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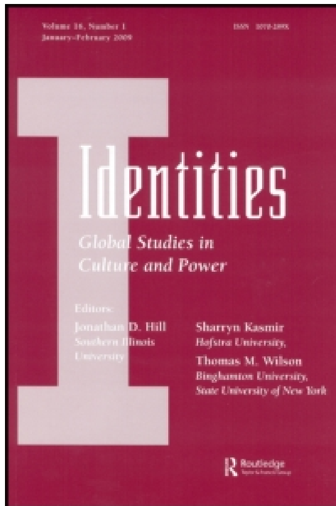

Identities
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713663307

FROM EL CAMPO TO EL BARRIO: MEMORY AND SOCIAL IMAGINARIES IN SANTO DOMINGO

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Online Publication Date: 01 March 2009

To cite this Article Taylor, Erin B.(2009)'FROM EL CAMPO TO EL BARRIO: MEMORY AND SOCIAL IMAGINARIES IN SANTO DOMINGO',Identities,16:2,157 — 178

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/10702890902739279

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10702890902739279

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Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power, 16:157–178, 2009
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ISSN: 1070-289X print / 1547-3384 online
DOI: 10.1080/10702890902739279

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From *el campo* to *el barrio*: Memory and Social Imaginaries in Santo Domingo

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In the social imaginaries of the Dominican Republic, national culture has its origins in el campo*, the countryside. Country spaces and country people are viewed as embodying the past in the present, making them authentic contemporary carriers of national culture and moral order. By contrast, the city has long been viewed as the site of a modernity that takes its inspiration from outside of the nation but also as a site of social degeneration. In recent decades, representations of poor barrios as a threat to the city's moral order have intensified in reaction to rising crime rates and a series of economic crises. First generation migrants from the country to the city find that their status as carriers of culture and morality is compromised. They evoke positive memories of their rural pasts to position themselves as moral beings transposed to a corrupt urban milieu. At the same time, they develop urban identities that incorporate aspects of rural life while rejecting others. I argue that migrants' memories of their rural past resist their emplacement while allowing for the transformation of their present structural position.*

Key Words: Memory, migration, social imaginaries, moral order, modernity

Introduction

Scholars have demonstrated thoroughly how individual and institutionalized memories are used to construct the past (see, e.g., Boyarin 1994; Cohn and Silvio 2002). Less common are studies that show how memories are used to construct the present. While there are many studies that show how people draw upon the past to negotiate identity, they tend not to deal with memory as such but with the transference of cultural experience to new contexts (Berliner 2005). In this article I explore how memory can be used as a tool in the construction and negotiation of social imaginaries of the present through the sharing of remembrances.[1] When memories are shared, they are reinterpreted and re-imagined to inform our "social imaginaries," defined by Charles Taylor as "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions

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and images that underlie these expectations" (2004: 23). Individuals and social groups use memory to situate themselves in relation to social imaginaries—to resist, reproduce, transform, and create them.

Drawing on my fieldwork during 2004–2005, I explore some of the ways in which social imaginaries are negotiated and constructed by poor rural migrants to Santo Domingo's barrios. In the Dominican Republic, *el campo* (the countryside) holds a positive value due to its important role in the cultural history of the nation. Country people are interpreted as having continuity with the past and as carriers of moral order. However, *el barrio* (meaning a poor urban neighbourhood) is viewed as a site of material and social degradation. For rural migrants to Santo Domingo's barrios, the reinterpretation of their subjective identity through relocation is problematic because they are recast as low status in the city. Imaginings of the urban poor as corrupt serves class interests, naturalizing the place of the poor at the bottom of the city's "moral order" (Austin-Broos 2005) and objectifying hierarchy onto space.

To counter their displacement, migrants must negotiate a more prestigious place in social imaginings of the city's present. Memories of their rural past form an integral part of their imaginings of themselves as moral people with a legitimate place in the city. These valuations of status and moral worth act as a counter-discourse to representations of barrios and their residents as socially degenerate. Although barrio residents generally agree that the barrios—and the city—are dangerous, they reject totalizing representations of barrio residents as immoral. They assert a morality that is bound up with traditional rural values: family life, hard work, and religiosity. In this sense memory can offer a form of resistance to the urban moral order, albeit one that is ultimately bounded by normative understandings of space and morality.

Memory also has a transformative potential. Barrio residents do not simply reproduce the rural past in the present, but rather seek a place in the city that combines rural values with modern urban life. In this way, residents of La Ciénaga create their own brand of modernity that is rooted in positive, *national* imaginings of the rural past, but which very much draws upon *local* meanings to imagine an urban future. This locally-derived imaginary of belonging in the modern city is crucial to the struggles of residents to transform both their social status and their material environment.

Social imaginaries of place

In the social imaginaries of the Dominican Republic, *el campo* (the countryside) has been cast as the heartland of Dominican national character and represents the past, whereas the city is the site for

citizenship and the production of the nation's modern future (Derby 1998; Martínez-Vergne 2005). *El campo* was the site of the great events in Dominican history, such as the 1844 War of Independence against Haiti, the birth of national leaders, and the development of folklore (Andrade 1969; Sagás 2000; Torres-Saillant 2000). As a result, a romanticized rendering of *el campo* dominates representations of Dominican culture in written history, painting, and music.

