn et al., 1994; Brunn and Purcell, 1996).

Heterolocalism as a Time-Dependent Phenomenon

Although, as already noted, we can identify earlier tendencies in the direction of hetero-
localism, its full-blown development has become a reality only within recent decades. Its advent parallels the attainment of a certain threshold in the evolution of our global economy and the arrival of the newer technologies of transport and communication which have facilitated a much broader array of human action-spaces.

The very recency of the phenomenon renders futile any effort at prognostication. Thus it is impossible to state whether heterolocalism will flourish for a considerable period of time or what future mode of sociospatial behaviour might eventually supplant it. What does appear plausible is that we may be witnessing a steady-state system that, in the American case, could endure as long as a substantial volume of immigration continues and in the absence of major disturbances in the operation of the current globalised economy and society.

Adding to the likelihood of such a situation are the ‘racial’, religious, and other cultural differences that distance the majority of the newer immigrants from the dominant Euro-American community and inhibit structural assimilation. It is conceivable, then, that the ‘pure’ expression of the heterolocal model may persist for some groups, and that a network of ties among co-ethnics will remain strong and lively despite the absence of an enclave or of any residential concentration involving a preponderance of members of the same group.

Beyond the Metropolis

Given the liberating effects of technology, heterolocalism should hardly be thought of as an exclusively metropolitan affair. Neither, for that matter, should the assimilation or pluralist scenarios. Although proponents of the latter two perspectives have little to say about the initial settlement of immigrants in non-metropolitan America - in the farmlands, ranches, forests, mining areas, and smaller cities and towns - or their subsequent spatial shifts, the millions of people in question have certainly played a major role in the ethnic history of the nation. It is clear, however, from the material presented by a multitude of studies, that the spatiotemporal careers of these newcomers parallel to some degree what took place in our larger cities, at least through the early 20th century.

Beginning in the colonial era, rural clustering was the rule for many Germans, Flemish,
Highland Scots, and Cajuns, among others. Later chain and group migration created notable agrarian concentrations not only of Germans, but also of Czechs, Dutch, Ukrainians, Finns, Norwegians and Swedes, including belatedly the successful Punjabi farmers of California’s Sutter County (Leonard, 1992). Cultural and social assimilation and some degree of spatial dispersion has ensued, but most of these early ethnic concentrations are still apparent in attenuated form.

At the same time, such pockets of rural ethnicity have been losing ground to their city cousins for at least 150 years. Immigrants to the US have sought out urban destinations to an extent unmatched by the native population, and, in recent decades, this cityward movement has intensified as a decreasing percentage of the foreign-born choose rural residence. Not surprisingly, then, students of contemporary ethnic and immigrant developments have focused heavily on the metropolitan scene. But changes emerging within the past quarter-century oblige us to include non-metropolitan America in any serious effort to upgrade old ethnic theories or construct new ones.

After many years during which the number of foreign-born in non-metropolitan (‘non-metro’) counties experienced decline (as did the total population of such places in many instances), something of a turnaround materialised from 1970 onward. Absolute increments in the non-metro foreign-born have been registered at the national level, even though this upswing has not rivalled the relative or absolute growth of such persons in metropolitan areas. This has come about in many tracts, notably in the southeast, where previously immigrants had been conspicuously rare.

The current infusion of the foreign-born into much of rural and small-town America is not a replay of the epoch of pioneer settlement. There are few, if any, opportunities for yeoman farmers or for engagement in mining, forestry, or fishing. Yet a small market does exist for menial, often dangerous, employment in such enterprises as meat-packing and the processing of poultry, which have attracted the Mexican and southeast Asian proletariat, and itinerant farm workers from Mexico and the West Indies continue to circulate around the country.

