Contemporary immigration remains significant to understanding race, racism, racialization, and race relations in the United States because of its effect on the demographic composition of places at numerous scales. This dissertation links patterns of immigrant settlement and everyday urban geographies with processes of racialization and identity (re)construction through a case study of Central American-born residents of Atlanta, GA, USA. I argue that examining and understanding residential settlement and identity negotiation among these newcomers requires delving into the complex, multiple ways in which race and processes of racialization intersect with place or socio-spatial context. Chapter two focuses on residential settlement outcomes among Central American immigrants in Atlanta, GA using Census 2000 data and a combination of segregation indices, mapping, and modeling techniques. Results suggest that the presence of non-Central American Latinos is a primary driving force behind Central American immigrant residential settlement in metropolitan Atlanta, GA. Chapter three draws on twenty-seven in-depth interviews with Central American immigrants living in Atlanta, GA to examine the process of negotiating a national identity and the pan-ethnic moniker “Hispanic/Latino”. Results indicate
that Central American immigrants in Atlanta generally assume this “Hispanic/Latino” label and that they understand this identity in racial terms. The engagement with a process of racialized “othering”, wherein interview participants are socially positioned as similar to (or exactly the same as) Mexican-identified residents, contributes to the assumption of such a pan-ethno racial “Hispanic/Latino” identity. The final empirical chapter explores the degree to which this pan-ethno racial “Hispanic/Latino” identity gains salience for Central American immigrants in Atlanta, and the degree to which the expression such an identity shifts across the various socio-spatial contexts (i.e., home, work, worship, play, etc.) that define everyday life. Interview participants’ social interactions and thus the opportunities for the expression of national identities vis-à-vis pan-ethno racial identities (or some other identity) depend in part on socio-spatial context. Place, therefore, plays a significant role in the process of identity negotiation for these Central American-born residents of Atlanta, GA. By examining the ways in which everyday geographies affect individual identities, I hope to draw attention to the inherent instability of contemporary categories of race and ethnicity.

INDEX WORDS: Identity negotiation, Racialization, Socio-spatial context, Central American immigrants, Atlanta
EVERDAY URBAN GEOGRAPHIES AND THE NEGOTIATION OF CENTRAL
AMERICAN IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES IN ATLANTA, GA, USA

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
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EVERDAY URBAN GEOGRAPHIES AND THE NEGOTIATION OF CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES IN ATLANTA, GA, USA

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to Grandma & Grandpa, Granddaddy George, Katy, and Uncle George
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First, I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Steve Holloway, for his guidance throughout this entire process. I would never have been able to complete this dissertation without Steve’s direction and advice and I am indebted to him for pushing and prodding me to go beyond what I ever thought I could achieve in this aspect of my life. I will take those lessons with me and they will serve me well as I move forward in my academic career. I also must thank my doctoral committee members, Dr. Kavita Pandit, Dr. Amy Ross, and Dr. Deborah G. Martin, and Dr. Stephanie Bohon for their assistance and input from the very outset of this project and their availability and their mentorship over the past five years. In addition, the assistance of the Latin American Association in Atlanta, GA and Analy Carpio, my interpreter, was invaluable throughout the data collection phase of this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the work of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (1925) on European immigrants in Chicago in the early twentieth century, generations of sociologists, geographers, anthropologists and historians have concerned themselves with the processes, causes, and consequences of immigration to the United States. In popular parlance many continue to describe the United States as “a nation of immigrants” and the contributions of successive waves of newcomers throughout the history of the twentieth century are not lost on the conscience of most American citizens. On the other hand, native-born residents historically have used immigrants as scapegoats in times of economic hardship. The federal government went so far as to legally preclude those of non-white, non-European origin from joining American society for over forty years during the twentieth century, based primarily on socially accepted racial prejudice. The long and complex history of immigration to the United States reached a turning point in 1965 with the watershed Hart-Cellar Immigration Act, which opened the door to the majority of post-1965 streams of immigrants hailing from Africa, Asia, and Latin America instead of Europe. This post-1965 immigration differs significantly from previous epochs, not only in geographic origin, but also by their non-white racial identification in U.S. society\(^1\) (Gans 1999).

Contemporary immigration remains significant to understanding race, racism, racialization, and race relations in the United States because of its effect on the demographic

\(^{1}\) Of course research on 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) century Irish and Italian immigrants has shown that they also were identified as non-white upon arrival to the U.S. (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1991). However, this research outlines the processes through which these groups “became white”, which is not an option for most contemporary immigrants from Latin America, African, and Asia.
composition of places at numerous scales (Liu 2000; Peake and Kobayashi 2002; Winders 2005). As Linda Peake and Audrey Kobayashi (2002) argue, “International immigration changes the processes of racialization, both because it diversifies societies and because racism responds to new patterns of migration with new forms and strategies.” (53). Conversely, recognizing that newcomers to the U.S. encounter and engage with processes of racialization and frequently are subjected to numerous racisms in their everyday lives, is integral to any examination of contemporary immigrant settlement, adjustment, or incorporation. A racialization framework, therefore, provides a critical theoretical perspective from which to conduct immigrant-focused research. As Liu (2000) asserts, “The demographic changes resulting from immigration thus demand that racialized ‘native-born’ groups and racialized immigrant groups be examined in relation to each other” (171). How immigrants identify themselves and thus with which social, cultural, and/or political groups they affiliate is an essential component to understanding their senses of belonging to U.S. society.

Although more and more immigration scholars have begun to connect immigrant-focused research to processes of racialization, racism, and identity formation amongst both immigrant groups and native-born racialized groups, this remains a fruitful and growing research trajectory (Liu 2000; Peake and Kobayashi 2002; Winders 2005). Literature on immigrants’ identities generally fails to assess critically the impact of place or socio-spatial context and holds a somewhat monolithic view of racial and ethnic identity, albeit one from a constructivist perspective. The literature on race and place in geography, moreover, rarely addresses the racialization experiences of international migrants and the ways in which they negotiate the racialized hierarchy into which they enter after they cross the border. Researchers are beginning to see how these demographic transformations are playing out in urban areas like Atlanta, GA,
yet they have paid little attention to how immigrants’ individual identifications and group affinities are reconstructed and reconstituted in specific places (see Itzigsohn 2004; Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2001; and Oboler 1995 for exceptions). What has been lacking in the literature on contemporary immigration across multiple disciplines is a concerted effort to examine critically the interconnections between processes of racialization and socio-spatial contexts for newcomers to the U.S. South, where processes of racialization historically have revolved around relations between white and black residents (Winders 2005).

In this dissertation, I link patterns of immigrant settlement and everyday urban geographies with processes of racialization and identity (re)construction through a case study of Central American-born residents of Atlanta, GA, USA. I argue that examining and understanding residential settlement and identity negotiation among these newcomers requires delving into the complex, multiple ways in which race and processes of racialization intersect with place or socio-spatial context. In framing this case study, the dissertation brings together several bodies of literature including those concerned with the construction or formation of individual and group identities, racial formation/racialization theory, immigrant assimilation and adjustment, residential segregation, race and geography, place and identity, and transnationalism. The dissertation is organized as three independent, yet connected manuscripts. I employ a multi-method empirical analysis that links mapping and modeling of Census 2000 data to data gathered through in-depth interviews with Central American immigrants in Atlanta to explore the ways in which the everyday geographies and social interactions of these newcomers impact their racial and national identities. This introductory chapter provides a discussion of Atlanta, GA as an “emerging gateway” city and the literature on race, immigration, and place before turning to a more detailed discussion of the three related, yet independent manuscripts.
THE U.S. SOUTH AS A NEW IMMIGRANT DESTINATION

Although traditional immigrant gateway cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami continue to receive large numbers of immigrants annually, new immigrant destinations have arisen over the past decade and a half, many of them in the southeastern U.S. (Suro and Singer 2002). The foreign-born populations of many of these emerging gateways, southern cities including Charlotte, North Carolina, Raleigh-Durham-Chapel-Hill, North Carolina, Nashville, Tennessee, and Atlanta, Georgia, are among the fastest growing in the country (Bump et. al. 2005; Mohl 2003; Suro and Singer 2002). These new destinations are drawing both foreign-born migrants from other states (primarily California and Texas) and direct immigrants from Mexico, Central, and South America with their abundance of so-called low-skilled, low-wage jobs and an apparent dearth of established residents willing to take them (Bump et. al. 2005; Mohl 2003). These new streams of international migration, with various southeastern cities as their final destination, are connected to global economic processes that encourage the movement of both capital and labor that have led to economic restructuring across the region (Eckes 2005; Mohl 2003; Smith 1998). Referring to the U.S. South, Barbara Smith (1998) notes, “…a newly racialized political economy seems to be emerging, one that displaces the apparent fixity and economic centrality of the black-white divide” (173).

Atlanta, GA’s strategic location in the southeastern United States along with its lax development requirements, weak labor unions, and relatively cheap land and cost of living has attracted both domestic and foreign capital to the area over the past three decades (Eckes 2005; Hansen 2005; Rutheiser 1996). The emergence of Atlanta as a business center, a transportation hub, and international city in the U.S. South has coincided with overall population growth and demographic changes that have altered the racialized landscape of the metropolitan area. A city
with a long history of black/white racial divisions and discord, Atlanta is recently experiencing immigration on a scale comparable to traditional gateway cities (Bretell 2003; Rutheiser 1996; Zhao 2002). By 2000 ten percent of the metropolitan area’s four million-plus inhabitants were foreign-born, signaling that a significant shift in Atlanta’s racialized landscape was underway (Hansen 2005). This dissertation research focuses on Central American immigrants in an emerging gateway and thus offers an opportunity to interrogate how processes of racialization are operating in the U.S. South with regards to these recent southerners.

The current political climate in the U.S. South and in Georgia in particular concerning immigration reform holds significant implications for the construction of a politicized “Hispanic/Latino”\(^2\) group identity at various scales. Such anti-immigrant proposals and legislation (or those that are viewed as anti-immigrant or as focusing unfairly on Hispanic/Latino residents) as Wisconsin Republican Representative James Sensenbrenner’s HR 4437, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives in December 2005, have resulted in massive opposition demonstrations across the country. In Georgia, governor Sonny Perdue signed into law Georgia Senate Bill 529 in April 2006, arguably the most comprehensive state law to date putatively geared toward curbing illegal immigration. These legislative moves have the potential to galvanize a Hispanic/Latino group identity and contribute to its adoption by greater numbers of residents in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Georgia has the largest number of registered Hispanic voters in the region and is thus well positioned to become the center of a pan-ethnic political movement in the U.S. South (Mohl 2005). Indeed, such group identities oftentimes gain

\(^{2}\) I place these terms in quotes here to denote their socially constructed origins, yet dispense with the quotation marks for the remainder of the paper. Following the U.S. Census, I use these terms interchangeably throughout this dissertation. See Oboler (1995) for a useful discussion of the differences between the two terms.
salience and political meaning and strength as a result of in-group members feeling oppressed by
the state or other outside-group actors or organizations (Young 1990).

**IMMIGRATION AND RACE**

Numerous studies (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Liu 2000; Oboler 1995; Oboler 1999; Roediger 1991) have traced the ways in which race and racialization have been central to the
settlement, adjustment, and incorporation of immigrants to the U.S. throughout its history.
Contemporary immigrants from Latin America find engaging with racialized hierarchies and the
negotiation of accompanying racialized subjectivities to be a crude, yet necessary introduction to
life in the United States (Alcoff 2000; Itzigsohn 2004; Oboler 1995). As Iris Marion Young
(1990) explicates, …“one finds oneself as a member of a group, which one experiences as always
already having been” (italics in original, 46). In the U.S. race, as a set of pre-configured
categories, is a primary means through which individuals identify themselves and others and thus
make sense of their place in society (Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 2004). These categories
frequently are presented by the state and experienced by individuals as fixed, rigid, and
unforgiving, although they are constructed discursively in and through interactions. They are by
their very nature, therefore, subject to transformations, changes, and/or transgressions.

The first manuscript of this dissertation, chapter two, uses Census 2000 tract data to
examine the residential settlement geographies of Central American immigrants in Atlanta.
Specifically, it utilizes two segregation indices in conjunction with mapping of Central American
immigrant residential concentrations to determine settlement patterns across the metropolis in
relation to other groups. Chapter two also includes a regression model that identifies census tract
characteristics that account for such settlement outcomes. Results indicate that the presence of
non-Central American Latinos is a primary factor driving Central American immigrants’
residential settlement in metropolitan Atlanta. Chapter two demonstrates that the residential geographies of Central American immigrants overlap considerably with those of non-Central American Hispanics/Latinos in addition to those of black and white residents of Atlanta. Chapter two frames these settlement outcomes within a racialization perspective and views them as situated within broader social processes that construct a racialized, pan-ethnic Hispanic/Latino identity for Central American-born residents of Atlanta, GA.

These findings suggest the need to examine critically the construction and adoption of the homogenous category Hispanic/Latino among Central American immigrants in Atlanta in relation to Black and White racialized subject positions, which chapter three addresses. Chapter three investigates questions concerning the degree to which and the means through which Central American immigrants in Atlanta adopt a racialized pan-ethnic Latino/Hispanic identity through an analysis of twenty-seven in-depth interviews. This manuscript poses questions such as: Do Central American-born residents identify primarily with their nationality or does a pan-ethnic Latino identity or some alternate ethno-racial identification emerge? In addition, to what extent are ethnic and national identities stable and cohesive? Chapter three examines the degree to which and the process through which Central American-born Atlantans adopt or accept a Hispanic/Latino label; it highlights the negotiation between an emergent racialized pan-ethnic identity and the retention of national identities.

Context, both temporal and spatial, matters when it comes to processes of racialization that produce, maintain, contest and/or transform racial meanings (Haney Lopez 1998; Jackson 1998; Schein 2002; Winant 2004). The localized contexts into which recent Central American immigrants move will affect not only their social, economic, and cultural adjustment experiences, but also the degree to which they might adopt and embrace a pan-ethnic
Hispanic/Latino subjectivity. For example, narratives of Latin American migrants living in states with longer histories of Hispanic/Latino immigrants like Texas or Florida differ greatly from those settling in Georgia or North Carolina (Velasquez 1999). Indeed, the political, social, and cultural contexts in and through which the everyday lives of Latino/Hispanic migrants to the U.S. South play out demand greater attention from immigration researchers.

Although the significance of context in processes of identity construction has been well established, the literature within both geography and other disciplines continues to offer too few empirical studies that interrogate how and why context is important. Geographers have contributed too few empirical studies to the existing identity literature, despite their requests that researchers attend to the role of place/geographic context in racial/ethnic identity construction (Anderson 1987; Delaney 2002; Findlay and Li 1999; Massey 1997; Pratt 1998). As Peake and Kobayashi (2002) affirm, “There is perhaps no more productive ground on the contemporary geographic landscape for highlighting the contours of the processes of racialization than that of immigration studies, currently engaging a large and growing number of human geographers” (53). The third manuscript of this dissertation, chapter four, builds on insights from the previous two chapters as well as poststructural theories of subjectivity formation in order to disentangle the links between everyday urban geographies and identity negotiation among interview participants. Specifically, this third manuscript asks how the socio-spatial contexts in which Central American immigrants live and experience their daily lives (e.g. home, work, places of recreation, worship, and shopping) affect the process of identity negotiation? That is, does racial/ethnic identification shift according to differing socio-spatial contexts across the metropolis? Finally, chapter five draws some overall conclusions and addresses further the numerous linkages and interactions between these three manuscripts.
TERMINOLOGY

I employ the term “immigrant” in its strictest sense throughout this dissertation to refer to those individuals born outside of the United States whom migrated here at some point over the life-course. Central American immigrants currently reside in the U.S. and were born in one of the following countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, or Panama. Although not exactly synonymous, I use the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” interchangeably in all chapters, following the U.S. Census. The terms refer to individuals in the United States who migrated from Latin America in addition to those U.S. citizens with family heritage from Mexico, Central, or South America. One of the fundamental questions of this research (addressed in chapters 3 and 4) concerns the degree to which and the means through which this racialized identifier gains salience for Central American-born residents of Atlanta and thus is adopted by them. Finally, following Omi and Winant (1994), I deploy the term “racialization” to refer to the processes through which racial meanings are produced, maintained, contested, and changed.

This dissertation addresses the overlaps and silences between the literature on immigrant adjustment and identity negotiation and the literature concerning place and identity. I argue that the residential settlement outcomes and identity negotiation experiences of Central American immigrants in Atlanta, GA, USA are interwoven inextricably with processes of racialization. This research project thus demonstrates the necessity of considering the role of place or socio-spatial context and processes of racialization when examining Latin American immigrant adjustment to life in the U.S.

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3 Such individuals are often referred to as 1st generation immigrants in the immigration literature, their children generally being the 2nd generation, and so on.
4 See Oboler (1999) for a superb discussion of the history of these labels, as well as the distinction between the two.
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CHAPTER 2

“FITTING IN” IN ATLANTA, GA, USA: RACIALIZATION AND CENTRAL
AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS’ RESIDENTIAL SETTLEMENT GEOGRAPHIES

5 To be submitted to Population, Space, and Place, October 2006
“FITTING IN” IN ATLANTA, GA, USA: RACIALIZATION AND CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS’ RESIDENTIAL SETTLEMENT GEOGRAPHIES

Abstract

Place of residence significantly impacts the adjustment experiences of immigrants with regards to education, income, occupation, social networks, and language skills. Newcomers from Central America constitute an increasingly important component of “Hispanic/Latino” migration flows to the southeastern United States, and yet they remain under studied. This paper focuses on residential settlement outcomes among Central American immigrants in Atlanta, GA, using Census 2000 data and a combination of segregation indices, mapping and modeling techniques. The study draws upon racialization theory to contribute to an understanding of how Central American immigrants are fitting in to Atlanta’s racially structured yet dynamic settlement geographies. Specifically, it offers an analysis of the residential concentrations of Central American immigrants in Atlanta relative to non-Central American Latinos of any race, non-Hispanic Blacks, and non-Hispanic Whites through indices of dissimilarity and exposure as well as the mapping of location quotients. In addition, I ask what census tract characteristics account for the residential settlement of Central American immigrants in the Atlanta area. Results suggest that the presence of non-Central American Latinos is a primary driving force behind Central American immigrant residential settlement in metropolitan Atlanta, GA. These inquiries are made using Census 2000 data and negative binomial regression (count) modeling.

Keywords: residential settlement, racialization theory, Central American immigrants
INTRODUCTION

Continued immigration from Latin America has tremendous potential to alter the longstanding bi-racial nature of social, political, and cultural life in the American South. Social scientists focused on the southeastern United States historically have concerned themselves with social and spatial relations between blacks and whites, paying little attention to Latino/Hispanic\(^6\) populations. Yet Latinos are roughly equal in number to African-Americans nationally, and their numbers are increasing dramatically in new Latino destinations (frequently dubbed “emerging gateways”), including those in the U.S. South (Singer 2004; Suro and Singer 2000). As one of these emerging gateways, Atlanta, GA exhibited greater Latino growth between 1990 and 2000 (362%) than established destinations such as New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Chicago (calculated from Census 2000). Most estimates predict that rapid Latino/Hispanic population growth will continue throughout the current decade and these demographic changes promise to greatly affect the southeast in unprecedented ways (Census 2000; Suro and Singer 2002).

Current figures for Atlanta show a 42% increase in the Latino/Hispanic population from 2000 to 2004, while this segment accounts for 31% of the total population growth for the metropolitan area over the same period (calculated from American Community Survey, U.S Census 2004).

Newcomers from the Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Costa Rica are an increasingly important component of Latino/Hispanic migration to the southeast: their number in Atlanta (26,430 in 2000) grew more rapidly during the last inter-census period than did the Latino population overall (calculated from Census 2000). Migrants from Central America continue to move to Georgia’s capital, as 2000-2004 estimates indicate a 33% growth rate among this population (calculated from American Community Survey, U.S Census 2004).

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\(^6\) Following the U.S. Census, I use the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” interchangeably throughout this paper. For a useful discussion on the difference between the two terms see Oboler (1995; 1999).
Survey, U.S. Census 2004). In Atlanta, the extant black/white dominant racial hierarchy shapes Central American immigrants’ socio-spatial interactions in unique ways, as they are a minority within a minority (Latino) population. Indeed, Atlanta’s traditional black/white racial binary and its relatively small but rapidly increasing Latino population provide only ambiguous places of belonging for Central American immigrants. The residential settlement geographies of new immigrants have important implications for their economic opportunities and economic status in Atlanta. One’s place of residence significantly impacts the adjustment experiences of immigrants with regards to education, income, occupation, social networks, and language skills (Massey and Denton 1993; Rodriguez 2000; Suro 1998). As Massey and Denton (1993) explain, “…where one lives determines a variety of salient factors that affect individual well-being: the quality of schooling, the value of housing, exposure to crime, the quality of services, and the character of children’s peers” (150).

