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Home Is Where the Heart Is: Afro-Latino Migration and Cinder-Block Homes on Mexico's Costa Chica

The Museum of Afromestizo Cultures (Museo de las Culturas Afromestizas "Vicente Guerrero") was inaugurated in Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero, Mexico in 1999. Cuaji, as locals call it, is located on Federal Highway 200. This two-lane paved road is the only major artery on the Costa Chica, a historically black region of Mexico's rural southern Pacific coast. When I visited the museum in 2001, I purchased a Valentine's Day card from its small collection of gifts. The cover is a cutout heart; the interior has a blurred color photograph of a round structure of wattle-and-daub. A few dark-skinned people are outside the structure, sitting on a bench under an open shelter made of palm fronds (*ramada*). The caption describes the structure as a *redondo*, a round house, from the village of San Nicolás. One of the coast's "black villages" (*pueblos negros*), San Nicolás is a community with some 3,500 members and a subsistence base in small farming. It is located about 30 kilometers south of Cuaji, which is its municipal seat.

Directly above the photo is a verse referring to the town: "My mother told me not to go to San Nicolás; I'm going to San Nicolás even if I die tomorrow."[1] These words might be a general

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warning to avoid San Nicolás, or perhaps a more specific caution to the subject that his problems will only get worse if he follows his plan. The verse and the cutout heart also suggest, however, that the individual is drawn to this place so strongly that not even his own death will keep him from getting there.

Today, the houses most desired in San Nicolás are not redondos. They are—in striking contrast—boxy, unadorned structures made of cinder block. These are financed mainly through personal remittances sent by San Nicoladenses living in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, who frequently couch their motivations for migrating in terms of "building my house" (*hacer mi casa*) in San Nicolás.[2] Because both migrant and nonmigrant San Nicoladenses are caught up in the transnational flows that have become characteristic of this moment, their lives can no longer be contained within national boundaries.[3] San Nicoladenses living in the United States are intensely tied to the Mexican community, making the village space a prominent symbol of the connections between migrants and nonmigrants.[4] As I examine these processes, particularly in San Nicolás itself, I focus on how houses "there" indicate the ways in which migrant San Nicoladenses recall a place many have not seen for years, represent their aspirations for upward mobility, and express ongoing attachments to a community where family members remain and where most will return to be buried.

Throughout the article, I stress the paradoxical ways in which houses speak to senses of place, history, and notions of community and kin. Redondos highlight the disconnect in Mexico between an emphasis on the Third Root, or an "African" heritage, and local people's lack of interest in that heritage, in part because of their migration experiences and global restructuring, and in part because, as they see it, they are "Mexicans" for whom the past is not only *not* African, but gone. Cinder block highlights the ironies of the migrant experience, as people cement themselves to a place that changes day by day, in large part due to the accelerating transformations that migration engenders as aspirations for stability and upward mobility transform the community's physical and social landscape.

San Nicoladenses began to establish a community in the metropolitan area of Winston-Salem about fifteen years ago, after a decade of migrating to Santa Ana, California, where some still remain. A trickle turned into a stream as the southern United States offered work, inexpensive living accommodations, and relatively few Latinos with whom to compete for jobs.[5] Today the Winston-Salem community numbers close to one thousand

people, most of whom hold low-wage jobs in the service industry, construction, and light manufacturing. Largely undocumented, most live in substandard and crowded housing, often in areas where drug dealing and violence are common. For many U.S. San Nicoladenses, sending remittances to family members in San Nicolás for the purpose of building a house there is a top priority. Such remittances are financially draining, as immigrants struggle to make ends meet, with obligations both in the United States and in Mexico.

Margarita, one of my *comadres*[6] living in Winston-Salem, and her husband Maximino have been able over the past five years to build a large five-room house in San Nicolás, with a wide breezeway that runs its length. I generally stay there when I go to San Nicolás, and have contributed in small ways to the home's construction. One day I called Margarita to ask her about the card I had just brought back from Mexico. After I read to her the verse, she said that it reminded her of the ballads (*corridos*) from her youth.[7] It is from the past, she told me, a time when the community was rife with violence, explaining the reference to mortality, a common theme in many Mexican ballads, not just ones from the coast.[8] But the verse on the card was specific to San Nicolás, and its content as well as its placement above the redondo suggested an abiding connection to this place. One might read the connection as a rootedness in the past, when redondos and ballads were the norm. Margarita described it with a hint of shame as a time when people did not know how to read, were "ignorant," and were more prone to settle disputes through violence. As in many rural Mexican areas, there were frequent agrarian disputes with wealthy landowners and neighboring communities, as Margarita pointed out. But many outsiders attribute the Costa Chica's violence to a local ethos bound to what they construe as its people's African roots, while others, in a different racist move, attribute to blacks a *bravo* (fierce or uncivilized) character.[9]

San Nicolás has long been seen by outsiders as hostile and unwelcoming. However, over the past two decades, Mexico's drive for multiculturalism has produced a set of artifacts and discourses identifying and valorizing African cultural survivals in Mexico. Black villages have become attractive to a variety of cultural investigators, who consider San Nicolás a community where the "old" traditions survive and are drawn there in search of the African bits of the Mexican mosaic. In the context of this discourse, and as the note card implies, redondos have become emblems of a distinctive local culture and identity.

This identity rests on what some researchers refer to as "vestige[s] of African inheritance,"[10] with which majority Mexicans have an ambivalent relationship. "Afro" Mexico is said to have a place alongside the Indian and Spanish roots of the nation and is thus lauded as a cornerstone of modern Mexico. Yet it is also associated with a primitive past and a time when national culture had not yet penetrated the Costa Chica. The discrepancy between outsider perspectives that anchor the past in "wild" African things and give value to their benign survival in the present, and the perspectives of local people who do not self-identify as "Afro" Mexican or even as black, has become clear over my years of fieldwork. San Nicoladenses look back on the past with a mixture of nostalgia and shame; they see themselves as modern Mexicans looking toward a future that distances them from the past. Most find that future in the United States, which they refer to as "the north" (*el norte*) or "the other side" (*el otro lado*). Over the past few decades, migration from San Nicolás to the United States has all but emptied the community of the physical presence of its middle generation and their older children.

Transnationalism, Place, and the Mundane

San Nicoladenses such as Margarita articulate their rationale for leaving San Nicolás through reference to the village itself by linking migration to their desires to build cinder-block houses for their families in San Nicolás. For them, redondos and other dwellings made of earth, such as adobe, are not "real" houses. But redondos do draw attention to San Nicolás's past, for until about thirty-five years ago they were common in the village, and many people remember living in them. More than signifying the past, however, redondos have a central place in the cultural calculus of the present as cultural promoters—anthropologists, local intellectuals, and politicians—"rescue" (*rescatar*) local traditions to draw out the exotic. As they do, however, local people replace the earth of the past with the cinder block of the modern.[11] Because cinder block belongs to the modern, however, it is never part of the cultural promotion that rests on the buried differences of the past. Contemporary houses are thus made invisible in scholars' contemporary accounts of local culture on the Costa Chica.