Dominican social history has been dominated by peasant production, and so rural people have long been seen as major players in the development of Dominican culture. Martínez-Vernge writes how at the beginning of the nineteenth century the "composite ideal Dominican was based in the countryside" (2005: 21) and included characteristics like colour (more white than black), affinity with Europe (as opposed to the United States), and love of country (hard work, family, and morality). The large, central valley known as Cibao is particularly associated with these characteristics because its fertility made it a popular settlement site for European immigrants. Today, relations with the United States have eclipsed ties with Europe, but notions of the authentic Dominican archetypal character continue to be based on these early imaginings of *el campo*. Country people, particularly those with lighter skin, are given a privileged place in national imaginings as carriers of culture and morality.[2]

Dependence on agricultural production and late industrialization meant that Dominican cities remained small until the 1960s. As a result, many city dwellers of all social classes are first or second generation migrants who retain strong connections with their relatives in the country and respect for rural life and its people. While *el campo* is seen as backward compared with the city, it is imagined as a place that is largely uncorrupted by negative aspects of modern urban living, such as disease and crime. Unlike tourists who flock to the nation's beaches, Dominicans take advantage of public holidays to head inland to visit relatives and bathe in freshwater rivers. City residents visit the country to visit family and escape the ills of city living, such as pollution, noise, overcrowding, disease, stress, and crime.

In contrast, the urban poor and the spaces they occupy have long been considered a retrograde force and threat to civilization in Santo Domingo (Martínez-Vergne 2005). Since the nineteenth century, municipal authorities have struggled to modernize the capital through construction projects and regulation of social life (2005). In recent decades representations of urban poverty as a threat to social order have intensified in reaction to rising crime rates and a series of economic crises. In Latin America urban social problems are often attributed to the social backwardness of rural migrants (Perlman 1976). But in the Dominican Republic the loss of morality is an *a priori* assumption tied

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to the spaces where the urban poor reside. Contrasting the poor but idyllic countryside with the modern but corrupt city lends a moral interpretation to the countryside's poverty and treats it as essentially *allochronic* (Fabian 1983), fixed in a pre-modern past. The city thereby assumes the role of a terminus for economic resources while the countryside is naturalised as the appropriate place for the poor to reside.

Poor migrants residing in the city's squatter settlements experience the tension between the idyllic countryside and the corrupt city as they struggle to define a place for themselves within the city's moral order. One street vender told me that "The barrios are where the *tigüeres* [tigers, or street-wise men] are, people who come from the country for the capital, and those that stay are these *delincuentes* [delinquents], no-one else." This comment implies that respectability and barrio residence are incompatible: If the respectable poor make the mistake of migrating to the *barrios*, they will soon realise their error and move to a more respectable location.

According to data I gathered during my fieldwork in Santo Domingo in 2004–2005, the poor barrios and squatter settlements located near the centre of the city on the banks of the Ozama River are considered to be the most dangerous parts of the city by the media, police, politicians, and the public (see Taylor 2009). The *barrios* have a distinctive class identity that conflates poor neighborhoods with disorder. A middle-class retired man told me that "The people who live there [in the barrios] are from the lower class. They don't even work and they have to make mischief." One taxi driver expressed to me his fear that I would be "murdered for my shoes" while living in the barrio. While *capitaleños* (residents of Santo Domingo) recognize that "there are many serious people, good people, in the barrios," the prevailing association between the urban sites where the poor reside, and the poor themselves, is of delinquency and disorganization. As a result, the urban poor face discrimination in social life, the workforce, and the justice system.

While positive representations of *el campo* are universal, urban classes privilege it for different reasons. For well-off urban residents, the corruption of the peasantry through their insertion in the urban milieu is catastrophic because it represents the loss of an ideal past and cultural continuity. The urban poor are also seen to disrupt the nation's history of progress, which depends on the modernization of the city. For the elite, the ownership of a large ranch in the country with a grand house, swimming pool, and servants declares their class dominance in a manner reminiscent of sugar plantations. By co-opting productive labour and controlling space in the city, the wealthy re-enact the power inherent in the patron-client relationships of the past, minus

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the social responsibility that such relationships entailed. Privileging *el campo* strengthens national culture and class stability, essential survival tools for a middle-class that has been historically fraught by economic and political crises.[3]

For poor urban residents, privileging *el campo* is an attempt to capitalize upon the romanticization of rural poverty to create a place for oneself in the modern city. As I will demonstrate, they simultaneously subscribe to normative imaginaries reinforces notions of what poverty means while challenging exclusionary views of the city. Memory of prior social status is therefore integral to the repositioning of individuals and communities within the city's social order, and, crucially, the transformation of that space in keeping with their vision of a modern urban future.

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The field site

According to Fay and Wellenstein (2005), 11 percent of Santo Domingo's population (approximately 300,000 people) reside in inner city 'slums' around the Ozama River (2005: 97), locally known as *barrios*. In the Dominican Republic, the term *barrio* is used to refer to the poor parts of the city. Although the term literally means "neighbourhood," it implies that residents are poor and the area consists of substandard housing. The term *barrio pobre* (poor neighbourhood) is often used for emphasis. Santo Domingo's barrios are overwhelmingly populated by migrants from rural areas. Approximately 60 percent of residents originated from the arid southwest of the country, 22 percent from the agricultural centre of Cibao, and just 5 percent from the southeast, the country's largest tourist region (Tejeda 2000: 33).