Atlanta is likely to exhibit a higher degree of suburbanization among its immigrant population than central city settlement, because it is an emerging gateway. This pattern brings into question the applicability of a traditional spatial assimilation framework to their settlement patterns (Singer 2004). In addition, assimilation perspectives generally demand a long time frame, typically across generations, over which to measure immigrants’ adjustment experiences (e.g. across generations). Racialization frameworks focus on the centrality of race in everyday life in America and demonstrate that individuals’ experiences are intricately connected to contemporary racial structures in the U.S. and their localized manifestations (Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 2004). A racialization approach applied to immigrant research draws much-needed attention to the impact of racial hierarchies and racial identities (both individual and group) on immigrant adjustment experiences, including those surrounding residential settlement.
I deploy a racialization approach in this paper to frame an analysis of Central American immigrant residential settlement in Atlanta, GA in order to stress the significance of the marking of immigrants with racialized labels and identities.

This study draws upon racialization theory to contribute to an understanding of how Central American immigrants are fitting in to Atlanta’s racially structured yet dynamic settlement geographies. The paper appeals to such a theoretical approach because of the continued importance of racial structures in the lives of immigrants in the United States. Specifically, this paper focuses on the following research questions: 1) To what extent are Central American immigrants residentially segregated from the largest racial/ethnic groups in Atlanta? 2) To what degree are Central American immigrants residentially concentrated and are they contributing to pan-ethnic Latino concentrations? and 3) What neighborhood-level factors account for the residential distribution of Central American immigrants? I employ a combination of mapping and statistical approaches, including the use of two common residential segregation indices and multivariate regression techniques, to address these three research questions.

Through this case study, I argue that the application of racialization theory to immigrant settlement research helps to capture the complexity of residential settlement outcomes and offers a fresh perspective from which to view residential settlement patterns and processes. The paper begins with a discussion of spatial assimilation and racialization approaches to immigrant settlement and segregation research. It then provides some background on Latino and Central American migration to Atlanta, GA. The final sections include the results of the segregation, mapping, and regression analyses followed by some overall conclusions and a discussion of future research possibilities.
Residential segregation has long been viewed as central to immigrant assimilation experiences (Logan et. al. 1996; Massey 1985; Massey and Denton 1993). Today, residential segregation continues for African-Americans and Latinos although segregation by race and ethnicity across the United States is less common than in the middle decades of the 20th century (Alba and Denton 2004). The vestiges of governmental and social separation of racial/ethnic groups are still discernible in the urban landscapes in many U.S. metropolitan areas leading Alba and Denton (2004) to assert, “the color-coding of the urban landscape that was firmly fixed in the organization of metropolitan space during the two decades following World War II remains predominant, even if it has blurred more than a little” (250). Traditional spatial assimilation theory (Massey and Denton 1985; 1993) attempts to describe immigrant settlement experiences as shifting from enclaves and ghettos to suburbs as they become more similar to native-born Americans (read: white, middle class) in terms of education, socio-economic status, language, and other socio-cultural traits (Alba and Nee 1999; Logan et. al. 1996; Zelinsky and Lee 1998). With each successive generation, families are assumed to become more and more like the majority of Americans (particularly in terms of socio-economic status) and their residential settlement patterns supposedly reflect this shift (Wright and Ellis 2000).

Many have questioned the utility of spatial assimilation theory in understanding contemporary immigrants’ experiences, particularly in light of increased immediate suburbanization of newly arriving immigrants, although it putatively reflected the settlement patterns of European immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Logan et. al. 1996; Wright and Ellis 2000; Zelinsky and Lee 1998). Others have begun to call for a more nuanced view of assimilation; one that does not necessitate a one-way view of the overall process, the
inclusion of a majority group as the reference group, and/or normative assumptions of white, middle-class status (Alba and Nee 1999; Brubaker 2001; Rumbaut 1999; Wright, Ellis, and Park 2005). Pluralist theories oftentimes are positioned opposite assimilation perspectives. This line of reasoning contends that immigrants retain their ethnic, social, and cultural ties, and thus their distinctiveness from the majority population, even after the passing of several generations (Gans 1999; Logan et. al. 1996; Zelinsky and Lee 1998). Spatially, most pluralist theorists expect that ethnic groups form distinct enclaves, thus resisting spatial assimilation into the majority population. Preliminary analyses of Census 2000 indicate that spatial assimilation continues to occur alongside growing ethnic enclaves across the U.S. This situation is due primarily to continued high streams of immigration and fewer barriers to suburban settlement for both current and newly arriving foreign-born residents (Alba and Denton 2004). Nevertheless, neither theories of assimilation nor pluralism, as narrowly and oppositionally defined, accurately reflect recent immigrants’ experiences (Brubaker 2001; Gans 1999; Portes 1999).

One source of these shortcomings is the limited ability of assimilation approaches to account for the settlement geographies of racialized groups. Racial formation entails the construction of racial groups for political purposes, which occurs within specific social, historical, and economic contexts (Omi and Winant 1994; Pierce 2000). Racialization is the process through which racial meanings and identities are produced, maintained, contested, and changed. Processes of racialization are geographically and temporally contingent and thus are subject to contestation and alteration (Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 2004). Individuals and groups encountering processes of racialization acquire particular racial identities along with their associated meanings, which are based primarily on skin tone and physical features. From this perspective Latino/Hispanic is a racialized identity that exists alongside and separate from the

Central American immigrants are not immune from racialized politics or hierarchies, although racial politics continue to be dominated by a black-white dichotomy in Atlanta (and in the U.S. more broadly). These newcomers discover where they fit (and do not fit) in the contemporary racial structure and this recognition is fundamental to both their socio-spatial relations and their adjustment experiences (Rodriguez 1994; 2000). The reactions to this racialization process are myriad, as Rodriguez (2000) describes, “This racial reclassification immerses immigrants in a social education process in which they first learn—and then may ignore, resist, or accept—the state-defined categories and the popular conventions concerning race (particularly one’s own)” (18). Rodriguez (2000) also notes the persistent stereotype of Hispanics/Latinos as “tan” or “light skinned” and argues that this perception restricts access to the category “White”, yet distinguishes them from other racialized groups (e.g. black and Asian).

The U.S. Census functions as a tool of the state by constructing racial and ethnic categories, collecting and analyzing data, and ultimately constraining individuals’ choices of racial and ethnic identification. Throughout their history, these data have served both to provide “facts” about particular races and to construct racial character and formal identity (Goldberg 1997; Holloway 2000; Omi and Winant 1994). In many ways, the U.S. Census produces the racialized “Us” and “Other”, both by reflecting and constructing racial formation, while naturalizing and fixing racial identities. The state contributes to the racialization of its residents, both foreign-born and native-born, with the U.S. Census serving as one of its primary tools (Goldberg 1997; Oboler 1995; Rodriguez 2000). Thus a paradox exists between the putatively democratic process of self-identification and the existence of ascribed racial identity and
identification. Utilizing these census data in a research context such as this paper runs the risk of perpetuating racial and ethnic stereotypes and reifying socially constructed categories that may or may not be meaningful to those individuals grouped therein.

Acknowledging that racialization is implicated in the identifying and labeling of Central American immigrants (both formally and informally) affects interpretations of analyses concerning their residential settlement patterns. Census data cannot effectively interrogate processes of racialization (i.e. we cannot use them to address the “how” and “to what extent” of racialization). This paper suggests a critical theoretical framework for researching the residential geographies of the foreign-born, one that considers how immigrant groups’ racialized experiences in the U.S. are likely to be reflected in their settlement patterns. In so doing, the paper focuses on neighborhood (using census tracts as a proxy) factors that contribute to Central American immigrant residential settlement. This approach contributes a degree of richness to assimilation research that tends to analyze immigrant group and/or individual characteristics (e.g. income, education, time in U.S., language proficiency, etc) as determinants of residential settlement outcomes (Alba et. al. 1999; Logan et. al. 1996; Massey and Denton 1993). It also questions the degree to which pluralist researchers can generalize about immigrants’ residential settlement patterns being primarily matters of choice given certain economic restraints, by placing such analyses within a broader social structural context.

The following case study of Central Americans in Atlanta, demonstrates how acknowledging the racialization of immigrants from Latin America provides a unique vantage point on immigrant residential settlement research relative to assimilation and pluralist approaches. I hope to shed light on the inherent instability of racial and ethnic classifications in the United States, both by presenting such quantitative analyses within a racialization framework
and through acknowledging the potential of such studies to contribute to a fixed, uncritical view of race and ethnicity. The constitution of the racialized pan-ethnic category “Latino/Hispanic” is of particular interest, although a detailed discussion is well beyond the scope of this paper.

LATINO IMMIGRANTS IN ATLANTA

Atlanta has experienced a relatively high amount of growth in its Latino population and even higher growth among Central American residents throughout the nineteen-nineties. From 1990 to 2000, the population of Atlanta, GA, USA grew at a rate of 39%, while the Latino segment of the population grew by over 350%, and stood at 6.5% of the total population by the end of the decade (Census 2000). The national average Latino growth rate during this same period was 58%. Segregation between Latinos and whites in southeast metropolitan areas with 100,000 or more residents increased noticeably during the 1990s, evidenced by an 11% average increase in dissimilarity indices since 1990. Atlanta, specifically, experienced an above average increase in Latino/White segregation throughout the 1990s, as the dissimilarity index increased 46 %, from 36 to 52.5 (Yarbrough 2003). However, a dearth of research currently exists that focuses on the southeast and explores the residential settlement geographies of the numerous nationalities that comprise the homogenizing category “Latino/Hispanic”. With a population cresting four million residents, metropolitan Atlanta is a prime location for this study for several additional reasons.

Atlanta’s population has increased substantially over the last twenty years. It has been characterized as an emerging gateway city experiencing high immigrant growth during this same time period, as it has become hub of economic activity in the southeastern U.S. (Singer 2004). During the 1990s, the state of Georgia’s immigrant population swelled due to an increase in the need for labor in low-wage, low-skilled industries such as carpet manufacturing, poultry
production, and agricultural work. Demands for construction and landscape workers increased
tremendously as the state’s population grew and preparations began for the 1996 summer
Olympic Games to be held in Atlanta. Immigrant workers (many of them from Mexico) filled
much of this need for labor and thus metropolitan Atlanta became the primary destination for
immigrants to Georgia in the 1990s (Atiles and Bohon 2002; Neal and Bohon 2003). Finally,
this quantitative analysis of Central American immigrants in the Atlanta, GA metropolitan area is
timely, as very little is currently known about the settlement patterns of particular
Latino/Hispanic immigrant groups in this increasingly important destination in the U.S. South.

DATA AND EXPECTATIONS

The following analyses provide insight into the residential settlement patterns of recent
Central American immigrants in both absolute terms and relative to other groups with whom
they share urban space in Atlanta, GA. The findings also address the degree to which these
newcomers are contributing to the formation of pan-ethnic Latino concentrations and
neighborhood factors that might account for such a contribution. The Atlanta metropolitan
statistical area (MSA) is a twenty county area containing 4,112,198 residents, of which
approximately 26,430 were identified as immigrants from Central America⁷ according to Census
2000. The concentration here is solely on foreign-born/first generation Central Americans living
in metropolitan Atlanta, GA, although not only on direct migrants, as many moved to Atlanta
from other locations in the U.S. These individuals, therefore, may or may not be legal residents,
naturalized citizens, or permanent residents of the United States.

Census 2000 tract data were used to examine the residential settlement patterns of Central
American immigrants in Atlanta and their spatial relations with other groups in the metropolitan

⁷ For the purposes of this study, Central American immigrants are defined as those persons residing in the United
States in 2000 whom were born in any of the following Central American countries: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador,
Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.
area. I expect Central American immigrants’ spatial concentration and distribution to approximate that of other Latino/Hispanic-identified residents, because of processes of racialization coupled with cultural similarities (primarily linguistic). The use of non-Hispanic white as the primary reference group, therefore, is not appropriate. The following analyses focus on Central American immigrants’ residential settlement outcomes primarily as they relate to non-Central American Latinos and Mexican-identified residents in particular. Segregation indices for Central American immigrants relative to non-Hispanic black and non-Hispanic white Atlantans are discussed briefly, however in order to provide points of comparison with these two largest racial groups in the metropolitan area.

ANALYSIS

Two segregation indices were employed to ascertain the degree to which Central American immigrants are segregated from non-Central American Latinos (NCAL), Mexicans, Latinos/Hispanics of any race, non-Hispanic blacks, and non-Hispanic whites. Dissimilarity indices\(^8\) provide information on the degree to which the percentage of a group in residential areas is equal to that of the entire urban area (Massey and Denton 1988). The exposure index\(^9\) measures the probability that members of one group will come into contact with members of other groups in a given geographic area based upon residential location. An alternative interpretation of exposure indices is the proportion of residents in a given geographic area (in this

\[ D = 0.5 \sum_{j=1}^{J} \left( \frac{x_j}{X} - \frac{y_j}{Y} \right) \]  
(Massey and Denton 1988),

where \( j \) reference tracts, and \( x_j \) and \( y_j \) are the tract counts of group X and group Y members. \( X \) and \( Y \) are the total number of group X and group Y members in the MSA.

\[ P^*_y = \sum_{j=1}^{J} \left( \frac{x_j}{X} \left( \frac{y_j}{t_j} \right) \right) \]  
(Massey and Denton 1988),

where \( j \) references tracts, and \( x_j, y_j \) and \( t_j \) are the tract counts of group X members, group Y members and total population, respectively. \( X \) refers to the number of group X members in the MSA.

---

\(^8\) The equation for Dissimilarity Index is given as:

\(^9\) The equation for Exposure Index (also referred to as the \( P^* \) index) is given as:
case a census tract) composed of by a specific group, such that when all groups are accounted for exposure indices sum to 1.0 or 100%. I present and discuss both dissimilarity and exposure indices comparing Central American immigrants to Mexicans, non-Central American Latinos/Hispanics of any race, non-Hispanic Blacks, and non-Hispanic Whites, in order to discern the degree of segregation between Central American immigrants and these four groups.

Table 2.1 contains four dissimilarity and six exposure indices for Central American immigrants in Atlanta, GA. The high dissimilarity figure for blacks (D = .673) indicates that Central American immigrants are highly segregated from black residents. Central American immigrants are not very evenly dispersed vis-à-vis black residents, yet the average Central American immigrant lives in a census tract that is 26% black (P* = .262). Similarly, Central American immigrants are highly segregated from Whites (D = .681), while white residents account for 42% (P* = .419) of the total population in the average Central American immigrant’s census tract. Although on the surface these may seem like inconsistencies, the high percentages of African-Americans and whites in the metropolitan Atlanta area (30% and 60% respectively) and the very low percentage of Central American immigrants (<1%) account for these patterns. When compared to segregation between non-Central American Latinos (NCAL) and Blacks and Whites respectively, there is greater dissimilarity among Central American immigrants than

| Table 2.1: Dissimilarity and Exposure Indices Comparing Central American (CA) Immigrants and non-CA Latinos to Black and White Residents of Atlanta |
|-----------------|-----|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                 | CA/Black | CA/White | non-CA Latino/Black | non-CA Latino/White | Non-CA/ Latino | Black/White |
| D               | .673    | .681    | .586     | .510     | .656     |
| P*              | .262    | .419    | .243     | .502     | 0.183    | .284       |

D: Dissimilarity Index
P*: Exposure Index

10 All figures pertaining to black and white residents were calculated using non-Hispanic black and non-Hispanic white population counts, respectively.
among Latino-identified residents not born in Central America (as non-NCAL/Black \( D = .586 \) and NCAL/White \( D = .502 \)).

From a racialization perspective, the indices reflecting the spatial relations between Central American immigrants and other Latino/Hispanic-identified residents given in Table 2.2 are of particular interest, as one would expect relatively low degrees of segregation between various Latino/Hispanic subgroups. Central American immigrants are only moderately segregated from both all non-Central American Latinos and Mexican-identified residents in particular, according to dissimilarity figures \( (D = .420 \) and .421 respectively). The exposure indices support this explanation by indicating that the average Central American-born resident lives in a neighborhood that is 23% Latino/Hispanic, though Latinos account for only 6.5% of metropolitan Atlanta’s population. When broken down into specific Latino/Hispanic groups, we find that Mexicans comprise 65% of this 23% \( (P^* = .149) \). Central American immigrants account for the next largest portion \( (19\% \) of the 23\%, \( P^* = .044 \)), while other Latino-identified residents (e.g. South American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican) comprise the remainder of the Latino/Hispanic population in the average Central American immigrant’s neighborhood in Atlanta \( (16\% \) of the 23\% \( P^* = .038 \)).

Frequently, Exposure \( (P^*) \) indices are easier to understand graphically. Figure 2.1 contains the racial/ethnic breakdown of the average Central American immigrant’s neighborhood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CA/non-CA Latino</th>
<th>CA/Mexican</th>
<th>CA/other Latino</th>
<th>CA/CA</th>
<th>CA/Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td>.420</td>
<td>.421</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P^</strong>*</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D: Dissimilarity Index  
P^*: Exposure Index
Figure 2.1

CA immigrant Exposure Indices

Racial/Ethnic Groups

Black .262
White .419
Mexican .149
Other Latino .038
CA .044

Figure 2.2

NCAL Exposure Indices

Racial/Ethnic Groups

Latino .183
White .502
Black .243
in Atlanta according to the calculated Exposure (P*) Indices. The average Central American immigrant lives in a census tract where Central American immigrants account for 4.4% of the population, Mexicans account for 15%, and other Latino-identified residents make up 3.8% (summing to the previously mentioned 23% Latino/Hispanic population). Comparing this to non-Central American Latinos, the average non-Central American Latino lives in a tract that is 50.2% White, 24.3% Black, and 18.3% Latino (see Figure 2.2). Overall, non-Central American Latino/Hispanic residents of Atlanta live in whiter neighborhoods and have fewer Latino neighbors than do Central American immigrants. Meanwhile, the black proportion of the average Central American-born resident’s neighborhood is slightly higher than that of the average non-Central American Latino (26.2 and 24.3 respectively).

For comparison, Table 2.1 (p. 25) provides dissimilarity and exposure indices for African-American residents of Atlanta relative to Whites. Although dissimilarity figures for Central Americans immigrants and African-Americans are comparable (i.e. both indicate moderate segregation from white Atlantans), exposure indices differ markedly. White residents comprise only 28% of a typical African-American’s neighborhood, while the average Central American immigrant lives in a neighborhood that is 42% White (see P* values for CA/White and Black/White, respectively). The socio-spatial experiences of Central American immigrants in Atlanta differ from those of African-Americans because they tend to live in neighborhoods with significant proportions of both black and white residents. African-Americans, on the other hand, are more likely to be the majority racial/ethnic group in their neighborhoods, and thus tend to have fewer white neighbors, as is the case in Atlanta (Alba and Denton 2004). Not surprisingly, Central American immigrants are more likely to come into contact with non-Central American Latinos (P*=.187) than are white or black residents (P*=5.3 and 5.7
respectively; Lewis Mumford Center 2002). Finally, although Central American immigrants have more white neighbors than do African-Americans, they still have fewer than do non-Central American Latinos (P*=.502).

This cursory look at the segregation of Central American-born residents of Atlanta relative to non-Central American Latinos, black, and white residents of the metropolitan area has utilized two complementary indices, dissimilarity and exposure. These calculations suggest that Central American immigrants are residing in neighborhoods with relatively large non-Central American Latino populations (measured as a proportion of the total tract population) and significantly smaller white populations relative to metropolitan proportions. These disparities between the racial and ethnic composition of Central American immigrants’ neighborhoods and the metropolitan area as a whole support neither pluralist nor spatial assimilation expectations exclusively as both models suggest similar outcomes in the settlement patterns of first generation immigrants. Indeed, the previous analysis simply documents these empirical patterns and thus cannot resolve the longstanding assimilation/pluralism debate. What I demonstrate subsequently in the paper, however, is how viewing these patterns through the lens of racialization contributes to our understanding of what they tell us and to what forces we might attribute them. Exploring the current spatial settlement patterns uncovered through mapping tract data is a useful precursor to embarking on a discussion of the neighborhood factors contributing to Central American immigrant settlement.
Residential Geographies of Central American Immigrants

Location Quotients\(^{11}\) for Central American immigrants in Atlanta are shown in Figure 2.3. These location quotients (LQs) provide information on the ratio of Central American immigrants to the total population in a given census tract, compared to the same ratio in the entire MSA. Mapping these calculated quotients indicates whether the percentage of Central American immigrants in a census tract is greater than or less than the percentage for the Atlanta MSA. In Figure 2.3 the entire map represents the metropolitan statistical area, while the yellow shaded area denotes the city of Atlanta. The census tracts with relatively high concentrations of Central American immigrants (i.e., those census tracts with location quotients that are at least above 2.0) are shaded in blue or black tones, while non-shaded tracts exhibit relatively small or no concentrations of Central American immigrants. The darker shading indicates a higher location quotient (LQ) value and thus a greater concentration (relative to the proportion in the entire MSA) of Central American immigrants. Those census tracts shaded lightest have two to four times the ratio of Central American immigrants to the total tract population than the same ratio in all of metropolitan Atlanta. The next darker shaded tracts exhibit four to eight times the concentration of Central American immigrants than the metro area as a whole, while the darkest group (only one tract) demonstrates more than thirty times this proportion. In other words, there is greater representation of Central American-born residents (as a percentage of the total population) in these shaded tracts than in the overall Atlanta MSA and the darker the shading, the greater degree of concentration.

