

Who is transnational? Considering ideologies of return in
Guatemalan origin communities

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Chapter One: Introduction

Rosa Florida's Story

Rosa Florida has spent her life waiting for loved ones to return from the United States. She was five and the eldest of four children when her father migrated to Los Angeles for the first time.

“We missed father...we were close to him and when he left we did not want mother to wash our hair because it was father that did this.”

“Nos hacia falta papa...nosotros nos cariñamos mucho con él y cuando él se fue ya no queríamos que mama nos lavara la cabeza porque papa era él que nos entendía”
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interview)¹

Rosa Florida does not remember how long her father was away, but that eventually he returned and would soon leave again for the US taking her mother with him.

“They told us they would be away two years...I said to myself ‘I will not endure the two years, I will die of sadness that they are not with us.’”

“Ellos nos dijeron que dos años iban a tardar...por dentro de mi decía ‘yo no voy aguantar esos dos años, yo me voy a morir de la tristeza que no esta con nosotros’”
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interview)

While her father stayed beyond the two years promised, her mother did return. Despite their reunion at age 13, the distance between Rosa Florida and her mother remained.

“I no longer felt the same affection that I felt when she left.”

“Ya no sentía ese mismo cariño como sentía cuando ella se fue”
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interview)

Her father returned a year later and for a time the family lived together happily.

Rosa Florida soon married, giving birth to her first child at the age of sixteen. When the child was two years old, her husband decided he would immigrate to the US.

¹ Translations reflect a grounded knowledge of words and phrases' meanings. Translations also reflect research

“An adolescent sometimes does not understand all the things in their head...I did not even know what it meant to marry for anything. We married with this young man and we had my first child. He was almost two years old when my husband, then at the time, told me ‘look, I want to travel over there in the United States...because I want to build us a house.’”

“Uno de adolescente a veces no sé le mete cualquier cosa en la cabeza...yo ni sabía que es casarse para nada. Nos casamos con ese muchacho y tuvimos mi primer hijo. Casi dos años tenía cuando mi esposo en aquel entonces me decía fijase que yo quiero viajar allá en Los Estados Unidos...porque yo quiero hacer una casa para nosotros”
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interview)

Rosa Florida’s young husband made it to Los Angeles and after a time began to send money back to support her and their son. Eventually, the frequency of his calls and letters to Rosa Florida slowed, and later so did the remittance money. She missed him, and when they spoke, she would ask about his return. He had told her he would go for three years but in time, and after great suffering, she would learn his intentions had changed.

“In the end he never built a house, he did not buy even a little piece of land, and later I asked myself ‘Will he return? Will he do something for us?’ I waited years for him, I waited months, I waited weeks for a response from him, but there never was a positive response.”

“Y total nunca hizo una casa, no compró ni un pedazo de terreno y luego yo dije ‘¿Va a regresar? ¿Va hacer algo?’ Yo lo espere años, esperé meses, esperé semanas alguna respuesta de él, pero nunca hubo una respuesta positive.”
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interview)

Rosa Florida eventually divorced her first husband, who has started a new family in the United States. Their son is now thirteen years old.

While Rosa Florida waited for her first husband to return, her father went to the US to work for a third time. After the divorce, she was dependent on the money her father sent home, and reluctant to re-marry.

“I did not want to marry. One is very fearful because they feel that what happened to me in the past with my ex-husband could happen again.”

“Yo no quería casarme. Uno tiene mucho miedo porque sentía que eso que me paso antes con mi exesposo...que tal que vuelve a pasar eso”
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interview)

However, a couple years ago Rosa Florida did re-marry and moved in with her new husband, Eduardo, and his family.

It is August of 2011, at the time of this interview, Rosa Florida is sitting in her husband's kitchen watching her 10-month-old baby and two-year-old boy. She tells me their father, Eduardo, left just a month ago to find work in the United States and that she is waiting to hear news of his crossing; whether he made it to the US or being held by immigration authorities. While Rosa Florida knows Eduardo left out of necessity, because he could not find work to support the family, his leaving was very hard for her.

