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Sarah J. Mahler

MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONAL ISSUES.

RECENT TRENDS AND PROSPECTS FOR 2020

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Executive Summary

Central America has been a locus of migration, both internal and external, for generations; this fact is unlikely to change in the next two decades. However, migration does not affect the region uniformly. Some countries and communities are highly impacted while others are little affected. Given this textured reality, it is very difficult to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the role of migration to Central America's development that is truly regional. Rather, the evaluation and prognosis both need to be attentive to nuance and differentiation as much or more than to large-scale trends.

Central America is characterized both by regional migration as well as emigration abroad, to the U.S. in particular. It is also a geographic bridge to North America that has become a conduit for extra-regional migrants seeking entry into North America. In short, Central America is a crossroads of many different migratory streams. This complex reality has several implications. First, the region is knitted together by migration, creating a need for regional strategies to address the issues that arise from this trend. Second, and in contrast to the first point, the region is also strained — wittingly or not — by migration, particularly intra-regional flows (e.g., Nicaraguans to Costa Rica). These stresses can pressure national governments to think and act unilaterally, undermining regional approaches. However, during the 1990s the foundations were laid for regional coordination and cooperation regarding migration, human smuggling, reception of deportees, and other subjects that are likely to continue in the coming decades. These programs provide an institutional layer to mitigate against tensions that arise from migration. The organizations involved include the Comisión Centroamericana de Directores de Migración as well as the Regional Conference on Migration, best known as "Proceso Puebla," which has expanded beyond its Central and North American beginnings to include officials from across the hemisphere. Still lacking is concerted attention to those communities most affected by migration. This report calls for addressing these concerns at least partially through the formation of Migration Councils (detailed below). These bodies would be amply constituted and charged with helping communities meet their needs as well as interfacing with larger, regional efforts.

Two current trends in regional migration are expected to persist into the future. First, rural-to-urban migration will continue as small-scale

agriculture declines, pushing thousands of low-skilled workers into urban labor markets, agribusiness, and seasonal labor markets, and into nodes of opportunity in a handful of growing sectors of the economy. As identified in the Zuvekas report for Central America 2020, the likely growth sectors are manufacturing (particularly maquilas), tourism, and services. Within the last category, financial services (accounting, customer orders, payroll, and so on) are likely to prosper in countries such as Costa Rica, where human capital levels are highest in the region. Second, such stable and relatively well-paying jobs will probably stimulate the demand for secondary services – such as domestic labor – which, in turn, will attract less-skilled labor, often imported from neighboring countries. This bifurcation of the service sector into highly paid native workers and poorly paid immigrant workers is already apparent in Costa Rica. It is also characteristic of the United States, where Central American immigrant workers have found employment niches as nannies, landscapers, and house cleaners to middle-class Americans (Mahler 1995, Sassen 1988).

With regard to migration, a combination of factors, including regional conflict and sustained demand for low-cost labor, have led to exponential growth in migration of Central Americans northward into the United States, Mexico, and Canada over the past two decades. I expect emigration to continue, albeit at an attenuated pace, over the next decades, driven by Central Americans petitioning for their relatives as well as enduring demand for labor in the North. A consequence of this migration has been and will continue to be growing interdependency between Central and North America. A predominant feature of this interdependency is remittances, which currently support if not sustain economies in much of the region. Contrary to some scholars (Pérez Saínz's report, for example), I do not predict remittance levels to fall in coming years, in large part because of sustained emigration.

Remittances sustain the economies of several countries; in the larger picture of migration, however, they mark but one of several economic, political, and cultural linkages between Central and North America. Termed "transnational migration" in contemporary scholarship, this hybridity will be felt most critically in certain countries and regions of Central America, though its imprints will transform certain areas of North America as well. In response, public opinion in the North may grow increasingly anti-immigrant, leading to the adoption of even more restrictive immigration legislation by the affected countries than the strict measures passed in the second half of the 1990s. If this occurs, it

will only intensify the vulnerability of many Central American migrants, particularly those whose status is not permanently legal. In turn, this vulnerability may strain diplomatic relations between North and Central America. Alternatively, if growing numbers of migrants become naturalized citizens abroad and therefore qualify to vote, they may increase their lobbying power to shift policy makers' opinions toward expanding, not restricting, immigration legislation. This latter possibility will hinge on the degree to which Central American immigrants in the North can form coalitions with other immigrants to broaden their political influence. Finally, Central Americans living abroad are pressing for an expansion of their political rights vis-à-vis their homelands, including the right to dual citizenship/nationality and voting from abroad. Given their economic clout, they are likely to win gains that will make them pivotal political players at home as well as away.

The report ends with a general call for a regional needs assessment study to identify areas, communities, and urban neighborhoods most affected by different types of migration and the issues that are most pronounced in these areas. A more specific proposal follows for the institutionalization of Consejos de Migración, or Migration Councils, in each country. These councils would operate nationally and coordinate regionally, interfacing with migration-impacted localities as well as with regional efforts such as Proceso Puebla and the Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (SICA). Communities would bring development projects to the council, which would be responsible for evaluating projects and helping different sectors — government, community, and migrant — obtain resources to implement approved projects. Beyond addressing the specific needs of each country and its migration-impacted populations, the councils would also be expected to meet periodically in regional fora to discuss the progress and problems each face as they evaluate funded development projects. Moreover, they would become organizations with abundant knowledge to offer in the exploration of regional initiatives. The councils would form an important middle layer between existing regional and hemispheric migration organizations, such as Proceso Puebla, Comisión Centroamericana de Directores de Migración, and small-scale communities impacted by migration.

Resumen Ejecutivo

Durante generaciones América Central ha sido un *locus* de migraciones internas y externas, y este hecho no tiene trazas de variar en los próximos dos decenios. Sin embargo, las migraciones no afectan a toda la región de la misma manera; de hecho, en ciertos países y comunidades el fenómeno tiene un gran impacto, mientras que en otros pasa casi inadvertido. Dados los matices de esta realidad, se hace difícil hacer una evaluación integral y de alcance realmente regional sobre el papel de las migraciones en el desarrollo de América Central. Ante ello, la evaluación y la prognosis necesitan prestar igual o mayor atención a los matices y a la diferenciación que a las tendencias a gran escala.

América Central se caracteriza tanto por los movimientos migratorios intrarregionales como por la emigración hacia el extranjero, especialmente hacia Estados Unidos. En su condición de puente geográfico hacia América del Norte, la región es lugar de paso para emigrantes extrarregionales que buscan seguir al norte. En pocas palabras, América Central se ha convertido en una encrucijada en donde confluyen múltiples corrientes migratorias. Esta compleja realidad tiene varias repercusiones. En primer lugar, las migraciones son un factor unificador en la región, lo cual plantea la necesidad de elaborar estrategias de alcance regional para abordar los temas que surgen de esta tendencia. Segundo, y en contraste con lo anterior, consciente o inconscientemente la región se ve tensionada por las migraciones, especialmente las intrarregionales (p. ej., los nicaragüenses que emigran a Costa Rica). Estas presiones a veces hacen que los gobiernos piensen y actúen de manera unilateral, lo cual desvirtúa las propuestas regionales. Sin embargo, durante los años 90 se sentaron las bases para la coordinación y la cooperación regional sobre migraciones, contrabando de personas, recepción de deportados y otros problemas que sin duda seguirán de actualidad en las próximas décadas. Ahora bien, estos programas entregan una base institucional sobre la cual mitigar las tensiones que surgen con motivo de las migraciones. Los organismos involucrados en estos programas son la Comisión Centroamericana de Directores de Migración y la Conferencia Regional sobre Migración, más conocida como el “Proceso Puebla”, el cual ha dejado atrás sus orígenes exclusivamente centro y norteamericanos para agrupar hoy a representantes de todo el

hemisferio. No obstante, aún falta una atención concertada hacia aquellas comunidades que se ven más afectadas por los fenómenos migratorios. El presente informe formula un llamado a abordar esta problemática, al menos de forma parcial, a través de la conformación de Consejos de Migración (ver detalles más abajo). Estos organismos de carácter amplio estarían a cargo de asistir a las comunidades de base a satisfacer sus necesidades y serían los interlocutores de las iniciativas de alcance regional.

Las migraciones regionales actuales muestran dos tendencias que con toda seguridad persistirán a futuro. Una de ellas es el éxodo del campo a la ciudad, el que continuará en la medida en que la pequeña agricultura siga decayendo y obligando a miles de campesinos malamente calificados a buscar trabajo en las zonas urbanas, en actividades agroindustriales, en ocupaciones de temporada o en los polos de desarrollo de algunos sectores de la economía. Como señala el Informe Zuvekas para América Central 2020, los sectores con mayores probabilidades de crecimiento son las manufacturas (especialmente maquiladoras), turismo y servicios. Dentro de esta última categoría, los servicios financieros (contabilidad, pedidos de clientes, planillas de pagos, etc.) tienen mayores posibilidades de prosperar en países tales como Costa Rica, que muestra los niveles de capital humano más altos de la región. En segundo lugar, este tipo de empleos estables y relativamente bien remunerados probablemente estimularán la demanda por servicios secundarios - de tipo doméstico, por ejemplo - lo cual, a su vez, terminará por atraer mano de obra menos calificada, especialmente desde países vecinos. Esta división del sector servicios entre trabajadores nacionales bien remunerados y trabajadores inmigrantes mal pagados ya se está haciendo aparente en Costa Rica. Este fenómeno es también característico de los Estados Unidos, donde los inmigrantes centroamericanos cumplen funciones de cuidadores de niños, jardineros y aseadores en casas de norteamericanos de clase media (Mahler 1995, Sassen 1988).

Respecto de la migración, durante los últimos dos decenios una conjunción de factores, entre ellos los conflictos regionales y la demanda sostenida por mano de obra barata, han causado un aumento explosivo en la emigración de centroamericanos hacia los Estados Unidos, México y Canadá. A mi juicio, si bien a un ritmo atenuado, esta emigración continuará durante los próximos decenios, especialmente a medida que los emigrantes originales pidan a sus familias y que se

mantenga la demanda de mano de obra. Una de las consecuencias de esta emigración ha sido y seguirá siendo la creciente interdependencia entre Centro y Norteamérica. Una de las características predominantes de esta interdependencia son las remesas de dinero, las cuales actualmente aportan – cuando no sostienen – a las economías de gran parte de la región. Al contrario de otros investigadores (ver el informe de Pérez-Saínz, por ejemplo), no pronostico una caída en los niveles de remesas en los próximos años, en gran medida a causa de la emigración sostenida.

Si bien las remesas sostienen la economía de varios países, en el contexto general del fenómeno migratorio éstas sólo ponen de relieve uno de los muchos nexos económicos, políticos y culturales existentes entre Centro y Norteamérica. Denominada “migración transnacional” en los estudios actuales, esta hibridación se hará sentir con mayor fuerza en ciertos países y regiones de América Central, aunque su impronta también transformará ciertas regiones de América del Norte. En respuesta a este fenómeno, existe la posibilidad de que la opinión pública estadounidense reaccione con una actitud anti-inmigrante, lo cual podría llevar a la adopción de normas aún más restrictivas que las promulgadas durante la segunda mitad de los años 90. De ocurrir, ello hará más vulnerables a los emigrantes centroamericanos, especialmente aquellos que carezcan de residencia legal. A su vez, esta mayor vulnerabilidad podría tensionar las relaciones diplomáticas entre Norte y Centroamérica. Por otra parte, si un número suficientemente grande de emigrantes adquiere la nacionalidad del país y por ende el derecho a voto, éstos podrían aprovechar su mayor peso político para presionar a las autoridades locales a ampliar las normas migratorias en lugar de restringirlas. Esta última posibilidad dependerá de la capacidad de los inmigrantes centroamericanos para conformar alianzas con otros inmigrantes a fin de ampliar su influencia política. Por último, los centroamericanos que viven en el extranjero están exigiendo mayores derechos políticos en sus países de origen, incluyendo el derecho a la doble nacionalidad y a votar en las elecciones. Considerando su peso económico, es muy probable que logren lo que se han propuesto, con lo cual pasarían a convertirse además en actores políticos centrales en sus países de origen.

