

***The South's Silent Bargain:
Rural Restructuring, Latino Labor and the
Ambiguities of Migrant Experience***

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Introduction

The U.S. South has become a significant new destination region for Latino immigrants (Murphy et al., 2001; Cravey, 2003; Fink, 2003; Furuseth, 2003; Mohl, 2003; Hernández-León and Zúñiga, 2005a and b). Scholars have examined the ‘supply-side’ factors driving this change in terms of three broad causes: the on-going crisis in Mexico (Griffith and Kissam, 1995; Wiggins et al., 2002; Cabello, 2003); the role of IRCA (Hernández-León and Zúñiga, 2000; Massey, Durand and Malone, 2003); and increasing hostility toward Latinos in traditional gateway regions (Durand and Massey, 1999; Massey, Durand and Malone, 2003). These factors alone, however, do not explain the changing dynamics of Latino migration in the South, or the fact that some areas have witnessed dramatic increases in their Latino population in recent years (in some counties, more than 1000 percent). This suggests a need to examine the local context for these processes, including the political-economic changes driving the ‘demand-side’ of Latino migration, as well as the subjective dimensions of these new forms of migration. In our view, this means paying close attention to the ways in which the rural context conditions the experiences of Latino migrants into the region. This is underscored by that fact that Latinos are increasingly settling in nonmetropolitan and rural areas of the U.S., many of which have experienced the highest Latino population growth rates (McHugh, 1989; Cantú, 1995; Johnson-Webb, 2002; Gozdzia and Bump, 2004; Kandel and Cromartie, 2004). Some scholars suggest that smaller nonmetro locations may feel a greater impact from migration (Hernández-León and Zúñiga, 2000) given the dramatic demographic shifts, the compressed migratory cycle and lack of experience with immigrants. Yet migration studies have paid less attention to the role of rural political economy in structuring migratory processes or how rurality shapes the subjective dimensions of the migrant experience. Our examination of Latino migration and settlement to the rural South seeks to address this lacuna by elucidating how and why rurality matters in understanding migratory processes and how migration and settlement is experienced by newcomers in rural contexts.

As we discuss in more detail in what follows, we view the position of Latinos in rural areas as somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, Latinos are self-consciously choosing rural areas because of available job opportunities, a stated preference for rural lifestyles, and because their relatively ‘hidden’ status has made Latinos much less susceptible to overt forms of harassment and discrimination. There has been no move in North Carolina, for example, to pass punitive legislation such as California’s Proposition 187, or Arizona’s recently passed Proposition 200. On the other hand, however, the rural context makes many forms of resistance and collective action more difficult. The lack of political advocacy and ‘voice’ in the rural context works to depress wage rates, and can serve to entrench Latinos in conditions of poverty and isolation. For their part, employers find Latino labor attractive because of the low cost and their reputation for being ‘hard working’, despite the potential difficulties posed by differences in language and culture.

The result is what we will refer to as a ‘silent bargain’ in parts of rural America. For employers, the social and cultural difference that Latinos represent is acceptable because these differences are inscribed upon working bodies that are subject to discipline and control. For Latinos, the *tranquilidad* of the rural experience becomes an acceptable trade-off for serving as a low-paid workforce subject to exploitation. In this chapter, we discuss some of the dimensions of this rural trade-off, focusing our attention on eastern North Carolina.

We begin with a brief description of the Central Coastal Plain of North Carolina to provide the backdrop for our study region that has experienced dramatic increase in Latino migration. We then evaluate some of the macro-scale ‘supply-side’ factors driving migration to the U.S. identified in the literature. While we find some evidence that these factors are important, we believe it is crucial to examine local political-economic factors in more detail. To do so we sketch some of the dimensions of recent rural restructuring in eastern North Carolina. We focus our attention on two sectors in particular, tobacco and agro-processing (particularly turkeys and hogs), and show how changes in these industries have created the conditions for the emergence of a Latino labor market. Our overall goal in the first half of the chapter, then, is to place recent shifts in Latino migration in the context of broader changes in rural political economy.

The remainder of our chapter then focuses on the way the rural context serves to shape the migration experience itself. Here we are interested in examining the subjective dimensions of rural migration, and the ways in which the rural context offers both opportunities and places constraints on migrants and their families. The Latino rural experience and the ‘silent bargain’ propping up the rural economy are at the heart of this analysis. First, we discuss the perceived benefits of living in a rural region, as articulated by Latino respondents. These benefits are both practical and emotional, ranging from a lower costs of living and a lax enforcement regime against ‘illegals’, to a strong desire to replicate the experience of rural lifestyles back in Mexico. Along with these perceived benefits,

however, come a series of less desirable features. We take a look at some of the difficulties facing Latino families in rural areas, including low standards of living, a lack of community organization and advocacy, and feelings of fear and isolation.

Latinos are well aware of these challenges. Many, furthermore, are fully cognizant of the essential role that their labor power plays in rural America, and express justifiable resentment against those who oppose their presence. Overall, however, it seems clear to us that Latinos are willing to endure less than ideal conditions in rural areas in exchange for the advantages arising from their relatively 'hidden' status.

Perhaps, though, not for long. We believe there is evidence that the 'silent bargain' is beginning to unravel in rural North Carolina, in part because Latinos have become much more visible as their numbers have increased. We are beginning to see evidence of racial tension, as well as an increasing backlash against Latinos in the state and region. Advocacy groups are also beginning to challenge the exploitive conditions frequently endured by Latinos. This means that the present moment is crucial, and this calls upon us to examine the ways in which residents of the U.S. South negotiate the visible, embodied cultural difference represented by the Latino 'other'.

The Central Coastal Plain of North Carolina

The analysis that follows is based upon results from an on-going research project aimed at better understanding the dynamics of Latino migration to eastern North Carolina. The initial phase of the project consisted of a telephone survey of 139 Latino families living in Greene County, a rural agricultural region in North Carolina's central coastal plain. The survey was a collaborative venture undertaken with the Greene County School System, whose administrators were eager to learn more about their Latino constituency. The survey was then followed by a small number of open-ended in-depth interviews conducted in both Greene and Duplin Counties and aimed at eliciting information about the subjective experiences and impressions of migrants within the region. In our discussion below, we draw selectively from both survey results and interview transcripts to highlight our argument.

It is worth mentioning here that our focus on Greene County, and our collaboration with the school system, has shaped the nature of our results in some important ways. First, nearly all of our survey respondents were of Mexican origin, and thus we do not consider here Latino migration from other Spanish-speaking countries, despite some evidence that Latinos are migrating from other Latin American countries as well (e.g., Fink, 2003). Second, our survey was limited to families with children in the Greene County Public School System, a relatively settled and permanent segment of the Latino population. Our results do not take into account, for example, the experiences of migrant farm workers or young, single migrants – groups that likely have a higher degree of mobility than our study population. Finally, a high proportion of our survey respondents were women. Indeed, although women account for less than half (46 percent) of adult household members in the study, they comprised 78 percent of all survey respondents. Although many of the survey questions asked respondents to answer for the entire household, some questions related more narrowly to personal experience, and in these instances answers may reflect the migration experience from a gendered perspective. We know, for example, that fewer women than men work outside of the home, which may inhibit their acquisition of English language proficiency, and lead to increased feelings of isolation and insecurity.

With these caveats in mind, our goal in this chapter is not to provide a detailed description of Latinos in Greene County (for this, see Torres et al., 2003), but rather to reflect more broadly on some of the causes, dynamics and consequences of Latino migration in rural areas of eastern North Carolina. Our scale of focus is what we will refer to as the Central Coastal Plain, a loosely defined region of 15 counties that share a number of important similarities (See Figure 10.1). The region is overwhelmingly rural and agricultural. Farms have historically been small family operations producing a variety of crops, including cotton, tobacco, peanuts, sweet potatoes, corn, soybeans, and livestock. In coastal areas, fishing and seafood processing are important economic activities. Counties within the region are among the most economically distressed in the state, with low levels of education and income, and poverty rates that rank well above the state average. Although the region as a whole lags behind in the standard indicators of wealth and human welfare, pockets of economic growth and prosperity do stand out. Cities such as Greenville (Pitt County) and Goldsboro (Wayne County) have grown considerably over the past two decades, serving as engines of employment growth even as surrounding rural areas continue to suffer economic decline.