\(^{11}\) The equation for Location Quotient (LQ) is given as:

\[
LQ_j = \left[ \frac{c_{aj}}{t_j} \right] \left[ \frac{CA}{T} \right]
\]

where \( j \) references census tracts, \( c_{aj} \) is the number of Central American immigrants in census tract \( j \), \( t_j \) is the total population in census tract \( j \), \( CA \) is the number of Central American immigrants in Atlanta, and \( T \) is the total population of Atlanta.
Figure 2.3 Location Quotients for Central American Immigrants in Atlanta, GA Metropolitan Statistical Area, USA, 2000

Legend

- Interstates
- City of Atlanta
- Counties

Location Quotients
- 2.00 - 3.99
- 4.00 - 7.99
- 8.00 - 18.99
- 19.00 - 34

Sources:
Shape Files: ESRI & US Census
Location quotient data: calculated from US Census, 2000
Map Creators: James C Rogers & Robert Yarbrough, 2006
Some distinct geographic patterns emerge upon closer examination of these LQs. The top eleven census tracts in terms of Central American immigrant concentration (LQs) run along the I-85/Buford Highway corridor stretching through northern DeKalb and western Gwinnett counties. Residential settlement of Central American immigrants along this corridor is far from surprising. The Buford Highway area spanning both DeKalb and Gwinnett counties in Atlanta is known for its immigrant residential settlement as well as immigrant-driven business activities (Rutheiser 1996; Walcott 2002). Businesses along this corridor cater to non-English speaking clients, including those who speak Chinese, Korean, or Spanish as their primary language, as one sees in the various signage along this route. Only four neighborhoods in the top 20 (25%) of Central American immigrant concentrations do not fall along Buford Highway, two in Cherokee County, one in Cobb County (Marietta), and one in Carroll County (Carrollton).

The two tracts in Cherokee County straddle Interstate 575 and rank 12th and 13th in terms of Central American immigrant residential concentration (LQ). The two shaded areas adjacent to one another in Cherokee also have significant Central American residential concentrations. In Cherokee county, the interstate serves as node of sorts for residential settlement Central American immigrants, as it does in DeKalb and Gwinnett counties. Unlike Buford Highway, this I-575 area is not known for its immigrant population, nor is Cherokee County a racially/ethnically diverse county, as 90% of its residents are non-Hispanic whites, while 5.5% and 2.2% identify as Latino and non-Hispanic black respectively (calculated from Census 2000). The spatial clustering in Cherokee County likely is due to the presence of affordable multi-family (apartment style) housing just off the interstate and/or the convenience of living close to the highway. Employment opportunities also are likely playing a major role, with suburban-driven development dominating this county and thus the need for construction and
landscaping workers, niches that many Latinos tend to occupy in Atlanta (Hudson 2003). One neighborhood in Cobb County just west of the city of Marietta and Interstate 75 exhibits more than eight times the concentration of Central American immigrants than does the Atlanta metropolitan area and ranks fourteenth in terms of its location quotient for this immigrant group. One final tract not along the Buford Highway corridor falls within the top twenty census tracts ranked by LQs (in Carroll County).

Several observations regarding these residential settlement patterns of Central American immigrants in Atlanta merit attention. First, the general residential settlement pattern for these migrants is highly suburbanized, providing support for recent studies that found diminishing barriers to immediate or rapid settlement in suburbs for newly arriving immigrants (Alba et. al. 1999). Second, a significant share of the most highly concentrated Central American immigrant residences is located in a well-established immigrant residential and business area, the Buford Highway corridor spanning DeKalb and Gwinnett counties. The remaining neighborhoods with high concentrations of Central American immigrant residents, moreover, are along major interstates outside Atlanta city limits. Central American immigrants, therefore, are residing in distinct suburban areas of Atlanta (primarily alongside other Latino/Hispanic-identified residents), while they are absent in many others.

These newcomers’ residential outcomes are consistent with a racialization perspective wherein they are marked/imputed with a racialized Hispanic/Latino label that is neither white nor black and this impacts their residential settlement outcomes (perhaps consciously, perhaps not). This does not necessitate the settlement of Central American immigrants in 23% Latino/Hispanic neighborhoods as the only factor that contributes to such settlement outcomes (e.g. white and/or black residents could be moving out of these areas). Nevertheless, one might view these
residential settlement patterns of Central American immigrants in Atlanta as a spatial manifestation of the social and political process of their racialization as Hispanic/Latino.

Further discussion of how a racialization perspective offers a different set of conclusions regarding these settlement patterns than assimilation or pluralist models follows the regression analysis. The subsequent Negative Binomial Regression addresses the specific question of what neighborhood characteristics might account for the residential settlement of Central American immigrants in Atlanta. This count modeling approach uses Census 2000 tract data and regresses raw counts of Central American-born residents against a variety of tract variables including: % non-Central American Latino (NCAL), % white, median contract rent, % renter occupied housing units, median value of owner-occupied housing units, total population, % vacant housing units, and % non-Central American Latino (NCAL) squared. Table 2.3 gives the mean values of these exogenous variables.

**Negative Binomial Regression Analysis**

Count models are best suited in cases such as this where the focus is on determining which neighborhood factors contribute to the number of Central American-born residents living there. Numerous census tracts in the Atlanta MSA have extremely low or zero counts of Central American-born residents because of their recent arrival and relatively small representation in the metro area. Therefore, because standard errors are highly suspect in cases where there are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% non-Central American Latino</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Renters (of total tract population)</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Vacant (of total housing units)</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Rent</td>
<td>$630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Housing Value (owner occupied)</td>
<td>$140,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract Population</td>
<td>6,241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
numerous zeros or small counts in a data set, I utilize negative binomial regression (NBR), a technique designed to minimize this overdispersion (Cameron and Trivedi 1998; Haller and Landolt 2005; Long 1997). The % non-Central American Latino (NCAL) and % white variables were included to test the expectation that a neighborhood’s racial composition significantly impacts Central American immigrant residential settlement. If the racialization of Central American immigrants as Latino/Hispanic does indeed contribute to their settlement patterns then the racial composition of neighborhoods should exert significant influence on the presence or absence of Central American immigrant residents. Specifically, I expect that the greater the composition of non-Central American Latino (NCAL) residents in a given neighborhood, the larger the Central American immigrant population. Other neighborhood characteristics also might influence Central American immigrant presence, including housing type, availability and affordability.

The following regression analysis includes four housing variables: percentage of total tract population that rents housing, percentage of total housing units that are vacant, median contract rent, and the median value of owner-occupied housing. These housing variables were chosen because they measure factors likely to be important in residential settlement choices for relatively new immigrant groups, namely the availability and affordability of rental housing (see Smith and Furuseth 2004). Total tract population was included to control for its effect on Central American immigrant presence. Finally, the percent non-Central American Latino (NCAL) squared variable was included after conducting a series of exploratory analyses to test various functional forms for the model (e.g. experimenting with various non-linear functional forms and conducting goodness of fit statistical tests).

12 Because both %white and %black could not be included due to multicollinearity, a separate model was estimated that replaced %white with %black, maintaining the remaining model specification. The %black variable was not a significant predictor of Central American residential settlement in this second model.
Regression coefficients, standard errors, and percent changes for all independent variables are included in Table 2.4. Table 2.4 also contains the predicted number of Central American immigrants in a neighborhood when all independent variables are at their mean values (constant: 17.3). The model predicts that just over 17 Central American immigrants would live in a metropolitan Atlanta neighborhood with the average characteristics given in Table 2.3 (p.22). The percent non-Central American Latino (NCAL), percent vacant, tract population, and the percent NCAL squared variables all are significant predictors of the number (counts) of Central American immigrants in a neighborhood. The first two variables exhibit a positive impact, while the latter two decrease the number of Central American immigrants in a census tract.

A series of post-estimation analyses were conducted that converted the parameter estimates to a format analogous to standard regression, because the interpretation of parameter estimates in negative binomial regression analyses is different from Ordinary Least Squares regression\(^\text{13}\) (Long and Freese 2001). The third column of Table 2.4 gives predicted percent change figures for the significant exogenous variables. According to the model, a one percentage point increase in a neighborhood’s non-Central American Latino (NCAL) share of the population increases the number of Central American immigrants by 21 % when all other independent variables are held at their mean values. Moving from the mean percent NCAL population of 5.7 to 6.7 brings an increase of almost four Central American-born residents in a neighborhood, as the model predicts a 21% increase in the 17.3 constant value. Vacancy status, on the other hand, exhibits a downward effect on Central American immigrant presence in a census tract.

\(^{13}\) As negative binomial regression is a logistic model, the post-estimation commands calculate factor changes by taking the inverse of the natural log of the parameter estimates generated by the model. Percent changes are then derived from these.
Table 2.4—Results of Negative Binomial Regression Analysis (N=660)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% non-Central American Latino (NCAL)</td>
<td>.1881**</td>
<td>.0233</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Renters</td>
<td>.00850</td>
<td>.0053</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Vacant</td>
<td>-.0577*</td>
<td>.0264</td>
<td>-5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Rent</td>
<td>-.04477</td>
<td>.0489</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Housing Value</td>
<td>.00149</td>
<td>.0012</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>.01143</td>
<td>.0061</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract Population</td>
<td>.0002**</td>
<td>.00003</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% NCAL Squared</td>
<td>-.0036**</td>
<td>.0007</td>
<td>-.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>17.3</td>
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* p< .05  
** p< .01

neighborhood, a somewhat counterintuitive relationship. This indicates that Central American immigrants are more likely to reside in neighborhoods with tighter than average housing markets (i.e. those with vacancy rates less than 5.7%). This finding, coupled with the fact that the median rent variable was not significant, suggests that housing availability and affordability are not the primary neighborhood factors driving the residential settlement of Central American immigrants in Atlanta. Other neighborhood characteristics are extremely influential, however; the most notable one being the presence of a significant non-Central American Latino (NCAL) population noted previously.

Figure 2.4 represents the effect of incremental changes in the non-Central American Latino share of a neighborhood population and percent NCAL squared, with all other independent variables held at their mean values. The graph shows that as the percentage of non-Central American Latinos in a neighborhood increases, counts of Central American immigrants
steadily increase until reaching a certain threshold. This threshold (i.e. the point at which the positive relationship between the non-Central American share of a neighborhood and the number of Central American-born residents reverses) exists at approximately 32.5 percent NCAL. Fifteen of the 660 census tracts comprising metropolitan Atlanta have NCAL populations above this 32.5 percent threshold, yet nine of them have greater actual counts of Central American immigrants than the model predicts. It is only six neighborhoods with extremely low actual counts of Central American immigrants that are bringing this curve down.

**DISCUSSION**

The negative binomial regression analysis confirms the trend first identified through comparison of dissimilarity and exposure indices; Central American immigrants are settling in neighborhoods with significant non-Central American Latino populations. The significance of
this trend is confirmed by the finding that the non-Central American Latino (NCAL) composition of the average Central American immigrant’s neighborhood is 23% (Table 2.2) compared to 5.7% across the metropolitan area (Table 2.3). The statistical significance of a neighborhood’s percent NCAL population, when controlling for several housing and population variables, points to the parallels between the residential settlement patterns of Central American immigrants and other Latino-identified residents in Atlanta. The uneven and non-random distribution of Central American immigrants across neighborhoods in metropolitan area can be attributed in great part to the presence of non-Central American Latino (NCAL) residents. These results indicate that Central American immigrants are contributing to ethno-racial Latino suburban communities in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The regression analysis also highlights the relative impact of the presence of NCAL residents on Central American immigrant residential settlement, as this was the most significant variable in the model. The residential settlement of others Latinos has a greater impact of the presence of Central American immigrants in a neighborhood than does either the availability or the affordability of housing.

This analysis provides limited support for spatial assimilation models of Central American immigrant incorporation in Atlanta, GA. First, Central American immigrants do share residential space with black and white Atlantans, as reflected in exposure indices. This is primarily the result of the dominance of these two largest racial groups in metropolitan Atlanta (28% and 56% of the total population respectively) relative to the small size of the Central American immigrant population (<1%). In addition, the variable measuring the percentage of a neighborhood comprised of white residents in the NBR analysis was not significant (Table 2.3). The rapid suburbanization of Central American immigrants in Atlanta (most of them having arrived since 1990) reinforces doubts about the relevance of traditional spatial assimilation
models for migrants from Latin America, including those in the U.S. South. Very little central city settlement is occurring among this subgroup, as is it following the overall suburbanization trend of the already established Latino/Hispanic population in the metropolitan area. Thus, Central American immigrant residential outcomes in Atlanta are not correlated with the residential geographies of black or white residents. Instead, these new residents are settling directly in suburban areas with relatively large non-Central American Latino populations.

This paper provides both a description and an initial explanation of Central American immigrants’ settlement outcomes in Atlanta, GA. The overall interpretation of both the segregation indices and the regression analysis is that Central American immigrants’ settlement outcomes are related significantly to the non-Central American Latino share of neighborhoods’ populations, (the majority of whom are Mexican-identified residents). An initial explanation of this relationship is that Central American immigrants choose to live in neighborhoods with relatively large non-Central American Latino residents (compared to metropolitan percentages). One might conclude that cultural commonalities (including but not limited to language) along with social and cultural networks between Central American immigrants and non-Central American Latino residents of Atlanta help account for the existing settlement outcomes. Indeed, places of residence are not only where people sleep; they are also sites of information exchange among family and friends, of community building, and development. For many Central American immigrants in Atlanta neighborhoods serve as sites for the building and maintenance of social networks, particularly in multi-family housing (apartment style) complexes.14

Racialization theory contributes to this conclusion an acknowledgement of the racialized (structural) context in which these decisions are made. Processes of racialization help to

14 That the Latin American Association locates several of its outreach centers in multi-family housing (apartment) complexes in Cobb, Clayton, and Gwinnett counties, for example, underscores the importance of such places in the overall Latino/Hispanic community in metro Atlanta.
construct perceptions of difference and foreignness with regards to migrants from Central America. National and regional identities such as “Mexican” and “Central American” are similarly subsumed by the broad, racialized identity “Latino/Hispanic” through state apparatuses such as the census, while popular media (e.g. local news outlets and television) serve to reinforce this seemingly fixed and homogenous ethno-racial category (Alcoff 2000; Itzigsohn 2000; Itzigsohn 2004; Rodriguez 2000). This process of racialization affects numerous aspects of these migrants’ daily lives and urban geographies, including decisions of where to reside. Residential settlement decisions are bound up in this process of racialization through which both Central American immigrants and other residents of Latin American origin or ancestry come to identify and/or to be identified as “Latino/Hispanic” in Atlanta, GA.

My point is not that Central American immigrants are forced to reside in neighborhoods with above average non-Central American Latino/Hispanic populations, but that the racial hierarchy they encounter upon moving to Atlanta begins to influence notions of who they are and where they belong (both socially and spatially) in ways that likely influence residential choices. Researchers focusing on immigrant settlement and adjustment must address the likelihood that these spatial settlement patterns are not only affected by neighborhood and individual characteristics, but also by non-quantifiable factors and processes such as racialization, racism, and perceptions of difference and similarity in relation to longer-term residents.

Residential segregation may occur because of economic characteristics, personal preferences, and/or discrimination (Kaplan and Holloway 1998; Massey and Denton 1993). A racialization perspective is compatible with all three of these possibilities and any combination of them. Central American immigrants’ decisions concerning where to live in Atlanta are not divorced from the highly charged racialized context of the metropolitan area. Central American
immigrant settlement in neighborhoods with high non-Central American Latino/Hispanic compositions are a reflection of the racialization of these newcomers as Latino/Hispanic combined with pluralist explanations (e.g. a sense of belonging or sameness among Latinos of various national origins emanating from common cultural characteristics such as language, cultural and social networks). The significance of the percent NCAL variable in the negative binomial regression analysis supports this multifaceted interpretation.

This interpretation diverges from assimilation and pluralist approaches by addressing the broader racialized structure of Atlanta, GA and its influence on myriad aspects of Central American immigrants’ lives. These settlement outcomes also likely serve to reinforce a racialized and homogenized pan-ethno-racial Latino/Hispanic group identity that glosses over intra-group differences. One might expect these same residential outcomes to function to perpetuate notions of difference and otherness among Latin American immigrants relative to native-born Americans (particularly white and black Atlantans) over time, such that traditional spatial and structural assimilation expectations are unlikely to come to fruition.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper has focused on where Central American immigrants are living in metropolitan Atlanta, particularly in relation to other racial/ethnic groups, and those neighborhood factors that might account for these spatial patterns and relationships. This research contributes to existing empirical work on Latino/Hispanic immigration to the U.S. in unique ways by focusing on a group that is underrepresented in the literature (Central American immigrants) and an often neglected, yet emerging, Latino destination (Atlanta, GA). I sought to demonstrate how a critical perspective on race that addresses the significance of racialization processes can inform quantitative research on immigrants’ residential settlement outcomes. In so doing, I have drawn
attention both to the commonalities and differences of approaching such analyses from a spatial assimilation/pluralist perspective versus a racialization framework. By stepping away from the assimilation/pluralism dichotomy, researchers gain a fresh perspective on the racialized processes operating to affect immigrant settlement patterns. My intention was to highlight the ways in which a racialization approach can be applied to immigrant settlement research to contribute a degree of richness to empirical analyses that are generally framed in such a dualistic way.

A theoretical framework that acknowledges processes of racialization highlights the racial structural constraints on many immigrants’ residential settlement options that tend to garner little attention in most assimilation research. This racialization perspective complements traditional spatial assimilation theories by addressing the significance of race and racial labeling for non-white immigrant residential settlement. I am suggesting, therefore, that researchers begin to ask questions about ‘race’ and racialization in all studies of Latin American immigrants, including projects examining residential settlement outcomes, even if there is no way to quantifiably measure their impact.

This study raises fundamental questions regarding the influence of burgeoning ethno-racial Latino/Hispanic residential concentrations on Central American (and other Latin American) immigrants’ racial, ethnic, and national identities, while providing an empirical context from which to explore further the negotiation of first-generation immigrant (individual and group) identities. The national identities of many migrants from Latin America are altered by racialization processes and they are frequently subsumed under the broad ethno-racial category “Latino/Hispanic”. These changes are intimately connected to their residential settlement outcomes. Questions regarding the influence of neighborhood contexts (as well as
other socio-spatial contexts) on the shifting, changing, and/or reconstruction of the individual identifications of these newcomers arise when considering how racialization proceeds among various Latino/Hispanic subgroups. Future research might focus on how and to what degree Central American immigrants (or some other immigrant group) experience racialization as well as how it impacts their personal conceptions of their individual ethnic, national, and racial identities. The everyday urban geographies of these transnational migrants’ have the potential to shape their engagement with broad structural forces of racialization in addition to the negotiation of their individual identities. Examining these everyday urban and suburban geographies, therefore, might also serve as a subsequent avenue of inquiry for migration scholars.
REFERENCES:


CHAPTER 3

BECOMING “HISPANIC”: THE NEGOTIATION OF RACIALIZED IDENTITIES

AMONG CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS IN ATLANTA, GA, USA

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BECOMING “HISPANIC”: THE NEGOTIATION OF RACIALIZED IDENTITIES AMONG CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS IN ATLANTA, GA, USA

Abstract

For many migrants from Latin America, “Hispanic/Latino” is an identity that they encounter in the United States with which they were unfamiliar in their home countries and must negotiate in their everyday lives in a new context. Specifically, immigrants from Central America are unlikely to see themselves as “Hispanic” or “Latino” prior to living in the U.S., more often identifying with their home country, city, town, village, or neighborhood. Numerous empirical studies demonstrate that transnational migrants from Latin America retain a national identity, while simultaneously adopting the pan-ethnic moniker “Hispanic/Latino”. Through a case study of Central American immigrants in Atlanta, GA this paper draws on twenty-seven in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis to examine this process of identity negotiation. Results indicate that Central American immigrants in Atlanta generally assume this “Hispanic/Latino” label and that they understand this identity in racial terms. Interview participants adopt this pan-ethno racial identity through a complex process involving the interplay between how they think of themselves and their perceptions of how native-born (primarily white and black) Americans view them. Finally, the engagement with a process of racialized “othering”, wherein interview participants are socially positioned as similar to (or exactly the same as) Mexican-identified residents, contributes to the assumption of such a pan-ethno racial “Hispanic/Latino” identity.

