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## NOSTALGIA POR LA TIERRA, NOSTALGIA POR EL DOLAR: GUATEMALAN TRANSNATIONAL LIVES AND IDEOLOGY OF RETURN MIGRATION

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### ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the ideology of return among contemporary Guatemalan migrants living and working in the southwestern desert city of Phoenix in Arizona. In Phoenix's metropolitan area, Guatemalans (both Ladino and Maya ethnic groups) add to the city's cultural mosaic, and at the same time, are vital agents for change in Guatemalan society. Little is known about the processes and patterns behind Guatemalan migration despite the fact that over 10 percent of Guatemala's population currently resides in the United States. Most Guatemalans in Phoenix, regardless of their length of residence in the United States, express longings for return to their homeland. In part, this strong notion of return prevails because the Guatemalan community in the Phoenix metropolitan area is not cohesive.

### RESUMEN

Este escrito es un estudio acerca de la ideología de retorno existente en los migrantes guatemaltecos que actualmente viven y trabajan en la ciudad de Phoenix, ubicada en la zona suroeste del desierto de Arizona, en los Estados Unidos. En el área metropolitana de Phoenix, los guatemaltecos —tanto del grupo ladino como del grupo maya— se suman al mosaico cultural de la ciudad, y al mismo tiempo son agentes de cambio vitales de la comunidad guatemalteca a la cual pertenecen. Muy poco se sabe acerca de los procesos y patrones que hay detrás de la migración de los habitantes de Guatemala hacia los Estados Unidos, a pesar de que 10% de la población de aquel país reside actualmente en la unión americana. La mayoría de los guatemaltecos que viven en Phoenix, independientemente del tiempo que tienen residiendo en los Estados Unidos, expresan un profundo deseo de regresar a su lugar de origen. Parte de este fuerte sentimiento de retorno prevalece debido a que la comunidad guatemalteca del área metropolitana de Phoenix no se encuentra unida.

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## INTRODUCTION

Guatemalan migrants, both *Maya* and *Ladino* add to the American cultural mosaic and are agents for change in Guatemalan society. This paper examines an aspect of migration processes generally ignored in transnational migration perspectives, that it is permanent return migration. More specifically, I address the ideology of return among contemporary Guatemalan migrants in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Estimates of Guatemalans living and working in the United States largely vary (*e.g.*, Loucky, 1987; AVANCSO, 1991; Barreras, 1999). According to recent figures, 1.2 million Guatemalans presently reside in the United States (Barreras, 1999). These are significant counts and comprise nearly 10% of Guatemala's total population, yet relatively little is known about Guatemalan migration to the United States and the impact this phenomenon has in home communities.<sup>1</sup> For the Phoenix metropolitan area, recent calculations suggest that there are now nearly 8 000 Guatemalans in this urban center (Amado, 1999). Although this figure is small compared to, for example, Los Angeles, which has almost 700 000 Guatemalans (Barrera, 1999), or Chicago, with an estimated population of 95 000 (Staats, 1996), it nonetheless is a significant phenomenon as new social fields are created and recreated in different US localities.

Like some migration scholars have observed with other Latino populations in the United States and in their home communities (*e.g.*, Hagan, 1994, 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Chavez *et al.*, 1997; Mahler, 1999), in this paper I argue that, yes, there are

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<sup>1</sup>The term "home community" is used here to refer to migrants' place of origin. Hereafter, references to home community will also include origin and sending community. Host and receiving community are terms used interchangeably to refer to the place of destination of migrants. Although at first glance these categories of locality may evoke a sense of an amicable reception to the United States or of a unidirectional migration, thus far, no other constructs have been presented to better depict these places.

Guatemalan migrants who remain in the United States and who have no intention to return to their homeland, yet many of these migrants continue to maintain strong links with their home communities. But there are also migrants who frequently move back and forth between Guatemala and the United States. Finally, and central to this paper, I contend that there are also newcomers who return permanently to their places of origin in Guatemala.