North Carolina's central coastal plain has also witnessed a significant increase in Latino immigration over the past decade. Region-wide, the Hispanic population increased by more than 50,000, or 167 percent between 1990 and 2000. In absolute terms, these numbers are not particularly striking. Census figures show that the largest Hispanic communities are found in North Carolina's metropolitan areas. Indeed, nearly 65 percent of the state's

Hispanic population lives in counties within the state's 13 Metropolitan Statistical Areas. Nevertheless, we believe that there are a number of good reasons why we should examine Latino migration to rural areas in more detail. In the first instance, the growth in Latino immigration to rural areas has been a relatively recent phenomenon, and thus the demographic change appears more dramatic. A number of rural North Carolina counties, for example, saw increases of over 1000 percent in their Hispanic population between 1990 and 2000. In the central coastal plain region, more than half of all counties witnessed increases of 600 percent or more. Hispanic residents now comprise 6.2 percent of the population in the area, compared with 4.7 percent in North Carolina as a whole (U.S. Census, 1990, 2000).

Beyond such figures, however, we believe that there are important conceptual reasons for thinking through the relationships between rural political economy, rural experience, and international migration in states such as North Carolina. Although there is increasing recognition within the literature that new migration streams are emerging, much of the research remains focused on major metropolitan areas, or on traditional 'gateway states' such as California and Texas. Accordingly, there is little explicit discussion of the ways in which rural settings mediate both the emergence of new migration streams and the experiences of migrants and their families. It is this task that we take up in the discussion that follows.

The Rural Context I: Local Political Economy and the Latino Labor Market

Macro-scale interpretations

We begin with a question: why has eastern North Carolina become a destination for increasing numbers of Mexican migrants? Although the answers to this question are complex, we believe that much can be learned by looking at some of the local scale economic processes that have shaped the region over the past few decades. Before turning our attention to rural North Carolina, however, it is worth considering some of the broader macro-scale factors that have contributed to the development of new streams of Latino migration in recent years. In most accounts, three such factors stand out.

First, of course, Latino migration is driven by the socio-economic conditions that migrants face in their homelands. Mexican migration, in particular, is a direct result of economic crisis and recent structural shifts in the Mexican economy generated by neo-liberal reforms (Gledhill, 1995; Kelly, 2001). These reforms have hit rural areas particularly hard. The elimination of agricultural credit and subsidies for smallholders and the restructuring of the *ejido* communal land tenure system have put a strain on agricultural communities, especially in marginally productive areas of the country. Second, the increase in migration to states such as North Carolina may in part be a reaction to increased hostility and law enforcement vigilance in traditional gateway states. The passage of punitive legislation, such as California's Proposition 187 and Arizona's Proposition 200, along with stepped up border control operations, might reasonably be viewed as inducements for Latinos to favor new destinations in increasing numbers.

Finally, many migration scholars point to the enabling role played by *The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986* (IRCA) as a key factor in initiating new patterns of dispersion and settlement (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Hernández-León and Zúñiga, 2000; Massey, Durand and Malone, 2003). Prior to IRCA, the U.S. migration regime was characterized by a relatively porous border and predominately male seasonal circular migration. The provisions of IRCA combined an amnesty and legalization program for long-term undocumented residents with employer sanctions and increased border enforcement aimed at halting illegal immigration. As a consequence, it has been suggested, the more than two million amnestied Mexicans had the freedom and geographic mobility to seek out greener pastures in other regions of the U.S., such as the South (Durand, Massey and Charvet, 1998; Durand and Massey 1999).

Our research suggests that all three of these factors have played some role in facilitating increased migration to eastern North Carolina, but they only tell part of the story. For example, many of our respondents told us their decision to migrate to the U.S. was spurred by the economic difficulties they faced in Mexico, especially for those from rural areas. Migrants painted images of agricultural crisis in their home villages, brought about by low commodity prices, market gluts, and poor government management of national marketing programs. Typical is the comment of one informant, from a small agricultural community in the state of Michoacán: *'there are no sources of employment . . . no industry. . .nothing'*! Faced with limited employment prospects, many Mexicans decide that their only hope is to migrate to the U.S..

Informants also told of high levels of vigilance and INS pressure in states such as Texas and Florida, some explicitly mentioning this as a reason for coming to North Carolina. However, our data show only limited support

for the typical hypothesis of a post-IRCA dispersal in response to pressures in gateway states. First, although some of our respondents have been in North Carolina for many years, and could have been ‘pioneers’ in a post-IRCA dispersal, most are of much more recent origin. Indeed, only seven percent were in the United States at the time IRCA was passed. And second, only about a third of our respondents came by way of traditional gateway states such as Texas (23 percent) or Florida (12 percent). Only one respondent came by way of California. More than half of our respondents (54 percent) came directly from Mexico to North Carolina. These data indicate that the shift in migration to places such as North Carolina is not just a result of post-IRCA ‘push factors’ operating in other parts of the U.S.. Rather, many Mexican migrants are apparently choosing North Carolina *instead of* traditional destinations such as Texas and California. This in turn suggests that local factors play an important role in the migration decision.

There is something else about this new migration stream that seems to us significant. Each of our respondents whose migration path took them directly to North Carolina came initially to smaller cities and towns, rather than to larger ‘gateway cities’ within the state. Not a single respondent first arrived in North Carolina’s major metropolitan areas such as Charlotte, the Triangle (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill), or the Triad region (Greensboro, Winston-Salem and High Point). Instead, respondents came directly to eastern North Carolina communities such as Snow Hill (pop. 1,514), Farmville (4,302), and Walstonburg (224). Overall, more than three-quarters of North Carolina migrants arrived in cities with populations of less than 10,000 (although this may in part reflect female respondents arriving to join their husbands). This implies that the migration routes of the rural eastern part of the state may be distinct from those that characterize the large Latino communities of North Carolina’s metropolitan areas. For this reason, we contend, we need to consider the specific processes of rural restructuring that have facilitated recent migration to eastern North Carolina.

Economic Growth and the Latino Labor Market

It is quite obvious that the principal motivation for Mexican migrants is employment. Fully 86 percent of our survey respondents mention jobs as a factor in their migration decision. Table 10.1 provides a summary of the principal occupations of all household members represented in our sample. Agriculture is the predominant sector, with approximately 38 percent of the employed household members working as farm laborers. Other important employment categories include construction (23 percent) and non-farm low-skilled labor (21 percent). The balance of employment is sprinkled among a diverse group of labor categories, including administration, secretarial, domestic, gardening and restaurant work, among others. It bears mentioning that while Latinos have long been present within the rural North Carolina labor market, particularly in agricultural sectors, their numbers have only increased relatively recently. This increase is related to a series of shifts within the North Carolina economy. In order to understand the increased demand for Latino labor, then, we first need to examine the economic boom and related demographic shifts experienced throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

During the second half of the twentieth century, and especially between 1980 and 2000, North Carolina made tremendous economic progress. Its Gross State Product increased 4.6 times from \$59,750 million in 1980 to \$272,934 million in 2000 (U.S. Department of Commerce 2004). The structure of the workforce changed during this period. Manufacturing jobs, which had expanded in the 1950s and 1960s, declined in the 1980s and 1990s, while high-skilled white-collar and low-wage service sector jobs increased (U.S. Census, 2000).

At the same time, educational levels, although still relatively low, rose in the state. High school graduation rates increased – approximately 89 percent of adults between 25 and 44 now have a high school diploma, compared to the national level of 88 percent, and the percent of residents with some college education increased from slightly more than ten percent in 1970 to 40 percent in 1990 (MDC, 1999). Nearly 20 percent of African American adults in N.C. have a college degree, up from just 4.3 percent in 1970 (U.S. Census, 1970, 2000). Because of these trends, per capita income reached 90 percent of national level in 1996, up from about 80 percent in 1980. By end of 1990s, North Carolina ranked 6th in the nation on an economic momentum index that combines shifts in employment, personal income and population with growth above the national average (MDC, 1999).

