deterritorialization and workplace culture

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In this article, I ask what happens to the moral economies and rhetorical frameworks that govern employment relations when labor markets become global. In particular, I examine the argument that globalization undermines the institutions and practices that govern local labor markets—eroding "locality." I present the results of fieldwork in knitwear firms in southern Virginia and Mexico and argue that globalization eroded the old ways that workers could make claims on the firm, while also undermining new bases for claims making. I suggest that these developments are part of a process of deterritorialization of workplace communities, even though the workers themselves do not move. [labor, unionism, apparel industry, textile industry, southern United States, Mexico]

The challenge for cultural anthropologists has been to sustain the integrity of local worlds in their descriptions of them, while contributing to the understanding of macrosystems, such as the economy.

-Marcus, 1990

Capital has slipped the moorings of the nation state, but labor has not.

-Langille, 1994

Anthropologists have long understood that labor markets are social and cultural constructions, deeply embedded in local institutions and practices. When workers and employers struggle over the terms and conditions of labor, these power-charged negotiations are never simply market transactions. They draw on rhetorical strategies, habits, and traditions that are familiar to, if not endorsed by, both groups. They involve provisional agreements about what constitutes justice, what is a fair distribution of rewards and efforts, and how the parties should behave toward one another. These "moral economies" of the workplace provide the grounds on which one group makes claims on another and the language for framing those claims (Scott 1976; Thompson 1971). They are not closed and immutable systems, but open, communicative frameworks susceptible to innovations of many kinds (Jones 1983).

In this article, I ask the question: What happens to these moral economies and their rhetorical frameworks when the labor market in question is redrawn to include workers in vastly different national settings? The context for raising these questions was my ethnographic research conducted with workers and managers at a Virginia knitwear firm. The company, in operation since 1937, was the primary employer in a small southern town. It made the transition from old-fashioned mill, to a modern publicly owned corporation in the 1980s, to a unionized workforce in 1994. Buffeted by the competitive pressures that devastated the U.S. textile and apparel industries in the

1990s, the firm sought to reshape work regimens at the same time that it moved some stages of production to Mexico and Jamaica. Through observations and interviews conducted in 1999, I sought to document the ways that workers and managers understood these changes.

In December 1999, the firm declared bankruptcy and its 4,300 workers lost their jobs. I documented the response of workers to this event. At the same time, I felt that I was missing part of the story. Following Marcus's (1995) suggestion that globalization may require multisited ethnography, I arranged for a brief period of research in Aguascalientes, Mexico, to observe and interview in a (still-functioning) factory where the Virginia firm had subcontracted its sewing operations.

The research in Virginia revealed that the dense, complicated, and profoundly ambiguous rhetoric and relationships that had structured the paternalist labor practices of the firm's first 57 years in Virginia had not simply evaporated. The emergent moral economy of the union period continued to be leavened by residual norms and expectations from the era of paternalism. But, more importantly, the transition to contractually governed work rules for which workers had struggled never quite occurred. The moment of union triumph (1994) was also a moment of triumph for neoliberal trade policies (the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]) and a moment in which unregulated consolidation in the retail sector was driving clothing prices down. Facing the competitive pressures unleashed by these events, the company ignored the union. Understanding that their jobs were at stake, there was little that workers could do in response. Global economic forces eroded the old ways that the Virginia workers could make claims on the firm, at the same time that they undermined the new basis for claims making that the union sought to establish. In Mexico. workers found themselves employed by a corporation with no ties to their community beyond a simple labor market transaction. Because of the practice of subcontracting, they did not know the name of the firm for which they were producing sweatshirts, where it was located, or who ran it. In addition, the Virginia-based firm had no legal responsibility for the conditions of their work.1

I argue that it is possible to understand communities of workers in both of the sites described here in terms that Appadurai (1990) has called "deterritorialization." Unlike the immigrant workers to whom theories of spatial dislocation have been previously applied (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Ong 1999; Sassen 1998) the individuals described here do not leave home. Rather, it is the mobility of firms and their construction of radically deracinated production processes that break apart relations between workers and their employers within the localized spaces where social reproduction occurs. Strategies of corporate relocation and subcontracting make it difficult for workers to know their employers and, in many cases, even to know whom their employers are.

My argument is not that deterritorialization is an inevitable part of economic globalization. Globalization is not like gravity. It is actively constructed and struggled over by actors in a multitude of locations. As the social movements that have coalesced around trade negotiations and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have emphasized, these struggles are not over whether the global economy should expand but over how it should be regulated; not over whether expansion is good or bad, but over who gains and who loses as a result of specific investments and regulations.

Deterritorialization is one way that firms can structure their relationships in the places where they do business. Ethnographers and geographers have sometimes characterized these relationships as the "erosion of locality" (Beynon and Hudson 1993; Peck 1996; Storper and Walker 1989). They have emphasized the diminishing investments

that mobile firms make in locations where they have factories and the reduction of multistranded employment contracts to single-stranded wage transactions. It is a strategy of minimizing long-term commitments and investments, maintaining labor as a variable cost, and enhancing the flexibility of the firm at the expense of workers' secu-

ritv.

To take advantage of cheap labor, globally organized firms can rely on strategies other than deterritorialization. Some companies have developed ways of mobilizing local social networks to recruit and control workers. McKay (2001) has described the ways that electronics firms in the Philippines use kin-based recruitment strategies and screening of workers to insure a docile labor force. They may require referrals from local officials, who then assume responsibility for the workers' behavior (and to whom the workers then owe votes at election time). And they regularly recruit "fresh" workers from rural provinces in order to leverage vulnerabilities in local labor markets. Not all of the electronics companies McKay studied engage in such localization practices. Like deterritorialization, it was one of several human resource strategies available to transnational firms.