The initial seed for this investigation resulted from my master's field research in two Guatemalan sending communities in the western highlands. Findings from this research suggest that although Guatemalan migrants are demographically similar to Mexican migrants, they are not part of the circular migration<sup>2</sup> that characterizes their Mexican counterparts, and many Guatemalan migrants permanently return to their home communities. Additionally, Guatemalan migrants appear to be transmigrants,<sup>3</sup> and seem to conform to ideas propounded in transnational migration perspectives because they sustain strong links between host and home communities. Often many of these social relations are maintained through consequent migration of other family members and via the reciprocal exchange of northbound and southbound resources—both tangible and intangible (Moran-Taylor, 1993; Moran-Taylor and Richardson, 1993).

In an effort to conduct a multi-site investigation (*i.e.*, research in both receiving and sending Guatemalan communities) to explore more closely current notions embodied in transnational approaches, this paper is the product of the initial stages of this larger project.

## METHODOLOGY

Guatemalan migrants in Phoenix tend to be invisible women, men, girls, and boys, thus identifying who they are and where to find

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<sup>2</sup> See Rouse (1991). He refers to “circular migrants” as individuals who move back and forth from the origin community to the host community.

<sup>3</sup> See Basch *et al.*, (1994).

them can be problematic. As noted by Wayne Cornelius, (1982:381), “a clandestine population cannot be sampled through any strict randomization procedure, and the total number of cases which can be observed or interviewed is likely to be substantially smaller than in the conventional sample survey[...]”. However, as other field researchers have found, locating and gaining access can be achieved by initially contacting what Cornelius (1982) calls “local notables”. Added to the invisibility factor is that Guatemalan migrants tend to be dispersed in the Phoenix metropolitan area and are not concentrated in particular ethnic enclaves. Key local notables in Phoenix include Guatemalan government officials, community workers, social service agencies, priests, merchants, and sports clubs. A valuable site for this research has been the *Tienda Latinoamericana*.<sup>4</sup> This is a small store that caters ethnic delicacies and a gamut of Latino paraphernalia to a broad range of Latino groups in the Phoenix metropolitan area, but mainly its clientele are Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Hondurans.

The owners of the *Tienda Latinoamericana* are a dynamic Guatemalan couple in their early forties, are well-established in the area, and have been in the United States for nearly twenty years. In short, because of this couple’s exposure to many Guatemalans who frequent their shop, they have served for a number of years as a major liaison between these migrants and Guatemalan government officials. Consequently, in March of this year the shop owners were appointed Honorary Consuls to represent the Guatemalan population in Phoenix. Previously, no formal Guatemalan government entity existed in this metropolis, or for that matter in the state of Arizona, despite the increasing numbers of

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonyms are used for the names of specific places and for names of individuals interviewed. Unless interviewees explicitly chose to reveal their name in this study, I employ their proper name in this paper.

Guatemalans now residing in this city and the growing numbers of Guatemalans crossing the US-Mexican border in Arizona.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, the Guatemalan Honorary Consuls' tasks entail aiding with processes such as the acquisition and renewal of passports, marriage and birth certificates, and sorting out dual citizenship documentation-this procedure is more recent as the dual citizenship regulation went into effect only in 1996.

Meeting Guatemalan migrants in this milieu has been valuable for this research and has led to the identification of interviewees through snowball sampling. This article is based on ethnographic observations, informal interviews, and formal interviews. In what follows I briefly examine the setting of this study and its significance to contemporary Guatemalan migration.

## THE SETTING

The Phoenix metropolitan area, also known as the Valley of the Sun, is ranked the sixth largest city in the United States and has nearly 2.45 million inhabitants (Arizona Department of Commerce, 1997). Two distinct groups attracted to this urban center are: 1) inter-state migrants (*e.g.*, snowbirds) and 2) Latino international migrants (*e.g.*, Mexicans, Central Americans, South Americans, and Cubans).