Much of this growth and new prosperity took place in metropolitan areas (MDC, 1999:32), and this led to changing demographic patterns from the early to mid-1990s. Between 1990 and 1996, black populations in urban areas of the South increased between 13 and 29 percent, a gain explained in part by migration from rural areas in the region (Selby, Dixon, and Hapke, 2001; Cravey, 2003). As both educated and low-skilled African Americans migrated from rural regions to cities, rural areas faced a corresponding shortage of workers in farming and food-processing industries. A number of rural counties experienced a net outflow of people during the 1980s and into the 1990s (N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, n.d.).

These broad trends facilitated an increased demand for Latino labor in both urban and rural areas. In the state's metropolitan areas, economic growth opened significant opportunities for Latinos in low-wage jobs in hotels, restaurants and retail establishments, as well as skilled sectors such as construction. In rural areas, the demand for Latino workers remained strong in a wide range of agricultural sectors, including the greenhouse and nursery industries and Christmas tree farms, along with the more traditional livestock and field crops.

Among the latter, perhaps the most important are tobacco, turkeys, and hogs. The state of North Carolina ranks first in the nation in the production of flue-cured tobacco, and second in both turkey and hog production (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2002). Much of the state's production of these commodities takes place in the central coastal plain region, which includes eight of the top ten counties in the production of hogs and turkeys, as well as six of the top ten tobacco producing counties (Figure 10.2). Importantly, these industries have also experienced significant changes over the past couple of decades, changes that have also influenced the growth of the Latino labor market. Thus, the demand for Latino workers in eastern North Carolina has been fueled not only by a shortage of workers in traditional labor markets, but also by a restructuring of certain agricultural economies, especially tobacco and agro-processing. We discuss each in turn.

The Restructuring of Eastern North Carolina's Agricultural Economy

The first series of transformations has taken place in the meatpacking and poultry processing industries. Over the past four decades, the rural South has become the dominant home of the poultry processing industry – half of all poultry plant jobs are now in the rural South, up from one-third in 1963 (Drabenstott, Henry, Mitchell, 1999). Within meatpacking, geographic shifts are less pronounced across regions than they are for poultry but tangible nevertheless. Rural regions in the Midwest and South have captured a big portion of the new production, and, interestingly, 'the most remote rural places are the biggest gainers' (Drabenstott, Henry, and Mitchell, 1999:71). Two factors explain this shift. First, firms have sought lower wages that prevail in rural regions (Melton and Huffman, 1995). Second, meat plants have followed shifts in livestock production toward less populated parts of rural America (Drabenstott, Henry, and Mitchell, 1999).

Linked to the geographic shift in meat industry plant location is industrial consolidation and restructuring. According to Schuller and Lee (2002), meatpacking and poultry processing industries consolidated between 1972 and 1992 into larger businesses able to reduce costs of production through economies of scale. These firms then implemented technological innovations that favored a shift toward low-skilled labor. 'Low-skilled labor became complementary to the technology used on the processing lines as the size of the processing plants increased' (Schuller and Lee, 2002:42). As factory tasks became routinized and de-skilled, real wages dropped 20-30 percent between 1972 and 1992 (Drabenstott, Henry and Mitchell, 1999). It is perhaps not surprising then that North Carolina, the state employing the fourth largest number of slaughterers and meat packers in the nation, also pays among the lowest wages in the country.

This trend served to make employment in these industries less attractive to domestic workers at a time when other low-skilled employment opportunities were becoming available within the state. At the same time, the 1990s marked a period of expanding trade and production in processed agricultural products, ensuring that labor demand remains relatively high (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2004). The result of this in eastern North Carolina has been an increase in the use of Latino labor within the industry (Cravey, 1997). In fact, the counties ranked first and second in the production of both turkeys and hogs—Duplin and Sampson—rank first and third in the state respectively in their percentage of Hispanic residents.

The second trend underlying Latino migration to rural North Carolina is the restructuring of the tobacco economy. Tobacco has long been a mainstay of North Carolina's eastern agricultural economy, with several counties ranking among the highest in tobacco-dependence in North Carolina (Beacham, 2002). Yet the last two decades have witnessed two important transformations that have altered the labor market in important ways. First, beginning in the 1970s, tobacco farming became more mechanized, particularly in the early stages of production. This resulted in a gradual reduction of traditional year-round African American employment and a decline in the use of household labor. Despite this increased mechanization, however, the harvesting and curing stages of tobacco production still required significant intensive manual labor. As African American farmworkers and teenage sons began taking up alternative forms of employment, 'assembling a large harvesting crew for only a few weeks at the end of summer became difficult and expensive' (Hapke et al., 1998:26).

This challenge has become more acute due to a second trend, namely the general contraction of the tobacco economy since 1997. Declining consumer demand, increasing costs of production, and global competition have put the U.S. tobacco industry in a state of crisis since the late 1990s. Slower export growth and a decline in purchase intentions by the major U.S. tobacco firms led to cuts of more than 50 percent in tobacco grower allotments between

1998 and 2003 (N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, 2000; Stevens, 2002). Although the reduced acreage served to lower overall labor needs, it also pressured tobacco farmers to keep wages low and extract more labor from existing workers. Both of these changes (mechanization and tobacco industry decline) have driven tobacco farmers toward greater efficiency in production, including the use of an organized, inexpensive, and economically efficient workforce during periods of peak labor demand. Increasingly in eastern North Carolina, this workforce has consisted of crews of Latino migrant labor.

One significant source of such labor in North Carolina has been the H-2A visa program, which expanded dramatically in the state during the 1990s. In 1989, North Carolina had 169 H-2A workers. By 1997, the number was more than 6,000 and in the year 2000, 10,600 H-2A visas were granted to North Carolina farmers, nearly one quarter of the nation's total. Of these, 7,800 were for work on tobacco farms (*Rural Migration News* 2001, 2002). In fact, in the southeastern U.S. tobacco farmers are the largest employers of H-2A workers. In North Carolina, this expansion in H-2A use has been encouraged and facilitated by the efforts of the North Carolina Growers Association and its head Stan Eury, a former North Carolina Labor Department official who aggressively promoted the program in the state (Cravey, 2003). Further east, in the coastal communities of the state, a similar labor transition took place in seafood processing, which came to rely more and more on H-2B visa (Selby, Dixon, and Hapke, 2001).

Further restructuring in the eastern N.C. tobacco belt is likely as a result of the recently enacted tobacco buyout legislation, which eliminates the federal tobacco program. Under the provisions of the plan, the federal government will make payments totaling \$9.6 billion to existing tobacco allotment holders (at the rate of \$7 per pound of quota owned) and farmers (at \$3 per pound grown) (Brown 2004). As a result, North Carolina tobacco farmers stand to receive nearly \$4 billion in buyout payments over the next ten years (Agricultural Policy Analysis Center, 2004). Although many details about the plan have yet to be worked out, it is clear that the production and marketing of tobacco will be significantly altered. Farmers with large allotments will receive windfall payouts and may well decide to leave farming, while those who remain will likely face lower prices and more volatile markets for their crop (Brown, 2002).

It is perhaps too early to tell what this may mean for Latinos in eastern North Carolina. In the short term, Latino agricultural workers may find fewer employment opportunities in tobacco and experience downward pressure on wage rates. Some workers are likely to leave agriculture and seek work in construction or other non-agricultural sectors. Others may move out of tobacco to take advantage of opportunities in other expanding agricultural sectors, such as agro-processing, sweet potato and cucumber production, Christmas trees or greenhouse agriculture. Still others may find opportunities to rent and farm newly-idle land in a post-buyout agricultural economy. In any case, it is clear the changing rural political economy of eastern North Carolina will continue to have an important impact upon the nature and magnitude of Latino migration.

Summing Up

Our aim in this section has been to explore some of the reasons for the increase in Latino migration to eastern North Carolina over the past few decades. Although conditions and experiences in Mexico and U.S. gateway states are clearly motivating factors, we believe a full accounting should also consider the specific outcomes of rural restructuring in local areas. An understanding of the changing patterns of migration, in other words, demands attention to the ways in which the rural context matters. In the case of North Carolina's central coastal plain, changes in the region's political economy have sparked the growth of a Latino labor market. As economic expansion created employment opportunities in urban areas, and as agro-industrial restructuring strengthened the demand for low-wage rural labor, Latinos found opportunities in rural North Carolina. As a result, many rural communities that lost population during the 1980s found their fortunes reversed in the 1990s. This is no less the case for eastern North Carolina where all three of the rural counties in the region that had lost population during the 1980s (Duplin, Greene and Sampson) more than regained this loss after 1990, largely as a result of Latino immigration (N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, n.d.).