Neither deterritorialization nor localization are unambiguously good or bad for workers. They are different strategies or styles of recruiting and managing labor and as such they constitute distinct environments within which workers must struggle for autonomy, labor rights, respect, and fairness. As Portes and Landolt (1996) and Schulman and Anderson (1999) have shown, the networks of relations that sociologists are fond of calling "social capital" can have a dark side. Drawing specifically on the example of the dense paternalist networks in southern U.S. textile firms, Schulman and Anderson argue that certain kinds of connectedness can entrench inequalities and reproduce existing power relationships, making it more difficult for workers to act on their own behalf. A critique of deterritorialization is thus not a lament for an imputed golden age of close-knit communities—what Rosaldo has called "imperialist nostalgia" (1985). It is an attempt to describe one complex of social relations, work practices, and rhetoric that is fairly prominent in communities where production is for global markets.

Finally, deterritorialization is not a one-sided assault on workers and their communities. It is an ambiguous process within which workers struggle in different ways for power and autonomy. Localization strategies can be oppressive in making workers responsible for the behavior of their kin and community members and in establishing patronage relations that can be deeply exploitative. Sometimes workers struggle against such networks of connectedness, seeking more democratic and regularized procedures. Where corporations operate in bureaucratized and inhumane ways, however, workers may struggle for more personalized procedures and rules, preferring the strictures of paternalism to having no recourse and no room for negotiation (Wright 1997).

Ong has observed that anthropological articulations of the global and the local often construe "the global as political economic and the local as cultural" (1999:4). They miss the political and economic content of everyday life—both the ways in which lives are structured by large political and economic happenings and the ways in which people enact politics in their workplaces and neighborhoods and practice economics in daily living. In this article, I echo Ong in seeking an approach to understanding "people's everyday actions as a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts" (1999:5), and I seek to extend understanding of the discourses and cultural frames that shape power relations in the workplace. As workers find themselves participating in a labor market that is global in scope, their fate is suddenly

linked to individuals in other nations with whom they share neither a language nor a workplace culture. To characterize this process as the "erosion of locality" is to suggest that the social relations of workplace and community are irreparably lost. To conceptualize it as deterritorialization allows for the possibility that new, transnational forms of locality can emerge to "socialize" the actions of firms and foster community among workers.

neoliberalism and locality

In the popular imagination, the effects of globalization on workers in the developed countries are most often gauged by numbers of jobs lost or gained. There has been less attention to the question of how participation in an increasingly global labor market affects the institutions and practices of the workplace and the neighborhoods and communities where workers live. Workplace communities in the 1980s and 1990s were affected by two important developments. The first was a casualization of employment relations, in which long-term jobs with benefits were increasingly replaced with part-time and short-term jobs, which were often arranged through a subcontracting agency. This trend not only had a tendency to inhibit relationships among workers, but it meant that many workers had no direct, contractual relationship with their employers. Savage (1998) has described the challenges faced by the "Justice for Janitors" campaign of the Service Employees International Union, which sought to create a unionized community under these conditions. Her account describes the difficult task of creating face-to-face relationships and facilitating the flow of information between men and women who worked alone at night in empty buildings cleaning the offices of companies that purchased their services from a subcontracting firm. The campaign needed to find creative ways to bring workers together in time and space before it could face the challenge of negotiating diverse understandings of work, gender, identity, and skill and ultimately develop a shared agenda. It had to seek legal action on the part of the National Labor Relations Board to establish that the owners of the buildings where janitors worked were their coemployers and thus had some responsibility for the conditions of labor and wages paid.2

A second trend affecting workers and their communities in the 1980s and 1990s was the increased mobility of firms. According to *Site Selection Magazine*, Internet transactions, high-speed telecommunications, and fiber optic lines that allow the linkage of operations in diverse locations enabled corporate relocation within the United States to more than double from 1996 to 2000 (*New York Times* 2000:24). The movement of labor-intensive operations offshore, or the off-loading of those operations to subcontracted firms in other countries increased as well. The new mobility of firms has created a situation in which workers and their employers relate to place in different ways. In the words of Beynon and Hudson:

Not all capitals are equally mobile, and not all working people are equally immobile, but in general capital is more mobile than labor. Locations that, for capital, are a (temporary) space for profitable production, are for workers and their families and friends, places in which to live; places in which they have considerable individual and collective cultural investment; places to which they are often deeply attached. [1993:182]

This situation places workers at a disadvantage in their negotiations with employers. Burawoy has argued that it gives rise to a particular politics of production that he calls "hegemonic despotism" (1985:150). He suggests that corporate mobility has created a situation in which the "tyranny of the overseer over individual workers has been replaced by the tyranny of capital mobility over the collective worker... the

fear of being fired is replaced by the fear of capital flight, plant closure, transfer of operations and plant disinvestment" (1985:150). This fear creates a situation in which workers not only demand less from their employers, but also accept pay cuts, irregular hours (forced overtime when the company needs them, temporary layoffs when it does not), smaller benefits packages, and reduced enforcement of health and safety regulations. It has led workers to back away from unions. Long-lasting ties between employers and communities are lost, and corporate investment in the local environment is diminished.

Some researchers have argued that, while deepening internationalization has pulled workers apart by stretching production systems across borders and introducing a new level of competition among workers, it also binds these workers together in common international production systems, often under a single employer (Moody 1997:36). This is the situation in the case examined here, where the erosion of locality in one place was tied in complex ways to the establishment of a spatially dispersed production process linking workers in the United States and Mexico. While corporate officials plan and execute these spatially dispersed activities, a central task for workers is to construct knowledge of what the firm is producing in different locations, where inputs are coming from, and where products are sold. Building solidarity and a common agenda across spatially dispersed communities requires new ways of both communicating information and imagining community.

paternalism as moral contract: race, gender, and "family" in a southern knitwear firm

The firm that came to be known as Tultex Corporation was founded in 1937 in the wake of a wave of unrest in the textile industry. This unrest had culminated in the General Textile Strike of 1934, in which more than 400,000 workers walked off their jobs—the largest single labor conflict in American history. The late 1930s were a period during which mill owners faced New Deal labor legislation with trepidation and during which improvements in highways and transportation were gradually resulting in the dismantling of the institution of the "mill village" (Hall et al. 1987). What led William Pannill to start a textile venture under such conditions was the allure of new knitting machines. Pannill had worked in cotton mills in North Carolina before moving north in 1903 to learn this new technology, which was first applied to hosiery production. He returned south to the small town of Martinsville, Virginia, in 1937 with the goal of setting up a factory that would produce knitted goods for other purposes—initially the long underwear or "union suits" popular in the period.

