

## **Latino Migration and Neoliberalism in the Rural South:**

### **Notes Toward a Rural Cosmopolitanism**

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This paper examines the relationship between the discourses of neoliberalism and understandings of Latino migration in the rural US South. As a set of economic policies, neoliberalism has provided the framework for the rapid globalization of rural areas and recent increases in Latino migration. At the same time, however, neoliberal discourse depoliticizes economic decision-making and promotes an ethical individualism that narrows the ambit of responsibility toward those same migrants. In opposition to such thinking, I explore the possibilities of a rural cosmopolitanism, which would expand a sense of obligation and mutual regard, and thereby promote a wider net of ethical responsibility.

Key Words: neoliberalism, Latino migration, ethics, cosmopolitanism, rural South

It is now widely noted that the US South has witnessed a dramatic demographic transformation over the past two decades. The most salient dimension of this change has been what Raymond Mohl (2003) has called the ‘Latinization’ of the region, resulting chiefly from an increase in Latino, and particularly Mexican, immigration. For residents and communities of this ‘Nuevo South’, both new and old, this has entailed coming to terms with a host of changes that have altered everything from labor markets and social institutions to interpersonal interactions and the performance of cultural identity. Across the region, from the largest urban centers to more remote locales, the nature of lived

experience and the meaning of Southern identity are being redefined by the dynamics of globalization and transnational mobility.

This process poses a particular challenge in many of the South's rural communities, some of which have seen their Latino populations grow by 1000 percent or more over the course of a decade. Rural areas often have little experience dealing with ethnic or linguistic diversity, and many are hampered by stubborn legacies of poverty, inequality and economic stagnation. In many areas, this has led to a deep sense of disquiet over the increasing presence of 'others' within the community. As the debates about immigration become more contentious, it is perhaps fair to say that this is an auspicious moment for considering this change, as well as the prospects for expanding the scope of responsibility and regard to include these new Southerners.

My argument in what follows is that an assessment of these prospects requires an engagement with the discourse of neoliberalism, which has generally served as the guiding political and economic ethos within American society since the 1980s. It is no coincidence that this time span corresponds with the increase in Latino migration; neoliberal notions of free trade, culminating in the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, lie behind the economic restructuring and regional integration that have fueled immigration (Delgado-Wise and Covarrubias 2007). Less often noted, but just as significant, is the fact that neoliberalism has also helped to frame the social and cultural interpretations of Latino transnational migration. One of neoliberalism's defining features, I will suggest, has been to instill an increasingly narrow and individualized sense of responsibility and ethical agency. The result is that, even while neoliberal globalization is increasing and intensifying the webs of connection between peoples and places, a prevailing neoliberal ethos constrains the ability to develop and use such networks as a basis for developing an ethos of engagement and inclusion when it comes to migration.

In what follows, then, I examine how neoliberalism has shaped rural Latino transnationalism in the US South, and argue for an alternative approach that would work against some of the more atomistic tendencies of neoliberal discourse. I begin by sketching some of the features of neoliberal ideology and its reception in the South. Key to this discussion is what I view as a contradiction, between a naturalized and

depoliticized view of economic globalization, and a highly politicized view of cultural globalization based in a narrowed sense of responsibility and an ethos of individualism. In the second half of the paper, I suggest an alternative, more expanded vision of rural social space, one that may be capable of engendering a greater sense of regard toward different and distant others. In particular, I explore how the lives and subjectivities of migrants themselves might offer conceptual resources for cultivating a more relational sense of identity, place and responsibility.

My observations are somewhat speculative in nature, but they are shaped by an on-going empirical research project examining Latino transnational migration into rural North Carolina, a region that has witnessed a dramatic increase in its Latino population in recent years and which in many ways typifies the larger shift toward rural Southern destinations within US migration streams over the past decade. Although many long-time residents have reacted to this change with a sense of openness and generosity, I have also witnessed a growing sense of disquiet, and even anger, over the recent social and cultural transformation of the region. My purpose here is to examine the context for such reactions, and to suggest some of the theoretical resources that might be brought to bear in trying to develop alternatives.

