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# CLPR *working paper*

*Guatemalan Immigration  
to the San Francisco Bay Area*

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## INTRODUCTION

Increasing numbers of Central Americans, primarily from El Salvador and Guatemala, began arriving in the United States in the early 1980s, fleeing brutal military repression and counterinsurgency efforts in their home countries (Hamilton and Chinchilla-Stoltz 1991, 1998; Julian 1994; Benz 1996; Burns 1988). The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) concludes that 200,000 people were killed or disappeared, and that state forces and related paramilitary groups carried out 93 percent of this violence (1999, 18, 20). During the most intense period of the military onslaught, from 1981 to 1983, as many as 1.5 million people were displaced internally or had to flee the country, including about 150,000 who sought refuge in Mexico (CEH 1999, 30). The Guatemalan Peace Accords in 1996 signaled an end to overt hostilities but not to bitter social tensions, political violence, stark inequality, and severe economic hardship, all of which fuel emigration pressures.

Numerous scholars have documented the factors contributing to immigration, particularly the critical connections between economic and political motivations (Richmond 1986; Chávez 1998; Chinchilla, Hamilton, and Loucky 1993; Fagen 1988; Hagan 1994; Vlach 1992; Portes and Bach 1985). Guatemalans, however, add a unique sociocultural dimension to migration flows. Unlike that of other Central American nations, more than half of Guatemala's population is indigenous, from various Maya ethnolinguistic groups, adding complex issues of identity to the immigration experience.

In this study, we explore the stages of migration through an ethnographic study of Guatemalan migrants to the San Francisco Bay Area. Our study first examines the demanding preparatory phase either in Guatemala or the refugee camps of Mexico, then the perilous journey north, and finally the arduous process of settlement in the United States. Two themes intersect throughout the journey: the role of social networks and issues of identity. In our research, we found that social networks are pivotal through all stages of migration and, in turn, intersect with fluid, changing conceptions of identity.

Social networks are fundamental structures that mediate transnational migration (Wilson 1998; Chávez 1998; Sanders and Nee 1996; Sassen 1995; Duncan 1994; Massey et al. 1994; Boyd 1989; Kearney et al. 1989; Coleman 1988; Briody 1987). Within these networks, relatives, friends, and people from the same town or distant communities assist with housing, loans, employment, advice, and other aid. In the preparatory phase, social networks offer the economic resources and emotional support that lay the basis for the journey, beginning with information critical to the decision-making process. During the migratory experience, the shared demands of crossing borders illegally can strengthen networks or, as a result of abandonment, shatter them. At times, new transnational and translocal networks emerge while Guatemalans are crossing with other groups, for example, Mexicans or other Central Americans. During the process of settling in the United States, social networks shape the ways in which the migrant is able to negotiate with both the larger society and local communities. Finally, in some cases, networks offer support for the return journey.

Recent literature on the role of networks among immigrant groups has offered a more sophisticated set of observations than previous research. A variety of scholars have challenged assumptions about kinship assistance, household unity, and gender neutrality and ideas of permanent, unchanging, unfailing networks (Rouse 1991, 1995; Menjivar 1995, 1997; Hagan 1998; Moretti 1999; Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Rumbaut 1992). Networks have been long considered crucial to immigrant flows, primarily from a functionalist perspective. A network in the receiving community provides low-cost housing to new arrivals, as well as aid in becoming oriented to a new

environment, finding employment, and reducing sociopsychological stresses. Menjivar (1997, 105) makes reference to previous work that considers immigrant networks to reflect common goals and interests and praises new work that "avoids the functionalist overtones and consensual tendencies that have characterized most studies of immigrant families and networks, and may capture more accurately the social worlds of immigrants." She examines the conditions surrounding faltering networks among Salvadoran immigrants, drawing on scholars who have considered networks' problematic aspects. She considers recent research that examines, for example, decision-making disagreements along gender and generational lines, arguing that the "context of reception includes political, economic, and community-level factors that influence the viability of immigrant kinship networks." She points out that most conflicts stem from economic tensions—for example, over a family member who does not obtain a job quickly.

Special attention is devoted to social networks because, through them, immigrants tend to select a destination and find employment, and they are fundamental in providing material and emotional support. Our research found ambivalent aspects to social networks as well: they can serve to limit options and restrict opportunities for acquiring new skills and pursuing different employment options. This bias can be gendered and ambiguous. Women can be more limited by networks than men, but they can also find more freedoms for themselves within networks in a new setting, and within the settlement process. Our research provides evidence for a hypothesis that the contexts of reception have been strongly favorable to stable networks among rural indigenous Guatemalans. The specificities of two of our sites--Casa Oakland and a household in Stockton--provide different but strong reinforcements to networks that have been negotiated and strengthened over time and varied conditions.

Although these two receiving contexts do aid in stabilizing networks, we turn back to Menjivar again, who concludes that "social networks ... are not automatically reproduced. Immigration and immigration policy are often based on the assumption that immigrants may rely on ... networks without fail. The insight that this assumption is not independent of forces in the context of reception may serve to illuminate policy" (1995, 230). Her comparative study in 1995 contrasts tensions among Salvadorans with a strong sense of "social obligation among Mexican [immigrant families] to share food with a relative, a compadre, or a friend from home" (225). This type of obligation is strongly felt among many informants. We learned of cases of very low income Guatemalan immigrants who offered material assistance to other Guatemalans who needed help, even when they had no kinship or community ties with them.

Intertwined with networks is the theme of identity. We selected indigenous rural Guatemalans as the group we would seek for interviews, probing self-perceptions of their identities. Did various migrations transform their self-identification? What role do networks play in their construction of self?

Identity had been long considered static, fixed. Compounding this are the "essentialized notions of Mayan identity" (Nelson 1999). Contemporary social scientists view identity as more fluid and linked to social constructions. Or as stated by Berger (1966, 116), "Identity is socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed. People build their personal identities out of the culture they live in." Clearly, then, the construction of identity for a person who has lived dramatic, varied experiences will be a complex, fluid process.

Identities are negotiated via power relationships with Mexicans, with Anglos, with the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service), between genders, and with employers. Gender constructions, particularly the disproportionate number of male immigrants, are crucial facets to understand. Also, communitarian and individual identity formations are key, especially in terms of our methodology: the informants are predominantly living in homes or areas with a concentration of Guatemalans.

Translocality is a logical way of thinking about international migration where the sending and receiving communities continue to interact. And yet, the very factors creating the economic and political motivations for migrating also prevent or weaken ties migrants may have to the larger society or nation in either site (Wilson 1998). Guatemala's history of economic and social marginalization of the indigenous population has contributed to the lack of connection of indigenous Guatemalans to the nation and the subsequent focus on the local. "The anti-democratic nature of the Guatemalan political tradition has its roots in an economic structure marked by the concentration of productive wealth in the hands of a minority. This established the foundation of a system of multiple exclusions, including elements of racism, which is the most profound manifestation of a violent and dehumanizing social system" (CEH 1999, 12).

Rouse, in his analysis of peasant farmers turned wage laborers in Northern California, describes a similar phenomenon. "The simple fact of living within the boundaries of a nation-building state did not mean that people necessarily treated the logic of identity as their only or even their dominant way of understanding personhood and collectivity.... [They] long operated at the margins of state and corporate influence and, as a result, for most people from the *municipio*, it was only when they migrated to the United States that the politics of identification first affected them with significant force" (1995, 369). This lack of stronger societal links not only affects identity, but also forges the basis of the translocal nature of the migration experience.

## METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic methods were invaluable for exploring the system of concepts, beliefs, and practices of migration. We did not seek to map a fixed, static group of people, but rather to understand a fluid dynamic population. The movement of Guatemalan Maya to the United States and its patterns, tendencies, and problems do not exist outside socioeconomic, political, and historical conditions. Ethnography allowed us to analytically develop this context and provided the basis for linking local specificities with global perspectives.

We used several forms of interviews, including key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. We began the research by speaking with individuals who had special information regarding Guatemalans in the Bay Area: key informants who work with immigrants, belong to organizations focusing on Guatemala, or do scholarly research on Guatemala or immigration. These interviews helped us to tentatively map the population and thus focus our efforts on areas with a significant concentration of Guatemalans. The key informants also assisted in building bridges with Guatemalan informants and helped us define networks, employment trends, and related information that might distinguish Guatemalans from other migrant communities.

Social networks were a central focus of our research. A number of questions were key: What types of networks exist, and what is their importance? How do informants' perspectives compare with recent literature on migration and social networks? In what ways do networks crosscut the stages of the migration process, and how do they intersect with gender, migration history, and receiving communities? Are these networks purely positive, or do they impose constraints on members also?

By cross-referencing key informant responses, we developed a demographic picture of the pool of potential participants: where immigrants reside and their living conditions, life histories, and typical employment. This information shaped the interview guide and provided a foundation to discuss critical issues.

Given the difficulty of interviewing undocumented people and the preliminary nature of this study, we make no claim to a representative or randomly drawn sample. Twenty-five rural

indigenous Guatemalan migrants were interviewed; pseudonyms are used in this document to protect their privacy. We sought a group that would embody many of the central experiences migrants face. We interviewed twenty men and five women, ranging in age from sixteen to fifty years old, with most in their twenties or early thirties. The majority had attended primary school for a few years; only three had secondary school or college experience; nearly a third had no formal education at all. The sample included both married and single people; more than half had children, and it was common for the children to remain behind in Mexico or Guatemala. A range of Mayan ethnic groups were represented, including Mam, Ixil, K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Q'anjob'al (some monolingual Spanish speakers did not specify their ethnic origin). All interviewees were of a low socioeconomic level and originally came from rural areas in Guatemala, primarily from the departments of El Quiché and Huehuetenango; nearly all are undocumented, with the exception of a few who have political asylum, work permits, or pending immigration cases.

We conducted one-on-one interviews, using an open-ended format. Special attention was paid to issues that link migration and social structure. The testimonies underscore collective experiences that place the local Guatemalan community in the larger context of political persecution and economic hardship in Central America. We were well aware that people who have suffered political persecution or racism are liable to be skeptical of participating in a study and, once involved, are often guarded in their responses. We sought to address these underlying fears, at least in part, by developing connections via key informants. People were contacted in advance by someone they knew or through a local community-based organization and invited to participate in the research project. After the invitation was accepted, we explained the goals of the project and the structure of the interview and its mechanisms and encouraged participation.

The interviews explored the phases of the individual's migration while mapping the networks that have arisen in the Bay Area. The guide was chronologically organized to begin with the preparatory phase of migration, continue through the experience of migrating, and finally examine the process of settlement in the United States. Each phase was divided into four subcategories that link individual background, broader family and community experiences, and the larger geopolitical context.

We also conducted focus groups, which proved effective in gathering a large sample of data concerning patterns and beliefs. Participants in the groups knew one another, which facilitated discussion. The juxtaposition of shared experiences from Guatemala, the refugee camps, and California against the specific circumstances of individuals provided insights into the complexities and diversity of refugee experiences. Participants would build on one another's statements by sharing a similar experience but would also highlight the diversity of experiences and opinions by offering differing perspectives. By following the lead of the participants, focus groups facilitated discussions around issues that may not have arisen during a one-on-one interaction.

Participant observation was a complementary source of data throughout the research, immersing us in the communities, building new relationships, and establishing bonds of trust. Some of this engagement continues even though the research has been concluded. Several researchers, for example, continue to teach English at Casa Oakland, translate in court, or appear as expert witnesses in political asylum cases.

## THE SETTING

Eduardo Stein, Foreign Minister of Guatemala, estimated that approximately 1.1 million Guatemalans, of a population of 11 million, live outside Guatemala, and of those, less than half have legal status in their country of residence (presentation at the University of California Berkeley,

September 30, 1998, Guatemalan Consulate, October 9, 1999). Guatemalan migration patterns have a significant economic effect on both the sending and receiving countries. Remittances, the earnings sent back to Guatemala by immigrants, currently represent the second-largest source of foreign revenue for the country, surpassed only by coffee (CEH 1999). As a result, economic and social links established by migrants create a system of interdependence not only among individuals, families, and communities, but among nations as well.

The number and distribution of Guatemalan immigrants is difficult to measure accurately, whether in the Bay Area, in California, or in the United States. Many Guatemalan immigrants are undocumented and thus fearful of official surveys. The 1990 census, however, identified 159,177 persons in California as Guatemalan, accounting for 2.1 percent of the state's Latinos and 0.5 percent of California's total population (Stiles et al. 1998, 2-5). Almost 60 percent of all Guatemalans in the United States reside in California, comparable to the percentage of Salvadorans, but higher than that of any other Latino group except Mexicans (Stiles et al. 1998, 1-2).

The Center for Latino Policy Research provides a detailed breakdown based on this 1990 census data, supporting our qualitative findings from key informants. Census tracts in the Mission district of San Francisco, the Fruitvale district in Oakland, and the city of San Rafael in Marin County all have large Latino populations, and the Guatemalan population tends to follow these concentrations. In our own research we found that many Guatemalans in San Rafael come from San Carlos Siga in the department of Quetzaltenango, in what immigration literature describes as a "binational community," a community spread out between two geographical points in constant interaction. Most of these Guatemalans work in construction, landscaping, or domestic work. In Fruitvale, a house called Casa Oakland, coordinated by a local religious organization, hosts around twenty Guatemalan migrants at any given time, with frequent turnover. Male residents here work in construction or gardening and female residents as domestic workers. Further east, Stockton contains a small Guatemalan community which is centered around one particular household, consisting primarily of Q'anjob'al and Mam Maya from Huehuetenango. Focus groups indicate that nearly all these Mayan Guatemalans lived in refugee camps in southern Mexico for up to seventeen years before coming to the United States. Most of the people we spoke with work in the fields and have loose but crucial links to institutions in the East Bay and in San Francisco, making Stockton a useful point of reference for the urban experience of other informants.

These concentrations of Guatemalans share a basic characteristic: people locate in a neighborhood where they can live in common and support one another. In the neighborhoods we visited, there was usually a small grocery store selling a mix of American and Central American products, a courier company for sending remittances back to Guatemala, and lines of men standing along the main street patiently waiting for an occasional—or regular—employer. Guatemalans often live mixed with other Latino groups, usually Mexicans and other Central Americans.

## PREVIOUS MIGRATIONS AND PREPARATORY PHASE

### *Previous Migratory Experiences Inside the Country*

Many rural Maya-origin Guatemalans engaged in other migrations both inside and outside the country prior to making the journey to the United States. Two primary, often intertwined, circumstances explain the internal flow of people from their villages to other parts of Guatemala: economic need and political persecution. Economic need compelled many to make the demanding seasonal treks to plantation regions, to enter the service sector, to colonize remote, humid rain forest areas, or to seek work in the maquiladoras (assembly plants in free trade zones generally set up by

transnational firms). Economic need stems from Guatemala's acutely inequitable distribution of land, which is the basis of livelihood and of the economy. In 1979, 88 percent of farms were too small to provide for the needs of a family (USAID 1982; see Manz 1988a, 1988b). A historical pattern of forced labor and debt peonage on coastal plantations was continued via highlands' communities' needs for wage labor to supplement what they produced on small plots of land. Political persecution was embodied in the military onslaught that drove people from their villages to the rain forest, border towns, elsewhere in Guatemala, or southern Mexico.

