

WHEN MOTHERS AND FATHERS MIGRATE NORTH:

Caretakers, Children, and Child Rearing in Guatemala

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Abstract:

A substantial portion of Guatemala's population emigrates to the United States—about ten to fifteen percent of a twelve million population migrates. Although this northward stream has led to significant societal changes throughout the country, little research examines this outward movement from the perspective of sending areas and explores how household structures increasingly are bound up in transnational migration processes. Drawing on ethnographic research, this article focuses on those who stay and captures the dynamics of transnational families and the forms in which gender intersects within families in an eastern Guatemalan sending community. Specifically, the article asks: What kinds of social relationships develop between caregivers and children and relationships between parents and caregivers due to transnational processes? Key to the analysis are gender and family relations among parents, caretakers, and children—transnational families whose lives straddle two or more nation-states and who are affected by the necessity for transnational migration.

1. transnational families
2. social relations
3. caretakers
4. child rearing practices
5. Guatemalan migration

When Mothers And Fathers Migrate North:
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“I raised a granddaughter and a niece,” Doña Sonia, a stout, jovial, middle-aged woman with six children and twenty grandchildren, proudly related when I inquired about the children she had cared for in previous years.²

The little girl, my niece, they [the parents] left her with me when she was merely a baby. But then, when she turned fourteen, my sister took her away from me. And from that I gained weight. I used to be really skinny. But when I’m nervous, I can’t sleep and I get hungry. When I’m sad or distressed, that’s how I get. The little girl is suffering a great deal with her parents over there [in the United States]. She cries and cries. One day my niece even wanted to leave; she was planning on running away. Whom she loves...is me. It was me who raised her.

But Doña Sonia, a non-migrant and caretaker, is far from alone. Such emotional wear and tear is not uncommon among many family and friends who maintain the responsibility of caring for children when parents migrate to the United States. Although in past years the overwhelming majority of males migrated and left their wives and children behind, increasingly females in Guatemala’s eastern region (el Oriente) make the journey North in search for better economic opportunities. Given that a substantial portion of Guatemala’s population emigrates, this northward stream has led to significant societal changes throughout the country—about ten to fifteen percent of a twelve million population migrates.

In spite that large flows of Guatemalans hail North (many whom reside in urban and rural areas scattered across the United States), little research examines this outward movement. Little work also explores how household structures increasingly are bound up in transnational migration processes. In general, much of the literature on migration tends to emphasize the standpoint of those who leave and migrants' places of arrival while overlooking those who stay and the effects and outcomes that transnational processes generate at the local level in home communities. Migrants' home countries become central when scholars examine the visible and tangible consequences of migration, particularly monetary remittances. The goal here is threefold: 1) to focus on those who stay; 2) to capture the dynamics of how transnational migration processes impact families; and 3) to explore the multivariate forms in which gender intersects within families.

Transnational migration impinges on families and households in variant ways. This article addresses the divergent child rearing practices that surface to accommodate the spatial and temporal separations between parents and children in migrant households in a Guatemalan sending community in the Oriente (eastern region). More specifically, I ask: what kinds of social relationships develop between caregivers and children and relationships between parents and caregivers due to transnational migration processes? Before delving into the core of the analysis, I first introduce my methods and research site. This section is then followed by a brief review of the literature guiding my study—Guatemalan migration, gender, and transnational families. Key to the analysis are gender and family relations among parents, caretakers, and children—families whose lives

straddle two or more nation-states and who are affected by the necessity for transnational migration.

METHODS AND RESEARCH SITE

The ethnographic data presented here derives from fieldwork in the community of Gualán in eastern Guatemala.³ This ethnographic material includes participant observation, fieldnotes, personal journal, multiple informal interviews, and in-depth, tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews, lasting between two to three hours each. The sample (based on snowball sampling) consisted of 35 Gualantecos, aged 18 to 67. I interviewed 20 females and 15 males (migrants and non-migrants) from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Of these study participants 25 were married or in consensual unions, 5 single, 2 separated, 2 divorced, and 1 widowed, and most had children. While employing snowball sampling does not yield generalizable outcomes, by selecting individuals from distinct neighborhoods this strategy ensures that different sectors of the municipio (township) are represented. One of the aims in my larger research project was to explore transnational processes, particularly return migration and remittances (economic and social), and their effects on gender, class, and ethnicity in migrants' homeland. During the course of my fieldwork Gualantecos repeatedly touched on family relations, especially relationships among parents, caretakers, and youth. Throughout my work, then, I sought to further delve into an issue that is significant to those involved in migration. Thus, the core question here emerges from research driven by the very concerns of the "studied" population.

Gualán, a vibrant and bustling eastern town, sits squarely in the department of Zacapa, 165 kilometers northeast from Guatemala City. Several physical and social

attributes characterize Guatemala's Oriente. While a few Maya indigenous villages dot the terrain, for the most part it is a Ladino-dominated region.⁴ The Oriente is a hot and dry area—a place that holds a distinctive spot in Guatemala's history and geography for its cattle ranches, large estates, poor quality land, and lack of irrigation. At the same time, it is a place largely enveloped with machista ideals, guns, and pistols. Guatemala's Oriente is often juxtaposed with the Occidente (the western highlands, a predominantly Maya indigenous region). This rift emerges and continues to be central in Guatemalan society as a result of the dichotomous ethnic terms—Maya and Ladino—in which the country is often cast: because of its distinctive ethnicities, because of its varied environments and differences forged during colonial times (e.g., tenure regimes, production objectives, and property relations), and because of particular political interests and historical accounts. Researchers, however, seldom compare both regions or focus on the Oriente because it lacks the “exoticism” that the western highlands offer.

GUATEMALAN MIGRATORY FLOWS

Like many other Guatemalan villages and towns, the Oriente has experienced strong out-migration North. Some of Gualán's residents say that almost a third of the township's men and women have migrated to the United States—a municipio with approximately 30,000 inhabitants. Early migrants began to look North in the 1960s. Thereafter, as political upheavals intensified and economic prospects declined, a greater number of individuals migrated during the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, and more recently, U.S.-bound migration from Guatemala grew exponentially. In the case of Gualán, folks head to several U.S. cities. Los Angeles (California) and Chicago, (Illinois) constitute the two main urban destinations. But current economic growth of

desert cities like Las Vegas (Nevada) and Phoenix (Arizona) catches the eye of many Gualantecos. In spite of the spatial and temporal distances that separate Gualanteco migrants from loved ones at home, enduring social networks connect their places of origin and arrival. Strong transnational attachments linking migrants' communities of origin and destination develop and continue because migration in one way or another impact those who remain behind—and in Guatemala, few remain untouched.