Keywords: Hispanic identity, racialization, Central American immigrants
INTRODUCTION

For many migrants from Latin America, “Hispanic/Latino”\textsuperscript{16} is an identification with which they were unfamiliar in their home countries, yet one they encounter and must negotiate in their everyday lives in the United States (Duany 1998; Fox 1996; Itzigsohn 2004; Oboler 1995; Portes and Truelove 1987; Rodriguez 2000). The incorporation of immigrants into U.S. society historically has been and today continues to be intertwined with processes of racialization and transnationalism (Glick Schiller 1999). Recent work in the area of critical race theory suggests that racial and ethnic identities are constructed through complexes processes at both macro and micro scales (Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 2000; Winant 2004). Some have questioned the degree to which the black-white model of racial hierarchy can accommodate continued immigration from Latin American and Asian countries (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Gold 2004; Kim 2004). Geographers interested in migration research must begin to ask how a critical race perspective can contribute to understandings of the intersection of race, place, identity, and belonging for recent immigrants from Latin America. Furthermore, there is a dearth of empirical research on the potential alterations and transformations to racial structures and processes of racialization in emerging Latino/Hispanic migrant destinations in the U.S. South (Winders 2005). Because of important socio-historical and cultural differences between source countries, researchers are beginning to recognize the inadequacies of pan-ethnic generalizations about those identified as Latino/Hispanic as well as exclusive foci on Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban immigrants (Lewis Mumford Center 2002).

\textsuperscript{16} Although the labels “Hispanic” and “Latino” do not carry the exact same meanings, I use them in combination here as many interview participants in this study used the terms interchangeably. I place these terms in quotes here to denote their socially constructed origins, yet dispense with the quotation marks for the remainder of the paper. See Oboler (1995) for a useful discussion of the differences between the two terms.
This paper explores the degree to which and the processes by which individual identities of Central American-born residents of Atlanta, GA undergo changes upon moving to United States, through a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews. Focusing on an emerging gateway city in the U.S. South provides an opportunity to examine the racialization experiences of a recent immigrant group in an urban context historically dominated by a rigid black-white racial structure. I argue that Central American immigrants in Atlanta generally accept a pan-ethno racial Hispanic/Latino identity in part as a result of their interactions with and perceptions of black and white residents of the metropolitan area. These Central American immigrants engage with a process of racialized “othering” wherein they are socially positioned as similar to (or exactly the same as) Mexican-identified residents, while retaining their national identities. This social positioning combines with shared (real or perceived) cultural characteristics to lay the foundation for adopting a Hispanic/Latino ethno-racial identity. A majority of research participants draw both from conceptions of race prominent in the United States and racial categories/identities from various Central American contexts in understanding and navigating the racial hierarchy currently functioning in the contemporary U.S. South.

This paper is organized as follows. First, I examine the concept of race and racial hierarchies in Latin America and some of the current literature on transnationalism as it relates to identities. Next, I discuss the construction of the pan-ethno racial category Hispanic/Latino in the United States and Latin American immigrants’ relations to it. A discussion of research methods and the subsequent qualitative analysis follows this brief literature review. The paper concludes by offering some direction for future research on immigrant identity reconstruction and the influence of socio-spatial contexts.
‘RACE’ IN LATIN AMERICA

Movements for a political and social collective identity of “Hispano” have existed in various forms and places in Latin America since the 19th century (e.g. those of Simon Bolivar, Earnesto “Che” Guevara, and Jose Marti) (Alcoff 2000; Fox 1996; Torres 1998). These attempts to create a common transnational identity in Latin America were focused on commonalities across countries and among individuals. Ironically, it is in the United States that Bolivar’s dream of a common Latin American identity (one that transcends nation-states) is emerging. This is due in part to the racial structure in North America, particularly in relation to those in many Latin American contexts (Alcoff 2000; Omi and Winant 1994; Torres 1998). We can trace the bi-polar conception of race as white and non-white dominant in the contemporary United States back to colonial times (Ignatiev 1995; Mendieta 2000; Torres 1998). Similarly, in Latin America this either/or notion of race as white or not white did not exist prior to the period of European colonization. Yet the creation of a third category, “mestizo”, along with the presence of various indigenous groups and their specific historical and social relations confounds this conception of race as white or not white in Latin America (Torres 1998; Wade 1997). Unlike definitions of mixed race individuals throughout the history of the United States (e.g. mulatto and quadroon) “mestizo” refers to a mixture of Spanish and Amerindian defined in relation to “pure” racial identity, although not necessarily whiteness (Mendieta 2000; Torres 1998).

Geoffrey Fox (1996) notes that the insistence of racial identity as black, white, or something else in the United States is inadequate to reflect the views of many Latin American migrants familiar with notions of racial mixture and numerous categories from their home countries. Various histories of colonization and the concept of “mestizaje”, meaning roughly race mixture, also have led to vastly different constructions of race in Latin American countries.
compared to the United States (Itzigsohn et. al. 2005; Safia 1998). Some commonalities in racial structures do exist across many Latin American countries, most notably the concept of “mestizaje” and the subsequent label “mestizo”. Nevertheless, there is no uniform or common racial hierarchy among Latin American nations, as countries have individual histories, demographic realities, social, cultural, and political systems and relations. All of these factors have affected the ways in which racial structures have emerged and shaped the lives of residents of countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Finally, the concept of “mestizaje”, with which most immigrants from Latin American countries are familiar, does not accurately capture and help explain the racial dynamics that dominate life in the United States (Itzigsohn et. al. 2005).

Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2000) examined how pan-ethnicity emerged for Dominican immigrants in the United States and found that understandings and conceptions of racial categories and structures in the Dominican Republic shaped the identity negotiation experiences of these newcomers. They used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore Dominican immigrants’ racialized experiences in New York City. Dominican nationals conducted the qualitative interviews in Spanish such that responses demonstrated how Dominican immigrants identified racially with co-nationals. The majority of respondents used pan-ethnic monikers (Hispano or Latino) that were operating as racial categories in that they were used to reject self-identification as either black or white. As Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2000) explain, “Dominicans choose these panethnic labels because these labels allow them to find a place within the American system of racial classification” (238). In this case, new/adopted identities were constructed through the interplay between categories and delineations brought from countries of origin and those existing in the U.S. upon their arrival. Although they do not
employ the term “transnational(ism)”, Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2000) explicate a process that might benefit from an appeal to such a term.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES

Basch et. al. (1994) define transnationalism as “…the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (7). When it comes to individual identifications and group affiliations, the reality for many migrants is that these are constructed, maintained, and/or contested within social fields that span more than one nation-state (Basch et. al. 1994; Levitt and Waters 2002; Vertovec 2001). Transnational linkages affect the retention, construction, and negotiation of many contemporary migrants’ identities and the ways in which transnational linkages affect localized identities has become a topic of research within the literature on transnational migration (Caglar 2001; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Morawska 2003; Robins and Aksoy 2001; Vertovec 2001). Appeals to nations or nation-states continue to dominate discourses of identity and belonging, yet immigrants in the U.S. are situated in multiple fields of social relations that straddle at least two countries (Basch et. al. 1994). It is the constitution of transnational political and social fields that creates the context in which many immigrants maintain, contest, and/or (re)construct their individual identifications and group loyalties (Basch et. al. 1994). Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) define the concept of “social field” as, “…a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed” (1009).

Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) also distinguish between transnational “ways of being” and transnational “ways of belonging” in order to tease out migrants’ experiences within these transnational social fields. Transnational “ways of being”, “refer to the actual social relations
and practices that individuals engage in rather than the identities associated with their actions” (1010). On the other hand, “Ways of belonging combine action and an awareness of the kind of identity that action signifies” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; 1010). Expressing such transnational “ways of being” and/or “ways of belonging” and thus maintaining ties to one’s birth country is not the polar opposite from incorporation into a new society; nor are these mutually exclusive processes (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). It is at the intersection of the social categories of birth countries and those of Atlanta, GA where Central American-born residents of Atlanta find themselves (in more ways than one). The subsequent case study offers a means through which to explore and better comprehend this process. A racialization perspective provides a framework for examining how and why these newcomers might engage with and ultimately adopt the homogenizing label Hispanic/Latino.

HISPANIC/LATINO AS A RACIALIZED IDENTITY

Racialization is the process through which racial meanings and identities are produced, maintained, contested, and changed. Processes of racialization are geographically and temporally contingent and thus are subject to contestation and alteration (Omi and Winant 1994). Individuals and groups encountering these processes of racialization acquire particular racial identities along with their associated meanings, which are based primarily on skin tone and physical features. In addition, social affiliations along with physical characteristics, accents, and other linguistic traits that society has associated with certain social identities (primarily racial and ethnic) serve as constant reminders of how individuals are perceived and thus in many ways who they are (Fox 1996; Haney Lopez 1998). Suzanne Oboler (1995; 2000) stresses the role of the state in creating and perpetuating racialized ethnic categories such as Hispanic/Latino and the concomitant social racism that follows. The U.S. Census (re)produces the racialized “Us” and
“Other”, by both reflecting and constructing racialized categories with whiteness as the norm, while perpetuating the myth that these identities are natural, fixed, and stable (Goldberg 1997; Oboler 2000).

The state plays an undeniable role in solidifying the racial classification that immigrants encounter upon entering the United States resulting in a paradox between the putatively democratic process of self-identification with regards to state documents and the social reality of imputed racial and ethnic identities. Ultimately, Hispanic/Latino is an essentializing term based on purported cultural commonalities, which functions as a racial category consistently at or near the bottom of the racial hierarchy in the United States (Alcoff 2000; Itzigsohn 2004; Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000; Oboler 1995; Oboler 2000; Rodriguez 2000; Torres 1998). The pan-ethno racial category Hispanic/Latino thus serves both to highlight cultural similarities and to conceal differences such as nationality and class (Mayer 2004). Finally, the contestation of a non-white group’s racial identity necessarily challenges the meaning of race and thus those meanings associated with the white majority population.

Racialized practices including the requirement of racial self-identification on many forms of paperwork, by both the state and private entities, take a unique form in the United States and necessitate some negotiation among migrants from Latin America (Alcoff 2000). As Linda Alcoff (2000) explains, “race suddenly becomes an all-important aspect of our identity, and sometimes our racial identity dramatically changes in ways over which it feels as we have no control” (24). Although ethnic identities are adopted somewhat voluntarily, physical characteristics and accents frequently result in an imputed identity, which an individual may or may not readily accept (Fox 1996, Waters 1994; Waters 1999). For new immigrants from Latin America to the U.S., the adoption of a pan-ethno racial identity is more of a requirement than a
choice because it functions as a racial identity (Alcoff 2000; Itzigsohn 2004; Mayer 2004; Oboler 1995; Rodriguez 2000). Studies of Latina/o identity must continue to engage with feminist discussions of the politics of location and intersectionality if they are to recognize the diversity of individuals whom are frequently grouped together under a common label. By doing so, researchers gain an opportunity to explore “identities-in-the-making” (Schutte 2000; 74). Interrogating processes of racialization and “othering” are integral to understanding these “identities-in-the-making” among Central American immigrants residing in Atlanta, GA.

RACIALIZATION AND “OTHERING”

In the United States, Hispanic/Latino identity is constructed at least partially through a process of “othering” where multiple generations of immigrants are identified as/identify themselves as something or someone other than American and eventually other than black, white, Asian, etc (Frankenberg and Mani 1996; Mendieta 2000). This undoubtedly is a multi-pronged, multi-scalar process in which settlement patterns, socio-spatial relations, localized racial hierarchies, political institutions/mobilizations, consumerism, marketing, and popular media are variously implicated. This “othering” also occurs across multiple dimensions (or on multiple fronts) for transnational migrants because they are constructed as both non-American (foreign) and non-white and non-black, particularly in the U.S. South (Kim 2004). Both ethnicity and race are important components to a Hispanic/Latino identity because the former highlights shared cultural and linguistic characteristics, while the latter points to the ways in which this category is experienced by those whom it putatively represents and how it is understood by society at large (Alcoff 2000). Nevertheless, cultural bases for group identity have a proclivity to mask and trivialize relative social positions and to reduce Hispanic/Latino
identity to some distinct, putatively common set of attributes, based on perceived cultural commonalities (e.g. language, religion, food, or music).

A relational conceptualization of group identity depends more on members’ social positions than on some easily identifiable, strict set of attributes (e.g. language, skin color, or heritage) (Young 1998). Individuals who identify as and/or are identified as Hispanic/Latino may have perceived similarities and affinities, but these are dependent at least in part on a point of reference, which in the context of the United States is primarily whiteness, but also blackness.

There are at least two separate, but interwoven aspects to this process of relational construction of group identities; first there are the ways in which individuals relate to one another, by stressing certain common traits, experiences, or characteristics, while recognizing the heterogeneity among those belonging to the group. A second aspect is the social positioning of one racial group to other groups, for example Hispanic/Latino relative to white or black (Young 1998). Thus the relations between group members as well as the social positioning of non-white racial groups to the white (Anglo-European) majority contribute to the constitution of Hispanic/Latino as a racialized group identity. This process of labeling/othering Hispanics/Latinos is simultaneously (re)making the collective “we” of the United States (Mendieta 2000).

In reflecting on some of her own experiences as a graduate student from India in the United States, Lata Mani (Frankenberg and Mani 1996) concludes that identity is both situated and relational; that is, we make assumptions about who people are based on social context and on who we are (and our group affiliations) and how we think someone relates to us (or our group). Her experiences of being “othered” help to stress that the “other” is far from a homogenous being. Placing conceptions of identity and subjectivity in their proper social and
historical contexts is integral to exploring what these conceptions mean, for whom they hold meaning, and how they are constructed and disseminated. One must acknowledge that although individuals have some degree of agency in constructing their narratives of identity, this occurs in specific social and political contexts. Various identities and practices are constructed within certain social fields that structure the ways in which (and the reasons why) such identities function, are experienced, and are enacted (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2001). A focus on multiplicity and multiple axes of experience and oppression oftentimes leads to the recognition of multiple, changing, and perhaps contradictory identities (Frankenberg and Mani 1996).

Indeed, some researchers have begun to discuss how the traditional bi-polar black-white model of racial hierarchy in the United States might not be sufficient to capture the experience of non-white, non-European immigrant groups (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Gold 2004; Kim 2004). This is due to the multi-dimensionality of these immigrant groups’ experiences with and relations to racism, as they are positioned as both non-white and “foreign”. This additional dimension of being non-native in the United States points to an often overlooked aspect of white privilege and normativity in most research on race and racism; that of citizenship and patriotism. Assumptions regarding loyalty and terrorism follow from this privileged status in a post-September 11th United States. Non-white, foreign-born residents (particularly those with some identifiable accent) are not only racialized according to skin tone and phenotype, but also are positioned through assumptions regarding their nationality and loyalties, in short, their “Americaness” (Kim 2004). One might argue that Hispanic/Latino-identified persons in general, regardless of place of birth, legal status, or citizenship are racialized and “othered” in a fundamentally different way than black Americans, while still positioned in relation to white normativity (the white majority).
In the U.S., therefore, this Hispanic/Latino identity becomes one marked primarily by difference from the majority of Americans culturally, linguistically, and ultimately racially.

**POPULAR MEDIA AND HISPANIC/LATINO IDENTITY**

Media outlets (particularly television and radio, but also print) also aid in the construction and solidifying of a pan-ethno racial Hispanic/Latino identity. Everything from radio, television programming, public access shows, websites, and even fliers posted in local stores provide a broad, generalized representation of Latinos/Hispanics in the context of marketing and consumption (Davila 2001; Kim 2004; Mayer 2004). Communications technologies, particularly television, widely viewed in the U.S. contribute to the creation of such a community, providing faces and somewhat neutral Spanish accents as representative of a Hispanic community (Fox 1996). Cultural bases for group identity are highlighted (frequently through gross exaggerations) and advanced through popular media for the purpose of marketing for profit. Hispanic marketing actively homogenizes a group that is quite varied along lines of nationality, race, class, language, and citizenship, through an appeal to a common language, the primary trait of “panlatinidad” (Davila 2001; Mayer 2004). As Arlene Davila (2001) notes, “…Hispanic marketing has become one of the primary institutional forces fueling a common Latino/a identity, prompting analyses of this industry in relation to contemporary Latino cultural politics” (411). These political-economic forces help to construct a Hispanic/Latino consumer identity that is guided predominantly by corporate and commercial interests, as opposed to political, social, or cultural ones (Davila 2001).

**NEGOTIATING A PAN-ETHNO RACIAL HISPANIC/LATINO IDENTITY**

Mapping the construction of a racialized Hispanic/Latino identity and some of its sources in the U.S. brings to the fore questions regarding how Central American immigrants in a
metropolitan area like Atlanta, GA engage with and interact with such a social identity. On many occasions, the adoption of a pan-ethno racial identity Hispanic/Latino entails setting aside national identities and accepting an American construct with which most eventual members of this group were unfamiliar before becoming intimately connected with the political and social contexts of living in the U.S. (Fox 1996; Mendieta 2000; Oboler 1995). Numerous empirical studies have reached similar conclusions, describing a pan-ethnic Hispanic or Latino identity that exists alongside national identifications, and in some contexts replaces them (Baia 1999; Duany 1998; Itzigsohn 2004; Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000; Rodriguez 2000; Oboler 1995).

Individuals might have numerous reactions to such a moniker (e.g. acceptance, rejection, negotiation), yet the label functions as a racial category within the social structure of the United States (Alcoff 2000; Duany 1998; Itzigsohn 2004; Oboler 1995; Oboler 2000; Rodriguez 2000).

Some engagement with this imputed identity occurs for those marked with the label Hispanic/Latino depending upon the specific socio-spatial contexts and media representations that affect them. As Schutte (2000) asserts, “The U.S. Latino today is situated in a cultural space apt for the negotiation of identities” (74). Immigrants become distinctly aware of social status based on race/ethnicity in the U.S. soon after arriving and they define themselves in opposition to other groups. They come to know these groups both through physical and symbolic interaction and they tend to define themselves in direct opposition to (generally considered unsuccessful) migrant groups and/or black Americans (Fernandez-Kelly 1998). Identity negotiation among migrants occurs through interactions and can result in a myriad of outcomes, from acceptance to resistance to contestation. The numerous (or maybe not) contacts that immigrants make in their neighborhoods, at work, schools, churches, and community
organizations shape how these newcomers learn to adjust to their lives in the U.S. (Fernandez-Kelly 1998).

Social interactions, state labeling and record-keeping, and media representations all combine in extremely complex, localized ways to contribute to the racialized “othering” of Latin American immigrants, regardless of generation, ethnicity, and class. All of these factors, therefore, are likely to contribute to the racialization of Central American immigrants in metropolitan Atlanta. The following case study focuses on Central American immigrants to examine the ways in which previously held conceptions and understandings of race and racial identity influence their engagement with the dominant black-white racial structure in Atlanta, GA. In addition, the case study interrogates the means through which this racialized “othering” occurs among Central American immigrants living in metropolitan Atlanta. The implications of this working through racial categories and identities for their everyday experiences are myriad.

IMMIGRATION TO ATLANTA, GA

Historically, black and white residents have been the predominant groups in the racialized landscape of Atlanta, GA, such that research based in the metropolitan area rarely analyzes the experiences of other racialized groups. Atlanta’s self-promotion as “the city too busy to hate” and more recently as “an international city” has yet to dislodge its long-standing reputation as a southern city mired in black-white racial strife (Bayor 2000; Hartshorn and Ihlanfeldt 2000; Keating 2001). Referring to Atlanta, Clayton, Jr. et. al. (2000) remind us that, “Changes in the racial-ethnic composition of society have always produced strong negative responses from the predominantly white society” (81). Of large southern cities not located in Texas or Florida, Atlanta, GA serves as home to more immigrants and more Latino/Hispanic-identified residents than anywhere else in the region (Hansen 2005; Mohl 2003). Beginning in
the late 1960s and continuing through the next two decades, metropolitan Atlanta, GA experienced substantial increases in its population size and diversity, as it became a major destination for rustbelt migrants as well as transnational migrants and refugees from Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Eckes 2005; Hansen 2005; Rutheiser 1996). For example, the Atlanta MSA grew from approximately 1.4 million residents in 1970 to a population of over 4 million in 2000, while its foreign-born population increased nearly five-fold (U.S. Census Bureau).

The foreign-born population began to grow tremendously beginning in the early 1980s with the resettlement of approximately 10,000 refugees from several southeastern Asian countries. Around this time and continuing into the 1990s, metropolitan Atlanta became a destination for a much larger number of foreign-born migrants from other states (e.g. Texas and California). Burgeoning construction, textile, and poultry industries, along with numerous service industry jobs, drew many of these intra-national migrants to Atlanta in addition to immigrants directly from Mexico, Central, and South America (Hansen 2005; Mohl 2003; Rutheiser 1996). In reference to these demographic changes in Atlanta, Charles Rutheiser (1996) notes, “The intensification of cultural heterogeneity has further complicated a social field already deeply riven by differences of gender, class, and especially, race” (5). This emerging immigrant destination, therefore, holds considerable significance as a site for a case study of Central American immigrant experiences with and reactions to processes of racialization.