El informe concluye con un llamado general a hacer una evaluación regional de necesidades a objeto de detectar las áreas, comunidades y zonas urbanas más afectadas por los diferentes tipos de migración, así

como sus principales problemáticas. A continuación se plantea una propuesta más específica para la institucionalización de Consejos de Migración en cada país. Estos Consejos de carácter nacional se coordinarían a nivel regional para interactuar con localidades afectadas por las migraciones y con iniciativas de tipo regional tales como el Proceso Puebla y el Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (SICA). Las diferentes comunidades podrían presentar proyectos de desarrollo ante el Consejo, el cual sería responsable de evaluar las propuestas y de colaborar con diferentes sectores – gobiernos, comunidades y emigrantes – a fin de obtener los recursos que permitan realizar los proyectos aprobados. Más allá de abordar las necesidades específicas de cada país y de las poblaciones afectadas por la migración, los Consejos también podrían reunirse periódicamente en instancias regionales para tratar los avances realizados y los problemas que enfrentan a medida que evalúan los proyectos de desarrollo aprobados. Más aún, los Consejos podrían convertirse en organismos con un amplio caudal de conocimientos que ofrecer para la exploración de iniciativas regionales. Los Consejos podrían también conformar una importante instancia intermedia entre organizaciones regionales y hemisféricas, tales como el Proceso Puebla y la Comisión Centroamericana de Directores de Migración, y las pequeñas comunidades afectadas por el fenómeno de la migración.

1. Introduction

This report looks prospectively at the future of migration and Central American development at a particularly strategic moment in its history. After twenty years of massive and often abrupt changes in migratory patterns and effects, Central America appears to be headed toward a period of stabilizing trends. This does not mean, however, that the effects of continued migration will be less dramatic. Conversely, migrations — both internal and external — promise to play a major, transformative role in the region's future. A brief historical reprise underscores this point.

Historically, seasonal rural-to-rural migration within the region was the predominant migratory pattern from the late 1800s through World War II and into the second half of the twentieth century. During the decade of the 1980s, severe armed conflict in the region brought a major shift in the tenor of the region's migration. Internal labor migrations diminished as production of crops for export plummeted and refugee flows surged. Warfare not only killed thousands and displaced millions, but it also institutionalized a migration pattern that heretofore had been very minor; viz., emigration to *El Norte*. A conservative estimate of this exodus, one derived from the 1990 U.S. Census and now well outdated, is that more than a million Central Americans fled their homelands and sought safe haven in the U.S. during the tumultuous 1980s. Central America transformed from being a minor player in hemispheric migration prior to the 1980s (in comparison to Mexico, in particular), to becoming a central player. More important for regional development, the vast exodus began to send homeward larger and larger quantities of cash remittances, which became extremely significant to families' survival and regional reconstruction in the post-war era.

Rates of emigration to the North slowed in the late 1990s, although they remained at significant levels. At the same time, rates of return migration — whether to visit or resettle permanently — soared, in large part owing to the cessation of violence and the fact that many migrants obtained legal status abroad, permitting them to travel freely. Increasingly, Central American migrants began to conduct their lives across borders or "transnationally." People who travel back and forth or at least maintain close contact with family and friends in two or more nations through phone calls, letters, and even the Internet serve to knit together both individuals and nations in ways that have only begun to

be explored. Also in the 1990s, Central American governments to varying degrees began to recognize that their countries' interests were intimately related to the fate of their expatriate populations abroad. They began actively to cultivate ties with their expatriates and to advocate on their behalf with politicians in the North. Governments which, in several cases, had contributed to the flight of refugees abroad now retooled themselves to become migrants' friends, a transformation that is still a work in progress.

In the twenty-first century, migratory patterns born in the past twenty years are most likely to mature without changing dramatically. This does not imply they will be negligible. To appreciate the complexities and subtleties of the broad topic of migration and transnational issues, I have divided it into several sub-themes: regional migration, extra-regional migration, remittances, and transnational issues. I will address each separately, though I will try to integrate them as much as possible. Each topic will not receive equal weight; rather, I will provide a synopsis of research on the well-documented themes first and concentrate the bulk of my report on the last themes, which are, to my mind, generating the ideas and approaches most helpful to predicting the future of Central American migration and its role in regional development. At this point I wish to acknowledge that my work has been enhanced greatly by participants who attended the workshop on migration in July 1999. I have tried to take into account the ideas circulated in the workshop and in participants' position papers in the preparation of this report. The workshop participants were fundamental in suggesting a model for migration and development along the lines I develop in the last section of this report under "recommendations."

2. Regional Migration Issues

Central American migration has been characterized historically by intra-regional movement, including rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration as well as international migration into neighboring Central American countries. These patterns persist, although they has been over-shadowed to a large degree by the addition of extra-regional migration. Alicia Maguid's chapter on migration in the comprehensive volume *Estado de la región* provides a statistical snapshot of this shift. In 1970, half of all Central American emigrants (those moving into other countries) relocated in other Central American countries, while half moved out of the region. By 1980, the proportions had altered dramatically to 80% extra-regional and only 20% intra-regional; in 1990, 93% of all emigrants left the region (Maguid 1999: 364). It should be no surprise then, that the literature focusing on Central American migration in recent years makes scant reference to intra-regional flows, with the notable exception of Nicaraguan migrants to Costa Rica and, to a lesser degree, migrations of Guatemalans and Salvadorans to Belize. This does not mean that intra-regional migration has become insignificant, only that it is neither well documented nor well understood. For example, there is anecdotal evidence of migrations of Nicaraguans and Hondurans into El Salvador spurred by the late 1990s post-war economic recovery in that country, a rebound financed in large part by remittance dollars from Salvadorans living in the U.S. The Panamanian economy too attracts a modest number of Central American migrants, but this number (11.600 in 1990) has not increased dramatically over the years (Escobar 1998).

Given the paucity of data on contemporary regional migration and its declining significance vis-à-vis extra-regional migration, I will concentrate my discussion of this topic on two areas. First, I will address the two most significant cases of intra-regional migration mentioned above. Second, I will examine the continued rural-to-urban migration, a factor that promises to be of importance to regional development.

2.1. Nicaraguan Migration to Costa Rica

Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica, like many regional migrations, has deep historical roots in agricultural labor. Since the turn of the twentieth century, thousands of Nicaraguans have migrated seasonally to Costa Rica to assist in the banana and later coffee industries. This pattern

was established a century ago and to a much lesser degree is still evident today. However, the character of Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica has changed dramatically in the past thirty years. Toward the end of the 1970s, as civil war was brewing in Nicaragua, growing streams of Nicaraguans sought refuge in Costa Rica, a country that offered them a humanitarian reception for the most part. This refugee migration is the main reason behind the two-fold increase in Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica between the national censuses of 1973 and 1984. The 1984 figure of 46.000 foreign-born Nicaraguans would nearly double again by 1997 to 87.000 (Maguid 1999).

During the 1980s, Nicaraguans continued to migrate into Costa Rica as a consequence of political and economic upheavals in their homeland and drawn by higher wages (the Costa Rican minimum salary was 3 to 4 times higher than the Nicaraguan [Maguid 1999]) and more generous social benefits, such as state-subsidized medical care. As this migration matured it became increasingly apparent that its profile no longer fit the seasonal agricultural worker profile of previous generations. Although some Nicaraguans continued to work in the export commodity sector, the percentage declined from 42% in 1984 to only 21% in 1997. Moreover, the migrant population became increasingly female and urban, with 40% living in the greater San José metropolitan area by 1997. Employment shifted toward urban occupations and became very gendered; women work overwhelmingly in the domestic and informal marketing sectors, while men predominate in construction (for a longer discussion, see Cranshaw and Morales 1998; Morales and Castro 1999). Additionally, the Nicaraguan migrant population of 1997 is, on average, much more educated than its earlier counterparts.

The demographic information presented is based on household surveys, as Costa Rica has not had a national census since 1984. I mention this as an introduction to the problematic area of estimating the total Nicaraguan population resident in Costa Rica. The 1997 survey indicates a figure of 87.445 foreign-born Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica, although scholars estimate that the total population is as high as 450.000. Indeed, Costa Rica's offer of amnesty in December 1998 after Hurricane Mitch produced 150.200 Nicaraguan applicants, who accounted for 97% of all applicants (Morales-Gamboa, personal communication). If, as scholars argue, the total population of Nicaraguans, foreign-born and native-born, approaches a half million, it represents between one-seventh and one-eighth of the country's total population.

Given the amnesty, a second generation born in Costa Rica, and the likelihood that disparities between earnings potential in Nicaragua versus Costa Rica will not attenuate in the next decades, this migration pattern is likely to continue.

Not surprisingly, the large-scale migration of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica has generated some hostility. Disdain for Nicaraguans is widespread and growing. A poll taken in July 1999 revealed that 17% of Costa Ricans view Nicaraguans as the principle problem Costa Rica faces, and some 60% favor deporting undocumented Nicaraguans (Rivera 1999). While it is not uncommon for migrations to spark jingoism and xenophobia, this instance merits an explanation. Maguid (1999) offers some clues. She argues that several factors have contributed to Nicaraguans' visibility and hence their perceived threat to the greater populace. These are (1) their real increase in population; (2) their concentration in the capital city; and (3) their transformation from primarily agricultural workers laboring at the fringes of the economy and in jobs that Costa Ricans do not want to urban workers who, though they primarily do not compete with Costa Ricans, are perceived to be potential competitors. In other words, as the migrants have become more like their hosts, the hosts feel threatened by them. Public pressure on government officials — Costa Rican and Nicaraguan — has grown as a result of the tensions, leading to increasing diplomatic strain. This situation clouds the picture of the role of migration in regional development. It suggests that even as the Americas move toward a free trade agreement, there will not likely be an accompanying policy of free movement for laborers, either to the North or internally to Central America.

2.2. Regional Migration to Belize

Another site of significant regional immigration is Belize. Though firm figures will not be forthcoming until the upcoming census, estimates for the number of regional migrants, predominantly from Guatemala and El Salvador, entering Belize in the 1980s range from 60.000 down to 24.000 (Woods, Perry, and Steagall 1997). Their percentage of the total population rose from 8% in 1980 to 13%, according to the 1991 census. In absolute numbers this regional migration is smaller than the movement of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica, but it is proportionately equivalent to that migration. In contrast to Costa Rica, however, most

migrants to Belize settle in rural areas where they are small farmers and/or participate in harvesting bananas, citrus fruits, and sugar cane (see Pérez Saínz report).

The influx of other Central Americans is complemented by an emigration of Belizeans to the United States. Emigrants are drawn primarily from the Garifuna, Creole, and Afro-Belizean sectors of the population, groups that (along with their counterparts in Honduras) have migrated northward along shipping routes for generations. As indicated in Table 1, the U.S. census recorded 30.000 foreign-born Belizeans in 1990, a figure that represents about one-sixth of the 1990 population of Belize. Thus, in relative terms, emigration from Belize is on par with Salvadoran emigration to the U.S., and immigration to Belize is comparable to immigration of Nicaraguans into Costa Rica. Yet, despite its significance, little research has been conducted on migration into and from Belize, an area meriting future study. One of the few publications on the topic to date documents dramatic shifts in Belize's demographic mix as a result of the combination of immigration and emigration. For example, the Afro-Belizean population dropped from 48% in 1980 to 36% in 1991, while the *mestizo* population, swelled by Central American immigrants, grew from 33% to 44% in the same time period (Woods, Perry, and Steagall 1997). These demographic changes are likely to continue, particularly as ecotourism expands into Belize, escalating demand for service laborers.