U.S.-bound Guatemalan migration stems from a number of forces. Broad structural dimensions—the interplay of historical and political economic conditions—that contribute to the rise in outward migratory flows include the political ramifications of the scorched-earth campaign, the country's continued economic crisis, lack of adequate development strategies, exorbitant unemployment rates, high inflation, the national currency's devaluation, and overall a “dollarized” economy (with the sole exception of minimum wages). A closer examination, however, reveals that several determinants at the local scale also help set the stage for Guatemalan mothers and fathers to leave their children behind. Such driving factors include wives escaping marriages fraught with domestic violence, marginalized women in their communities, and/or men and women fleeing the law—aspects that often remain unspoken. While husbands abandoning wives is not new in Guatemala, increasingly commonplace is spousal abandonment when males migrate to the United States and then form another family abroad. For many Gualantecas facing such estrangements, and who are often left with the sole responsibility to nurture and raise the children, out-migration becomes an option. Although during the initial years of U.S.-bound migration male adults primarily headed North, as streams matured

females began to emigrate too. Now an equal migratory flow of men and women go to the United States from the Oriente.⁵

Although out-migration continues to increase, little is known about this northward movement and its effects and outcomes on Guatemalan soil. A proliferation of significant work considers Mexican migration to the United States, especially emigration from western and central Mexico. In comparison to the extant literature on Mexican migration, scant research attends to the Guatemalan case. Past work on U.S.-bound Guatemalan migration primarily brings to light the ways in which individuals build new lives and incorporate to the United States and Canada (e.g., Burns, 1993; Hagan, 1994; Loucky and Moors, 2000; Hamilton and Chinchilla, 2001; Fink, 2003; Nolin, 2004). Other studies explore, for example, the socio-psychological traumas (Vlach, 1992), the meaning of place and journey (Moran-Taylor and Richardson, 1993), labor (Repak, 1995), religion (Wellmeier, 1998), nostalgia (Moran-Taylor, 2001), and women's networks (Menjívar, 2002a). Increasingly, Guatemalan migration scholarship focuses on various aspects of transnational migration processes. Such contributions include: Kohpahl, 1998; Burns, 1999; Popkin, 1999; Hamilton and Chinchilla, 1999; Loucky and Moors, 2000; Menjívar, 2002b; Moran-Taylor, 2004; Moran-Taylor and Menjívar, 2005; Taylor, Moran-Taylor and Rodman Ruiz, 2005. Compared to this literature, explorations of transnational households, in particular caretakers and children—as foci of specific roles in the family, as social agents in migration, and in the context of the sending community remains overlooked.

GENDER AND TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

A large body of work now exists that takes a transnational analytical perspective to the study of international migration (e.g., Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Basch et al., 1994; Levitt, 2001). Despite the fact that a spate of studies on transnational migration emerged in the past decade, relatively little work examines interactions and dynamics of transnational families. Little research explores, for example, the underpinnings of how families work and the gendered implications of transnational processes on them. Past studies that address gender and transnational family life among Latin Americans include Soto (1987), Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow (1987), Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997), Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001), Thorne et al. (2003), and Pribilsky (2004). Increasingly migration scholarship provides a gendered view of migration; focuses on how women are equal participants in migration processes; and shows how gender shapes and is in turn transformed by migration (e.g., Georges, 1990; Donato, 1992; Hagan, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Hirsch, 1999, 2003). Past work also pays attention to “stay-at-homes,” “women who stay behind,” and “white widows” (Dinerman, 1982; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Reed, 2003). Although these prior studies attend to gender and transnational life, the role of caretakers remains understudied. Yet caretakers are social actors in migration processes too. Caretakers typically stay in migrants’ communities of origin; they care and raise children left behind when parents migrate North. The few contributions that explore transnational fatherhood, motherhood, and childhoods only indirectly discuss the critical role of caretakers in fostering and nurturing family connections (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997).

In this article, I frame my discussion within the literature that examines the dynamics of transnational families (i.e., families who are affected by the need for transnational migration) and the ways that gender comes into play within these families. In doing so, I place caretakers and children at the forefront of the analysis. An emphasis on caretakers, their views and experiences, reveals the divergent social practices and social relations that develop due to international migration. At the same time, rather than just looking at migrant men and women's experiences as many studies do, such a focus offers a greater appreciation of how migrant families forge family ties. Equally significant here are children. Children are social actors in global and transnational processes too, however, their lived experiences rarely receive adequate recognition in migration scholarship. Stephens (1995), for example, in her brilliant edited volume, Children and the Politics of Culture, calls for a better understanding of children's experiences in different world regions, national frameworks, and social contexts.

Migration studies, for example, give little recognition to how migration affects children and youth, especially first generation. Additionally, where and how dependent transnational family members grow up receives scant attention. A recent corrective include the contributions of Orellana et al. (2001) and Thorne et al. (2003). While this work nicely demonstrates the varied ways transnational practices impact how children grow up, primarily the focus rests on youngsters in the United States. Further, when studies consider children, the emphasis centers on how youngsters incorporate into U.S. communities. Most of this research privileges second generation children, language acquisition, segmented assimilation, identity, health, and school performance (e.g., Ogbu 1989; Fernández-Kelly and Schaufli 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Gibson 1997;

Zhou 1997; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Smith et al. 2003). By paying attention to caretakers and children, I provide a more nuanced reality of the underlying dynamics that shape transnational families. The following sections, then, lay out in greater detail the centrality of child rearing in migration processes, family dynamics, and the kinds of social relations that unfold between caregivers, children, and parents.

CHILD REARING PRACTICES

Child rearing is a vital dimension in social reproduction processes. It is the practice whereby children and young teenagers are taken care of by family, compadres (fictive kin), and/or friends while their parents migrate. Among Caribbean women (e.g., Soto 1987) and African-American women (e.g., Stack, 1974; Gray White, 1985; Stack and Burton, 1994), for instance, there is a well-established tradition of shared mothering and of leaving children behind while women migrate to other places in search of better economic prospects and brighter futures. The contrast between Guatemala and the Caribbean case is particularly striking. Given that Caribbean (especially West Indian) child leaving patterns among parents who migrate has a longer history and different gender relations than what I found in the Guatemalan example, it is instructive to briefly examine some of the responses that develop with that migratory flow.