#### THE TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF THE RURAL SOUTH

Nearly a quarter-century ago, the Southern Growth Policies Board established a ‘Commission on the Future of the South’. The Commission, chaired by then-Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, was tasked with issuing recommendations that would “increase the per capita income, reduce poverty, and reduce unemployment for Southerners” (Southern Growth Policies Board 1986, 4). The Commission’s report, *Halfway Home and a Long Way to Go*, placed a significant emphasis on the ways in which the forces of economic globalization were reshaping the contours of the ‘new South’:

Moving forward from these crossroads in 1986 requires knowledge of a world atlas as well as a road map. Few Southerners can grasp how rapidly the Mason-Dixon line has been effaced by lines of latitude and longitude extending outward from the South around the globe, the way water ripples used to spread across the

old swimming hole ... these challenges have produced a brand new form of interdependence which requires the South to think regionally and globally at the same time (Southern Growth Policies Board 1986, 8).

If the commission recognized the South's changing economic geographies, however, the region's shifting *social* geographies were not yet evident: within the discussions of varied topics such as education and workplace training, there was no mention of immigration.

Much has changed in the intervening years. Today, any assessment of the 'future of the South' would almost certainly acknowledge that the globalization of the economy has now been accompanied by an attendant globalization of the South's population; that the South's interdependence arises not only from networks of economic production and exchange, but also through new forms of transnational social relations and the globalization of cultural identities. Although this process has taken many different forms, the most salient transformation has resulted from the growth of Latino immigration and settlement in the region. The numbers are by now familiar: between 1990 and 2006, the South's Latino population increased more than fourfold, growing from around 580,000 to more than 2.6 million (Odem and Lacy, 2009). Anywhere from a third to one-half of these migrants are estimated to be undocumented (Passel 2005). Most were drawn here, despite the considerable hardship and risks involved, by a combination of dwindling prospects back home and the ready availability of income-earning opportunities within the South's restless economy (Mohl 2003). Many of these opportunities have presented themselves in the South's rural areas, where Latinos have been welcomed as agricultural labor, and as workers in a host of rural industries, ranging from hog and poultry processing to carpet-making (Lichter and Johnson 2006). As a result, much of the rural South is undergoing a quite visible and dramatic demographic change (Kandel 2005).

This is certainly true of Eastern North Carolina, a largely agricultural region characterized by persistent poverty and a declining manufacturing base. The region forms a part of the so-called Southern Black belt, and African-American residents account for around 30 percent of the region's population, as well as a disproportionate share of those living in poverty (North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center 2004). As in other areas of the rural South, this racial context has shaped the labor

markets, residential patterns, and cultural negotiations that have formed a part of the migration experience in North Carolina (Marrow 2008; Smith 2009; Stuesse 2009).

The Latino population in Eastern North Carolina has increased notably over the past 15 years, and now accounts for more than 15 percent of the population in some counties. Previous research suggests that most of these new arrivals are Mexican, and that the majority are foreign-born (Torres, et al. 2006). More than half arrived directly from Mexico, by-passing traditional gateway states such as California and Texas. Many Latinos initially found their way to North Carolina as farmworkers, assisting on hog farms or picking tobacco, cucumbers and sweet potatoes as part of a seasonal migration up and down the east coast (Griffith 2005). More recent settlement has included a larger proportion of families, and an expanded labor market that now includes turkey and hog processors, landscaping and horticulture, construction, and the service sector. As a result, the rural countryside has become dotted with isolated clusters of Latino-owned trailer homes, and the visible markers of Latino life: Mexican *tiendas*, small taquerias, and the presence of Spanish on billboards and church marquees.

Like much of the US South, then, Eastern North Carolina has undergone a process of transnationalization, in the sense that the region's social relations, familial ties, and political-economic processes all increasingly stretch across territorial borders and jurisdictions. Importantly, this transnationalization of rural space is experienced not only by migrants, but also by locals, who are now situated within an expanding network of transborder connections, and increasingly entangled with the lives and livelihoods of distant others. As Jackson, et al. put it, "increasing numbers of people participate in transnational space, *irrespective of their own migrant histories or 'ethnic' identities*" (Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer 2004, italics original). For longtime residents, this has brought about qualitative changes in the everyday experience of rural space, and in the performance of rural identities.