**DATA AND METHODS**

The following analysis draws on in-depth audio taped interviews conducted with 27 Central American-born residents of metropolitan Atlanta, GA, USA between November 2004 and July 2005. Nineteen men and eight women from Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua who
had migrated to metropolitan Atlanta, GA were asked questions regarding their individual identifications, their birth countries, families, and traditions, as well as their everyday geographies\(^{17}\). Eleven interviews were conducted in English, while the remaining sixteen were conducted through a professional interpreter (a native Spanish speaker from Guatemala). These active interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) allowed me to pose questions that oftentimes facilitated shifts in positionality among the interview participants. Some questions, for instance, would focus on a participant’s birth country, ties and memories of such places, and practices and acts that represent aspects of individual identity associated with these socio-spatial contexts. Other questions, however, focused on experiences in Atlanta, GA and led interviewees to reflect upon and express their relations with people in their home, their neighborhood, at work, or at church. The interviews were structured in a way to engender responses that demonstrated various aspects of individual identity (including but not limited to nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and class).

Transcription of interviews was completed by the Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia and the typed transcriptions were then imported into the qualitative software program NVivo, which I used in the coding of interviews and in conducting the analysis. Codes revolved around various types or aspects of individual and group identities (e.g. nationality, personal racial/ethnic identifications, and the Latino/Hispanic community in Atlanta) and interactions with and perceptions of other immigrant groups and native-born Atlanta residents (e.g. neighborhood interactions/relations and in-group relations with other racial/ethnic/national groups). This paper articulates a coherent narrative out of these multiple

\(^{17}\) All interview participants were given a pseudonym to be used throughout this paper. The average age of interviewees was 30. They had lived in the United States for a mean of 7.5 years and in metropolitan Atlanta for an average of 5 years. Seventeen of twenty-six participants had lived somewhere else in the United States before migrating to Atlanta, while the remaining ten were direct migrants.
voices and I view the representation of such polyvocality along with recognizing my role in the research, interpretation, analysis, and representation as integral to the research process (Denzin 1998). Any discussion of my influence as interviewer/researcher, therefore, must take into account my social positioning as a white, male, native-born American academic geographer dedicated to anti-racist research and teaching.

ANALYSIS

Although Kobayashi (2003) views reflexivity as a potentially self-indulging, excessive act that might serve to reify “others” and solidify those power relations we hope to chip away at, it nevertheless remains a significant and useful step in qualitative research. Discussions of positionality must have a purpose, however, as it must be evident why the discussion is included in the research and what effect it has on various stages of the project (Jackson 2001). The sites of the majority of interviews were at mobile consulates sponsored by the Latin American Association (LAA) in Atlanta and consulate workers, volunteers, or my interpreter (a former volunteer for the LAA) introduced me to potential interviewees, who were typically waiting several hours to complete paperwork or documentation. I was clearly an outsider in these situations, but with a certain degree of legitimacy from being associated with the consulate workers and volunteers. Indeed, I was neither a co-national, nor an employee or volunteer for the consulate or the Latin American Association. I did have the authorization and the support of these organizations and frequently my interpreter and/or someone affiliated with the mobile consulate introduced me and explained my status (a student at the University of Georgia, not affiliated with any government entities, looking for volunteers for my research project). This affected the power relations between interview participants and me; I was somewhat out of place, an outsider in more ways than one. Not asking for any personal, contact information from
potential interviewees and having some official support positioned me as an outsider, but also as someone with some credibility.

Tracy Skelton (2001) stresses how one’s positionality can serve as both an asset and a hindrance, depending on the situation and this was certainly the case here. The greatest assurance that interviewees were being forthright and honest with me was that I collected no personal information and could not identify them or contact them after the interview (although they had my contact information). Finally, being positioned as a student, somewhat naïve to the daily experiences of interview participants helped to assuage the reticence that frequently arises when individuals feel they are being studied by academic researchers or putative experts. Although occupying this student role did not mitigate my role as an “Americano”\(^\text{18}\) or “outsider”, it frequently facilitated exchanges and conversations where it was clear that interview participants wanted to help me understand their experiences.

In addition, having a Guatemalan-born Spanish-speaking female interpreter (Analy) working with me, introducing the project and me to potential interviewees in Spanish, and generally encouraging individuals to participate in the research greatly increased participation in the project. Analy’s presence also affected the power dynamics at play and provided interview participants with a certain degree of comfort and ease during the interviews that I would not have afforded them had I conducted the interviews alone. I soon realized that many of the male research participants were eager to speak with me (or us?) at least in part because of the presence of Analy. Analy became more akin to a co-researcher/partner, therefore, rather than simply an assistant during the interviews. Having Analy work in this integral role during the interviews helped to mitigate my outsider status, as we were perceived as working together more than her

\(^{18}\) “Americanos” was a term frequently used by interview participants to denote native-born Americans in Atlanta (primarily white and black residents, who collectively comprise approximately 86% of the metropolitan population). My usage of this term throughout the remainder of the paper is in this vein.
working for me. This, coupled with the absence of interview questions regarding names, addresses, legal status and other identifying information, helped to solidify my status as a non-threatening, inquisitive graduate student, as opposed to someone who might endanger their presence in Atlanta and/or their livelihoods. This does not mean that everyone we encountered wanted to speak with me, but that the contacts I had made, including Analy, played a significant role in the willingness of potential interviewees to participate. I discuss further considerations of my positionality and potential influence on interview responses in the subsequent analysis sections.

**Intersecting/Intertwining Conceptions of Race and Group Identity**

Table 3.1 contains a breakdown of responses to an open-ended question of racial identity among the twenty-six interview participants. A majority of respondents (78%) used the labels Hispanic and/or Latino to describe their race or ethnicity, while six (22%) interview participants referred to race or racial categories from their countries of origin to describe themselves. In these latter cases, there was a distinct understanding that these labels and their associated meanings were not very relevant to experiences in the United States. Indeed, most non-U.S. specific understandings of race, racial categories and/or groups, were examples of national identities from Central America (e.g. “Guatemalteco”). The effect of my position as a white, male, Southern, graduate student was most apparent during interviews where participants asked for clarification regarding questions of their racial and ethnic identities.

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<td><strong>Table 3.1: Interview Participants’ Responses to Open-Ended Racial Self-Identification Question</strong></td>
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When interviewees expressed confusion or uncertainty about what I meant by asking them “What is your race or ethnicity?” I gave them an example using myself instead of providing them with options such as Latino, Hispanic, Honduran, etc. This was a conscious decision intended to maintain the open-ended nature of such questions, yet also to convey a sense of what I meant by race during the interviews. It is likely that interviewees defined themselves racially, at least partially, relative to me in these instances. Moreover, the result of this strategic decision likely buttressed the normativity of whiteness and the “othering” of these non-white, foreign-born residents of Atlanta. I see this as a microcosm of the larger process of racialization in which white is the standard against which all non-white identities are constructed and defined. The question remains whether or not responses to questions of racial identity would have differed significantly if the interviewer had been from a Latin American country as opposed to the U.S.

Somewhat ironically, many interviewees had difficulty understanding the initial open-ended question regarding their racial identity, yet when asked about relations among different racial groups in Atlanta and their neighborhood, frequently spoke of U.S. racial groups and/or various Latin American nationalities. This reflects interviewees’ recognition of the significance of race and racial identity in U.S. society, whether or not they understood race in the U.S. similarly to constructions in their countries of origin. For example, eighteen of the twenty-seven interviewees (67%) made reference to one or more nationalities from Latin America in response to questions regarding various racial groups in Atlanta and their relations with one another. All but one interviewee used racial labels specific to the United States at least once during the interview, either in response to inquiries about their individual identities or the interactions between different groups in their neighborhood and the metropolitan Atlanta area. Seventeen of
those twenty-six respondents (65%) had been in the Atlanta area for less than four years at the time of the interview. Additionally, none of the twenty-seven interview participants self-identified as Black/African-American or White when asked about their individual racial/ethnic identifications, but as either Hispanic, Latino, or by nationality or racial label from a birth country (although this last type of response was extremely rare). This is an instance where silences, absences, and exclusions during interviews warrant as much attention as the obvious, easily observable, and pronounced themes or trends in the data (Jackson 2001).

The significance of this propensity to self-identify neither as Black nor White cannot be overstated. It demonstrates that a critical approach to race and immigrant adjustment highlights what traditional assimilation perspectives oftentimes overlook; that an engagement with the localized racial hierarchy in a destination area occurs relatively quickly and begins to influence personal conceptions of identity and belonging relatively soon, compared to many standard measures associated with immigrant adjustment (e.g. English proficiency, income, education, residential integration, intermarriage, etc.). The group questions, furthermore, occurred near the end of the interview, while the racial/ethnic self-identity question was open-ended and at the beginning of each interview. The disparity in responses and reactions to these different questions is likely a reflection of the difference in the meaning of the term race across many Central American contexts and also compared to its definition, categories, and meanings in the United States.

Of course the use of U.S. and non-U.S. specific categories (e.g. nationalities) to discuss racial identities and race relations in Atlanta, GA are not mutually exclusive. Sixteen interview participants (59%) made reference to both U.S. racial categories and non-U.S. specific terms (i.e. national identity or country of origin specific terms) to discuss issues of personal racial/ethnic
identity and/or the relations among various racial/ethnic groups in the metropolitan area. Eighty percent of those sixteen respondents, moreover, had lived in Atlanta for less than four years at the time of the interview. What appear at first glance to be inconsistencies regarding usage and understanding of racial terms, categories, and meanings, therefore, serve as examples of how conceptions of group identity based on race from both birth countries and the United States are operating simultaneously for the majority of interview participants. This proclivity evinces the degree to which these differing understandings and assumptions of racial identity and group affiliation intertwine to shape individual identities, as well as group identifications and loyalties. This dual self-identification serves as an example of a transnational “way of belonging”, as it is reflective of an active knowledge among these interview participants of symbolic transnational ties and relations. These Central American immigrants do not simply replace previous conceptions of race and racial identifications from their birth countries with U.S.-specific racial categories and affiliations. On the contrary, they are actively engaged in a process of negotiating (e.g. using interchangeably) these old and new notions of racial identity and belonging, resulting in formulations that are not always commensurate with the black/white racial structure historically prominent in the U.S. South. Interview excerpts concerning the personal identifications of interview participants and their connections to interactions with native-born residents provide further evidence for this assertion.

**Negotiating Nationality and a Pan-Ethno Racial Hispanic/Latino Identity**

On the whole, interviewees’ responses support findings in the literature that nationality remains a salient aspect of Latin American immigrants’ individual identities, yet a pan-ethno racial Hispanic/Latino identity is frequently adopted. The importance of maintaining this national affiliation is evident in the fact that the majority of participants explained that customs,
traditions, and/or practices from their home countries were significant and important to them and their families. Many interview participants explained how they missed certain religious or cultural practices, acts, and observations that symbolize a national identity, yet are not prevalent in the U.S. (e.g. local processions in the streets for Semana Santa, the week of Easter). In addition, given the opportunity to express a national identity, these participants do so, as in the case when someone asks about them and their migration experiences. Although a specific Central American nationality remained significant for nearly all interviewees, they also recognized that the opportunities for expressing such an aspect of their identities were likely to exist only among co-nationals and/or others with Latin American heritage. They demonstrated a keen understanding of the racial structure in the United States and Atlanta in discussing their interactions with “Americanos”. For example, twenty-three year-old Alejandro who has lived in metro Atlanta for four years explained:

“I would feel more from Guatemala if I was over there [in Guatemala]. But here I’m just Hispanic. I’m still from Guatemala, but it’s just in a different way.”

Similarly, Mario, a thirty year-old realtor responded to a question concerning his nationality by describing:

“Here, I’m Hispanic. Of course I don’t need to say that, but if somebody asks me, I would say ‘I’m 150 percent Guatemalan’.”
Both Alejandro’s and Mario’s responses suggest that internalized notions of how native-born Americans perceive them influence the ways in which they identify themselves racially. Guatemalan nationality remains significant to both men, yet their descriptions reflect an acute sense of their relations to the racialized hierarchy in Atlanta. Mario’s comment about not needing to say that he is Hispanic in Atlanta (and the United States) demonstrates the degree to which he has assumed a pan-ethno racial Hispanic identity, at least in part because of his social positioning based on physical characteristics. The shared experiences of being non-white and non-black in Atlanta reflect their social positioning vis-à-vis the white majority and significant black population in Atlanta. Thus for Alejandro and Mario their Hispanic/Latino identity is one marked primarily by difference from the majority of Atlantans, racially, culturally, and linguistically. Central American immigrants’ identities are racialized as Hispanic/Latino through a process of “othering” that occurs both through their everyday interactions and through frequently homogenizing popular media representations.

These passages also provide support for a trend discussed previously; that interviewees used both U.S. and non-U.S. racial categories in describing and discussing themselves. Ultimately, these expressions demonstrate that Alejandro and Mario are actively engaged in negotiating their national identities and a pan-ethno racial Hispanic/Latino label and that this process is ongoing and continuous. This experience of “becoming Hispanic” is far from definitive, as national identity remains an integral component of individual identity for these Central American immigrants in Atlanta. The active negotiation on the part of interview participants does serve as an expression of what Levitt and Glick Schiller refer to as a transnational “way of belonging”, as interviewees acknowledged that social categories and
meanings from their birth countries interact with U.S. social positionings (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004).

The social interactions of Central American immigrants in their new urban and neighborhood contexts, therefore, challenge a pre-existing, stable, yet un-fixed national identity. Nationality is built upon and in the process altered in accordance to the experiences of these newcomers with various “Americanos”, everyone from neighbors to store clerks to actual and/or potential employers; racial identity is central to the tone and substance of these interactions. These everyday interactions in effect serve to solidify a Hispanic/Latino pan-ethno racial identity that is socially positioned as “other” than black or white and contains at least some (real or perceived) cultural components (e.g. language). Perceptions of “Americanos” (both black and white) shape the ways in which these Central American immigrants racially identify themselves. Central American immigrants’ understandings of how “Americanos” view and treat them contribute to their personal conceptions of their racial/ethnic identities. As a final example, Edgardo, a 23 year-old factory worker who lived in Mississippi before moving to Atlanta, describes his perception of how most “Americanos” view him:

“Ok, I think that people that are not Hispanic think that everybody is just Hispanic because we all look alike.”

In subsequent exchanges, Edgardo qualified this response by explaining that the notion that “we all look alike” was part of his interpretation of how white and black Atlantans perceive those identified as Hispanic/Latino. Regardless of whether or not Edgardo had completely and definitively adopted this Hispanic label (he had not), this passage reflects his awareness of its
significance to the ways in which he is seen and treated by non-Hispanics and in turn how shapes the construction of an imputed racialized identity. These stereotypes associated with who these immigrants (and their descendants) are in terms of nationality/citizenship, class, and language construct a particular racialized identity that is neither white nor black, but something “other”. The various implications of this adoption of a pan-ethno racial Hispanic/Latino identity through “othering” includes the redefining and defending of whiteness as the normalized, dominant racial identity (Lewis 2002).

**Being Mistaken as Mexican and Hispanic/Latino Identity Adoption**

A significant component of interview participants’ engagement with and negotiation of a racialized Hispanic/Latino identity emerges when considering another common experience among interviewees; that these Central American immigrants are frequently mistaken for being of Mexican heritage in their day-to-day lives. Native-born Americans did not identify them as African-American or white, however, and this was clearly understood by all interviewees and they had not adopted these racial identities themselves. Far from assuming a national Mexican identity, interviewees actively resisted this false labeling by “Americanos” when the opportunity presented itself. Jose, a twenty-one year-old construction worker described his interactions with native-born Americans as such:

“White people think everybody is Mexicans. White and Black people think everybody is [sic] Mexicans.”

RY: “Do they ask where you’re from?”
Jose: “Yeah, sometimes. They say ‘Where are you from in Mexico?’ I say ‘I’m from Guatemala.’ They say ‘Everybody looks the same.’ That’s normal.”

When the opportunity arises in their daily interactions with native-born Americans all interview participants told of expressing their nationalities. Most interviewees, however, saw limited opportunities for expressing their national identity during interactions with “Americanos” unless they knew them personally. Exemplifying this feeling is the response of Carlos, a 53 year-old construction worker, who when asked a question regarding interactions with his native-born American co-workers explained:

“People there (at work) know that I’m Guatemalan, and they identify me as being from Guatemala. There is [sic] some people they get me mixed up with the Mexicans, because they think anybody who is Hispanic or from Central America is Mexican. Because we don’t have a sticker on our face saying ‘I’m from Guatemala, or Honduras, or El Salvador’ it’s just that we’re Mexicans because of our features.”

The commonalties in the ways in which many Hispanic/Latino residents of different backgrounds feel they are seen and treated by native-born Americans are highlighted in such cases of mistaken national identity. Jose’s and Carlos’ interpretations of their interactions build upon an already existing linguistic (and in some cases more broadly cultural) sense of similarity with Atlantans of Mexican heritage. The recognition of similar racial positioning with Mexican-identified residents of Atlanta, therefore, is one means through which the adoption of a pan-ethno racial identity is facilitated for interviewees. Interview participants adopted and confirmed a racialized Hispanic/Latino identity via their interactions with native-born Americans as much as
through perceived or real shared cultural characteristics with other Hispanic/Latino-identified residents. Somewhat paradoxically, the misidentification of Central American immigrants as Mexican serves to reassert a national identity while also strengthening a sense of Hispanic/Latino group identity and community with Mexican-identified residents of metropolitan Atlanta.

These previous excerpts show that Central American immigrants in Atlanta acquire particular relations to other Hispanics/Latino-identified metropolitan residents in part because of language and other cultural characteristics, but also because of the commonalities in their daily experiences relative to whites and blacks. These similar experiences vis-à-vis white and black Atlantans, in turn, contribute to the acceptance of a Hispanic/Latino identity among interviewees. Whiteness remains the normative (usually invisible to its groups members) racial category against which Hispanic/Latino identity is juxtaposed (Lewis 2002; Winant 2004). The significance of the 30% African-American population in Atlanta cannot be dismissed, however. Most respondents displayed an awareness of and familiarity with the binary black-white racial structure in Atlanta, as well as their situatedness within that hierarchy as neither white nor black, nor American. This is not to say that each and every interview participant adopted and enacted this homogenizing racialized moniker equally or in the same ways. Certainly, individual characteristics such as gender, occupation, age, nationality, length of residence in Atlanta and the U.S., and previous place of residence potentially intersect to shape interviewees’ experiences. It is to these considerations that the paper now turns.

Although the majority of interview participants were employed in manufacturing and low-wage service sector occupations, a few enjoyed higher wage service sector jobs (e.g. customer service and management positions). These interviewees had generally lived longer in the U.S. than the average 7.5 years, spoke English fluently, and were proud of having achieved
their middle-class status. The experience of having to confront a racialized Hispanic/Latino imputed label, nevertheless, cut across these class differences. Those employed in higher wage jobs expressed common feelings as to how they were perceived by and treated by native-born Americans, although they realized that their English skills diminished the degree to which they were “othered” as foreign and/or as illegal. One’s place of residence prior to living in Atlanta emerged as more significant than country of origin with regards to coping with and adjusting to the contemporary racial hierarchy in Atlanta.

Interview participants tended to have varied understandings of race relations and racial hierarchy and social relations, depending upon where they lived before moving to Atlanta. Those having lived in Los Angeles, for instance, had experiences that differed greatly from those who had migrated directly to Atlanta from Central America. The perspectives of the six interviewees who had moved to Atlanta from Los Angeles demonstrate how both unique demographic realities and localized racialized structures combine to affect individual and group identifications divergently. For example, Mario, who described himself earlier as being “150 percent Guatemalan”, migrated to Atlanta after living in L.A. for five years. He had confronted a Hispanic/Latino identity in a much different urban context before living in metropolitan Atlanta. When asked to compare his experience of living in Atlanta to that of Los Angeles, he asserted:

“Right here [Atlanta] is not the same thing. It doesn’t matter if you’re from Guatemala, from Mexico, or any part of Latin America. It’s more friendly. There are no lines. I think everybody just treats each other the same, no matter if you’re Guatemalan or El Salvadoran. That’s the way I feel. I feel so much better about it. But in L.A., it’s a big difference. There’s a lot of competition.”
This passage is indicative of the changes that influence notions of group affinity and loyalty when one migrates from one metropolis to another, particularly from a place like Los Angeles with a much longer history of Latin American migration and the resulting population trends. Mario felt a greater sense of belonging to a broadly defined Hispanic/Latino community in Atlanta than he did in Los Angeles. We might attribute this greater sense of community to the demographics and the recent nature of Hispanic/Latino migration to metropolitan Atlanta (and the South in general). On the one hand, Atlanta has a much smaller composition of those identifying broadly as Hispanic/Latino than does Los Angeles, while the numbers of residents with heritage from individual Central American countries is hardly comparable across the two metropolises. For example, Mario explained that there were no distinct Guatemalan, Mexican, Honduran, or Nicaraguan areas of Atlanta like there are in Los Angeles. Mario’s recognition of the differences between living in L.A. versus Atlanta is also linked to the previously examined penchant of black and white residents of Atlanta to mistake interview participants for being Mexican and the similar social positioning that results from such misidentifications.