2.3. Continuing Rural-to-Urban Migration

Population projections for all of Central America indicate the continuation of a historical trend toward greater urbanism. According to Celade and UNDP estimates (1999), by the year 2020 every Central American country with the exception of Guatemala (42%) will have an urban[1i] population that exceeds its rural population. The urban population in El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, and Nicaragua is expected to rise to around two-thirds of the total population by 2020, approximately

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[1] There is no uniform definition for what constitutes "urban" in Central American countries. For country-by-country specifications, see Celade's website: URL: http://www.eclac.cl/Celade-Esp/bol63/DE_SitDemBD63-def00i.html.

a 10% rise from 1995 but still well below the Latin American average of 80% urban. The factors influencing rural-to-urban migration are diverse and engage themes discussed in other Central America reports (see, in particular, Zuvekas and Rodas). The factor most significant to increasing rural-to-urban migration during the previous two decades, regional armed conflict, cannot be discounted as a future factor, but it seems less likely. Rather, to predict the degree and nature of these flows it is critical to examine regional economic opportunities. Historically, these have not been evenly distributed, causing many migrants to flock to poles of opportunity.

As identified in the Zuvekas report and the INCAE/CLACDS/HIID study (1999), the likely sectors of future expansion in Central America are manufacturing (particularly *maquilas*), services, tourism, and, to some degree, agribusiness. The first two will open opportunities primarily in urban areas, given the need for transportation, communication, and, for some specialized service markets, skilled labor. Financial services, such as accounting, customer orders, payroll, and software support are expected to prosper in countries like Costa Rica, where human capital levels are highest. These stable and relatively well-paying jobs are likely to stimulate demand for secondary services – such as domestic labor – which, in turn, will attract less-skilled labor from the countryside or neighboring countries. This bifurcation of the service sector into highly paid native workers and poorly paid immigrant workers is already apparent in Costa Rica. It is also characteristic of the United States, where Central American immigrant workers have found employment niches as nannies, landscapers, and house cleaners to middle-class Americans (Mahler 1995, Sassen 1988). The growth of tourism may also affect migration patterns, attracting low-wage laborers into vacation areas to perform low-end services and, to a lesser extent, regional migration of personnel trained in hotel/restaurant management. In the case of countries with little tourist infrastructure but high emigration rates, such as El Salvador, tourism will be linked most closely to returning migrants from abroad. Government-private sector initiatives are likely to foster this segment of the tourist industry.

With a few minor exception, such as bananas and products salable in the overseas ethnic markets, the growth prospects for agricultural products appear very poor, particularly in comparison to other sectors. The decline in small-scale farming will push future migrants out of the countryside and into urban areas, capital cities in particular. Moreover,

many areas of subsistence agriculture have witnessed such extreme environmental degradation — deforestation, loss of topsoil, and ground water contaminated with fertilizers, to name just a few — that peasants cannot survive and are obliged to migrate to urban areas or abroad. The drop in export commodities during the years of warfare in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador also affected the peasantry, depriving it of seasonal agricultural wages that paid for a modicum of supplies from fertilizer and clothing to medical care. In certain communities, the seasonal migration evolved into international migration, with remittances fulfilling the role that wages once filled. One of the groups most at risk for rural-to-urban migration is indigenous populations, which form a large corps of the rural population in Guatemala and, to a lesser extent, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. On the Guatemala-Mexico border, the attraction of international migration is especially pronounced among Maya youth. Increasing numbers of Maya have migrated northward; to what degree these individuals have migrated directly from the countryside to the U.S. I cannot say, but it is likely that at least some have step-migrated first to urban areas and later across international borders.

Step migration introduces another angle from which rural-to-urban migration can be analyzed. Up until this point I have been developing those factors that attract people into urban areas — or what are commonly referred to in migration literature as “pull” factors. If a discussion contains only “pull” factors it leaves the impression that people have a propensity to move when the incentives are sufficient. Though commonplace, this assumption does not fit empirical reality, for the vast majority of Central America’s population and indeed the world’s does *not* migrate even when greater economic opportunities are known to exist elsewhere. When migration is understood as the exception and not the norm, then the focus of an investigation shifts to understanding why people become uprooted; that is, from looking at “pull” factors to “push” factors. An obvious force of uprooting is disaster — man-made or natural. Other forces are often much less obvious, requiring a more grounded approach than macro-level studies that can identify “pull” factors readily, and are quite sensitive to variations in local conditions. In the case of Central America, the neoliberal reforms of the late nineteenth century constitute one of the most significant, if not the most significant, factors contributing to the uprooting of the rural population historically (see Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991).

In the next paragraphs I will identify and discuss several factors affecting the continued uprooting of the peasantry in El Salvador, drawing on my own research. This is *not* an exhaustive list, but rather a suggestive one. I will illustrate forces that I do not see developed in the literature yet which, according to many conversations with Central American scholars, appear germane to a broader understanding of persistent rural-to-urban migration. Perhaps the least discussed and yet the most insidious is the educational system. Academic achievement in El Salvador as elsewhere in Central America entails increasing levels of migration. As children continue their studies from elementary into secondary schools, they must travel increasingly farther from their homes. In many communities, schools within walking distance offer only the earliest grades. If students continue their education they must find and pay for transportation to distant schools; meanwhile, their families assume the burden not only of the expense of this education but the loss of children's labor. Higher education is even more unattainable; secondary schools are often located only in large towns and cities, while universities are located exclusively in cities. For students to attend these schools, they may have to leave home entirely and migrate into increasingly urban areas, where they acculturate into an urban lifestyle. In addition, there are few jobs for the highly educated in rural communities. An important corollary to this phenomenon is the fact that remittances from international migration play a key role in students' ability to continue their education — and hence to become urban subjects (Mahler 1999b).

Whereas education uproots and pulls students into longer-term migrations, before they even enter kindergarten children have already been introduced to migration and urban life via the medical care system. Medical care is another scare resource in rural El Salvador as elsewhere, and early morning buses are brimming with parents traveling to cities with sick children in tow. From an early age, children learn that opportunities are limited near home and that power and resources emanate from the bustling cities. Similarly, the people I studied in eastern El Salvador traveled hours each way to buy staple and specialized goods from well-stocked commercial centers or to retrieve remittances in cities. In short, peasants are obligated — pushed — into a lifestyle that incorporates constant mobility. In contrast to generations ago, much if not most of this motion is not of workers heading to the fields or of families visiting each other in neighboring villages, but

repeated trajectories from rural hamlets into towns and cities. In the short run this may not uproot populations, but over the long run I argue that it is a contributing factor. This is particularly true in the case of students relocated for weeks if not years in cities where they can pursue their education.

Finally, I will highlight the effects of remittances on uprooting. Through many interviews, I have gathered evidence of the relationship between remittances and escalating land values in the region I have studied. During the Salvadoran civil war, land prices plummeted, but after the 1992 Peace Accords they began to climb and then skyrocket. Land distant from roads and with only marginal agricultural value — owing to high degrees of erosion, steep inclines, or limited access to water, for example — was selling in 1997 for several thousand dollars a *manzana*. Plots for homes often cost double this figure. When asked why the prices had increased so dramatically, respondents invariably attributed the rise to migrants living in the U.S. and their families, who bought the land with remittances. Much of this property is not planted, and owners are unwilling to lease the land. The effect is to exacerbate existing land scarcity. Moreover, the rise in land values prevents the area's non-migrant youth from access to land, particularly to land purchases. In sum, the situation places additional pressure on these youth, boys in particular, to emigrate, although in this case the migration is more likely to be international (where dollars can be earned) than rural-to-urban. Regardless, it represents another aspect of uprooting occurring in many regions of Central America, not just in the region I have studied in depth.

2.4. Future Prognosis

As stated above, the factors discussed here are not intended to be exhaustive; rather, they accentuate issues that have received little attention to date but merit more. They provide a broader empirical foundation for predicting, as I do, that the uprooting of rural populations in Central America will continue in coming decades, as will rural-to-urban migration. Some instances of regional migration, most notably that of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica, may ameliorate some rural-to-urban migration within nation-states. I also expect that regional migration to certain poles of opportunity as identified previously will persist and evolve as a consequence of myriad factors, including disparities in

prosperity as well as political and environmental stability between different countries.

3. Extra-regional Migration

In the past two decades, Central America has been transformed from a area marked by intra-regional migrations to one marked predominantly by migrations beyond its regional borders. It is important to note at the outset that these migrations, while significant in many ways, are relatively insignificant demographically. To wit, in the most recent calculations using 1990 as the base year, only one percent of Central America's population is constituted by immigrants from outside the region and only 5% has emigrated. This latter figure varies from country to country, with a low of 2% registered for Costa Rican emigrants to a high of 9.5% for Salvadorans (Maguid 1999: 365). In sum, only five in every 100 Central Americas lives outside the region. The overwhelming majority of these emigrants have relocated in the United States. More than one million foreign-born Central Americans were censused in that country in 1990, whereas only 48.000 were censused in Canada at about the same time (ibid.; see also Lara Martínez 1994). There are also tens of thousands of Central Americans living in Mexico, but for purposes of simplicity this report will concentrate on Central Americans living in the United States. Of course, these raw statistics do not begin to communicate the impact these migrations have had and promise to have in the future. Aggregate statistics also obscure the fact that migrations are notoriously uneven in their origins and effects. They are constituted through personal and community networks, such that one municipality or region of a country may be heavily affected while another may experience only minimal effects. Such unevenness characterizes Central American migration, but the lack of a comprehensive background study makes it impossible to know its full extent.

3.1. Central Americans in the United States: Migration Trends

The situation of Central Americans living in the United States is quite dynamic and, consequently, it is difficult and probably impossible to provide exact figures. This is owing in great part to the numbers of undocumented as well as legal migrants. "Undocumented" is one of several terms (including the more pejorative "illegal") used to denote individuals who do not have authorization to remain in the another country legally on a short or permanent basis. These include people who arrived legally (e.g., with a tourist visa) and then lost legal status by, for example, overstaying their visa, as well as people who entered

another country illegally and remained. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimates that as of 1996, 335.000 Salvadorans, 165.000 Guatemalans, 90.000 Hondurans, and 70.000 Nicaraguans were residing in the U.S. unlawfully (INS 1999). For the purposes of this report I will not attempt to estimate total Central American migration to the U.S., documented or not, but will employ census data and figures for legal and illegal migration to identify migratory trends that should prove useful to developing future scenarios. A comparison of U.S. census figures for 1970, 1980, and 1990 in Table 1 illustrates the dramatic rise in Central Americans living in the U.S. These figures only include the foreign-born; it is important to note that even 1990 figures are outdated and therefore significantly underestimate current levels. Moreover, studies have shown that the censuses underestimate Central Americans residing in the U.S., particularly the undocumented (e.g., Mahler 1993).

Table 1
Foreign-Born Central American Population
Living in the U.S., by Census Year

Country	1970	1980	1990
Belize	8.860	14.436	29.957
Costa Rica	16.691	29.639	43.530
El Salvador	15.717	94.447	465.433
Guatemala	17.356	63.073	225.739
Honduras	19.118	39.154	108.923
Nicaragua	16.125	44.166	168.659
Panama	20.046	60.740	85.737
Total	103.913	345.655	1.127.978

Source: U.S. Census 1999

Between 1970 and 1980 the population triples, and then nearly triples again during the next decade. An examination of Table 2 helps identify a pattern, common to all Central American countries, comprised of a major rise in legal migration between the late 1980s and early 1990s followed by a decline to levels higher than the mid-1980s but much lower than the peak years of 1989-1993. The upsurge is directly related to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). IRCA is best known for authorizing a legalization program for undocumented immigrants who met specific criteria, including over 200.000 Central Americans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans in particular.