According to a recent study by Cornelius (1990), Phoenix, Arizona comprises the ninth most popular destination for undocumented Mexican migrants. Surprisingly, despite Phoenix's increasing Latino population and its geographic proximity to the US-Mexican border, little systematic work has been done on migration to this area. Instead, more attention has been paid to other border states such as California and Texas.

While previous migration scholarship emphasizes Mexican migration experiences to Phoenix (*e.g.*, Regnell and Packard, 1975;

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<sup>5</sup> See Phoenix District Office of INS as they keep records in their archives of apprehended undocumented persons, where as the Border Patrol office in Tucson files records of illegals apprehended specifically at the border.

Fernandez and Pedroza, 1981; Mendez and Esquier, 1983; Trotter, 1987; Theobald, 1989; Bracamonte, 1990; Harner, 1995), little attention has been paid to other Latino migrants in the area who impact the population profile of Phoenix (*e.g.*, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Hondurans, Peruvians, Cubans). This anthropological study makes a unique contribution as it helps fill this geographic void and because its grounded analysis provides a humanistic perspective of international migration processes often lacking in migration studies.

#### TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Several models have been developed to explain international migration, yet no single theory presents a comprehensive framework for understanding the causes, processes, types, and consequences of international migration (see Massey et al., 1993; 1994). Primary models to understand causes of contemporary international migration are equilibrium theory and historical-structural theory. More recently, transnational approaches provide an approximation to capture and study processes of how contemporary migrants constitute their lives in social spaces that transcend geo-political boundaries and sustain strong social relations linking their sending and receiving communities (Rouse, 1991; Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1992, 1995; Basch *et al.*, 1994; Kearney, 1995). A variety of transnational perspectives associated with transnational migration has been developed in the social sciences (see, for example, Rouse, 1991; Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1992, 1995; Basch *et al.*, 1994; Kearney, 1991; Portes 1995). Increasingly migration scholars have incorporated transnationalism in their research agendas, but it is cultural studies academics who have been the pathfinders and emphasized cultural accounts surrounding transnational practices (*e.g.*, Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1988; Appadurai, 1990, 1996; Bhabha, 1990; Clifford, 1992; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Hannerz, 1996; Yaeger, 1996).

In an effort to understand current transnational migration processes, anthropologists have been at the forefront in this endeavor.

Basch *et al.*, (1994) in their call for an unbounded anthropology, present transnationalism as an analytical framework.

Further, Michael Kearney (1995) states that transnationalism is often treated as a synonym for globalization, and says that, “transnationalism overlaps globalization but typically has a more limited purview. Whereas global processes are largely decentered from specific national territories and take place in a global space, transnational processes are anchored in and transcend one or more nation-states” (Kearney, 1995:548). Transnationalism has rapidly permeated across disciplines and is now employed by anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, political scientists and other academics. This, in turn, has led to much confusion in the literature, and as Guarnizo and Smith (1998:3) correctly point out, transnationalism “runs the risk of becoming an empty conceptual vessel”.

The focus on migration processes has changed from looking at migration as a unidirectional to a bidirectional movement of people, goods, ideas, remittances, and socio-cultural practices. Not only do migrants move back and forth more frequently between home and host communities, but technology has tremendously facilitated communication between these two places. The transnational individual has a sense of belonging simultaneously to two communities. For Roger Rouse, (1991), who builds on Jameson’s notion of “postmodern hyperspace” and whose research concentrates in two localities, a Mexican municipio called Aguilla and Redwood City, California, migrant circuits between these two places constitute one social space. Rouse challenges previous notions of reading migration and notes that members of both receiving and sending communities maintain two ways of life.

In a similar vein as other postmodernists who challenge how scientific knowledge and categories are constructed, Rouse calls for a reconsideration on how scholars conceptualize space in anthropology. Another view of transnational migration is that of Eugenia Georges (1990), who describes Dominican migrants as people with “*un pie aquí, el otro allá*”, (one foot here, the other there) (Georges, 1990:233). Or as echoed by Elsa Chaney (1979:290), “they are people with feet in two societies”. Migrants are thus able to navigate

themselves more easily in either place because of the intensity of global communication, technology, and transportation.