Similarly, interview participants who had lived in other places in the South prior to moving to Atlanta (e.g. New Orleans, Alabama, and Tennessee), tended to see themselves as part of a Hispanic/Latino community that included all Latin American nationalities. This perspective on group identity and belonging carried over from their experiences in these other non-traditional destinations to influence their views of race, identity, and belonging in Atlanta. While still continuously involved in negotiating nationalities and a Hispanic/Latino identity, many interviewees told of befriending and interacting regularly with individuals whom they described as Hispanic, Latino, and/or of Latin American heritage since living in Atlanta, because there was little pressure to interact exclusively with co-nationals and few country-specific neighborhoods
exist in the metropolitan area. The interactions and identifications garnered previously in other urban contexts in the U.S. help to form and shape racial/ethnic perceptions of interview participants and thus notions of group belonging in Atlanta. This is similar to the way that racial structures in Central America impact the identity negotiation experiences of these Central American immigrants.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper demonstrates that Central American-born residents of Atlanta undergo changes in their national and ethnic identities as a result of migrating to the United States. In doing so, it highlights the influence of geographic context on discourses and meanings associated with race and racial belonging. Interview participants adopt a pan-ethno racial Hispanic/Latino identity through a complex process involving the interplay between how they think of themselves and their perceptions of how native-born (primarily white and black) Atlantans view them. They understand this identity, moreover, in racial terms, as they encounter a process of racialized “othering” in their everyday geographies and day-to-day social interactions. Frequently being mistaken as Mexican by native-born residents is a common experience among interview participants that contributes to the assumption of a homogenous Hispanic/Latino identification. This racialized pan-ethnic Hispanic/Latino identity does not replace national identifications, but exists alongside them, as interviewees tend to assert their nationalities when given the opportunity. Previously held ideas regarding racial identity and belonging intertwine and intersect with the binary black-white racial hierarchy encountered in Atlanta to inform and influence understandings of individual identification and group affinity.

The negotiation between nationality and a racialized pan-ethnic Latino/Hispanic identification thus is both reflective of and constitutive of transnational linkages between the
U.S. and interview participants’ birth countries. One might also interpret this negotiation as exemplifying a type of symbolic transnationalism, which functions as a tangible sign of something that otherwise might remain invisible. In accordance with Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) this ongoing negotiation among Central American-born residents of Atlanta also serves as an example of a transnational “way of belonging” in that interview participants are keenly aware of the ways in which the internalized identifications stemming from their social interactions are dependent upon social categories from both the U.S. and one or more Central American countries.

These Central American immigrants in Atlanta do not simply change or replace their previously held understandings of race and racial identity, but instead are actively engaged in a process of negotiating the old and the new, the more familiar with the less familiar. Interview participants encounter and engage with a process of raciliazed “othering”, as they are socially positioned as neither black nor white, but something else. Atlanta’s relatively recent status as an immigrant destination remains significant to this process of racialized “othering” and the identity negotiation that Central American immigrants experience by virtue of living in the metropolitan area. The contemporary racialized landscape of metro Atlanta, with its 86% black-white combined population, necessitates a racial positioning vis-à-vis these two groups. The extremely small number of co-nationals from Central American countries living in Atlanta also contributes to a situation in which broad racial grouping and identifying according to Latin American heritage is prominent, as opposed to country-specific grouping. This demographic reality leaves few opportunities for identifying racially in relation to any groups except these black and white “Americanos”. This paper demonstrates the need to acknowledge and interrogate the geographic contexts in which immigrants live when undertaking studies of their racialization and identity
negotiation experiences, because localized demographic, political, social, and cultural characteristics impact these processes considerably.

The insertion of this racialized pan-ethnic category is in many ways necessitated by the centrality of race in everyday life (even when it is denied as important by white residents) as a means of identifying those whom we do not know. What follows from the ubiquity of race is the concomitant need for a category to explain who these non-white and non-black immigrants or “foreigners” are and where they fit into the well-established, unforgiving racial hierarchy of the U.S. South. The awareness of an “other” racial group that is neither black nor white is being driven by demographic shifts, economic niches that many Latin American migrants are filling, and by cultural changes that are accompanying these in Atlanta, Georgia and in the U.S. South more broadly speaking (e.g. the emergence of stores, media outlets, restaurants, and even government entities catering to Latino/Hispanic residents). A notable difference between a city like Atlanta and traditional gateway cities or postmodern cities like Los Angeles is that the moniker Latino/Hispanic does not yet seem to have gained status as a political identity or affiliation, which might be attributed to the lack of a critical mass (Eames and Goode 1977).

Finally, a few words on how this negotiation process potentially affects conceptions of race and racial relations in Atlanta, GA are appropriate here. First, the negotiation between a national identity and an ethno-racial Hispanic/Latino identification amongst Central American-born residents of Atlanta is nearly invisible to black and white residents, while at the same time it does little to counter the assumption that all Latinos or Hispanics are the same. The fact that the tacit adoption of a racialized pan-ethnic subject position among Central American immigrants is facilitated in part by being mistaken for Mexicans supports and further contributes to the construction of such a homogenous racialized group identity, while also overshadowing intra-
group differences. Furthermore, such a negotiation is reflective of a broader process of racialization among those with Latin American heritage wherein the racialized category “Latino/Hispanic” is coming to sit side by side with the traditional racial formations of Black/African-American and White in U.S. Southern society. This research suggests that this incipient racial re-positioning is occurring in a fundamentally different manner and possibly at a slower pace because of the infancy of large-scale Latino/Hispanic migration in Atlanta and the history of an entrenched black-white racial structure in the U.S. South.

Overall, this paper highlights the inherent instability of racial identities and affiliations, while drawing attention to the nearly inescapable effect of native-born residents’ perceptions of Central American immigrants and their racial positioning relative to blacks and whites on these newcomers’ personal conceptions of their racial/ethnic identities. Simply put, Central American immigrants in Atlanta reconstruct their individual identities, in part through their interactions with “Americanos”. These interactions, in turn are dependent upon the specific urban contexts in which these migrants encounter fellow metropolitan area residents. Future research might examine the ways in which various socio-spatial contexts within the metropolis impact this identity negotiation and reconstruction process.
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CHAPTER 4

“PLACING IDENTITIES”: EVERYDAY URBAN GEOGRAPHIES AND THE NEGOTIATION OF CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANT SUBJECTIVITIES IN ATLANTA, GA

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“PLACING IDENTITIES”: EVERYDAY URBAN GEOGRAPHIES AND THE NEGOTIATION OF CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANT SUBJECTIVITIES IN ATLANTA, GA

Abstract
Numerous empirical studies demonstrate that transnational migrants from Latin America retain a national identity, while simultaneously adopting the pan-ethnic moniker “Hispanic/Latino”. Recent work in geography and other social sciences, however, stresses the fluid and shifting nature of subjectivities. Within the fractured metropolis, moreover, the places that people frequent constitute their everyday urban geographies and thus structure their social interactions. This paper examines the importance of place, conceptualized as socio-spatial context, in the process of negotiating national identity and racialized “Hispanic/Latino” subjectivities by Central American-born residents of Atlanta. Through a series of in-depth interviews, I explore the degree to which a pan-ethno racial “Hispanic/Latino” identity gains salience for Central American immigrants in Atlanta, and the degree to which the expression such an identity shifts across the various socio-spatial contexts (i.e., home, work, worship, play, etc.) that define everyday life. Results confirm that Central American immigrants in Atlanta generally assume this “Hispanic/Latino” label and that they understand this identity in racial terms, particularly in relation to the categories “Black” and “White”. Furthermore, interview participants’ social interactions and thus the opportunities for the expression of national identities vis-à-vis pan-ethno racial identities (or some other identity) depend in part on the particular socio-spatial context. Place, therefore, plays a significant role in the process of identity negotiation for these Central American-born residents of Atlanta, GA. By examining the ways in which everyday
geographies affect individual identities, I hope to draw attention to the inherent instability of contemporary categories of race and ethnicity.

Keywords: racialized subjectivity, socio-spatial context, Central American immigrants
INTRODUCTION

Claims that a “Latinization of the South” is well underway and descriptions and discussions of the “Neuvo New South” have brought the relatively recent trend of “Latino/Hispanic”\(^{20}\) migration to the American South into the limelight in recent years (Fink 2003; Mohl 2003). Within the social sciences, sociologists have been at the forefront in discussions of immigration, immigrants, and immigrant identities. Place and socio-spatial contexts as integral to identity changes and/or negotiations historically have garnered scant attention in the immigration literature. Some research (Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Waters 1994) seems to situate race at a national scale when asserting that immigrants lose or reconstruct their ethnic identities upon arrival to the U.S. Yet ethnic and racial identities remain salient at more localized scales; they are retained, shaped, and molded by social, cultural, and political processes in neighborhoods, communities, and cities. The purpose of this paper is to explore the ways in which place, conceptualized as socio-spatial context, influences the construction, adoption, and expression of Central American immigrants’ identities in Atlanta, GA.

Recent research has begun to address the role of context in the process of identity negotiation among various immigrant groups (Foner 1998; Lopez and Hasso 1998; Nagel 1996; Sanchez Gibau 2005; Velasquez 1999). With the exception of Sanchez Gibau’s (2005) work with Cape Verdeans in Boston, however, these studies lack a focus on the influence of those interactions that occur regularly in and through immigrants’ everyday geographies on individual racialized identifications. Those studies that do consider socio-spatial contexts (generally conceptualized as context or setting) have a proclivity to focus on a kind of strategic expression,

\(^{20}\) Following the U.S. Census, I use these terms concurrently throughout the paper to refer to individuals with heritage from one or more Latin American countries. See Oboler (1999) for a thorough explication of the distinction between the two terms. The quotations signify that this category is a social construction and for stylistic purposes I dispense with their use for the remainder of the paper.
adoption, or enactment of a particular racial or ethnic identity as a matter of choice, giving little credence to the productive capacity of places (Jaret and Reitzes 1999; Nagel 1996; Waters 1990). Although these researchers do interrogate processes of racialization and the broader structural forces at work therein, they fall short of offering a comparable critical assessment of the role of specific socio-spatial contexts in constraining or enabling the enactment of a given racialized subject position or set of subjectivities. As part of the broader research project to which this paper belongs, I argue that while Central American immigrants in Atlanta generally adopt a racialized Hispanic/Latino subject position, national identifications remain significant to most interview participants. My argument in this paper builds upon this negotiation that characterizes the daily experiences of these metropolitan Atlanta residents by asking how their everyday urban geographies influence this process. This project thus questions the degree to which the adoption of a homogenized Hispanic/Latino identity is definitive among Central American-born residents of Atlanta.

Attention to the multiple socio-spatial contexts that collectively constitute the everyday geographies of these newcomers offers an opportunity to examine critically the stability, fixity, and solidity of individual and group identifications and affiliation. As such, this paper addresses the following specific questions through an analysis of twenty-seven in-depth interviews with Central American-born residents of metropolitan Atlanta, GA: How do the socio-spatial contexts in which immigrants live and experience their daily lives (e.g. home, work, places of recreation, worship, and shopping) affect the process of identity negotiation? To what extent and how does place influence the racialization of Central American immigrant identities in Atlanta, GA? Do the racial, ethnic, and national identifications of these newcomers shift according to differing socio-spatial contexts across the metropolis?
Before examining these questions through a case study of Central American immigrants in Atlanta, GA, I present some background on the relatively new phenomenon of immigration to the metropolitan area and the U.S. South more broadly and the increasing cultural heterogeneity found there. Next, I discuss how a synthesis of poststructural theorizations of identity formation and the literature on place, conceptualized as socio-spatial context, and identity provides a meaningful framework from which to interpret the subsequent case study. Finally, the paper turns to the case study itself, followed by conclusions and ideas for complementary research in the future. Ultimately, the analysis of interviews suggests that multiple socio-spatial contexts produce differing racialized subjectivities by structuring the racialized discourses from which research participants draw in order to identify both themselves and other Hispanic/Latino-identified residents of metropolitan Atlanta.

IMMIGRANTS AND THE RACIALIZED LANDSCAPE OF ATLANTA, GA

As a region, the U.S. South (with the exception of Texas and Florida) is uniquely situated with regards to its recent (within the past 20 years) demographic changes resulting from growing migrant streams from Latin America or with Latin American heritage and its historically tumultuous black/white racial relations. Although many small towns and rural communities have been the destinations of many Hispanic/Latino migrants to the American South throughout the 1990s, Atlanta, GA exemplifies a trend of urban settlement of large numbers of these migrants to the region (Mohl 2003). The significance of the metropolis as a new (im)migrant destination is reflected in the fact that the majority of Hispanic/Latino residents in Georgia (greater than 60%) live in Atlanta and the population’s growth rate in the metropolitan area from 2000 to 2002 (22.8%) was the highest among the twenty largest urban areas in the U.S. (Bixler 2003; Census 2000). Historically, Atlanta has been viewed as a bi-racial black/white society, yet
with the immigration and intra-national migration of non-white and non-black newcomers in the past quarter century, the “city too busy to hate” is primed for significant changes in its racial dynamic (Smith 1998; Zhao 2002).

(Re)constructed Subjectivities and Identities

“Identity is a fiction which must be continually established as a truth”

(Pile and Thrift 1996; 49)

“The self is a product of social processes, not their origin”

(Young 1990; 45)

Anti-essentialist, poststructural perspectives generally view identity as partial, fragmented, and constructed relationally through an appeal to difference, or defining what/who one is not, despite popular conceptions of coherent, fixed, and stable notions of who we are as individuals. Thus identities are understood as always in the (re)making (Martin 2005; Pile and Thrift 1996; Probyn 2003). This conception of identity, in which plurality is central and context and contingency have gained significant attention, diverges considerably from notions of the individual as a subject with an ontological status separate from social relations and interactions. Because the conception of identity as stable, fixed, and singular provides individuals with a sense of comfort and security in knowing who they are (and the concomitant questions of where they belong), it remains a powerful idea, not easily dispelled in popular imaginations despite considerable contributions of social theorists in this arena. Theorizations of subjectivities or social positions as opposed to identities seek to highlight the complexities and socially constructed nature of multiple axes of difference and to dislocate notions of a singular essence of
individuals. The multiple subjectivities\textsuperscript{21} or social positions that we occupy throughout our everyday lives have a cumulative effect on internalized notions of “the self” (i.e. how we view ourselves, who we think we are). These subject positions include both our numerous roles as worker, mother, researcher, interviewee and their raced, gendered, and classed dimensions. I use the term “subjectivities” throughout this paper to refer to individuals’ multiple and oftentimes simultaneous subject positions or social locations constructed and maintained discursively through power-laden social relations.

Multiple subjectivities are mutually constituted through the everyday acts, practices, and interactions in which we are engaged and the power-laden discourses that shape those engagements (Gregson et. al. 1997; Mains 2000; Pile and Thrift 1996; Young 1990). These subject positions also vary, shift, and change according to socio-spatial context (England 2002; Probyn 2003). Vision, our sight-biased way of interpreting the world, is integral to the mapping of subjects, the construction of subjectivities. Power and meaning are thus inscribed on bodies, and the body becomes a site in which boundaries “between the same and other are installed and naturalised” (Pile and Thrift 1996; 41). Subjectivities are experienced in and through bodies and thus the body materially grounds subjectivities (Longhurst 2003; Pile and Thrift 1996). As Probyn (2003) asserts, “Clearly then subjectivity is not a given but rather a process and a production” (294). Nevertheless, in the face of a globalizing world, both the state and social groups are actively involved in projects that attempt to fix these fluid, unstable subjectivities in space and time such that they gain a sense of singularity and stability (Gerschiere and Meyer 1998).

\textsuperscript{21} As the Feminist Pedagogy Working Group (2002) notes, the term “subjectivity” carries multiple meanings within social theory literature and thus can become a source of confusion in many contexts. I limit my usage of the term, therefore, to the description contained in this paragraph.
The notion of multiple, unstable, discursively produced, shifting subjectivities is at odds with more pedestrian conceptions and experiences of identity as an internal whole or essence that exists a priori to social interactions (Martin 2005). Indeed, as Martin (2005) notes, “If identities are discursively constructed, multiple, contradictory and open to transgression, it is rare nevertheless, for them to be explicitly experienced as such” (100). In short, our numerous subject positions are fluid and ephemeral despite the desire to assert a stable, fixed, coherent identity (i.e. to say that we are always the same person, regardless of context or situation). Place or socio-spatial context potentially affects one’s racialized subjectivity without necessarily changing the way s/he feels about her/himself.

Subjectivities (including, but not limited to racialized subject positions) are constructed, maintained, and contested through the interplay of individual agency and societal and contextual ascription. Identity construction, negotiation, and articulation, therefore, occur at a micro-level, while being simultaneously influenced by the macro-level social structures within which all interactions take place (Howard 2000; Mullings 2005). The resulting multi-tiered or multilayered identity is constrained by structural forces such that the same choices/options of racial or ethnic identification do not exist for all individuals in all situations (Nagel 1996; Waters 1990). As Mullings (2005) asserts, “...race is always simultaneously imposed from above and experienced from below” (682). Ultimately, the category “Hispanic/Latino” is an essentializing term, based on purported cultural commonalities, which functions as a racial category consistently at or near the bottom of the racial hierarchy in the United States (Alcoff 2000; Itzigsohn 2004; Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000; Oboler 1995; Oboler 2000; Rodriguez 2000; Torres 1998). Some have questioned the degree to which the black-white model of racial hierarchy can accommodate continued immigration from Latin American and Asian countries
Claire Jean Kim (2004) argues that shifting from conceptualizations racial hierarchies to one of “racial positionality” acknowledges the multiple positioning of Hispanics/Latinos as both “foreign/immigrant” and non-white/non-black. Such a conception recognizes that Hispanics/Latinos fall somewhere between black and white on the one hand, while society generally views them as quite foreign on the other. The racial positionality of Central American immigrants in Atlanta is an integral aspect of subjectivity negotiation. This racial positionality is susceptible to shifts according to the multiple socio-spatial contexts that comprise individuals’ everyday urban geographies.

Postcolonial writer Stuart Hall (1997) advances the notion of a cultural identity that unites, yet recognizes differences within groups. Similar to those theorists drawing on poststructural perspectives, Hall (1997) conceptualizes this cultural identity as a process of becoming rather than simply a state of being. Cultural identity is not an essence, therefore, but a positioning; one that is susceptible to and affected by history, memory, myth, and narrative. One’s point of reference remains significant to this process as two individuals can be seen as the same and different, depending upon who is doing the viewing/gazing. Hall (1997) uses the example of how whites would view two black Caribbean migrants, likely assuming them to be the same whether or not they were from the same country, island, or area. Yet if another Caribbean was the gazer, s/he might see them as quite different from one another. Correspondingly, the ways in which Hispanic/Latino identities are perceived needs to reflect the dynamic and fluid nature of racialized subject positions (Darder and Torres 1998). The subsequent empirical study heeds this call by interrogating the processes through which Central American immigrants’ adoption and expression of a racialized pan-ethnic Hispanic/Latino subjectivity shifts according to socio-spatial contexts.
SOCIO-SPATIAL CONTEXTS AND IDENTITIES

A significant amount of research in the social sciences focuses on multiple subject positions individuals occupy (or axes of difference, e.g. race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality), their intersectionality, and the identity politics surrounding the formation of groups based on one or several of these shared facets. This body of literature often stresses the contextually dependent construction of fluid, shifting and/or hybrid identities, such that some subject positions may come to the fore in certain socio-spatial and temporal contexts, while others might recede (England 2002; Jackson 1998; Mahtani 2002, Mullings 2005; Pratt 1998; Twine 1996). These researchers view place as social space that is constituted by and constitutive of social relations and thus potentially serves both as a constraining and enabling force in individual identifications (Cresswell 1996; Delaney 2002; Dwyer 1997; Pratt 1998; Schein 2002; Sibley 1995). Indeed, this body of work has shown that one of the reasons that subjectivities are fluid and dynamic is precisely because they are (re)constructed and experienced in and through places. As Isabel Dyck (2002) observes, “Geography matters in that it makes a difference to how subjectivities are formed and lived,…” (237).

In a similar vein, Pratt (1998) argues for careful attention to the complexities of the relationship between identities and places, building on postmodern and poststructural theories that view identity formation as an on-going process. The links between place and identity formation exist in all contexts, yet an acknowledgement of multiple subject positions and the complexity and contingency of this relationship is required in order to examine them effectively (Anderson 1987; Peake and Kobayashi 2002; Pratt 1998; Sibley 1995). Recognizing the potential for the construction of new, contextual, and/or hybrid identities, Pratt (1998) cautions that the crossing of social, spatial, and cultural boundaries could serve to reassert current power
relations instead of transgressing the status quo. The racialized hierarchy that Central American immigrants encounter in Atlanta and the resulting subject positions with which they engage are shaped by local histories of race and racism in addition to socio-spatial contexts, a situation that geographers are well-positioned to explore.