Table 2
Central American Immigrants admitted to the United States
by Country of Birth, Fiscal Years 1986-96

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total	Percent
Belize	1.385	1.354	1.497	2.217	3.867	2.377	1.020	1.035	772	644	786	**16.954**	**2.50%**
Costa Rica	1.356	1.391	1.351	1.985	2.840	2.341	1.480	1.368	1.205	1.062	1.504	**17.883**	**2.64%**
El Salvador	10.929	10.693	12.045	57.878	80.173	47.351	26.191	26.818	17.644	11.744	17.903	**319.369**	**47.07%**
Guatemala	5.158	5.729	5.723	19.049	32.303	25.527	10.521	11.870	7.389	6.213	8.763	**138.245**	**20.38%**
Honduras	4.532	4.751	4.302	7.593	12.024	11.451	6.552	7.306	5.265	5.496	5.870	**75.142**	**11.08%**
Nicaragua	2.826	3.294	3.311	8.830	11.562	17.842	8.949	7.086	5.255	4.408	6.903	**80.266**	**11.83%**
Panama	2.194	2.084	2.486	3.482	3.433	4.204	2.845	2.679	2.378	2.247	2.560	**30.592**	**4.51%**
Total	**28.380**	**29.296**	**30.715**	**101.034**	**146.202**	**111.093**	**57.558**	**58.162**	**39.908**	**31.814**	**44.289**	**678.451**	

Source: INS Yearbook 1996, Table 3

IRCA was designed to thwart illegal immigration into the U.S. by imposing sanctions against employers who hired undocumented immigrants. That is, it offered benefits to some undocumented immigrants, but also created a much more restrictive climate for others. IRCA is very significant to Central American migration because it not only allowed hundreds of thousands to obtain legal permanent residency, but it also qualified them to file for immigration status for their spouses and children. If and when these IRCA beneficiaries become naturalized citizens (they must wait 5 years after obtaining residency), they will qualify to sponsor more relatives faster than they could as permanent residents. A dramatic rise in naturalizations appears already to have begun, as reflected in Table 3. This promises to produce yet another rise in immigrants over the coming decade

Table 3
Central Americans naturalized to United States Citizenship
Fiscal Years 1987-96

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total	Percent
Belize	316	426	373	389	499	304	381	636	856	1.765	**5.945**	**3.26%**
Costa Rica	658	726	676	589	792	547	672	1.063	1.145	2.603	**9.471**	**5.19%**
El Salvador	2.428	2.291	2.001	2.410	3.653	2.056	3.057	5.675	13.667	33.240	**70.478**	**38.64%**
Guatemala	1.490	1.358	1.281	1.280	1.832	1.086	1.682	3.001	5.159	13.383	**31.552**	**17.30%**
Honduras	964	1.229	1.167	1.259	1.306	1.248	1.713	2.208	2.943	7.494	**21.531**	**11.81%**
Nicaragua	1.118	1.363	1.271	1.520	1.732	1.100	1.500	2.442	3.930	10.614	**26.590**	**14.58%**
Panama	1.151	1.561	1.791	1.755	1.492	1.150	1.393	1.854	1.735	2.935	**16.817**	**9.22%**
Total	**8.125**	**8.954**	**8.560**	**9.202**	**11.306**	**7.491**	**10.398**	**16.879**	**29.435**	**72.034**	**182.384**	

Source: INS Yearbook 1996, Table 47

Another significant change in INS policy will also affect rates of legal immigration by Central Americans. During the early 1990s, over 300.000[2] Guatemalans and Salvadorans qualified for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) after the settlement of a lawsuit by immigrant rights organizations with the INS (American Baptist Church [ABC] v. Thornburgh). The ABC agreement allowed these immigrants to remain in the U.S. and work until 1995, when the program ended. The group was then expected to file new political asylum claims, leaving them again in legal limbo. A more generous benefit was authorized by the U.S. government toward undocumented Nicaraguans. The Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) was passed in 1997, allowing an estimated 100.000 Nicaraguans apply for permanent residency. This unevenness in treatment by the U.S. toward different

[2] Concrete figures for TPS/ABC applicants as well as NACARA and Hurricane Mitch beneficiaries are very difficult to obtain. The figures cited here reflect estimates provided by GUATENET, the National Network of Guatemalans in the U.S., and the National Immigration Forum (NIF). For ABC-class applicants, GUATENET cites 225.000 Salvadorans and 85.000 Guatemalans. NIF figures are 190.000 and 50.000, respectively. For NACARA, GUATENET gives a figure of 40.000 Nicaraguan beneficiaries, and NIF 100.000. Mitch TPS beneficiaries cited by GUATENET are 95.000 Hondurans and 5.000 Nicaraguans versus NIF estimates of 101.00 and 6.000, respectively.

Central American groups led to a campaign aimed at extending NACARA to Salvadorans and Guatemalans. As of this writing, such legislative changes have not occurred; however, an INS ruling in 1999 enabled ABC-class Salvadoran and Guatemalan members to apply for political asylum under a legal standard that is less strict than that applied to new applicants (although the old standard applies to the applicants' beneficiaries, i.e., spouses and children). To complicate the description of Central American legal status in the U.S. further, some 100.000 Hondurans and 6.000 Nicaraguans were granted TPS after Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Their fate, like that of the ABC-class Salvadorans and Guatemalans, is unsure.

This digression into U.S. immigration policy serves to illustrate its complexity and therein the difficulty in using numbers of current migrants to estimate future levels of Central American migration to the U.S. If the ABC-class of Guatemalans and Salvadorans obtain legal residency in the coming years in addition to the NACARA-class of Nicaraguans, then an additional 300.000 Central Americans — over and above other channels of legal immigration — will be able to apply for the immigration of their relatives. This will likely add significantly to current levels of legal immigration from the region to the U.S.

Beyond examining migration flows, it is important to highlight a few demographic features of this migration. First, Central American immigrants do not reflect the entire socioeconomic spectrum of the societies they hail from. Rather, in the aggregate, they are neither the poorest nor the wealthiest members of their constituent societies (Escobar 1998; Maguid 1999; Mahler 1995). This may be counterintuitive for many who assume that it is predominantly the destitute who migrate to the North, but research has shown consistently that migrants must draw on some economic and/or social resources to orchestrate their migrations.

Another indicator that the migrant population is not representative of the regional population is educational achievement. On average, less than 50% of Central American migrants in the U.S. finished high school and 9% finished college. These figures vary, however; Salvadorans constitute the least educated (67% never finishing high school) and Panamanians the most educated subgroup of migrants, with 20% university graduates (Maguid 1999: 373). The Nicaraguan migrant population is divided; the more educated migrants head to the U.S.,

while those with less education and fewer skills tend to move to Costa Rica. These statistics on education highlight the fact that the emigrant Central American population is more educated on average than those who stay, representing somewhat of a brain drain to the region.

3.2. Central Americans in the United States: Future Scenarios

There is every reason to believe that Central American migration to the United States over the next two decades will not decline from its current levels. Conversely, there is evidence that levels will increase — albeit not as dramatically as in recent history — in the future unless major changes intervene. The reasons to expect an incline in emigration from the region are many-fold. First, a large and growing legal immigrant population (particularly Salvadoran) is naturalizing at higher rates than ever before. These individuals will be in an enhanced position to petition for the immigration of more relatives, helping to multiply legal migration. This has been true of Asian migration to the U.S. and other more mature Latin American migrations, such as Dominican and Mexican. Second, changes in U.S. immigration policy approved in the 1990s favor skilled over unskilled immigrants. These provisions may become a magnet for more privileged sectors of Central American society, particularly in times of economic and/or political crises. Third, undocumented migration, already estimated at approximately 700.000[3], is likely to continue and perhaps expand for several reasons. These include classic demographic and socioeconomic pressures — such as high regional birth and poverty rates; insufficient employment opportunities, particularly in the countryside; and inequitable land tenure policies. Also important are factors that facilitate migration, such as a sophisticated and mature smuggling industry and the fact that increasing numbers of Central Americans have family members living in the U.S. who can help finance their migrations. High levels of legal immigration may reduce undocumented migration from some countries,

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[3] INS estimates of the undocumented immigrant population in the U.S. for 1996 included 335.000 Salvadorans, 165.000 Guatemalans (2nd and 3rd highest groups after Mexicans), 90.000 Hondurans, 70.000 Nicaraguans, and an undefined number of Panamanians, Costa Ricans, and Belizeans. (See INS website: http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/statistics/illegalalien/index.htm).

such as El Salvador and Guatemala[4]. Honduras is likely to be an exception to this rule, as its stock of legal immigrants in the U.S. is quite low. Particularly given the effects of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, undocumented migration from Honduras to the United States is likely to grow (see USIA 1999b for Mitch-related estimates, however circumspect).

Another factor that will influence the future of undocumented migration from Central America is interdiction, not only by the U.S. but also by Mexican and Guatemalan authorities. The U.S. has all but admitted it cannot find and deport undocumented immigrants once they have arrived. Such efforts are too costly; rather, in recent years the U.S. government has moved to (1) bolster interdiction of undocumented immigration at the border, enjoining Mexico and Guatemala to aid in this effort (for more details on the latter see Castillo G. and Palma C. 1996; Castillo García and Palma Calderón 1999; Izaguirre and Jerez 1999; Kobrak and Palencia n.d.); and (2) pass legislation aimed at dissuading undocumented immigration by depriving the undocumented from access to labor markets and legal status.

It is my personal opinion that U.S. legislation and policy regarding immigration is *unlikely* to become less restrictive in the coming years. This opinion is based on historical analyses that mark restrictions on immigration as evolving out of economic crises (such as recessions that lead to political and popular anti-immigrant campaigns claiming that immigrants take American workers' jobs). In the late 1990s the U.S. Congress passed major restrictions on legal and illegal migration, several years after a recession and other events, such as the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, that fostered

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[4] This is attenuated by the fact that relatives of legal migrants from these countries now must wait four or five years for their visas to arrive as opposed to only two years a decade ago. Families who cannot endure this lengthy separation may choose to have members migrate illegally, with potentially serious consequences. Changes in U.S. immigration law in 1996 (the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, or IIRIRA) penalize undocumented immigrants, requiring them to return to their homeland for 3 to 10 years before they can become legal immigrants.

anti-immigrant sentiment[5]. Another factor responsible for rising anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. is fundamental demographic change in the U.S. population. Hispanics are expected to double from 12% to 25% of the population in the coming decades, primarily as a consequence of immigration. These changes are likely to fuel greater racial/ethnic tensions and *increased* restrictions on immigration. On the other hand, if Central Americans file for citizenship and organize politically with other Latino groups, their influence may be sufficient to block such legislation. In either case, I predict a tense future in this area, one similar to contemporary animosities between Costa Ricans and Nicaraguan immigrants.

Several factors could substantially alter the gradual increase in Central American migration outlined above. These include unpredictable events such as wars and natural disasters. Hurricane Mitch highlighted the ecological vulnerability of the region to natural disasters and the likelihood that some members of affected populations will emigrate as a consequence. Regarding Mitch, dire predictions of massive emigration (e.g., USIA 1999a, USIA 1999b) seem to have been overstated, but a comprehensive report on Mitch's effects is still incomplete. Certainly, warfare in the region during the 1980s expelled far more migrants than Mitch and should remain high on the list of intangibles that could change emigration from the region dramatically. A second hypothetical change that could alter migration patterns would be economic transformations producing a greater equilibrium between opportunities in *El Norte* and in Central America. The fact that Panamanian and Costa Rican emigration is so low is indicative of the greater equality in opportunity between these countries and the United States and Canada versus El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. Logically then, greater parity in opportunity for the latter countries vis-à-vis North America would lessen some of the pressure to emigrate. This parity could be caused by enhanced economic development in Central

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[5] These include the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), which expedited deportations of criminal migrants, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which denied many social benefits to legal immigrants, and IIRIRA, which, among other things, expanded interdiction efforts along the U.S.-Mexico border and required immigrants to have higher incomes to sponsor relatives abroad for legal immigrant status.