Having examined some of the political-economic factors underlying the growth of a Latino job market, we now move to consider how and why 'the rural' matters to migrants themselves. To do this, we believe, it is important to examine the nature of the *rural experience* for Latinos. This experience, we suggest, is somewhat ambiguous or contradictory. On the one hand, Latinos are self-consciously choosing to migrate to rural areas of North Carolina because the rural context offers a number of perceived advantages. On the other hand, this same rural context places Latinos in a position of structural disadvantage.

The Rural Context II: Latino Migrants and the Rural Experience

As we have suggested, changes in the local political economy of Eastern North Carolina have much to tell us about the rise in Latino immigration to rural areas of the region. This, however, only tells part of the story. Latino migrants are not simply passive workers responding to changes in regional labor markets. They are active agents, whose decisions and experiences significantly shape the dynamics of transnational migration, and thus also the profound social and cultural changes that are transforming the rural South. Accordingly, we move to consider the rural context from a second perspective, focusing on the reasons why migrants appear to be choosing to reside in rural areas, and on some of the consequences of this rural experience for migrants and their families.

Employment and Cost of Living

In the first instance, there seems to be a perception among migrants that, compared to traditional gateway states, North Carolina presents better employment opportunities and working conditions. Although work in tobacco is notoriously difficult, Latinos look favorably upon employment in other sectors, such as construction, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and other agro-processing. In part, this is because conditions are more difficult in Florida, Texas and California, where Latinos commonly face a higher cost of living and more exploitive work conditions.

For example, informant Alicia Suarez, a 33-year-old mother of four, explained that it was the type of work that drew her husband to North Carolina. He now works year-round in the hog industry, where pay is higher, work is indoors (in air conditioned hog facilities), and the company provides housing and health benefits. Another informant, Arturo Fernandez, initially worked as a seasonal farm laborer circulating between Florida and North Carolina before settling permanently in North Carolina in 1984 to work in the meat and poultry industries and more recently in construction. For Arturo, working with hogs, turkeys or chickens is '*más sencillo*' (simpler) than working tomatoes, cucumbers or oranges in Florida. Still another informant, Manuela Aguilar, recounted how in Texas, as a domestic employee, she was expected to live in a home ('*de planta*') working around the clock cooking, cleaning and caring for children for a mere \$100 a week. In North Carolina, by contrast, she can clean houses during the day, return home to her family in the evenings, and still make more money than she did in Texas.

It is not only the type of employment that appears attractive to Latinos but, at least in some circumstances, the treatment they receive from their employers. Arturo Fernandez notes, for example, '*here any boss will give you a pig. In Florida – who will give you anything there? Here the people are friendlier than in Florida. Here the farmers are good people*'. This impression may in part be tied to the nature of the North Carolina farm economy. In contrast to the large-scale corporate farms of Florida, Texas and California—most of which have relied on Latino farm labor for over half a century—some 85 percent of farms in Eastern North Carolina are family farms, which are only now transitioning from the traditional African American and white labor force to Latinos. Many of these farms are small-scale operations, where workers have direct interactions with farmer owners, and thus can develop long-term relationships. These relationships can lead to a certain non-remunerative benefits, such as the common practice of farmers giving away pork, corn, and poultry to their workers. When a hog dies on a farm, for example, farmers will often ignore the requirement to burn or dispose of the hog in a state-specified manner, and instead give it to their workers. For households existing at the margin, this nutritional largess can be an important contribution to the bottom line.

It helps too that money goes further in rural areas, which generally have a lower costs of living. In comparing N.C. to Florida where he once lived, Arturo Fernandez explains, '*here there is a lot to eat. There life is very expensive*'. Ignacio Villanueva, a 32 year old construction worker and father of three, agrees: '*I never liked Florida because it was too expensive – you couldn't make it*'. One element of 'making it' in rural North Carolina is the availability of affordable housing, most often in the form of a mobile home. Many families have been able to take out mortgages on new trailers on country roads that provide them with amenities, space and privacy not feasible in expensive and congested urban neighborhoods and ethnic enclaves. In fact, 50 percent of families surveyed indicated that the availability of inexpensive housing influenced their decision to settle in Greene County.

The Allure of Rurality

Although it is clear that the above employment context provides some incentive for migrants to settle in Eastern North Carolina, Latinos appear to be attracted to the region for a number of less tangible, under-explored and more emotionally-based reasons associated with notions of rurality. The rural 'essence' of eastern North Carolina appears to be a significant draw in and of itself, especially for families originating from rural parts of Mexico. Table 10.2 shows the results of an open-ended survey question asking Latinos what they like about living in Greene Country.

Notable here is the relative insignificance of material qualities such as employment, housing or cost of living. Instead, respondents focused on the qualitative character of rural living. The most commonly used depiction in this regard is *'tranquilo'* (calm, or peaceful), and synonyms *'pacífico'* and *'calmado'*, terms also encountered in nearly all of our interviews to date. Israel Gonzalez, for example, a father of eight who works in construction, believes that, *'here [in Greene Country] we live more tranquil, more pleasant, more peaceful lives – there are no problems with people'*.

But what does it mean, exactly, to suggest that rural North Carolina is *tranquilo*? There appear to be several different connotations. For some families the preference to live in a rural area is an overt rejection of the negative aspects of life associated with city dwelling. Survey and interview informants commonly indicated that they prefer to live in a rural place such as Greene or Duplin County to escape crime, gangs, drugs, noise, traffic and overpopulation. Low crime rate, for example, was cited by 38 percent of all survey respondents as an issue in household decisions to settle specifically in Greene County. Informant Alicia Suarez recalls with disdain her experience living in the urban center of Raleigh. It was much more restrictive for her family as she was afraid her daughters would get injured in traffic or getting on/off the school bus. She was concerned with having so many cars and a highway so close by their home, and indicated that she feels safer in Greene County. Informants also discussed other negative aspects of city life. For example, Israel Gonzales explains, *'It is more complicated to live in the city than here where we are. In the city there are problems. Problems getting along with people – racism'*. He concludes, *'In the city there are many bad influences'*! Another informant, Arturo Fernandez explains, *'To live enjoyably, it is better on the outskirts rather than in the city ... our lifestyle is better here'*. Ignacio Villanueva gesturing to his trailer on a country road exclaims, *'I like it here! I really don't like living in the city. I don't like the noisy cars. And then the people... I don't like it!'*

For some, the sense of *tranquilidad* clearly refers to North Carolina's relatively less vigilant policing of migrants. As Arturo Fernandez comments, *'Out there they are sending back people every day. They say the worst places are California and Florida. La Migra doesn't come here. I have been here for years and I've never heard of that'*. The image of places such as California, Texas and Florida as 'police states' hostile to immigrants resonates in the collective imagination of North Carolina Latinos. Here is how Alicia Suarez puts it:

They say in other places, if the police stop you they ask for migration papers, and they are throwing out people who don't have them. Here if the police stop you and you don't have a driver's license they just give you a ticket. I think that makes a lot of people come here.

Survey respondents concur with this assessment, averring that *'the police here are not as racist as they are in other places'*, and that, *'they look out for us'*. This favorable impression can serve as an inducement for further migration, as Latinos in North Carolina encourage friends and family in 'hostile' places to relocate to the state. According to twenty-eight year old Manuela Aguilar, *'We say "come here. Here it is much more peaceful. Here there is no danger"'. I think this has brought a lot of people here'*.