The sheer ordinariness and ubiquity of cinder-block homes in San Nicolás demands an ethnography of the mundane that contextualizes such homes in the more extraordinary experiences of people's lives, in this case the parallel processes of migration and global restructuring that simultaneously

foster displacements *and* reconnections in new and affective ways. Over the last decade or so, these processes in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America have generated new theoretical insights into migration, all but replacing traditional models resting on unidirectional movement and assimilation.[12] Today scholars stress that many Latin Americans and immigrants to the United States from other parts of the world live "simultaneously in two countries" multilocally through "transnational migrant circuits" or "social fields."[13]

The theoretical scholarship on migration often fails to address directly the issue of undocumented versus documented immigrants. For the former, simultaneity might in fact not be characteristic. For instance, the majority of U.S. San Nicoladenses exist in a kind of liminal space that makes it almost impossible for them to fully "live" in the United States even though they spend their time there. They cannot participate in U.S. society in the ways that legal residents and citizens can. Most people older than fifteen do not speak English and thus cannot communicate with landlords, employers, the electric company, and so on. They are also stymied by state and federal laws that make it all but impossible to move about.[14] Furthermore, due to their legal status and their relatively recent history of migration, most San Nicoladenses do not participate easily in border-crossing processes because the return journey costs too much and is too dangerous. All of this conspires against their cultural fluidity or bifocality, a description that assumes an equal sense of belonging in two places at once.[15] Instead, their orientation is generally toward the village of San Nicolás and the country of Mexico, which motivates the current generation of San Nicoladenses with hopes for a future return.

Without downplaying the fissures and dislocations that characterize migration, or losing sight of the economic, social, and political conditions that compel it, I believe that, perhaps counterintuitively, it is *because* of their undocumented status that U.S. San Nicoladenses do not experience migration as *disrupting* ties to their home communities. Indeed, rather than being "radically pulled . . . apart from place,"[16] they seem to be constantly pulled toward it through actions and words. By attending to their Mexican connections, I therefore highlight the meaningful sentiments and obligations that orient them to their village and make them always (affectively) present there.[17]

That presence and those sentiments are evident in the marks they leave on the place they left behind. Those marks and that place are central to the

logic compelling San Nicoladenses to leave, but they are also evidence of their ongoing identification with home. Most pointedly, the cinder-block houses of San Nicolás speak to the violence of a modernity that ruptures family ties and to other social changes engendered by migration. Yet they also and equally speak to the enduring importance of place, kin, and belonging, and to the paradoxes of being labeled black in Mexico, where blackness is historically tantamount to ongoing displacements.

Cinder block might not at first glance seem to inspire culturally thick ethnographic description. We associate it with the blandness of suburban utopias dotted with strip malls; it is denigrated by elites in those parts of the world where the maintenance of the quaint or exotic feeds tourist economies.[18] But cinder-block dwellings are texts for reading how San Nicoladenses, both at home and abroad, are embedded in a transnational world. That embeddedness is inscribed not just in the houses that people build and often do not occupy for years as they struggle to make it in the United States, but also in the tombs in San Nicolás's cemetery, which personal remittances also pay for and which also index the persistence of place and kin even as they make apparent the scope of the transformations that finally send San Nicoladenses home.

The Past in the Present

San Nicolás's majority population is descended in part from sixteenth-century free and enslaved blacks brought to the coast by Spanish landowners. The free and enslaved population was joined by maroons who settled on the coast after fleeing other parts of Mexico.[19] Along with most of what are referred to today as Costa Chica's *pueblos negros*, San Nicolás is located on the coastal plains, where the land is relatively fertile and where cattle raising—largely by elites—has been part of the economy since colonial times.[20] The community's agrarian history is marked by conflicts and boundary disputes with large landowners. During the 1930s agrarian reform, San Nicolás became an *ejido*,[21] with land carved out of the white American engineer Carlos Miller's 100,000-hectare estate, on which San Nicoladenses had tended his cattle and grown cotton for his cottonseed oil factory. Today, San Nicolás contains about six hundred small farmers who raise cattle, corn, and chile for subsistence and sesame and mangoes for local and regional markets. Unfortunately, these markets have seen dramatic price drops as international policies remove supports and agrarian

assistance while opening markets to free trade in commodities and leaving geopolitical borders closed to the free movement of people.

To the north of the coastal plain and its black villages lie the region's small cities—Ometepec, Pinotepa Nacional, and Cuaji. These are still dominated by an economic elite of merchants, politicians, and professionals who would be "mestizo" in national parlance but who are locally referred to as "whites" (*blancos*). In the hills and mountains farther north are indigenous communities of mostly Amuzgo and Mixtec speakers. San Nicoladenses refer to them as "Indians" or as "Indian Indians," depending on how assimilated they perceive them to be. They have poorer land and tend to be more impoverished than whites and African-descent Mexicans, who hire them to work as unskilled laborers on their own holdings.

In recent decades, San Nicolás has become home to several hundred people from an arid and hilly northern zone of the Costa Chica. These relative newcomers are designated "Indians" by majority San Nicoladenses. This is because of their phenotype and geographical origin rather than because of their dress and language, the usual national markers of indigenousness; these individuals suppress "Indian" dress and language or leave them behind. When San Nicolás's Indians began to arrive thirty years ago, land was plentiful and had not yet been privatized, and the Indians became community members with rights to community land. Today, population growth and market demands have put pressure on landholdings, and San Nicolás's Indians often voice fear of ejection from the village while simultaneously disparaging "blacks" as "not from here." These Indians tend to be less well off than the community's African-descent residents, who sometimes still refer to the Indians in a colonial idiom as *gente sin razón* (people without reason, i.e., uncivilized people).[22]

Scholars have long referred to the Costa Chica's African-descent people as "black" (*negro*). This racial label is still maintained, but over the past decade and in the context of cultural preservation initiatives funded largely by the Mexican federal Office of Popular Cultures, "black" has come to overlap with "Afromestizo" and "Afromexican" as politicians, anthropologists, artists, and other culture workers shift their language to accommodate people they identify as the "Third Root"—after Indians and Europeans—of the Mexican nation. San Nicolás's "blacks" are caught up in complex ways in the politics of cultural production. They count as ancestors the African-descent people who have populated the region since colonial times, but they are largely unaware of the history of slavery in Mexico, know noth-

ing about Africa, and ascribe Mexico's status as a "free" country to Indian heroes who "broke the chains of slavery."[23] As with other Mexicans, central to their consciousness is a Mexican national identity that has traditionally rested on ideologies reconciling a romanticized Indian past with an elusive modernity achieved through whitening. Such an identity is therefore a deeply mestizo one, and it has always erased blackness from the face of the nation while including both Indians and whites. That "blacks" are considered people "without a country," as I was once told by a mestizo cab driver from one of the coast's small cities, captures the state of *not belonging* with which African-descent Mexicans have grappled and which have excluded them from the nation.

This historical and ongoing exclusion is part of the reason that majority San Nicoladenses do not self-identify as wholly black (*negro*), a term they reserve for their ancestors, for insults, for people in *other* villages, and for what outsiders say about them. Still less do they see themselves as Afromexican or Afromestizo, in part because "African," like "black," makes them *different* from other Mexicans. Instead, African-descent San Nicoladenses, like majority Mexicans, see Indians as integral to their own identities. Referring to themselves as *criollos* (native-born) and to Indians as *naturales* (primordial natives), they combine what James Clifford calls "diaspora cosmopolitanisms," which draw on historical contexts of displacement, with indigenous claims to continuity, which rest on "natural" connections to places.[24] They refer to themselves as a "race" (*raza*) of "black-Indian" *morenos*, contrasting themselves not only to the *negros* of the past but also to the African Americans with whom they have contact in the United States. *Morenos* make Indians central to San Nicolás's agrarian struggles and filter black-Indian experiences and perspectives through local rituals, stories, histories, politics, kinship, and supernaturalism. Significantly, the authentic statue of the village's dark-skinned eponymous patron saint—San Nicolás Tolentino—is guarded and worshiped in an Indian community 300 kilometers from the coast.[25]