In short, studies focusing on transnational migration are important because their central concerns are directed to: 1) how migrants maintain lives in binational spheres; 2) how social fields are constructed; 3) how concepts are constructed; and 4) challenging prevailing views of globalization. And as illustrated by Kearney, (1995:548), a transnational focus “calls attention to the cultural and political projects of nation-states as they vie for hegemony in relations with other nation-states, with their citizens and ‘aliens’”. Put differently, the agendas of nation-states are largely questioned in this model.

Basch *et al.* (1994) problematize “hegemonic constructs” such as the notion of the bounded nation-state as this, they argue, can affect migrant identity because of how it can help empower dominant structures in both the home and host societies. In this vein, what ethnographic possibilities arise from these contestations? Gupta and Ferguson (1997) provide a number of cultural accounts exploring these issues. Essentially, the common thread in this edited volume is that the authors seek to challenge constructs previously used in anthropology and they present alternative ways of doing ethnography. Spatial concepts such as locality and community vary in each article presented in Gupta and Ferguson, and the authors illustrate how these are represented by different cultures. Standing in distinct contrast to notions of place, which are clearly perceived of and challenged by the authors in this text, issues of power are not adequately addressed. Overall, Gupta and Ferguson show that there is no single recipe to follow when examining how constructs of space and culture are conceptualized. Briefly, I examine below recent arguments contesting the newness of transnationalism.

#### RETURN MIGRATION: AN OVERVIEW

In this section I treat several topics: 1) return migration in a historical perspective; 2) definitions of return migration; 3) return migration studies; and 4) ideology of return migration.



As early as 1885, Ravenstein, an English historian, outlined “The Laws of Migration” in which return migration is identified as one of the migration laws. Despite this early identification, historically this theme has been neglected in favor of host community studies. I begin this section, then, with a succinct overview of return migration from the New World to the Old World.

#### *HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF RETURN MIGRATION: NEW WORLD TO OLD WORLD*

Although scholars have largely documented the consequences of migration to the United States, return migration to places of origin generally has not been viewed as an important aspect of the migration process. Most migration studies emphasize the assimilation of new immigrants, that is, the process of being incorporated into the “melting pot” or the “salad bowl” (D’Innocenzo and Sirefman, 1992) and on immigrants’ success in America.

As commented by George Gmelch, (1980), scholars usually thought that those who embarked on the transatlantic journey from the Old World to the New World did not return, yet, since the 17<sup>th</sup> century individuals and groups of people have engaged in return migration and repeat emigration from the US to Europe. As Mark Wyman (1993:4) puts it, “immigrants have been heading back to Europe from the earliest days of the rush to the New World”. To exemplify, during the late 17th century annual departures from American colonies to England outnumbered arrivals from England (Sachse, 1948:251). From the period of one of the largest waves of immigrants from Europe to the United States (1880s to the 1930s), nearly one-third of all European immigrants to the United States permanently returned to their homeland (Wyman, 1993); surprisingly these numbers were barely noticed by social scientists (Gmelch, 1980).

#### *DEFINING RETURN MIGRATION IN ANTHROPOLOGY*

Conceptualizing return migration is problematic and unclear. In this fashion, Wiest (1979) articulates that up until the late 1970’s

there had been no discussion of what was meant by return migration in anthropology. The process of return migration can be defined as the movement of migrants back to their places of origin to resettle, regardless of time away (Wiest, 1979; Gmelch, 1980). Typologies of return migration usually bifurcate along the lines of: 1) length of time migrants intend to remain abroad, and 2) reason(s) migrants return (Lianos, 1975; Rhoades, 1978; Gmelch, 1980; King, 1986).

Several studies focus on the impact migration has on the home community according to length of time away (*e.g.*, González, 1961; Wiest, 1973). González (1961), and, outline five different types of migratory patterns and the impact this process has on family structure: 1) seasonal migration; 2) temporary, nonseasonal migration; 3) recurrent migration; 4) continuous migration; and 5) permanent removal. Diverse patterns of behavior are manifested with each migration type, but González argues that generally these are lumped together, thus, he concludes that each migration category must be viewed independently as each pattern has a different effect on household organization.