A third connotation of the *tranquilo* label has to do with a general sense of comfort with the lifestyle and atmosphere of rural agricultural communities. When describing what they liked about Greene County, survey respondents frequently referred to the general 'country' or 'village' environment. Some mentioned the small size (*'I like that it is a small place – I know where everything is'*), others point to the agricultural atmosphere (*'I like that it is a farming community'*) and still others expressed a general attachment to rural life (*'I like that it is in the country.'*). What is particularly interesting about such impressions is that in many cases, they serve to connect North Carolina back to migrants' lives and livelihoods in Mexico. Some informants have told us directly that they enjoy living in rural North Carolina because *'se parece más a Mexico'* (It is more like Mexico.). Although we have yet to analyze this in any systematic way, it seems clear that at least some families moving to eastern North Carolina are originally from rural *pueblos* back in Mexico and were themselves farmers or children of farmers. Many continue to make small *milpa* plots (traditional mix of corns, beans and squash) at their residence, or keep chickens and other small animals in their backyards. These activities not only contribute to the household bottom line, they also maintain a connection to the village lifestyle that immigrants associate with home. As informant Ignacio Villanueva explains with emotion, *'How can I say – you feel freer when you are in the countryside. Nobody judges you, no one – you feel like you're in the village back home in Mexico'*. Such sentiments underscore the importance of feeling and emotion in shaping recent changes in transnational Latino migration, for they suggest the emergence of a possible 'rural-to-rural' migration stream, sparked not only by the 'supply-side' factors of employment growth, but also by a concerted effort on the part of migrants to re-create in their new home something resembling their rural livelihoods back in Mexico.

The Material Disadvantages of Rural Settlement

Taken together, our conversations and survey responses indicate that Latinos are self-consciously choosing to locate in rural areas, and that they are generally satisfied with their quality of life in these areas. Indeed, when asked to describe ‘dislikes’ about living in Greene County, nearly 70 percent of survey respondents indicated ‘nothing’. This is not to suggest, however, that there are no drawbacks. Despite the perceived benefits of rural locations, Latinos also face a number of challenges in Eastern North Carolina, including persistent poverty, a lack of upward mobility, feelings of alienation and powerlessness, and racial tensions. Although such difficulties are not exclusive to rural areas, they can be exacerbated by the relative homogeneity and isolation of rural communities. In this regard, the overall situation for Latinos in Eastern North Carolina is somewhat ambiguous. Although the rural setting provides a sense of emotional comfort and a refuge from over-zealous authorities, it also makes it much more difficult for Latinos to assert basic claims to the rights and responsibilities of political and economic citizenship.

Table 10.3 shows selected responses to a series of open-ended survey questions, and provides some indication of the kinds of difficulties experienced by Latinos. We can note, firstly, that access to jobs is for many an abiding concern. Although some Latinos told us that they came to North Carolina because employment prospects are better than other states, it remains the case that Latinos here are over-represented in low-skilled employment categories and live on the margins of poverty. Jobs in agro-processing and construction may be preferable to seasonal farmwork, but wages remain low. Survey data show an average monthly salary of approximately \$600 per employed worker, and indicate that three quarters of all households live on average household earnings of less than \$2000 a month (households average just under five persons). Within Greene County, the Latino poverty rate stood at 44 percent in 2000, more than double the county-wide rate of 20 percent, and more than 90 percent of all survey households qualify for free or reduced lunches for their school-aged children. What’s more, there is no indication that Latinos are increasing their household incomes over time. Survey results reveal that mean monthly salaries of individuals who have lived longer in Greene County are not appreciably higher than those of recent arrivals (see Table 10.4). This runs counter to common wisdom that suggests that, over time, increased experience in the U.S., acquisition of social capital, and the opportunity to transition into better jobs, should allow longer-term immigrants to earn more than recent arrivals.

One reason for the lack of upward mobility may be the relatively low levels of education among Latino immigrants, which averaged only seven years of schooling among our survey respondents, combined with relatively low levels of English proficiency. Such disadvantages can reinforce a general sense of disempowerment in the face of exploitive work conditions or employer malfeasance, especially for those who are not legal immigrants. In most cases Latino workers choose to simply endure poor conditions and treatment, or search for alternative employment. In some rare instances workers have stood up to employers, but without organized labor or Latino advocacy groups they have not always been successful in bringing about change. Indeed, confronting an exploitative employer can often result in being fired and even ‘black balled’ with other regional employers in the same sector. Ignacio Villanueva, recounts being fired after protesting to his employer regarding an unpaid half hour at the end of each day when workers were expected to unload construction equipment from trucks.

He got mad at me. Then one day when I came to work he said to a fellow worker – he started to say vulgar things and I didn’t understand anything and then he called me in and said that someone was ‘opening their mouth too much’ about the pay and other things, and it was me.

Despite his willingness to stand up to his previous employer, Ignacio’s current circumstance is only marginally better and prospects for future mobility, despite the acquisition of new skills, are limited. He has now worked at his present construction job for five years. He started at \$7 an hour and now earns only \$9, despite having acquired and mastered many new skills. He notes that his employer is hiring new inexperienced workers at \$10 despite his seniority and skill level. Ignacio has been requesting an increase over the last three years but he realizes that if he changes jobs the income earning potential will not be dissimilar. His only option is to relocate his family and then there are no guarantees the situation will be better.

An important dimension of worker disempowerment is related to the undocumented status of many Latinos, which has likely served to suppress wages in the region. While we did not directly ask survey informants their legal status, only 20 percent of the adult survey respondents voluntarily reported being U.S. citizens and two percent indicated they were legal residents. Results of qualitative interviews and information offered voluntarily by survey respondents suggest that a significant portion of the remaining the 78 percent is undocumented. It is important to bear in mind that this lower level of citizenship and legal employment status may partially reflect the gender imbalance in our sample, as nation-wide there has been growth in the number of undocumented women entering the

U.S. to reunite with their spouses who are likely to have legalized through IRCA (Cerrutti and Massey, 2001). Nevertheless, lack of legal status is a major factor rendering immigrants vulnerable to exploitation in the form of low wages, abuse and poor working conditions.

The Social and Cultural Challenges of Rural Settlement

Latinos also face a series of social and cultural challenges, which can contribute to feelings of isolation, alienation and marginalization. Factors that feed into this alienation include language barriers, lack of Latino organizations and advocacy groups and legal status, all of which can be exacerbated by the lack of a 'critical mass' of Latinos in new rural destinations. One informant, Flor Villanueva recalls the pain and loneliness she suffered when she first arrived,

It takes a long time to get used to it here. One feels very lonely here – it's hard. Because I, when I came here I didn't know anyone – I was lonely. He [husband Ignacio] worked nights and I stayed all alone in the house. I came already pregnant with my eldest son, Ignacio Jr., and so I stayed alone with no one to talk to. I missed Mexico, my mother and everyone. It feels awful!

While these feelings may be felt among Latinos in many different settings, they become amplified in rural areas, where strong Latino community support networks are often lacking.

The sense of relative isolation can be especially difficult for Latinos in the region who lack basic English language skills. Unlike residents of cities such as Miami, New York or Los Angeles, who can live their lives entirely without English, recent arrivals to rural America find the lack of English proficiency a constant challenge. Even so, our survey population exhibited a low level of English proficiency, with 72 percent indicating that they spoke 'no' or 'little' English, in most cases even after many years of living in the United States. Small wonder, then, that lack of English language training was commonly noted as both a source of stress and a community need. Informants expressed frustration at their inability to help children with schoolwork, limited job opportunities due to lack of English and a feeling of isolation stemming from their inability to communicate with others. Lack of English proficiency may also inhibit the ability of Latinos to take advantage of health clinics and other public services, as well as their involvement in local civic activities.

Another factor that may foster a sense of marginalization in rural areas is the lack of political and civic organizations that advocate on behalf of immigrants. Aside from advocacy, such groups are an important vehicle for forging a sense of group identity and unity. According to the survey and recent interviews, few such organizations have developed in eastern North Carolina, and those groups based in major urban centers such as Raleigh or Charlotte that do exist have failed to develop strong connections with the east – let alone the rural areas in the east. Juan Carlos Fernandez observes, '*We see ourselves as a family, but in reality there has never existed any sense of Hispanic unity here*'. When asked about Latino-based support networks, interview informants suggested that it is through individual, personal relationships with family and friends that people receive support – particularly when they first arrive in the U.S.. Informants are generally unaware of support available through formal Latino based organizations or even informal networks linked to country or regional identity. According to Manuela Aguilar, '*ultimately it comes down to everyone for themselves*'. The one notable exception – nearly always mentioned by families – is the rapidly growing number of Latino churches in the region. Churches are recognized by everyone as the strongest Latino-based organizations in the area. The overall lack of Latino political and civic organizations, particularly in North Carolina's rural areas, means there is little context for organization, advocacy, political mobilization, activism or community development on the part of Latinos. Yet many Latinos do realize that in the future they *will* have political and economic power in North Carolina. Their numbers are simply too strong for it to be otherwise.