“When he told me that he wanted to go to the United States I became sad. I started to think, and I started to cry and I said, ‘Why is it my luck that this would happen? I have suffered since I was five from the absence of my father, of my mother; I married a man who wanted to do better for his wife and his child and we failed with him because he...he left us. I remarried and again my husband talks about this trip...or it is to say that I am now thirty years old and imagine that for twenty-five years I have been living and suffering in this way.”

“Cuando él me dijo que él quería ir en los Estados Unidos yo me empecé poner triste. Empecé a pensar, y empecé a llorar y dije, ‘¿porque la suerte mía a caído de esa manera?...yo he sufrido de la edad de cinco años en la ausencia de mi papa, de mi mama; me casé con un hombre que quería superar su esposa y su hijo y fracasamos con él porque él...nos dejó. Me volvía a casar y otra vez mi esposo me habla de este viaje...o sea que yo ahorita tengo la edad de treinta años y imaginas que hace veinticinco años he estado viviendo y sufriendo de esta manera.”
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interview)

Eduardo told Rosa Florida that he would work in the US for four years and then return. Rosa Florida is confident he will and she hopes that when he does he will never have to leave again. She looks forward to his return as a time of healing.

“After he returns I hope that this great emptiness that I have felt, that he is able to come and help me overcome it.”

“Después de él regresó para acá espero que este gran vacío que yo he sentido, puede el venir a ayudarme para superar esto.”
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interview)

She also waits for the return of her father, who she explains will return soon so he can retire and rest in his old age.

Project Background

In the indigenous Guatemalan village where Rosa Florida lives, labor migration to the United States is an essential survival strategy. The community is highly impoverished, owing to environmental and socio-political factors. As ethnic Maya, the people are victims of historic class and race based discrimination by Guatemala's ladino majority. They have been dispossessed of much of their land and resources and now face growing population density, soil infertility, frequent droughts and tropical storms, which all limit the productivity of traditional crops. There is very little employment available to indigenous people and wage rates are not enough to support families' costs. Malnutrition results, especially among children. Crime in the form of petty theft, robbery and kidnappings is rampant, adding to historical patterns of social unrest and violence, and increasing many families' economic vulnerability. The largely ladino-controlled government, widely corrupt, offers little assistance. These challenges, stemming from historical suppression, push indigenous Guatemalans into labor migration.

Communities throughout Guatemala are in the same position. Ten to fifteen percent of Guatemala's population is estimated to reside in the United States, with the majority, around 700,000, living in Los Angeles (Taylor et al. 2006; Moran-Taylor 2009). While the poverty that drives immigration in Guatemala is exceptional, labor migration to the United States is endemic throughout Mexico and much of Central America. Small farmers throughout the region have been burdened since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in the mid 1990's and the Central American Free Trade Agreement in the mid 2000's. Those that have

surplus maize to sell are not able to compete with the resulting cheap, tariff-free corn imports from the United States.

Thus, within Rosa Florida's village labor migration to the United States is an enduring fixture. Some people, like Rosa Florida's mother, emigrate but only stay a few years, while some, like her father, stay much longer or engage in multiple migration trips throughout their lives. Others, like Rosa Florida's first husband, emigrate and never return. All the while, Rosa Florida and others left behind wait. What the vast majority of these people have in common is the intention and expectation of return to Guatemala, where the family can settle together permanently.

Numerous scholars explain immigration out of Guatemala and the rest of Latin America in terms of transnational theory (Moran-Taylor 2001; Taylor et al. 2006; Burrell 2005; Popkin 1999; Norma Chinchilla 1999; N. Chinchilla 2005; Menjívar 2002; Montejo 1999). Defined as "the process by which migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together societies of origin and settlement" (Basch et al. 1994, pg. 7), transnational theory conceptualizes immigrants as adopting multi-national identities and as developing hybrid communities that span national borders. The transnational character of migration is thought to result from contemporary immigrants increased mobility and utilization of new communication technologies. Rather than settling in their host societies or eventually returning to their origin communities to settle permanently, immigrants today are perceived to travel frequently between their origin and host societies, maintaining lives across borders (Black & King 2004; Aranda 2007; Ley & Kobayashi 2005).

