



Toque una Ranchera, Por Favor¹

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This paper explores the literal spaces of transnational social reproduction for Latinos and Latinas in central North Carolina and the US South. Examining these spaces and circuits of social reproduction can enhance our understanding of globalization by making globalization processes at once less abstract and less indisputable. Attention to social reproduction is important for understanding and theorizing globalization and, more significantly, for imagining and constructing alternative forms of globalization.

Inspired to pursue certain freedoms and immediate goals, transnational migrants live and breath alternative models of globalization in their everyday activities. Responding less to neo-liberal and more to human-centered values, transnational migrants demonstrate that different principles can guide the construction of contemporary globalizations. Ethnographic evidence from Mexican transnational migrants suggests that the intimate and distant social connections that constitute Latinos' translocal way of living help to facilitate the very same globalizing labor markets that entice and propel migrants to seek "greener pastures" in the US South.

On a Sunday morning a few weeks ago, some Mexican friends invited me to go along when they were buying *carnitas* (cooked pork). We headed down a residential street only a few blocks from my place and pulled up in front of a small house. There were no visible signs of any commerce, although I started to smell the *carnitas* as we went toward the back porch to select our purchase. Chunks of meat were swimming in vats of hot lard and—along with several other customers—we waited until this batch was ready. Once we had our meat, my friends wanted to stop at Johnny's store, a tiny fishing supply place only a block from my house. While I'd been to Johnny's store a few times, I had always entered from the front and had frequently wondered how the good-ol'-boy owners stayed in business selling worms, crickets, minnows, and Coca-Cola. I hadn't realized until this particular Sunday that there is a Mexican *tienda* with an entrance at the backside of the same tiny building. My friends bought some *bolillos* (white buns) in the *tienda* (store) and we set out for a tasty picnic.

I begin with this anecdote because I have some expertise in Mexican labor markets and Mexican experience in the US South. And in the last few months, as part of a research project, I have been immersed in Mexican activities in North Carolina, or *Carolina del Norte*, as my friend Elva says of her own leisure-time destinations: "When I'm not

at work, I head out to *Carolina del Norte*.” So how can it be that I keep finding new “Mexican” places right under my nose?

The literal spaces of transnational social reproduction for Latinos and Latinas in central North Carolina constitute a parallel universe, a world that is largely invisible to long-term residents (Davis 2000; Smith 2001). As soon as one steps through the right parallel door, however, one encounters a whirlwind of activities that provide cultural, social, political, and economic sustenance to migrant communities. Places such as the *carnitas* vendor and the nearby *tienda* are connected through dense social ties with places such as the *pulga* (the rural Mexican flea market), the work exchange organized at a local strip mall at Chilango’s corner, apartments and apartment complexes where one can get one’s hair cut by a professional from El Salvador, soccer leagues, bars, pool halls, and dance clubs. These local social networks are also closely linked to faraway locations through family and community connections. This translocal way of life involves living intimately in two or more disparate places at once and is often a creative response on the part of migrants as they adjust to—and, in turn, influence—changing opportunities and constraints in disparate places (Burawoy 2000; Davis 2000; Smith 2001). The intimate and distant social connections that constitute this translocal way of living help to facilitate the very same globalizing labor markets that entice and propel migrants to seek “greener pastures” in the US South.

In this paper, I argue that examining these spaces and circuits of social reproduction can enhance our understanding of globalization by making globalization processes at once less abstract and less indisputable. Others have argued that analyzing social reproduction provides insight on globalization, yet this idea is not necessarily widely accepted (Cravey 1999; Katz 2001; Marston 2000). Economic production is so central to both proponents and critics of globalization that, by and large, social reproduction gets ignored. Yet, by bringing in the gender dynamics of social life and by focusing on the smaller scale processes of social reproduction, it is possible to recover some of the complex sociospatial elements that facilitate contemporary, neoliberal forms of globalization. More importantly, shifting our perspective to the microgeographies of social reproduction gives us the tools with which to imagine alternative models of globalization that might spring from more egalitarian social relationships, from social and economic justice ideals, or directly from creative translocal ways of living and self-expression. That is, in pursuing his goals and his freedom to do so, the unauthorized migrant “lives his life more as a citizen of a non-bounded society (one shaped by extraterritorial social, economic, and cultural forces) than as a citizen of a bounded territorial state” (Nevins 2002:180). For these reasons, I believe attention to social reproduction is important for understanding and theorizing globalization and,

more significantly, for imagining and constructing alternative forms of globalization.