Some informants reported having made the seasonal migration to the coast for work since childhood. Considering the harsh economic reality, migration to sugar, cotton, and coffee plantations was undesirable but necessary. The migration was usually done in groups, lasted only for the duration of the harvest (two to four months), and was repeated annually (Bossen 1984). Before ever considering migration to the United States, many Guatemalans had experienced the disruption of being swept up in these seasonal journeys. Anselmo, a married Kaqchikel man with five children, describes the grueling work and the hardships that accompanied coastal migration:

The first time I left my village, I was four years old. We went down to the "*tierra caliente*" [the coast] to harvest cotton. Both my parents and my older siblings worked all day. My little sister and I were always with my mama. I remember how beads of sweat would fall from her. We came from the "*tierra fria*" [the highlands], and we weren't accustomed to the heat nor to so many mosquitoes. Each year was the same: living in the barracks and taking along the few things we had brought with us from one place to another. Then, at night, my mama would soak the corn, make tortillas, and cook beans. That is all we ate. That is the basic food for campesinos. A little egg or meat, that was for fiestas.... I would have been six or seven when I started to work. I remember the bales of cotton we picked. They were taller than me. We worked the whole day. This is how my childhood went, between my village and from one *fincas* to another. I went many times.

In the midst of this scarcity, Anselmo also found personal relationships, ritual, and new experience:

There were many adventures. It was fun to meet girls from other villages who spoke other languages, and at night sometimes, mostly on Saturdays, we would start chatting. If it was Christmas season, *los peones* that lived all year on the *fincas* made *Posadas* [Christmas celebration] and *lous* [nighttime parties with costumes]. The women, after the prayers, served the *tamalitos*. Sometimes, there was even a dance. There were always plenty of drunks and fights. Once my father got drunk, and they had to take him to the hospital. That's how I know about the capital. I had never been to the capital; I didn't know how to speak Spanish well.

### ***Violence and Displacement***

In 1998 the Office of Human Rights of the Archdiocese of Guatemala (ODHAG) completed the Project for the Recuperation of Historical Memory (REMHI). The study recounts 55,021 cases of violence committed during the armed internal conflict, among them 442 massacres committed between 1978 and 1995. The most affected area was the department of El Quiché, whose population is mostly indigenous (86 percent). Two days after the presentation, the coordinator of the project, Monsignor Juan Gerardi, was murdered.



The Commission for Historical Clarification estimated the number of displaced persons between 500,000 and 1.5 million people in the most intense period of violence, from 1981 to 1983, including both those who were displaced internally and those who were forced to seek refuge abroad. Approximately 150,000 people sought safety in Mexico. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), about 50,000 people were assigned refugee status by the Mexican government. Another 50,000 refugees were dispersed throughout Chiapas, Campeche, Quintana Roo, and other states in Mexico. Combining the data of the CEH with other work on political violence in Guatemala, the estimated number of persons killed or disappeared reached a total of over 200,000. Eighty-three percent of fully identified victims were Mayan (CEH 1999).

Sofia is an Ixil woman from Santa Rosa Morelia. Nearly two decades ago, Sofia's young son was kidnapped and killed by the army, and she fled for her life to the mountains. She describes the horrific nature of the experience:

The first time I left my home was when the army came, then we went, just how we were, running to the mountains, fleeing from the army. They [the army] killed my three year-old son, and someone returned him to me in a plastic bag, his little body in parts. It is something I will never recover from. I still cry a lot, I am still very sad. I suffered a lot. Life totally changed for me, I didn't have any reason to keep living anymore. We [the Community of Popular Resistance (CPR)] spent fourteen years in the mountains, surviving off anything. We were from various places; that is where I learned to speak a little Mam, Q'anjob'al, and K'iche'. I had left everything in my house; the army razed everything. We lost everything. At times I didn't even have clothes to wear; I wore nylon to keep the cold out.

After fourteen years in the mountains, she and her husband decided to migrate to the United States. They first went to a refugee camp, which they found intolerable, but which provided an exposure to modernity in the form of documents and access to a network that looked north.

In Mexico where we lived, there were a lot of mosquitoes; there were cattle that didn't let us sleep. The heat was tremendous; it was the same shitty life as in Guatemala, but without the army. Why live like that? There was nothing to lose.... I spent two months in Mexico; I worked for a lady who helped me a lot. When I told her my story, she even gave me a document. I didn't know anything about that; I had never left my village or the mountains. Everything was very quick, like a nightmare. She gave me clothes and money. With that, my husband and I decided to join a group coming to the USA. That's how we passed through Mexico and arrived in Tijuana.

Anselmo related his experience of fleeing Guatemala to Mexico. His journey took him through a decade-long engagement with the insurgents, the death of a brother, and then arrival in the Mexican camps. In the camps, he wrestled with the fear of a Guatemalan military incursion and the hope of a better life in the United States:

I noticed the misery of our people. That's why when the guerrillas came, I joined them. I was in the guerrillas ten years. I was really young when I joined. Everything there was group work, it was a beautiful experience, although with its problems. I learned a lot, but suffered a lot. It's not easy being so long without a house, without anything, moving from one place to another. When I came down from the mountains the first time, I had gone about six years without touching pavement. I even felt dizzy from walking erect. I was also working with a community in resistance in the mountains. Later I had problems, and my family no longer



supported me. I had a brother they killed, you know—it was during the time of civil patrols. Then we went to Mexico; we were all together again [with his children and his wife]. We went to a camp in Campeche. I was there a long time, about four years, but I never got used to it. In addition, I was scared the army would enter the camp and kill us—you hear a lot of things. Also, the work was very hard, and it was living just to live; I didn't have faith anymore. Then I began to save, from my work in the planting and harvesting of coffee in Mexico, in order to come to the U.S. to work and give my family a better life.

The hardship suffered by Guatemalans in their precarious existence as exiles in communities of resistance and in the Mexican refugee camps has been well documented (Simon 1987; Manz 1988a and 1988b; Amnesty International 1990; CIREFCA 1990; Simon and Manz 1992; Falla 1992; Billings 1999, among others). The experience of fleeing one's home, perhaps losing family members in the process, is in itself traumatic. Once in Mexico, the refugees faced additional challenges and crises. For example, the Mexican government relocated many of the refugee camps, and the Guatemalan army staged attacks against the camps even though they were located within Mexican borders. To face in a place of refuge the danger one risked so much to escape, and then to be uprooted again by the Mexican government, is an incredibly strong second blow. Multiple migrations of this kind can, and in the case of Guatemalan migrants, often do lead to a distrust of government agencies. This may later affect the willingness of a migrant to apply for legal residency or to seek out needed health care or social services once in the United States (Miralles 1989). The refugee camps were an extension of suffering that only added to the loss of relatives and the destruction of property.

The move to refugee camps in Mexico involved significant cultural adaptation, making the arrival in the United States less of a transition than for those who come directly from Guatemala. The Mexican experience allowed refugees moving toward the United States to adapt to the changes in culture, language, and environment in stages, stages at times separated by years. This transition takes many forms, from living in a diverse community to being exposed to new sources of information. "In Guatemala we only had a radio and would listen just at night to the news or certain programs," Javier commented, "but in Mexico we started to watch the television all the time."

### *Preparatory Phase*

When imminent threat of violence is not involved, the process of preparing for migration is complex. Immigrants rely on networks, on previous experiences of adaptation, and on family support. The decision to migrate is seldom simply an individual one; the input of family members and acquaintances plays a role. Migration then is both familial and social, with various people, representing distinct points of view and interests, participating in the discussion regarding benefits and drawbacks.