Redondos similar to the one depicted on the museum note card were still common on the Costa Chica in the 1940s, when the late Mexican anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán conducted the several weeks of fieldwork in Cuaji that formed the basis for the only ethnographic monograph focused on Mexicans of African descent. He emphasized what he saw as the isolation of the region's "blacks" as well as their differences from both national (mestizo) and indigenous populations. For him, redondos were "cultural reten-

tions of African origin, more specifically, Bantu."[26] The Mexican scholar Gutierre Tibón drew a much different conclusion, however, when just a bit later he visited the "black" Costa Chican village of Collantes, Oaxaca. Tibón noted that round houses were characteristic of the precolumbian Cauca region of Colombia, as well as of areas of Mexico to which blacks never arrived. He subsequently questioned the logic of Aguirre Beltrán's argument. "Are [Mixtec round houses] precolumbian?" he asked rhetorically, or "a cultural loan from the Africans?" "If some ancient tradition survives in Collantes," he continued, "it is not African but rather Indoamerican." He referred to locals as "Afromixtecos" because of their "mixed" African and Indian heritage.[27]

Although the problem of origins cannot be definitively answered, it is not a question of academic musing or a pointless exercise in outsider essentialism. For Aguirre Beltrán's rather than Tibón's assessment was seized on in the 1980s and 1990s by scholars of black Mexico, and the idea that redondos and other cultural forms are vestiges of Africa and have their origins in "black" culture guides much outsider interest in—and interactions with—local communities on the coast, including San Nicolás.[28] "[Redondos] are now all over the place," I once heard a schoolteacher from Cuaji remark, "even up in the Mixteca (an indigenous part of Guerero and Oaxaca states). This is blacks' influence."

What is happening in Mexico is similar to what has happened in other Latin American locales, where a "black" culture is identified by outsiders and then equated with African survivals depicted as isolated and leftover fragments of a tangible past to which the value of the present is seen to adhere.[29] Within this discourse, the meanings local people give to their "roots" are overlooked in favor of the priorities of outsiders.

Like other local traditions, such as the music known as *sones de artesa* (also coded as African), redondos are folklorized in ways that spatially and temporally decontextualize them. Redondos are turned into portable pictures and replicas and made available for national and even international consumption.[30] During my first visit to San Nicolás in 1992, I was brought directly to a redondo that turned out to be a replica built in the 1980s at the urging of a visiting Mexican anthropologist.[31] It stood on the outskirts of the village on borrowed land, next to a carved wooden trough used as a dancing platform for performances of *artesa* music. Ernesto, the San Nicoladense who took me to the spot, contended that it was the "African center" of the village. This comment caught my attention because the space was

at some remove from the village's demographic heart. But I later came to understand that I was invited to visit this site and it was presented to me in the way that it was because Ernesto, an *artesa* musician familiar with the discourse of cultural promotion, was personally caught up in the politics of Africanness. The site he brought me to represented what he saw as of interest to outsiders, who typically seek out "lost" traditions.

The model of the redondo Ernesto identified as African, the one built at the urging of an anthropologist in the 1980s, appears on the note card I found in the museum. The image is therefore twice removed from the authenticity that it seeks to convey. Over the years, the replica has crumbled following a move to a new location: the outskirts of the village next to the shuttered *casa de cultura* (cultural promotion center). No one attends to either of these structures, which are surrounded by overgrown brush. Yet whenever there is a new cultural initiative, outsiders move to have a redondo rebuilt, and the *casa de cultura* again becomes a topic for discussion. Redondos otherwise still surface in contexts controlled by outsiders, who emphasize the past as the repository and fount of racial and cultural difference. Thus, models of redondos cast in concrete are found outside the main building of the museum, control of which has been a source of contention between local "blacks" and "whites." An image of a redondo appeared on the badges made for participants in the 1997 First Meeting of Black [*negro*] Communities, organized by a Trinidadian priest who lives in a nearby Oaxacan Costa Chican village. The attendees—mostly local intellectuals and schoolchildren—seized on redondos as evidence of African influence in the region. Redondos were also depicted—along with palm trees, the ocean, and a black woman in a short skirt carrying water on her head—on the backdrop created for the First Traditional Fair organized by cultural promoters and held in San Nicolás in January 1998.

San Nicoladenses collectively refer to culture promoters as *la cultura* (the culture).[32] As Arlene Torres and Norman Whitten have noted in their work on African-descent Latin Americans, pairing the Spanish article *la* (the) with *cultura* in situations similar to the one I describe here has the effect of elevating culture to a level of "refinement" and "civilization" that contrasts with "low" culture.[33] That San Nicoladenses collectively refer to cultural promoters in the singular and with the article "la" speaks to the distance they perceive between themselves and those who have come to study them. For while cultural initiatives are meant to draw "Afro"-Mexicans into a Mexico that unites its people through their differences, many San Nico-

ladenses see what one scholar calls the "Africa thesis" as emphasizing their *difference* from other Mexicans while inventing and valorizing the past in ways that are meaningful mostly to outsiders.[34] As one elderly man pointed out to me, "[*La cultura*] is concerned with dated things, but we are in the modern world."

Nostalgia and Shame

San Nicoladenses are cautious about those who profess to act on their behalf. In part this is because cultural promoters and political activists impose identities without addressing the community's experiences or concerns, which include migration and access to basic infrastructure—drainage, paved roads, consistent running water, decent schools—and to the material wealth that late modernity holds out as a promise. In part it is because the interests of the cultural promoters focus on a few local residents, particularly the musicians who were taught *sones de artesa* music in the 1980s and who now perform it mostly for outside audiences. And in part this caution is because many in the community see themselves giving away their cultural capital without getting anything in return. Modesto put it rather bluntly one day as we chatted under the shade of an almond tree in one of my *comadre*'s yards in San Nicolás: "The round house doesn't interest the people here," he said. "That's why [people] don't take care of it. They need someone to pay them. Who's going to pay someone to work in the casa de cultura?" Maximino told me much the same thing in North Carolina. "Miguel Angel [the anthropologist] paid them to make [the redondo]. They don't want to do it anymore. They don't want to cut the wood. They just want to be paid."

For some San Nicoladenses, especially for elderly ones, my questions about redondos brought out wistfulness and ambivalence, as well as descriptions of the more "rustic" but also more generous environment of the past. The recently deceased Margarito, who was born in the wilderness at the height of the 1910 Revolution, during which San Nicolás burned to the ground because its houses were so flammable, described the old San Nicolás as "pure sticks . . . no streets, just redondos, just trails; the village was full of brush." His daughter Lupe, who is Maximino's mother and now in her midsixties, described how redondos would be bunched together during her childhood. People made bonfires and everyone would bring their sleeping mats outside to smoke tobacco. "Men and women would come out to chat,"

she continued in a long chain of associations. "There weren't any streets. People ate deer, beans, fish, pigeons, iguana, wild pig, badger. [But] then the jungle disappeared," she continued. "The vegetation ended. They began to take down the trees—to remove the brush, you know, agriculture. . . . People used to have a few cattle for the milk, their own chickens, they would grow chiles, tomatoes, and beans and get their salt from seawater, they'd make soap too, but now everything is bought—people want to buy things."

When Sirina, my close friend and *comadre* of three years, was growing up in San Nicolás, her grandparents lived in a redondo. "[Redondos] were made of long fronds [*bejuco]*, with earthen walls," she explained. "People would put more grasses on the roof and then would mark off the area with their feet. The beds would be inside and people would make a raised platform out of sticks to keep their clothes off of the ground." She added and laughed: "Cows lived among the people. They would be milked on the patio in front of the house, and come and go by themselves." Like Sirina, Manuel linked redondos to "the time of his grandfather." Back then, he also added, in a raced assessment of progress, the village was "really, really black and there was nothing here."

