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Jason Pribilsky. *La Chulla Vida: Gender, Migration, and the Family in Andean Ecuador and New York City.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007. xxi + 336 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-3119-4; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8156-3145-3.

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Identity, Family, and the Transnational Experience

The Ecuadorian expression "La Chulla Vida" is Quechua-based, indigenous terminology for a life that is out of natural balance. In this compelling ethnographic study, Jason Pribilsky, assistant professor of anthropology at Whitman College, distills a decade of fieldwork in Ecuador and New York City in a successful effort to discuss transnational migration in terms of gender and family and efforts to "compose" lives that challenge the "Chulla Vida." The first half of this study focuses on the history and experiences of rural families of indigenous background in southern Ecuador who are drawn into the dynamic of illegal labor migration, which eventually locates family members in the borough of Queens in New York City. The second half of the study accompanies those undocumented as they meet the challenges of daily life and struggles to maintain identity and family so far from home.

Pribilsky points out that labor migration has been a traditional response to changing socioeconomic conditions in Ecuador and is not a phenomenon of recent development. The practice by indigenous-based rural communities of dividing up family land to distribute to male children produced a traditional inclination to *minifundia*, or increasingly small landed households. Various episodes of governmental land reform in the middle and late twentieth century accelerated this practice and reduce family farms even more. The traditional response to this dynamic was the combination of some form of artisan craft labor alongside agricultural production to form the economic base for the family. Most notable was the introduction of the production of straw hats in the mid-nineteenth century, which became the thriving "Panama Hat" trade, which lasted into the early 1950s. This artisan-agriculture balance was diminishing just as the banana boom emerged on the coast and the new Cuenca-Guayaquil road appeared. Consequently, from1950 to 1980, a significant labor migration pattern emerged. Many of the families of these southern Ecuadorian communities found the men and boys migrating to the coast for seasonal labor. Pribilsky notes that while this phase of labor migration "did little to alter the core structure of rural life," it did begin a new dynamic of a gendered division of labor (p. 64). Where men and women had equally engaged in both agricultural labor and weaving, the latter tasks now fell almost exclusively to the women of the households, and male children soon defined such work as women's work. Thus the initial pattern of migration and gender effect was in place prior to the next significant experience of the latter decades of the twentieth century.

As the debt crisis, inflation, and high unemployment swept not only Ecuador but also all of Latin America over the "lost decade" of the 1980s, a new labor migration pattern emerged. The "push" was certainly the disrupted economic realities in Ecuador. The "pull" was a unique experience in U.S. immigration policy as a result of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. By providing amnesty and citizenship to previously illegal immigrants, the act functioned as a catalyst to draw Ecuadorians north in search of economic opportunity, not unlike the earlier migration experiences. Ecuadorian immigration increased by 99 percent ranging from 199,000 to over 396,000 from 1990 to 2000, and most significantly, a "disproportionately large" number were undocumented (p.

8). While many of this group landed in Chicago, Miami, or Los Angeles, Pribilsky notes that New York City became the "epicenter" of Ecuadorian immigration (p. 173).

Pribilsky is at his best in his analysis of the socioeconomic and cultural factors within the communities that accompanied the external structural factors of this phase of immigration. Here the author draws out the "agency" or independent choices of the members of the community who embraced the immigration experience. Three interwoven factors are prominent, the "remittance economy," the issue of *nuestro folklorico*, and the theme of progress and modernization.

Soon after the initial immigration experiences, many Andean families began receiving remittances of dollars or material goods, such as appliances, from the fathers and husbands in the United States. This ongoing process ultimately amplified divisions of wealth within the communities between families receiving remittances and those with no men overseas. Prebilsky notes that while the average monthly income for a typical rural family would run from 90 dollars to 170 dollars, a family receiving income from abroad would range from 200 dollars to 250 dollars per month. These remittances allowed for land purchases, home building, and investment in small business. In some cases land values increased and community members with no migrant members were disadvantaged. However, rather than proving caustic to the community, Pribilsky found that in general all members defined the effect of the remittances a mark of *progreso* and modernization, and so an enhancement of the overall community that everyone could take some pride in.