In contrast, migrants who fled their communities in response to the army's scorched earth campaign in the early 1980s had to make the decision instantly. Some informants we spoke with fled massacres in their villages, death threats, or the murder of loved ones. Although family members were involved in the decision to flee and may have participated in the migration itself, the urgency of the circumstances hardly allowed for methodical planning.

As we have seen, many immigrants prepared for the move to the United States after living in Mexico. Every member of the Stockton focus group, for example, had been in either of two camps in Mexico: one near the Guatemalan border and one in Campeche. All were originally from Huehuetenango, and they constituted a network in the camps that supported migration to Stockton.

Though the initial migration to Mexico was often an urgent decision to flee violence, once people arrived in the camps, their decision to migrate to the United States was more carefully considered and arranged.

As an infant, Carmen lived in the jungle for several months after the army burned her village. Her family later returned to the village when it was under army control, and Raquel and other siblings were born in what the military called a "model village." Meanwhile, Javier and his wife and children, from the same village, remained in the jungle for one year as part of a "community in resistance" and later settled in a refugee camp in Mexico. Although each of these informants made decisions defined by their immediate safety concerns, the later decision of migrating to the United States was made over a longer period of time and was more carefully arranged.

Economically motivated migration is often difficult to distinguish from its politically motivated counterpart. Although informants may attribute migration to a single factor, such as "the money didn't stretch," in the same discussion they may refer to political turmoil in the country. Similarly, migrants who explain their motivation as "the army burned our village" may also allude to the impoverished conditions in which they lived. Even when one factor more profoundly affected the decision, other forces influence the choices that are made.

Among the informants in this research project, economically motivated migration tended to have clear goals. The majority of male participants mentioned the desire to earn money for a specific purpose, such as to acquire land, buy a truck, or construct a house. All informants described a logical process for deciding to migrate. Certain factors, such as money, networks, and available assistance, determined the precise opportunity to leave once the decision had been made. Gender issues emerge as central factors. If the migrant is a married man with children, for example, his parents will often take on responsibility for looking after his family. Informants mentioned that the parents receive and distribute the money sent by their children in the United States. They are then in charge of giving *el gasto* (domestic spend) to the wife. In a case like this, the family is fully involved in the decision and in organizing the household around the absence of that family member.

Language abilities also influence the choice to migrate. One informant who speaks Mam as his first language reported that when he told his family about his desire to migrate, his father told him he could not leave Guatemala because he did not speak Spanish and therefore would not be able to survive.

#### ***"My Cousin Helped Me Pay the Coyote"***

Resources are necessary to cross Mexico and to pay a coyote to arrive at a destination in the United States. For a peasant, who earns between five and ten dollars (U.S.) a day, accumulating these resources is an enormous sacrifice and, in some cases, a major family investment. Kelly and Portes point out that "there is little empirical evidence to support the perception that people leave their places of origin pushed by the fear of starvation and abject destitution. In fact, moving away from one's place of birth requires a minimum base of material and human resources, as well as information. Therefore, it is people with some education, some money, and some knowledge about employment prospects who are most likely to migrate" (1992, 272).

The economics of migration is linked to networks. Informants mentioned that relatives from the United States sent them money to pay for the trip north or friends from Guatemala lent them money with the promise that it would be repaid as soon as they had a job. In the collective imagination the idea exists that those who go to the north enrich those who stay in the south. The construction of this image is based on cases of individuals who send money back to their families, are able to build a "good house," take back a vehicle, or buy land to cultivate. Using the case of Mexican migrants who reside in California, Rouse explains that "migration has been seen principally as a way of raising outside funds to finance their local realization" (Rouse 1991, 13).

Consider Carmen and Raquel, two sisters who worked in maquiladoras an hour from Guatemala City. Carmen developed repetitive strain injuries. Feeling she had exhausted all income possibilities in Guatemala, Carmen looked to migration as the only way to find suitable employment. Frustrated by the job opportunities in Guatemala, she hoped to find better work in the United States, where she could earn more and work at a less demanding job. Her three eldest sisters were already in the United States, providing a solid kinship network that could look out for her and provide housing and food while she found a job. These sisters sent enough money to hire a respected coyote for her and Raquel and to make the journey.

Javier's circumstances were quite different. He remained in the Mexican refugee camp for twelve years, during which his family painstakingly saved money for his trip to the United States. "I decided to come [to the United States] in Mexico," Javier recalled. "The money didn't stretch anymore. Many from the camp were coming. I also wanted to try my luck." Carlos described the discrepancy between his life and the stories and pictures of life in the United States as a factor in considering migration. "The Voice of the Americas has programs where they talk about other parts of the world," he told us. "This is how I began to figure things out, and it made me want to know." He continued:

Where I lived, everything was mud. There wasn't water or furniture, nothing, nothing. I saw on the TV how the others lived. When I stayed waiting for my cousin who was already here, he wrote me that I should come, and I came. I saw that those that went to the United States, they returned with money and they could do something. Many even returned with a vehicle ... they returned well-off. Many people want to come just to try; they hear so much spoken about the United States. I also wanted to come to see how it was in reality to be here.

Anselmo explained that the stories shaping his ideas about migration were not those of wealth, but of danger and risk. The economic support of family members already living in the United States and the arrangements made by family members at home to compensate for his absence, however, outweighed the perceived risks.

I thought about it every night [the possibility of migrating]. I talked about it with my wife. She was scared by everything she heard on the radio: about people who get lost in the desert or who die drowning. She told me, "It makes me scared; I don't want you to die like a dog and be eaten by buzzards. I prefer that we remain poor but together." My cousin was going to help me. He had already come once and knew how to do it. He was also going to lend me money [more than \$500]. I was sure my sons would be cared for, since they were going to live with my parents.

In some cases, mixed feelings existed about going to the United States among migrants who had been engaged in the revolutionary movement. Javier described the tension this way: "*Era como venir a la boca del lobo*" [It was like coming to the belly of the beast].

## CROSSING BORDERS

Migrants who cross into the United States confront vicious attacks by gangs seeking to rob or rape them, callous abandonment by the coyote, and the collapse of their dreams through detention and deportation by the INS. Courage, resourcefulness, strength, and religious faith all are drawn upon during the experience. Central American migrants cross various borders and experience

multiple new environments before arriving in the United States. For indigenous Guatemalans, this experience is magnified. Attempting to blend into Mexican society during the journey north, informants reported that they told others they were from Chiapas or other regions of Mexico with large indigenous populations. By assuming this identity, migrants were able to both claim Mexican nationality and explain their indigenous features and flawed Spanish. In this way, the Maya represent a unique migratory experience. Migration becomes more than just the home left behind and the new destination. For many, the journey itself is a transformative experience. As Leo Chávez stated, "The border is a political fiction. The border is both a symbolic and a physical separation. It is a divide that must be crossed, a barrier that must be surmounted, a moment that must be transcended" (1998, 45).

The experience for Mayan Guatemalans of physically crossing the United States –Mexico border is similar in some ways to the experience of any other undocumented Latino immigrant. If it is the first time a person has made such a trip, the experience is jarring regardless of one's background. Increased patrolling and violence along the border make an illegal crossing all the more dangerous. Amnesty International, in a special report regarding the human rights situation along the border, states that "between 1993 and 1996, it is estimated that at least 1,185 migrants died in the attempt to cross the border, and it is feared that the true number is much higher since many bodies are never found" (1998, 6). For women there are additional safety concerns. "Women who attempt to cross into the USA illegally face many perils. The INS enhanced security operations in San Diego, El Paso and Brownsville have channeled migrants to more dangerous, remote areas of desert and mountain ranges, where they are at risk, among other things, of dehydration, hypothermia, drowning or abandonment by their guide if they fail to keep pace with the group. Women are at particular risk of being physically assaulted, raped, robbed or murdered on their journey" (36). Women migrants sometimes pay a higher rate to coyotes, as one woman reported who crossed undocumented with her seven children.