With the exception of Ernesto, who is familiar with the rhetoric of "la cultura," when local people discuss the origins of redondos they link them not to Africans but to Indians and to a past that was simpler, more deprived, and more rural than the present. "Generations of Indians made houses like [redondos]," Maximino told me. "They can still be found in the hills and mountains . . . who knows where." Even elderly people can be negative about redondos. "Redondos were for poor people," Domingo told me. "Rich people—those who had cattle—built square houses (*casas largas*)." The ninety-year-old Catalina expressed it this way: "Before, there weren't any good houses—just redondos. . . . Now there are only good houses."

If you walk through San Nicolás today, you will notice endless neat rows of "good houses": square and rectangular cinder-block dwellings (and a few red brick ones) in various stages of construction. Yet you will also notice a smattering of unreinforced adobe houses, and even more rustic *bajareque* wattle-and-daub, which are mostly abandoned. Like the ancestral redondos, adobe and *bajareque* are made principally of earth mixed with plant materials. Adobe is sometimes sided with plaster and, like "modern" homes and the historical homes of local elites, earthen houses are rectangular or square.[35] Many of them are transformed into storage or kitchen extensions as their owners move into new cinder-block houses. But many people in

San Nicolás still live in adobe homes. Such homes have pitted walls and dirt floors and, like redondos, have come to be associated with poverty and low status. Sirina told me that it "shames" people to live in a house made of earth and to be perceived as the poorest members of the community. "If you construct a house out of earth," she said, "people will say you are poor and can't make it." Once she derisively described such houses as of "muck" (*lodo*). Lupe once asked me whether Sirina and her family—whose home is brick and added onto year after year with money sent by their son in North Carolina—had a dirt floor in their home as she attempted to gauge how wealthy they were. Sirina, for her part, pointed out that Angela, an "Indian" resident of San Nicolás who lives in an adobe house with exposed walls, "should have had 'her house' a long time ago, but Pedro (Angela's husband) drinks." In Sirina's mind, then, Angela did not yet have "her" house, a "real" house, because she still lived in one made of earth and her family was not unified.

Angela's two grown children and her husband are currently in North Carolina, while she remains in San Nicolás with her young daughter-in-law Chela. She lives among San Nicolás's other Indians in what is considered to be "their" neighborhood on the outskirts of town. On the whole these Indian latecomers have fewer resources—including land—than *morenos*. But due to increases in the Indians' wealth and in intermarriage between *morenos* and Indians, migration and cinder-block homes have taken hold in this neighborhood as well. Angela is therefore even more self-conscious about her adobe dwelling, with its "rustic" walls and dirt floor, fearing not just that *morenos* but also her own kin and neighbors pity her for her material circumstances and for her husband's drinking. Her house might not be a "nice" house, she once said to me, but she always has food and I am always welcome to eat there. She then segued into a discussion of the redondos still favored by indigenous people in the uplands.

Angela's adobe house is surrounded by piles of building materials purchased over the years with funds sent mostly by her son Oscar, as her husband has trouble holding a job. Oscar works in construction in North Carolina and at home, and he will build Angela's "real" house when he returns from the United States. "Oscar is an excellent bricklayer," Angela remarked. "He's going to make us a house in a [city] style. Everyone will like it; he'll then get a lot of work in San Nicolás and he'll never have to go back to the U.S." In fact, construction in San Nicolás provides many opportunities for builders, electricians, and even plumbers as drainage capacities expand and

people want the flush toilets and indoor kitchens they became accustomed to in the United States. These workers also wait for the migrant remittances that provide their livelihood in San Nicolás. Although what people make in the United States far outweighs what they could make in San Nicolás or even in Mexico City, economic downturns or too much competition among workers in the United States does sometimes cause migrant San Nicoladenses to send less money home, bringing construction in San Nicolás to a halt.

Stable Attachments and the Tense Mobilities

Indians such as Angela live on the outskirts of town in part because they are relative newcomers and in part because property is expensive in the center, which is tightly packed with houses or plots of land awaiting houses. In the past, the plant materials and earth for redondos were freely available from the surrounding wilderness (*monte*), even when the land that today belongs to the community belonged to Carlos Miller, and San Nicoladenses were peasant tenants and workers on Miller's *latifundia*.[36] The prefabricated cinder block of today is referred to as *material*. This, of course, must be purchased, and most is purchased with remittances. As Lupe's cousin Chico put it rather succinctly, "Lots of dollars, lots of houses."

People go to the United States for those dollars because in San Nicolás "there is no way to make money to build a house for your children," Sirina told me. "If there weren't opportunities in Carolina, there wouldn't be any houses." Such sentiments challenge racist local and national discourses that represent "blacks" as lazy, violent, uninterested in improving themselves, and really "not Mexican" at all. San Nicoladenses not only migrate like other rural Mexicans; they also desire to be upwardly mobile in order to reinscribe themselves as Mexicans in generic Mexican houses that are far removed from the ethnicized *redondos* of the past.

With that past perceived as rooted in Indianness, poverty, dirt, and rurality, *morenos* also link progress and upward mobility to their "mestizoization," an identity that retains an emphasis on Indianness and mixedness but is closer to the romantic Mexican ideal of a glorified Indianized past and a "whiter" future. "The people [here] are modernizing themselves; now they are 'mestizo,'" Lupe told me. She also noted that now people wear shoes because they move about in cities rather than in the countryside. For her, then, "mestizoization" moved people beyond "morenoness," but it was not

simply or even primarily a race-based term. Rather, it indexed a move from rurality and poverty, tangentially associated with "darkness," to urbanity and wealth, tangentially associated with "lightness."

The twin processes of "dollarization" and mestizoization engage both geographical and economic mobility. These processes drive and result from migration to the United States, where *gabachos*—white people—hold political and economic power. In the United States, rural San Nicoladenses move to urban areas, develop new aesthetic and ideological tastes, and, like other Mexican immigrants, turn into "eager shoppers" with the means to acquire things unavailable in San Nicolás.[37] Perceptions of deficits in San Nicolás keep some from returning home. As Margarita's sister Alicia once told me while we sat around Margarita's dining-room table in Winston-Salem, "If I went back to San Nicolás, well, I would have money, but there would be nothing to buy!" Her son lives in San Nicolás with his extended family, while Alicia, who is single, sends money to support him and to build her own home.

The United States is not just a place where things can be acquired. It is also seen as cleaner, more orderly, and more comfortable than Mexico. The highways are smooth and wide, I was told admiringly by the elderly Ernesto, who had visited his adult sons in California. My friend Judit's young son, who was born in Winston-Salem and returned to San Nicolás with his parents when he was three, repeatedly told Judit he wanted to go back to North Carolina because "the floors are cleaner there." My former neighbor in San Nicolás, Ismael, who left for Winston-Salem eight years ago when he was seventeen, does not want his own son, who was born in Winston-Salem and has never been to Mexico, to grow up "in the dirt" as he and his younger brothers did.