If these movements vaguely resemble the classic succession of newcomers from central, southern, and eastern Europe posited in the assimilation model, a totally original phenomenon presents itself in the form of an influx of well-educated, upwardly-striving foreigners who are now widely distributed throughout non-metro America in modest yet significant quantities. Their farflung ranks include physicians and nurses, engineers and technicians, and business executives and managers often operating foreign-owned enterprises. Equally intriguing are the many thousands of foreign-born faculty members, not to mention students, who have become a noticeable presence on hundreds of college campuses in smaller towns as well as in major cities. Nothing like the current situation would have been seen before the Second World War.

Although we still lack methodical studies of these medical, managerial, academic and other personnel from distant sources, it is reasonable to suspect that, whether they are only sojourners or come with intentions of permanent residence, such individuals are part of the broader phenomenon of heterolocalism. Thus any evaluation of the heterolocal model must take them into account. Has their dispersion been as sudden as that of their metropolitan counterparts? Do they participate in and identify with an aspatial community of their co-ethnics despite their relative geographic remoteness? Affirmative answers seem likely in light of their human capital endowments and presumed inclination toward mobility. Only through further research, however, can questions about these members of the upscale foreign-born non-metro population be definitively addressed.

TRANSNATIONALISM AS HETEROLOCALISM?

We must also reckon with another quite recent, apparently unanticipated manifestation of heterolocalism which has begun to engage scholarly attention. For lack of any generally accepted terminology, we resort to the terms ‘transnationalism’ for the phenomenon and ‘transmigrants’ for the participants therein, since those are the words adopted by the authors of an extended, ground-breaking

The concept in question also relates to claims concerning the ‘deterritorialisation of the state’.

How to define transnationalism? In the language of Basch and her colleagues (1994: 7), the word refers to:

‘the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political – that span borders we call “transmigrants”. An essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies.’

Like the types of heterolocalism already discussed, transnationalism entails a degree of freedom from spatial constraints coupled with the opportunity for attachment to one’s own group, but at a higher level of geographical abstraction. In either case, the underlying axiom is the same; to a degree unknown in the past, ‘ethnic’ individuals or groups may exercise some flexibility in choosing their identity as well as location, making both decisions contingent on personal circumstances (Kivisto, 1992).

The general definition of transnationalism can be fleshed out with a specific, admittedly extreme example:

‘The importance of the Pacific Rim connection to the economic activities of Los Angeles’ Chinese immigrants can be seen in the emergence of hypermobile migrants who keep family in one society, business in the other, and are in constant motion between the two. With a “two-legged existence”, one leg in the homeland and the other in the country of immigration, these newcomers – called “spacemen” by English media and known in Taiwan as “Tai Kun Fei Jen” (the equivalent term for “spacemen”) represent a unique class of Chinese immigrants shuttling comfortably between Taipei, Hong Kong, and such places as Los Angeles.’ (Waldinger and Tseng, 1992)

The phenomenon is also discussed by Skeldon (1997: 113-15).

It is almost superfluous to note that contemporary transnationalism and its attendant hypermobility have been rendered feasible, if not inevitable, by the invention and adoption of modern means of transport and communication and a radical cheapening in per-kilometre and per-unit costs. Whereas in earlier times the transoceanic transmission of passengers, commodities, documents and cash might take weeks or even months, today money and information can be transferred around the globe in the blink of an eye, while travel time for people and parcels between all but the most remote points is now measured in hours.

Critics might challenge the uniqueness and theoretical and practical impact of transnationalism by pointing out that the present-day situation is no more than a logical continuation of historical trends. As previously noted, over the course of many centuries, a small but influential transnational corps of merchants, clergy, mercenaries, skilled craftsmen and scholars has circulated across wide distances. Indeed, some of those considered immigrants to the US in the past were sojourners who eventually returned to their original localities or even made several round trips during the course of a working life. The world has long been acquainted with a number of multinational ‘tribes’ that manage to sustain commercial, social and cultural ties despite the diasporas which have strewn them far and wide. Among the more conspicuous examples we have the Armenians, Jews, Lebanese, Chinese and gypsies of modern times, and the Phoenicians and Hellenes of yore (Kotkin, 1993; Chaliand and Rageau, 1995). Moreover, the incidence in both past and present of return migration – upon retirement or for other reasons – and of annual cycles of international movement on the part of seasonal labourers and other transients has often reached a magnitude too great to be ignored.