America or, less likely, a decline in opportunity in the U.S., owing to a major recession, for example. An intermediate scenario would take into account the uneven economic development that already characterizes the region and suggest, much as in the Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica, that areas generating opportunities will likely attract immigration. These may siphon off some of the flow that otherwise may have migrated northward.

3.3. Central American Migration to Mexico

For many years Mexico has been a locus for both Central American migrants in transit to the North as well as a home to more established migrants, such as Guatemalan agricultural workers on the Guatemala-Mexico border and refugees of regional civil wars. Exact numbers of Central Americans residing in Mexico are not forthcoming; census figures, which report only legal immigrants to Mexico, document a mere 14.000 in 1970 and 1980 but a major jump to 59.000 in 1990, the overwhelming majority Guatemalan (Maguid 1999: 372). Overall, Mexico absorbed only about 4.4% of Central American emigrants in 1990, and 16% of Guatemalans (Maguid n.d.: 27). Mexicans also constituted only 3.6% of all foreigners living in Central America in that same year (ibid.: 16). The single largest group of Central Americans in Mexico were Guatemalan refugees in the state of Chiapas, numbering some 43.000. They received aided from UNHCR and other international organizations in the 1980s and 1990s, but their status was in limbo until 1999, when Mexico finally granted them permanent resident status.

Though Mexico is not a haven for large numbers of Central American migrants (even taking into account that the data above underestimate the number of undocumented), it is a major conduit for migrants heading to the United States and Canada. During the 1980s, Mexican officials maintained a virtual laissez-faire attitude, interdicting and deporting fewer than 10.000 Central Americans each year despite massive flows. In the 1990s, however, under pressure from the U.S., Mexico drastically increased its efforts; in that decade, the number of deportees was more than 100.000 per year, with the largest numbers from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (Castillo G. and Palma C. 1996: 150). In the near future, Mexico will remain a principal avenue for migratory flows from the region. It may attract more permanent immi-

grants as it develops internally and if, as expected, U.S. immigration policies become ever more restrictive.

4. Remittances

Remittance flows to Central America are largely a function of emigration; consequently, as emigration has increased over the past twenty years, so too have remittances.

Table 4
Remittances received by Central American countries
1984-1998 (in millions of U.S. dollars)

	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998
Belize	16	15	15	16	18	13	13	18
Costa Rica	32	37	40	55	88	-	122	112
El Salvador	118	150	202	324	709	967	1.084	1.338
Guatemala	28	51	142	205	339	263	375	457
Honduras	10	13	28	49	61	85	128	220
Nicaragua	2	0	0	0	10	50	95	200
Panama	*	*	*	*	*	17	16	16
Total Received	206	266	427	649	1.225	1.395	1.833	2.344

* World Bank data for the years 1984-1992 are not included as they do not use the same calculation.

Source: World Bank *World Tables* 1995 (figures 1984-1992); International Monetary Fund's Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook for 1999. Vol. 50, Part 1: Country Tables, 1999. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund (figures 1994-1998)

Table 4 illustrate this trend; however, it is important to state at the outset that estimates of remittances vary owing to differences in definition, accounting method, and reporting accuracy[6]. Therefore, it is

[6] Remittances are commonly understood to be the transfers that migrant workers abroad send back home, to family members for instance. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), one of the major institutions that estimates remittances, however, includes in its calculations not only the funds remitted by workers (who have been abroad over a year), but also two other categories. These are: (1) gross earnings of foreigners residing abroad for less than a year, including the in-kind benefits such as housing and payroll taxes they receive or pay; and (2) "migrant transfers", which are the net worth of migrants who move from one country to another. While these are important analytical categories, "in practice, the data on financial flows that are provided by individual commercial banks to the central bank [of a country] cannot make the relevant distinction between transactions that involve short-term migrants and persons who change residence for at least one year" (Pérez-López and Díaz-Briquets 1998: 323).

most critical to look at trends over time rather than specific estimates of overall sums.

In a macroeconomic sense, remittances have shifted Central American economies significantly — but not uniformly — in their generation of foreign exchange. Prior to the onset of mass emigration from the region, most countries derived the majority of their foreign exchange via commodity exports and, in some cases, foreign aid. In the 1990s several countries, most notably El Salvador, saw this relationship shift to a greater and greater dependency upon remittances (e.g., Funkhouser 1992, 1995; García n.d.). For instance, remittances exceeded exports in 1992 and 1993 then declined as El Salvador's economy rebounded after the war (see also, de la Garza, Orozco, and Baraona 1997). Recently remittances to Honduras and Nicaragua have grown substantially, mimicking other countries' patterns. Clearly, remittances have become an integral feature of many Central American economies in the past decade, a fact that has motivated a few governments to play increasingly activist roles with their expatriate communities with the intention of preserving remittance flows.

4.1. Critique of "Productive" Uses of Remittances

Before proceeding to an analysis of future scenarios regarding remittances and regional development, I feel it is imperative to examine critically the key concept of "productive use" of remittances. Owing in large part to CEPAL's efforts, numerous country reports on productive use of remittances in Central America have been published recently (e.g., CEPAL 1999a,b,c,d). These reports employ the traditional,

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There are numerous other limitations to remittance estimations. For example, the IMF and World Bank derive their information from data provided by central banks of the recipient countries. This data varies in quality from country to country. The banks rely on reports filed by remittance intermediaries (wire services, banks, remittance agencies) and know that there is a margin of error in this information (Orozco 1999). Moreover, in-kind transfers (such as goods brought home by plane) and remittances sent via informal couriers (people who make a living traveling back and forth personally carrying remittances and packages and referred to as *viajeros* or *encomenderos*) do not figure into the official estimates. All of these factors produce remittance estimates that are just that — estimates — and should be treated as such.

conservative definition of "productive use," a designation for remittances invested in business ventures or placed in savings accounts where the capital can be invested by the banking system. In the wider remittance literature this definition has generated criticism as (1) too narrow; and (2) laden with infelicitous sociocultural connotations.

A good example of the first criticism emerges in revisionist literature examining the trickle-down effects of remittances on economies at various levels. Durand, Parrado, and Massey (1996), for example, argue that studies have under-assessed the multiplier effects of remittances to local, regional, national, and international economies. More specifically, remittances spent on housing — which previously had been characterized as of largely individual or household benefit (e.g., Russell 1986) — have greater ramifications for at least the local economy (Stahl 1986: 915-6). Indeed, investment in housing generates more multiplier effects than any other industry (Taylor 1998), meaning that funds spent on construction and home repair create jobs and circulate wealth more amply than previously believed. Moreover, "productive" uses for remittances or any income must be contextualized within the available opportunity structure for investment. That is, people understand that it makes rational sense to invest their resources only "if conditions are created that makes(sic) productive investment viable and if there are policies to channel their monies (sic) into investments" (Meyers 1998: 7; see also Durand, Parrado, and Massey 1996).

The second issue, sociocultural biases, is best illustrated through gender. Women are the majority of household remittance recipients. They are also the population most excluded from access to many of the institutions needed to invest remittances, such as banks and government offices (CEPAL 1998: 24). When remittances are spent on consumption then, a subtle gendered critique emerges, one in which women are portrayed — albeit inadvertently — as failing to put remittances to their best use, or inhibiting investment. One reason for this characterization is the fact that remittances are not studied holistically (see discussion in CEPAL 1988). Most research studies only one aspect of the phenomenon, namely, its uses. Much less attention has been devoted to understanding the various methods of transfer (Orozco 1999 is an important exception), the factors involved in the decision to remit or not, the effects on remitters of depriving themselves of these moneys, and the experiences of recipients. The research biases expressed in the literature coupled with the difficulty of

estimating remittances and veracity of the data collected leave questionable the overall validity of remittance data. Certainly, more research on remittances, remitters, and recipients is necessary.

4.2. Future Prognosis

Overall, I expect that remittances to Central America from abroad (as well as between countries, such as the case of Costa Rica - Nicaragua) will at least remain at their current levels and are likely to climb over the next twenty years. The main assumptions behind this prediction have already been discussed and include primarily: (1) the likelihood that emigration will also remain at or exceed current levels; (2) remittances should not be expected to decline as a migrant population ages (contrary to the "decay hypothesis"); and (3) the economic status of migrants abroad will remain at or exceed current conditions (see also Meyers 1998 and Durand et al. 1996 for detail on these predictors). I do expect, however, that remittances to Honduras will be more dynamic in the immediate future than elsewhere. Honduran emigration has risen recently, not merely as an effect of Hurricane Mitch; consequently, remittances should rise. This is confirmed in a CEPAL country report that cites a jump in remittances from $68.5 million in 1993 to $202 million in 1998 (CEPAL 1999c: 7). Of course unforeseeable circumstances, such as natural disasters or warfare, would affect both migration and remittance flows in ways that cannot be predicted well. I also predict that a product of the region's augmented (albeit uneven) dependency upon remittances will be ever-increasing levels of government activism addressing primarily emigrant communities abroad. This attention has multiple goals, not the least of which is to foster linkages that will ensure steady remittance flows. While such efforts are comprehensible, they are drawing increasing criticism because they place responsibility for Central America's economic stability disproportionately on the shoulders of migrants. In the words of a major CEPAL report[7], "the so-called productive use of remittances has been in large part one of smoke and mirrors as exercised by the migrants' countries of origin. These countries' policies

[7] All translations of Spanish-language documents into English were performed by the author of this report.

want to treat them as captive agents despite being so far away and demand from them behaviors and commitments that they do not ask of the rest of the society" (CEPAL 1998: 33)[8].

To summarize, remittances will continue to enter Central American economies in the next decades, but their contribution to regional development is a function as much of government policy as it is of sheer volume. Savings and investment — whether of remittances or of income more broadly defined — are best encouraged by sound social and economic policies. Governments that promote economic, political, and social stability, including low inflation and free floating exchange rates, create the conditions most propitious to investments and development in general (CEPAL 1998, Meyers 1998, Russell 1986). Governments that attempt to control and channel remittances specifically run the risk of pushing migrants toward remitting via unofficial means (Meyers 1998: 12). Additionally, countries who push for "productive" uses of remittances should encourage the non-migrant population to increase savings and investment as well. If this practice were applied more universally then the disproportionate burden placed on migrants would ease.

4.3. Improving Utilization of Remittances

The 1988 CEPAL report and the Interamerican Dialogue report (Meyers 1998) provide a basic template of suggestions for making remittances more instrumental to regional development. Recommendations fall into three substantive areas: (1) methods for decreasing the cost and inconvenience of remitting; (2) methods aimed at improving savings and investment among recipients; and (3) methods to facilitate home town associations and other efforts involving "collective" remittances (1998: 25). I will address now the first and second areas, describing and critiquing, where necessary, the ideas laid out in the cited publications. I will address the third area separately in Section 5.

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[8] Original Spanish version: "el llamado uso productivo de las remesas ha sido en gran medida un espejismo para los países de orign de los migrantes. Las políticas de estos países quieren tratar como agentes cautivos a quienes están más fuera de su alcance y exigirles comportamientos y compromisos que no solicitan del resto de la sociedad."

Several authors have noted that migrants pay a very high cost for remitting to their homelands. The fees vary by type of service and from company to company, but 10% of the value remitted is typical (for details see CEPAL 1998, de la Garza, Orozco, and Baraona 1997, Mahler 1999a, Meyers 1998, Orozco 1999). Agencies and wire services are making high profits off remittances, profits skimmed from the efforts of hard-working and often poor migrants. Salvadorans in Los Angeles have the option of remitting through a credit union that charges far less than other services (Kandel 1997); personal couriers also charge less, a 5% commission on average (Mahler 1999a). There has been some discussion among government officials in the United States about remittance intermediaries donating a small proportion of their profits into a common pool that would be used to fund projects in Central America (Elliott, personal communication). It has also been proposed that Central American banks establish more branches in the U.S. and Canada to assist their clients' remittance transfers; these proposals have been stalled by U.S. regulators' concerns over the problem of money laundering (Orozco 1999). Another suggestion often raised to improve remittance flows is to allow migrants and their families to establish savings accounts in dollars and pay high interest rates on these accounts to attract savings away from the U.S. and Canada. So far only El Salvador and Nicaragua permit such accounts; interests rates, however, have not been very attractive (CEPAL 1998; Meyers 1998; Orozco 1999). There has been some effort at least in California to form non-profit credit unions that would provide remittance services at discount rates (Kandel 1997).