I want to examine some spaces of social reproduction that involve translocal lives and transnational identities for Latinos in central North Carolina. Transnational identities—as feminist theorists have shown—are worked out simultaneously at many geographical scales, from the scale of the body to the scale of the globe (Marston 2000). Transnational spaces and identities are particularly interesting for this reason, because microscale processes so clearly intersect and shape macro ones, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we accept the idea that many Latinos in the US are living at two or more places at once, then we can explore the direct causal relationship between the most micro-scale processes and global ones. For instance, social exchanges between places such as Carrboro, North Carolina² and Guanajuato, Mexico are so intense that people are on the phone enough, and back and forth enough, and sending cash remittances to the extent that they are literally keeping up with who stopped by for a chat that afternoon, how much rain fell, and who is dating whom in both places.

In this paper, I seek to contribute to our understandings of the links between the construction of translocal identities and the spaces of social reproduction through which these constructions are translated. Immigrants create and appropriate new social spaces that are highly contested, intensely expressive, and densely networked with other immigrant circuits. Specifically, I argue that certain forms of social reproduction practices facilitate and sustain transnational migration flows. In turn, gender relations, sexual expression, and desire are all altered by the need to substitute new spaces of social reproduction for family and household forms not available in North Carolina. That is, when they migrate to the US South, Latinos and Latinas creatively adapt to and substitute for the loss of two important sites of social reproduction in their daily lives: household/family systems of support and state-funded channels of social provision. In this way, transnational migrants provide a vast subsidy to the regional economy and to employers. At the same time, migrant flows are fueled by a desire for certain personal freedoms that are not available in Mexico. Thus, the pursuit of adequate wages is entwined with cultural ferment in everyday locations and a quest for human freedom.

I begin by describing the general situation of Latinos and Latinas in the US South and, more specifically, in North Carolina. These recent migration flows are directly tied to contemporary production changes and are distinct from earlier migration flows to the US in several ways. From this contextual background, I turn to an examination of some specific places that extend and substitute for household and family relationships. I focus on dance halls, bars, and clubs to illuminate some of the everyday ways in which transnational identities and social

relationships are sustained and reproduced in order to shift the angle of view to the scale of daily life. Mainstream corporate, government, and academic representations of globalization tend to neglect this scale. To take that same stance as a critic of neoliberal globalization models is to reify this one understanding of globalization. On the other hand, a shift in scale can reveal crucial dynamics that, when examined closely, suggest an alternative version of globalization, one based less on governmental and economic understandings and more on the personal, day-to-day lives of individuals swept up in globalization processes. The social sites examined are places where immigrants relax, drink, meet and make friends, dance, date, and often make temporary and long-term household arrangements. Through music and dancing, migrants—who are predominantly men—appropriate certain spaces as Mexican, find an outlet for sexuality, desire, and anger, and distract themselves from the difficulties of living far from home.

This work is part of a larger research project—partly collaborative and partly my own—that examines Latino migration in the US South. The discussion draws upon in-depth interviews, as well as nine months of participant observation research in 2001 and 2002 with the Latino community in central North Carolina. Because immigrant households are stretched across vast geographical distances, I have made an effort to spend time in those places that seem to compensate—at least in part—for the household relationships and activities that migration displaces and alters.

Context: North Carolina and US South

The interplay of regional commodity histories, place-based social histories, and regional racial dynamics has shaped particular federal policies and practices designed to assist powerful growers and grower organizations and to sustain and increase US farm production and profits. In the US South, the legacy of slavery, sharecropping, and reconstruction produced a highly distinct, agrarian social history that relied upon a reserve army of African Americans and poor whites as seasonal migrant and nonmigrant agricultural labor. The confluence of a number of macro- and microscale processes facilitated the rapid globalization of labor markets in the US South.

In the last two decades, the US South has been transformed by the rapid influx of foreign immigrants, the majority of whom are Latinos. Of the Latinos, a large proportion—about 75% in North Carolina—are Mexican, predominantly from the working class. Of course, the movement of Mexicans to the US South is part of a long and cyclical history of Mexican migration to the US.³ The specific racial dynamics of the US South, and the racialized division of labor in agriculture in particular, made the South the last region of the United States to be attractive and hospitable to Mexican migrants. A relatively strong

regional economy and state intervention in a guest-worker program (H2A), however, help to explain many contemporary changes in spatial divisions of labor and a corresponding “Latinization” of the region. The very rapid pace of change has created hardships for Latino immigrants and for certain communities that are caught up in these changes.

Racialized regional patterns of temporary labor supply in US agriculture remained in place for decades, only beginning to shift in the 1980s and 1990s. The structured coherence of agricultural production in the South (with the exception of Florida) is particularly notable: regional stability rested on a continued marginalization of black workers and poor whites, such that a large racialized reserve army of labor could be mobilized as needed (Harvey 1989).⁴ At the same time, white southern farmers also historically fought for and depended on the exclusion of foreign labor. Thus, while the geographical pattern of unevenness in the use of seasonal immigrant labor has been partially an ad hoc policy, federal intervention—and the varied responses to it—produced a pattern of labor supply that connected specific US regions to certain racialized labor groups for much of the last century. For instance, immigration policy was used to channel *nearby* sources of labor to specific limited areas of the country: Mexican immigrants worked in the Southwest, West Indians went to the east coast of Florida, and Canadians helped bring in the harvest in Maine, while the rest of the nation’s farmers had to rely on domestic sources of labor (Hahamovich 1997:96). Thus, in spite of a surge in Mexican immigration into the United States during World War I, the demographic impact was extremely uneven geographically.