Rural migrants have "autoconstructed" (Holston 1991) communities around the river, drawing upon networks of friends and relatives in the city to find housing and employment. Rural Dominicans migrate to cities primarily because of a changing economic balance between the country and the city that leaves them few options in the country. Economic opportunities in the country have diminished severely over the past century as large companies have acquired peasant landholdings and population has outstripped supply of arable land for peasant production (Dore y Cabral 1981). At the same time the city has industrialized, creating jobs in manufacturing and services.

La Ciénaga is one of the poorest of Santo Domingo's barrios and houses approximately 18,000 people, none of whom hold land titles. The barrio is located just a few kilometres from the centre of Santo Domingo, but it was not settled until after the death of the dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1961. The word *la ciénaga* means "the swamp." Before settlement the area

was used as farmland by working class urban residents who cultivated rice, coconuts, and other crops in its fertile, flood-prone soil. Since the 1960s, migrants have transformed the farmland of *la ciénaga*, the swamp, into *La Ciénaga*, the urban community. Many of the original settlers who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s came from the fertile Cibao valley (which includes the ex-capital city of Santiago), traditionally considered to be the heartland of Dominican national identity (Martínez-Vergne 2005).

According to a survey of 300 people that I conducted in August 2005, at least 90 percent of occupied persons in La Ciénaga work in the city's informal sector. Women primarily work as domestic servants in the homes of the middle class or sell products (e.g., homemade juice or ice cream, beauty products, or non-perishable goods) from their homes. Men work as ambulatory vendors in the city, take passengers on their motorbikes from La Ciénaga to the top of the cliff, labour in the construction industry, run grocery stores within the barrio, or work as security guards for apartment blocks and offices in the city. There are, of course, exceptions. Alternative professions include engineers, lawyers, secretaries, teachers, computer technicians, and nuns, but on the whole, *cienigüeros* (residents of La Ciénaga) find that the range of occupations available to them is limited, so the barrio is relatively homogeneous in terms of income.[4] Because of the differentiated and irregular occupations of residents, the primary way in which they experience social class is through the space in which they live. The characteristics and representations of that space are therefore crucial to residents' positioning in the city's moral order.

From *el campo* to *el barrio*

Pedro and his family were some of the earliest people to settle in La Ciénaga. Pedro was born in 1925 in Constanza, an agricultural town located in the mountains on the western edge of Cibao. His father was a landed peasant who died when he was around eight years old, and the family lost their land. Pedro was not able to attend school because he and his elder brother had to work to look after their mother and younger brothers and sisters. Pedro first moved to Santo Domingo in the late 1940s and lived in the centre of the city while he worked in the construction industry. In 1972 he married his wife, Isabel, who is also from Cibao. In the same year, Pedro bought a small piece of land on the central, rocky high ground in La Ciénaga that is known as La Clarín after its landmark radio tower. At the time, his elder brother Roberto was already living on the main road, near the entrance to La Ciénaga.

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Pedro built his home on high ground in the centre of the barrio. When he had constructed a small wooden *ranchito* with a dirt floor, as well as rice fields and vegetable plots in the unused marsh behind his house, he brought his new wife to live with him. In the same year, Pedro convinced his thirty-eight-year-old cousin Altagracía to buy a plot of land in La Clarín. Altagracía was living with two of her children in a tiny house in a neighbouring suburb. She sold the house and bought a large block of land near her cousin, where she constructed a *ranchito* of her own and joined Pedro in farming rice. She commented,

> When I arrived in La Cienaga it was destroyed *monte* (wilderness). There were very few people here and we couldn't help each other because we were all poor. There were few houses or people, the place was pure *monte* [Altagracía].

For Pedro and Altagracía, relocating to La Ciénaga was a strategic choice because the land was inexpensive and close to the city centre, and it was relatively easy to construct a small, country-style home. La Ciénaga represented an opportunity to enjoy the benefits of country living while remaining close to the centre of the city. The city permitted access to a larger labour market at a time when peasant production was dwindling due to the unavailability of land, as well as the chance to take advantage of the benefits of modern city living, such as the chance to educate their children. Over time members of their extended family also moved into the barrio, including Isabel's brothers, their wives and children. The ability to establish an extended family network was a major drawcard. In the city as in the country, the proximity of family is highly valued for the sake of sociality and also provides the poor with a safety net in times of uncertainty (Gregory 2007). As one of Isabel's brothers explained to me,

> We are a very united family. If one of us is hungry and the other one can give him food we do so enthusiastically, and we always treat each other well. When we have some time we visit each other and greet each other with lots of affection. We're a family that is totally united because we were brought up to respect home life. This was the teaching that gave us such good unity. [Carlos]

Like most city residents the family keep in close touch with their relatives in the countryside. Although Pedro is no longer able to travel due to his ailing health, his wife occasionally visits her parents and family in Cibao, and their children regularly visit both sides of the family, always returning with fresh produce. Relatives

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from Cibao also visit Pedro's family in Santo Domingo, sometimes staying for weeks at a time.

The barrio's transition to an urban form was gradual because it physically resembled, and effectively functioned as, a rural space. La Ciénaga lacked services, but migrants could construct houses inexpensively, use the land to grow produce as they had done in the country, bathe in the fresh water of the Ozama River, and sell their produce or labour in the city. Residents remember that during these early days, La Ciénaga lacked basic services but was quiet and safe. One woman who moved into the neighbourhood in 1973 told me:

> La Ciénaga was good. It was bad that there were so many mosquitos and frogs. There were many, many, many of those, and we had so many crabs. Oh, la! Every morning we would fill a bucket with crabs that we collected in the house, running over the wooden floor, the zinc roof, we found them in all corners of the house. If I left the door open at night they would run into the kitchen, it was all full up with crabs. La Ciénaga wasn't so tremendous, but it was very quiet. There was a military base here, and after the military left the police came. I slept with the door open, I never closed the door . . . I wasn't afraid [Lidia].