Finally, as mentioned briefly above, lack of legal status can contribute to a sense of isolation or alienation. Many undocumented Latino families express fear and anxiety over possible deportation, with one mother surveyed explaining, '*For that reason we stay locked up in the house*'. Indeed, legal status was the most frequently cited source of stress among survey respondents, in part because of the many ramifications of lacking papers. It means, for one thing, that Latinos cannot participate in the political process, and indeed only four percent of survey respondents had household members who voted. More importantly, perhaps, the lack of citizenship rights makes it much more difficult to gain employment, challenge unfair or illegal labor practices, send children to college, or to make return visits to Mexico to visit family. This latter concern, in particular, was voiced by a number of survey respondents. '*It is a source of stress that the immigration office won't give me permission to travel to Mexico*', says

one, *'I want to bring my children to Mexico one day so that my parents can meet them'*. Another comments, *'I can't go home to visit. It has been seven years since I've seen my family, and it makes me sad. But it is difficult to return'*.

Summing Up

As we have tried to suggest, there are a number of important ways in which the rural context shapes the experiences of Latinos in Eastern North Carolina. From one perspective, there are a host of perceived benefits, ranging from the availability of jobs to the general ambiance of life in a rural, agricultural community. What strikes us most, however, is the relatively high level of acceptance of this new Latino presence in rural areas. Latino respondents report very few incidents of overt discrimination or poor treatment by non-Latino residents, and seem to generally get along with their neighbors, white and African-American alike. In part, of course, the relatively tolerant attitude toward Latino immigrants may be a matter of economic self-interest. Many rural residents are aware that the agrarian and economic crisis would likely have been far more devastating without the steady flow of Latino labor over the past decade. No one is more aware of the importance of Latino labor than the farmers and other employers who depend upon immigrant workers. After working 20 years in an eastern North Carolina Employment Office, one employee comments, *'I guarantee there would be a revolution in eastern Carolina if you got rid of immigrant labor'*! A Greene County farmer and businessman agrees: *'I absolutely depend on Latinos for my labor. At this point in time there is no other option. Without them, the work simply would not get done. If they (the INS) came in here and cleaned out all the undocumented labor, farming in this area would go down the tubes. The whole region would collapse'*. If the community has not embraced Latinos, it has quietly and passively accepted their presence.

From a different perspective, however, the picture looks decidedly less rosy for Latinos in rural North Carolina. Many live in conditions of poverty, remain entrenched in low-wage employment, and remain relatively isolated from sources of assistance or support, conditions that are especially acute for those who lack papers and/or basic English proficiency. Still, it seems clear that on balance most Latinos willingly accept these trade-offs, and are actively choosing to settle in rural areas. Despite the difficulties, the employment and educational opportunities in rural N.C. are better than those back home, where many families faced chronic unemployment. They accept the trade offs for the opportunity to educate their children, buy a home and have some level of household economic stability.

What has emerged, then, is what might be characterized as a tacit bargain, in which the Latino presence within the community is acceptable to established residents, as long as it remains relatively unobtrusive; and the harsh conditions of life and work in rural areas is acceptable to Latinos, as long as they are given the relative space to live in peace. It is in many ways the rural context of this setting, in terms of both the labor market and forms of livelihood, that make such a bargain both possible and expedient for both the migrant and host communities.

But, how long can such a bargain endure? As the numbers of rural Latino residence continue to increase, and as their settlement becomes more permanent, there is evidence that the relative accommodation between long-term residents and newcomers may be experiencing strain. We close, then, with a look at some of the challenges that rural North Carolina—and by implication areas of the rural South more generally—may have to address as this new stream of Latino migration increases in importance.

The Stresses and Strains of Rural Latino Migration

There are three trends, in particular, that suggest that the implicit bargain in rural North Carolina may be starting to break down. The first of these has to do with the larger political context of 'immigration reform', which has become a cause célèbre for some of the state's important politicians. In the post-9/11 political context, migration has become a source of contentious debate, providing opportunists with an opening to push a strident anti-immigrant agenda. In the run-up to the 2004 elections, for example, television viewers across Eastern North Carolina were treated to television advertisements equating Mexican immigrants with the 9/11 terrorists. Small but vocal North Carolina-based organizations such as *Stop the Invasion!* and *N.C. Listen* maintain a high-profile web presence and stage periodic anti-immigration rallies.

For their part, Latinos are acutely aware of how disingenuous such sentiments are, and of the vital role that they now play in the regional economy. Indeed, we have frequently heard statements such as the following, from Manuela Aguilar:

How is it that they want to send people back to México, or now that they are deciding to fix papers or not? As I understand it – the Latinos are the ones holding up the economy of this country. Who will work their fields? Who will care for their children? Who will do it? The Latinos are the ones who do it!

Families express frustration that in the arena of public opinion Latinos are accused of taking jobs from Americans. Arturo Fernández recalls responding to such comments with, *'Look friend, are you going to pick cucumbers? Are you going to go prime and cure tobacco? You know where you all are – only where there is air conditioning blowing'*. In terms of the present debate, Latinos question why there are not more opportunities to legalize workers when farming rests on their backs. Israel, a former farm worker ponders, *'So I think to myself, - - thanks to us farms produce but they don't give you an opportunity [to legalize]'*? His wife Maria continues, *'For the sake of farming they should give you a chance because farming is what carries everything forward. Even though they know this – they don't give it any importance'*. Israel explains, *'We haven't come to do any bad things... we've come only to work'*. Maria adds, *'... and still they make life harder and harder for you'*.

It is easy to overstate the depth of the more virulent strain of anti-immigration sentiment. By all accounts, only a small minority of North Carolina residents associate themselves with such groups. Nevertheless, as the debates continue in the U.S. Congress about the possibility of a new amnesty program, state and local politicians will increasingly be forced to take public stands on the issue. If nothing else, the publicity surrounding the immigration debate serves to make the average resident more aware of the presence of Latinos in their communities, and thus perhaps disrupt the 'out of sight, out of mind' mentality that seems to be holding sway in the current moment.

A second trend serving to increase the visibility of the Latino presence relates to the actions of Latinos themselves. With increasing force and frequency, Latino organization and advocacy groups are challenging the deplorable, and often illegal, treatment they receive from employers in Eastern North Carolina. The North Carolina Growers Association (NCGA), for example, has been the target of lawsuits alleging that thousands of farmworkers were blacklisted for talking to a lawyer or seeking medical care. In addition, large users of Latino labor, such as Smithfield Foods and Mount Olive Pickles, have faced boycotts and legal action over alleged mistreatment of their workers. In the fall of 2004, Latinos in North Carolina won an enormous victory, when the NCGA signed an agreement with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) establishing the nation's first ever union contract with 'guest' agricultural workers, and the largest union contract in North Carolina history (Farm, Labor Organizing Committee 2004). Again, what seems significant about such events, beyond the securing of basic freedoms and protections for Latino farmworkers, is that they put a very public spotlight on the lives and experiences of Latinos in rural parts of the state. It is one thing, in other words, for Latinos to provide their labor power, but quite another when they start demanding the rights and due benefits of citizenship.

A third and final trend relates to the more subtle, day-to-day impressions and interactions between Latinos and their white and African-American neighbors. Latino migration has transformed the South from a historically biracial society to one that is multi-ethnic. MDC (2002:10) summarized the challenge, *'...the South still must deal with civic tensions and economic disparities that linger from its long white/black divide, even as the region faces new challenges arising from unprecedented ethnic diversity'*. Several N.C. studies confirm growing tensions between African Americans and Latinos (Cravey 1998; Decierdo, 1991; Hyde and Leiter, 2000; Leiter et al., 2001; Leiter and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2000; Selby, Dixon and Hapke, 2001; Skaggs et al., nd) based on perceived competition for low skilled jobs, housing, social services and 'preferred minority status'. Anecdotal information and initial interviews in our research reveal existence of tensions between recent Hispanic arrivals and long standing African American residents, with the latter group resenting perceived displacement in the competition for low and semi-skilled employment.