In this thesis, I explore the limits of the transnational framework, the dominance of which obscures attention to permanent return migration. In the context of transnationalism return is

seen as taking the form of short term visits back home or circular migration (Sinatti 2011; R. Black et al. 2004; Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Aranda 2007; Duval 2004). From this, some scholars have begun to conceive transnationalism as a form of return (Black & King 2004; Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Sinatti 2011; Jeffery & Murison 2010; Duval 2004). I recommend re-focusing attention on *definitive* return migration, or the notion that migrants resettle back in origin communities permanently. Importantly, definitive return draws attention to the reality that not all immigrants are able to move easily, maintain relationships or live comfortable across borders, or desire such a lifestyle. Rather, many immigrants confront enduring ethnic, racial and economic barriers and maintain identities rooted in specific places. As a dominant framework for understanding contemporary international migration, transnationalism obscures questions of immigrant return and migration processes dependent on place.

Transnationalism theory makes an important contribution by allowing migration scholars to explore new forms of identity formation and livelihood strategies; however, I critique the framework on four counts. First, the term transnationalism is overused and applied indiscriminately to migrating populations (Smith & Bailey 2004; Portes 2003). For instance, transnational theory characterizes both documented and undocumented migrant groups, even though it is likely migrants' documentation status has a major impact on the migration experience and one's ability to be transnational. Second, The framework discounts the significance of place and enduring obstacles to movement through space or across borders (Dunn 2010; Mitchell 1997). Third, transnationalism obscures the inequities and injustices affecting some immigrant populations, such as racial discrimination and wage theft (Dunn 2010; Castles 1998; Bailey 2001). Finally, transnational studies too often leave out the complexity of migrant

stories (Mitchell 1997; Dunn 2010). Recent attempts to characterize transnationalism as a form of return reinforce these failings.

I argue that permanent return migration or *definitive* return should be a focus within migration studies and more specifically studies of transnationalism for three reasons. First, definitive return is the intention of many immigrants (Sinatti, 2011), and thus raises questions about immigrant quality of life; How do immigrants experience difference in terms of class and race? How do they experience work and separation from family? Throughout the 1970's scholars were interested in exploring migrant's ideas and discourses surrounding permanent return migration, which they termed 'ideology of return' (Philpott et al. 1973; Cornelius & Ruiz 1976; Dahya 1973; Anwar 1979; Rubenstein 1992; Hoffmann-Nowotny 1978; Brettell 1979). Few scholars have explored ideology of return since.

A second reason is that return migration is important to the social and economic development of origin communities (Black & King 2004; Tsuda 2009; Hugo 2009; Dustmann et al. 2011) and definitive return can maximize this benefit. Return migrants that settle back home permanently establish new businesses and perform important care work.

The final reason that attention to return migration is important, and a leading argument in this thesis, is that investigating return improves our understandings about migrant transnationalism and theory, such as revealing specific immigrant populations that do not function or identify as transnational or have a desire to adopt transnational livelihoods. Investigating definitive return migration through ideologies of return is also a way to offset the weaknesses of the transnational framework by incorporating a grounded perspective of place through immigrant voices. Much of transnational scholarship has done little to distinguish between different types of migration experiences and populations, most especially between documented and undocumented migrants.

Scholars conduct transnational investigations in respect to both elite and undocumented migrant populations, but an explicit discussion of how these differences impact transnational identity is lacking.

The Case Study

I put my argument into practice with a case study investigating ideologies of return and migration from the perspective of a Guatemalan migrant origin community. This project has two main objectives. The first is to investigate and draw attention to return migration, specifically *definitive* return migration. The second is to refine our understanding of transnational theory and application concerning a specific population of immigrants. My research questions are: 1) How do Guatemalan emigrant origin communities experience migration and return? 2) What are emigrant origin community ideologies of return? 3) And what do answers to both these questions tell us about the nature and extent of transnationalism for Guatemalan labor migrants?