The new knitting mills were the most desirable sources of employment for textile workers in the 1930s. Knitting work was "better paying, physically easier, and cleaner" (Hall et al. 1987:225–256) than cotton mill jobs. The machinery was not as dangerous, and the air in the factories was not laden with dust. When people left the mill, they did not walk down the street covered with the lint that branded others as mill workers. Knitting mill jobs were also more complex and carried more prestige (Hall et al. 1987:255–256). Pannill did not build his knitting mill in an isolated hamlet that included housing for workers; instead, he took over an abandoned cotton mill in the growing town of Martinsville, Virginia, where he employed the wives and daughters of local furniture workers and rural women and men who had access to automobiles.³

The firm was a family enterprise from the start. Pannill turned his new company—Pannill Knitting—over to his son-in-law, Michael Sale, soon after founding it. After three years, Sale passed on the firm, which he had renamed Sale Knitting, to his brother-in-law (the husband of another of Pannill's daughters), William Franck. The

Franck family—first William and later his son John—retained ownership of the company until it went public in the 1980s. The elder Franck was able to obtain lucrative contracts for producing underwear for the military during World War II and emerged from the war with a thriving business.

In 1971, Sale Knitting merged with a diversified New York apparel firm—the Henry J. Tully Company, changing its name first to the Tully Company and, in 1976, to Tultex. The new firm that resulted was a vertically integrated operation that performed all tasks from the manufacture of yarn to the packing of finished clothing. Workers spun yarn; knit it into fabric; dyed or bleached it; fleeced it; and cut, sewed, labeled, and packaged the final product. Most of the work was done in Martinsville, but some sewing and yarn manufacturing took place in seven smaller plants in rural Virginia and North Carolina.

In the 1980s, when the market for sportswear and athletic apparel soared, Tultex soared with it. In the words of one Tultex manager I interviewed, "Fleece came out of the locker room and became acceptable casual wear. . . . The middle to late 1980s were the heyday of the fleece business." When the firm went public in that decade, it had nearly 6,000 employees. From the 1970s through 1990s, it acquired several smaller firms that produced related products or inputs, and it invested approximately \$60 million in a new distribution center in Martinsville. In December 1997, the firm was designated an "all-star" by Apparel Industry Magazine, which commended it for its "state of the art" practices. Its sales were over \$636 million in that year, placing it among the top 30 U.S. apparel firms (Fairchilds Textile and Apparel Financial Directory 1999).

Tultex brought a measure of prosperity and stable jobs to the otherwise poor region where it operated. While many of its employees lived in and around Martinsville, some commuted from as far as 80 to 100 miles away. Given the decline in the other major industries of the southern Virginia Piedmont—most notably furniture and tobacco—the firm's importance to the regional economy grew markedly in the 1970s and 1980s. Driving into town in June, 1999, the imposing 100-year-old cotton mill where Tultex operations were headquartered was one of two landmarks by which visitors were guided. The other was a huge Wal-Mart store.

It was a somber testimony to the competitive pressures facing the U.S. apparel industry in the 1990s that, by December 1999, the firm had declared bankruptcy and laid off its 4,300 workers. Tultex's bankruptcy threw the town of Martinsville and the surrounding county into a tailspin. The city stood to lose over \$700,000 annually in tax revenues and nearly \$600,000 in water fees. The state faced massive unemployment claims, and local services were overwhelmed with demands, especially since the layoffs came during the coldest time of the year and in the midst of the December holiday season. City and county officials organized job fairs and short-term loan programs. They also put together a package of incentives for new industry that included free land for any company that would make a substantial capital investment. News services across the country picked up the story of the "Free Land for Jobs" program, and it was covered by Dan Rather on the Saturday Evening News.

A series of public hearings was held as Tultex's bankruptcy proceeded, in which workers voiced first their hurt and astonishment and, later, their determination to pursue claims as creditors against the company for severance pay, unpaid bonuses, vacation pay, and contributions to pension plans. Public outrage was fueled by news of the large payments made to top company executives in the last six months of operation and by the hefty severance packages that top managers were requesting from the bankruptcy judge. Meanwhile, the Virginia State Legislature debated and ultimately

rejected a bill that would have provided emergency benefits to laid-off workers. (Virginia State Legislature 2000).

For 57 of its 62 years, Tultex had operated on a model of paternalism. Paternalism has been described by historians of the southern textile industry as a system that united white workers and their employers in a conservative and racialized consensus. Paternalistic mill owners sought to model their relationships with workers after that of a father dealing with his children. The factory and the community that surrounded it were portrayed as a family with shared interests. The owner, however, was always the one who determined what these interests were. Paternalism operated through provision of nonwage goods and services, an ideology of beneficence, and the cultivation of deferential relations between the company and its employees (Frankel 1991:106). Janiewski (1991) has argued that through such means, paternalism had the effect of transforming power relations into moral obligations—a system of mutual responsibilities, duties, and, ultimately, even rights.

Historians of the southern United States disagree about whether paternalism ultimately had any value for workers. Hall et al. divide the literature into boosterism and muckraking in this regard (1987:xvi). "Benign" accounts of paternalism in the textile mill industry emphasize the tutelary role that factory owners adopted, the welfare services they provided, and the fact that the factory was a refuge for families whose small farms had failed and who had few other employment alternatives (e.g., Mitchell 1921; Thompson 1906). Muckraking accounts argue that textile mill workers were "white slaves" who had no liberties and a frightfully low standard of living. They argue that the southern mill village was a total institution that left workers without autonomy (see Billings 1979; Cash 1941). Carlton argues that such negative accounts emphasize structure at the expense of any vestige of agency or resistance on the part of workers (1994:18).