One predominant reason for the positive perspective was that it served as a corrective reaction to the issue of *nuestro folklorico* raised by the Ecuadorian elite. Journalists, educators, government officials, and other representatives of the urban and elite culture spoke and wrote extensively of the evils of the migration process for its effect of destroying the folkloric cultures of the nation. Presented in paternalistic, patronizing, and romantic terms, the demeaning qualities of this concern were not lost on the rural, indigenous communities. Consequently, embracing the migration dynamic with its remittance income and modernizing impact was the perfect chosen response. Within rural communities, as personal networks of migrants emerged and conspicuous consumer goods and new houses demonstrated progress, the decision for new husbands and fathers to migrate became a "certain inevitability" rather than possible alternative. "Indeed, for many couples," Probilisky writes, "the issue was not if a new husband would migrate, but when and how to" (p. 146).

The latter chapters present the author's fieldwork in New York City and focus on three themes: the division of the Ecuadorian community, the migration experience and male gender identity, and the maintenance of family in the transnational experience. The first generation of Ecuadorian migrants to New York was generally white or mestizo upper-class professionals who secured work visas and ultimately permanent residency. The community that emerged from this foundation created neighborhoods, civic and fiscal institutions, sports teams, newspapers, and cultural centers reflecting national pride in their homeland. In many ways this foundation highlighted New York as a desired location for the next generations of Ecuadorians. However, as the Ecuadorian community became over 70 percent undocumented, a sharp division set in. For these immigrants, there is little engagement or contact with the "established" community. As with other undocumented immigrants, their illegal status keeps them peripheral, and as one interviewee expressed it, "We are not part of life here. We float above it. We are here, but we are not" (p. 176)

The theme of gender identity is analyzed through the perspective of the migrant men as consumers. In Ecuador, while the men exercised ultimate authority in a patriarchal household, it was the women who handled the money, budgeted for consumer items, and maintained the household. Now the migrant men had to take on all of those tasks, and not only for their own security and well being, but also as a conscious strategy to maintain the now transnational family. As the men meet the challenge of budgeting and household, Prebilsky finds a "regendering" of this experience with significant positive results. The enhanced family income and ownership of status goods, such as appliances and electronic devices, provide tangible expressions of a continuing transnational commitment. Not only do migrant men reinforce their own economic stability and autonomy, but the remittance economy also proves to be a compelling and essential tool for maintaining transnational family ties. Priblisky thus concludes that "family structures, though, do not merely stay in tact in the context of migration, they also have become amplified, assuming a new importance" (p. 280).

As with all good works of scholarship, the author prompts questions that go unanswered or are beyond the scope of the project. Specifically, it could be worthwhile to further investigate the first generation and le-

gal Ecuadorian community in New York and assess their perspectives on their undocumented countrymen. Is this community more in line with that elite culture which pines for the health of the folkloric culture? O. Hugo Benavides moves in this direction with his study, *The Politics of Sentiment: Imagining and Remembering Guayaquil* (2006), noting a nostalgic tie to a "Guayaquil Antiguo" that exists more as a cultural talisman than accurate history. Also, Pribilsky acknowledges that his focus on masculinity is of one design, but that there is "a plethora of emergent masculinities," and that young men and women in the transnational experience are "in the process of generating new definitions of what it means to 'have gender' in ways unimaginable to previous generations" (p. 278).

La Chulla Vida is a significant and challenging contribution to migrant studies. It not only provides an unusual and detailed case study within an Andean context, but by focusing on gender and family, also enlarges the terms of the dialogue and discussion of migration studies. Pribilsky asks scholars to move beyond standard concepts of gendered roles and state and legal dynamics of identity, to add a degree of depth perception to the transnational experience that may assist in a more nuanced understanding of this universal experience.

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