Though crossing borders is a huge risk for migrants, the conditions they leave behind often make such a risk worthwhile. For the Guatemalan Maya who fled the country during the violence of the 1980s, migration presented a possible risk, but remaining in Guatemala would have meant almost certain death or continuing conditions of social violence and extreme poverty. Sofia described her panic when she was detained by the INS and faced deportation to Guatemala.

We ran through the mountains of Tijuana at night. When the INS caught us, I told them I was Mexican, but they didn't believe me. Then they told me to tell the truth; then I told them I was from Guatemala. They told me to sign so they could deport me; I said I didn't know how to sign my name and that I didn't understand what they were telling me. They separated me from the Mexicans. Then they told me to call my lawyer, the court stuff. I didn't even know what a lawyer or a court was, I didn't understand anything, and I barely spoke Spanish. I told them my story, the truth, and I told them, "What the army will do with me when you send me back, you can do here. Please, kill me here. Why would you prolong my crucifixion? Please, please, I beg you, kill me here. You can do it too. I prefer to die here than with the army in Guatemala." I remember how they had killed my son and everything that they had done in my village, with my house, with my animals. I told them, "Don't send me back; it's better if you kill me here. It's the same thing. Why send me back to Guatemala? They are only going to kill me there. I beg you, kill me here." Then the agent felt pity for me and told me that he would not send me back. I was so happy, it was like a ray of sun had entered my life. I was ready to die. They made me sign: I didn't even know how to write my name. I didn't have a lawyer, I defended myself with my testimony, and I told my story. In jail they had us all mixed. There was a Mexican lady that knew the laws. I asked

her to help me write my testimony. Sister Maureen [a nun in the Bay Area] took over my case. I arrived in Oakland, after nearly three months. Here I am in heaven. I am scared to think that it could be a dream, that I am going to wake up and I will be dead. Or that I am in the mountains again. This is like heaven.

Coyotes play an essential yet ambivalent role in the act of migration; they are border specialists. Their reputation, established through word-of-mouth recommendations, often travels through networks to Guatemala to link with those who are contemplating migration. Coyotes negotiate multiple languages, cultures, and legal, geographic, and social landscapes on behalf of their clients and for their own enrichment. They seek out clients who are healthy, eager, determined, and intelligent. Pregnant, ill, elderly, or very young people are considered high-risk and are discouraged or avoided completely. These vulnerable groups might endanger themselves and the group, as well as the coyote's career, which greatly depends on his success rate. Antonia described her experience:

My father lent me the six hundred fifty dollars that it cost. But when we got to Mexico, the coyote had me change out of my *corte* and into pants. Then he realized I was pregnant. He said I had to go back, that I couldn't go like that. I told him I wasn't going back. He told me to go back, have the baby, and then come back. I got angry, and he told me, you're going to have to pay rent, the hospital bill, and then you will end up living on the street. It's better if you go back. But I had already paid my money, which he wouldn't refund. My cousin and the others convinced him to let me go. I didn't even know the others—they were from other *aldeas*, I had never seen them before in my life—but they took pity on me. The coyote demanded more money for me, since I was pregnant. My cousin and my father paid more, like a thousand dollars, and I have finally paid back my cousin, but I still owe my father. For that, I need to keep working. Fifteen people from my village came here, but they live all over—in Chicago, and other women from my town live in Los Angeles with my cousin. Here, Sister Maureen helps me.

The language employed by migrants and others involved in the "border culture" reflects the mythlike status of the coyote, whether positive, negative, or a combination. Accounting for the symbolism of language, Domitilo reflected on the terms used:

You know, I am a peasant. And for us, coyotes are very intriguing animals. And I understand why they are called coyotes. Because they have to be quick, they have to be risk takers, and they have to have strong blood. I prefer to call them coyotes and not *polleros*. Because a *pollero* is for chickens, and we are not cowards, we are not chickens. I prefer to identify them with coyotes.

The ambivalent view of coyotes is a result of the wide range of experiences migrants have had. If a client becomes a risk to the group or to the coyote, the coyote must decide whether to accept that risk or abandon the client. For example, a coyote abandoned Javier in the Arizona desert. After four days without water or food, Javier was convinced he would die. Instead, an INS agent found him and took him to a detention center where he was jailed for three months. Despite this setback, he considered himself lucky to be alive. One of his greatest fears during the journey, being apprehended by the INS, may actually have saved his life.

Coyote stories and legends abound, conveying contrasting fears, trust, and betrayal. For Carmen and Raquel, from Chimaltenango, the coyote trained their group how to "act Mexican," how to dress, what to say in certain situations, and what to expect. Before leaving, the coyote first



came from Huehuetenango to meet with their family and a neighboring family. Their father had heard about him and was told he had a good reputation. Because the daughters wanted to go, the family discussed the coyote's trustworthiness. The father negotiated the price and the details of the trip and was finally satisfied with the terms. The eldest sister, who lived in San Diego, sent the money for the trip, approximately three hundred dollars each. After leaving Guatemala, Carmen and Raquel's coyote took them to a secret house in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, where they hid for one week. He coached them on basic facts, such as the colors of the Mexican flag, the name of the Mexican president, and what Pemex is. They were instructed to identify themselves as Tzotzil Indians, to name a town of origin from Chiapas, and to pretend they were sleeping if soldiers came onto the bus. Once in Mexico City, the group visited the Basilica to say prayers for a safe journey. This is a scene often repeated, as most migrants must pass through Mexico City and the religious aspects of the trip are of central importance to both the migrants and their families. They traveled in secrecy in Chiapas, but in Mexico City, they were free to spend the day like tourists. Both girls were very impressed by the grandeur of the capital. In fact, they described the remainder of the trip, mainly by bus, with happy surprise also. "We traveled like tourists the whole way; it was very easy, it was first class." Pleased with their success, even their clandestine border crossing to El Paso seemed less traumatic. Carmen recalled:

We tried to cross the river one time at night, but the water was too fast, so we turned back. The next morning at nine, we crossed. We could see the guard towers down the river. We had to run across a wide-open area, and we got stuck with thorns from the shrubs. It was easy to cross the river—we waded across, then ran to an abandoned house where we stayed for a while. A man there gave us water, and we waited for our clothes to dry. Then we went to the bus station and rode to San Diego directly. God was with us. Thank God we had no problems. We had very good luck.

Although migrants make some superficial changes to appear Mexican, the INS is often able to identify a Guatemalan. Certain features cannot be modified. "We ran for the mountains in Tijuana," Sofia recalled. "When Immigration stopped us, I said I was Mexican, but they didn't believe me, because of my golden bridge. So, I told them I was a Guatemalan." Physical transformations have additional complications for women, causing them to address identity issues, often for the first time. To cut their hair, for example, or to use makeup or wear tennis shoes or jeans are all traits linked to Ladino, and often masculine, characteristics. Antonia recalls the moment of that physical transformation:

Can you imagine, in the morning when I wake up, I still have my traditional clothes on, but when the coyote arrived, I had my tennis shoes and pants in a bag. I was waiting until the last moment to change into these clothes. If the people in my community saw me dressed like that, they would laugh at me. I didn't want people to think badly of me. I never cut my hair: that was too much for me!

By minimizing indigenous features, clothing, and speech, many Mayan migrants believed they would pass more easily through Mexico and across the border. If detained at the border, by appearing Mexican and claiming Mexican citizenship, the Guatemalans hope to be deported back to Mexico rather than all the way to Guatemala.