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But there are telling counter-arguments to the charge that transnationalism is simply a new label for an old phenomenon. The most basic is that incremental quantitative change in technologies and social arrangements can result, sometimes quite abruptly, in serious qualitative change. Such was the case, we believe, with the advent of the electric telegraph in the 1840s and long-distance commercial aircraft in the 1940s. In parallel fashion, and thanks to the newest innovations in transportation, communication and the manipulation of information, we have recently experienced — and indeed are still experiencing — rather sudden, mind-altering reconstructions in our social, cultural, political and economic dealings that may be even more consequential than the technological advances with which they are so intimately associated.\(^5\) The transnational phenomenon is only one of the results.

Superficial similarities may blind us to the essential distinction between the traditional diaspora of a community that insists on clinging to its ancient identity, and the novel attributes of the new transmigrants. Basch et al. (1994: 269) suggested a subtle, but crucial, difference:

‘The concept of diaspora is closely related to that of “nation” which envisions a people with a common past and a biological bond of solidarity who may or may not at any one time have its own state. In counter-distinction is the deterritorialized nation-state, in which the nation’s people may live anywhere in the world and still not live outside the state. By this logic, there is no longer a diaspora because where its people go, their state goes too.’

A striking example of such free-floating nations, but one not involving standard immigrants or footloose labourers, is that of the virtually worldwide constellation of American bases with their transient military personnel and civilian dependents, one that materialised with the onset of the Cold War. A parallel development is the widely scattered set of foreign retirement colonies inhabited by equally staunch members of the American sociocultural collectivity.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the unprecedented character of transnationalism can be seen in the attributes of the participants. It may be true enough that those ‘spacemen’ flitting between California, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and wherever represent the latterday incarnation of the footloose adventurers of long ago. Similarly, we can observe in the new Indian-American inhabitants of our land, with their enviable socioeconomic status, the inheritors of a venerable south Asian tradition now raised to a new degree of intensity, complexity and social penetration. One has to be impressed by the frequency of international telephone calls (and probably Internet postings as well), family visits, the traffic in prospective brides and grooms and entrepreneurs, the interchange of merchandise, gifts, audio and video cassettes, all of which is predicated on having a comfortable income (Williams, 1988: 19; Helweg and Helweg, 1990: 128). The more well-to-do of the Filipino immigrants have also been constructing ‘fluid and multiple identities that link them simultaneously to both countries’ (Espiritu, 1995: 27–8). It is likely that an investigation of Israelis throughout the US (one of the groups to enjoy de jure dual citizenship as well as de facto) would also detect symptoms of transnationalism.

What sets the current situation apart from the past, however, is the fact, so amply documented by Basch et al. (1994), that the actors fashioning the actual or nascent transnational entities are increasingly not elites but middle- and working-class individuals who originate in lands with no record of diaspora. Most importantly, and consistent with heterolocalism at the national level, there are signs of sustained ambiguity, of dual allegiances that may continue indefinitely, rather than of absorption into the host society as mandated by the dynamics of the assimilation model. In the words of Appadurai (1991), ‘[t]he landscapes of group identity ± the ethnoscapes ± around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous.’

Alerted by the empirical work of Basch and her colleagues on ordinary folk from Grenada,
St Vincent, Haiti and the Philippines, we can expect similar transnational expressions of heterolocalism involving persons in the US circulating to and from, and otherwise entangling themselves with, Brazil (Millman, 1997: 210-20), Mexico (Kearney, 1995), Jamaica, the Dominican Republic (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991) and other Caribbean isles. The heavy to-and-fro oscillations of Puerto Ricans between the island and mainland should probably also be classified as transnational in character, even though they nominally inhabit a common political space. In related fashion, anyone seeking them out is bound to discover transnational communities of a non-traditional type linking the UK with the British Caribbean, and others are undoubtedly waiting to be identified in other corners of the world.