The second group of general recommendations focuses on improving savings and investment of remittances. Among her recommendations, Meyer suggests that national or regional financial institutions ("remittance banks") be created into which migrants can deposit their remittances and have funds sent directly to beneficiaries. Those funds not sent to migrants' families would remain in savings accounts and consequently would then be available for investment in development projects in the region, opening up a new source of capital. A problem I see with this suggestion is the fact that in many if not most rural areas

of Central America — where large numbers of migrants originate — there are *no* financial institutions of any kind in close proximity[9]. I think it would be hard to attract depositors to "remittance banks" if their relatives found it difficult to receive funds (state-run postal services are notoriously bad and would not be adequate to deliver remittances).

Other suggestions pertaining to the second area of recommendations include more aggressive banking policies aimed at attracting remittances that would be invested in housing and other areas of importance to migrants; contracting NGOs that specialize in training recipients on how to handle their budgets and the different ways they can put remittances to work (such as in financing microbusinesses and cooperatives); and the establishment of other technical and financial services to help direct remittances into development projects (CEPAL 1998: 27). For more suggestions I direct readers directly to the CEPAL and Interamerican Dialogue reports, which I can only summarize here. Other useful ideas are raised in de la Garza et al. 1997, Lungo 1997, Orozco 1999, and Siri 1996.

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9 CARUNA, a confederation of cooperatives in Nicaragua, is about to initiate remittance services to rural areas for migrants living in Costa Rica (Castillo, personal communication).

5. Transnational Migration and Issues

Much of Central America looks, feels, and sounds like a cultural crossroads, a blend of *lo centroamericano* and *lo gringo*. Upon arrival at the Comalapa airport in El Salvador, for example, the traveler is greeted with huge billboards advertising remittance services and international direct dialing to the United States and Canada. Newspaper headlines in Nicaragua scream the latest information about the plight of Nicas in Costa Rica, and along the Guatemala-Mexico border young Mayas have forsaken traditional employment in agriculture for quick money assisting streams of migrants headed for *El Norte* to cross Central America's northern river border. In many hamlets in the countryside, sparkling new brick homes with tiled roofs and television antennas contrast sharply with thatched-roof *bahareque* huts with a mule and not a new Toyota pickup in front. Sections of *El Norte* have also become Central-Americanized. Entire swaths of commercial thoroughfares in Los Angeles, Houston, Washington, D.C., and even suburban New York feel more like Guatemala or San Salvador than they do Main Street U.S.A.; a *pupusa* or a *tamal* is easier to find than a hamburger and fries. "Spanglish," a blend of Spanish and English, is becoming the *lingua franca* of these neighborhoods as well as in pockets of Central America.

What these brief descriptions portray is cultural syncretism — the blending of once distinct places and ways of life into a new reality. Of all of the changes wrought by Central American migration, this is probably the most palpable and certainly one of the most intriguing to everyday Central Americans and to the people who try to research and comprehend these changes. It is important to repeat here that migrations and the cultural transformations they bring with them do *not* affect each country, region, or locality equally. People migrate along networks of contacts, giving some communities a high proportion of migrants and leaving others almost unaffected.

This section of the report addresses the complexities of the cultural interconnectedness that has arisen largely as a consequence of sustained international migration over the past two decades. The interconnectedness is also fostered through television, film, and radio as well as through the Internet and global marketing campaigns which, though also important, lie outside the scope of the report. This analysis will focus on what is termed "transnational migration," a phenomenon

understood as the processes through which migrants maintain and promote ties between the countries where they reside and their home-lands and home communities (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992: 1-2). Some people create and nourish these bonds by physically traveling across international borders; others primarily maintain contact through remittances and by sending and receiving letters, phone calls, and even email. Increasingly, governments foster linkages as well; for example, several Central American countries deploy their consular corps to reach out to their expatriate populations abroad.

The transnational perspective on migration is less than a decade old; as such, its scholarly literature is still quite limited. Ideas and issues studied so far, however, provide an expanding picture of contemporary Central American transnationalism and prepare the foundation for making some modest predictions about the future. I will begin this discussion by addressing the general notion of Central American transnational migration, that is, of how people maintain relationships across borders. I will then move to a discussion of several particular topics, such as home town associations and deportees, that have captured particular attention in recent years.

During the conflict-ridden years of the 1980s, many Central American migrants lacked legal status in the countries where they sought refuge. Political and legal barriers prohibited them from physically returning to their countries and communities of origin for many years. Moreover, families were often split as a consequence of the wars. Some members fled across borders, while others stayed and still others migrated from rural conflict zones into more protected cities. It should not be surpris-ing then that a growing literature discusses the effects of migration on family life and gender relations. One could easily assume that the tumultuous events of the 1980s would have far reaching consequences for these relationships, but the evidence is conflictive. In communities highly impacted by emigration, for instance, it is quite common to hear people complain that children left behind in the care of grandparents when their parents emigrate suffer from emotional, disciplinary, and educational problems. For example, in their research on Nicaraguan migrants to Costa Rica, Cranshaw and Morales (1998) have found that high female migration leads adolescent girls, in particular, to feel abandoned by their migrant mothers, resulting in deep psychological and emotional scars. Faulstich Orellana et al. (1998) document that

increasing numbers of children born in California experience "transnational childhoods," traveling back and forth between their parents' home towns in Guatemala and El Salvador and cities in California during school vacations or even longer.

Negotiating family matters and relationships across borders is very stressful, not infrequently to the breaking point. I have discussed these issues extensively with non-migrants in El Salvador, particularly with the wives of migrants who depend upon a steady stream of remittances to feed their families. The remittances received often do not cover the expenses; letters and phone calls to migrants often do not resolve the problem, for the physical distance has also become a social distance across which people cannot adequately communicate the differences in their realities. The fact that many families have become dependent upon the remittances supplied by migrant members exacerbates as well as attenuates these difficulties. On the one hand, the income may permit the family members to enjoy a higher standard of material living than prior to migration. On the other hand, the long-term absence of migrants from their families can lead to divorce and to children feeling abandoned by their parents. There is also evidence that gender relations shift as women and girls assume "male" tasks, such as planting crops, because so many men are absent for long periods of time (Mahler 1999c).

5.1. Transnational Entrepreneurial Activities

Over the years, one of the transnational phenomena that has received much attention is the existence of transnational enterprises. These are small to medium-sized businesses which operate across borders and are frequently run by migrants themselves. A case in point is the *viajeros* or *encomenderos* who transport remittances, packages, and communications for migrants and their relatives living in different countries (Mahler 1999a; Orozco 1999). Another, larger example, is evidenced by the Tapachulteca supermarket chain, which has a store in Los Angeles as well as stores in El Salvador (Landolt, Autler, and Baires 1999). Transnational businesses thrive off of meeting the needs and desires of a migrant clientele, often aided by Central American governments who have also become transnational actors. An example is the Salvadoran government's Programa Nacional de Competitividad. This program works with migrant communities to assist in the ex-

pansion of Salvadoran exports to these areas as well as to cultivate business relationships with Salvadoran migrant entrepreneurs that could expand commerce between El Salvador and other countries. In a similar vein, Salvadoran and Guatemalan governments and business organizations have established trade fairs in Los Angeles. Government officials have expressed to me the desire to expand these efforts in the future, to exploit the commercial possibilities opened up by transnational migration and transnational markets. Given the expanding Central American population abroad, there is good growth potential in these markets. Consequently, I expect that such government-private sector hybrid efforts to develop transnational markets will expand in the coming years.

5.2. Home Town Associations

Home town associations formed by migrants and operating across borders are one type of transnational activity that has received a great deal of scholarly as well as public attention in recent years. Ostensibly, home town associations organize fundraisers to garner moneys that will be used for altruistic projects in migrants' communities of origin: the building of new schools, roads, or recreation facilities, for instance (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1999; Landolt et al. 1999; Lungo 1997; Popkin 1999). Numerical estimates are rough as organizations come into and out of existence with some frequency; figures for Salvadoran associations suggest that there are 70 or more in Los Angeles, around 15 in Washington, D.C. and several in metropolitan New York (Landolt et al. 1999).

Home town associations mark transnational grassroots involvement in and responsibility for local development and improvement endeavors. Projects organized with home town associations can enjoy greater autonomy than state-funded projects because the associations provide much or all of the necessary funding. Thus, communities are not as beholden to government funding and to the party politics that typically accompany such ventures. I will add here that in the literature to date home town associations are always depicted as transnational; however, in my own research I have found that home town associations are also formed by people resident in cities in Central America. Like the transnational organizations, these associations are usually constituted by migrants, though rural-to-urban migrants, and serve as support

systems for the migrants as well as fundraising entities to help their home towns. They are urban counterparts to the transnational associations.

Emerging research findings on transnational home town associations strike a cautionary note: Associations may facilitate collaboration in innovative ways, but they may also foster cleavages. One example is gender. The 1998 CEPAL report suggests that home town associations are opening avenues for high degrees of participation by females. Research on this topic is limited and engages Mexican transnationalism, but its findings, nonetheless, diverge sharply from CEPAL's optimism (e.g., Goldring 1996; Goldring 1999). Women are found to participate, but largely in supporting and not decision-making roles; they have different priorities for projects, and their interests are neglected. Home town associations can also be crucibles for class interests if not conflicts. Data from a cross-national study documents that Salvadoran business entrepreneurs participate in home town associations over six times more often than non-entrepreneur migrants (Guarnizo, personal communication). This disparity suggests that home town associations may be a medium for certain groups — the wealthy and politically savvy, in particular — to pursue their interests. In that vein, there is also growing evidence that home town associations produce rifts between local leaders and migrants as much or more than they foster cooperation (e.g., Landolt, Autler, and Baires 1999; Orozco 1999; Smith 1998). Local leaders become jealous of migrants' power as exercised through the associations and the remittances generated, at least in part because it makes the leaders seem incapable of addressing their own communities' problems. In some cases migrants have run for and been elected to office as local mayors, underscoring the vulnerability of local leaders.

A corpus of research also documents that home town associations and their agglomerations (e.g., regional associations) attract the attention of migrants' home country governments, which seek to cultivate relationships that benefit states as well (Goldring 1998; González Gutiérrez 1997; Guarnizo 1997; Smith 1998). Most of this research extends beyond Central American case studies, but I will provide a brief overview because some of these efforts are being explored if not duplicated in Central America. The quintessential example of state cultivation of migrant home town associations is the Mexican government's Program of Attention to Mexican Communities Abroad (PCME). Founded in 1990

and housed in the Foreign Ministry, PCME's mandate is to foster state cooperation with home town associations. Consular officials, governors, and other government officials are sent to cultivate ties with migrant organizations and win their support for issues crucial to the Mexican government, such as the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (for details see Goldring 1998; Gonzalez Gutierrez 1997; Guarnizo 1997; Smith 1998). One strategy employed by PCME was to match every dollar donated by affiliated home town associations with two from federal coffers. The "2 for 1 program," as it was nicknamed became very popular and attracted the attention of some Central American governments, most notably El Salvador. In 1999 the PCME director visited the Salvadoran Foreign Ministry to explain the program more directly. On October 1 of that year El Salvador established the Dirección General de Atención a la Comunidad en el Exterior (DGACE), with the stated goal of "incorporating the Salvadoran community abroad into the process of national development by fortifying its links with El Salvador through national initiatives…." (DGACE 1999)[10].