Despite Ismael's sentiments, even he on occasion checks in with me to see if I can take his son to San Nicolás to visit his grandmother, my *comadre* Rosa. Although Ismael has always changed his mind, most people would go back and forth frequently if they were not undocumented. But home grows ever more distant, as it is nearly impossible for most people to regularly attend the rituals that characterize village life in San Nicolás. Those who have left children and other family members behind wonder when they will have a chance to see them, and telephone calls and videos of missed events are lifelines. People long for the tastes and smells of their home community. Sirina's brother Teo once demonstrated this dramatically while we were riding around Winston-Salem in my car: He suddenly

rubbed his belly in an exaggerated way, threw his head back, closed his eyes, and moaned about the iguana he would like to eat. In her Winston-Salem kitchen Margarita cooks the same tamales, barbecued beef, and cheese that she would make in San Nicolás, some of which she sells to San Nicoladenses in Winston-Salem to supplement the family income. After my visits to Mexico, I haul large suitcases and boxes filled with dried meat and shrimp, country cheese, and fresh herbs for San Nicoladenses in Winston-Salem. These foods are not simply about people's gastronomical preferences. They fall somewhere between "ways of being" and "ways of belonging," as people identify through food as Mexicans and as San Nicoladenses.[38]

Perhaps more profound than food choices are the senses of connectedness to the village, which remain deeply and unconsciously ingrained in San Nicoladenses' very gestures. I realized this one day as Margarita and I conversed *in Winston-Salem* about where a particular family lived in San Nicolás. At one point Margarita quite spontaneously and naturally waved her arm and gestured with her hand as she said, "Over there, by the main road" to point me in the right direction, as if we were orienting ourselves in San Nicolás itself.

Going Home, Going Mexican

Houses of *material* have become "symbols of progress," as the Mexican journalist and political commentator Juan Sánchez Andraka writes with reference to northern Guerrero. In contrast, he also writes, "huts and mudbrick have become symbols of social and economic failure." He sees such "progress" as the by-product of a paternalistic state that effects "criminal reconstructions of Catholic churches, covering [even] colonial jewels with cement."[39] Yet while cement might jar the aesthetic sensibilities of intellectuals, and while San Nicolás's unadorned and boxy abodes with their flat slab roofs become all but uninhabitable ovens in the tropical heat, local people consider cinder block more visually pleasing and infinitely more stable than earth.

Nineteen-year-old Amalia, my godchild (*ahijida*) and Ismael's younger sister, has lived for the past two years in Winston-Salem with her husband. She once told me, as we swung in a hammock in the backyard of the two-bedroom, dilapidated house she shares with her husband and his male cousins, brothers and uncle, that "houses made of earth are from the past." "Who would want a house made of dirt?" she asked. She stayed home to

look after Ismael's son, who was not yet in school, and to cook for the men while her husband worked to save for what Amalia described as a square or rectangular house with "straight" (*plano*) walls and floors. Back in San Nicolás, Sirina pointed out that while cinder-block houses "might be hot, they survive earthquakes." "[They] do not [fall down]," she said. "They do not get damaged." This part of Mexico also sees its fair share of floods and the high winds and hurricanes that still sometimes blow away corrugated tin roofs. Redondos would "fall to pieces because of the wind and the water," Sirina explained to me. They also easily went up in flames from candles; San Nicolás and Cuaji were both burned to the ground during the Mexican Revolution. In one account the disappearance from the village of its patron saint is linked to a storm that lasted fifteen days and destroyed many redondos, including his. The earth out of which such dwellings were made thus symbolizes the ephemeral, the missing, and the insecurity of the past that people struggled with, even as they now struggle equally to anchor themselves to the ground.

By some accounts, cement was first introduced into rural Mexican communities when the federal government began to build primary schools in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead of constructing local schools with local materials, as Sánchez Andraka writes of northern Guerrero, "schools were made of prefabricated materials and their construction implied specialized knowledge of how to utilize those materials."[40] For San Nicoladenses, the government-built primary school is in fact the turning point in their own collective memory, and they link it to migration. Sirina, for instance, remembers exactly when it was that "good" houses entered the consciousness of San Nicoladenses: after a cyclone in the mid-1970s, when the state founded San Nicolás's first primary school. "From the beginning," Sirina went on, "the schools were made out of *material*." Local people watched as the building progressed, learning the building techniques and modeling their desires for more secure houses on the school. But they did not have the economic wherewithal to buy *material*. Some went off to Acapulco to work and send money back to build a house. "Little by little, people started going off to Mexico City," Sirina said. "Now they go to *el norte*." This indicates that the larger-scale processes wrought by migration to the United States are continuations of changes that were already under way before such migration became the norm.[41]

The strength of gender roles and gender segregation in San Nicolás has historically meant that *women* are closely associated with the community's

history of migration. In the past, husbands typically worked the land and cared for the livestock while wives found positions as domestics in Mexico City and sent money home for expenses, including house building. Women separated from their husbands were generally not permitted to return to their father's house, which is still inherited by the youngest son and his wife.[42] Traditionally, these women also went to Mexico City to make a living.

Sirina told me that "from the beginning women have been the ones to pay for the houses." "Amparo's daughter was the first to go" to the United States, she said. The daughter sent money to build the house that Amparo now lives in. Sirina continued, "People would pass by Amparo's house and say, 'Look at the nice house Amparo has.'" Today, although men migrate and couples often cross the border together, single women occasionally go too. Like single men, they live with relatives in the United States while working and sending money home to purchase their own house plot and build their own house. Variations on the kind of home Amparo's daughter built for her are now the norm in San Nicolás, where "even *señoritas* (young women who are virgins and not yet married) can build their own houses," Sirina's husband and my *compadre* (co-father) Rodrigo once exclaimed to me. His own daughter, who separated from her husband soon after marrying him, will be permitted to stay in her father's house for only a short time before she is expected to join her brother in the north. When she goes, her infant will stay behind with Sirina.

In order to build a house, individuals first purchase house plots (*solares*), which are typically fenced off in order to keep other people's wandering pigs—and other people—from encroaching. As a house is built, window openings and breezeways will typically be protected with wrought iron gratings. If the owner can afford it, outside walls will be erected to protect the whole property, as is typical in Mexico, and those walls might be embedded with glass bits or barbed wire for additional security. Most houses are one story, but they have flat rather than pitched roofs in order to accommodate a second floor that adobe could never support. While finished second stories are becoming more common, most houses have protruding metal rods that *anticipate* a future second floor and thus continued upward mobility.

In the past, twenty or so people could lift a redondo and move it to another locale. This meant that extended family could always take in a member who was in trouble. "I had a cousin," Margarito told me before he died. "She got married and lived on the edge of town, where she had her house. They killed her husband, though, and she moved closer in. They brought her house

from there. About twenty people tied it up, someone stuck their head inside [to lift it], and they brought it here." "People could move much more easily back then," Sirina said, "because there was a lot more space and now there is none. You could move and build another house."

That redondos were movable meant that disputing parties could separate easily. But new notions of ownership and the sheer immobility of cinder block have increased social tensions because feuds can no longer be resolved by one party moving a dwelling to another location. "Now," Juan told me in San Nicolás, "if you want to change locations] you have to sell." Conflicts arise around interpersonal issues, fruit trees, drainage, rain runoff, and passageways. Sirina used her son's remittances to build a massive brick wall to block her home off from that of the sister-in-law she despises; Delfina once accused me of eating the mangoes that fell from her tree onto my roof, and during the rainy season the runoff from the palm-frond shack that her family used to relieve themselves would drain into Sirina's outdoor kitchen; Lupe did not think she should have to leave room for cars and pedestrians as she built a wall to enclose the house that belongs to one of her emigrant sons; Felipa insists that her neighbor built his wall on her house plot while she was gone; and so on. Such conflicts over property sometimes result in full-blown hostilities that are resolved only through the intervention of the village mayor.

"Before," Sirina explained to me one day, "the people were poorer; with the opportunities that exist in Carolina now, people can go make money to live well, more or less." While new sources of wealth from migration have allowed people to improve their standard of living in ways that are meaningful to them, such sources have also escalated tensions between households. These tensions are linked to emerging class differences. As a middle-aged woman named Yolanda pointed out, "In the past we were all humbler and poorer. Now those who go to 'el norte' send money and we are growing more distant from one another because of jealousy. Now the person who has a lot of money is proud." Rosa put it this way: "Here the person who has money does less [than a poor person] and doesn't even speak to those who do not have [anything]—to poor people."