On the other hand, critical question that needs to be raised concerns the length of time people have been back home. Can it be considered return migration if an individual permanently returns home, and then decides, five years later, to migrate again? Georges (1990) demonstrates in her study of Dominicans how migrants have the proclivity to engage in this type of migration several times in their lifetime. In another study, Mahler (1999) maintains that previous immigrant Salvadoran men generally stay for years in El Salvador and have no desire to return to the United States. Therefore, Mahler (1999) calls these individuals "permanent returnees". Then she adds, those individuals who trek back and forth are best understood as "recurrent migrants". In sum, how return migration is conceptualized is slippery and its use may vary according to particular cases. Like Massey (1986), who states that settlement is a slippery term because an individual's stay in a place is never fully determined until death; the social reality with return migration is that this process also is never fully established until death.

Fundamentally, like many other categories scholars construct to address different social phenomena, concepts such as settlement and return migration need to be challenged and used with caution. But how the people studied think about these concepts also needs to be considered. Below I examine contemporary studies focused on return migration in Latin America.

#### *RETURN MIGRATION STUDIES IN LATIN AMERICA*

In this section I specifically analyze return migration studies that focus on the return of Latin American migrants to their homeland and I also draw from my own work.

To reiterate, return migration remains a little understood dimension of international migration (Wiest, 1979; Gmelch, 1980; King, 1986; Guarnizo, 1997), and anthropologists have neglected this aspect. Moreover, as noted by Gmelch, (1980:135), “return migration is the most difficult aspect of the migration cycle to quantify”. Scholars posit several reasons for the paucity of literature on return migration: 1) more attention has been paid to migrant adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation in host communities; 2) most studies solely emphasize the economic impact of sending communities (Rhoades, 1979; King, 1986); and 3) past studies focus more on rural-urban migration which is generally viewed as a one-way process and a static event (Rhoades, 1979). Although more recently migration scholars have paid attention to urban-urban migration (*e.g.*, Massey *et al.*, 1987), return migration is still largely neglected from these processes.

Some scholars documenting Caribbean migration to the United States have recently recognized the impact return migration has in sending communities in a transnationalist approach, and have included both rural-urban and urban-urban migration in their research (*e.g.*, Pessar, 1997; Guarnizo, 1997b). Guarnizo, (1997b:307), for example, argues that Dominicans that shuttle back and forth are “a new kind of ethnic group, that of transmigrants”. Although Guarnizo presents a good case of return migration at the local level, issues of ethnicity and race are not considered. Attention, however,

is paid to structures such as gender and class. A question that needs to be asked in this regard is: How does migration affect ethnicity, and importantly, how does ethnicity affect the type of migration undertaken? More specifically, for Guatemala I question whether *Maya* migrants become *Ladino* in this process, and if ethnicity plays a role in return migration.

My research in the Phoenix metropolitan area among Guatemalan migrants also suggests that Guatemalans tend to return to their places of origin (see Moran-Taylor, 1999). This may be attributed to the fact that Guatemalans living and working in Phoenix come from different regions in Guatemala and this, in turn, prohibits bonding of people from the same area. Thus, unlike observations of other migration scholars who emphasize how migrants develop a sense of community, that is, newcomers feel they belong to a specific locality and establish strong roots in a place regardless of how long they reside in the United States (*e.g.*, Chávez, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Hagan, 1994, 1998; Chávez *et al.*, 1997), my findings suggest that there is not a strong sense of community among Guatemalans in Phoenix. Consequently, Guatemalan migrants are more inclined to return to Guatemala as they have not developed a sense of community in the Phoenix area (Moran-Taylor, 1999). This point then brings me to an analysis of ideology of return migration.