## PROCESS OF GETTING SETTLED

### *Initial Impressions: It Was Like a Dream*

When migrants arrive in the Bay Area, multiple barriers to permanent settlement remain, such as the INS and legal problems as well as other challenges related to culture, language, and new social settings. As in the journey itself, networks allow the successful negotiation of these new borders and integration into the life of a new community.

Between the time of crossing the border and the process of settlement, liminal moments exist that are difficult to situate in time and space. People tend to move between their dreams, memories, and reality. With hindsight, informants often describe this initial encounter as seeming as though they were in a dream. This description, however, only emerges with the perspective gained by reflection and a better understanding of those things that initially impressed them. Informants repeatedly referred to an unreal, dreamlike, or even nightmare, experience. "*Todo era como un sueño*" [Everything was like a dream]. Many informants described their first reactions to not being in their home community and to confronting a different reality. Anronia's shock was so great upon arriving directly from her rural community, she could not eat more than crackers and water for a full week.

I had never left my village. I only knew the town next door where we had gone to leave the coffee. But I had never gone anywhere before. I had only ridden in a bus two times; I had not even been to Huehuetenango. Just once I went to Barillas and another time to Xalbal to leave coffee. I had never seen anything, I had never seen what a city was like, or TV. In my village there is no electricity. My mama has never left our village.... I was very frightened; sometimes I still feel that I am in a dream. At first I couldn't even eat.

Some migrants were amused by the gulf between the stories of the United States they had heard and the reality that they were now facing. Many members of a focus group recalled, laughing, how shocked they had been at these contrasts. "Some say that when you come here to the North," Emiliano related, "dollars are lying everywhere, and you just have to go sweeping them up with a broom—they're just lying there. It's a total lie."

Many of the informants, when asked what impressed them the most arriving in the United States, described their surprise about the infrastructure—its scale and modernity. Sofia commented,

In my village there are only small rivers. I had never seen the sea or even imagined it. I thought that the USA was like Barillas, like Altamira, maybe bigger, but I didn't imagine it was like it is. What impressed or surprised me the most at the beginning were the two-story houses and the stories [how do they make them? she asks] and the bridges and the boats and the metro and everything.

Clarivel elaborated:

Here everything is different. In my village the people are very poor; there isn't anything like what there is here. People make their own clothes, eat what they grow or what they are able to buy at the market. If someone wants a chicken, well, you kill it, you cook it, and have fresh broth. Here you go to the supermarket and buy everything. You can even buy food already made. The woman makes tortillas, makes everything. She washes in the river or in the sink; there is no washer or hot water. There is no light or electricity, you can't keep the

food in the refrigerator, and everything has to be fresh since there is no electricity. There aren't a lot of things; I didn't know about "big carrots" until here. Here everything is big, and they have it in bulk, in the supermarket and the stores. I had never eaten fish (I don't like it, just shrimp). Here they even throw away what they don't want; it's a lot of garbage. They take it away in trucks.

### ***Multiple Borders***

Once immigrants are in the United States, the INS remains a concern. Immigrants need to pass several control points near the border and fear INS patrols in the areas where they settle. Day laborers are among the most vulnerable of the undocumented population. They congregate at known stops, or *paradas*, so employers can find them, and thus are at risk for INS sweeps. This experience is comparable to continually recrossing the border, but inside the country. In San Rafael, day laborers stated that the INS sweeps the boulevard every two weeks where they wait for work. "When I was at the *parada*," Javier commented, "the *migra* passed, and I had to jump a fence into a backyard. I asked the woman to let me hide there, and I had to stay for several hours. I was afraid that she would report me."

Adolfo took a train from Encinitas to Los Angeles and hid in the bathroom for the entire trip so the INS would not question him when they boarded the train. He had planned to stay in Encinitas, but a friend told him there was heavy INS patrolling in Southern California and he would be safer in Northern California with his cousin. This fear, plus a contact (diffused network ties) determined his choice to go to the Bay Area. Other informants mentioned similar strategies. Carmen and Raquel were fearful while staying with their sister in San Diego. They kept the curtains closed and were reluctant to leave the apartment. Some people do not even want to leave their rooms. This confinement is a significant phase for many during the process of getting settled. An invisible geography of fear and uncertainty, based on power relations that relate specifically to undocumented immigrants' conditions, means that private and public spaces are constituted differently for them.

### ***Translocality***

The term *translocal* designates a current pattern of migration, and of interrelations between places and people... " Many such locations create complex conditions for the production and reproduction of locality, in which ties of marriage, work, business, and leisure weave together various circulating populations with kinds of locals to create neighborhoods that belong in one sense to a particular nation-state, but that are from another point of view, what we might call translocalities" (Appadurai 1996, 192).

For rural indigenous Guatemalans, a strong link to Guatemala as a nation may be subsidiary—to the extent that it exists at all—to ties to the *aldea* (small village), ethnic group (twenty-three languages are spoken), or extended family. The idea of locality is rooted in the *aldea*. Becoming translocal requires people to expand their notions of territorialization to larger geographies: where a Guatemalan might initially regard the *aldea* or perhaps the municipality as the key reference of his or her spatial identity, migrating requires a larger frame. Thus, in an interview in Stockton, informants identified their *aldea*, the municipality, the department, and then Guatemala as their point of reference. Without dropping the most local, they add to this to give the listener a better understanding of their sense of place. When asked about identity, people often consider themselves Mam, Q'anjob'al, or K'iche'. Also, other informants respond that they are Guatemalan, but that being Guatemalan has a localized significance, referring to their immediate municipality.



## *Networks*

Casa Oakland residents have a tendency toward insularity vis-à-vis the larger society, a characteristic reinforced by their not feeling safe in the neighborhood and usually going places in small groups rather than alone. Within Casa Oakland, migrants receive substantial support from North American community-based organizations, particularly one that assists them specifically as recently arrived Central Americans. The organization began as a response to the large numbers of refugees from the wars in the 1980s and thus is sensitive to the context of their sending communities. This form of support reinforces their identities as Guatemalans, encourages them to celebrate their cultural identities, and also relieves material pressures and tensions.

The Stockton household is not as closely connected to this support organization, receiving only legal aid rather than other material assistance. Networks, however, tie residents to refugee camps in Mexico and to Guatemala. Almost everyone traces their heritage to Huehuetenango, and all participants in our focus group lived in one of two refugee camps in southern Mexico. The camps, home to an entire generation of Guatemalans who were raised there, possess strong social networks that initially aided settlement in Mexico and were effective in fighting for refugee rights there. These networks were reconfigured in Stockton and continue to be linked to those who remain in Mexico. This maintaining of networks over widely disparate conditions is remarkable and poses an extraordinary contrast to the difficulties that Menjivar (1995, 1997) and others document among other immigrant communities.

The impulse to migrate is often embedded within myths, but networks guide the migratory journey itself. One participant had imagined the United States to be one vast city, with no countryside or undeveloped land. Although part of this image was constructed from media such as television, the specific plans for where to migrate were developed within specific information flows among friends and family, not within a more abstract framework of depersonalized geographies. "I had a cousin who I knew was in Pittsburgh, but I didn't know his phone number, nor where Pittsburgh was," Ernesto said. "Now I have his phone number, and he has told me that, if necessary, I can join him there and he can get me a job."

Communities are partially reconstituted in the States, due to the networked migration of part of the village population. Several informants were advised to go to Oakland because they could be helped there. When Adolfo arrived in the United States, he hardly had any contact besides the cousin of a friend he had heard was living in a refugee home in Oakland. Networks constitute "social capital," as they offer different contacts and opportunities from which the migrant can choose. "Although the occupational niche of the first migrants from a community is often a matter of chance," Massey writes, "once migrants become established in a particular occupational-industrial position, they tend to channel other towns-people into the same structural location, thereby determining the character and composition of the subsequent stream" (Massey et al. 1994).