Local reaction to the first wave of Latino immigrants was generally one of accommodation (Torres et al. 2006). More recently, however, the picture has begun to look less rosy. Throughout the South, nervous residents, and not a few opportunist politicians, have begun to express anxieties about the growing presence of Latinos, and many communities have become considerably less hospitable toward their new neighbors

(McClain 2006; Winders 2007; Lacy and Odem 2009). Letters to the editor proclaim that “most citizens of North Carolina are very concerned about the quality of life deteriorating because of illegal immigration” (Weintraub 2006). Illegal aliens will “ruin our neighborhoods” (Graves 2007) and lead to “a weakening of the values that once underlay the American order” (Cariello 2006), such that “the U.S. will not survive, in recognizable form” (Shuford 2006).

Such sentiments are not, of course, universal, but they may be taken as symptoms of a sense of disquiet about the changing character of social space, which calls into question long-held collective sensibilities. As Edensor puts it, “emerging out of globalization, the proliferation of multiple, simultaneous enactions on rural stages ... means that people constantly confront other actors and practices which may contradict and challenge cherished, embodied and unreflective ways of doing things” (Edensor 2006, 493).

These everyday challenges to taken-for-granted understandings have no predetermined outcome; such encounters are equally capable of producing moments of generosity and mutual regard as they are of fomenting defensive postures and hostile dispositions. In order to promote the former, and dissuade the latter, it will be important to consider how these new interactions are given meaning. In what follows, then, I offer some thoughts on the discursive context for Latino immigration in the rural South. My interest is to consider how the social and moral geographies associated with neoliberalism have shaped conventional understandings of transnationalization. Highlighting the contradictions inherent in neoliberalism, I want to suggest, may open up space for reimagining transnational mobility in ways that may be conducive to a wider sense of engagement, justice and responsibility.

## NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION IN THE SOUTH

Most commentators on neoliberalism agree that one of its chief characteristics is a belief in the efficacy of markets, export-oriented manufacturing, and a liberalized trade regime in bringing about the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The roots of this model are complex, but its deployment in practice has been a result of

technological change (which facilitated the spread of multinational corporations); declining productivity in the rich countries (which prompted a search for both new markets and lower-cost production sites); and the so-called Third World debt crisis (which provided a vehicle for exporting the model around the world). The resulting form of globalization, managed by multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization, has come to be called the “Washington Consensus.” It is characterized by a common set of policy prescriptions, such as tight monetary policy and fiscal restraint, the privatization of public sector goods and services, and the creation of a ‘business-friendly’ environment to attract mobile capital investment.

Within the United States, these discourses of market competition and liberalization have played particularly well in the South, where low tax rates, cheap labor, and a push to open foreign markets are all part of an economic legacy extending back to the Civil War era (MacLean 2008). These policies, combined with an antipathy toward labor unions, would later help to spur a post-World War II expansion of Southern manufacturing, as firms relocated from the North in search of lower costs. Thus, as Donald Nonini argues, “the South historically may have led in constructing, and its elites certainly anticipated and led in creating, the design of the features of the neoliberal political and economic order that currently prevails more widely in the United States” (Nonini 2005, 256).

Over the past 30 years or so, the ascendancy of neoliberal economic policy has further reshaped the Southern economy. Although some areas have been successful in developing service-based economies or in luring new manufacturing facilities attracted by a combination of fiscal incentives and a low cost of doing business, these same imperatives have resulted in the relocation overseas of thousands of jobs in traditional industries (MDC, Inc. 2000). In North Carolina, deregulation and trade liberalization help to account for significant declines in the state’s traditional sources of employment, particularly textiles and apparel, furniture, tobacco, and agriculture (Walden 2008). This restructuring has hit rural areas particularly hard. The number of rural North Carolinians living in poverty increased by nearly 50,000 during the 1990s, and rural unemployment remains significantly higher, and incomes significantly lower, than in the state’s urban areas. (North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center 2004).

Meanwhile, North Carolina's low taxes, generous fiscal incentives, and the lowest unionization rate in the country have made it the nation's 'top business climate' for the fourth year in a row, according to *Site Selection Magazine* (Arend 2008). Overall, Southern states account for 7 of the top 10 most favorable climates. Per capita incomes in the South, meanwhile, continue to lag behind the rest of the nation (with Virginia the only exception) (MDC, Inc. 2007). Thus, as Smith and Winders aptly note (2007, 62):

features that once made the South 'backward'—cheap labor divided along racial lines, weak unions challenges by powerful paternalisms and vulnerable communities driven to secure investment at any costs—now position it at the vanguard of neoliberal globalization and flexible labour.