In part, the debate reflects the different positions of the scholars who write about the institution, but it also derives from the fact that paternalism was many things in many places and times, continually being reworked to adapt to new conditions. Blauner (1964) sees a decline in paternalist practices with the end of the mill village and the tendency to locate new mills in small towns and cities. As Janiewski (1991) has observed, however, this represented a change in practices and not a simple decline. In her words, there was a constant unraveling and reworking of the fabric of control in the transition from Old South to New South and from New South to Sunbelt (1991:90). In an attempt to capture this variability, Simon (1991) argues that paternalism was a managerial style. It was based on material power, but it blended symbols, gestures, and welfare programs into a style of control that featured personal involvement and accessibility. His account of paternalism characterizes it as based on a shifting balance of consent and force. Consent could be bought with a public face of goodwill and largesse, but the threat of force always lurked in the background. The elements of this complex system could be combined and recombined in different settings and places; in some, relations between firms and managers could be characterized as consent, while in others, force might predominate.

As the primary employer in the town of Martinsville and surrounding counties, Tultex exerted a powerful influence over local politics and governance. It also scrupulously maintained a public face of good will and largesse. Both Franck and his managers played important roles in the community, serving on economic development boards and school boards, attending church, and contributing in visible ways to local charities. Tultex cultivated the idea that what was good for the firm was good for the

community and for workers, but it always retained the right to determine what that "good" was.

The enforcement of norms and expectations, and reciprocal but unequal duties, was facilitated by dense webs of kinship within the firm. In the mill towns of the beginning of the century, access to a house belonging to the mill had been linked to the number of family members who worked for the company. In some places, eligibility for access to a house required a minimum of three family members at work (Lahne 1944:143), while in others the rule was one worker per room of the house. At times, families would take in boarders in order to justify continued occupancy (McHugh 1988). Up until the 1930s, it was most common for parents and children to work together-often widowed mothers and their sons and daughters. After that time it became increasingly common for husbands and wives to work alongside one another in the mill (Frankel 1984). If one family member did not show up for work regularly, the jobs of all family members could be threatened. In the 1990s, the various divisions of Tultex continued to employ husbands and wives, parents and children—in fact, whole extended families. Family connections were not simply a way for the firm to exercise control over workers, however. It was the practice throughout the decades for line bosses to be promoted up from the ranks of workers. This meant that line bosses shared networks of kinship with other employees. Thus, they could often be held accountable for tyrannical workplace discipline through social networks outside the firm (Hall et al. 1987:96).

Because relationships within the firm were multistranded and face-to-face, there was a general understanding that management could ask workers for "help" in hard times. Workers could be asked to work overtime to meet a deadline, to defer a raise in times of economic difficulty, and to tolerate layoffs in slow periods. There was also an expectation that worker complaints would remain internal to the firm. When a malfunctioning forklift spewed carbon monoxide into one of Tultex's small sewing plants in 1994, causing 60 workers to pass out, employees came to work the next day and none filed claims against the company despite the fact that several experienced longterm health effects. In return for their forbearance in this case, workers felt that they were entitled to job security, continuing (if slow) improvement in wages and conditions, and treatment as individuals. In reality, however, Tultex closed the small plant in Smyth County, Virginia, where the emissions occurred, in March 1998. On hearing the news, one worker commented: "This is a place where mothers sew alongside their daughters, where friends have worked together since they finished school. We've been very faithful workers. Even after the carbon monoxide, we came right on back to work" (Kegley 1998).

As many analysts of the southern United States have pointed out, racial segregation was a key element of the paternalist system in the mills up until the 1960s (Boyte 1972; Genovese 1976; Janiewski 1991). One had to be white to be a member of the "mill family" and they offered racial exclusivity as part of the "wages of whiteness" (Roediger 1991). As John W. DuBose, one Turn of the Century proponent of segregation, expressed the situation, maintaining an all-white workforce provided a basis for identification up and down the line: "It excites a sentiment of sympathy and equality . . . with classes above them, and this way becomes a wholesome social leaven" (Boyte 1972:20). As in most southern mills, the majority of workers at Tultex were female, so that rhetoric of racial segregation was gendered, with the firm claiming to provide a safe and respectable work environment for white women workers. In Virginia, the racial segregation of mills was enforced informally (in South Carolina it was law until 1964).

Before this time, black workers performed a number of nonproduction jobs such as groundskeeping, loading and unloading operations, and janitorial tasks.

After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, integration at Tultex began slowly, but picked up speed in the 1970s. By the 1980s, African American workers had come to form the majority in the plant. Once hired, black workers were not drawn into the social networks of paternalism that governed everything from work assignments, to overtime, to shift rotations. As Adler has argued, African American families "were not indoctrinated in mill culture the ways whites were, and had not grown up under the company's paternalistic wing" (1994:20). They did not, or could not, look to personal ties to white managers as a way to insure fair treatment. At least in part for this reason, black workers at Tultex were among the earliest and most enthusiastic supporters of the union.

Attempts to bring a union to Tultex had begun in the 1970s, and workers waged seven membership drives before finally achieving success in 1994. The successful vote was the largest victory for the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union since their J. P. Stevens drive in the late 1970s. The union's success in 1994 could be attributed, in part, to actions taken by Tultex in the early 1990s in response to a series of bad years. A slowdown in the market for sweatwear coincided with an increase in cotton prices and generalized deflation in the apparel sector. There was growing pressure to lower labor costs as more and more of the firm's competitors moved operations (or subcontracted) overseas. Tultex responded by laying off workers, closing down its sewing plants, and moving those operations to Mexico and Jamaica. It then announced wage cuts and ended its contributions to workers' pension plans.

All of these actions were seen by white workers as violations of the paternalist contract. One worker noted, "When I first came to work here it was still a small company and people knew everybody. Then it got bigger and workers were not important" (Swoboda 1994:F1). Another worker echoed this view, "When I first started it was a relatively good place to work. Over the past five years, I've seen that change. It's expansion—corporate greed. They've forgotten about the people who are making the products" (Southern Exposure 1994). In an interview with me, a union organizer added: "They were changing in the 1990s to a public corporation, and they changed the basis on which they do business. . . . Before that Franck would say 'give me another chance . . . I built this company with you.' And they would, but I think they played the family card one time too many."