Racisms and processes of racialization are global phenomena, yet they are shaped by geographic contexts and thus take local forms (Mullings 2005; Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 2004). Diverging from more traditional research trajectories such as spatial distribution and segregation, economic and social issues, and political participation, most contemporary projects on race in geography investigate processes of racialization from a critical theoretical perspective (Peake and Schein 2000). These most recent studies thus question the existence of essentialized, biological racial categories, many following David Delaney (1998) in interrogating how space is implicated in the very constitution of race itself (Peake and Schein 2000; Schein 2002). Context-specific racial formations, for example, shape the enactment or expression of racial and ethnic subjectivities that inevitably occurs during and through social interactions (Howard 2000; Nagel 1996). Delaney’s (2002) argument that numerous racialized identities are constructed according to differing scales, from the nation, to the urban, to the neighborhood, to the home is applicable to an examination of Central American immigrant subjectivities. Recent empirical work demonstrates that, in concert with defining themselves within the sociocultural context of the United States, Cape Verdean immigrants’ identifications are subject to contextual shifts at smaller scales, for example the city, the neighborhood, and the home (Sanchez Gibau 2005).

Within the sociological literature, the notion of situational ethnicity is an attempt to acknowledge the significance of place, by recognizing the effect that different settings might have on the invocation or performance of the numerous aspects of an individual’s identity (Jaret
Mary Waters (1990) credits John Paden with coinining the term situational ethnicity, which refers to “the particular social contexts and structures affecting an individual’s invocation of one ethnicity or another” (17). Waters (1990) asserts that shifting ethnic identifications are possible, as she observes changes in accordance with socio-spatial and/or temporal contexts. Waters (1990) notes, “At various times and places, one is more or less at ease dropping or inventing a self-identification” (19). When it is likely to provide benefits and/or minimize disadvantage the argument goes, individuals will invoke or express a specific ethnic identity; one that remains nevertheless constrained by broader structural forces (Nagel 1996; Waters 1990). An element of choice thus pervades most if not all descriptions of situational ethnicity, in that individuals are seen as invoking or claiming a specific identity or subject position as a matter of expediency.

Furthermore, Mary Waters (1990; 1994; 1999) has argued convincingly that race plays a significant role in the degree to which individuals can claim identities, regardless of the context, noting that white ethnics are less constrained and have more ethnic identity options open to them than do African Americans. Yet this research tends to disregard other subject positions (e.g. gender, class, and nationality) by compartmentalizing a racial or ethnic identity and focusing solely on it. Researchers have only recently begun to take the construction of multiple subject positions/axes of difference into account in examining how racialized identifications shift across socio-spatial context (Lopez and Hasso 1998; Mahtani 2002). Despite Waters’ (1990; 1994; 1999) and others’ attention to race, much of the research on situational ethnicity is lacking a critical assessment of the interactions between socio-spatial context (oftentimes referred to as setting) and the construction and imputation of racial and ethnic subjectivities.
David Delaney (2002) urges geographers interested in research on race “to take place seriously” (10). He explains that, “Taking place seriously alerts us to the contextualities and contingencies of power, identity, and community” (Delaney 2002; 10). Moreover, he stresses the need to pay attention to the generative effects of displacements and relocations of people, seeing these as “race-making events” (Delaney 2002; 10). Although historically Black/African-American and White have served as primary analytical categories for geographers interested in researching race, current scholarship should shy away from the assumption that whiteness is always constructed in opposition to blackness and seek to investigate the racialized construction of various other categories or social positionings (Jackson 1998). Following both Jackson (1998) and Delaney (1998; 2002) this paper focuses on the instability and fluidity of multiple subjectivities of Central American immigrants and the impact of socio-spatial contexts and permeable boundaries on their constructions.

Undertaking such analyses as those proposed by Jackson (1998) and Delaney (1998; 2002) entails focusing on the productive function or capacity of places, as opposed to viewing socio-spatial contexts simply as containers in which identification choices occur. As Probyn (2003) notes, “In other words, the space and place we inhabit produce us” (294). Attention to the everyday geographies of Latin American migrants and racialized experiences in their daily lives is crucial if we are to examine critically the ways in which social relations among these migrants and established residents are constituted, maintained, and possibly transformed in a new immigrant destination such as metropolitan Atlanta, GA (Winders 2005). Transnational migrants from Central America are racialized as Hispanic/Latino at a national scale through state mechanisms (e.g. the Census), while this process of racialization plays out differently in a primarily Mexican neighborhood of Atlanta relative to a large immigrant gateway metropolis.
like Los Angeles. Some engagement with this imputed identity occurs for those marked with the label “Hispanic/Latino” depending upon the specific socio-spatial contexts and media representations that affect them. A handful of recent empirical studies demonstrate the usefulness of such a conception of how social identifications and places interact to shape the experiences of non-white residents of the U.S., many of them transnational migrants.

Lopez and Hasso (1998) interviewed female Latina and Arab university students and found that experiences at home and in university settings both combined to redefine ethno-racial and gender identities. The two settings induced unique issues and moments of reflection regarding identity, despite the intertwining of these two socio-spatial contexts to affect individual identities. Latina interviewees expressed the power of racialized narratives and expectations in university contexts, explaining that the redefining of their identities occurred in opposition to predominant whiteness, white racism, and Euro-centric curricula on campus. For most Latina interviewees, the dominant whiteness confronted at their university differed greatly from their homes (variably defined as neighborhood, hometown, and/or birth country) and contributed to the increased salience of a Latina identity. The significance of “being Latina” therefore, increased when these students found themselves in a socio-spatial context wherein they were consistently faced with racialized-cultural opposition (Lopez and Hasso 1998). Lopez and Hasso (1998) conclude that although the common assumption among their interview participants was that racial-ethnic identities are fixed and natural, their experiences show otherwise; that these identities (in conjunction with gender and class) “...are always being constructed and redefined in social interaction and through social practices” (276).

Other examples of empirical work on the relationship between place and identity draw from the narratives of multi/mixed raced individuals. In her research on the experiences of
mixed race women, Minelle Mahtani (2002) emphasizes the impact of the places in which these women interact in their daily lives on the presentations and performances of their racial identities. She argues, furthermore, that attention to socio-spatial context enables researchers to examine and think about identity construction in unique ways. In a similar study, Renn (2000) discusses the role of public and private spaces in the identity (re)construction experiences of multiracial students in university settings. The students’ experiences and interactions in public spaces influenced their self-reflections, writings, and discussions in more private contexts.

Privately held and constructed ideas of race and identity also served to shape their interactions in public, however, such that Renn (2000) argues for a dialectical understanding of the relationship between public and private spaces in the broader identity construction process among the multiracial university students she interviewed. Student organizations based on bi-racial or multi-racial identity served as spaces of acceptance and inclusion for these students, such that in this context many of them felt the ability to express a multi-racial identity in public for the first time (Renn 2000). Renn (2000) concludes that a theoretical perspective stressing the fluidity and situational nature of racial identities is best suited to the experiences of her interview participants, as racial identifications tended to shift according to socio-spatial contexts on campus.

More recently, in her work on Cape Verdean immigrants in Boston, Gina Sanchez Gibau (2005) pays particular attention to the ways in members of this group redefine themselves in the U.S. Cape Verdeans’ identity formation experiences are marked by the interaction and negotiation between state-defined (racialized) identities, self-perceptions, and the perceptions of others (Sanchez Gibau 2005). Cape Verdean immigrants frequently are racialized along linguistic as well as phenotypic lines, because they speak Portuguese as their primary language
and tend to speak English with an accent. Sanchez Gibau’s (2005) work with Cape Verdeans in Boston demonstrates the fallacy of expecting immigrants to identify racially/ethnically in one and only one way, as personal conceptions, social interactions, social contexts, and broader racial formations intersect in unique ways at various times and places for these newcomers. Many of Sanchez Gibau’s (2005) interviewees asserted a “both/and” identity rather than an “either/or” identity when it came to identifying with nationality (Cape Verdean) and race (African American). Cape Verdeans enacted these two identities in different socio-spatial contexts, for example self-identifying primarily as African American or black at work versus Cape Verdean at home and were conscious of the impact that racial formations had on their lives in the U.S.

Empirical projects that focus on the spatially-contingent dimensions of racial identification thus highlight the constitutive power of places. Immigrants from Central America engage with processes of racialization and “racialized othering” in their relations and interactions with both native-born and foreign-born residents. Drawing on poststructural theorizations of the constitution of multiple subjectivities and paying close attention to the everyday urban geographies of immigrants enables researchers to interrogate the possibility that processes of racialization and racialized “othering” are filtered through socio-spatial contexts. The subsequent case study seeks to do just that by examining the everyday urban geographies of Central American immigrants in metropolitan Atlanta and their role in reproducing racialized subject positions among members of this group. Ultimately, the case study shows that socio-spatial contexts help produce place-specific racialized subjectivities by filtering and shaping broader macro-level discourses of race and belonging.
CASE STUDY OF CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS IN ATLANTA, GA

This case study of Central American immigrants in Atlanta, GA, USA joins the literature on race in geography that “explore[s] the role of geography in racial formation in both historical and contemporary contexts” (Schein 2002; 4). The following analysis draws from twenty-seven in-depth interviews conducted with Central American-born residents of metropolitan Atlanta between May 2004 and November 2005. These interviews serve as constitutive moments in the research process, such that my and interview participants’ multiple subjectivities were in the process of being reproduced during the interviews (Dyck 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Valentine 2002). Interview participants were born in Guatemala, Honduras, or Nicaragua and had lived in the U.S. for an average of nearly eight years at the time of the interview.22

Before pursuing interview participants, I organized a focus group with five international students at the University of Georgia to solidify interview questions (and their phrasing) and also to begin to identify themes/codes to be used in this analysis. I combined insights from this focus group with themes garnered from theoretical insights found in the literature on identity and place as a point of departure for coding the interviews. These etic codes included those associated with the multiple socio-spatial contexts that comprise everyday geographies including home/neighborhood, work, places of consumption, worship, socializing, and recreation. Emic codes were generated based upon trends in interview participants’ responses identified throughout the coding process. These emic codes center on racialized discourses concerning both places and individuals identified by interviewees as “Latin American”, “Latino”, or “Hispanic” (Crang 1998). I used the qualitative software package Nvivo to store, organize, and

22 All interview participants were given a pseudonym to be used throughout this paper. The average age of interviewees was 30. They had lived in the United States for a mean of 7.5 years and in metropolitan Atlanta for an average of 5 years. Seventeen of twenty-six participants had lived somewhere else in the United States before migrating to Atlanta, while the remaining ten were direct migrants.
code all of the interviews. A brief reflection on my positionality during the interview process precedes the detailed analysis of interviews. Following this, the analysis begins with a broad discussion of the impact of socio-spatial context on subjectivity construction and negotiation among interview participants. The paper subsequently turns to a comparison of specific socio-spatial contexts that serve as integral pieces of Central American immigrants’ everyday geographies such as neighborhoods, churches, and retail/shopping spaces.

At numerous points in conducting these interviews, I was positioned as both an “outsider” and “not-so-much an outsider”, depending upon the interaction and the multiple axes of difference that were constructed during the interviews. As the major thrust of this project concerns racialized subjectivities of interview participants and I am a white male geographer, the production of racialized difference served as a common thread weaving its way through all of the interviews, albeit oftentimes in divergent ways. The purported benefit of being a “racial insider” is based on the assumption that research participants will feel more comfortable with someone with a similar racial subjectivity. The presumption is that this leads to interviewees’ providing more honest responses. Conversely, the presumption is that participants are distrusting of someone identified as outside their racial group. This “racial matching” is not necessarily beneficial to a given research project, however, as the interactions between researcher and research participants are dependent upon the multiple subject positions occupied by both participants during an interview and not solely on racial identification (Best 2003; Twine 2000; Williams 1996). On the contrary, some race researchers have argued that similar racial positioning of researcher and research participants (i.e. racial insiderness or racial matching) is potentially problematic, because of the assumptions and expectations that “racial insiders” might bring to an interview setting (Hurtado 1994; Rhodes 1994; Twine 2000).
Each individual researcher must carefully consider and critically engage with questions of how her and her research participants’ multiple subject positions affect and are affected by the interview process. Failing to do so simply ignores the generally accepted assertion that qualitative interviews are implicated in processes of knowledge production and that in conducting interviews, researchers are engaged in “doing race” (Best 2003; Twine 2000). However, it remains impossible to engage in reflexivity to a point of complete understanding of how the numerous and multiple subjectivities of the researcher and interview participant interact to produce knowledge (Rose 1997; Valentine 2002). An appropriate and necessary strategy, which I employ here, is to acknowledge the points in the research process where we recognize that our positionality has had an impact and to describe as fully as possible the complexities of such interactions.

In the context of this case study of Central American-born residents of Atlanta, my social positioning as a white, male academic with partial Spanish speaking skills was a disadvantage insofar as it hindered my access to potential interview participants. This disadvantage, however, was countered by the presence of an interpreter who became more of a research assistant than I could have anticipated before the interviewing began. Analy, a nineteen-year old Guatemalan-born woman whom I met through the Latin American Association (LAA) in Atlanta ultimately served as an interpreter, recruiter of interviewees, and racial/ethnic insider for this project. Although we both brought our own assumptions and expectations into the interviews, it was in working together through most of the data collection phase of the research that we were able to recognize this in each other and to discuss strategies for acknowledging the influence of these preconceived notions on the interview process.
Regardless of this reflexivity over the numerous months during which we conducted these interviews, certain influences were inevitable. I have noted in previous work that draws on this same set of interviews how positionality quickly became a consideration when initial questions regarding self-identification of research participants were met with quizzical looks and requests for re-phrasing of questions. I realized that the racial vocabulary I had internalized by virtue of being a white, middle-class male from the U.S. South was not necessarily commensurate with the racialized subject positions with which many Central American immigrants living in Atlanta were accustomed. France Winddance Twine’s (2000) discussion of racial fields and racial discourses as methodological considerations relates well to this point of concern. She asserts that the ways in which people talk about race, race relations, and racism have significant implications for conducting qualitative research, including interviewing (Twine 2000).

Throughout this project, I found myself constantly grappling with questions and concerns of how to ask interview participants about racial and ethnic identification and affiliation, so as not to lead them to discussing these issues in any particular way. Attempts at erasing or at least tempering my relative social location by commenting on my knowledge of and travels to Central America often backfired as they were met with intense assertions of differences in experiences based on national identifications. To me, this highlights the necessity to remain cognizant of how difference is produced within and through interviews, while not attempting to mediate that difference. In the analysis that follows, I specify some of these reflective moments wherein I recognize my role as researcher in the production of interviewees’ subjectivities.
Place-Contingent Subjectivities

The influence of socio-spatial contexts on racial and national identifications of interview participants depended upon who was prominent in specific places, how they viewed interview participants (and vice versa) and/or how they interacted with them. This relationship is consistent with theoretical perspectives that view place as social space that is constitutive of and constituted by social relations. A common response from interviewees was that other people see them differently in numerous public places than they see themselves or are seen at home. They knew this because they could sense it and feel it, even if they did not think of themselves differently in those public places. In another analysis using these same interview data, I have documented the negotiation between a racialized Hispanic/Latino subjectivity and national subjectivities among these Central American immigrants living in Atlanta. Responding to a question asking him to elaborate on his dual affiliation as both Hispanic and Guatemalan, Alejandro explains:

“Depends upon where I go, who I’m with, and what I’m doing. Sometimes I am just Hispanic because I am with other Hispanics and we’re all Hispanic in a way. Other times I feel Guatemalan, but I am still part of the Hispanic community.”

Addressing a similar line of questioning, nineteen year-old Angela expounds:

“But I feel like it depends on where you go. If I went to a very Hispanic place they usually ask you where you’re from. So I usually say the country, and they’re like ‘Oh really? I have a friend that’s from there.’ And then they ask you what specific area you’re from. And then they see you
as being from that specific country. Whereas if I go to somewhere and they just look at me, they’ll just think that I’m Hispanic.”

Both of these passages suggest that the tension or negotiation between the two aforementioned subject positions (a racialized Hispanic subjectivity and one based on nationality) is conditioned by socio-spatial context. Alejandro’s and Angela’s responses reflect multiple social positionings and identifications of being both Guatemalan and Hispanic, while these subjectivities fluctuate according the places they go and the people they find there. This status of occupying both a national subjectivity and a racialized Latino/Hispanic subject position complements recent studies that argue against “either/or” conceptions of immigrant identities in favor of more complex “both/and” understandings (Itzigsohn 2004; Itzsigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2004; Sanchez Gibau 2005). Despite the similarities in Alejandro’s and Angela’s comments, some incongruities exist that speak to the complexity of the relationship between places and subjectivities.

Alejandro and Angela describe two distinct, yet related experiences when in Hispanic places. Alejandro connects such socio-spatial contexts with the adoption of a Hispanic subjectivity, while Angela explains that these are places that promote the expression of her nationality. Undoubtedly, these seemingly contradictory experiences are not mutually exclusive and Alejandro and Angela can relate to both of them. I would argue that these incongruities actually reflect multiple ways of being affiliated with both a racialized Hispanic group and one’s birth country. That is, Alejandro’s and Angela’s “both/and” subjectivities may be constituted and presented in multiple ways, depending upon their specific interactions, claims, and expressions. These multiple ways of being “both/and” are conditioned by the socio-spatial
contexts through which Alejandro and Angela navigate in their everyday lives. These excerpts begin to hint at the productive capacity of places and the differing discourses encountered in different places that ultimately construct or maintain racialized subject positions and their associated meanings. It is not sufficient, however, simply to assert that the ethno-racial identifications of Central American immigrants in Atlanta shift across the numerous socio-spatial contexts in which their lives play out, although this certainly is a common narrative among all interview participants. What must be interrogated are the ways in which macro-level racial structures intersect with specific socio-spatial contexts to constrain and/or enable the choices available to these individuals with regards to expressing, enacting, or performing racial, ethnic, and national subjectivities.

The previous interview excerpts demonstrate that socio-spatial contexts function to constrain and/or enable the enactment of certain subject positions for these newcomers and that in some places there are multiple possible outcomes of this process. We begin to see how this process occurs through a focus interview participants’ descriptions of their individual identifications as well as the identifications and group affiliations of other Hispanics/Latinos in specific socio-spatial contexts. In a place like church, for example, the discursive formulations of race and the racialized subjectivities with which Central Americans immigrants engage are not always commensurate with the dualistic black/white racialized structure historically prominent in the U.S. South. Interviewees tended to describe their churches and/or church services given in Spanish as Hispanic and thus attributed a non-black and non-white identity to both fellow church members and to the place itself. Jose, a twenty-one year-old migrant from Honduras, explains:
“Yeah, at church I feel Latino, everyone is Latino where I go [to church]. I mean, we all speak the same language.”

Initial descriptions or explanations of one’s church drew from a racialized discourse based upon the black/white structure within which they viewed their comparable and separate Hispanic/Latino subjectivity as situated. Interestingly, interview participants see themselves as part of that racial structure only insofar as they are excluded from membership in either of the two groups, Black and White. They are a part of the racialized structure, therefore, only by virtue of not being Black or White, but something “other”, a marker based primarily on skin tone/physical features and linguistic distinction.

Despite having Analy as a potential “racial/ethnic insider”, my positionality as a white male had an undeniable impact on the ways in which interview participants discussed their racial, ethnic, and national identifications, in addition to their daily interactions that occurred in and through their everyday geographies. I soon realized that responses to interview questions regarding race, racial/ethnic identity, and race relations were frequently conditioned by my positionality, as I became representative of “Americanos” in general and most discussions were in relation to my white, presumably middle-class social positioning. An unintended, unavoidable consequence of me conducting these interviews was the reproduction a “racialized other” Hispanic/Latino subjectivity among interview participants, as well as re-establishing my racialized White subject position as the dominant, normative racial category. I had to prod interview participants to discuss in greater detail their relations and interactions with Latino/Hispanic-identified persons of different nationalities, because they assumed that I would

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23 “Americanos” was a term used frequently by interview participants to refer to native-born residents with whom they saw or with whom they interacted across their everyday urban geographies. Interviewees used the term primarily to refer to white residents, although occasionally it was used in reference to all native-born residents.
not understand and/or was not interested in those experiences. Again, Analy’s presence and engagement with the project and research participants facilitated access to racialized discourses that were not characterized primarily by the existence of “White” as the normative, often invisible point of reference.