The binational Bracero program mobilized and funneled similarly patterned flows of Mexican migration during World War II. Between 1942 and 1964, agribusiness played a decisive role in the administration of the Bracero program, which supplied Mexican workers to southwestern states, as well as to some growers in the Northwest and Midwest. While the Bracero program supplied Mexican labor, the H2 program, administered by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, has been used since 1943 to secure contract labor from the West Indies and Jamaica to work the sugar harvest in Florida and other specific crops up the East Coast. Even so, these immigrants had little opportunity to work in former plantation districts of the US South. In this way, distinct national groups were channeled into separate migratory streams in the western, central, or eastern parts of the country.

Regional patterns in agricultural labor have shifted dramatically in the last two decades. As part of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, the H2 program became the H2A program. During this same period, mechanization reduced the demand for Jamaican sugar workers, and the Mexican agricultural work force simultaneously expanded to become the largest group of H2A participants.

In particular, the federal H2A program expanded rapidly in North Carolina in the 1990s, bringing seasonal contract workers (“guest workers”) to a transport hub in Vass, North Carolina,⁵ where they could be matched with specific employers in North Carolina and eleven neighboring states. Under the program—aggressively promoted by Stan Eury, a former North Carolina Labor Department official—each farmer specifies the number of workers and length of time necessary for harvesting their crops. Farmers and workers each pay a fee up front in order to enter into a contract. By the tenth year of operation, some 40% of all H2A workers in the United States were disembarking in Vass (Smith-Nonini 2002). In Eury’s small warehouse, workers are regularly asked to throw away pamphlets describing their legal rights before receiving their work assignments and contracts (Hicks 2002; Human Rights Watch 2000; Smith-Nonini 2002). The rapid expansion of formal regulated labor markets (through H2A) has encouraged informal flows, so that in the last decade such industries as poultry-processing, Christmas-tree and wreath production, and other related agricultural activities, service industries such as entry-level hotel and restaurant work, and heavier jobs in construction and landscaping have quickly become reliant on Latino workers, whether Mexican, Guatemalan, or Honduran (Cravey 1997; Johnson-Webb 2000).

Social Reproduction in North Carolina

Analyzing social reproductive practices provides some insight into how and why these economic transformations driven by contemporary globalization processes proceeded so rapidly in the region. For instance, if we simply consider the social and economic cost of producing and raising children (who are ultimately destined to become laborers), we can see how guest workers provide a substantial subsidy to US employers *outside* the United States. No one has expressed this more clearly than Cindi Katz:

[T]he social reproduction of a migrant workforce is carried out in its members’ countries of origin. When they are employed elsewhere, this represents a direct transfer of wealth from generally poorer to richer countries. Variable capital produced in one site and tapped in another is no less a capital transfer than the extraction of raw materials, debt servicing, and the like.” (Katz 2001:710)

In this way—via this direct transfer—massive flows of both formal and informal migration lower the cost of labor in the US South. In both cases, migrants find themselves stretching their household and family relationships across vast geographical distances. Social reproduction occurs mostly (though not entirely) at the sending end of stretched community and household relationships, while more formal economic

production occurs mostly at the receiving end. Quite literally living in two or more places at once, migrants find creative ways over time to sustain themselves and their families.

Ranulfo's confident hands carefully and quickly pick through a mountain of fresh green jalapeño chiles while he fills a shopping bag at the rural flea market near the Buckhorn Jockey exit of Interstate 85. Without pausing, he moves along in the early morning light to gather nopales and select sugar cane from the bountiful displays at the weekend *pulga*. The hum of low voices and the straining of wooden crates being unloaded signal the steady flow of commerce. Ranulfo's gaze leads him forward in a deliberate fashion as he searches for the best produce for Chilango's clientele.

Heaps of tortillas and *limones* are displayed for those who come for serious shopping; others come to stroll with their families, or to show off their newly painted ride with the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe on the van's wheel cover. Everyone is on the move this crisp market morning.