Soto's (1987) astute analysis, for instance, casts light on how kin, fictive kin, and friends help maintain a cultural continuity among West Indian migrants. Like Stack (1974) and Stack and Burton (1994), she demonstrates how the practice of child fostering among women signifies a reciprocal commitment between the children that they raise and those same children who as adults must later care for them in old age. Soto (1987: 125) observes that engaging in such child rearing practices serves as an outlet in which women

can gain independence. This pattern develops because it reduces their dependence on the resources that male partners may or may not be able to afford them (Soto 1987). More recently, in a study that examines Dominican transnational migration, Levitt (2001) shows that sharing child rearing responsibilities is becoming commonplace. She goes on to illustrate some of the experiences that Dominican children must contend with when they are brought up across borders.

Hijos de crianza, in other words, children by rearing is not a new practice in Guatemala or in Latin America. Leaving children under the care of grandparents and/or other close kin is a long-standing tradition among Guatemalan women who migrate from rural areas to the hustle and bustle of Guatemala City (the capital) searching for wage-work.⁶ Many women find jobs in the capital as domestic workers, but increasingly in foreign-run maquilas (factories). Instead of seeking employment in these niches, what is novel about current migration trends—particularly for young and single mothers—is to journey North. In these cases, as Levitt (2001) also observes and as I later further discuss, sharing child rearing responsibilities becomes a transnational endeavor.

In Guatemala caretakers usually say mis hijos (my children) or los niños que cuido (the children I care for) when referring to the children under their care. For the most part, in Gualán maternal grandmothers, and then aunts, are entrusted with children left behind.⁷ Only on rare and dire circumstances children stay with personas particulares (close friends hired to help). Such situations emerge when parents have no one else to turn to (i.e., no family members of confianza [trust]) or no one available deemed adequate enough to discipline and raise their children. Many migrant and returnee parents expressed concerns about having their children well fed, taken well care of, and

out mischief during their absence. Generally, caretakers are known as encargados (guardians). Public and private institutions often acknowledge the term encargado as a valid entry on official forms. And when speaking to school principals and teachers about caretaker roles, they reported that about one-third of the students live under such arrangements. In contrast to the Caribbean case whereby women gain social power and prestige by exercising the position of caretaker (see Soto 1987), in Guatemala encargados do not seem to acquire any of these important social standings. What, then, accounts for such differences? Because Guatemala's Oriente is a place enveloped with strong machista (manly) ideals, this particular gender ideology may shape caretaking roles and thus the relative lack of prestige attached to caretakers.

While both men and women assume the responsibility of care providers, typically females take on this role. When male figures partake as caretakers in a household, such roles rest more symbolically. Even when female caretakers are expressly left in charge, male figures in the family may dominate in any decision-making that pertains to parental control. Again, these gendered dynamics most likely unfold because of prevailing patriarchal ideologies. In turn, these perceptions and norms configure the actual and symbolic roles of caretakers. A striking example is that of Mariana. She separated from her husband and raised three youngsters with no financial support. Determined, Mariana journeyed to Los Angeles. Although her kids stayed with her mother, in the end Mariana's brother held the final say in all social and financial matters concerning the children. Mariana's experience, and that of other migrant parents in Gualán, demonstrates common scenarios many locals related during the course of my fieldwork.

DYNAMICS OF FAMILY MIGRATION

A growing trend in eastern Guatemala is when couples migrate together to maximize their household economic resources. As Hirsch (1999) observes among Mexican migrants, it is not simply the negotiating power that migration changes, but it is what married folks opt to bargain for, in other words, their goals as a couple. To work por la necesidad (for economic needs), to financially prosper, and to improve their children's life chances emerge as chief reasons why Guatemalans migrate and leave their youngsters behind. Such decision-making takes place despite the enormous emotional suffering and pain involved. Findings from my study suggest that two distinct patterns unfold concerning whether individuals leave or bring their children to the United States: 1) when parents migrate legally (because they have the economic means and successfully manage to process the necessary paper work for a visa) youngsters are generally taken with the idea to stay and settle in the United States, and 2) when mothers and/or fathers make the journey North illegally (which in the Guatemalan case many do) children usually remain behind. Critical here too is that the different migration and accompaniment patterns that develop are class based to some degree.

Several factors influence the latter parental decision-making of leaving children home during migrants' long stints abroad. For one, including children in parents' migration agendas is generally viewed as deterring their goals. Plainly, it hinders their financial goals of earning, saving, and bringing piles of money back home. Because many Guatemalans migrate to the United States mostly due to economic motives, as most Gualantecos told me, bringing children impinges on the possibilities for both parents to productively engage in the labor force. Second, when families migrate, typically

individuals usually follow a stage migration pattern. Thus, when couples or one parent migrates, eventually the remaining family members at home are sent for to reunify with loved ones abroad. Third, the high fees charged for making the clandestine journey undocumented, guided by a coyote, preclude many parents from taking their children along.⁸ Fourth, few children migrate illegally, especially young girls, simply because of the hazards of moving North. Fifth, the uncertainties and lack of extra financial resources migrants may have when initially setting up (e.g., finding employment) in their destination places also inhibits illegal child migration. Finally, mothers and fathers who prefer leaving their children behind may consider the environment in the United States not safe enough for raising a child. These key points are significant and strongly weigh in parents' decision-making plans.

An example that aptly highlights some of the dilemmas of bringing and/or sending for children is that of Pedro. Pedro is a ten-year old boy who along with his sister, Maribel, a vibrant, blondish thirteen-year old were left under the care of their paternal grandmother seven years ago. Every year, especially during the Christmas holidays, Maribel and Pepe receive a suitcase laden with toys, clothes, and other coveted goodies. Maribel, in a matter-of-fact tone, explained that her mother never returned home because of the lack of legal documents in the United States. She also told me that at the moment her mother is processing the necessary legal paperwork for her to go. The mother, however, has no intentions of petitioning for her son Pedro because she (and family members at home) consider him a difficult child. Pedro abandoned his fifth grade studies, joined a gang under the guise of "Poporopos" (Popcorn), and turned to petty thefts.⁹ Added to this mischievous behavior, Pedro bounced from caretaker to caretaker

within his extended family (grandparents, aunts, and uncles). No one, including several male figures, can firmly come to grips with Pedro's deviant behavior. Pedro's extended family adopted the strategy of having male guardians as caretakers. In part, the family embraced this decision due to prevailing patriarchal notions of parental control—but it was to not avail. Pedro continued off track. Hence his mother feels that if Pedro migrates to the United States se va a perder (literally meaning to lose oneself, but in this specific context the term captures the caution that parents may hold concerning youngsters becoming even more deviant and rebellious). Pedro's case reveals how migrants may view distinctive cultural milieus from their own. Because some locals perceive the United States as a less healthy place, and a place where youngsters may become more involved in major mischief, parents prefer to leave their children with caretakers at home. Unlike Pedro who has gone astray, his sister Maribel enjoys a more positive standing—within the family and within the community. Maribel's good looks, nice clothes (many of which her mother has sent from the United States), and overall, self-assurance and maturity, recently earned her the annual patron saints feria's (festival) queen title. During my last visit to Gualán in the summer of 2005, when I visited Maribel's family, her grandmother proudly related this news as she showed me the large photograph hanging in their living room, a 16x20 portrait of Maribel in complete queen regalia. Meanwhile, as Maribel's mother prolongs her stay abroad, she continues to miss out on the everyday and extraordinary moments in her daughter's life—a price many migrant parents must pay when migrating North.