This sense of betrayal, or violation of an implicit contract, was less marked among black workers who, because they had been largely excluded from personalized ties with (white) managers, had never harbored illusions of the firm as "family." Most of the firm's black employees saw the union, rather than ties to management, as the best chance for improved wages and working conditions. Frederickson (1985) has argued that the growth in militancy of southern textile workers since 1965 is a direct result of the organizing activities of black women. The support for the union among black workers in the 1990 union drive was so strong that Tultex brought in Golden Frinks—a speaker who claimed to be a former civil rights activist and to have worked with Martin Luther King in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in the 1960s. Frinks urged black employees to vote against the union, so as not to jeopardize their "good jobs." Pro-union workers contacted the SCLC, which disavowed any present or former association with Frinks and expressed their support for the unionization effort (Kegley 1990).

The fact that black workers had been excluded from networks of patronage and had long experienced discrimination in things like job assignments, shift rotations,

and access to overtime meant that much of what they sought from the union was standardization and fairness in work procedures. Both black and white women workers also wanted access to the full range of jobs in the plant, including higher-paid positions that they had been excluded from in a rigid, if somewhat arcane, division of labor. The contracts that were negotiated in 1995 and 1998 specified the rules for every aspect of advancement and work assignment in great detail. Establishing a culture in which the rules mattered was a more difficult task. When workers grieved violations in the first years of the union they were not only attempting to redress unfairness that affected them as individuals but fighting a battle to replace the racially inflected personalism of the preceding period with habits of attention to democratically established rules and procedures.

The emergent rhetoric of contract associated with the 1994 union drive coexisted with the well-established rhetoric of paternalism. Both union and firm argued that they had the greater good of the community at heart and portrayed the other party as seeking narrow financial gain. The mayor of Martinsville, who allied himself with the firm in opposing the union, made public statements criticizing workers for "hitting Tultex when it's down." Union supporters retorted that it was unfair "for heavy hitter community leaders to load hourly wage employees with so much guilt" (Kelley 1994). Managers asked workers to consider the firm's economic difficulties and to refrain from imposing the additional costs a union would imply, while workers cited wage and benefit cuts as evidence that the firm did not have their welfare at heart (Kelley 1994).

After the union won (1,305 to 706) in 1994, John Franck (William's son) stepped down from his position as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Family members remained on the Board of Directors, but the firm promoted a professional manager (who had been hired from outside) to the position of CEO. In the process of negotiating the first union contract with Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) in early 1995, the firm reorganized itself to accommodate the new contractually governed practices of the union era. It raised prices to accommodate the higher wage bill, established rules for promotion, shift rotation, layoffs, and grievance procedures, and established an employee-management committee to address productivity issues.

The era of paternalism had left a mixed heritage. As a managerial style, it blended consent with force, but as a rhetoric, it provided workers with certain resources. As Simon has noted, workers and their employers could struggle "over the appropriation of symbols and information and how the past and present in mill communities should be understood" (1991:96). The ideology of firm as family went both ways and allowed workers to hold managers accountable for behavior that appeared uncharitable or self-interested. As Frankel has demonstrated for Hendersonville, North Carolina, a mill-village culture could be transmuted into union culture by unraveling and reworking key themes. "When management activities violated communal norms and family welfare, the close kinship, work and neighborhood ties among workers provided a sense of oppositional unity" (1984:40). Frankel showed how the deep religious roots of southern communities provided mixed resources as well. While "mill owners had underscored the importance of religion in providing an ideological justification for 'clean living' and hard work" (Frankel 1991:115) in the old mill villages, independent churches evaluated things differently. Owners and harsh managers were portrayed as money lovers unsympathetic to the plight of poor workers. Churches in Martinsville, and particularly black churches, were bastions of union organizing and activity, and meetings of local 1994 typically began with a prayer. It was these social and rhetorical resources that constituted "locality" in the mid-1990s.

the "stretch-out" in the era of globalization

At Tultex, the era of the union coincided exactly with growing pressure on the firm to globalize production. The cost-cutting measures that angered workers enough to make them vote for the union were the firm's first response to a complex set of competitive pressures that severely lowered corporate earnings in the 1990s. Consolidation in the retail sector increasingly allowed the firm's buyers to set prices. Major retailers like Wal-Mart and Target were willing to pay less and less each year for basic T-shirts and sweatshirts; at the same time, they wanted their suppliers to develop justin-time order fulfillment practices (Collins 2001). Apparel firms relied increasingly on overseas contractors to lower their labor costs. The passage of NAFTA in 1994 opened new opportunities to produce and subcontract in Mexico. Firms that were able to globalize their production strategy were better able to meet retailers' demands for deflationary pricing. Tultex could move its sewing operations overseas, but it could not easily transfer its more complex and capital-intensive knitting and dyeing operations. Moving some operations offshore required that the firm reorganize its tightly integrated vertical production process.

Because the coming of the union coincided with these pressures, there was no era of labor peace at Tultex. There was no period in which the union was simply a means to press claims, defend rights, and achieve gains in salary and benefits. From the beginning, the union was under siege from the pressures associated with the textile and apparel sector's financial woes and its efforts to globalize production as a way of meeting those pressures. Union meetings served as a venue for workers to try to understand the forces that were undermining their position. During the union's first year, the firm closed two sewing shops, moving the work to owned and contracted sewing facilities in Mexico. It combined cuts in the number of hours employees could work each week with new productivity measures that increased stress for workers on the job.

Workers in textile mills have waged a battle against the stretch-out since the first days of the industry, although the term dates to the 1920s. The stretch-out referred to the practice of increasing the number of looms or spinning machines for which workers had responsibility. As Hall et al. describes it, "the 'stretch-out' was their term for the cumulative changes that set them tending machines 'by the acre,' filled every pore in the working day and robbed them of control over the pace and method of production. Work became a constant struggle to meet ever-increasing production quotas" (1987:211-212). In the 1920s, mill owners began implementing "scientific" management practices, keeping careful records on the flow of materials and tasks performed, and setting quotas and production goals. Strangers with stopwatches entered the mills, rearranged the shop floor, introduced faster and more efficient machines, and intensified the pace of work (Simon 1991:92). Workers chafed under the new routines, striking in Greensboro, South Carolina; Elizabethton, Tennessee; and other locations. As one worker at Cone Mills expressed it: "Hundreds of folks go to jail every year . . . for doing things not half so bad or harmful to their fellow man as the stretchout" (Terrill and Hirsch 1978:178).