For their part, Latinos sometimes complain that African Americans do not work as hard as they do, suggesting that African Americans do not want to do the low paid and unpleasant jobs they perform. Several of our interview subjects mentioned feeling they were resented by other workers because of their willingness *'to work harder'*. Israel explains, *'They feel more obligated to work... more pushed to work because we work harder.'* There is significant anecdotal evidence that Hispanics are favored in agricultural jobs and some landlords express a clear preference to rent to Hispanics over African Americans. Latinos interpreted this as a source of tension – particularly among African Americans who are often working alongside them in low skilled jobs. Clearly, this resentment may exist for many reasons, including feelings of displacement and wage depression attributed to Latino labor.

Overall, approximately 20 percent of the Latino families we surveyed reported that people 'have been mean or unkind' to them. In several cases respondents reported feeling 'discriminated against', particularly when dealing with government employees, school teachers and other service providers, and the local police. Juan Carlos

Fernández, for example, explained that when Americans are stopped they let them go immediately, but Latinos are required to get out of the car and everything is checked. In some cases, it is not direct discrimination but feeling alienated as an ‘outsider’. Flor Villanueva recounted visiting a local church with friends,

There are a lot of black people and some whites there and they just stare as if to say, ‘they are Mexican’! Since we are not many, the Mexicans, that go there, they look at you and talk like this (hand gestures indicating whispering).

Taken together, these trends suggest that there may very well be a disconnect in parts of the rural South between the tacit acceptance of Latino labor power, and the uneasy tension surrounding the socio-cultural difference they embody, and the possible extension to them of political and economic citizenship rights. The way these kinds of issues play out will have much to say about the future of the Eastern North Carolina region, and areas of the rural South more generally.

Conclusions: Looking Toward the Future

We began this chapter by asking why Eastern North Carolina has become a significant destination for increasing numbers of Latino migrants. The answer, we believe, requires an understanding of the ways in which the specifically rural context of the region conditions both the opportunities available to Latino migrants and the perceptions and experiences of Latino residents. As we have described, opportunities have become available because of broad shifts in the region’s political economy, which have served to diminish traditional supplies of agricultural labor at a time when the region’s agrarian economy is undergoing significant restructuring. These changes have spurred a significant growth in the demand for Latino labor, and have made eastern North Carolina a favored migrant destination. It has also ensured that Latino job-seekers are not treated with the antipathy sometimes found in other parts of the United States. At the same time, the region’s rural setting offers Latinos a number of perceived benefits, ranging from the relatively lax enforcement of immigration regulations to the more personal feelings of comfort and familiarity that come from living where life is *tranquilo*. For most of the men and women we have spoken to, these benefits are enough to outweigh the obvious disadvantages of living in a relatively remote area, far from home and isolated from networks of solidarity and support.

It is at this intersection, then—between rural political economy and rural experience—that we can identify what we have called a ‘silent bargain’ between the host communities of the U.S. South and their immigrant guests. Although this bargain is more ‘silent’ in some parts of the South than in others, and although it takes many different forms depending upon local circumstances, it is clear that Latinos are increasingly becoming an indelible part of Southern economies and cultures, and that the rural localities of the region will face a set of common concerns as we look to the future. Like the ‘silent bargain’ itself, these concerns are in equal measure economic and socio-cultural.

Economically, significant portions of the rural South continue to experience declines in their agricultural and manufacturing sectors (MDC, 2004). As MCD reports in its 2002 *State of the South*, ‘in effect, there are two rural Souths, one enjoying the fruits and enduring the stresses of unprecedented growth, the other engulfed in darkening shadows’ (2002, p. 8). It is these latter areas, the ‘shadows of the Sunbelt’, where the Latino presence may be most unsettling. As traditional manufacturing sectors such as textiles and furniture continue to shed jobs, and with the continued consolidation and contraction of agriculture, some areas will likely face increased competition for employment, primarily in low-end service jobs. In such a context Latinos, who are often willing to work for lower wages and may be less inclined to challenge exploitative conditions (especially if undocumented), are frequently preferred by employers. These economic trends, we believe, have the potential to fuel increased tensions between Latino newcomers and the traditional, largely African-American, pool of low-skilled labor.

This brings us to our final point, which is that the way that rural areas of the South deal with these tensions is of signal importance. As the number of Latinos living in rural Southern communities continues to increase, it will become increasingly difficult for Latino migrants and their families to remain ‘hidden’. As the Latino presence becomes more and more visible, Southerners will be forced to negotiate the new forms of social and cultural difference that Latinos embody. It is one thing, for example, to demonstrate a degree of acceptance toward ‘outsiders’ whose presence in the region is a short-term economic benefit. But it is quite another to offer to Latinos a form of hospitality that would extend beyond the region’s workspaces, and include the full benefits of social and community citizenship.

For Latinos living in small towns and rural hamlets across the South, at stake is whether they will become increasingly marginalized, and subject to new forms of legal, social and spatial exclusion. We would hope for a

different outcome, one in which the contributions and sacrifices of Latino families becomes a part of the Southern conversation, and in which our interactions with our Latino neighbors are guided by a form of responsibility that transcends the boundaries of nationality and culture. This future, which might be called a 'rural cosmopolitanism', will require nothing less than a reevaluation of longstanding notions about the nature of labor, race and Southern identity. Difficult though this task may be, its success or failure will have much to say about the future of rural communities across the American South.

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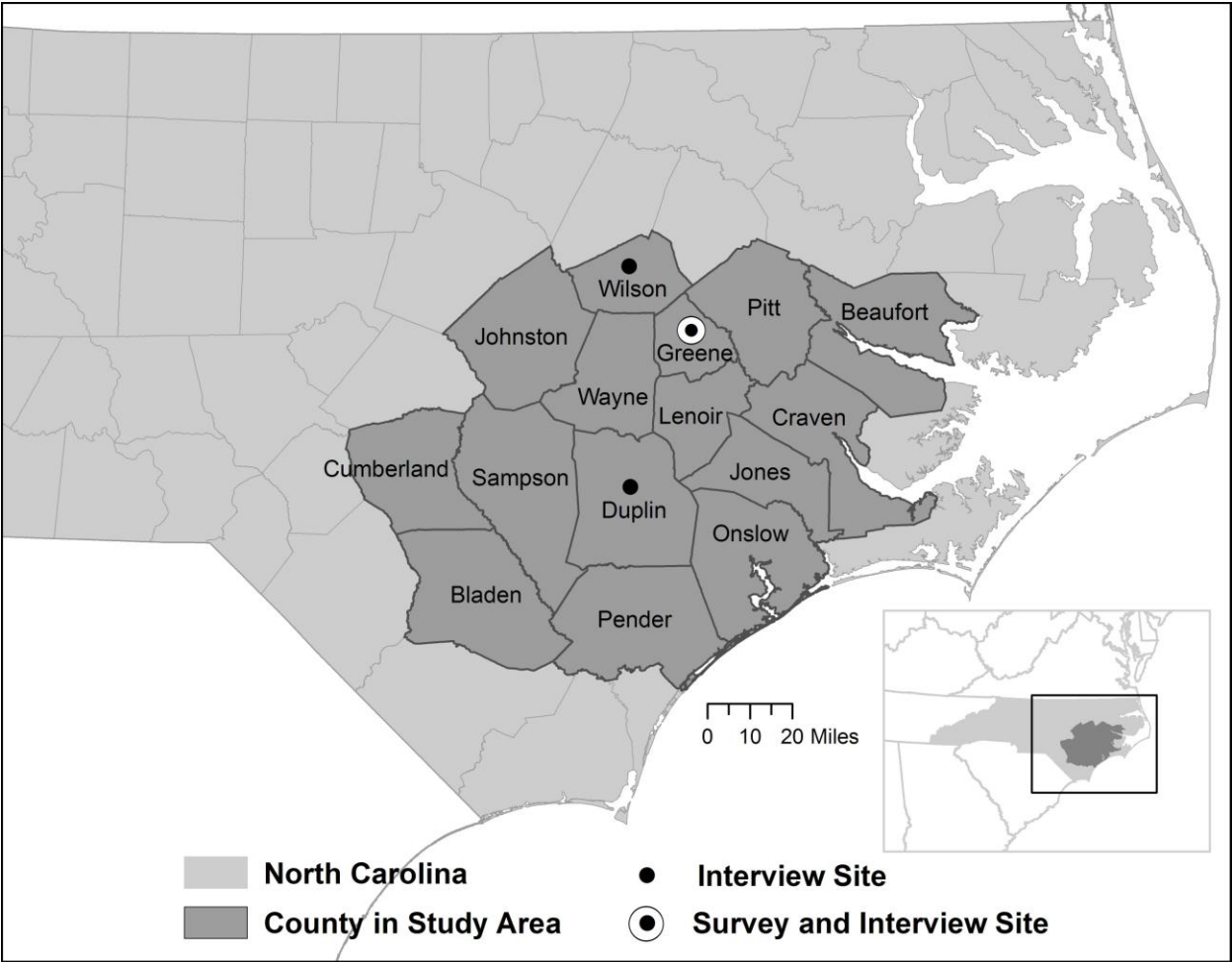