Back in the city, the procession at the church is moving along too, yet at a slower pace. Individual voices fade in and out of range as they pass by with reverential expressions. Priests, lay workers, altar boys, mariachis, and finally the members of the flock wind their way along the path. The faithful sing "*Adiós la alegría, adios hermana mía, adiós, adiós, adiós*" and carry candles. Two men lead the way out of doors into the crisp December air carrying a six-foot tall image of the Virgen de Guadalupe in an ornate gilt frame. Later on, back inside the warmth of the church, a peasant's vision of the Virgen is re-enacted as participatory theater. The virgin reappears on a very large cloth that is folded out from one man's clothing as others crowd around him and proclaim "*[L]a santísima virgen—que buena es la santísima virgen ...*"⁶

In some ways, stretched relationships of Mexican communities and households compensate—or temporarily compensate—for the spatial disconnect between globalized labor markets and less-globalized networks of social reproduction. In other ways, Latino migrants creatively find and appropriate new spaces of social reproduction in North Carolina and other southern states. As the vast majority of these migrants are men, it is interesting to see the ways in which gender shapes these processes. The evolution of a fairly new Mexican neighborhood illuminates how some of these gendered and national identity dynamics play out.

On the edge of Carrboro, large numbers of Mexican men have moved into a cluster of apartment complexes. A traffic intersection with a mini-market, laundromat, and restaurant/bar serves as the hub of the community. In particular, the restaurant/bar—Chilango's—has been appropriated as Mexican space and becomes more intensely Mexican on certain nights, and even from moment to moment, with specific

types of music or a certain mix of clients. The owner of Chilango's⁷ wanted to serve good Mexican food when he first established the restaurant in this relatively low-rent area. At the same time, he made an effort to provide a space for cultural exchange and talked of forming a nonprofit community-center organization.⁸ He set up work-notification bulletin boards near the front entrance of the building and offered regularly scheduled language classes in both English and Spanish, as well as Latin dance lessons and music. To promote other types of cultural exchange with non-Latinos, he devotes one night each week to live, "old-timey" fiddle and banjo music.

Bright red and black splashes of movement are perfectly synchronized with each other and with a challenging rhythm. The woman's faultless body is encased in a sexy, red-fringed sparkling miniskirt and red bra, while the man is all in black. The drama of their movement is heightened by the completely still moments that punctuate their dancing as they reverse directions and spin and gyrate in precise harmony. The spiky gold lamé heels accentuate the woman's shapely legs and draw admiring stares from the hundreds crowded inside the high school auditorium for Fiesta del Pueblo. At the outdoor stage a few paces from the auditorium, the music blares: "*Suave, suave, suavement ... un beso es lo que quiero ...*," while many more couples of all ages dance. Baseball caps shade a few brown faces of various tones, and one man has a big gold cross around his neck. Other dancers have extremely light and very dark complexions. Anglo bodies are sprinkled among the mostly Latino crowd. The tiniest of children are dancing with intricate steps and keeping up with the music.

La Fiesta has something for everyone, and those who want to bring along something different just do so. Guys who like cars are checking out each other's hydraulic systems, which lift a car several additional inches off the road. One car that is going up and down and up and down and up and down is bright yellow. The entire hood has been painted with a big design that says "*Que bonita es mi raza.*" Another car has a Mexican flag, while yet another car is opening up to show the levers and the hydraulic containers that make these movements possible. Two guys watching the demonstration have identical t-shirts that say "Delinquentz Car Club" across the back.

A great proportion of Chilango's clientele are Mexican men who work at low-paying menial jobs. Many live in one of the large apartment complexes at the same intersection or just down the road. Most live in crowded apartments with other men. Entering a typical apartment, one immediately sees photos from home tacked onto the wall, next to a list of domestic tasks such as "Thursday, Jose'[s day for] cleaning the floor in the bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, and living room, Alonso's day for cooking. Cable must be paid on the 15th." The arrangements tend to be fluid and variable, and many migrants suggest that

they have learned to adapt to roommate situations that are constantly in flux. Profound changes in the gender division of domestic labor, however, are typical, because of the shortage of women to do tasks that are considered “women’s work.” It is also not uncommon for some men to become adept at “owning” apartments and renting out space to others. In another apartment that I have visited many times, Guadalupe has been renting out space for four years in a “two-bedroom apartment” (really one bedroom and a living room). He himself has very stable employment and good English-language skills, and is able to profit by skillfully managing many details that newcomers find perplexing. For most of the past year, he has had five or six men living in his apartment.

While such makeshift households replace some of the functions of Mexican households, and other functions are stretched through regular remittances, frequent phone calls, and circulation patterns, still other activities spill into the public areas of apartment complexes, cultural centers, and such convenient public places as Chilango’s. These new spaces become the sites of creative expression, interchange, and identity formation. Drinking and dancing at Chilango’s, for example, is of major importance to many nearby residents. According to Rafael, “I think about the music and dancing everyday at work and it helps me get through the week” (interview, 2001). Because the clientele is largely Mexican, the restaurant always feels very Mexican, although on certain nights, because the mix of people and types of music played varies considerably from night to night, it can become more or less so. Even in the course of a single night, with music such as *ranchera* music, it can become more intensely Mexican, with men racing around the room to compete for the limited number of female dance partners and with Valentine and other regular Chilango clients accompanying the music with loud *gritos*, or shouts.