La Ciénaga lost its rural character during the late 1970s and early 1980s as a new wave of migrants arrived from the southwest of the country, near the Haitian border. By the early 1980s Pedro and Isabel had given up their farmland to new migrants and Pedro gained steady employment in a local government program to restore colonial architecture. Pedro retired in 1990 and receives a monthly government pension of DOP$2,000 (around US$60). Isabel continues to work in part-time cleaning jobs, and they also receive support from their sons, Samuel and Antonio.

The urbanization of *el barrio*

Today, La Ciénaga is a lively settlement of small, detached dwellings that are crammed into virtually every corner of the barrio. The swamp has long been drained and apart from a stand of coconuts next to the river and a scattering of mango trees, few traces of its agricultural past remain. The sounds of frogs and scuttling crabs have been replaced with the blare of radios and the roar of motorbikes. Concrete-paved alleyways joining tin, wood, and concrete houses stand where rice fields and grazing grounds provided existed. Residents congregate on the street to socialize *colmadones* blare out *merengue*. Some names referring to La Ciénaga's pre-urban past remain, include *los cocos* (the

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coconuts), *el arrozal* (the rice field), and *pata de vaca* (cow's foot). These names map the barrio's history onto the urban landscape by reminding residents of its past uses.

Rural social relations have to some extent been replicated in the city, despite La Ciénaga's urban location and population density. La Ciénaga is composed mostly of one- or two-family dwellings with direct street frontage, and much of the community's socialization takes place on the street. Any given afternoon will see dozens of adults sitting on plastic chairs and yet more adults passing from group to group in search of conversation. Children liven up the streetscape by playing noisy games. Unlike elsewhere in the city (and particularly unlike middle- and upper-class areas), the boundary between the private and public sphere is blurred. Most people tend to leave their front doors open to facilitate the flow of air, light, and visitors into their home. The openness of the private sphere is ironic, considering that the barrio is supposed to be one of the most crime-ridden places in the city.

The basis for social structure in La Ciénaga is the extended family and their neighbours who all tend to know each other intimately within their sector of residence. Like Pedro and his family, most residents have family members living close by, and it is not uncommon for entire extended families to migrate from the country to take up residence in the barrio. While the population of the barrio is too large to allow a sense of intimacy throughout the entire community, family groups provide a strong sense of embeddedness (Taylor 2004) that is more representative of a pre-Trujillo past, both urban as well as rural (Derby 1998) than it is of modern urban life. *Cienigüeros'* spatial control over their social structure provides protection against some of the negative aspects of urban life, such as social alienation, crime, and unstable employment. Other modern problems, such as alienation from the means of production, exclusion from the benefits of citizenship, and a rise in crime, remain part of barrio life.

Despite the personalized intimacy of community life, *cienigüeros* agree unanimously that the barrio is dangerous, unhealthy, and overcrowded. Pedro's sons are particularly critical of discrimination against barrio residents and the difficulties of living in a *barrio marginado* (marginalized barrio) with irregular services. In particular, Samuel told me a number of times how he worries that one of his children will become ill in the middle of the night because no taxi will enter the barrio after dark, not even for an emergency. Thus, despite the barrio's proximity to the city, residents experience a sense of dangerous isolation. During my fieldwork there were a number of house fires caused by candles lit during the barrio's many blackouts. Fire engines would arrive quickly, but they would often spend time driving fruitlessly around the barrio, trying

to get close enough to the engulfed house buried down the barrio's narrow alleys to put out the fire. More widely experienced is flooding in the wet season, which particularly affects homes at the edge of the river or in the lower central zone. Residents also worry incessantly about crime and the effect of urban living on their children.

Migrants choose to *luchar* (struggle) in the city with the hope that their children will benefit from better education and greater opportunities. As Samuel points out, the city offers much greater opportunities for personal advancement:

> Although La Cienaga is *marginado* (marginal) it is more comfortable than the country because here you are close to the centre of the city. You have schools close, universities close, perhaps more opportunities for employment than in the country where everything is far. This is what makes it easier to live here than in the country [Samuel].

Despite the hardships and tensions of urban life, the rural poor continue to migrate to the city as it offers them a chance to *echar para adelante* (move forward) in life.

> The poor have continued arriving from the country and the only opportunity they've found has been around here. You know that the poor, when they arrive they can't live close to the rich because the rich stop them. But when one arrives to the poor barrios it's because there is a family of poor who can protect them (*amparar*) and place them (*colocar*) and in this way La Ciénaga has been growing and now it's a town [Jorge].

The insertion of children into the urban landscape is considered to be a gamble, because they can either receive a good city education and advance in life, or they can fall in with delinquents and end up in jail. When deciding whether to migrate to the city, Dominicans try to strike a balance between moral risk and economic success. Isabel's brother Gregorio and his wife moved to La Ciénaga from the Cibao because they wanted to give their six-year-old daughter a better education. Gregorio makes bottles of *mama juana*, rum with a special type of bark inside that is imputed to be an aphrodisiac, and sells them to tourists in Boca Chica, a beach located thirty minutes' drive from Santo Domingo. La Ciénaga is a much more convenient location for his work than the country, and yet the family lasted just one week in the city. They returned to Cibao, citing the noise, pollution, and different social relations as reasons why they did not wish to stay. When they left, Maria's son Antonio commented to me that the little girl would most likely get very little education in the country, and like

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most girls would grow up to be a rural housewife. When I expressed concern, he told me "There's nothing you can do, it's how things are done in the country. At least there isn't the *corrupción* [immorality] and the *vagabonería* [laziness] in the country that we have here. Look at all the armed men you see walking down this street. Some *delincuentes* who can't afford a gun put a mobile phone in their trousers to look like one. La Ciénaga is a mess!"