Increasingly, of course, this 'flexible' labor is supplied by transnational migrants, many of whom have suffered the consequences of neoliberal restructuring back home as well. In Mexico, for example, successive rounds of neoliberal globalization have resulted in the debt crisis of the 1980s, the peso devaluation of the early 1990s, and the increasing withdrawal of the state from important sectors of the economy and society. In the Mexican countryside, competition from cheap US agricultural imports, combined with the progressive dismantling of agricultural support programs, has spurred increased streams of migration northward:

As if the culmination of a diabolical plan ... neoliberalism has produced an apparent complementarity of interests between poor countries with unambiguous labour surpluses created, exacerbated and transformed under neoliberal reforms, and wealthy ones with sectoral labour deficits, especially in low-waged, unskilled and semi-skilled occupations (Binford 2009, 504).

The result is a cheap and compliant labor force, whose reproduction is subsidized by cross-border networks of familial support (Cravey 2003).



## THE DISCOURSES OF NEOLIBERALISM

In a certain sense, there is little that is really new about all of this, apart from the addition of immigrant labor. Indeed, in many respects, contemporary patterns of race, class and economy in the South appear more like a continuation of historical trends than a new neoliberal model of development. The literature on neoliberalism is instructive, however, because it calls attention not only to its economic policies, but also a set of narratives that have been put in circulation to explain or legitimate them. Neoliberalism, that is, is not simply a new phase of global capitalism, but a new ‘logic of governing’ (Ong 2007), grounded in a set of discourses that work to produce particular kinds of social subjects and cultural understandings. I wish here to contrast two strands of this discursive framing, in particular, the first of which is an economic story about global markets and trade, and the second of which is an essentially socio-cultural story about the nature of the individual in society.

### *The Depoliticization of the Economy*

One of the challenges of confronting neoliberal ideology is that the discourse of neoliberalism tends to script powerful economic metaphors such as ‘the market’, ‘free trade’ or even ‘the economy’ itself as natural and self-evident, rather than as social institutions that are the result of political debate and choice. As Tickell and Peck put it, neoliberal discourse has a tendency to “sequester key economic policy issues beyond the reach of explicit politicization” (Tickell and Peck 2003, 175).

In much of the South, for example, “globalization” and its attendant manufacturing decline have not been the subject of political debate but instead largely taken as fact. Rural change has been generally depicted as natural and inevitable, as something to which the region’s residents have no choice but to react and adjust. A 1999 report on ‘The Rural South and its Workforce’ exemplifies the attitude: “the economy, and therefore the life, of the rural South changes. The results of that change—good or bad—depend largely on how well rural Southerners foresee the change and respond to it” (Rowley and Freshwater 1999, 5). Another prominent think-tank refers to globalization as a ‘tsunami’, a kind of natural force that cannot be resisted: “globalization and

technology have become a tidal wave drowning whole communities” (MDC, Inc. 2002, 16). In North Carolina, this passive stance is reinforced by the state’s pre-eminent rural development organization: “the economy,” asserts the Rural Center, “is re-shaping itself in ways that are dramatic and irreversible” (North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center 1999, 5).

My point here is not to criticize these organizations or their generally commendable work. But it should be clear that economies do not ‘re-shape themselves’ but are social institutions shaped by political negotiation and struggle. Indeed, the naturalized and depoliticized narrative of globalization offered by neoliberalism is belied by the South’s economic history. Far from resulting from the workings of a ‘free market’, the New South was constructed through specific policy choices and the actions of regional leaders. Barbara MacLean has argued persuasively, in fact, that the neoliberal model originated in the US South, whose white elite pushed for low labor costs, a weak state and open markets. “As the South’s conservative elites have amassed power,” she writes, “they have succeeded in imposing more and more of their historic model of political economy on the nation as a whole” (MacLean 2008, 22).