Central American governments have also been very active in diplomatic negotiations with the governments of countries their citizens have migrated to. High-level meetings have discussed immigration policies (see CEPAL 1998, Mahler 1999b, Orozco 1999) and, most recently, the impact of Hurricane Mitch as well as more traditional topics, such as trade and economic assistance. Pressure for governments to act on transnational issues also emanates from migrant communities abroad who are, for example, increasingly demanding expanded transnational political rights. At present, some but not all Central American countries permit their citizens to hold dual nationality or citizenship with another country; only Belize permits its citizens to vote abroad. Naturally, this limits migrants' political influence back home. In the future, Central American migrants are likely to press for similar expansions of their political rights. Many nascent organizations working toward this goal already (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1999; also GUATENET, personal communication). If more migrants win the right to vote abroad they

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[10] Original Spanish version:"Incorporar a la comunidad salvadoreña en el exterior en el proceso de desarrollo nacional, por medio del fortalecimiento de sus vínculos con el país por medio de inciativas nacionales eficaces…".

could well determine elections, particularly in the case of El Salvador. Such electoral power already exists for newly legalized Nicaraguans in Costa Rica who, if they vote en masse, could swing close elections. Given the potential for transnational politics, I predict that struggles between migrant and non-migrant constituencies over migrant political rights will be contentious and lengthy in coming years. Given their existing economic power, they are likely to succeed over time with major ramifications for Central American politics.

5.3. Future Generations of Central Americans Living Abroad

My research has found pervasive fear among many government officials that the children of migrants living abroad will lose their national identity, a sense of their ancestry and heritage. They fear that future generations who do not maintain a Central American identity will be much less likely to remit to their ancestors' homelands or make other contributions. The fate of children born to Central American migrants living outside their homelands is complex and to date there has been little research to evaluate the situation, let alone hypothesize about the future. As mentioned previously, some children are being raised transnationally; they are likely to acquire an identity that incorporates their heritage. There is growing evidence of this cultural hybridity in music, art, poetry and novels (see for example, Rodríguez 1999).

The positive side of Central American migrant youth is often overshadowed by the growing incidence of deported gang members. In the 1990s, deportations from the United States to Central America escalated by several thousand per year, as reflected in Table 5. Though gang members and other criminal deportees are only a small subset of Central Americans who return each year, they have had high visibility and are widely blamed for accelerating crime rates in several countries, El Salvador in particular. In that country, gang graffiti blemishes walls nearly everywhere, even in very small, rural towns, giving the impression that the gang situation is more pervasive and consequential than is probably true.

Table 5: Central Americans deported from the United States
By Country of Nationality
1992-1996

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total	Percent
Belize	97	113	83	55	88	**436**	**1.46%**
Costa Rica	42	36	28	34	47	**187**	**0.63%**
El Salvador	1.962	2.014	1.784	1.783	2.360	**9.903**	**33.17%**
Guatemala	1.409	1.310	1.179	1.654	1.980	**7.532**	**25.23%**
Honduras	1.849	1.648	1.585	1.875	2.693	**9.650**	**32.32%**
Nicaragua	310	252	376	354	382	**1.674**	**5.61%**
Panama	105	105	98	81	86	**475**	**1.59%**
Total	**5.774**	**5.478**	**5.133**	**5.836**	**7.636**	**29.857**	

Source: INS Yearbook 1996, Table 67

Grass-roots transnational organizations such as Homies Unidos have been started to assist gang deportees and their families (Cruz and Portillo Peña 1998). The crisis that has arisen around deportations has also motivated new intergovernmental efforts by Central American countries and the United States. Programs to receive the deportees and assist in their reintegration into society are being developed in several countries along a model begun in El Salvador's airport called *Bienvenido a Casa* (Welcome Home). Some of these advances can be credited to the Regional Conference on Migration, more commonly known as the Proceso Puebla. Shortly, I will turn to a discussion of Proceso Puebla and other multilateral, national, and local efforts to address migration and provide services to migrants.

Finally, in recent years government advocacy, often in collaboration with migrant organizations, has begun to sponsor transnational cultural events and organizations, such as "Immigrant Week" at home and abroad. Central American consular officials also attend Central American Independence Day celebrations in various cities in the United States. El Salvador and Guatemala have taken the lead by each opening a Casa de Cultura (cultural center) in Los Angeles, a transnational counterpart to such centers in Salvadoran and Guatemalan towns (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1999; Landolt et al. 1999). The Salvadoran Casa de Cultura encourages home town associations to meet and plan their activities from its location. One government official stated that the long-term goal is to encourage collaboration between *casas* in El Salvador and in Los Angeles. One motivation for such efforts is that governments correctly anticipate that the second and later generations

of Central Americans living abroad can play key roles in regional development if their identities are cultivated and their economic and human capital tapped. Above and beyond continuing to remit, these generations are likely to enjoy high levels of knowledge, training, and contacts that could benefit Central America. Such a “brain gain” is unlikely to occur unless expressly cultivated by governments and the private sector through, for example, cultural and educational exchanges, internships, and other incentives offered to high school and university students.

5.4. Regional Organizations that Address Migration

Although during the crises of the 1980s international organizations such as UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided most assistance to Central American migrants, the massive migrant flows through the isthmus pressured regional governments to address the issue as well. The first effort was the Comisión Centroamericana de Directores de Migración (Commission of Central American Directors of Migration). This Commission was established in 1990 with several objectives: (1) to establish a permanent forum for adopting regional decisions and actions on migration; (2) to improve regional monitoring of migration and migration facilities (e.g., border crossing stations and record keeping); and (3) facilitate the transit of member countries’ nationals throughout the region (Maguid 1999). The latter objective evolved into “CA-4,” a convention around free transit that included a unified migration policy with control cards for four participating nations: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

In 1996, a much more ambitious collaborative government-level initiative was begun in Puebla, Mexico. The Regional Conference on Migration, or Proceso Puebla, brings together many foreign affairs officials as well as directors of immigration from the hemisphere, North and Central America in particular, on a regular basis to create a multilateral approach to regional migration. Its mission is to coordinate the policies, actions, and objectives agreed to by the participating governments, who meet annually to set priorities and plan activities. Proceso Puebla has identified five main areas of concern: migration policies, migration

and development, combating human smuggling[11], international cooperation for returning migrants from outside the region, and human rights. Throughout the year subcommittees of Proceso Puebla meet to work on specific objectives around those themes outlined at the annual meeting. Though NGOs have been active since the inception of Proceso Puebla, only in 1997 at the third annual conference were they permitted to attend meetings. Their status is nonvoting; they are invited principally as observers, sharing this status with the United Nations organizations such as the IOM, UNHCR, and CEPAL.

Proceso Puebla is a young organization that is growing and maturing. There is no reason to believe that its efforts will subside; conversely, I expect them to increase and expand over the coming decades. However, it is largely a high-level undertaking. The question remains as to how effective such a regionally focused organization can be, given the fact that migrations and their effects in Central America and beyond are so uneven. I will address this query in the next and final section of my report.

On a national level, most Central American countries have some type of *Consejo*, *Foro* or *Mesa de Migrantes* that serves as a collaborative forum for NGOs, government officials, community representatives, service organizations, and sometimes scholars to discuss and address the multitude of needs arising as a consequence of migration. They vary by format, constitution, legitimacy, level of collaboration, and degree of effectiveness from country to country. In some countries, such as El Salvador and Honduras, they have been instrumental in coordinating services to deportees; in Guatemala and again in El Salvador, they have been a locus for organizing "Immigrant Week" and other activities that affect the perception and reception of migrants in their countries of origin. They also serve to inform the public about migration and to sensitize people to the plight of migrants. To my mind they hold great promise for understanding the particularities of each

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[11] The official reference is "illegal trafficking in humans" but I personally disdain this terminology as it consciously or subconsciously equates migration with drug "trafficking," as if they were similar and equivalently evil processes. Many attendees at the Central America 2020 conference emphasized the need to distinguish these two phenomena.

country's migration issues and for being able to communicate these to higher level organizations such as Proceso Puebla. In my discussions with members of these forums, however, I have learned of structural and financial limitations which undermine their effectiveness. A critical problem is financing; the forums are often underfunded or do not enjoy funding stable enough to allow them to operate continuously and smoothly. Frequently, the limited funding available is from the government or from international funds administered by the government. The perception of a forum as dominated by government interests — though this need not necessarily be true — can jeopardize its effectiveness, particularly when it seeks to work with transnational migrants who are often wary of past experiences with governments (e.g., Lara Martínez 1994).

Finally, I have noted that in most cases few, if any, researchers participate in these migrant forums. In some cases, such as Honduras, this is nearly inevitable. Almost no research has been done on Honduran migration (a notable exception is Garifuna emigration). Although the countries most impacted by migration have sufficient scholars to be included, at least in some cases they seem quite divorced from the *Foros, Mesas* or *Consejos*. Thus, there is a significant distance between the people who generate much of the information about Central American migration and the people who make policies or address the needs of migrants. Not surprisingly, no university in the entire region offers a course on migration — whether on theories of migration, migration law and policies, or even courses to train service providers. This deficiency needs to be addressed. FLACSO-Guatemala has begun to do so by offering a year-long training — a good start, although more needs to be done, as I will emphasize in my recommendations.

5.5. Future Prognosis

There is no reason to believe that transnational migration and its consequences will abate in the next two decades. On the contrary, numerous factors indicate that these ties will widen and strengthen. A principal one is the continuation of emigration from the region (most notably to the United States, albeit also to Canada and Mexico) as well as intra-regional flows. The infusion of new migrants into communities abroad is likely to thwart those communities' full-fledged assimilation

into the larger society. Secondly, transnational ties are facilitated by technological changes that will only accelerate in the future. These include the ease of travel via airplane and revolutions in communication (e.g., the Internet, satellite connections and so on) that make it cheaper and easier to cultivate ties and interests across transnational spaces. Lastly, I predict that transnationalism will be fostered through developing economic and political ties. As addressed previously, Central American governments have become key transnational actors in recent years and I see their efforts growing into the future. A case in point is the current Salvadoran government, whose president is a transnational migrant who has made relations to expatriate communities abroad a top administration priority. These efforts include the establishment of technology centers in Salvadoran towns that will facilitate communication between migrants and their family and friends abroad. Additionally, as Central American communities abroad mature, they are generating new leaders, many of whom have a vision for their communities that acknowledges and embraces transnational ties. The degree and impact of these ties, however, will be shaped largely by if and how well different sectors of Central American society — at home and abroad, private and public, civil and governmental — identify and pursue fruitful collaborations. Such partnerships must be viewed as processes that will take time and effort to cultivate. They will likely pursue different styles to meet the varying needs of each country and region. In the next and final section, I propose one possible model that I feel holds promise if implemented thoughtfully over the coming years.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Migration will remain an enduring feature of Central American life in the coming decades. Trends in force today are not expected to change radically in coming years. To date, the enormous impact of different types of migration in the region, though uneven, has not generated either government or civil sector responses and planning commensurate with its impact. Consequently, the great potential of migration has not been harnessed effectively toward concrete regional development strategies. It is now time to make such planning a priority, but it must be done carefully and cooperatively.

6.1. Comprehensive Needs Assessment Study

The wealth of migratory processes affecting Central America have not been adequately researched, crippling the work of comprehending their future trajectories and effects. Problems include inadequate record keeping, such as statistics from border check points and the lack of standardization in migration-related data collected during countries' annual household surveys and periodic censuses. Few areas affected by migration have been researched comprehensively; no universities offer classes on migration theory, policy, law, and consequences; and the dynamics of the region's multiple migratory flows serve to further complicate this deficiency in research and training. Consequently, my first and most ardent recommendation is that Central America undertake a systemic evaluation of the types and effects of migration in the region. Such a comprehensive study could be reasonably designed and undertaken over a two-year period, could lead to more standardized statistics, and would provide a foundation for embarking on specific development projects related to migration. Additionally, financial assistance is needed to support centers for research and training on migration, places where different constituencies can meet, share ideas, and develop strategies.