Chilango’s is part of an expanding dance/music scene in central North Carolina. Migrants who have transportation might begin the weekend at Chilango’s and go to another club later in the evening. As Jose says: “If nobody shows up or if the Hondurans show up [meaning too many Hondurans], we can always go somewhere else” (interview, 2002). While a mix of nationalities shows up at almost all of the many dance places in the region, audiences range from nearly exclusively Mexican to one near the Research Triangle Park that is very Latino yet, at the same time, decidedly non-Mexican (and quite middle class). The gender balance is much more equal at such “non-Mexican,” more international clubs. Based on my observations, Mexican migrants are relentlessly creative in claiming and policing Mexican spaces. While this may sound to some like an innocent few hours on the dance floor, I suggest that in these moments of leisure, national identities are intensely challenged, contested, affirmed, reinscribed. At the same time,

race, gender, and class aspects of identity are negotiated in the subtle and not-so-subtle rituals of dancing, drinking, fighting, and courtship. Gender dynamics seem particularly fluid in a situation in which a shortage of Spanish-speaking women is reinforced through state practices and policies. In this vacuum, various groups of women emerge and are recruited to each dance hall, bar, and club, creating situations similar, in some ways, to wartime dating rituals (Cooper 1996; Howard 2001; Rose 1997).

At El Toro's, for instance, a bar with live music in nearby Durham, there is a persistent shortage of women. This is true even on Fridays, when women are admitted free. The clientele is mostly Mexican men in their 20s and 30s. The majority of women are Anglo women from Durham's eastside working-class neighborhoods. The scene is one of extremes: some women are exceptionally overweight, while others are 15–20 years older than their dancing partners. A few Mexican women and a few Black women are usually there. In addition, some gay men and transvestites attend. Thus, while Mexican men at El Toro are faced with a shortage of Mexican dance partners, they have a wide range of others to choose from. The dance floor is the site of transnational romance, as well as the site of frequent conflict. Insults and shoving quickly escalate to violent displays. Such fights tend to be quickly contained by police and security guards, although one night I witnessed a brawl that swept up much of the crowd and continued for several minutes. At the height of the *mêlée*, the bartender whacked the surface of the bar with a large baseball bat, but no one really paid much attention to her. Likewise, it seems few patrons are concerned about rule number 4 on El Toro's list of rules⁹:

1. No spitting on the floor.
2. Neat dress.
3. Put trash in wastebasket.
4. No fussing and fighting:

First offense: 30-day suspension. Second offense: 60 days. Third offense: permanent suspension.

During the daytime—especially the early morning hours—the space in front of Chilango's becomes a bustling informal labor market where Mexican men gather and wait for trucks to arrive with offers of both skilled and unskilled work. Many *patrones* or *patronas*—usually English-speaking—pull up near the densely packed clusters of men and announce that they need a certain number of workers for a certain amount of hours. Sometimes the boss will specify a skill, such as drywall finishing. The motivating element for the men seeking work, however, is the wage. A boss who offers US\$8 will be able to hire workers quickly, whereas another who offers only \$7 may have to

stand and haggle for a while before finding someone who is willing to get in the truck and go wherever the job may be.

Lalo Quintero, a recent, undocumented migrant worker from Morelos, Mexico, told me that he was able to get work at the Chilango intersection the very first weekday he was in North Carolina. He added that he was careful to separate himself a bit from the crowd so that he could approach vehicles as they stopped and ensure that he had a good chance to be selected for employment. "When I stand at some distance from the crowd, I can move quickly" (interview, 2002). Another strategy that worked for Lalo was to arrive very early, around 6:30 am, so that he would not miss any opportunities. In fact on some occasions, Lalo returned from one job in time to get a second one. When I suggested to Lalo that he was hard-working, he confided that he was anxious to pay off the costs of his illegal international passage so that he could begin earning his own money. A month before, he had been deported from South Texas and forced to forfeit his savings in the process of trying to cross into the United States. Stranded at the international border with no possessions and little cash, he desperately placed calls to family members and close personal friends to see if he could salvage his plans. As it turned out, two former employees of Lalo's (who also happened to be brother and sister) offered to fix him up with a trusted coyote¹⁰ and pay \$1500 for his passage to North Carolina. To make this connection, Lalo had to travel west along much of the 2000-mile-long US-Mexico border. From his new location, he proceeded with a group that walked for three days and nights in the dangerously rugged desert area of western Arizona.¹¹