CONCLUSION

In an effort to make sense of the rapidly evolving ethnic scene in the US, we have subjected to critical scrutiny the widely accepted assimilationist model as well as the less frequently invoked pluralist doctrine. Despite their virtues, the inability of these formulations to account fully for the spatial and social behaviour of recent immigrants or of previously established minority groups prompts us to propose a third model which we call heterolocalism, one that can supplement and partially replace the older two.

The term ‘heterolocal’ applies to recent populations of shared ethnic identity that enter a given area from distant sources, then promptly adopt a dispersed pattern of residential location, all the while maintaining strong social cohesion by various means, despite the lack of propinquity. Heterolocal arrangements are most readily observed in metropolitan settings, but such ‘communities without propinquity’ can exist at the regional scale, within non-metro territory, or, under the designation of ‘transnational’, as something approaching ‘deterritorialised nations’ that span the boundaries of two or more conventional nation-states. Although the most conspicuous of heterolocal communities involve relatively privileged people, the concept is also valid for some less privileged groups whose economic survival depends upon movement and transactions over long distances while retaining an older, or creating a latterday, sense of peoplehood.

Certain hints of heterolocalism can be detected in earlier times. However, its full development has become feasible only within the recent past, and there is no way of anticipating how it may play out in the future. The very complexity of this situation – at least in the US – requires an openness to new models. Apart from the immediate effect of mutual acculturation generated by having large numbers of non-traditional migrants interacting with the native-born, American society and culture are changing at an unprecedented rate in response to internal forces and the long-distance sharing of information, images, ideas, commodities and problems with other parts of the world. Thus the sociocultural system into which our newer immigrants might be presumed to be assimilating, or else resisting the process, is a moving target, and the pace of movement is far from negligible.

Against such a backdrop, we cannot discount the continuing utility of either the assimilation or the pluralist model. Some immigrant groups currently entering the US will undoubtedly become assimilated into the larger society, whether or not they replicate the classic upward-and-outward spatial movement of an earlier era. Similarly, other groups may still pursue the pluralist path as they retain their cultural distinctiveness and territorial separateness. The African-American community is perhaps the prime example, but various Latino groups (with the possible exception of the Cubans) clearly fall into this category as do some Native Americans, the Cajuns, the more fundamentalist of the Mennonites, and other small isolated communities, old and new (e.g. Hutterites, Chasidic Jews), that cling jealously to their unique character.

In proposing our third model, we acknowledge that in the real world it fails to capture completely the reality of a number of communities and that the same qualification applies to the other two models. There are multiple instances of groups that fall into the cracks of ‘model space’ by displaying the attributes of two or even three of the models. The extreme case may be that of the Jewish-American community whose dominantly metropolitan
component has undergone much of the assimilation process, with its outward spatial progression, a fair degree of suburban dispersion, and much cultural adaptation but, pluralistically, without budging on the fundamental issue of a separate identity. At the same time, Jewish Americans in the South can best be classified as both heterolocal and pluralist. Similarly, many Chinese, especially in the northeast, are enacting the spatial aspects of the assimilation model by anchoring initially in Chinatowns, then fanning outward to less constricted quarters while stubbornly retaining their Chineseness, even as their Taiwanese and Hong Kong compatriots in California have been behaving heterolocally.