Doing so required not Laissez-faire policies, but active federal intervention, including infrastructure investments and tariff and quota protection from international competition, as well policies governing labor and immigration (Glasmeier and Leichenko 1996; Eckes 2005; Stuesse 2009). Most notably, as Smith-Nonini (2009, 251) points out, “a range of government programs and policies have long worked to keep southern agricultural labor cheap.” In North Carolina, this included a major expansion of the federal H2A guestworker program, as well as the active recruitment by businesses of foreign Latino workers (Cravey 2005; Griffith 2005; Smith-Nonini 2009).

The point here is that the prevailing discourse of neoliberalism tends to depoliticize processes that resulted from very deliberate interventions and which have social and economic consequences. As Stuesse puts it, “the state’s actions and inactions, through its neoliberal policies and strategic wielding of law enforcement, clearly benefit corporations at the expense of low-wage workers, this allowing the ‘invisible hand’ to tighten its grip on social relations” (Stuesse 2009, 95). One way to counter this is to work to denaturalize the economy, to open it up as a site of political negotiation, and to

recognize that contemporary globalization is as much a political project as an economic one. When carried into the arena of transnational migration, such a perspective calls attention to the role of politics and policy in the larger dynamics of immigration. ‘We need,’ as Sassen notes, “a more comprehensive evaluation of what are the arenas and who are the actors in the world of immigration today” (2005, 42).

### *The Narrowing Scope of Responsibility*

In addition to the economic dimensions that I have been discussing, commentators have called attention to neoliberalism as a form of governmentality or subjection (Barnett 2010). At its most basic, this has meant the promotion of the individual as the locus of social agency, perhaps best exemplified by Margaret Thatcher’s famous quip that “there is no such thing” as society, only individuals who must “look to themselves first” (Thatcher 1987). As a form of governmentality, neoliberalism can be described as “an art of governing whose logic is the condition of individual active freedom” (Ong 2006, 13). As Harvey (2006) notes, this emphasis on individual freedom or personal liberty is part and parcel of the surface appeal of neoliberalism as a guide to ordering our social and economic life. Neoliberal governmentality invokes an aspiration, in the words of former US President George W. Bush, of “making every citizen an agent of his or her own destiny” (quoted in Ong 2006, 20).

What I want to suggest is that this project of making each individual the agent of their destiny has also entailed a gradual shift in the nature of ethics and responsibility, from a sensibility of mutual regard and collective well-being, to what Ong (2006, 2) calls a “rationality of individual responsibility and fate.” If this is so, then the moral and ethical subject under neoliberalism is one who does not demand any responsibility on the part of anyone else; those who, as Thatcher had it, ‘look to themselves first.’ This sentiment has led to a host of policy changes in recent years that have effectively privatized relations of obligation, solidarity and concern that were once considered part of the common good. This, as Wendy Brown (2003, 15) asserts, “reduces political citizenship to an unprecedented degree of passivity and political complacency ... a fully

realized neo-liberal citizenry would be the opposite of public-minded, indeed it would barely exist as a public.”

Once again, it is possible to suggest that the US South has been particularly fertile ground for the growth and development of such a discourse (Wilson 2007). The legacy of self-sufficient plantation economies and the more recent history of Jim Crow segregation have shaped a particular moral geography that is compatible with neoliberalism’s individualization of responsibility. Commenting on the former, Clyde Woods (2007, 56) argues that the “plantation regime is actually emblematic of a deeply rooted American form of social organization and philosophy that have provided neoliberalism with its core organizing principles.” Woods focuses his argument on the plantation model’s relative autonomy, export orientation, social division and hierarchy, and intense forms of social and labor regulation, all of which can be witnessed in contemporary neoliberal economic enclaves such as ‘free trade zones’, and in ‘entrepreneurial’ urban spaces such as gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods (Woods, 2007).

We can add to this, I think, that the plantation model is based in a social and racial segmentation of the community, and a consequent narrowing of the ambit of responsibility. In many parts of the rural South, in other words, the prevailing vision of ‘the social’ has long been circumscribed by race and class in ways that have benefitted business leaders and political elites, but have worked against the development of a larger sense of collective accountability or mutual regard (MacLean 2008). This narrowing of the social can be seen, for example, in the sanctioning of a particular, limited view of Southern history and heritage, one that frequently neglects the historical geographies of African Americans (Hoelscher 2003; Alderman and Modlin 2009).