The stretch-out introduced at Tultex in the 1990s had a new twist. In classic speedups, managers often reset piece rates in order to hold salaries more or less constant—so that workers did not realize a net gain from their higher productivity. At Tultex, a large proportion of workers in the plant were on piece rate or "incentive pay," and since rates were established by union contract, increasing the number of machines should have offered the potential for higher earnings. The stretch-out of the 1990s did not simply involve giving workers responsibility for more of the same

machines, however. Managers were experimenting with new team-based approaches and with multitasking. The new approaches placed workers in different jobs on different days, or at different times of the day, or forced them to perform a combination of tasks simultaneously. This slowed workers down to the point that they could not make their "normal" rate at the same time that it vastly increased stress on the job. Researchers have warned of the disadvantage workers experience if piecework is combined with multitasking. One study argued that "the two are not compatible as operatives frequently change tasks, thus their speed falls, and therefore so do their weekly earnings" (McLellan et al.1996:210). It found that sewing machine operators who were forced to complete up to five operations while receiving piece work pay experienced minimal loss of earnings on the second operation, but a much greater earnings loss on operations three to five (1996:210).

For workers at Tultex, the combination of increased stress and lower earnings was painful. The company had (re)introduced the 12-hour day in the early 1980s, and workers performed these shifts in a complex schedule of four days on, three days off, keeping the plant running 24 hours a day. The lengthy days only exacerbated the stress of the new routines. As one young man from the knitting department complained in a union meeting in 1999, "I used to do one job. Now I have to do four. For almost two years they've had me working between floors. I go in on the weekend and I'm doing an entirely different job. We're working harder and losing money on a daily basis." He reported that when he questioned his supervisors about his rate of pay, their answers were unsatisfactory: "They throw a bunch of numbers at you that are above your head. They say you're making more money. But you look in your wallet and see that you're not."

Chatting informally with workers after a union meeting, I found that many people concurred with this assessment of things. The 50-year-old President of the union, who had been at the plant for 18 years, said that his son-in-law could occasionally work fast enough to make money under the new system, but that he was "too old to work that hard now." Doris, who had worked as a knitter for 20 years, said, "When I started out, I worked six knitting machines and now I work 11 and a half on two floors. We have to walk further to keep check on all the machines. The walking makes it hard. And we have to carry much more yarn. Each cone is ten pounds, and we carry three at a time. A human body's not meant to carry like that all day long." Her 50-year-old coworker Kathy noted that a 27-year-old man in knitting had bought some special gloves meant for arthritis sufferers to ease the pain caused by the work. She said, "If a young boy has pain doing the work, you can imagine what it's like for me." She added, "The new machines are raised up with a narrow catwalk.... You have to work with your arms over your head a great deal." After reflecting for a moment, Doris asked, "Why did I agree to those extra machines? I guess I thought I could make a little more. That was dumb, wasn't it?"

The union encouraged workers to file grievances in cases like these. There was a widespread perception among union members, however, that the grievance procedures had ceased to work after the first few years. Grievances that moved up from the shop floor committees to the third level—where they were supposed to be resolved between the director of human resources and the General Shop Committee—became stalled. The union had not had a successful resolution of a grievance at that level for nearly six months. Union members had visited their regional representative in Eden, North Carolina, to figure out what was happening, but without success. In this climate, personalism and managerial impunity reasserted themselves. Workers told stories in their union meetings about having been laid off for filing a grievance. One said

that his supervisor "shrank two of his creels" (frames that hold bobbins in a knitting machine) when he filed a complaint. This action required him to use smaller bobbins and to change them more frequently, increasing the difficulty of his work and slowing him down. When someone suggested that he grieve that action as harassment, he replied, "She told me if I did, she would shrink all my creels!" One woman summarized the situation: "There's not a grievance been won in fleece knitting in the last two years. They say, 'Your union is crap. Your union is so weak it can't do nothing.'"

For workers in the 1920s, the response to the stretch-out had been to go on strike. Workers at Tultex not only had a "no-strike" clause in their union contract, but they were painfully aware that jobs in the industry were being moved out of the country at a rapid pace. By July 2001, jobs in the U.S. apparel sector had dropped from a peak of 1.4 million in 1973 to 656,000, and jobs in the textile sector had declined from a peak of 1.2 million in the late 1940s to 574,000 (U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics 1994:583; Women's Wear Daily 2001). A busload of 120 Tultex workers had traveled to Washington, D.C., in 1993, where they visited the offices of members of Congress to encourage them to support antisweatshop legislation. They were aware of the irony in the fact that the same forces that were leading firms to establish lowwaged enclaves of garment production overseas (and in U.S. cities) were undermining the working conditions and security of their own jobs. As one young man said: "We went to Washington to protest sweatshops. But third-floor knitting is a sweatshop now."

This was not simple irony, however. Hegemonic despotism—the threat of job loss—had unraveled the fabric of "unequal rights and obligations" between workers and the firm. The union's bargaining position was undermined by the fact that the boundaries of the labor market were no longer local. That market now included thousands of nonunionized workers in Mexico and other parts of the world. The vulnerability of their jobs in this situation forced the workers and their union representatives to back away from issues that were affecting them deeply. After its initial relocation of labor-intensive sewing activities, the firm did not have to threaten to move jobs. The politically constructed "economic realities" of free trade were visible enough. Perhaps, in the end, it was Tultex's rootedness in place that prevented it from moving off-shore quickly enough, ultimately leading to its bankruptcy.

When Tultex filed bankruptcy, workers were devastated. "I feel like somebody jerked the rug out from under me and hit me over the head with it," one sewing worker said (*The Depot* 1999). Another employee said, "It makes you feel like 14 years of your life are wasted" (Cawley 2000). "They just dumped us out like we were nothing," another added (*Cox News Service* 2000).