Figure 1. The Central Coastal Plain of North Carolina

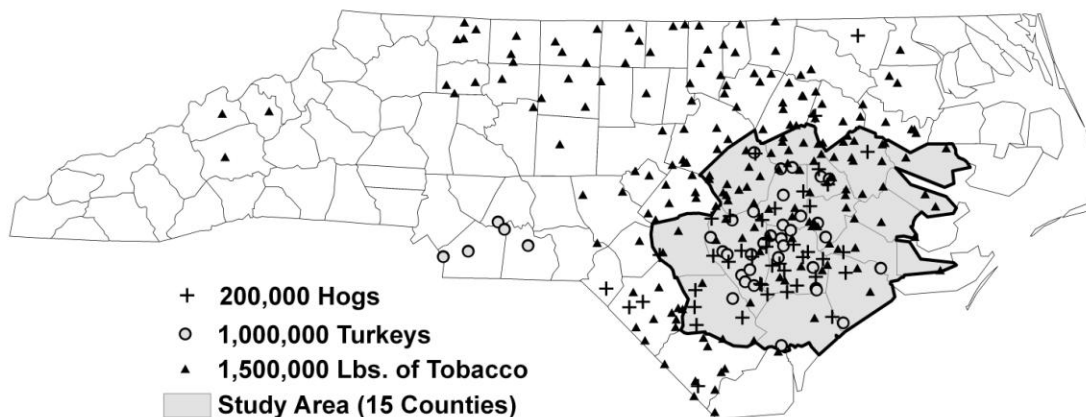


Figure 2. Production of Hogs, Turkeys and Tobacco in North Carolina

Table 10.1 Job Categories

Job Category	Frequency	Percent
Farmworker	76	40.9%
Building and Construction	47	25.3%
Laborer, Unspecified	15	8.1%
Assistant/Secretary	5	2.7%
Food Service Worker	5	2.7%
Gardening/Lawn Care	4	2.2%
Seamstress	4	2.2%
Self-Employed	3	1.6%
Machine Operator	3	1.6%
Factory Worker	3	1.6%
Laundry	3	1.6%
Packer	3	1.6%
Supervisor/Administrator	3	1.6%
Trucking	2	1.1%
House Cleaning	2	1.1%
Others	8	4.3%
Total	186	100%

Table 10.2 Survey responses to open-ended question, “What do you like about living in Greene County?” Responses are not mutually exclusive, N=136.

Common Responses (Times Mentioned)	Frequency	Percent
‘Tranquilo’ [Peaceful/Tranquil]	72	53%
Good Schools; ‘Muy bonito para mis hijos’ [Very good for my kids]	36	26%
‘Todo’ [Everything]	18	12%
Clinics/Health Services	13	10%
People are helpful/friendly	6	4%
‘No hay problemas’ [No problems]	6	4%
Jobs	4	3%
Other Latinos are living here	3	2%

Selected Quotes:

- ‘Se parece a México.’ [It is like Mexico]
- ‘Me gusta que es como un rancho’. [I like that it is a farming community.]
- ‘Que está en el campo’. [That it is in the countryside.]
- ‘Tranquilidad. Los policas de aquí no son tan racistas como en otro lugares’. [Tranquility. Here the police are not as racist as in other places.]
- ‘La policia cuida bien’. [The police take good care of things.]
- “Es muy tranquilo, no hay mucha drogadicción ni pandillas.” [It is very tranquil, there isn’t much drug addiction nor gangs.]
- ‘Nadie se mete con nosotros’. [Nobody messes with us.]
- ‘No hay gente problemática’. [There aren’t problematic people.]
- ‘La libertad de la gente para expresarse’. [The freedom people have in expressing themselves.]

Table 10.3 Responses to three open-ended survey questions. Responses are not mutually exclusive.

“What do you dislike about Greene County?” (Times Mentioned, N=118)			“What causes you stress?” (Times Mentioned, N=124)			“What are areas of need for the Latino community?” (Times Mentioned, N=123)		
‘Nada’ [Nothing]	82	69%	‘Nada’ [Nothing]	29	23%	More/Better job opportunities	26	21%
Lack of jobs/Jobs are far away	18	11%	Legal status	26	21%	‘No sé’ [Don’t know]	25	20%
No large stores	4	3%	Lack of jobs/Difficulty finding work	20	16%	Spanish/Bi-lingual services and programs	25	20%
Monotonous/nothing to do	2	2%	Miss family/Cannot visit Mexico	17	14%	Amenities: parks, recreation & events	18	15%
Too small	2	2%	Worry about children	13	10%	English classes/Assistance	12	10%
Racism/poor treatment	2	2%	Can’t speak English	10	8%	Help with legal status/travel to Mexico	8	7%
No parks	2	2%	Bills/Lack of Money	6	5%	<i>Cultural issues</i>	3	2%
Others	7	6%	No car/Hard to get around	2	2%			
<u>Selected Quotes:</u>								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘<i>Que migración no me da permiso para viajar a México. Poder llevar a mi familia algún día a México para que mis padres la conozcan</i>’. [That immigration will not give me permission to travel to Mexico. To one day take my family to Mexico so that my parents can get to know them.] • ‘<i>No poder ir a visitar. Siete años sin ver a la familia, se siente triste. El regreso es difícil</i>’. [I can’t go home to visit. It has been seven years since I’ve seen my family, and it makes me sad. But it is difficult to return.] • ‘<i>Que llegue migración y nos deporten. Por eso nos quedan encerrados en la casa</i>’. [That immigration will come and deport us. For that reason we stay locked up in the house] • ‘<i>Nosotros estamos pagando las consecuencias de los terroristas por 9-11</i>’. [We’re paying the consequences of the 9-11 terrorists.] • ‘<i>Aprender más acerca de la cultura americana para poder convivir mejor y entender mejor a los hijos</i>’. [Learn more about American culture to be able to get along with and understand our children better.] • ‘<i>Más atención y comunicación con organizaciones. Más respeto y confianza</i>’. [More communication with organizations. More respect and trust.] • ‘<i>Es muy pequeño y tiene muchas divisiones</i>’. [It is very small and very divided.] • ‘<i>... Es peligroso -- no hay seguridad para mis niños, se quieren meter a mi casa desconocidos</i>’. [It is very dangerous, my children aren’t safe. People I don’t know want to break into my house.] 								
‘ <i>He encontrado mucha gente racista</i> ’. [I have encountered a lot of racist people.]								

Table 10.4 Employment Figures vs. Years Household Respondent Has Been in Greene County (for those currently in the labor force)

Years in Greene County	N	% in agriculture	% in construction	Mean monthly salary
0-3	54	24%	20%	\$741
4-6	60	42%	18%	\$817
7-10	46	41%	35%	\$804
10+	30	33%	20%	\$750