To answer these questions I draw upon participant observation and in-depth interviews with people connected to the migration experience within a Guatemalan migrant origin community. I consider returned migrants and migrant family members left behind as people connected to the migration experience. Research within an emigrant origin community provides a unique perspective in contrast to other investigations of return migration, ideologies of return and transnationalism. Returnees' perceptions of migration and return are unique in that they reflect a completed experience. Furthermore, non-migrants in origin communities experience migration and return in distinct ways, also contributing to ideologies of return. Focusing on return from the often-overlooked perspective of returned migrants and migrant loved-ones left behind, this project can help reveal the extent to which Guatemalan labor migrants exhibit transnational behavior versus more stationary ways of being, the degree to which they self-

identify as transnational, and how return migration is practiced and perceived. Thus, my investigation has the potential to contribute to our empirical and theoretical understandings of return migration and transnationalism.

Focusing this study on the origin community perspective gives a voice to those normally left out of investigations of ideology of return and transnationalism, but also poses some risks. Just as studies conducted only in host societies leave out the perspective of returnees or migrant family members, my case study is one-sided, leaving out the perspective of migrants currently engaged in migration. Thus, it is better to bring my study's findings into conversation with existing literature on ideologies of return and transnationalism than to treat them as holistic truths on their own.

My research is modeled on previous studies of return migration and transnationalism (Teo 2011; Moran-Taylor 2009; Sinatti 2011). I gather migrants' personal accounts through qualitative in-depth interviews and participant observation. Interview questions probe subjects' intentions, perceptions, ideologies and relationships experienced and formed in the process of migration, all of which are factors important to understanding ideologies of return (Sinatti 2011; Al-Rasheed 1994). Observations from time spent in the community also lend important contextual information to my study.

The study site is a few small indigenous villages surrounding the municipality of Santa Lucía Utatlán (Santa Lucía) in the department of Sololá, located in the central highlands of Guatemala (See Map on pg. 57). Interviews and observations took place over the month of September 2011. Previously (2007 and 2009), I lived and worked in Santa Lucía as a Peace Corps Volunteer. This study was largely enabled by my established familiarity and relationships,

without which, access to the research population would have been difficult and more time consuming.

My curiosity about return migration and the Guatemalan migration experience developed during Peace Corps. I worked with women's groups teaching methods in organic gardening and nutrition and many of the woman's husbands were in Los Angeles working. Spending time with these woman and their families I learned that migration is intended to be temporary and most often specified to be two to four years in duration. At the same time, it seemed these families waited much longer for their husbands and fathers return. I wanted to understand how the women thought and felt about this delayed return and migration in general. I wanted to know how migrants and their families negotiate their separation. These initial questions motivated this thesis.

Looking Ahead

In the next Chapter, I lay out the arguments of this thesis in detail by reviewing the existing literature on return migration and transnationalism. While numerous scholars explain return migration as an understudied subject (Gmelch 1980; Moran-Taylor & Menjivar. Cecilia 2005; Sinatti 2011; Piotrowski & Yuying 2010; Black & King 2004; Potter et al. 2005), in actuality, there is substantial research on return. Research documents return migration as the intention of many immigrants (Waldorf 1995; Coniglio et al. 2010; Moran-Taylor & Menjivar 2005; Sinatti 2011; da Coulon & Wolff 2010; Rubenstein 1992; Thomas-Hope 1999), including the 1970s cluster of research surrounding immigrant return intentions, termed "ideologies of return" (Philpott et al. 1973; Cornelius & Ruiz 1976; Dahya 1973; Anwar 1979; Rubenstein 1992; Hoffmann-Nowotny 1978; Brettell 1979). Scholars investigate the determinates of immigrant return, finding a range of push and pull factors (Pinger 2010; Coniglio et al. 2010;

Waldorf 1995). Others explore immigrant experiences after return, in terms of re-settlement and integration back home (Bailey & Ellis 1993; Aranda 2007; Ardittis 1991; Cobo et al. 2010; Enchautegui 1993; Markowitz & Stefansson 2004; De Souza 2006; Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2009; Potter et al. 2005; Guarnizo 1997; Richardson 2007). There is also a concentration around return migration's impact on social and economic development in host and origin societies (Black & King 2004; Tsuda 2009; Hugo 2009; Dustmann et al. 2011; Gibson & McKenzie 2011; Dustmann & Kirchkamp 2002). Scholars also look into historical patterns of return migration such as Wyman's documentation of immigrant return to Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s (1993).