Economically, residents depend on the supply of rural produce to circumvent a modern urban market that sells highly priced imported foods to the wealthy. Every day, utility vehicles transport fresh fruit, vegetables, and legumes from the farms to the barrios. They wind their way through the narrow streets, announcing their wares via loudspeaker. It could be argued that it is the continuation of peasant production that makes life in the barrios possible. Without locally produced foodstuffs, the meagre wages paid to the urban poor would not allow survival. The social disintegration that the middle classes and elite fear so much would become reality. In this sense, the barrios are a transitional zone between rural and urban residential and economic forms.

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Critiquing urban life

Narratives of rural life provide a fruitful source of critique of modern urban life. They are also indicative of socioeconomic changes and the adaptations that they require. Because the majority of residents of La Ciénaga are rural to urban migrants, they share a similar trajectory from semiproletariat (Mintz 1979) to casual labourer or microentrepeneur in the informal urban economy. While residents remember rural work as being physically demanding and difficult, they also recall with nostalgia the greater security of the time relative to informal urban work and the social problems of city life. The remembrances that I present here reflect popular views of what it means to be a moral person, characterised by hard work, family life, physical health, and religiosity.

Cienigüeros remember the hard work involved in country life: for men, working with a machete, and for women, picking coffee and other crops. Pedro's wife, María, grew up working the land:

> After I grew up I started cutting coffee, growing rice, cutting rice, cutting corn, growing corn, and picking beans, and growing beans. I did everything, everything, everything. It was really hard work, and I also had to cook, fetch water, and clean. We didn't stop all day long [Isabel].

Isabel's depiction of rural work is shared throughout the community, as virtually all migrants undertook similar activities. Work is a central

theme in memories of country life, and residents draw comparisons with the work they do in the city. Country work and life are insurmountably difficult compared to city work, which, though also hard, is "soft" in comparison to the country. Indeed, city people of all classes regularly use the term *gente de trabajo*, meaning a hard worker, in reference to country people. They also use the term to differentiate hard workers who live in barrios from *delincuentes*. To be called *gente de trabajo* by a middle-class employer is to gain recognition as a person of value in the city.

Another common theme tells of how *el campo* is as a healthy place to live due to the abundance of food:

> Where I lived in the country there was a lot of agricultural production. I never lacked food. There was a lot of milk, chickens, cows. It was beneficial because I acquired a good diet from when I was very small [Juan].

Similarly, Pedro has fond memories of working on his family's farm and eating the produce grown there:

> I'm talking of *la buena vida* [the good life]. The present time is better on the one hand but worse on the other because in that time things were cheap. You had pigs, chickens, everything, and if you killed a pig your neighbours ate of it, and your neighbour would kill another and would also share it with all the world, all the world would share well. Nowadays it's not like that, it's better on the one hand but worse on the other.
>
> In that life we lived well, because we had everything, lots of chicken, many goats, cows, horses, and birds called turkeys and guinea fowls. My father had his own farm and grew lots of potatoes, onions, he grew lots of coffee, beans, and everything. What one gave, the other returned. Everything was so cheap it was like it was given to you, and one lived very well. In my house we refused to drink cow's milk because we had goat's milk, which is more nutritious for children. Today I live a good life, but the money doesn't stretch so far . . . In the end I don't have a good house like I thought I would, but God helped me build what I have [Pedro].

Juan's and Pedro's reflections on life in the country are informed by their experience of modernity in the city. Compared to present struggles to maintain employment and buy expensive imported foods, the rural past is perceived to have been a time of abundance and social equality. Hard work and good social relations ensured that everyone had their share. There was hope that the future would bring progress, but modern life has not lived up to Pedro's expectations. Nostalgia for the countryside, as expressed by the poor, harks back to a time of secure

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social position, though their economic state was unsatisfactory and their involvement in political life was minimal. An account of country life by his brother-in-law Carlos, who was born in 1962, reflects changes that had been taking place in the Dominican economy:

> Country life is different and I'm going to tell you why. Country life is rich, very good, in the first place because you breathe clean air; in the second place because there is less licentiousness; less delinquency; and a more favourable environment in which to subsist. Like the heat, there is less heat, the river is rich, very good, the food is vegetables, sugar cane, fruits, and is much better because we cultivate it. If I don't have something, someone will give it to me.
>
> But life in the country is also more difficult. If you start a business selling food in a shop, people want to buy on credit and it's hard to get them to pay because there aren't many means of production because businesses have a small profit margin and so they don't pay very good wages. But money goes farther in the country because there is less to spend it on . . . Here in the city, if you go out to the street to sell coffee, eggs, cigarettes, mangoes, avocados and food you will sell it [Carlos].