6.2. Migration Councils: A Model for Migration-Related Development Projects

At this point I will direct the report toward a concrete model for addressing migration and regional development. My approach is to

integrate these purposes into an institutional structure called Consejos de Migración, or Migration Councils, that would operate nationally and coordinate regionally. These councils would interface with migration-impacted localities as well as with regional efforts such as Proceso Puebla and Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (SICA). The councils would *not* involve developing wholly new institutions but rather build upon existing foundations, the *Foros, Mesas*, or *Consejos de Migrantes*, strengthening them and expanding their roles.

One major change from existing structures would be the constitution of the organizations. In my discussion of home town associations and how they have attracted government attention in Section 5, I noted that these organizations, as well as *Consejos/Foros/Mesas de Migrantes*, face the daunting task of representing and negotiating many people's interests. Inevitably, some groups or individuals feel excluded or marginalized. This is a recipe for schisms, and there is evidence in case studies of fractures that undermine important community projects. What I will propose now is an alternative that incorporates many of the different players active in these organizations into a structure that does not permit the domination of any one group and its interests over the other. Moreover, this proposed model includes not only procedures for project implementation, but also for research and evaluation.

Fellow migration scholars and I agree that the constitution of each council should be carefully designed around inclusivity. Membership should include representatives from government, service, and scholarly circles as well as from migrant groups — urban and transnational — and affected communities. Ideally, each group would enjoy equal representation and the council would enjoy stable funding (addressed later). The councils would be charged with two fundamental responsibilities: (1) to evaluate and address national needs relating to migration (rural-to-urban, regional, international, and transnational); and (2) to work collaboratively with councils in the region as well as with larger regional and hemispheric efforts to address supranational issues, such as collection of statistical data border entries and exits, treatment of interdicted undocumented immigrants, and so on. The first step to be implemented would be for each country to create a council or transform an existing organization into a council along the constituency specifications outlined above. The council, in turn, would hire a professional director, support staff, and program evaluators.

The centerpiece of the model would address the councils' first responsibility, namely, gearing development assistance to communities most impacted by migration and most willing to marshal different resources to meet their identified needs. The proposal calls for a research phase, followed by implementation and later evaluation. Each country in the region would conduct comprehensive assessment studies to identify areas, communities, and urban neighborhoods most affected by different types of migration and the issues that are most pronounced in these areas. Results from the study would be disseminated nationally and locally through the media and fora during which the council would describe its mission and explain to communities how they can apply for development assistance. The councils would encourage communities to: (1) develop a plan to address their needs and prioritize them; and (2) identify and bring together different groups to assist in developing and implementing the plan. The groups I feel need to be included at the negotiation table are: local community leaders (of institutions such as schools, as well as business and municipal government officials); representatives of migrant populations (including home town associations abroad as well as those located in cities in Central America, but not to the exclusion of other unorganized migrants); and the researchers who originally conducted the needs evaluation study. A member from each major constituency (e.g., government, civil society, business, migrant, intended beneficiary) would be elected to serve on the project's advisory board. Ideally, council staff would be available to work with community groups to develop a project, identify its cost, and generate an implementation plan. Alternatively, local NGOs, such as community development agencies (ADESCOs in El Salvador for example) with legal standing (*personería jurídica*) could be contracted by the advisory board to serve in this same capacity if needed.

Once a plan of action is developed and priced, funds would be raised by the advisory board using a formula that requires participation by the local community (including local government), the migrant community (urban and transnational), and the national government. One possibility is for each group to raise one-third of the necessary funds. By distributing the financial responsibility across different constituencies, each group would become vested in the project and also receive acknowledgment for its participation. There may also be a way of setting up a bank account or "remittance bank," monitored by an independent agency, where each constituency could deposit funds (and so that

migrants abroad could send donations directly to the fund). The council/NGO would continue to work in an advisory capacity to ensure the trustworthiness of the fundraising and distribution as well as the orchestration of the project. Additionally, the council/NGO would be charged with ensuring democratic representation in the project and arbitrating any grievances. Appeals of decisions at the local level could be filed with and arbitrated by the council. The latter regulations would assure that certain traditionally disenfranchised groups, such as indigenous groups, the peasantry, and women, would not be excluded in these efforts.

Finally, upon completion of the project, the advisory board would produce a report that would be made available to every constituency. Additionally, an independent evaluation of each project would be required and would be performed by the migration council's evaluation staff. The latter evaluation would help to identify both general strengths and weaknesses of projects designed and developed in this manner, as well as specific reasons why the community in question should or should not be funded for additional projects.

I believe that this model, while not fully refined in this brief description, would address multiple issues that have plagued development projects in many venues to date. It would address issues of inclusivity, ensuring that a wide variety of people and their interests are addressed if not met. Second, it would foster local initiatives but assist them with backing from a series of different actors and institutions. This mitigates against both the possibility of one group controlling the project or taking the funding for its own purposes, and against the common expectation in Central America that the government or international aid donors are the only available sources of financial assistance for development projects. On the contrary, this model would emphasize that people can take initiative and invest themselves in the betterment of their communities *and* that government is obligated to assist them but not resolve their needs completely. Third, because this model is driven by local needs and informed by local leadership, it is much more likely to generate appropriate development strategies than projects identified and financed from national and international NGOs located almost exclusively in capital cities. Fourth, this plan would encourage people to work collectively and even across international borders to achieve their goals. No one group would be allowed to dominate, but neither

could projects be allowed to proceed without the integrated efforts of different social sectors. Fifth and finally, the model builds in accountability and evaluation. If problems were to occur, the evaluators would identify them and perhaps recommend against assisting future projects organized by groups whose previous projects did not meet council standards.

The major problem I foresee with this model is its financing, particularly start-up moneys. Although the funds invested in the actual project would be raised as outlined above and would not require a major new funding source, the resources needed to pay for the comprehensive assessment studies, the NGO/advisory board involvement and the migration councils would need to be generated. This is the contribution I see international aid agencies making, one with a definite time limit. For example, agencies could commit to five years of start-up funding and technical assistance. During these five years, each country would develop and train a migration council, conduct a nationwide study on migration with the assistance of the international community, and institute procedures for receiving and evaluating development project proposals as well as monitoring and assessing them. During the five years, much of the funding for actual development projects would emanate from the international agencies, but councils would work toward identifying alternative, long-term funds to cover both the administrative expenses of the councils as well as a pool of capital available to invest into the projects themselves. One possible candidate for long-term funding is a tax on remittance agency profits, applied in the U.S. or, less likely, in Central America. Other possibilities include: (1) a tax on tourism (modeled after Mexico); (2) a percentage of the airport exit tax or customs duty on imported goods; or (3) a fee incorporated into the cost of the funded projects. The key is to identify and solidify sources of uninterrupted income that will guarantee the livelihood and independence of the councils over time. Funding for development projects themselves may not be as difficult, following a calculus outlined above.

Aside from overseeing development projects, the migration councils could become involved in a variety of other activities relating to migration. Examples include but are not limited to the following: organizing cultural or academic exchanges between countries linked by migratory flows; celebrations reflecting the positive contributions of migrants to their societies of origin, such as “Immigrant Week”; developing policy

recommendations for government leaders on matters needing legislation, such as tax breaks or special funds for return migrant entrepreneurs or for local entrepreneurs hiring returnees; starting or extending programs to assist deportees and their reincorporation into society, along the lines of the Salvadoran "Bienvenido a Casa" program. The councils might also provide financial or other assistance to migrants abroad, such as helping them import donated goods or facilitating information on associations working in their home towns.

Beyond addressing the specific needs of each country and its migration-impacted populations, the councils would also be charged with meeting periodically in regional fora to discuss the progress and problems each face as they evaluate funded development projects. They would become organizations with abundant knowledge to offer in the exploration of regional initiatives. I see the councils as forming an important middle layer between existing regional and hemispheric migration organizations, such as Proceso Puebla and Comisión Centroamericana de Directores de Migración, and small-scale communities impacted by migration. The broad representation of different social sectors in the councils would bring an additional dimension to their participation in diverse regional issues, from data collection on migration to treatment of interdicted undocumented immigrants.

If the proposed model were followed and implemented along the lines suggested, the outcome would be a strengthening and enhancing of existing organizations that currently serve as a foundation for a much more ambitious effort. The migration councils would evolve from the Consejos/Foros/Mesas de Migrantes already in existence in most countries but they would be strengthened and their purview expanded. As such, they would serve as key intermediaries between local and transnational communities' interests and those of national governments. Similarly, they would bridge the existing gap between the Proceso Puebla hemispheric governmental efforts and the more specific needs of nations and of Central America as a region. The councils would also become depositories of information and trained personnel at the disposition of every sector of society, helping to ensure that accurate information is disseminated and appropriate procedures are followed. Finally, I see in this model tremendous potential for implementing development projects that could actually resolve some problems wrought by migration. A community with high emigration of its youth owing to a dearth of local employment opportunities could apply

for funds to build workshops to teach skills appropriate to the region. Another community might apply for funds to build a youth center to mitigate the effects of deported gang members. An urban neighborhood might need a drop-in center for women whose husbands are migrants to meet, exchange their experiences, and work on strategies to help them cope with their spouses' absence. The list of needs is already long; if the proposal were implemented then more of these needs would be met and a new chapter written on the role of migration in regional development.

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Central America 2020

Background

During the 1990s Central America went through processes of profound change on the political scene, with democratic governments being set up in all states in the region. However, the political changes were not accompanied to a sufficient extent by parallel economic and social transformations, so Central America continues to be the continent's poorest region. At the same time the armed conflicts of the previous decade led to greater backwardness in the region in terms of social development (education, health and life expectancy of its population).

This situation has led to increasing awareness in the Central American countries of the importance of implementing profound changes, and the need to establish a regional development model for all the states in the area has grown increasingly apparent. So various actions have been initiated with the goal of achieving regional economic integration, thus reactivating the common internal market.

However, these forces of integration have often found themselves impeded by the lack of an adequate institutional framework capable of meeting the challenges that the future will pose. This is precisely where the international community could support the regional development process in the area in the long term, and the present project *Central America 2020* is in keeping with this.

Project objectives

The aim of *Central America 2020* is to promote sustainable development in the region, starting from a concept of development as a dynamic, multidimensional process consisting of:

- sustained economic growth
- improvement in social well-being
- guarantees of citizenship for all social, gender and ethnic categories.

This definition of development is sound and was devised before Hurricane Mitch struck the region in October-November 1998, with devastating effects. It is not that the definition now lacks relevance, but Mitch served to remind us of the region's vulnerability to natural disasters and of the state's meagre capacity to respond in an effective way. In this context, sustainability acquires a special significance in Central America: natural disasters are inevitable, but they must not be made worse by human action, nor must their consequences be aggravated by the incapacity or incompetence of the state and its institutions.

One of the chief objectives of the *Central America 2020* project is to contribute toward the Central American states' regional integration process, taking stock of the results achieved so far and examining the current difficulties and those which are likely to emerge in the medium term in the politico-institutional field.

The specific objectives are:

1. To mount a comprehensive regional survey of contemporary development issues. The questions asked must take into account three intersecting issues:
    - relations between the state, the market and civil society
    - options at the local, national and regional level
    - the viability of sustainable development in Central America
2. To ensure the participation and contribution of a wide range of key regional players in the course of research.
3. To provide governments and other sectors in the region with various policy options and recommendations
4. To promote regional identity among the public and private players involved in development
5. To extend the project results to the international players that are most active in the region's development dynamics, including multilateral organisations and NGOs
6. To make policy recommendations to the United States and the European Union for more effective aid programmes.

The project's findings will be presented at a major international conference to be held in Central America during 2000 and at seminars in Washington, D.C., and Brussels. They will also be distributed in a series of working papers, monographs and books published in English and Spanish and also available on the Internet, the Spanish and German versions at http://www.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/IIK/za2020 and the English version at http://ca2020.fiu.edu.

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