The Stockton household has developed a strategy in the local agro-industry. Most Mexican migrant laborers return to Mexico during the slower season, beginning in November, so although far less work exists during the winter months, the Guatemalans can position themselves as the predominant workforce during this time. Thus, although subordinate to the Mexican working population overall, the Guatemalans have established a specific role that allows them to continue generating income during the slower work period.

Gender differentiation runs through networks. Hagan (1998) observes that men's networks expand as they settle into work and life in the United States, while women's networks contract. This distinction is rooted in the type of work that immigrants deem suitable for men and women and by the type of workers that employers seek. Thus, two separate and specific constructions of gender

and class intersect, and Guatemalan Mayan men typically work in landscaping, day labor construction, and janitorial work, while women typically do domestic work and child care. Men, then, find themselves in the public sphere, working with many other people, waiting for work on the street, and networking together for employment openings, while women work for an individual boss (*patrona*) within a private household. This differentiation reinforces our study's gender bias toward male informants. Although more men migrate to begin with, women who migrate tend to be less accessible for this type of study. In San Rafael, dozens of men were waiting to be hired along the main boulevard and told us that Guatemalan women were either at home or working in private homes at jobs they obtained through more personal networks.

Although a recent migrant obtains a job through local networks, the migrant will then be incorporated into larger Mexican, Salvadoran, or other Latin American circles once on the job. For example, in Stockton, informants described a sense of unity among field-workers that transcended national Spanish-speaking groups. Although a particular network provides access to employment, the job exposes one to additional networks. The new relationships among day laborers in San Rafael, for example, illustrate the "strength of weak ties in networks expansion" (Wilson 1998, 397).

"A series of open concentric circles can be envisioned, describing a continuum from the most dense to the most diffuse network members" (Wilson 1998, 398). Hagan (1994) found that networks for employment among the Maya in Houston are so strong that those currently employed with a company recommend friends or relatives so that most available positions are never posted for the general public. Workers who hear of a vacant position or know of someone being promoted or transferred immediately confer with friends and acquaintances so as to have a recommendation prepared for the manager. A similar labor network was observed in Stockton, and, despite the transitory nature of agricultural work, word-of-mouth information regarding positions and practical support such as transportation were present. These employment networks are not universal, but industrial or occupational patterns exist nonetheless. Maya in Los Angeles are dispersed into various sectors, but 90 percent are estimated to have worked in the garment industry at one point since their arrival (Loucky 1995, 31). Unlike the Houston Maya, 75 percent of Mayan respondents in a survey conducted in Los Angeles said that they had received assistance from a relative or friend upon arrival, but only 25 percent of these reported that the aid took the form of job placement (32). Though this is no small amount, it does not compare with the significant employment assistance reported in Houston.

All female informants in the Bay Area worked as domestics or in other gender-coded jobs, such as seamstress or cook. The Houston research indicates similar trends; nearly 97 percent of Mayan women there were employed as domestics (Hagan 1994). Domestic work is usually done alone and in an unfamiliar space, thus it can lead to a sense of isolation from the larger society and from local networks. This experience is in sharp contrast to that of the men, who tend to work together more and interact with other communities. This employment pattern for women limits their access to established networks and their ability to create new ones.

Another significant gender distinction is that women are more likely to follow relatives than their male counterparts. Men may wait on roadsides for work as day laborers; women remain in the home until work is secured. Generally, members of the extended family assist in seeking work on the female migrant's behalf. When Sofia left her village, she borrowed money from a cousin living in the United States who later helped her to find work in a house where he worked as a gardener. After working for six months, she was able to repay the debt to him and pursue her own employment options. Her decision to migrate was anchored in family, reflecting a pattern in women's networks.

Many migrants, especially at Casa Oakland, voiced an idealistic vision of the country in which they had recently arrived. "Here the Americans give away everything," Antonia remarked; "they are very kind. At Casa Oakland they bring us bread, bags full of clothes. Since I've been here I

haven't even bought a pair of shoes; everything has been donated—and nice things. They are very kind." This community-based network augments immigrants' impressions of a culture where class-based behavior is not as sharply marked as in Guatemala. Those who do not find a network like this, however, can find systems to be far less accessible and friendly.

Networks can also have negative consequences, such as hindering English-language acquisition, which would expand options for employment, social services, and legal assistance. In addition, networks can fulfill immediate needs such as housing and food upon arrival but can falter in the longer term. Although participants were mainly part of "immature" migrations, we were surprised by the resiliency of networks and the amicability of households, which stand in contrast to portrayals by studies of other immigrant groups or more "mature" flows. For example, Menjivar (1995, 1997) observes familial conflicts over employment, household expenses, and other issues among recently arrived Salvadorans in San Francisco. (There is need for caution when discussing "mature" migrations: there is no clear indication that recently arrived Guatemalans are on a path to bringing their families or permanently settling here. Although some have plans to do so if the opportunity arises, others are specifically saving for an investment in Guatemala or Mexico.)

### ***Cultural Identity***

The interviewees in Stockton expressed a sentiment that closely parallels Rouse's analysis of Aguilillans (1991, 1995). These Guatemalans insisted upon the notion of a unified, campesino character of the household. They portrayed themselves as a solid community, with strong links to families in refugee camps in Mexico, with a common location of origin, and with a common goal of working in agriculture to earn money to live and to support faraway families. Although some members of the household were born in Mexico, and perhaps half were reared in Mexico with no memories of Guatemala, all self-identified as Guatemalans. When asked about language, most stated Mam as their primary language, although there was a marked generational difference. This translocalized community, then, sees itself as a branch, or satellite, one of several locations of a people united by family ties, culture, and shared history.

In contrast, Casa Oakland is a transitional home for immigrants from all parts of Guatemala, with various languages, migration experiences, and goals. Situated in a large and diverse urban area, Casa Oakland is a valuable support network for new arrivals who need to find their way. Most residents work as day laborers in construction and landscaping, but some branch out into bakeries, restaurants, and other parts of the service sector. Javier justified his choice of work as a gardener by stating that he only knew about the land, so this job draws upon his skills and culture as a campesino. Thus, he incorporates his current work identity with a deeper sense of his historical identity.

All of the informants we interviewed spoke Spanish, some fluently and others haltingly. Spanish is essential to their daily existence, as most live in Latino neighborhoods where Spanish can be more common than English. Interviews conducted at Casa Oakland revealed that many indigenous Guatemalans continued to speak in their Mayan language with other residents of the house. For those who were living in Mexico prior to coming to the United States, this represented the opportunity to engage themselves with their first language again after many years. One informant said he had not spoken Mam for ten years after leaving Guatemala and living in Mexico. Upon his arrival at Casa Oakland, he found himself living with others from his region and began to speak Mam again. "It's a miracle," he remarked. To go so far from one's home, culture, and language only to encounter it again in the United States was an unexpected, but pleasant, surprise.

Rouse (1995) in "Questions of Identity" is skeptical about the universality of identity formation. Most importantly for our project, he challenges the notion that the presence of multiple identities within migrants is only a transition from one identity to the new, static, assimilated immigrant. Although a large number of informants do not wish to return to Guatemala, there is no evidence that they see themselves on a linear path toward becoming Americans. In the majority of observed cases, Guatemalan men strive to appear Mexican. In part, this can be understood as an acknowledgment of the long history of Mexicans in the United States, particularly in California. Mexican and Chicano lives and migrations are integrally woven into the history of California; in contrast, Guatemalans were few in number before 1980. Guatemalan men pay close attention to clothing styles, language, and mannerisms and strive to appear "Mexican," particularly when seeking work. Denying any discrimination or resentment on the part of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans the focus group in Stockton claimed to enjoy a supportive, unified relationship with Mexicans in the area. They did discuss tensions with neighbors, however. They feared being reported to the INS and feared other agencies, such as the Health Department. They have more residents per household than allowed by city codes, and they know the neighbors think they are different and strange. One proposed solution is to pool money and buy a little *ranchito* where they could live as a household but without meddling neighbors.