Rosario, one of Lalo's North Carolina sponsors, said that she wanted to help Lalo because he had been a good friend to her and to her family in her hometown in Morelos. "I was working for Lalo when I first decided to go and harvest crops in California—he bought me a pair of shoes for the trip." After reflecting a couple minutes, Rosario added, "We've known Lalo since we were little kids" (interview, 2002). She explained that lending a helping hand involved a lot of late-night calls to arrange the details, trips across town to wire money to Lalo and to the coyote, and some anxious nights awaiting the delayed arrival of the "freight-handlers" in Carrboro. Rosario and her brother made the final payment to the coyote when he delivered Lalo to a shopping plaza a few blocks from Chilango's. Rosario, her brother, and a few friends celebrated Lalo's safe arrival with a case of Bud Light and tales of the North Carolina work scene. As a visitor at Rosario's place that evening, I enjoyed a very special festive atmosphere that had been created by the combination of relief over Lalo's safe arrival and the joy of being with a friend from home. Everyone was talking at once and keen to give Lalo advice about the local labor market. A common sentiment—expressed in a variety of ways—was that Lalo should say

that he had whatever skills the boss needed. Rosario thought Lalo's best opportunities would be in restaurants or grocery stores, while her brother, who had also helped to sponsor Lalo, insisted that the wages were much higher at the informal labor exchange at the Chilango's corner.

Lalo is an example of someone who has temporarily given up a successful career in Mexico to work in "whatever comes along." He managed a small fresh vegetable and fruit stand for 19 years in Morelos. Many factors will influence Lalo's ability to stay in the United States as an undocumented worker for an extended period of time but—at least at this moment in time—stay is exactly what he intends to do. He wants to provide a good living for two children who are still in school and to save enough to bring his girlfriend across the international line. While his own parents had no previous experience in the United States. Lalo knew that Rosario's father (also a close friend and neighbor of Lalo's) earned a considerable amount of money picking cotton as a *bracero*¹² in Pecos, Texas in the early 1950s. He had seen first-hand that this income had helped Rosario's father improve his land and harvest in Morelos. In more recent years, Lalo had gotten regular reports from Rosario's family of the success that she and her brothers were enjoying. "I had some other friends from home who are working in California and Nevada," he says "but I'm glad things worked out so that I could come to North Carolina" (interview, 2002). Many immigrants use social networks and personal knowledge of the previous generation to guide their decisions about whether and where to migrate. Thus, while communities in Mexico lower the socially necessary labor time—and thus the cost—of future migrant workers, the experience of an older generation inspires some to travel north and work in the United States.

The space in front of Chilango's is also a site of much commerce. Available goods include steaming fresh tamales at the bus stop, a selection of international telephone calling cards at Teresa's apartment door, and haircuts at Margarita's. On the street itself, one can ask for and purchase illicit drugs, stolen jewelry, and stolen brand-name clothing at most times of the day or night. Every now and then, a prostitute or group of prostitutes seeks clients by strolling along in front of the gas station and convenience store. One of the most popular sites of commerce is a makeshift weekend restaurant in a two-bedroom apartment near the bus stop. While there are usually only two or three items available at any given time, the food is so good and so reasonable that people line up to sit at the single table available or on couches in the living room of the apartment. Of course, some clients ask for a carryout and take their food home. Sunday mornings are especially competitive, because the mother and daughter who run this business always prepare *pancita* (a tripe stew, also known as *menudo*) and it goes quickly. Marta, the mother, told me that this business is

thriving because they always use fresh ingredients and cook as if they were cooking for themselves. “We enjoy getting the kitchen organized so that we can feed a lot of people each week” (interview, 2002). In the course of two years, Marta has been able to finance the expense of bringing much of her extended family to North Carolina. “When we combine our earnings [from the restaurant] with my husband’s and my son’s salary, we can save quite a bit each week” (interview, 2002). They continue to live in the same apartment that they use as a restaurant, but in the past year, as the family has expanded to include five more individuals, they have rented a second apartment that faces their own. Marta’s grandchildren circulate between the two apartments during business hours.

Blond hair spins around the dancer in the skin-tight snakeskin blue blouse, while the black man who is her partner reveals a perfectly sculpted chest underneath his cut-away t-shirt. They have the full attention of La Fiesta’s audience. One guy brought his lizard and carries him along on his shoulder. Couples are crowded onto the makeshift dancing area of the high school parking lot.

The *cumbia* contest at La Marakas draws a slightly more homogenous crowd. Most of the couples are young Latinos. Those who want to compete have numbers taped to their backs. They spin around under the disco lights while the crowd sips beer at one of many bar tables encircling the generous dance floor. When a few couples advance to the final round of the competition, some—including one woman in black boots and a black miniskirt—appear tired from the strenuous dancing.

The DJ at El Chilango’s announces that he wants to play something special for those from Mexico this evening. He flips through his massive collection of CDs to pull out a *ranchera*, and people spring to their feet and head toward the cozy dance floor. After the dance, the DJ announces that a live group will be playing tomorrow. The band is free, he insists, and the *cervezas* will be *bien frías*.