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In Carlos's statement, the countryside, which represents health and morality, competes with economic production and material consumption in the city. Remembering the country helps migrants like Pedro and Carlos evaluate and judge modern urban life. The city has not met their expectations of economic advancement, and in crucial ways falls short of the social life of *el campo*, but it offers choices that are not available in the country due to a deficit of economic production. Unless one has enough money to shorten the experiential distance between rural and urban life, city life offers the greater range of opportunities for the poor to engage with modernity. The poor may remember *el campo* nostalgically, but they also remember what they came to the city to find and what they have been denied. Much of the idyllic reminiscing about the country is a response to the adverse conditions of urban poverty rather than a wish to return to a rural past. Migrants speak of relocating to the country only if they can do so on middle-class terms; that is, with enough money to live comfortably.

Samuel explained to me that when he applies for jobs, he now pretends he is from a neighboring suburb to avoid astonished reactions and comments such as "You're from La Ciénaga? But isn't it dangerous down there?" Much of their astonishment is due to his appearance. He is a light-skinned, well-dressed, articulate young man and therefore does not fit the stereotype of the young, black, Nike-wearing, motorbike-riding *tigüere* (tiger, a streetwise person).[5] Samuel is a great fan of the countryside, praising its clean air, good food, music, people, and

peaceful atmosphere. His love of the countryside is not only an orthodox response to the national imagination but also a distancing of the self from both the negative urban identities he encounters and also the discrimination he faces daily.

As is the case in other cities around the world, poor young people in Santo Domingo are perceived to be over-urbanized; that is, they enact both the positive and negative aspects of urban living through consuming the resources available to them and using crime to gain those that have been held from them. Pedro's brother, Roberto, laments the changing nature of child-parent relationships and discipline:

> I remember one time when we lived in the country we went to the river and my brother found a nest of eggs, because chickens laid wherever they liked, and since we found them in the wilderness we took them home. When we arrived with these eggs our father hit us and sent us to return them, because we didn't have a chicken to care for them. But now it's different—children steal cars and their fathers help them. It's for this reason that society is like it is, it has decomposed since the '80s. Before Christmas was beautiful and was the only day of the year when children were allowed to drink alcohol, but now they drink all the time [Roberto].

Bethania, a community activist who grew up in the southwest of the Dominican Republic, contrasts her childhood in the country with modern urban life:

> I had a very beautiful childhood, it wasn't like now. Before, when I was growing up, we played ball, told stories, made up poems. They were healthy games. We sung songs. Now it's different, kids don't enjoy themselves in a healthy way, they live in front of the television and this doesn't help them because most of the programs are bad. Most of the delinquency exists because the children don't play properly and pass all their time in front of the television [Bethania].

Clearly, concern for the transformation of childhood is modern discourse that is not limited to the city, let alone the barrios. However, *cienigüeros* have, for the most part, experienced modernity as an urban style of living. Although for the wealthy, a combination of poverty and urban living generates delinquency, the above comments suggest that for the poor, the corrupting force is the wider structural adjustment that the Dominican economy has experienced as the State attempts to modernize. In Bethania's comment, the social upheaval that this has entails is expressed in terms of nostalgia for a past in which children "played properly" without the corrupting influences of the modern world.

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While wealthy urban dwellers view poor barrios as corrupting their residents, barrio residents hold that respectability derived from the country can be re-deployed in new ways that transgress class boundaries. They articulate a discourse of belonging that draws upon positive aspects of representations of rural life, while rejecting the negative aspects of urbanity such as criminality and social alienation. A common statement by residents falls along the line of the following speech by a female community leader: "We aren't all delinquents. There are many serious people in this barrio—working people, people of the church!" [Soledad]. Here, the values of work and religiosity are evoked in opposition to social disorder. To call upon hard work and religiosity as individual and community features is to evoke an unbroken line of heritage from the country to the city. Conversely, the *delincuente* and *tíguere* are inextricable from the milieu of the city, for they depend on the social and physical setting as a prop for the performance of their identity.

The elevation of the rural over the urban milieu is a double-edged sword, for although it supplies residents with a sentiment of collective origin and a personal sense of dignity, it also reproduces negative representations of barrio spaces. By distancing themselves from urbanity in favour of rural life, barrio residents reinforce the popular notion that when poverty is present in the city, it causes moral decay and poses a threat to respectable city residents of all classes. The public and the media then call for greater State control to reduce the "disorder." In 2006, the Fernandez government extended the *barrio seguro* (safe neighbourhood) program to La Ciénaga. When I visited in July 2006, groups of between four and six policeman were patrolling the barrio throughout the day and night. This program has been warmly welcomed by cienigüeros because they feel safer and also feel that the government is looking after them. Furthermore, based on my media and survey data, I predict that a stronger police presence that is publicized by the media will lead to improved perceptions of the *barrios* amongst the general public. However, this greater security nonetheless represents a loss of control of the spaces that they have themselves constituted, and it is unlikely that improved perceptions alone will raise the status of cienigueros enough to make significant changes to their living conditions. Simply asserting a rurally-derived moral identity among themselves is not enough: Barrio residents also take measures to gain recognition as legitimate urban residents to transform their structural position.

The transformation of the present

As well as providing a repertoire of experience and knowledge with which to critique modern life, memories contribute to social transformation

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through their role in providing legitimacy, creativity, and autonomy. Memories of past identities provide evidence that urban residents are people of value, countering discourse that posits them as disorderly and therefore illegitimate. Residents' struggles to create an urban environment on their own terms involves the assertion and deployment of traditional values to transform the urban environment and own it. This deployment transforms the city from a place where residents are ideologically excluded to one where they can make a legitimate argument for their identities and legitimacy as urban people.