This shifting identity is complex and ambiguous. In a nightclub where the majority were of Mexican origin, for example, the Guatemalans emphasized their "Mexican macho" style of appearance, wearing boots, jeans, and silver *charro* belts. "Can you imagine being dressed in a traditional way here? No way! Everybody will make jokes about us: the little Indians," Ernesto commented.

In the context of "Mexicanization," we find multiple, multilocal, and fluid identities, "especially for those that challenge the idea of loyalty to a single sovereign state" (Rouse 1995, 353). The form of male Mexicanization is associated with a *norteno* rural aesthetic of the people who are actually working in the fields and, thus, is a role model for the reconstruction of identity that is chosen by Guatemalan men who are seeking a practical and meaningful identity within a new context. Men frequently Mexicanize themselves as a survival strategy, because, in their view, Mexicans have a deeper history and relation to the area than new immigrants. There is also the more immediate fear of deportation to Guatemala. Men are at greater risk because of their work sites, their visible presence. In San Rafael, for example, men are exposed in a public space every day, waiting to be picked up for work. Two fascinating questions remain unanswered: To what extent have men internalized fears of appearing Mayan so that Mexicanization is desirable? Has that translated into an internalization of Mexican values and icons?

Nearly all male informants say they identify themselves as Guatemalans or as members of their ethnic group. Informants seem comfortable balancing acceptance and pride in their own identity and incorporation of new influences, both by choice and out of necessity. For women migrants, the issues of cultural identity once in the United States are experienced and articulated much differently. In contrast to male informants, they express a desire to maintain a strong connection with Guatemala and the traditions of their families and communities. When we asked of three women, "What would you have liked to bring with you?" they all mentioned, "My *traje*." Sofia described the longing for her traditional dress in the following context:

[In Guatemala] we have nothing. We are simple country people. There aren't any stores to buy things. One finds other ways to be entertained. There aren't games; you don't go to big stores. There are not any stores, we only go sometimes to Barillas but just to buy food. My dad bought us clothes and shoes and school notebooks when we needed them. What I would like to do now is send for my *traje* that I left there. It cost a lot of money, and it was

almost new. The shipping is very expensive, but when I have the money, I will have it sent to me. I miss wearing it, although I would only wear it in the house.

Antonia elaborated on these sentiments:

The first thing I'll do when someone goes there is have them get my *traje*. It's very lovely, and I miss having it. I am used to having my waist wrapped snugly in a sash. Without my *corte* I feel like my stomach is loose. I'm going to wear my *traje* here, like Rigoberta Menchú. At least I will wear it at home, and when I leave the house, maybe I will change into other clothes. But I see the women from India, they wear their *traje* here, and they are very beautiful.

This discrepancy between responses from male and female informants is in part due to differences that existed in Guatemala, where women continue to wear traditional clothing and most men wear Western-style dress. This distinction in Guatemala is translated into the new setting of the United States.

### ***Relations with Other Latinos and Other Ethnic Groups***

The relationship of Mayan Guatemalan immigrants in the United States with other ethnic groups begins with the social fabric of Guatemala itself. For indigenous Guatemalans, contact and connection with Ladinos is limited and often impeded by geographical distance. This separation begins to blur, however, once the experience of migration is encountered. Whether due to internal employment migration or international political migration, new alliances form among diverse parties. Common past experiences and present challenges bring together diverse Guatemalans, in some instances people who would otherwise never meet. The refugee camps of southern Mexico are a graphic example of this phenomenon, though it occurs in an infinite number of ways and places. Arrival in the United States further deepens the bond among Guatemalans and expands the social context in which they exist as a group. "I knew that in Guatemala, there were Q'anjob'ales, Cobaneros, who spoke other languages," Sofia stated. "One of my aunts married a Cobanero. I didn't know him before. The others are Ladinos, who only speak one language. They don't know about customs like we Mayans do."

Contact with people from non-Latino ethnic groups has been limited for many informants, as most live in predominantly Latino neighborhoods and work in fields dominated by Latino laborers. Experiences ranged from superficial observation to continuous working relationships to assistance with needed services. One informant reported working with an Asian-American man who spoke a little Spanish and would, in turn, teach the informant certain things in English. Other informants had less one-on-one contact and shared their general impressions, frequently stereotypical. "The blacks are like us, only different: they shout a lot and walk in the street with their radios," Tomas related. "Also the Mexicans. They hang out on the corners and drink a lot. The others that speak Spanish are faster and shout more." Clarivel remarked that in the United States "there are many people. In *Guatemala* we are just indigenous, and there are Ladinos, but there aren't Chinese or black people." Antonia shared her impressions:

I had never seen black people, I didn't know they existed. At first it caught my attention: they eat the same, laugh the same; they are like me. Later in Oakland where I live, there are

many: I am always staring at them, I just feel they are different. With the Asians it's not the same, they look more like Guatemalans.

Some impressions were vague; others were stronger and more specific. Based on a migrant's experience with social service organizations, perceptions of mainly white Americans can be positive. Javier, who has received legal and housing assistance from a religious organization, reported the following. "The Americans who speak Spanish are really great; I think they are delightful. I've even eaten at restaurants with them, and they have asked me for my testimony. I have spoken with students—they are so educated." Javier continued, "And the people never leave someone alone and helpless. On the bus, someone helped me find my way, and in San Francisco, someone helped me buy a BART ticket without even knowing me."

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this preliminary ethnographic study, we explored the intersection of social networks and identity among rural Mayan Guatemalans in Northern California. These networks are the social highways transporting increasing numbers of Guatemalans to new communities in the United States. What began as an anguished and tumultuous exodus to refugee camps in Mexico in the early 1980s, as a result of the vicious counterinsurgency war inside Guatemala, evolved into a further migration to the United States and now continues despite the formal cessation of hostilities. Although the bloody war has officially ended, we found that people's sense of insecurity, marginalization, vulnerability, and neglect remains. For the youth there are few economic options. The study explored the stages of migration from its origins in either the terrified flight from villages under attack or the more measured separation from refugee camps in Mexico to the anxiety-filled arrival in the United States.

Our research, conducted primarily in Oakland, Stockton, and San Rafael, revealed the importance networks play in each stage of the journey north: from the initial idea of migrating, to preparing the journey, through the crossing first of Mexico and then of the border with the United States, to the difficult settlement in an overwhelmingly different environment in the Bay Area. These networks provide the economic resources, the guidance, and the emotional support to endure the journey. In the case of the Guatemalans we interviewed, we found the networks to be stronger and more resilient than other researchers had concluded in the context of Salvadoran immigrants.

Intertwined with the social dimensions of networks were complex, evolving, at times conflictive notions of identity and gender. Contradictions abound: networks open doors to new worlds, yet restrict the options women may act on; migrants began with a strong identity fixed on the local, yet under the pressures of a new life and the process of integration into a new community gained a stronger vision of being Guatemalan, even Latino. Assimilation often involved appearing more Mexican rather than becoming more like the dominant culture.

In scholarly terms, the research posed important questions concerning the evolution and interaction of networks, identity, and gender over time and in evolving communities. In policy terms, this preliminary study underscored the importance of networks both in understanding and in relating to this growing immigrant population.



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