Union members had organizational structures that allowed them to share information, however. In the first days after the announcement of bankruptcy, this was information about job fairs, loan programs, and other kinds of assistance available to former workers. Later, these same networks were used to establish a creditor group to press claims against the company for back pay, vacation pay, and pension funds. Workers organized to attend public meetings with former company executives, with officials from the U.S. Department of Labor, and with representatives of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court. When Tultex executives argued that other priorities might come before worker claims, the union obtained information about executive pay and severance packages that were being negotiated with the bankruptcy judge and brought it to the attention of the local press. Reminiscent of incidents in the 1920s, when workers faced with the stretch-out obtained and published the tax returns of their employers (Simon 1991:91), workers dusted off the rhetoric of mutual obligation to suggest that managers were taking more than their fair share. One worker noted, "I feel disgusted,

I feel it's ridiculous that salary people are getting the bonuses and all of the people doing the work aren't getting anything" (Martinsville Bulletin 2000).

reconstructing workplace communities

As Burawoy has observed, paternalist labor relations take advantage of workers' dependence on a specific employer and of the fact that family members work together in the same mill. The authority and influence of the company permeate the day-to-day existence of employees outside and inside the factory (1985:97). The networks through which paternalism operates have historically reproduced race and gender hierarchies. Those networks are also profoundly local.

Tultex employees struggled for nearly 20 years to replace the habits and practices of paternalism with the more democratically distributed rights and responsibilities of the union. The day-to-day practice of these new rights and responsibilities were also locally grounded—they took place in interactions with shop floor representatives, in membership meetings, regional workshops, picnics, holiday parties, canvassing, solidarity marches, and visits to local and national political representatives. At the moment of union success, however, new economic pressures were changing the shape of the industry. Retail consolidation drove an intense price competition in the market for low-end, or commodity, apparel, forcing many U.S. companies to close their domestic manufacturing operations and open new ones in other countries or to subcontract production overseas. Once it became feasible for firms to move their operations, competitive pressures made it imperative. The spatial framework for decision making shifted from the region to the globe, the time horizon from the long term to the next few years. As one Tultex executive said, "It was a race between us and our competitors to see who could get their sewing operations to Mexico first. . . . If you weren't there, you were out of business."

If labor relations at Tultex were too embedded in place-based relationships and too encumbered by contract to give managers the flexibility they needed to lower the wage bill, what did labor relations in those alternative low-wage locations look like? In March of 2000, a research assistant for this project traveled to Aguascalientes, Mexico, a town of about half a million people located 320 miles northwest of Mexico City. She spoke with local officials and leaders of the textile and apparel industry and visited several garment factories there, including one plant that had produced sweatshirts for Tultex prior to its bankruptcy and that continued producing these items for Hanes, Sara Lee, and other U.S. firms. This plant housed 60 sewing operators in a dark and cramped warehouse in the central city. Workers assembled garments from fabric that had been knitted, dyed, and cut in the United States. Under the terms of NAFTA, these items made of U.S. materials could be re-imported into the United States without payment of tariffs.

Managers at the plant were attempting to improve the quality of their product through introducing in-line, as well as final, inspections. Shirts were checked by inspectors as the seamstresses produced them, and a "history of defects" was compiled for each worker. Workers' productivity and quality ratios were graphed and posted by their workstations. While these attempts to increase efficiency through "Taylorist" methods seemed to be effective, efforts to implement methods of teamwork and multitasking—like those that had troubled workers in Virginia—had apparently failed. Despite the urging of the U.S. firms that contracted production, managers had stopped implementation of such systems after initial trials. Workers had been unwilling to accept a system of task sharing that slowed down piecework or that linked their wages to the rates of others. Through complaints and productivity declines, workers

were able to convince managers to replace the "modular system" with the previous straight-line method.

There are many accounts of work in Mexican maguilas, a number of which discuss the politics of shop floor production.⁷ Within apparel maquilas, in particular, high rates of labor turnover initially created an impediment to workplace community. By the mid-1980s, labor shortages forced managers to abandon practices of hiring primarily young, unmarried girls and to hire more married women. The average age of the workforce increased, along with the tenure of the average worker (Tiano 1994:80). In most contemporary maquilas, management at the level of the shop floor is personalistic. Line bosses know workers' family situations and bend rules for loyal employees, but they also discipline and fire workers with relative impunity. At higher levels of management, decisions about wages, conditions of work, and factory location are made by expatriates using decision criteria established by corporate headquarters (Fernández-Kelly 1983; Iglesias Prieto 1997; Ruiz and Tiano 1987; Tiano 1994; Wright 1997). The success of workers in Aguascalientes in rejecting new teamwork regimens demonstrates the ability of workers to negotiate issues with line and plant managers. Labor shortages in parts of Mexico that have a longer history of foreign investment, such as the border region, have increased workers' bargaining power as well (Cowie 1999; Peña 1997). More work remains to be done on the rhetoric and vocabularies that structure workers claims in these cases, how differences in institutional form and corporate hierarchy affect the ability of workers to make claims and have them heard, and how workers can obtain the information they need to press claims further up the corporate hierarchy.

Workers in Martinsville experienced job loss as their wages became too costly in a labor market the boundaries of which expanded to include places where workers made in a day what they made in an hour. In Aguascalientes, workers gained jobs selling their labor to corporations that had no ties to the community beyond that labor market transaction. The industry's structure of subcontracting made it difficult for them to know the name of the company that would sell their handiwork, the history of that firm, or the location of corporate headquarters. By law, the contracting firm had no responsibility for their working conditions or wages.

These are 21st-century dilemmas that can perhaps best be understood as dilemmas of deterritorialization. While workers of previous eras had to construct shared understandings and solidarity out of sometimes-fractious communities, under neoliberal production regimes workers must often create community itself before they start to construct solidarity. It is not just the greater mobility of corporations that has changed, but the ways in which firms associate with the places where they do business: the reduction of multistranded relationships with a specific place to single-stranded economic relationships in space (Harvey 1989).