Reconfiguring Kinship

The processes that have reconfigured dwelling spaces also index changes in kinship, including the potential destruction of the very unity of the families

for whom cinder-block houses are built. The fact that, as Rodrigo told me, even unmarried girls have the wherewithal to purchase their own homes is one indication of this. So is the fact that San Nicolás has become "a nursery and nursing home" for the children and parents of migrants.[43] As Vertovec points out, the lives of such nonmigrants are also transformed by migration.[44] Lupe, one such nonmigrant, feels abandoned because four of her six children, and most of her grandchildren, are in North Carolina. She has no one to help her with the demands of the land and cattle she inherited from her husband, who was killed many years ago in a local land dispute. She links her abandonment and subsequent isolation to the widespread obsession with houses. "Before," she told me, "no one bothered about their house. Now it is all anyone thinks about—building additions, this and that. . . . They go to *el norte* and forget about us." She oversees several house plots and several houses for her absent children. One of her grandsons was already dreaming of "his house" by the time he was fifteen. He left for Winston-Salem as soon as he looked old enough to find work in North Carolina, and he just got married there. Her other grandsons have also left to join their parents.

The reconfiguration of living spaces reflects changes in family structure as well. According to one source, in the not-so-distant past, single redondos were inconceivable to local people, who saw redondos in terms of their relation to one another rather than as isolated entities.[45] Redondos, then, were not self-contained living units. Not only did different redondos serve different functions—as Sirina and others have told me, "there would be one redondo for sleeping and one for cooking"—but the kitchen redondo was shared by the women in extended families. Moreover, "there would be one big bed for everyone." As Margarito said, "Before there weren't any house plots . . . people just took them but stayed near their families. Families were united. Everything is changing now." "Before," Rosa lamented, "your family were your neighbors. But that's not the case any longer."

Compounds that used to hold redondos and extended families have given way to individual plots for individual houses and smaller, nuclear households within which separateness is also more of a priority. People still routinely visit friends and family, packs of children dart in and out of one another's homes, and front doors are always open if someone is inside. But shared compounds with a single kitchen are much less common than they once were, houses have more than one room so that people can be both

inside and separated, and no one brings their sleeping mats outside to chat or to sleep anymore, in part because people are entertained inside by televisions and cooled by fans as they recline on the store-bought mattresses that have replaced the traditional sleeping mats (*petates*).

Privacy is also more of a concern. Sirina humorously explained the difficulties of making love while living with children or in-laws in a one-room house. Margarita's house has many rooms and partitions. Amalia envisions her house with a large master bedroom, a living room, an indoor kitchen and bath, and separate rooms for her future male and female children.[46]

As some San Nicoladenses grieve the social changes that index widening gaps between the rich and the poor and a breakdown in family ties, they also speak of rising crime that largely affects and is effected by "loose" (*suelto*, unsupervised) young people whose parents are in the United States. Many of these young people have themselves been to *el norte*, and gang graffiti—sometimes in English—can be found on San Nicolás's walls. Sirina explained that when people first started out for the United States, they were responsible and went to work to make a little money. Now, she continued, young people do not want to work. Instead, they want what she called a "hidden" business that will make them a lot of money in a short time. Much local crime is attributed to *marijuaneros* who have been in the United States. "Things weren't like this before," said Rosa. "They brought that [marijuana] from *el norte*. Before it was really really quiet—we could sleep outside." Daria, an elderly woman who had no children and recently died, struggled with her husband for years to scrape together money from crop sales for a one-room cinder-block home with a dirt floor and a flimsy door. Like Rosa, she pointed out that "before, you could sleep [outside] under a *palapa* (shelter) or in a house of sticks. But now you can't" because of the crime. Indeed, while her house is more solid than one made of earth, it is not quite solid enough. She used to leave the little jewelry she owned with a niece, for fear of someone breaking into her home.

Older nonmigrant San Nicoladenses often speak of a breakdown in traditional forms of respect and reciprocity. Margarita's father, for instance, described the past as a time when "people were trustworthy, honorable, and didn't steal from others." It was a "golden era," he insisted; "there were great quantities of fruit." He noted that youth in those days were more respectful. They knelt before their godparents for a blessing, and, in his words, "they greeted older folks with 'uncle,' bowed and tipped their hats." His

comments, along with the others, thus characterize the past as an era when residents esteemed one another, crime and class differences did not exist, and the earth itself was more giving.

Carolina Chica and the Persistence of Family and Place

Migration has shifted from being a promising avenue for security and a shortcut to the modern to a move fraught with dangers that come not just from crossing borders without documents but also from social processes that threaten to undermine the very concept of "community." Cinder-block homes might be anchored to the ground, but now the people they are meant to house are scattered all over, and respect and reciprocity have given way to self-centeredness, to a less "communal" set of values. Indeed, San Nicoladenses often refer to themselves as competitive *egoístas* who will not do anything for free, as Modesto indicated in his comment about people wanting to be paid for building redondos.

Yet houses are paradoxical. On the one hand, they do reflect the social displacements that accompany migration, which in a kind of vicious circle make such homes necessary to ensure safety and security, not just because of what nature might bring but also because of the problems that migration has itself engendered, in part through the acquisition of immobile property. Thus, the houses that protect against the "outside" world can exist only because of the processes that simultaneously erode what people perceive to be traditional social rules and bonds as rich people stop talking to poor people, young folks steal, extended families are torn apart, and children stop respecting their parents.

On the other hand, one can see in the very presence and immobility of cinder-block homes an ongoing and profound attachment to place and to kin, an attachment that challenges the idea that global restructuring simply dislocates and one that challenges the displacements that have historically turned African-descent Mexicans into "people without a country," a phrase that becomes even more ironic in the new transnational context. The transatlantic and internal Mexican slave trade, colonialism, land disputes, war, and migration have historically conspired to fragment San Nicolás's families. Yet cinder-block homes now cement in/to Mexico the continuing aspirations and desires of people who have moved quite far afield. Those aspirations and desires are coded by class, as some people are able to literally own more of the village than others. But the fact that they are also coded by

absence—a striking number of cinder-block homes stand empty because their owners are elsewhere—attests to the central importance of families and their futures.

Achieving that future requires an ongoing reliance on family. Migrants preparing for departure depend on their kin in Winston-Salem, who often send money to pay for their passage, then find jobs for them, give them a place to sleep, and help them negotiate the complexities of life in a place where the lingua franca is English. Emigrants, on the other hand, have to trust nonmigrant family members to receive remittances and put them to work purchasing the building materials and overseeing the construction of the houses to which the emigrants hope to return. Many of the empty houses, and even the ones that are occupied, are constructed in stages as money trickles in from "the other side." And those who stay behind often live in houses that they are essentially building up around themselves. That people who are not there regularly send money to family to construct sturdy houses which they cannot yet live in, and to which they might in fact never be able to return, suggests that even San Nicolás's most displaced migrants retain abiding ties to—and an abiding confidence in—this place. Indeed, even Ismael has bought a house plot, which suggests a kind of "cognitive tension" between "home" and the "foreign."[47]

Perhaps most tellingly, whatever else happens, virtually every San Nicoladense is buried in the local cemetery. Indeed, even if migrants die before they make it home, their resting place will be in San Nicolás. The burial plots that migrants young and old sooner or later occupy reflect the house aspirations they left in the first place to fulfill, for the preferred form of interment is in elaborate concrete tombs that stylistically resemble houses. These have detailed edifices, some of them are tiled, and most of them are individually enclosed with fencing and sturdy gates, much like house plots themselves.[48] Surviving family members cultivate plants in the enclosed and protective spaces where the dead reside, and many of the plaques that adorn the tombs speak of family and of the deceased, who will "dwell" in the hearts of the living forever.