Specific attention to *definitive* return migration is lacking. Definitive return is return that result in permanent settlement back in the home community, rather than repeat or circular migration. The deficiency is largely due to the dominance of transnational theory, which seeks to understand contemporary migration as the frequent and fluid movement of immigrants and their communication across borders. Three factors motivate my focus on definitive return. First, it may be more beneficial to the socio-economic development of origin communities, than return visits or return that results in repeat migration. Second, definitive return is the goal and desire of many contemporary immigrants and as such may influence their quality of life. In other words, it is important to recognize that “many are forced to migrate due to lack of economic resources at home” and we should “support the right of people to stay on their land...” (GHRC, 2012). The final reason is that attention to definitive return, primarily through ideologies of return, can improve our understanding of transnational theory.

Transnationalism is the leading theoretical framework within migration studies today and defined as “the process by which migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that

link together societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al. 1994). However, the term and theory have taken on multiple meanings and connotations over the past twenty years.

Transnational scholars discuss the occurrence of transnational communities or “transnational social fields” which result from immigrants utilization of new communication technologies to remain in frequent contact with their origin communities (Horst 2006; Goldring 1998; Fourn & Glick-Schiller 2002; Peggy Levitt & Nina Glick Schiller 2004; Basch et al. 1994). Scholars also talk about how these transnational formations impact the nation state in terms of their sovereignty, the contemporary relevance of national borders, and citizenship identity (Fourn & Glick-Schiller 2002; Levitt & De La Dehesa 2003; Coutin 2007). There is also a focus on the development impact of transnationalism, in terms of remittances. (Levitt & De La Dehesa 2003; Townsend et al. 2002; Cohen 2001; Faist 2008). Finally, scholars talk about transnationalism as a form of immigrant resistance to oppressive economic and political environments (Schiller et al. 1992; Portes 2003; Rouse 1992).

Although transnationalism is celebrated as a framework that allows for the investigation of migration processes in both host and origin communities (Basch et al. 1994), and moves scholars away from a singular focus on immigrants within receiving societies, it is critiqued on four counts which I elaborate in the next chapter. First, for lack of a standard meaning, scholars explain that the concept is overused, or applied to populations of immigrants that should not be characterized as transnational (Smith & Bailey 2004; A. Portes 2003). Second, transnational theory is charged with exaggerating the ability of immigrants to travel and maintain connections across distance and borders (Bailey 2001; Jones & De La Torre 2011; Dunn 2010; Mitchell 1997; Conradson 2005). The third critique is that the transnational framework obscures the vulnerability and marginalization of many immigrants within the process of international

migration (Mitchell 1997; Castles 1998; Bailey 2001). Finally, transnational scholarship is said to leave out the important perspective of immigrants themselves (Mitchell 1997; Dunn 2010; Sinatti 2011).

I attribute the absence of scholarship addressing definitive return migration and other migration processes dependent on place to the above weaknesses. Transnational scholars have even begun to conceptualize transnationalism as a form of, and replacement for, definitive return migration, arguing that frequent visits home and circular migration is a more sustainable form of return (Black & King 2004; Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Sinatti 2011). I argue that this conceptualization of return is problematic, as it reinforces the transnational framework's known weaknesses, and further diverts attention away from definitive return migration. By directly focusing research on definitive return migration, primarily through investigations of ideologies of return, we can begin to respond to the critiques of the transnational framework, ultimately improving our understanding of transnational theory and the extent of immigrant transnationalism.