The “temporary” arrangements organized for leaving children behind generally have no strict and defined time limit between parents, caretakers, and youngsters. If

migrants aim not to return home, but instead seek to root themselves in their new environs, then, parents send for their children—often once they establish legal status in the United States. In such cases children usually remain home for extended periods ranging from seven to ten years without physically maintaining social ties with parents. Recently, because of strict U.S. immigration laws for reunification and to legalize illegal statuses, many more parents send for their children through illegal means (employing a coyote), occasionally accompanied by close kin. Generally, in situations where children are left behind for brief periods, estrangements only last between two to three years from the time that the parents initially head North. Another factor that largely influences sending for children is when parents deem having their children closer due to economic reasons. Thus parents may embrace the following rationale: it is less expensive to have children live with them in the United States than to send U.S. dollars for their maintenance in Guatemala. While parents may not physically stay connected, they sustain strong emotional ties. Maintaining these ties becomes much easier with the proliferation of intensive, sophisticated, and more economic means of communication now available (e.g., telephones, cellular telephones, facsimile, home videos, and e-mail).¹⁰

A variety of reasons emerge for bringing and/or sending for children to the United States. But under certain circumstances, migrants may be propelled to send their offspring back to Guatemala. The constraints and hardships some individuals face in their places of employment may encourage them to send their children home. This trend is particularly true among single migrant mothers living and working in the United States. Like many other female Guatemalan migrants, for nearly a year Marcía, a woman in her

late thirties, worked as a domestic worker in Los Angeles. Prior to her migration, she worked doing administrative work at a private school in the capital. The following telling vignette raises issues and concerns that deal with the unfair treatment Marcía received from her American employer. But more importantly, it points to the poor conditions and quality of life that drove Marcía to send her son back home, and ultimately, her eventual return. She explained:

I worked from Monday through Saturday. I felt that the Jewish lady I worked for was too exploitive...I did everything—clean, cook, and care for the children! If I was bathing her four-year old daughter, then I also had to take the baby in her car seat and put her next to me...and the lady did nothing. When I cleaned the house, I would do my best—that's how I was taught. But my employer, using a white glove, she would pass her fingers through all the corners...even picture frames. If she found the slightest bit of dust, she would yell at me. Then, one day the washing machine broke down. She accused me of breaking it and charged me for a brand new one. After working there for a few months, I sent for my ten-year old son in Guatemala. In Los Angeles, he lived with some relatives and I would pay them \$100 a month for his room and board. Only on Saturday evenings and Sundays [during the day], I got a chance to see my son. After a couple of months, I decided to send him back to Guatemala because it was too difficult for me to keep up with all my debts. The day my son left it was on a Friday—I couldn't get him on a Saturday flight. Pues (well)...[Marcía commented in a saddened tone] the lady I worked

for didn't even give me permission to go and stay with him on his very last night or for him to come and stay with me... Then, on another occasion, they [her employer and family] went to Florida for a three-week holiday and left me a long list—como que era la Cenicienta de todo lo que tenía que hacer (as if I were Cinderella from all the things I had to do). But the last straw was when she [her employer] tried to hit me! That was it! Then, I told her, "Ay no, me voy. Aunque miro como hago para conseguir mi boleto y de allí me voy (The heck with this, I'm leaving. Even if I see how I come up with my plane ticket and then go.)" I couldn't stand being there any longer.

Sending migrant children back to the home country as a disciplinary measure is a norm reported in several studies (e.g., Guarnizo, 1997; Loucky, 2000; Levitt, 2001). The Caribbean case demonstrates that migrant parents in the United States frequently send their children back to the home community because they deem it a better place to raise youngsters (e.g., less drug-related violence, high crime, over-crowded housing, and discrimination). Additionally, because parents desire that their children acquire a cultural identity similar to their own, children get sent back home (Soto, 1987; Georges, 1990; Guarnizo, 1997; Levitt, 2001). In the Guatemalan case, my findings indicate that once children reside in the United States with both parents (whether it is because they initially migrated with them or were sent for legally or illegally), rarely do parents organize for children to return home and live with close kin—even if parents consider that the child has gone astray. Indeed, when I touched on this issue during the course of my research, Gualantecos were hard pressed to recall any cases of children being sent back to

Guatemala. Such responses beg the following question: could the fact that Caribbean parents send their children home and Guatemalan parents feel less inclined suggest something larger? For one thing, Dominican U.S.-migration is more mature than the Guatemalan migratory flow. In turn, this may largely impinge on Guatemalan parents' decisions to keep or to send their children back home. Further, as Thorne et al. (2003) note, parents may threaten to send kids back as a "transnational disciplinary" strategy to maintain parental control, but seldom act upon it. In part, Guatemalans do not seem to carry through such tactics due to the high costs, dangers, and uncertainties involved in bringing youngsters North in the first place, especially those with illegal status. Continually, parents told me that they simply prefer to keep their children next to their side mentioning that the benefits of learning English potentially outweigh the negative aspects of life in the United States.

Whereas the Guatemalan Ladino example reveals such outcomes, Loucky (2000) observes that the Q'anjob'al Maya migrants in Los Angeles return children to their home country due to disciplinary practices. Similarly, Hagan (1994) highlights that K'iche' Maya migrants in Houston prefer to send their U.S.-born children back home to expose youngsters to their culture. Closely paralleling the eastern Guatemala case I just discussed, I found that in my study among the K'iche' Maya in the western highlands such practices do not ring true. Given such divergencies, what can be said that accounts for these distinctive outcomes? For one, the variation in patterns may be due to the different research approaches employed. Hagan's (1994) study, for example, primarily considers the receiving-end and the interplay of national immigration policy reform and migrant settlement. By contrast, my work mostly tackles migrant experiences in their

communities of origin. Of centrality here too is that these contradictory responses reveal the complexities in scholars grasping what migrants say they do, and what migrants actually do.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS:

ES MÁS PADRE EL QUE CRÍA, QUE EL QUE ENGENDRA

Sometimes parents migrate for a significant period, others have no intentions of returning to their homeland, or some simply head North and abandon their children. For the most part, many families who go to the United States for an extended period sustain close-knit relationships across national borders while others raise their children. Typically, these individuals remit on average between \$200 and \$300 each month into households. Others, however, sever ties and fail to comply with their financial obligations. Miriam, for instance, migrated to Los Angeles and left her two youngsters behind, Pepe and Zoila. Because of Miriam's decision to migrate and her decision concerning the children's care, Zoila and Pepe experienced two major dramas in their lives: their mother's long absence and being placed in separate households. Additionally, the mother never forwarded any monies to the caretakers, visited, telephoned or stayed in touch in any other way with her children. On one, crisp and breezy afternoon, while we sat at the mint-colored ice-cream kiosk, Pepe's caretaker recounted the families' saga.