Over time, migrants increasingly take on an urban identity. After two generations of births in the new urban setting, much of the country allegiance is lost as children are further removed spatially and temporally from their rural origins. Until children reach around thirteen years of age, they rarely leave La Ciénaga apart from trips to the doctor and occasionally to visit relatives or go to the beach. Although contact is maintained with rural relatives, these children identify as primarily urban, but they often continue to espouse a belief in the healthiness and morality of *el campo*.

However, the urban lifestyle and its possibilities are rather different from that of their rural relatives. Apart from the three hours per day that they are in school, children spend most of their free time playing with other children in the street, only heading indoors to eat, rest, or sleep. Young women tend to spend more time in domestic chores and looking after younger siblings, while many males go to work as ambulatory vendors or shoe shiners in the city streets. These tasks often delay the completion of schooling significantly and the local school runs night classes for working students, most of whom are in their twenties. Low completion rates mean that *cienigüeros* are disadvantaged in the urban workforce, and discrimination against *barrio* dwellers make it even harder to get a well-paid job. Santo Domingo's poor do not suffer so much from lack of a "capacity to aspire" (Appardurai 2004) but rather a deficit of opportunities. As Bethania commented to me,

> Here there are three ways to *salir adelante* [move forward]. One is robbing, which isn't good. Another is leaving the country, and the third is to study. And of these three, as I want to *salir adelante*, I have chosen to study. I'm studying now, I stopped studying when I was twelve years old to come here. My brother is an engineer and with his first job he was able to buy a house for our mother, he bought himself a car, and I said, "Oh, but I'm going to start studying again," so I started and now I am in the last year of my high school certificate.

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In certain ways the urban dreams of the poor correspond with normative imaginings of a comfortable life. If the archetypal rural character is a landed peasant who dances to *merengue* and has a large family, then the archetypal city person is an engineer or lawyer who listens to *reggaetón*, drives a Mercedes Benz, lives in a planned neighbourhood, and takes trips to Miami and New York. Barrio residents' aspirations for the future include dreams of material wealth: the modernization of the barrio, salaries that allow consumption of consumer goods, and transnational lifestyles characterised by *movement* between diffuse places rather than situation of being fixed in locality by their lack of resources and the negative social imaginaries that emplace and enclass them.[6]

However, residents' dreams are not limited to reproducing traditional class relations and superimposing themselves as beneficiaries. While barrio residents covet good quality housing situated in well-serviced, safe neighbourhoods, they are critical of the *social distance* inherent in the lives of the urban and wealthy. In particular, they criticize the middle class for living an inside, unsociable life. Furthermore when I undertook my survey of the barrio, I was struck by the number of residents who told me "us poor people have more freedom than the rich, because we can go wherever we like without worrying about getting robbed." Indeed, the constraints upon the rich were seen not just as security measures but pathological: "The rich have to walk around with security guards and are always getting sick through constantly worrying about their money." Although the wealthy view the poor as prone to diseases due to their inadequate living standards, the poor viewed the rich as prone to illness because of their antisocial lifestyle. *Cienigüeros* quoted to me on more than one occasion the Christian Bible's warning that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." They tended to mix the concepts of wealth, moral bankruptcy, and physical illness together in a single narrative that justified their own condition while distancing themselves from the dominant social group. This constitutes an alternative social imaginary where the poor have a *greater* moral credence *because of* their poverty. They may not drive the latest BMW, but they are in closer communication with God. The social imaginaries of barrio residents clearly do not seek to reproduce a normative social order or resist negative representations: They go further in emphasising the importance of social relations to counter the depersonalism of the global city.

Migrants feel that they have the right to live in the city because they have constructed their material and social position themselves through hard work and collective action. The construction of the barrio's first school, *Virgen del Carmen,* in 1987 was one of the first major communal actions achieved by the Catholic congregation.[7] It was organized by a nun called Maria Blanca and carried out in conjunction with the

community, with men supplying labour and women carting materials to the site and preparing food. Every house donated a block toward the building of the school and their labour according to their capabilities. Soledad, a middle-aged community activist, remembers that she had a bad leg and was ordered to rest by her doctor but "God gave me the strength to go on working." The thought of God watching her and judging her kept her going back every day. By struggling in daily life, Soledad feels they are working toward god and a place in heaven. Similarly, Lidia remembers:

> I was involved when we, the parents, made the school that used to be here. We carried heavy things, we carried the food, we carried breakfast when the men were working. We helped a lot with the school. It was us.

Residents remember the construction of the school with pride. Community actions such as these stand as evidence of residents' civility and moral worth in contrast to a normative discourse that speaks of the worthlessness of the urban poor. Furthermore, they foster a sense of collective identity and purpose among migrants who originated in different parts of the country. These relations have been institutionalised through the formation of legal community organisations such as CODECI (Coordination for the Development of La Ciénaga), an umbrella organisation funded by the Catholic Church that coordinates the acitivities of all the community's organisations. Their vision is to modernise the barrio so that existing residents can live there comfortably. The leader of the community's sports organisation explained,

> We want to *llevar mas adelante* [take ourselves forward]. As they say, a diamond is made of carbon but once you polish it, it shines. That is, you bring out the value. As an institution we could prepare a fertile terrain, that is, the seed that we plant today will turn the barrio into fertile terrain for development [Gabriel].