In the context of transnational migration, this already-reduced sense of political citizenship can be mobilized in opposition to the recent Latinization of Southern space. As Winders puts it, (2007, 934) “the South’s past (and present) exclusionary projects around heritage, whiteness, and other formations provide powerful means of interpreting and reacting to community change.” One manifestation of this, I think, is that the frame of neoliberal individualism makes it easier for immigrants to be positioned as subjects who are somehow disconnected from other transnational process, and whose practices

and decisions can thereby be portrayed in isolation from them. In Wendy Brown's terms, the neo-liberal "individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action" (2003, 15). Letters to the editor, for example, seldom reflect a sense of the larger context of immigration. Instead, prevailing opinion maintains that "these people make the choice to break the law and come here illegally" (Shomaker 2007). "It is their responsibility that they are here illegally," goes the thinking, and thus "they are victims of their own actions and inaction – not ours. Period" (Fletcher 2008; Miller 2006).

Whereas the globalization of the economy has been normalized as something natural, then, the presence of the migrant body from the other side of the border is decidedly unnatural, something illegal, even *alien*. Thus, the transnational migrant is figured not as a subject of responsibility or hospitality, but instead as an intruder into 'our' circumscribed public sphere. This kind of nativism, of course, has a long history in the US (Higham 1988; Ngai 2004), but earlier waves of immigration did not have an appreciable impact on the rural South. It is worth considering, then, how we might reconceptualize these new transnational subjects and spaces in ways that can instill a broader sense of what Gibson-Graham (2006, 84) call our "economic being-in-common," one cognizant of our many entanglements with the lives and spaces of distant others, and from which might follow a more expanded ethos of engagement and responsibility.

#### FOR A RURAL COSMOPOLITANISM

Resources for doing so can be found in contemporary geographic scholarship, which has focused a good deal of recent attention on questions of ethics and responsibility, and how they are constituted in and through space. Empirically, however, the lion's share of this work focuses specific attention on the city, for it is the urban milieu that provides the most evident setting for multicultural interaction and citizenship. To take one example, Ash Amin has sketched a vision of what he calls 'the good city'. Focusing on "the particularities of the urban experience" (2006, 1012), Amin highlights "a certain kind of sociality that comes from particular forms of gathering in public spaces" (1019), one that might promote "an expanded habit of solidarity ... through

which difference and multiplicity can be mobilized for common gain and against harm and want” (1020). Amin is careful to acknowledge that the kind of sociality he envisions is not limited to the urban context, but it nonetheless remains the case that, for most commentators, it is the city that holds the potential for developing a more extended net of engagement and concern.

One way to describe this sense of openness is *cosmopolitanism* (Popke 2007). As Michael Keith describes it, cosmopolitanism can be considered “an ethical project ... a way of resolving the moral questions that arise from the attempt to reconcile different kinds of difference” (2005, 39). It may be understandable, then, why so many commentators focus on the specifically urban dimensions of cosmopolitanism, for it is the city’s diverse public spaces that demand engagement, negotiation, and the everyday give-and-take that arises from what Doreen Massey (2005) calls our ‘throwntogetherness’ with others.

The issue of cosmopolitan difference, however, is not merely a local affair. Theories of cosmopolitanism are also concerned with the ways in which our social relations are geographically extended to different and distant others. Here too, cities have long been at the center of discussion. It is the city, after all, that serves as the setting for various kinds of global flows and interactions, the ‘evidence’ as it were, of our global condition. Thus, Saskia Sassen avers that “...global cities are ... the terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized form. These localized forms are, in good part, what globalization is about ...” (Sassen 2002, 285). It is precisely this sense of ‘localized globalization’ that can lead to a wider scope of cosmopolitan connection and responsibility. “If the cosmopolitan is to represent a normative vision of the future,” Keith therefore concludes, “the city is to be its empirical realization” (Keith 2005, 22).

These discussions of global cities and cosmopolitan urbanism are constructive, but they do not translate easily to a rural context, where the development of a cosmopolitan imagination may be a different kind of challenge. If cities have historically been constructed as sites of diversity, interaction and difference, rural areas have traditionally been scripted as the opposite: homogeneous and stable, reservoirs of long-standing tradition and patrimony (Woods 2006). It is worth asking, then, how rural

citizenship might be differently performed and, on this basis, how to conceptualize in rural settings the kinds of connections and responsibilities that cosmopolitanism seeks to foster.