As couples dance to *rancheras*, *cumbias*, *bachatas*, Guatemalan animal masks stare down from the walls at the densely packed crowd. Many regular customers live nearby and know most of the others who are here. The hairnet gang guy has earrings and a snake tattoo on the back of his neck, yet he sits calmly with some very young friends who are intently watching the dancers. A Ricky Martin look-alike is dancing with a heavy-set Anglo schoolteacher who wears glasses. Another Mexican man with a “Tar Heels” T-shirt dances with a woman in a cutaway red blouse. The music throbs relentlessly and bodies twist and turn on the small dance floor. People’s relaxed expressions burst into hilarity from time to time.

The ancient masks on the wall compete with bright neon beer signs: the yellow Corona bottle stands beside a green palm tree and a blue

ocean wave, while the Dos Equis symbol is a bright red double XX. TECATE is displayed in capital letters on a white neon map of Mexico.

One of the men drinking in the bar has the Virgen de Guadalupe on the back of his T-shirt. This Virgen has the Mexican flag on one side and the US flag on the other. Many Latino men are dancing with Anglo women. Several guys don't even bother to come in—they stand in the parking lot outside and watch the festivities from the front window. Quite a few women are taller than their partners, some are noticeable older, while yet a few others are rather heavy, or have features that might cause them to be considered unattractive in other contexts.

Translocal Lives, Transnational Ways of Living

Latino migrants in the South typically maintain familial ties through techniques such as remittances, frequent phone calls, and return visits. For many migrants and migrant communities, these techniques become a way of living in more than one place at a time, or of living translocally. At the same time, migrants must form some kind of household arrangement in order to meet immediate daily needs. For recent migrants to the US South, these makeshift households often involve a profound transformation of gender divisions of labor in housework. While such household arrangements may be temporary for some, they can also be a source of long-term profit for others, such as Guadalupe, mentioned above.

Likewise, through transnational migration, Mexican men can improve their wages tenfold in many economic sectors. The more modest claim often heard in North Carolina is that one can make the same amount here in a single day that one can make at home in a week. Such an extreme wage gap is a powerful incentive that overrides many risks and hardships. The extent of the wage gap also fuels cultural stereotypes that newcomers are “hard-working,” while the previous employees (and the domestic cultural groups with which they identify) are “lazy” (Hicks 2002; Johnson-Webb 2000; Rosenberg 2002). In these popular assessments, the ways in which Latinos hold personal costs to a minimum and the way in which immigration and labor policies lower the costs of social reproduction are ignored. The degree to which domestic employers and the US economy have come to rely on globalized flow of labor is also neglected. Tracing these transnational human pathways, with particular attention to the rate of exploitation (ie, the ratio of surplus labor to socially necessary labor time), is one way to illuminate the personal impact of these globalized jobs. Even so, such calculations miss crucially important factors such as unhealthy working conditions, the degree of control over the work situation, and the extent to which household and other undervalued forms of labor may be subsidizing wages (Cravey 1998).

Along with the stretching of household/family/community relationships, creative approaches to microscale social reproduction facilitate the globalization of labor markets. This process is quite complex, and the gender dynamics within households, workplaces, dancehalls and along immigration pathways only make it more so. Gendered divisions of labor in Carrboro's Latino households are profoundly distinct from those in most households in Mexico or North Carolina. While these households are often organized in temporary and experimental ways, this very flexibility and fluidity in gender systems and household dynamics has benefited North Carolina employers, while simultaneously propelling wider economic and cultural transformations.

Cultural change is perhaps the most disorienting angle of view on transnational migration in the South. On the one hand, state policies and practices are reinscribing race in the region through labor-importation programs and selective enforcement of immigration policies. Recruitment of foreign workers is carefully balanced with subtle and overt efforts to criminalize the same people that are recruited. In addition, difference is being actively produced in workplaces and places of leisure. The advantage of exploring cultural difference in dancehalls and public places is perhaps that the creative potential of migrants is so palpable. Various national groups of Latinos compete, date, fight, fall in love, negotiate, and dance seductively with each other and with US Anglos and Blacks. If we want to understand globalizing labor markets in North Carolina, we must learn more about processes of social reproduction on the dance floor, at the *pulga* (flea market), and in temporary and stretched households.