In this case, social memory is not "counter-memory" but a source of solidarity that can be harnessed for social change. It depends on continuity with the past as well as the re-deployment of values in a new context. In recent years the community has achieved a number of improvements to living standards, including better drainage and a more regular electricity supply. They have also managed to improve their public reputation through official media releases and press conferences. In a survey I undertook of city (not barrio) residents, a few people expressed to me the belief that "La Ciénaga is bad, but not as bad as before." The material possession and transformation of space

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has resulted in its partial conversion to symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986; 1972) in the form of material improvements and some (albeit limited) recognition of the community's legitimacy by the State and the general public. An integral part of this re-identification has been the presentation of the barrio as an organised urban community. Barrio activists speak of *nosotros la gente de los barrios* (us the people of the barrios) to portray a sense of unity and belonging as an *urban* class. This attests to the flexibility of memory and its creative deployment across milieux.

Residents' aspirations for modern urban life are centred on social relations and the localities in which they take place, precisely because these are the factors that enable their survival in the city. Without control of urban space residents would not have been able to construct their own dwellings or develop their current form of community based on the proximity of kin and long-term residency. It is therefore not surprising that people and place feature strongly in their visions of the future. Nevertheless, people's imaginings of place are always made with reference to the outside world; that is, with awareness of their place in the present social—and, indeed, global—order:

> Sometimes I'd like to leave because when one sees things like Cyclone David one wants to live in the high part, but in many ways this is the best area because it's so close to the city, this La Ciénaga. But it's not a good barrio anymore. And at times it's my wish to leave here to live again in my village, in my place, in my village another time, in La Vega. One lives well there. But the church is here and I'm comfortable; the community in my village isn't like this one. This country *dominicana* is in darkness all over because the power plant isn't functioning. It's not like this in your country, is it? The light never fails there' [Samuel].

Samuel's comment reveals the tensions and ambiguities involved in the negotiation of place in modernity. His is a vision that looks inward to an idyllic past as well as outward beyond national borders. It is the city's poor that struggle most to resolve this dilemma, compelling them to be creative in developing their responses.

Conclusion

The efforts of the poor to counter representations of urban poverty are conservative: Rather than deny the association between poverty and social degeneration, they distance themselves from negative urban elements. However, their use of memory as a tool to transpose rural values and status to the urban milieu contests a long history of

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spatialized class relations in the Dominican Republic. It provides residents with a collective moral platform upon which to fight for material change, in the form of the modernization of their community and the provision of employment. It also provides symbolic change with increasing recognition of the urban poor as moral beings with a political, rather than spatial, identity and the right to participate in the nation's future.

The struggle for representation taking place in Santo Domingo's barrios can be seen as a microcosm of a greater movement toward modernity. The Dominican Republic has long strived to be "modern," but their late industrialization and subordination in the international market has long thwarted the realization of modernity for the poor and resulted in an unstable modernity for the middle classes. Cienigüeros' critique of modern urban life is directed largely at its exclusiveness rather than at modernity itself. They resist social imaginaries that posit the poor as outside of modern life, arguing that they as much as anyone have the capacity to participate in and contribute to the development of a modern nation. By drawing upon the "good" values of the country while distancing themselves from negative representations of the city, poor urban dwellers carve out a place for the poor in the urban milieu and maintain hope in the possibility of progress. In so doing, they are leading the movement for the modernization of class relations in the Dominican Republic.

Scholars have argued that globalization has adverse localization effects for poor populations (Bauman 1998; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Gregory 2007). I contend that the bounding of unfree labour is both economic and symbolic. Social imaginaries that spatialize and exclude the poor have very real effects on the ability of the poor to make choices and participate in modern life. Further work on memory would illuminate one of the few resources that are available to the poor to negotiate social imaginaries of the present and therefore their place in the modern world. I believe we must pay attention to the role of memory in empowering the poor and also recognize its limitations.

Notes

Received 14 September 2007; accepted 17 September 2008.

This paper was produced with the assistance of a University Postgraduate Award at The University of Sydney, Australia. All data were collected during fieldwork from September 2004 to November 2005, which was supported by the Carlyle Greenwell Research Fund from The University of Sydney. My thanks to the Centro de Estudios Sociales Padre Juan Montalvo, S.J., in Santo Domingo, for the use of their media

library, which was the source of the newspaper articles referred to throughout the paper. I also thank Yoselyn Espinal and Marco Quiroz Rodríguez for their assistance in carrying out the survey of the barrio. All names of barrio residents have been changed.

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1. My concern is not to critique the many uses of the term "memory" but rather to explore the social uses of individual memory. By memory, I mean information stored in a human subject; by remembrance, I mean the act of recalling that information. I treat memory as specifically human: An object such as a book may serve as a carrier of information but it cannot remember.
2. For a good discussion of the creation of a racialized Dominican identity by its elites see Baud (1996).
3. See, for example, Calder (1985), Cassá (1995), Cuddington and Asilis (1990), ECLAC (2004), Fay and Wllenstein (2005), Ferguson (2003), Gregory (2007), and many others.
4. Most incomes tended to range from 1,500 to 5,000 pesos per month (US$45–150). The highest salary reported to me was 15,000 pesos per month (US$440) by a carpenter and a grocery store owner.
5. For an elaboration of the racial aspects of urban identities, see Taylor (forthcoming 2009), "Poverty as Danger: Fear of Crime in Santo Domingo."
6. For a discussion of *movimiento* as metaphor and the limitations to movement posed by neoliberal economic policies, see Steven Gregory (2007).
7. The original school was subject to frequent flooding and has since been replaced by a four-story composite school constructed by the government on higher ground.

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