Sirina's comments speak to the ways in which the "modernity" that is perceived to have destroyed family ties also manages to reaffirm them in the cemetery's tombs. "They have roofs," she said of these residences for the dead, "and the entire family is buried there. People grab their burial plot and enclose it, just like now they grab a house plot." She then spoke of the past and the very transience of the earth. "Before, when people died they

were not entombed; they were just buried in the ground. Family members were not buried together. Now everyone is united as a family. If the gravesite is not enclosed and there isn't a tomb," she added, "people will grab a bit of the land and even dig it up again." She knows this because her second child, Antonino, died of a fever many years ago, when he was one year old. He is no longer where Sirina and Rodrigo buried him—indeed, they cannot find his remains because they had no money to entomb him and his bones have been scattered over the earth.

Migrants send money for the cemetery's tombs as well as for the homes they hope to live in one day. Chela explained that the former were in fact more important than the latter in the long run. "Everything comes from Carolina," she said. "What they say here is 'I'm going to make my house,' but one also says that it is not one's house, that it is simply on loan. One's *real* house is in the graveyard, because [as people say] 'I'm going to be there forever. No one can take me out of there. In my [everyday] house, well, [I'll be there] no more than a short time.'"

In the cemetery, then, families are reunited in fixed dwelling places, which are replicas of the homes that have torn them apart in the first place. It is poignant, of course, that people leave to find work in order to purchase their own tombs, as well as those of kin they might never see again, in a homeland to which they might not return alive. San Nicoladenses, however, joke about the situation and, in their inimitable fashion, give it an ironic twist. I discovered this one day after I had visited San Nicolás's graveyard to see the tombs. Afterward, I went by Rosa's house to chat. I told her I had gone to the cemetery, which is along a country road some distance from town, and I expected her to admonish me for going alone, not because it was dangerous but because, despite changing social norms, people still see being alone as unusual and uncomfortable, especially for a woman. Instead of admonishing me, however, Rosa laughed uproariously. "Ahhh," she guffawed, "[you went to] *Carolina Chica* [little Carolina]!" I must have looked perplexed, because she quickly added—still laughing—"You know, [the graveyard]—it's 'the other side' [el otro lado], but you don't need a passport or a coyote to get there."

Rosa's three oldest children are now in *el norte*, along with Ismael's son—a grandchild she has never seen. Amalia and her husband just lent the house money they had saved to an uncle who lives in Winston-Salem and needed a car to get to work. Ismael regularly sends Rosa money to secure her own cinder-block home in San Nicolás and to pay for the telephone she uses to

call her children. Rosa once asked me where Africa was and whether there was work there. She would like to go to *el norte* herself to see her children and the grandchild she has never met, but she has no documents and is afraid of making the difficult journey across the border on foot.

To conclude, perhaps we can imagine a new note card like the one with which I began. This one would still have a heart signifying a profound attachment to place, but it would speak to the dangers and promises of migration. Its verse might comprise a mother's futile warning to her child not to go to *el norte* and that child's reply that he or she is going anyway, even if he or she dies trying to make it. Such a note card might be embellished not with a picture of a redondo, in a nostalgic rendition of an imagined past, but instead with an ambiguous Mexican cinder-block structure that could be either a home or a tomb.

Notes

Versions of this paper were given at the University of Virginia, Anthropology Department Colloquium, the Conference on Contemporary Issues in Anthropology, the conference "Between Race and Place" at Tulane University, and at the American Studies Association Meetings. I would like to thank the participants at those venues for their comments, and Brad Weiss, Juliette Levy, and Judith Boruchoff for their close readings of final drafts.

1 The original Spanish is colloquial: "Mi madre me lo decia que a San Nicolás no fuera; a San Nicolás me voy a unque mañano me muera."

2 Steven Vertovec makes a distinction between personal or individual remittances sent to families, and collective ones sent to communities by migrant organizations, particularly Hometown Associations; see his "Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation," *International Migration Review* 38.3 (Fall 2004): 970–1001, esp. 986–87. Unlike many other Mexican overseas communities, San Nicoladenses do not have a Hometown Association. As almost all remittances are personal, they go to personal family needs, including houses. The result is what has been called "'private affluence and public squalor,' or new homes reachable only over dirt roads" (ibid., 986).

3 Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," *International Migration Review* 3 (Fall 2004): 1003.

4 With respect to my emphasis on meanings (more so than larger structural conditions) and on nonmigrants, I draw on Vertovec, "Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation."

5 Competition has increased as more and more Latinos move to the U.S. South, which has become a geographical magnet for Latinos; see Arthur D. Murphy, Colleen Blanchard, and Jennifer A. Hill, eds., *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001). North Carolina's Latino population quadrupled between 1990 and 2004 (http: //census.osbm.state.nc.us/lookup/, accessed December 14, 2005); Associated Press, "North Carolina Preps for Latino Boom," www.cnn.com, accessed July 9, 2004). San Nicoladenses often complain that Winston-Salem is so crowded with other

Latinos that work there is now difficult to find. Many have moved to nearby cities such as Greensboro and Charlotte, while a few have moved into southern Virginia, which is still within driving distance of Winston-Salem, so that family members can easily move back and forth.

6 Margarita, like all of the names used in this article, is a pseudonym. A *comadre* is literally a co-mother. It is a ritual kin relationship and one that I have with many San Nicoladenses. I have known Margarita for almost ten years both in San Nicolás and in Winston-Salem. She has been my *comadre* for two years, ever since she asked me to attend and to sponsor part of her son's wedding in San Nicolás. She could not return from Winston-Salem for the occasion.

7 An expert in the music of the Costa Chica told me that the verse was more likely a *chilena*, a type of song structure specific to the coast (John McDowell, pers. comm.).

8 These themes can even be traced back to Spain (John McDowell, pers. comm.)

9 Laura A. Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans: The Dynamics of Race, Nation, and Identity in a Mexican Moreno Community," *American Ethnologist* 27.4 (2000): 919, n. 4. For examples, see Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Cuijla: Esbozo etnogríafico de un pueblo negro* (1958; reprint, Mexico City: Secretaria de Educación Pública, 1985); Miguel Gutiérrez Avila, *Derecho consuetudinario y derecho positivo entre los mixtecos, amuzgos y afromestizos de la Costa Chica de Guerrero* (Mexico: Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 1997); and *Corrido y Violencia entre los afromeztizos de la Costa Chica de Guerrero y Oaxaca* (Chilpancingo: Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, 1988), 19–20.

10 María Los Angeles Manzano A., *Cuajinicuilapa Guerrero: Historia Oral (1900–1940)* (Mexico City: Ediciones Artesa, 1991), 37, lower caption.

11 Cinder-block homes can be found all over Mexico as well as in other parts of the "third world," where globalization, and ideas about modernity and progress, have made it the material of choice for construction in rural areas. Although I have not yet researched cement companies, no doubt such research would add an important dimension to this discussion. Cemex (Cementos de Mexico) is the third largest cement producer in the world.

12 See, e.g., Leo Chavez, *Shadowed Lives* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998). See also the discussion in Levitt and Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity," 1002, 1005.

13 "Simultaneously in two countries": Nina Glick Schiller and Eugene Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 3. "Transnational migrant circuits": Roger Rouse, "Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Transnationalism," *Diaspora* 1.1 (1991). "Social fields": Levitt and Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity," 1008–9. Of the vast numbers of studies of Mexican transnationalism, here are but a few that consciously link the different locales Mexicans inhabit: Kimberley Grimes, *Crossing Borders: Changing Social Identities in Southern Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998); Peri L. Fletcher, *La casa de mis sueños: Dreams of Home in a Mexican Migrant Community* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999); and Jeffrey H. Cohen, "Transnational Migration in Rural Oaxaca, Mexico: Dependency, Development and the Household," *American Anthropologist* 103.4 (2001): 954–67.