The mother didn't cultivate anything; there's no fruit, and then the love is lost. Because the mother never sought to share, support, and socialize with her children, es más padre el que cría, que el que engendra (who raises a child is more parent, than he/she who procreates). Miriam's

oldest child, Zoila never got to see her mother. And on one New Year's Eve, Zoila, who at the time was nearly fifteen years old, died unexpectedly in a car accident. All Zoila ever aspired for was to meet her mother. This case, however, is not unique. Many Gualantecos I spoke to mentioned similar accounts regarding parent and children separations.

That parents do not return to their homeland in several years is not viewed in terms of abandonment among some caretakers, especially when it relates to migrant mothers. Rather care providers seem to realize that the parent may be unable to make the impending return and thus view it as a practical coping strategy. Because of tenuous and scarce employment opportunities in Guatemala, relatives also understand the economic benefits of remaining abroad. Staying a little bit longer than initially expected and remitting U.S. dollars allows migrant parents to better provide for their offspring. A case in point is that of Doña Katia's daughter. When I first met Doña Katia, a soft-spoken, woman in her early sixties, she was still overcoming the devastating damages of Hurricane Mitch that severely ravaged Guatemala's eastern region and Atlantic coast during the Fall of 1998—almost 10,000 people perished in that catastrophe. Doña Katia resides in Gualán's most marginalized area, a stone's throw from the rapid, murky waters of the Motagua river. During that tragedy, the river's waters flooded her home nearly 20 feet. After telling me about the disaster, our conversation turned to the topic of her grandchildren and children. Her daughter Luz, the oldest of ten children, migrated to Los Angeles and left behind her five children with Doña Katia, including a set of three-year old twins. At the time, Luz had separated from her husband and grown economically desperate. She wanted somehow to provide for her children's sustenance and schooling.

It was during the summer of 1999 when I first spoke to Doña Katia. In a low and nostalgic tone, she commented:

Well, ...she [her daughter] has been with the idea of coming back to visit...to see how things are going here, but also with the idea of then returning back to Los Angeles because here she can't do anything. Life is hard here, especially for her. Since she has such a great responsibility in maintaining those children. She has to make available everything because the father died last year in a car accident—an eighteen-wheeler killed him along la ruta (the main Atlantic highway connecting Guatemala City and Puerto Barrios).

Doña Katia wholeheartedly understood her daughter's long absence and often insisted that she not return yet. But also Doña Katia dearly thought that in Guatemala her daughter would endure great economic hardships raising five young children. Despite this lengthy separation, Luz continues to remain strongly connected with loved ones and recently sent extra monies to purchase a cellular telephone to ease communication with her family.¹¹ This narrative speaks to how extended physical absences from migrant parents do not always unfold negatively, particularly from the caretaker's viewpoint. In this case Doña Katia has provided the love, warmth, and even some of the financial backing needed in raising her five grandchildren. More importantly, the foregoing narratives capture how caretakers in migrants' places of origin often bear the brunt of the social reproduction processes while mothers and fathers migrate North. Undoubtedly, caretakers hold up the system of social support for migrant parents back home.

Gualantecos report that because grandparents assume such a fundamental responsibility of raising children that parents leave under their care, subsequently social relations improve between caretakers and migrant parents. Once parents decide to migrate and leave their children behind, sending U.S. dollars to caretakers becomes one of the foremost familial obligations they must comply with while living and working in the United States. Tensions arise, however, when migrant parents fail to fulfill their familial obligations by not sending cash remittances for their children's care and schooling. I found, for instance, that the longer parents stay abroad, gradually the remitted monies dwindle. Under these circumstances social relations alter between caretakers and parents, and thus, result in torn, fragmented families. What is also clear, especially when monetary issues come into play, is that close-knit ties, in-between ties, or fragmented ties revolving around family relationships differ greatly over time.

To demonstrate, Doña Sonia (a caretaker mentioned earlier) raised a granddaughter and a niece. She lives in one of Gualán's neighboring villages, but commutes nearly everyday into town to work at a pharmacy. In her village, Doña Sonia also works as a mid-wife and is well-respected in her community. Her kindness and high spirits always shined through during my many visits. While her granddaughter (who she cared for since four months old until her eight birthday) joined her parents by making the trip North legally, her niece did not. Barely walking and talking, the niece was left with Doña Sonia. But when the young girl turned fourteen, her parents sent for their daughter. They wanted Silvia next to their side, despite the brutal journey North she would have to endure. While social relations between the parents and Doña Sonia moved seemingly well during the course of Silvia's long stay with her aunt, this suddenly changed. Doña

Sonia told me, as we sat one day swaying in the hammocks slung across the airy veranda at her house watching her young grandson play with my three-year old daughter:

They wanted me to send her [the niece] illegally. But I didn't want to because I knew the mishaps she could potentially endure along the way. Because you hear of so many despicable things that happen, right? When we spoke on the telephone my brother-in-law would even insult me. He would say that I didn't want to send their child because I was taking the money, the U.S. dollars they sent. But I never took any of the money for myself. I did, however, lump it together with mine to use for the household expenses, but even that wasn't enough. They would send me \$75 each month. And with these funds, I placed my niece in a private school. My youngest son, who just turned twenty, was very distressed about this whole situation. He then decided to go there [the United States] to accompany my niece along the way and drop her off at her parents' house in Arizona. So now, there she is. Since her arrival over there [Phoenix], my sister and her husband don't even write to me—and they don't even want my niece to have anything to do with us. My husband now tells me: 'you see... since you raised her, they don't even want anything to do with you now.' But my little niece still keeps in touch—she calls me when they [the parents] are not around. Her father, though, always tells her that she needs to forget about us altogether.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

When I asked the many Gualantecos I spoke with to discuss some of the social and cultural outcomes of migration on youngsters, especially for those who stay behind with caretakers, they pointed out the positive and adverse effects among boys and girls. Migration negatively affects boys when they become involved in gangs, juvenile delinquency, drugs, and substance abuse. Poverty and high unemployment rates in Guatemala impact some of these outcomes, but they alone cannot adequately explain the full gamut of consequences. The role of U.S.-bound migration becomes central too. Interestingly, the effects locals report are the very same issues parents fear their children will be drawn to if raised abroad (see also Thorne et al. 2003).