#### IDEOLOGY OF RETURN MIGRATION

Much attention was paid to ideology of return migration during the 1970s (*e.g.*, Kenny, 1976; Hoffman-Nowotny, 1978; Anwar, 1979; Brettell, 1979; Rubenstein, 1979), thereafter it was left in the darkness and not picked up again until recently (*e.g.*, Guarnizo, 1997a). As pointed out by C. Brettell (1979) in her widely cited article examining ideology of return migration, there are analytical distinctions that need to be considered between an ideology of return and actual return migration. For Brettell, (1979), the actual return migration can be defined as manifesting itself due to a number of factors: immigration policies of the host communities; emigration policies of the home communities; employment possibilities upon return in the

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sending societies; and socio-economic or demographic conditions. On the other hand, ideology of return varies from actual return migration in that it accounts for a number of social, cultural, and historical traditions or perceptions about migration (Brettell, 1979). In short, Brettell (1979:1) argues, "return migration is affected not only by the way the host society receives and accepts migrants, but also by the way the migrant views both his own society and the host society".

Attitudes and perceptions of return migration have also been examined under labels such as "institutionalized return" (Kenny, 1976), "return illusion" (Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1978), "myth of return" (Anwar, 1979), and more recently, "mirage of return migration" (Guarnizo, 1997a:286). As echoed by Guarnizo, "return has been constructed more as a mirage than a reality".

Although ideology is an important aspect of return migration as it strongly influences how migrants feel and think about the home and host societies, it is seldom highlighted in migration studies. Brettell (1979) demonstrates that even after many years in receiving communities, Portuguese migrants retain an "ideology of return". Many lower class Portuguese migrants in France, for instance, maintain strong intentions to return to their homeland, send their earnings to relatives back home, and invest much of their savings in building homes in Portugal. But, according to Brettell, despite the strong ideology of return maintained by Portuguese migrants, few do engage in the journey back home.

Hymie Rubenstein (1979) also examines beliefs and expectations migrants have concerning the impending return to their homeland in the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, and concludes that ideology of return migration affects behavioral patterns for both migrants in the home and host society. He adds that the ideology of return as opposed to the physical return is highly significant as a host of patterns are produced: it fosters a strong solidarity among peers in the host community; it promotes endogamy; it establishes strong ties between home and host communities; it promotes sponsorship of migration for other family members and friends; and it results in remittances being sent to the home community and used for the purchase of land and dwellings.

In keeping with the central focus of this article, fundamental to this paper is the following question: How does “ideology of return” fit into a transnational framework? In my own research addressing Guatemalan transnational migration in Phoenix, I found that many migrants seem to retain an ideology of return, but how and when this actually manifests itself varies (Moran-Taylor, 1999).

For some individuals living and working in the United States for several years is not a prerequisite to feeling settled or part of a community (Moran-Taylor, 1999). Without an ideology of return, migrants would solely be committed to the host society, and thus home ties would be weakened. Put differently, as Rubenstein noted two decades ago, ideology of return strengthens relations between home and host communities.

A question that also needs to be raised when dealing with Guatemalan return migration is: Does the signing of the 1996 Peace Treaty between the Guatemalan government and Guatemalan guerilla factions play a significant role in the attitudes and motivations for returning to Guatemala? Indeed, this is an important question that merits consideration in both the host and home communities. For Enrique, a *Maya Mam* from Huehuetenango who has lived in Phoenix for nearly ten years and journeys back to Guatemala to visit relatives once a year, this is still a point of contention. He explains: “*En los pueblos está tranquilo, pero en la sierra todavía está inquieto*”. In other words, (in the townships it is calm, but in the mountains it’s still shaky). Enrique is uncertain of his eventual permanent return and momentarily prefers to make annual visits to his home community in Guatemala.