14 Part of the difficulty is due to U.S. state laws that refuse undocumented people drivers' licenses, bank accounts, access to public higher education, and other services, making it

difficult, if not impossible, for even children brought to the United States by their parents at an early age to acquire property, find good jobs, and receive higher education.

15 The term "cultural bifocals" is from Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo, "Introduction: A World in Motion," in *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*, ed. Inda and Rosaldo (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 20. This essay generally fails to distinguish between documented and undocumented immigrants, instead assuming that the position of not fully belonging to any one place that transmigrants find themselves in is due entirely to the state of living in two places at once. As I suggest here, immigrants' legal statuses must be taken into account in any discussion of transnationalism because such statuses affect people's sense of, and ability to, belong. Hilary Cunningham makes similar points when she argues that anthropologists need to "stay attuned to . . . issues of exclusion, access, and stratification in a context of global interconnections," in "Nations Rebound? Crossing Borders in a Gated Globe," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 11 (2004): 332.

16 Inda and Rosaldo, "Introduction," 11.

17 In this respect I look to Glick Schiller and Fouron's ethnographic account of Haitian transnationalism. They try to capture the deeply sentimental experiences of transmigrants, whom they define as people who "remain tied to their ancestral land by their actions as well as their thoughts" (Glick Schiller and Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing*, 3). Although she does not make this explicit, Karen McCarthy Brown does the same in her wonderful ethnography of Haitian vodoun, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

18 E.g., Jane Perlez, "Where Pagodas Draw Tourists, Concrete Is Unwelcome," *New York Times*, July 8, 2004.

19 For an early history of the region see Rolf Widmer, *Conquista y despertar de las costas de la Mar del Sur (1521–1684)* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990).

20 For a later history of the region see Maria de los Angeles Manzano Añorve, *Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero: Historia Oral (1900–1940)* (Mexico City: Ediciones Artesa, 1991).

21 Historically, rights of access to and use of *ejido* lands belonged to communities. Following amendment to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992, *ejido* lands were parceled out to individuals and privatized. They can now be bought and sold, including to third parties.

22 Laura A. Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints: History, Memory and Place in the Making of Moreno Mexican Identity," *Cultural Anthropology* 16.1 (February 2001): 62–82.

23 Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 898–926.

24 James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 302–38.

25 For more in-depth treatment of these issues see Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans" and "Of Ships and Saints."

26 Aguirre Beltrán, *Cuijla*, 93. In the 1940s some of these redondos still displayed crosses at their apex, as they typically did before the Revolution, which curtailed the authority of the Catholic Church.

27 Gutierre Tibón, *Pinotepa Nacional: Mixtecos, negros y triques*, 2d ed. (1961; reprint, Mexico City: Editorial Posada, 1981), 49, 41. "To speak of a Mexican Congo," Tibón concluded, "is a cheap literary device" (ibid., 49). The anthropologist Frederick Starr's account of his late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century travels in the Mixteca Alta region of south-

ern Mexico includes photographs of redondos that look strikingly like the ones that prevailed on the coast; see Starr, *In Indian Mexico* (Chicago: Forbes and Company, 1908), 135, 139. Archival evidence, including a late-sixteenth-century map depicting round dwellings with crosses at their apexes, suggests the same, for the dispute the map was meant to help resolve involves Indian homes and land (Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo Tierras, vol. 48, exp. 6, f 162, 1583). Local people also associate redondos with Indians, for the form can still be found in upland Indian communities.

28 The American historian Richard Thompson even devoted a chapter of a book to Mande-influenced architecture in the Americas, arguing on the basis of comparison, and despite significant differences, for cultural ties between Mexican redondos and western Africa; see Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1984), 195–206.

29 Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 77–78; Jean Rahier, introduction to *Representations of Blackness and the Performance of Identities*, ed. Rahier (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1999), xv–xxi.

30 On the concept and intent of folklorization in general see Greg Urban and Joel Scherzer, introduction to *Nation-States and Indians in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 11; William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* (New York: Verso, 1991), 58–59. On its effects in San Nicolás see Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans."

31 Miguel Gutiérrez Avila, *La conjura de los negros* (Chilpancingo: Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, 1993), 18.

32 As a non-Mexican my relationship to *la cultura* was at first somewhat uncertain, and I repeatedly had to reiterate that I was not with *la cultura* (and also that I was not an evangelical Christian, or an *alelujah*, as other whites in the village tend to be). The constant questions and comments made me quickly realize that many people viewed representatives of national cultural interests with some hostility (Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans").

33 Arlene Torres and Norman E. Whitten Jr., "General Introduction: To Forge the Future in the Fires of the Past: An Interpretive Essay on Racism, Domination, Resistance and Liberation," in *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Torres and Whitten, 2 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 4.

34 John McDowell, *Poetry and Violence: The Ballad Tradition of Mexico's Costa Chica* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). See also Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans"; Torres and Whitten, "General Introduction."

35 Although both are made of dirt mixed with plant materials, the building processes are different. Adobe bricks are a mud and straw mixture; wattle and daub consists of interlaced posts covered with mud.

36 Manzano A., *Cuajinicuilapa Guerrero*, 30.

37 Grimes, *Crossing Borders*, 66. Consumption, of course, is also fueled by mass media in Mexico, where material goods are racialized in ways that associate them with "whiteness" and power (ibid., 125).

38 "Ways of being" and "ways of belonging": Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity," 1010. On food and self-identification in the wider context of consumption see Jonathan Friedman, "Globalization and Localization," in Inda and Rosaldo, *The Anthropology of Globalization*, 233–36.

39 Juan Sánchez Andraka *¡Hablemos Claro! ¿Que occurió en Guerrero durante el gobierno de Alejandro Cervantes Delgado? Testimonios* (Mexico City: Costa-Amic, 1987), 26.

40 Ibid., 26.

41 As Vertovec points out, "While not bringing about substantial societal transformations by themselves, patterns of cross-border exchange and relationship among migrants may contribute significantly to broadening, deepening or intensifying conjoining processes of transformation that are already ongoing" ("Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation," 972).

42 Although outright divorce is all but unheard of, separation for a period of time or even permanently is quite common among couples in the community. Postmarital residence is virilocal, with daughters joining their in-laws' household upon marriage. House inheritance in San Nicolás favors the youngest son, and while older male offspring reside in their parents' home with their new wives for a time, they eventually have to find new house plots and build their own homes. This is generally done in phases as older males save to move out on their own, making way for the next son's wife to become the new *nuera* (daughter-in-law) of the household, and so on and so forth until the youngest son's wife takes over running the household permanently from her mother-in-law as the latter ages. Only daughters who are disabled and hence unmarriageable will stay in the family home.

43 Rouse, "Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Transnationalism," 252.

44 Vertovec, "Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation," 976.

45 Cited in Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 204.

46 Although Amalia desired separate rooms for her male and female children, she did not indicate that each child would have a separate room. This is in keeping with San Nicoladenses' emphasis on gender segregation and on close relationships between brothers, sisters, and cousins. Children find the idea of sleeping alone completely alien, and they always wander and play in groups. This is a fine example of what Inda and Rosaldo refer to as the "customization of alien cultural forms" as people filter outside impositions through their own deep cultural practices. "Introduction," 16.

47 Vertovec, "Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation," 975.

48 Most tombs have crosses and therefore also recall small churches. Yet churches themselves are in many ways modeled on houses, as Sánchez Andraka's comments suggest, and even redondos had small crosses at their apex.