Further discussion also unveiled some of the deleterious outcomes of parents' emigration among girls. Female youth seem more shortchanged than boys. Gualantecos mentioned that because caretakers cannot maintain a watchful eye and strong parental control many female adolescents become promiscuous. Thus, locals mention that this practice has led to an increase in madres solteras (single mothers) at very early ages. It is not uncommon, for example, to find twelve and thirteen year-old girls following such trajectories. In part, this trend emerges when male returnees come back to their communities of origin, often only for a brief visit, and then fail to acknowledge their responsibilities. For many young, infatuated females hitching up with a new return migrant is viewed as their ticket out of Gualán or the neighboring villages, and then onto the United States. As a result of these liaisons, a greater number of single mothers now abound. Commenting on this outcome, Don Mario a resident of Gualán in his sixties and disturbed by this distressing situation, blurted: "es que los que regresan sólo a hacer

averías vienen” (those who return only come back to cause havoc). Similarly, Grimes (1998) notes that one of the most negative effects of out-migration in Putla, a western Oaxacan site in Mexico, is the rise of single mothers. When addressing the consequences of migration among female students, a principle of Gualán’s public primary school for girls, Doña Licha, a lively woman in her early sixties, emphatically responded to my question: “Look... what happens is that young girls who are madres solteras migrate, then their daughters ... as they grow up and who have been left under the care of someone else also fall into this same path, and thus what we see here is that the cycle repeats itself.”

In addition to an increase in single mothers, a localized view of what is deemed as “prostitution” among female youth is noted as an acute consequence of the child rearing practices that unfold due to transnational migration. It was only after a few months of prodding on some of these revealing issues, however, that it became clear what Gualantecos generally understood by the term “prostitution.” From their perspective, the label prostitution, and as used in certain social contexts, simply evokes: female youth milling around in the streets after dark, with boyfriends and without any strict surveillance; leaving social dances without a chaperone; donning inadequate clothes, and overall, displaying greater promiscuity. Hence the notion of prostitution as locals perceive it is a cultural-specific term that does not always conjure the idea of sex workers. Prevailing gender ideologies and norms of women typically relegated to the domestic versus public arena play a role here in how gendered spheres are viewed. And while much feminist scholarship critiques this binary model, it continues to govern how many Gualantecos organize their daily realities and spaces.

Turning attention to how migration affects children's schooling when parents go North, most Gualantecos commented that children's academic performance dramatically declines—especially during the initial stages of parents' absence. During one of my visits at a primary school, the fourth-grade teacher, for example, even had a 17-year old student in her class. Don Carlos, a retired principal from a boy's public middle school voiced:

When parents migrate there is an immense lack of authority and caretakers who are given the task of disciplining children left behind cannot carry out this responsibility properly and solely. Parents just cannot maintain discipline by remote control. This situation also results in many disciplinary problems in schools. Many boys and girls no longer desire to study. Plainly, they know that they can earn a better future simply by migrating to the United States.

Such responses are not unique to the Guatemalan case. Many migration studies reveal similar trends, especially sending countries where the culture of migration is now a way of life. On the other hand, migration positively affects schooling. Returnees, or migrant parents who remit monies, often send their children to private rather than public schools. This shift allows migrant families several things: it provides children a better education, but at the same time, it offers family members a tacit display of greater social status within the community. Other benefits reaped, particularly among migrant families in close-by villages, include how some can now afford extending their children's education from primary to secondary school, and others even onto vocational school.

Given the various child care arrangements and the impact of migration on children, this begs the following question: how do the temporal and spatial separations between parents and children configure social relations in families that must migrate? If children remain apart from their parents for a relatively short period, then the physical distance becomes more significant to children than the U.S. dollars they remit. Sandra, for example, is a jovial woman in her mid-thirties who held high aspirations of remaining in the United States for a brief stay, enough time for her to earn and save a few U.S. dollars to build her own house in Gualán. Instead, she found herself back home after merely one year and no better off than when she initially left. Earlier, Sandra's husband abandoned and abused her. She had a ten-year old son and juggled several jobs in order to make ends meet. Sandra thus headed to Los Angeles in search of better job prospects and left behind her son with her mother. Every month, with great effort, she remitted part of her earnings—usually \$300 per month for her child and household expenses. Tearfully, her son begged Sandra each week to return home: “I don't care whether you build a house or anything mommy, or that you send us money, the only thing I ask from you is that you please come back home!” Finally, she relented and returned. When I spoke to Sandra she expressed no desire in migrating again to the United States. She now runs a booming fast-food restaurant in downtown Gualán, reunited with her son, remarried, and has a two year-old daughter.

Because Sandra and her son experienced a relatively brief separation, and both remained tightly connected during her stay in the United States, social relations between the two did not suffer major repercussions. The longer parents remain physically separated from their kin, however, the more inclined children are to cultivate other

feelings. In such cases, the child becomes more reliant and caring of the U.S. dollars sent than in their parents' well-being and affection. Whenever Doña Katia's five grandchildren (a case I explained earlier), for instance, receive any monies from their mother in Los Angeles, their most pressing concern relates to when and how much she sends. Telephone conversations nearly always allude to this topic. And if the mother is unable to remit any money one month, then the children (who are now all teenagers) become despondent with her. In other words, the trend of money replacing intimacy increasingly becomes commonplace among Gualán's youth with migrant parents abroad.

When parents migrate for prolonged stretches of time, such separations lead to clear emotional outcomes. Social relations between parents and children are subjected to many ups and downs in their lifetime. If children are fairly young when their mothers and fathers leave, they often do not recognize or acknowledge them upon their permanent return, brief visit, or when parents send for their children. In these situations it is difficult for children to intimately relate with parents or to simply refer to a parent as "mom" or "dad." This lack of bonding creates much friction between parents and children, but also it generates resentment on behalf of the parents. Additionally, when mothers and fathers journey North and remain absent for many years, children tend to lose respect, trust, and love for their parents. Mothering and fathering from abroad becomes more challenging as the kids reach teenhood because many do not acknowledge their parents' authority. Olivia, a divorced woman in her late thirties and a mother of three children, migrated during three distinct periods of her life to the United States. Each time she experienced lengthy separations from her kids. After recounting her migratory experiences and the

harrowing events she lived through during each clandestine trip, our conversation turned to her children. Teary-eyed she told me:

The children suffer. One goes so that they are well. We think that they are going to be alright, but in reality we are morally destroying them. When parents migrate and leave their children behind, they do not receive the same warmth that parents provide, even if they are left with a grandmother or an aunt. If they need advice or anything else, they feel deserted.