At the end of Chapter Two, I introduce my case study of Guatemalan labor migration and the specific studies that inform my work (Sinatti 2011; Moran-Taylor 2001; 2009; Teo 2011). Sinatti addresses ideologies of return in relation to Senegalese migrants. And, like me, Moran-Taylor looks at the ideologies of return of Guatemalan labor migrants. Teo makes a similar argument to my own, explaining that attention to return can improve our understanding of immigrant transnationalism. He investigates educated migrants in Canada that originate from Hong Kong. While these works influence my argument and study design, my work is distinct in that it addresses an undocumented immigrant population from the perspective of an immigrant origin community.

In Chapter Three I present my study's methodology, detailing the choice of field site, characteristics of the study population, mode of observation and sampling strategy. I also discuss how my position and identity as a researcher has influenced the fieldwork.

Conducting my research in an immigrant origin community is important as it captures a perspective of return that has received relatively little attention within the literature on ideology of return. I assume returned migrants and non-migrants left behind contribute to ideologies of return and experience migration in ways that can further our understanding of transnational theory. Guatemala is an appropriate location for this study as its immigrants are frequently characterized as transnational (Moran-Taylor 2001; Taylor et al. 2006; Burrell 2005; Popkin 1999; Chinchilla 1999; N. Chinchilla 2005; Menjívar 2002; Montejo 1999), and are largely undocumented in the US.

I conducted sixteen interviews. I identified subjects with the help of a few key informants and through snowball sampling (Babbie 2007). I also relied on empirical observations of the communities in which I conducted interviews, taking note of how objects, behaviors and casual conversations might lend insight to my research questions.

In Chapter Three I also I talk about how my identity and position as an American, graduate student and woman influenced my fieldwork and the research process. I acknowledge how my privileged position within these communities might influence subject responses and the interpretation of results. Lastly, I discuss the kidnapping of my host family's daughter, which occurred during my fieldwork, as further evidence of this populations' extreme vulnerability. I also discuss the ethical dilemmas this event posed to my fieldwork.

In Chapter Four, I present my study's findings. Interview responses revealed that respondents highlight the difficulty of border crossings, as migrants face physical dangers,

frequent confrontations with immigration authorities and mounting debts. Life and work in the United States is described as a fight, because migrants struggle with burdensome working conditions and hours, racial discrimination and the stress of living as an undocumented person. They also express longings for return migration motivated by their wish to escape these difficulties, be reunited with family, to retire in their old age and to care for a loved one back home. Others explain they would be content settling permanently in the US if their families could be with them. In terms of migrants' communication with their families back home, respondents report talking by cell phone with their loved ones only once a week or every two weeks, as call rates remain expensive for Guatemalans on both sides of the border. Finally, respondents describe the experience of coming home as bittersweet. While returned migrants initially celebrate their homecoming, soon they become nostalgic for the opportunities and amenities available to them in the United States.

Concerning research question two, which asks about the nature of origin community ideologies of return, I found that migration is viewed as temporary and return migration is intended to be permanent. Families generally agree on a specified number of years migrants will be away, and set a savings goal. Most people immigrate to work in the United States to earn enough money to buy land and build a house in Guatemala, to which they can return and settle permanently. Interview responses also highlighted the importance of family. Returned migrants and non-migrant loved ones often express the idea that they would rather have their family living together humbly in one place, than live comfortably off remittances and be separated by migration. As highly religious people, the outcome of migration and return migration are frequently referred to as "in the hands of God," or something only knowable by God. A last prominent theme evident from the interview respondents is that the United States is considered a

country of sin and vice, or what they call a, “país de perdición” or “country of ruin.” Thus, the US is viewed as a place that tests an immigrant’s fortitude and strength of mind, in terms of their ability to avoid the corruption of crime and drugs and provide for their families.