To illustrate, when I asked Guatemalan migrants in Phoenix how they viewed their status, many indicated that they perceived themselves as being temporarily in the United States. Additionally, many migrants seem to retain an ideology of return, but *how* and *when* this actually manifests itself largely varies. For some Guatemalans having lived and worked in Phoenix for several years is not a prerequisite to feeling settled or part of a community. To exemplify, when I asked Lolita, a lady in her forties, about her

intentions of returning to Guatemala, she retorted, *"tengo 10 años de estar aquí, pero por mis hijos me voy a regresar porque todavía están pequeños"*, (I have been here for ten years, but for my children who are still young I am going to return". Her children are now 17, 15, and 12 years old and have been under the care of Lolita's mother throughout her stay in the United States. Despite Lolita has been successful in securing a job and has several relatives in Phoenix, many of whom she lives with, she does not feel she has developed much contact with other Guatemalans. Again, as mentioned earlier, this is illustrative of the lack of ethnic enclaves in the city and the difficulties of extending Guatemalan social networks beyond the family or a handful of friends. Because many migrants work long hours or hold two employments, little time is left for nurturing friendships and/or socializing. Creating a sense of a Guatemalan community is an issue that, in fact, the Honorary Consuls hope to gradually instill in Phoenix. Celebrating Guatemala's Independence Day, *el 15 de septiembre*, for example, is an event that could begin this process. And perhaps this will encourage Guatemalans to settle more permanently in the area and may help change their ideology of return. Or may help foster a community where Guatemalans do not feel they are second class citizens.

Moreover, when I elicited recent Guatemalan migrants their intentions to return, they indicated that they desired to return to their home community, yet only after having earned enough dollars to take back home. Sarah, a 30-year old woman, who is now expecting her second child and continues to work in a furniture factory from dawn to dusk, has been in the United States for almost seven years. When I asked Sarah about her intentions on returning to Guatemala, she replied in a tired voice, *"cuando yo me vaya... me voy de una vez, porque aquí uno nunca descansa, sólo es trabajar y trabajar"* (when I go, I'll go for good because here one never rests, it's only work, work, work).

Although Luis, a young fellow from the Petén area, feels he has learned a lot from living in the United States, he would like to return to Guatemala, mainly because of his family. He added that his brother had reunited with his family two years ago. After working for almost five years in Phoenix, his brother decided to

return home and set up a business. Luis spoke proudly about his community and felt that overall life would be better in the long run at home.

For Mario, the newly appointed Honorary Consul who expressed a positive view about living in the United States, returning to Guatemala is not an option. Despite Mario has never visited his home country in almost twenty years, he still maintains a strong link with his relatives in Guatemala. Mario's perceptions on Guatemalan return migration were: *"es que se van porque les da nostalgia por la tierra, pero... después se regresan por nostalgia del dólar"* (they leave because they are nostalgic for their homeland, but ... later on they return because they're nostalgic for the dollar).

In sum, whether manifested physically or mentally the notion of permanent return in migration is generally not accounted for in a transnational framework despite its emphasis on bidirectional flows.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, then, the bottom line is that the ideology of return among Guatemalans in Phoenix is generally that they desire to return to their homeland despite how long they remain in the United States. For some, this may translate as three years, but for others it can be as long as ten years or longer. In part, this is due to the lack of a cohesive Guatemalan community in Phoenix. As far as transnational links are concerned, my preliminary findings suggest that there are strong ties between home and host communities, regardless of variations in ethnicity, class, and gender.

In short, in order to assess the issue of intent to return and what is actually acted upon more accurately, the larger phase of this project is to investigate return migration in Guatemalan sending communities to examine broader issues of social, cultural, and economic membership back home. Does, for example, permanent return migration differ between Guatemalan men and women, and does this difference affect gender relations and gender ideology? Several scholars have pointed out that, yes, variation does exist in how men and women view their return home (e.g., Hagan, 1994; Hondagneu-



Sotelo, 1994; Pessar, 1986; Guarnizo, 1997). Primarily, female migrants fear a loss of gender equity which they have gained while living in the United States. Other important questions that need to be raised are: How does return migration affect household, class, and ethnicity, in *Ladino* and *Indigenous* Guatemalan home communities, and how does this perpetuate or inhibit further migration? Indeed, these are important questions that merit further consideration to better understand contemporary international migration and to provide more powerful explanations of transnationalism.

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