These remarks echo the sentiments of many others in Gualán. Importantly, Olivia's comments speak to the emotional suffering and heart-breaking grief that many migrant parents feel. Not only do many endure such emotional pains, but also many migrants must contend with the liminality of living illegally in the United States as well as the discrimination and harsh treatments experienced in their everyday lives—the “hidden” costs when mothers and fathers migrate North.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CARETAKERS AND CHILDREN

A salient feature of transnational child rearing practices and its effects on social relations between caretakers and children relates to how caregivers often lose authority and control over youngsters they look after, especially when children reach teenhood. Typically, this change in social relations takes place among female caretakers who maintain sole responsibility of the children. One explanation that community members provide for this behavior among adolescents is that: caretakers tend to be more alcahuetas (they spoil their grandchildren more than parents do) when caring for their grandchildren. This scenario parallels that of most families (including those in the United States with local parents). Such effect, however, is especially acute due to teen-harbored

resentment among the children of migrants. Gualantecos also say that the lackadaisical attitudes that youth develop lead to conflictive situations as they grow up. Further, because youngsters have the propensity to exhibit more resentful and recalcitrant demeanor, it becomes more difficult for caretakers to handle. Consequently, youngsters (chiefly boys) join local “gangs” and spend much of the migra dollars—monies that parents earn from backbreaking jobs in the United States and that they send home—on alcohol and expensive consumer goods.

Social relations between parents, caretakers, and children can deteriorate because of the varying disciplinary strategies employed. While in the homeland some caretakers may impart discipline more rigorously, returnee parents tend to be more lax (especially because of U.S. rhetoric espousing children’s rights and the different disciplinary perspectives embraced in the North). Armando, for example, is a male care provider in his forties. Armando, along with his mother, was left in charge of his sister’s kids. When Armando’s sister returned from the United States to reside in her hometown, frequently both experienced tense bouts of friction. This tension emerged due to the divergent views each held on parenting styles and practices. Whereas Armando maintained stricter disciplinary tactics, his sister embraced more liberal views. And as a whole, she was less inclined to harshly reprimand her children for misbehaving. Such unevenness in disciplinary actions led to conflictive situations between Armando and his sister. These contentions can also be explained in that disciplinary attitudes returnees maintain are highly influenced by a greater awareness on child abuse and the power of intervention permitted by U.S. laws. Therefore, Armando’s sister felt less compelled to be as staunch as her brother, even though now her roots remained in Guatemala. As one female

returnee, a mother of two children in her early thirties, carefully explained when discussing children's disciplinary issues: "In the United States one has to constantly watch one's back and look to the sides to see if a neighbor is looking when you reprimand your child because of all the child abuse laws. But when I'm in Guatemala it's different. Here I can chastise my child without this worry. I can do it how I please, but of course, always within reason." Undoubtedly, for many migrant parents in the United States a central cultural clash concerns the disciplining of children: where harsh reprimands end and child abuse begins.

Perhaps one of the most trying issues that significantly alters social relations in transnational households is when migrant parents abruptly send for their children, particularly after being with a guardian for several years. Highlighting this point, Anita, an energetic non-migrant mother and caretaker, painfully recounted her experiences. For nearly four years she nurtured and cared for her nephew since he was a toddler. "The mother," Anita demoralized and almost in tears told me:

did not have any need to migrate because her husband would send money regularly from the United States... so, she was financially fine. Once the mother left, she would never telephone or write to her son, even for special occasions like his birthday. Then, one day, without any warning, she arrived to fetch her son. She came, took him, and left. You should have seen how I felt when I had to go to school and pick up his projects he had made for Mother's Day.

This incident totally devastated Anita. It took her nearly two years to recover. But this alienation not only affected Anita, it also deeply wounded her own young son. Because

the nephew considered Anita and her husband his true parents, when he was hastily taken from his “temporary” arrangement he, too, was devastated and reluctant to join his biological mother. Since this family rupture Anita has visited her nephew in New York on a couple of occasions. She is able to travel with ease back and forth because of her U.S. visa. Hence for Anita staying physically connected with the child she helped raise—albeit for a brief period during the long stretches now apart—has been a relatively easy endeavor. But for the overwhelming majority of caregivers in Guatemala this is not the case. Once parents send for their children, anxious and desperate caretakers often follow their kin—even if for many this decision means making the harrowing journey North illegally. This trip is dangerous and taxing for many caretakers, who are often the grandmothers, not physically well-equipped, but nonetheless, plough northward with great hopes and aspirations to reunite with “their children.” As noted earlier, this emotional wear and tear caretakers often experience may strain social relations and even fragment ties in families that engage in transnational practices across geographic boundaries.

CONCLUSION

In this article I tackle the issue of caretakers, children, and child rearing arrangements that take shape when mothers and fathers go North. I examine the different set of complex circumstances that may arise for leaving children behind, bringing children with parents, and sending for children. By concentrating on caretakers and children, actors also in migration processes, it allows us to further understand transnational processes and to render more powerful explanations of how transnational migration permeates and reconfigures families across national borders. Further, an

emphasis on caretakers and children recognizes human agency and personhood in these individuals.

Throughout, the role of caretakers in migration processes is a concern. My argument here is that caretakers become central in the development and maintenance of transnational migration. Caretakers, who are the “*usung heroines*,” help migrant parents go, stay, and work for long periods of time in the United States while their offspring remain behind under their care. Equally important, caregivers primarily buttress the social reproduction processes when parents journey North, and occasionally even the financial burden. Ultimately, then, caretakers help reproduce the following generation of migrant workers—a generation that already lives in a culture of migration. Although examining who finances the reproduction of people that regularly supply migrant labor to developed nations is significant (e.g., Griffith 1985), understanding the subjective side (i.e., the emotional input) of social reproduction processes merits attention too as often emotions and feelings of those studied get relegated to the back burner. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that while some caretakers may feel exploited and resentful, others grow exceptionally attached to the children in their care and sometimes even head North themselves. And even though both females and males may take on the responsibility of caregivers, women chiefly carry through this task. The role of males, as guardians, typically unfolds as a more symbolic practice.