In the first instance, we can note that many rural areas lack the dense and tangible evidence of global interconnectedness noted above by Sassen. Although global processes have undoubtedly shaped the South, in ways I have tried to suggest, the region's rural landscapes do not always bear obvious witness to its transnational networks and connections. Indeed, this may be one reason why forms of economic transnationalism have a tendency to be naturalized, rather than politicized, within standard rural narratives. Related to this, rural areas tend to lack the kind of vibrant and diverse public spaces found in many urban settings, and thus rural dwellers do not have a long history of negotiating multicultural experiences. As recently as 1990, for example, less than 2% of the US rural population was foreign-born, compared with around 10% in urban areas (Donato et al. 2008).

Even the rapid increase in the Latino population in many rural areas has not always facilitated cosmopolitan forms of interaction and engagement. Many scholars describe Latino settlement patterns using terms such as 'enclave' (Lacy, 2009), 'invisibility' (Nelson and Hiemstra 2008) or 'silence' (Torres et al. 2006), and the response from the community is frequently characterized as 'ambivalent' (Grey and Woodruff 2005; Fennelly 2008; Shutika 2008). What this suggests I think is that a cosmopolitan sensibility will not simply emerge in the rural South; rather, it must be cultivated through a politics and practice of engagement.

I want to turn, then, to consider what a *rural cosmopolitanism* might look like, one capable of grappling with the specific kinds of coexistence and connection characteristic of rural areas, as well the forms of reciprocity or responsibility that might ensue from their acknowledgment. A recent essay by Michael Woods provides a valuable starting point. Taking the work of Massey as a touchstone, Woods argues for a relational and hybrid understanding of the globalizing countryside. In this formulation, the rural is not a space of isolation, but constituted through global connections, "hybrid assemblages of human and non-human entities, knitted-together intersections of networks and flows that are never wholly fixed or contained at the local scale" (Woods 2007, 499).

Rethinking the rural South in this manner would draw attention to the region's sometimes hidden transnationalization, and highlight the ways in which Southern rural spaces are bound up within networks of capital and commodity flows, new forms of political administration, and global forms of culture and identity. This kind of "revitalized rural geography of globalization" (Woods 2007, 486) can be one means to help to promote a rural cosmopolitanism.

As we have seen, however, cosmopolitanism is not only an intellectual stance, but also an ethical project, and it here a rural cosmopolitanism can confront most directly the sensibilities and narrowed social horizons fostered by neoliberalism in the rural South. As an ethic, cosmopolitanism would seek to expand and politicize our sense of 'throwntogetherness', and to see in this a rationale for a wider net of engagement and responsibility. One way to approach this, I want to suggest, is to look to the embodied performances of transnational subjects themselves.

#### MIGRANT SUBJECTIVITY

One avenue to politicizing the hybrid assemblages that constitute the rural is to work to cultivate what might be termed a *migrant subjectivity*. I mean by this first and foremost the kind of consciousness derived from the transnational subject position of migrants themselves. "Neoliberalism," Ward and England note, "is an *embodied* process" (2007, 19), and for this reason a focus on migrant lives and experience can help to illuminate the contradictions and ethical lapses of neoliberal discourse.

One strategy for doing so is to facilitate, following Massey (2004), a relational understanding of identity and responsibility, by exploring the networks and connections that constitute migrant lives across borders. Scholarship within the field of 'transnational studies' (Levitt and Khagram 2007) has nicely captured some of the important dimensions of this, having "highlighted the multistranded social relations that are at the base of ... immigrants' daily experience and illustrated how they are sustained through multiple, overlapping familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political practices that transcend borders" (Szanton Blanc, Basch, and Glick Schiller 1995, 684). This image of cross-border social worlds certainly captures the lived reality of Latino



communities in North Carolina, many of whom still retain extensive material connections and emotional ties to their places of origin.