Conclusion

[I]n the course of this activity, i.e. labour, a definite quantity of human muscle, nerve, brain, etc. is expended, and these things have to be replaced. Since more is expended, more must be received. If the owner of labour-power works today, tomorrow he must again be able to repeat the same process in the same conditions as regards health and strength. His means of subsistence must therefore be sufficient to maintain him in his normal state as a working individual. His natural needs, such as food, clothing, fuel, and housing, vary according to the climatic and other physical peculiarities of his country. On the other hand, the number and extent of his so-called necessary requirements, as also the manner in which they are satisfied, are themselves products of history, and depend therefore to a great extent on the level of civilization attained by a county; in particular they depend on the conditions in which, and consequently on the habits and expectations with which the class of free workers has been formed. In contrast therefore, with the case of other commodities, the determination of the value of labour-power contains a historical and moral element. (Marx 1990:275)

As Marx suggests, the value of labor power—and thus, the value of the peculiar commodity that is a human worker—is highly contingent on historical and geographical context. Social reproduction of quantities of “muscle, nerve, [and] brain” occurs in discrete households and other sites where workers are fed, nurtured, and educated. Thus, examining the geography and dynamics of social reproduction provides insight into globalization processes such as transnational labor markets and transnational identity formation. When we consider the social reproduction of transnational migrants in the US South, it is clear that these migrants provide several subsidies to capital: a generational subsidy, a daily or short-term subsidy, and racialized workplace practices and wages. As Katz suggests in the quote cited above, workers produced at lower cost elsewhere provide a substantial savings to employers’ contexts such as the United States. In the situation examined here, this spatial arrangement—between US employers and Mexican employees—has a long history. Lalo and Rosario followed the example of Rosario’s father, who had worked in US cotton harvests. Thus, not only is Rosario’s labor power subsidized by having been produced elsewhere, but also, in her family and in her community, transnational incomes are becoming increasingly necessary for survival. A strong, healthy worker’s body is capable of traveling these circuits and taking these risks. Other family members—especially the infirm and the young, and oftentimes women—find that the hazards of international migration outweigh the possible benefits (Nevins 2002).

A subsidy to capital is also provided through the circuits of daily and short-term social reproduction. This happens in a variety of ways. The various creative approaches that transnational migrants have for daily survival are central to this process. For instance, the extremely crowded conditions in apartments and other households allow transnational migrants to trim expenses and live cheaply. The novel ways in which they organize labor within these households likewise allow them to cut certain costs and to hold other costs below the norm for nonmigrants living in North Carolina. More interestingly and more importantly, the very fact of transnationality lowers the cost of “socially necessary labor time,” because social needs and expectations are shaped partly—in many regards, almost totally—by distinct national and local contexts and norms. Thus, when one’s neighbors back in Guanajuato are surviving on one-tenth the wage, the socially necessary labor time of the transnational migrant from Guanajuato is considerably lower than for those with whom he may work in North Carolina.

Another key issue to emerge from examining these spaces of social reproduction is the creative potential of transnational identities themselves. One can glimpse new ways of living and interacting in these transnational spaces of social reproduction. Pan-American exchanges occur, while transnationality constantly calls up place identity such as

nationalism and other place-based identifications in an endless swirl of unexpected encounters. New spaces that can be claimed or appropriated are essential to this way of life. Thus, as Hardt and Negri (2001:397) suggest, the pathways of transnational migrants “often cost terrible suffering, but there is also in them a desire for liberation that is not satiated except by reappropriating new spaces, around which are constructed new freedoms.”

Acknowledgments

I want to thank Allen Feinberg for his encouragement and Elva Bishop for the video images of *Carolina del Norte*. I am also grateful to Michael Petit, Sallie Marston, and three anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments on an earlier draft of the paper.

Endnotes

¹ “Play a ranchera [song], please.”

² Carrboro is a former textile town that abuts the college town of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Both Carrboro and Chapel Hill are part of the Research Triangle metropolitan area and enjoyed the extremely low unemployment rates in the Triangle area in the 1990s.

³ It is important to remember that Mexicans “have lived ‘here’ since before there was a Mexico or a United States. And they have been immigrating to this country almost from its inception. Since 1820, when the federal government began keeping immigration records, only one other country, Germany, has sent more immigrants to our shores” (Gonzalez 2000:96).

⁴ While the idea of a structured coherence originated with the notion of a balance of power at the urban scale, such a conceptualization is also useful in understanding the way in which regional power dynamics remained relatively static for decades in the US South, particularly when seen from the angle of rural labor markets.

⁵ Vass is in central North Carolina, approximately 50 minutes south of Carrboro.

⁶ I am grateful to Elva Bishop for the video images of cultural transformation in North Carolina upon which these descriptions are based.

⁷ *Chilango* denotes a person from Mexico City. In some contexts, the term is used derogatively. There is even a popular saying reflecting provincial resentment toward urban Mexicans: “*Haz patria, mata un chilango*” (Be patriotic, kill a chilango).

⁸ The owner has transnational claims of his own: he is of French ancestry and has lived many years in France, Mexico, and the United States.

⁹ Rules are posted in English and in Spanish in prominent locations.

¹⁰ A person who smuggles Mexicans into the United States.

¹¹ Such high-risk desert crossings are increasingly common, due to heightened surveillance in urban portions of the international boundary (Nevins 2002).

¹² The *bracero* program brought Mexican workers to the United States, beginning during World War II and ending in 1964.

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