While my study primarily concentrates on the role of caretakers in transnational migration processes in Guatemala, this case also sheds light on the transnational experience in other parts of Latin America. Hence a broader question concerns: what are the forces that precipitate such outcomes and put pressure on families to migrate in the

first place? The uneven development of capitalism can be accounted for as one of the leading culprits behind the rise of families that are affected by transnational migration processes. As Glick Schiller et al. (1992:5) observed earlier, the development of transnational migration is largely connected to the shifting conditions of global capitalism. In the past three decades, Guatemala has moved to a remittance-based economy (whereby humans are becoming the primary export commodity). This is not unique to the Guatemalan example. Many economies of nations around the world face similar trends. And like many other countries in Latin America with long histories of authoritarian regimes that the United States supported in the western hemisphere during the Cold Era, as well as an unequal distribution of wealth, land, and income, Guatemala experienced much political unrest in the last century. From the early 1960s to the late 1990s, its people endured nearly four decades of conflict between guerillas and the state. Consequently, this struggle resulted in over 200,000 deaths or disappeared, left deep-seated wounds and long-festering resentment even within many migrant sending communities (Jonas 2000; North and Simmons 1999). These chaotic events in Guatemalan history reinforced and deepened poverty for many people. Moreover, they set the groundwork for past neo-liberal governments to implement a range of policies (e.g., from slashing of credit sources for small producers, privatization of former government-run services such as the mail, electricity, and telephone, violent suppression of attempts to create unions, to demand land reform, and most recently, to block CAFTA—Central American Free Trade Agreement). Such outcomes, and mirroring other Latin American countries that have experienced comparable neo-liberal economic policies, gradually weaken the livelihoods of many Guatemalans throughout the country.

Many families must go to extraordinary lengths to survive. Migration, then, increasingly becomes an option for thousands of Guatemalans.

At the heart of this paper lie the kinds of social relationships forged, particularly those between caregivers, children, and parents. Of concern here also include the varying ways in which children, who grow up in Guatemalan transnational households, are affected because of the extended periods of temporal and spatial separation between them and their migrant parents. Although migration helps provide for peoples' survival back home, it also spawns negative and positive outcomes at the local level—some that unfold as gender-specific differences. Another theme explored relates to mothers who leave their children behind and how these migrant women are viewed within their places of origin and their families. While some locals perceive mothers as self-sacrificing and holding the fate of their children, many others are lowly regarded. Certainly, these mothers—those seen in a positive light—defy Oakely's (1974) earlier observation: that every mother must be a mother; and all mothers need their children. But why do locals hold such perceptions? Why are some women stigmatized and others not for hailing North? In the end, what seems to mostly configure such localized responses do not relate to the choices of caretakers, attachments to men, or amounts of money sent. Rather the specific motives that propel these women to migrate in the first place. For instance, many of the female migrants viewed in a positive light experienced domestic violence or abandonment from their husbands. For these women out-migration becomes an escape valve. At the same time, migration allows them to provide for their children's sustenance back home and better childhoods for their children.

In short, by paying attention to the social aspects rather than economic consequences of migration, as many studies do, my research highlights some of the emergent outcomes of migration processes—those that become less visible and more subjective, yet significant. Often government officials, who are so eager to have vast sums of cash remittances pumped into the economy, rarely look at the social impact of U.S.-bound migration. Clearly, the topic of cash remittances is an important one, especially given that in Guatemala (as many other sending countries in Latin America) these monies have become the leading source of foreign currency channeled into the country. In turn, this phenomenon has huge consequences for issues dealing with foreign aid—how much and where these funds go. Additionally, it raises concerns dealing with economic development. Consequently, much attention is paid to the economic aspects of U.S.-bound migration and the social factors and social costs this population movement has in migrants' homeland continue to be neglected.

This study is deeply rooted in eastern Guatemala, but it parallels in many ways other sending regions and countries—notably Mexico and other Central American nations. While to some extent transnational child rearing practices help maintain cultural traditions in Guatemala, this trend results in important social and cultural changes too—primarily for those who stay. At a broader level, as international migration becomes institutionalized in Guatemala, as it has in other sending countries, here I show how migration-related transformations alter Guatemalan society and how its people begin to understand and experience these changes. Recently, Guatemala's President, Oscar Berger, echoed that Guatemala's migrants constitute the national heroes because of their tremendous financial impact back home ([Prensa Libre](#) 2004). Indeed, cash remittances

that migrants send certainly help sustain Guatemala's economy and help improve livelihoods in the homeland, thus these folks may be deemed the countries "economic heroes." The caretakers, who are often the parents of these "heroes" and who care for the children of these "heroes," must, however, be equally acknowledged—for without them migration would be less possible.

NOTES

¹ “North,” or el Norte in migrant parlance simply means the United States or Canada.

² To maintain confidentiality throughout this paper I use pseudonyms instead of actual names.

³ I collected ethnographic data in the summer of 1999, over the course of a year in 2000 through 2001, and in short visits in 2003 to 2005.

⁴ Ladino refers to non-indigenous Guatemalans. This term, however, is fully loaded. And, many Guatemalans would not self-identify in such terms. I capitalize both the labels of Ladino and Maya throughout this paper to assign both descriptors equal weight.

⁵ Conversely, I found that in the western highlands Maya males tend to dominate the northward flow to the United States.

⁶ While here my focus centers on out-migration from eastern Guatemala, in the western highlands men and women have also migrated to coastal plantations and gone further afield to southern Mexico in search of wage-labor for decades (see Bossen 1984). Also, see McCreery (1994) for a brilliant historical discussion on power relations and labor relations in the East.

⁷ By contrast, findings from my study among the Maya K’iche’ group in the western highlands suggest that paternal grandmothers typically share child rearing responsibilities. This outcome may relate to the practice of patrilocal residence among Maya groups.

⁸ A coyote is a guide or people smuggler. In Gualán, the going rates for traveling with a coyote oscillate around Q35,000 per person (adult or child), close to \$4,500. This trip

covers a door-to-door journey from Gualán to a U.S. final destination (generally Los Angeles, California).

⁹ For Gualantecos the context-specific use of gangs embraces the idea of youngsters coming together, horse playing, writing graffiti on private and public walls, consuming alcohol (usually beer), and smoking marijuana. But recently, gangs or maras such as the “Mara Salvatrucha” and the “18th Street,” which initially formed in south central Los Angeles, are sanguine groups that increasingly make their presence felt in many localities in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. These gangs now contribute to high crime rates and are becoming an acute dilemma for these Central American countries.

¹⁰ Interestingly, with the introduction of much more sophisticated means of communication, the art of writing letters has nearly effaced. See Moran-Taylor (2004) for a detailed discussion of how Guatemalans craft connections and keep these alive using different modes of communication between their homeland and the United States.

¹¹ In Guatemala many households often have to wait several years before receiving a land telephone line. Hence some Guatemalans in rural and urban areas have opted for owning a cellular telephone, a much easier and cheaper solution to keep in touch.

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