The move from globalization to responsibility lies in excavating the ways in which such transnational ties and connections are embedded in larger political-economic processes in which we are all implicated. In North Carolina, ethnographic studies (e.g., Fink 2003), photo-documentary projects (Gill and Drake 2006) and documentary films (Hill and Thompson 2006) have all contributed to the development of this kind of relational sense of community, in part by drawing connections between the neoliberal policies that are altering lives and livelihoods in Mexico and other Latin American countries, and the Southern economy's dependence upon migrant labor. In this way, such work can develop an expanded sense of our economic being-in-common, and thereby repoliticize processes of globalization that are too often viewed as the outcome of 'neutral' market forces.

A second approach to migrant subjectivity has examined the intimate spaces of migrant dwelling in North Carolina. Both materially and symbolically, many of the rural South's most cosmopolitan spaces are associated with migrant social and economic life: flea markets and tiendas, dance clubs, community festivals, soccer fields and concert venues (Cravey 2005, Shutika 2008). Revealing the textures of these kinds of sites can illuminate the hybrid assemblages that constitute rural globalization, assemblages that enroll migrant and non-migrant participants alike. For this reason, as Altha Cravey notes, "examining the transnational spaces and circuits of social reproduction that Latinas/Latinos carve out in the US South complicates our understanding of globalization and globalization processes" (Cravey 2005, 378).

Although a migrant subjectivity is most evidently associated with the lived experience of transnationalism, I would suggest that it is not exclusive to migrants, but represents rather a particular kind of outlook attentive to the nature of spatial passages and connections within the rural South. José María Mantero, for example, has compared in evocative terms the border passage across the Rio Grande to the crossing of the Ohio River by slaves seeking their freedom via the Underground Railway (2008). In so doing, Mantero reminds us that the crossing of borders can be an emancipatory act, that it may be bound up not only with the aspirations of those who migrate, but also with larger

social and economic institutions in which we may be complicit. A migrant subjectivity, in other words, is one that would instill a more general diasporic or hybrid consciousness, one attentive to the connections and disjunctures, and also the contradictions, that today characterize neoliberal globalization.

It remains to be seen, of course, whether these kinds of epistemological interventions can help to facilitate a more widespread, everyday ethic of practical engagement and generosity. It seems to me, however, that there are encouraging signs. Alongside letters to the editor decrying the presence of ‘illegals’, we can read calls to “offer migrant families hospitality, not hostility, along their journey” (Reamer 2006). Recent research, too, has highlighted the fact that communities undergoing rapid demographic shifts are not always defined by tension and conflict (Marrow 2006; Smith 2009). Instead, many Southern locales seem to be experiencing what Winders calls “an ongoing process of coming to grips” with social and spatial change (Winders 2008, 268). This ‘coming to grips’ may at times take a defensive posture, but its contours are also shaped by everyday gestures, encounters and engagements that are much more hospitable than hostile. These kinds of mundane interactions, and the sense of civility, or even solidarity, that they may help to engender, might yet offer a cosmopolitan basis from which to challenge the more detrimental impacts of neoliberalism in the South.

## CONCLUSION

Michael Woods has noted that “the hypothetical space of the global countryside can ... be seen simultaneously as a site of uncertainty and challenge for rural communities, and as a realm of opportunity” (2007, 496). This is an apt description of the transnationalization currently reshaping Southern spaces and lives. I have suggested in this paper that, to turn uncertainty into opportunity, there are good reasons to be attentive to the contours of neoliberalism in the rural South.

As we have seen, neoliberal framings of globalization have found a ready audience in the South, and helped to justify its particular model of economic growth. The result has been a tendency to naturalize the economic dimensions of globalization, while also depoliticizing them in ways that narrow the ambit of care and regard. With respect

to the South's 'Latinization', this has meant that the political and economic processes that help to account for increased migration are often occluded by a kind of 'ethical individualism' focused solely on the sometimes-troubling presence of migrant difference.

To think against this tendency, I have sought to sketch the contours of a rural cosmopolitanism, one that might be cultivated through an examination of migrant subjectivity. As a geographical project, such an orientation has the potential to expand our sense of awareness of the connections and assemblages within which we are all entangled, and to promote a greater recognition of our economic being-in-common. As an ethical ambition, this may help to instill a sense of mutuality and concern that might flow from a more expanded view of the social, and thereby widen the skein of relations toward which we can be said to bear some measure of responsibility. My hope is that, in the face of continuing regional transformation, rural Latino migration might be viewed in a more open and positive light, perhaps even through the lens of a new and critical form of Southern hospitality.

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