In the 1990s, part-time work, subcontracting, and corporate relocation all challenged the ability of workers to establish lasting and meaningful ties to their employers and their peers. One of the challenges of the antisweatshop movement that emerged in that period, for example, was to help workers figure out who their employers actually were, since the subcontractors who supervised them did not make larger decisions about the production process or conditions of labor. The Justice for Janitors movement in Los Angeles visited the dispersed work sites where cleaning staff worked alone at night to provide them with information about the company that contracted their services and about the union; organizers then followed up with home visits. Bronfenbrenner has argued that spatially dispersed production systems require a new model of union organizing that utilizes grassroots campaigns, house calls, and

intensive personal contact (1993:379). The renewed emphasis of some parts of the labor movement on "social movement unionism" (Moody 1997; Tufts 1998) represents an attempt to reground workplace issues within larger community concerns and to develop alliances among groups working for different social causes.

But while these efforts seek ways to reconnect workers and reestablish their grounds for communicating with and making claims on employers, they do not deal with the difficulties of constructing such community transnationally. Unions such as Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Workers (UNITE) have invested a good deal of effort in educating workers about the way that the globalization of the industry affects their jobs. The union mobilized workers to lobby against NAFTA in 1993–94, the expansion of the Caribbean Basin Initiative and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act in 1999-2000, and China's entry into the WTO in 2000. It encouraged workers to see the connections between free trade and job loss, and between poor labor conditions in developing nations and corporate relocation. But such understandings may have only reinforced a sense of competition among workers in spatially separated locations. Wills (1996) has argued that local political traditions can be translated across space through the movement of workers and through demonstration effects. Activists in the antisweatshop movement of the 1990s, working through nongovernmental organizations, used Internet connections to uncover and transmit information about corporate organization to apparel factory workers. But at the moment, there are few examples of how such community building operates.

Ironically, experiments in transnational organizing have had more success in linking consumers and producers than in linking workers in the United States and Europe with their peers elsewhere. In the apparel industry, the National Labor Committee received significant media attention when it brought to the United States a young girl who had worked in a factory in El Salvador, producing Kathie Lee Gifford's line of Wal-Mart clothing. The girl's account helped consumers understand more about the conditions under which their clothing was made (Ross 1997). The exposure of sweatshops in Los Angeles revealed how subcontracting obscures responsibility for working conditions, prompting movements for reforming the law to hold branded marketers of apparel accountable for labor conditions in the factories that produce their clothing (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000). Creating new networks for sharing such information may not resolve perceived conflicts of interest between workers in the United States and their counterparts elsewhere, but it is the first step in developing the kind of deterritorialized community where such issues can be addressed.

In a period when so much anthropological attention is focused on cultural flows across borders, hybridity, creolization, and transnational cross-fertilization, there has been relatively little attention devoted to transnational labor organizing. Workers in southern Virginia and Mexico can drink the same brands of soft drink, enjoy some of the same films, and wear T-shirts with the same logo. What they cannot yet do is share their concerns about labor practices that increase their stress on the job. They cannot act together to prevent their employers from playing each against the other to discipline and rein in their demands. They cannot engage their employers in a discussion about how the actions of the firm will affect their health or the well being of the communities over the long term. New transnational economic flows alter the institutions and practices of the workplace in ways that require workers to develop new rhetorical resources and new forms of resistance. What contestatory frameworks are available to replace the moral economies of paternalism and the besieged contractual economies of the union? How can workers reestablish sociality and reciprocity as a feature of work—building new transnational territorialities? And what new practices can link

workers across national boundaries and help them address their shared employers based on their common concerns?

The case presented here suggests that spatially dispersed production regimes and casualized bonds between employers and workers erode the local conventions and practices that formerly structured and, to some extent, regulated employment. In so doing, they have profoundly altered the ways that class relations are experienced. In Martinsville, that erosion was felt intensely by workers in the months prior to the firm's bankruptcy, as their former strategies of making and pressing claims were rendered ineffective by the firm's new global logic of production. In Mexico, production arrangements in new apparel factories denied workers the kinds of knowledge, information, and multifaceted face-to-face contact that would have allowed them to make claims on the firm that employed them. While workers could (sometimes successfully) exert pressure on their immediate supervisors, subcontracting firms could also lose contracts for failing to implement recommended practices.

Anthropologists are learning a great deal from research on diasporic communities and the ways that they retain and recreate bonds across geographic distance (cf. Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Ong 1999). Potentially, the same tools could be turned to the understanding of new deterritorialized forms of work. In the ways described here, these arrangements undermine the ambiguous moral economies that formerly structured the day-to-day experience of class for workers and their employers. At the same time, in ways that remain to be studied, they potentially link workers in different parts of the world to each other.

notes

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- 1. In 1999, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, in *Lopez v. Silverman*, found that an apparel manufacturer may be jointly liable for a contractor's failure to pay overtime to its employees. The court examined liability in the context of "joint employment doctrine," which is being tested in other economic sectors, such as janitorial work and agriculture. The case sent shock waves through the apparel industry and is under appeal (see *Bobbin Magazine* 1999).
- 2. In 1987, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that the Mellon Bank in Pittsburgh was a coemployer of the janitors it hired through a contractor, establishing precedent for actions in other parts of the country (Hurd and Rouse 1989).
 - 3. The population of Martinsville was approximately 15,000 in 1999.
- 4. Other firms that declared bankruptcy in the late 1990s included Starter, Pluma, Fruit of the Loom, Oneita, Umbro, and Brazos Sportswear, among others.
- 5. In 1990, 20 firms controlled 38 percent of the apparel market. By 1998, the share of these retailers had increased to 47 percent. Among department stores in 1999, the six largest companies captured nine out of every ten consumer dollars spent (Apparel Industry Magazine 1999; Women's Wear Daily 1998).
- 6. Taylorism refers to the methods of scientific management developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the first decades of the 20th century.
- 7. Maquilas are plants run by foreign investors in Mexico under the terms of specific programs established by the Mexican government.
- In 1995 ACTWU merged with ILGWU (International Ladies Garment Workers Union) to form UNITE.

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