Applying any of the three rather abstract models to real people and real places is a difficult task because the cultural baggage and history of a given immigrant group will determine in part which model it follows in its adopted land. Equally determinative for those who are city-bound is the size, structure, economy and general ambience of the urban destination. The date of entry is also quite significant. A number of post-1965 immigrants differ markedly from their co-ethnics who arrived some generations ago, not only in their personal characteristics but also by virtue of the fact that the homelands have experienced great change over the intervening years. Much research remains to be done on the similarities and differences in the manner in which earlier and later contingents of Filipinos, Chinese, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Armenians and others have adapted themselves to their new homes.

Also on the research agenda is the applicability of any of the three models to other settler countries that have received major influxes of immigrants, most notably Canada, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa and Australia. What relevance does the American set of models have for such places? Also, when we turn to virtually all the nations of western Europe (formerly such vigorous exporters of emigrants), will it be necessary to contrive additional theoretical formulations, or does heterolocalism, with its transnational dimension, offer some hope?

Whatever the merits of the heterolocal model or the older perspectives, we can no longer confidently predict, as we did in years past, the ultimate structural assimilation of recent immigrants into the mainstream of US society or of other countries accepting sizeable numbers of newcomers. In fact, the question of assimilation – how, where, at what speed, and under what circumstances it may occur – seems obsolete to the point of becoming a non-problem, at least for a substantial portion of those populations that have been crossing and recrossing international boundaries. Their members are capable of retaining or inventing much of the ancestral culture, while devising original amalgams of their cultural heritage with what they find awaiting them in their new, perhaps provisional, abodes, and with no assurance of ultimate Americanisation, Anglicisation, Gallicisation, or whatever. This resourcefulness all but guarantees that the more general, hotly contested issue of multiculturalism will remain at the forefront of public discourse for the foreseeable future.

At a still loftier level of abstraction, the ethnic phenomenon with which we have been struggling represents a challenge to the Eurocentric master narrative of modernism: that in a rational, well-regulated world, all of the ‘Other’ would eventually be recruited into the superior order of those who had already built the ‘promised land.’ Happily, in our opinion, history has undermined the credibility of the Eurocentric view, but it has left us with a daunting task. As the present century comes to a close, we must radically rethink the fundamental relationships among person, community, culture and place for all of us, not just for immigrants and ethnic groups.

NOTES

(1) For a brief commentary on the ideological agenda of the ‘Chicago School’ of sociology, the principal author of the assimilation model, see Basch et al. (1994: 41).
(2) For insights into the ways that cinema, television and VCR technology have reshaped the global cultural order and enhanced the role of imagination in social life, see Appadurai (1991), especially p. 198.
(3) In the ensuing decades, academics have continued their critique of the assimilationist doctrine, although without offering a workable
substitute (e.g. Blaut, 1987: 142–71; White et al., 1993; Harrison and Bennett, 1995).

(4) Outside of the Census enumerations, the non-metro foreign-born population of the US (values in 1000s) declined from 1224 in 1950 to 721 in 1970, then rebounded to 1338 in 1990 an increment of 85.6%. During the same 40-year period, the number of metropolitan foreign-born increased by 104.1%, from 8936 to 18,241.

(5) A related development that still awaits adequate documentation and analysis is the recent advent of international tourism involving co-ethnics. Such trips are quite different from the periodic circulation or return migration of immigrants of the past. They entail not only descendants of European (and some African?) immigrants frequenting ancestral sites, but also such visits as those of German tourists to New Ulm, Minnesota, or the Swiss heading for New Glarus, Wisconsin (Hoelscher and Ostergren, 1993; Hoelscher, 1995).

(6) A striking example of such mutual acculturation can be seen in Miami with its substantial recent intake of Haitians, Nicaraguans, and especially Cubans. Portes andStepick (1993: 8) observed that ‘[t]he overlap of parallel social systems in the same physical space has given rise to acculturation in reverse – a process by which foreign customs, institutions, and language are diffused within the native population. As a consequence, biculturalism has emerged as an alternative adaptive project to full assimilation into American culture. Opponents of biculturalism, immigrants and nates alike, must either withdraw into their own diminished circles or exit the community.’

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