Upon further discussion, the racialized discourse that interviewees used to frame interactions and relations with Latino/Hispanic residents shifted from one based on U.S. (and southern black/white) racial categories and labels to one in which nationality became the predominant axis/marker of identification. The notion of a stable, coherent, homogenous racialized Latino/Hispanic identity becomes problematic, as evidenced by interview participants’ proclivity to delineate fellow church members according to nationality. This shift, although pronounced and common throughout accounts of interview participants’ churches and experiences in these places, was far from permanent. That is, interview participants were quick to point out that although they recognized differences in nationality (sometimes based solely on accent, stereotypical racialized characteristics, and/or colloquialisms) at church, such national distinctions were insignificant because they were all part of the same Hispanic/Latino community. As forty-seven year-old Marco describes:

“And when we go to the Hispanic mass, we know there is people from just about every Hispanic country. Being treated differently, I don’t think that that happens. We know that…we very much know where people are from by the way that they express themselves or the way that they do things. We know that they are from Mexico, or we know if they are from Central America, we know if they are Cubans or Puerto Ricans, Dominicans. But as far as our service goes, there is no distinction for race.”
This interview excerpt demonstrates the flexible nature of a racialized Hispanic/Latino subjectivity for these Central American immigrants in Atlanta. It also highlights the process through which church as a specific socio-spatial context marked by the presence of many Hispanic/Latino-identified residents functions to shape the racialized discourse that frames the interactions and experiences of Central American immigrants while in that place. These racialized discourses are actively produced through interactions, practices, and representations, while simultaneously shaping the social relations and individuals’ multiple subjectivities in this specific place. Mario’s comments suggest that the way individuals “express themselves or the way they do things” are primary avenues along which a process of subjectivity reconstruction occurs at church. The dominant discourse at church, therefore, is marked by reference to nationalities as race or racial categories in addition to assertions that distinct behaviors or acts are associated with specific nationalities. Interrogating these shifting racialized points of reference in a place like church, brings to the fore the common assumptions of many Central American immigrants regarding who Hispanics/Latinos are based upon nationality.

Interviewee responses indicate that nationality clearly matters even if all churchgoers feel a sense of belonging to a broader Latino/Hispanic community. Marco’s comments reflect how numerous national subjectivities are produced while at church. Additionally, we see how assumptions of nationality oftentimes are based upon stereotypical phenotypes, accents, and/or colloquialisms. That is, certain stereotypes based upon previously held conceptions of differing and distinct Central American nationalities are integral to the prevalent racialized discourse at church and thus do affect interviewees’ perceptions of fellow church members (and themselves). Another example of the significance of stereotyping to prominent racialized discourses at church comes through in the following description by Maria:
“Usually when they ask me where I’m from and I say ‘Guatemala’, they don’t believe that I’m from Guatemala.”

RY: “And why’s that?”

Maria: “They have in mind that people from Guatemala are short and dark. So they don’t believe that I’m from Guatemala.”

Here, Analy’s (my interpreter/research assistant) presence contributed to the depth and richness of the interview, as I had learned to follow such a strand of inquiry by asking interviewees to elaborate on such tangential moments attributable to her presence. In this case, I was able to access some of the stereotypical, racialized assumptions and expectations of interview participants with respect to numerous “other” Latinos/Hispanics. Racialized difference is produced here according to height and skin tone that are assumed to be stereotypical of Guatemalans. These stereotypes, moreover, were part and parcel of a racialized discourse that served to “other” certain Latin American nationalities during interactions at church. In this instance, subjectivity formation occurs through a process of racialized “othering” which depends upon certain physical characteristics. This experience differs quite significantly from that described by Mario above, wherein national subjectivities are constructed according to specific acts, practices, or behaviors. Mario’s and Maria’s comments reflect two distinct, yet related ways in which racialized subjectivities of Central American immigrants are reconstructed in and through attending church.
Similar to churches, neighborhoods are places where both a racialized Hispanic/Latino subject position and nationality were constituted and fostered, as most interview participants described hanging out with neighbors from other Spanish-speaking countries and sometimes developing good friendships with them. Oftentimes these were daily interactions, after work for instance, but interview participants also told of cookouts, and social activities in which multiple nationalities participated, sometimes for special occasions (e.g. Mexican Independence Day) and sometimes just for socializing. Given that the majority of interview participants reside in neighborhoods with above-average representation of Hispanics/Latinos, it is not surprising that this negotiation is prominent in neighborhood interactions. Regardless of whether or not interview participants believed that certain Latin American nationalities were prejudicial towards those from other countries in their neighborhoods or churches, a large majority commented on the various nationalities living in their neighborhoods. Much of the discourse concerning neighbors in self-identified Hispanic neighborhoods was marked by stereotypes based upon nationality (e.g. Mexicans like to party or Guatemalans are short and dark-skinned). Like churches, therefore, neighborhoods were places in which specific racialized discourses present facilitated (indeed, oftentimes demanded) a national identification that presumably provided more accurate information about who neighbors were and what could be expected from them.

**Gendered Subjectivity and Hispanic Places**

Although I avoided referring to any aspects of interview participants’ everyday urban geographies in racialized terms throughout the interviews, I soon realized that the participants themselves were using racialized labels to describe specific places. Examples included referring to their neighborhoods as “Hispanic” or “White” as well as describing those locations they frequented with numerous Spanish-speaking patrons as “Hispanic” places (e.g. restaurants,
bars/clubs, grocery stores/markets, and churches). Interview participants’ narratives of experiences in such Hispanic places tended to contain some common themes. The first theme, as discussed previously, is that opportunities for and/or the necessity of identifying according to nationality were nearly ubiquitous in these socio-spatial contexts. Secondly, in addition to nationality, other personal and social characteristics became significant (not only gender and class, but also where you live, who your family and friends are, and other social connections). Indeed, it becomes apparent that other subject positions intersect with this process of racialization to shape experiences in specific places when we focus on how gender intersects with race for female interviewees. Angela, a nineteen year-old woman who was born in Guatemala and has lived in Atlanta for nine years discussed her impressions of a popular Hispanic market that is frequented by many Latin American migrants living in the Buford Highway area of Atlanta. Specifically, she described why she has a negative impression of such a Hispanic place:

“Because you see a lot of Mexicans just walking around. And me, I’m a girl, and it’s uncomfortable the way they just stare at you, and look at you, you know? So I feel more comfortable going to just a regular grocery store.”

At first glance Angela comments may seem to be fueled by stereotypical (and somewhat derogatory) assumptions of Mexican patrons at the market. Although this may partially explain her perspective, one must also pay particular attention to the gender dynamics at work here. The intersection of Angela’s gender and racialized subject positions in this place of consumption is a critical component shaping her experiences there. More accurately, her experiences and
interactions there result in a constructed Hispanic/Latina subjectivity that diverges from that in other places like “a regular grocery store”. The specific discourses of race and gender at this Hispanic market shape her interactions and experiences there and result in the formation of a subjectivity that differs from the one constructed at other grocery stores. I am not suggesting that Angela’s gendered social position is insignificant when at “a regular grocery store”, but instead that the intersection of her race and gender results in unique interactions at the Hispanic market vis-à-vis other grocery stores, which have a distinctive effect on her subjectivity in this place. For Angela, gender becomes integral to a process of “othering” and oppression (through the male gaze) along with her race when at the Hispanic market. Angela attempts to avoid occupying this Latina subject position, moreover, by structuring her everyday geographies to exclude this as a place of shopping/consumption when possible.

The case of Angela demonstrates how the complexity of the construction of subjectivities emerges when we begin to account for both the intersections of multiple subject positions and the numerous socio-spatial contexts that constitute Central American immigrants’ everyday urban geographies. Like previous excerpts, this instance destabilizes the racialized category Hispanic/Latino by showing that it remains a constructed subject position that is produced in accordance to discourses that may shift across socio-spatial contexts. Angela’s comments also elucidate the process through which one’s gendered subject position is potentially affected by socio-spatial context and thus intersects with processes of racialization to produce place-dependent, multiple subjectivities. Regardless of her sexual preference, a presumed and thus invisible heterosexuality underlies Angela’s Latina subjectivity constituted in this market.

In other words, occupying an Hispanic woman or Latina subjectivity leads to specific experiences and associated feelings for Angela in this Hispanic market compared to other
grocery stores because the dominant racialized and gendered discourses permeating the interactions there are marked by a distinct heteronormative machismo. This market is a place that in many ways is defined by its large numbers of Hispanic/Latino-identified patrons, yet is not a place where Angela feels comfortable because of the ways in which her gendered subjectivity is constructed there in concert with her racialized subjectivity. Simply assuming, therefore, that Central American immigrants choose to live, shop, and recreate in places where there are significant other Hispanic/Latino-identified persons fails to consider the ways in which multiple subjectivities are constructed and are in turn implicated in shaping their experiences as they move through the numerous socio-spatial contexts that constitute their everyday urban geographies.

CONCLUSIONS

This case study serves as means to begin to understand how multiple, sometimes contested subjectivities are produced and reconstructed through discourses and interactions that are themselves dependent upon the places in which they occur. The everyday urban geographies of these Central American-born residents of Atlanta, GA play a vital role in the formation, maintenance, and contestation of a racialized Hispanic/Latino subjectivity as well as numerous other subject positions. The racialized subject positions of these Central American immigrants residing in metropolitan Atlanta shift across socio-spatial contexts, as place-specific discourses of race and belonging shape individual identification options and expressions. This empirical research supports recent work on immigrant adjustment experiences and identity construction that argues for a “both/and” conception of identification, as opposed to “either/or” formulations of identity and belonging. Interviewees’ responses also suggest that there are multiple ways in which “both/and” subjectivities are constituted, and thus that there are multiple way of being
both Latino and Guatemalan, for instance. This research problematizes studies that assert the primacy of national identifications over racialized ones, by demonstrating that subjectivities are constructed discursively through interactions and social relations in which place-specific discourses play a constitutive role. Descriptions of fellow church members and neighbors elucidate how racialized discourses in these places differ fundamentally from the black/white discourse historically dominant in a U.S. southern city like Atlanta, GA.

Church and neighborhood are two specific places where the negotiation between a racialized Hispanic/Latino subjectivity and a national subjectivity is most prominent because the racial discourses there evoke both senses of group affiliation and of difference. These places structure broader discourses of race and belong in such a way that alters the individual racial identifications of interview participants when in those socio-spatial contexts. In addition, the above discussion of these two socio-spatial contexts indicates that there are multiple ways in which national subjectivities are discursively reproduced at church and in neighborhoods. For example, phenotypical characteristics and distinctive acts or behaviors that are associated with specific Latin American nationalities are embedded in discourses of race and racial belonging prevalent in church. Interview participants may resist or disrupt these dominant discourses through not possessing stereotypical phenotypical features and/or through behaving or speaking in unexpected ways, amongst other possibilities. The same places do not necessarily affect identity negotiation among all interview participants in the same way. In addition, other subject positions (e.g. gender and sexuality) intersect with race and nationality to reconstruct these contextually-dependent subjectivities. Angela’s experiences at the Hispanic market reflect the production of a distinct heterosexual, Latina subjectivity that she attempts to avoid by not shopping there.
It is worthwhile to note that although all interview participants are forced to engage with processes of racialization on a daily basis since soon after (and perhaps prior to) their arrival in metropolitan Atlanta, they retain a certain degree of agency in self-identifying. This power to identify, however, is conditioned by specific racialized discourses they encounter through their everyday geographies, such that decisions of where to live, work, worship, shop, and recreate, are one means through which interview participants exercise control over their identifications. Another aspect of individual agency with regards to constructed subjectivities are the numerous ways in which interview participants engage with and/or contest the racialized discourses predominant in a given place. These Central American-born residents of Atlanta, GA do have the potential inscribe their own subjectivities, but they must do so within and through interactions that are structured by their everyday urban geographies. Racialized Hispanic/Latino subjectivities are always in the making, therefore, constantly being reconstructed through place-specific discourses and social interactions. This paper speaks to the productive capacity of places, as they filter and structure the macro-level racial discourses in and through which racial meanings are produced. The paper avoids fetishizing place, however, because it demonstrates how these Central American immigrants navigate their everyday urban geographies in numerous ways and participate to some degree in reconstructing their multiple subjectivities.

**SIGNIFICANCE AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

These unstable, shifting, contextually dependent immigrant subjectivities hold implications for innumerable facets of adjustment to and incorporation in U.S. society, including notions of group belonging and affiliation, participation in social movements, and political activism. As a relatively new destination for migrants from Latin America (and/or their descendents), Atlanta has yet to witness the formation of an expressly political Hispanic/Latino
identity, although proposed legislation at both the federal and state levels could potentially
galvanize such a politicized group affiliation. Recent efforts at federal immigration reform have
brought to the surface discourses of race, citizenship, and belonging in the United States that
were drawn upon and contested through large public protests and demonstrations in numerous
metropolitan areas, including Atlanta (Broden 2006; Swarns 2006).

Participation in these public rallies and demonstrations serves as an example of a practice
that has implications for the ways in which the subject positions “immigrant” and
“Latino/Hispanic”, among others, are discursively produced at numerous scales, from the nation-
state to the neighborhood. Additional fruitful avenues of research would include augmenting this
study with interviews of non-immigrants in metropolitan areas with newly emerging Latin
American immigrant populations. This would enable an analysis of processes of racialization of
Latino/Hispanic-identified residents in general and/or Central American immigrants from the
perspective of native-born groups (specifically native-born black and white residents). A study
such as this could draw on research concerning whiteness as a theoretical framework,
particularly with regard to its relational construction, its invisibility, and its spatial
manifestations.
REFERENCES:


CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation presented a case study of the changes to racial, ethnic, and national identifications of Central American immigrants currently living in Atlanta, GA, USA by drawing on racialization theory and the literature on geography and identity construction. Recent Central American immigrants in Atlanta must navigate the binary black/white racial structure they encounter, while also negotiating their personal notions of their racial identity with others’ perceptions of who they are and where they belong. In viewing places as unique sites of social interaction and symbolic meaning that are constitutive of and constituted by social relations, this project demonstrated how discourses of race and nationality in specific places shape and mold Central American immigrants’ personal conceptions of their individual identities in an urban area of the U.S. South. This research contributes both theoretically and empirically to existing knowledge of Latino immigration to the U.S. in unique ways both by focusing on a group that is underrepresented in these bodies of literature (Central Americans) and an often neglected, yet emerging, Latino destination (Atlanta, GA). Results of this dissertation, moreover, point to the potential for these migrants and other residents (and soon-to-be residents) of Latin American heritage to effect notable changes to Atlanta, GA’s historically black/white racial dynamic.

The first manuscript, chapter two, showed that neighborhood racial composition, particularly the presence of non-Central American Hispanics/Latinos accounts for the residential settlement geographies of Central American immigrants in metropolitan Atlanta more than any other neighborhood characteristic. Chapter two’s conclusions, furthermore, indicate that these
current residential settlement geographies of Central American immigrants are both reflective of and contributing to processes racializing these newcomers as “Hispanic/Latino” or “Mexican”. This first manuscript demonstrates the utility and appropriateness of framing research on immigrant settlement patterns within a racialization perspective. Chapter two also was influenced by findings and conclusions from the subsequent chapters in which analyses were based on interview data. This first manuscript provided an empirical foundation from which to begin addressing more intensive questions regarding processes of racialization and Central American immigrants that lend themselves to qualitative analytical techniques, beginning with asking how and to what degree these newcomers adopt a racialized Hispanic/Latino subjectivity. The second manuscript comprising chapter three focused on such inquiries.

Both chapters three and four drew upon poststructural accounts of subject formation to analyze the avenues through which Central American-born residents of Atlanta engage with imputed racialized labels. Chapter three focused on the negotiation and tension between national and racialized Hispanic/Latino identifications amongst interview participants. This second manuscript examined the general pattern through which most Central American immigrants come to adopt such a homogenizing Hispanic/Latino racialized identification. Results of chapter three highlighted racial stereotyping and cases of being mistaken as Mexican as primary moments and interactions through which a homogenizing Hispanic/Latino subjectivity is constructed and adopted. Interview participants’ engagement with a process of racialized “othering” wherein interview participants are socially positioned as similar to (or exactly the same as) Mexican-identified residents, yet not black or white, contributes to the assumption of such a racialized Hispanic/Latino subject position. These results engendered questions
concerning the likelihood that significant variations in these experiences exist across individuals and across places.

Chapter four appealed to poststructural accounts of subjectivity formation in interrogating the impact of socio-spatial context on processes of racialization encountered and experienced by Central American immigrants in Atlanta, GA. Chapter four investigated the role of place or socio-spatial context in a substantially different way than does most immigration research, by honing in on the productive capacity of socio-spatial contexts vis-à-vis racialized subject positions. The analysis of interview data in chapter four demonstrated the degree to which socio-spatial contexts contribute to the simultaneous reconstruction of multiple subjectivities (i.e. the mutual constitution of racialized, gendered, classed subject positions). Chapter four confirms that places are more than mere settings in which social interactions and relations occur, in that they play a constitutive role in the formation and reproduction of racialized subjectivities for these Central American immigrants in Atlanta, GA.

Chapter four effectively demonstrates how one aspect of the dialectical relationship between places and individual subjectivities plays out for Central American immigrants living in metropolitan Atlanta. Yet this mutually constitutive relationship must also be analyzed as a whole, and not simply partially or as the sum of its parts. Future research should include a greater focus on the productivity of place, not only on the ways in which socio-spatial contexts shape identities. Analyses of how places themselves are produced through the people that frequent a given place, the types of activities occurring there, and the social relations and interactions prevalent are needed in order to fully understand the ways in which places and subjectivities are mutually constituted. Geographers are uniquely positioned to undertake such
analyses as they focus on the spatial aspects that are implicated in the reproduction of social relations in numerous locales and at various scales.

This dissertation has shown how racialized discourses of and in specific places shape the subject positions of individuals in those places, yet these discourses do not simply appear from nowhere. Indeed, these place-specific racialized discourses are simultaneously produced by the impressions, actions, and interactions of those individuals. Similar to individuals’ multiple subjectivities, socio-spatial contexts are always already in the making when researchers begin to dissect their constitution. The market discussed in relation to Angela’s experiences and subjectivity construction while in that place serves as a fine example. The question that remains is how do interview participants like Angela aid in the production of the places that collectively constitute their everyday urban geographies? To what degree and how do they engage with the prevalent racialized and gendered discourses in/of those places and in turn contribute to such discursive formations? What might such an analysis look like?

Such an analysis would begin by revisiting the findings of chapter four and proceed by viewing interview participants’ comments through the lens of place production. This would entail a focus on how the people there are producing a certain type of place in addition to how they are situated as multiple subjects when in that place. Another primary task would be to work through the ways in which and the reasons why this market is racialized as “Hispanic” and the role of interview participants, market patrons, non-patrons, and local media in the production of that place identity.

Broadly speaking, this dissertation argues that it is inevitable that Central American immigrants will engage with and be affected by processes of racialization to some degree, yet outcomes depend upon individuals’ everyday geographies across the metropolis. This research
offers a glimpse into what a specific segment of first-generation migrants from Latin America encounters after moving to a major metropolitan area in the U.S. South and how they grapple with being marked with a racialized Hispanic/Latino subjectivity, vis-à-vis predominant Black and White racial monikers. It diverges from prominent research on immigrants that addresses questions regarding changes in identity, affiliation, and/or national belonging that occur over generations across numerous immigrant groups. Established factors such as time of arrival and length of residence in the United States will undoubtedly remain significant factors in immigrant adjustment experiences in the future. Nevertheless, a spatially sensitive perspective of the racialization experiences of newcomers sheds light on how everyday interactions and engagements with discourses of race and belonging have an almost immediate influence on immigrants’ lives in the U.S. Taken as a whole, the three manuscripts suggest that processes of racialization begin to impact the lives of Central American immigrants relatively soon after arriving to Atlanta and that they impact multiple aspects of these newcomers’ lives, from residential settlement to personal conceptions of identity and belonging.

**Future Research**

“Nearly a century after W.E.B. DuBois decried the oppressiveness of the color line, the veil of race remains the paramount feature of Atlanta’s landscape” (Rutheiser 1996).

It is important, yet not necessarily surprising to note that in this passage Rutheiser (1996) is referring expressly to social and spatial relations between black and white residents of Atlanta and not to other racialized groups, particularly immigrants. In contemporary Atlanta, however, the racialized landscape is changing due in great part to immigration. Thus racial identification
and affiliation are coming to mean more than simply black or white. If as Rutheiser (1996) comments “…the veil of race remains the paramount feature of Atlanta’s landscape”, it no longer looks the same as it did as recently as ten years ago. In the face of increasing political and media attention on immigration reform, and recent demonstrations, marches, and protests, moreover, this dissertation demonstrates that the racialized category “Hispanic/Latino” is perpetually reconstructed in relation to “Black” and “White” and oftentimes is adopted or assumed in resistance to oppression and/or as a matter of political expediency.

The results of this dissertation along with demographic trends over the past two decades may offer a prelude as to what changes are likely in the future in metropolitan areas like Atlanta across the region of the U.S. South. Potential changes to the dualistic black/white racial structure that has historically prevailed in the region come to the fore when considering these three manuscripts collectively. Specifically, this dissertation suggests that while fitting into and adjusting their personal identifications within the extant racial hierarchy of Atlanta, migrants from Central America simultaneously are effecting significant changes in that structure. Viewing chapters three and four in conjunction with one another highlights the active role of immigrants, including but not limited to interview participants, in constructing and reproducing their racialized subjectivities and to some extent the discourses that shape them. What this suggests is that although relatively recent arrivals to the U.S. South, Latin American migrants possess significant potential to contest and change the existing racial structures within which they are continually being positioned. Future research might further explore these changes through surveys, focus groups, and/or interviews of native-born residents, focusing on how constructions of immigrant subject positions depend on constructions of whiteness and blackness and vice versa in a southern metropolitan area like Atlanta, GA.