In my concluding chapter, I discuss how the results answer my study’s third and final research question concerning the nature and extent of transnationalism for Guatemalan labor migrants. I explain that Guatemalan origin community ideologies of return and perspective of migration problematize the characterization of Guatemalan labor migrants as transnational. My findings suggest that in terms of origin community perceptions and behavior, Guatemalan migrants’ livelihoods remain dependent on place and their mobility across borders is limited. Memories and fears of dangerous, expensive border crossings that motivate delayed return challenge the notion of “transnational mobility” (Cassarino 2004) and highlight the need to reconcile documentation status with transnational theory. And respondent accounts of alienation and struggle while working in the United States, longings for return and permanent settlement back home do not support the existence of “transnational identities” (Cassarino 2004) among Guatemalan labor migrants. I also contest the notion of Guatemalan transnational communities or transnational social fields as respondents report infrequent communication with loved ones and frustration with their inability to participate in the care of loved ones across distance. Finally, I highlight respondents’ strong desire to reside in one place with their families or “un lugar fijo,” (“a fixed place”) as evidence against their transnational identity and behavior.

Ultimately, my research suggests that Guatemalan labor migrants generally do not exhibit transnational qualities. Undocumented, impoverished and racially subjugated Guatemalan labor migrants’ mobility and capacity to maintain relationships with friends and family across distance is greatly limited. Characterizing these immigrants as transnational is doing them a disservice by

obscuring their vulnerability and marginalization within society, and disregarding their right to remain with their families in Guatemala.

We must continue to ask the question “who really is transnational?” particularly in consideration of undocumented, indigenous and other racially subjugated immigrant populations. Not all bodies characterized as transnational move frequently and easily through space or across borders. Nor are they all able to maintain satisfying relationships across distance. Furthermore, not all immigrants desire transnational livelihoods. We must take seriously the importance of home places for some immigrant populations and their desire, and right, to remain there. Attention to definitive return can reveal which immigrant populations, in reality, function successfully as transnational.

I end with a call for more empirically grounded research of ideologies of return to further our understanding of the extent and nature of transnationalism. Future research should pay particular attention to how specific populations historical and contemporary circumstances such as class, racial and ethnic struggles as well as environmental conditions, influence migration intentions and experience. Multi-sited investigations, that research ideologies of return and transnationalism from the perspective of both immigrants in host societies and their loved ones left behind in origin communities, can contribute more holistic findings and should be a priority of future study.

Chapter Two: Return Migration, Transnationalism and the Importance of Definitive Return

Return Migration

Voluntary return migration is repeatedly referred to as an understudied subject within migration studies (Gmelch 1980; M. Moran-Taylor & Menjivar. Cecilia 2005; Sinatti 2011; Piotrowski & Yuying 2010; R. Black & R. King 2004; Potter et al. 2005). The deficiency is attributed to the absence of quantifiable data on return migration (Cassarino 2004; Black and King 2004). Nations still do not keep as careful a record of immigrants leaving as those coming in. And the outflow of undocumented immigrants is largely invisible (Coniglio et al. 2010). Another complication to documenting return movement is the difficulty of verifying where migrants settle, and whether or not that settlement represents a return to “home”, or onward migration (Wyman 1993). Never-the-less, some scholars have managed to quantify or assess rates of return migration to some degree (Massey 2006; Jones 2009; Jones & De La Torre 2011). Lack of attention to return migration is also attributed to migration scholars’ preferential interest in the process of immigrant settlement and assimilation within host societies (Rhoades 1979; Alejandro Portes et al. 1980; M. C. Waters & Jiménez 2005; Loucky & Moors 2000). Questions about the socio-economic impact of immigrants dominate (Odem 2009; Poot et al. 2005; Fakiolas 1999). Interestingly a careful review of the literature reveals that the volume of research on return migration is significant and highly interdisciplinary.

Return migration is most commonly defined as “the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle”(Gmelch 1980, p.136). This definition, however, prompts a series of inquiries. For instance, the meaning of “homeland” is called into question (L. E. Guarnizo 1997; Newbold 2001; Plaza & Henry 2006). Does “homeland” refer to an immigrant’s nation of birth?

Could “homeland” be taken to mean a general region or continent? Perhaps “homeland” should be qualified as a smaller area such as a state, city or village. Another question that confronts Gmelch’s definition asks about the meaning of “resettle.” In other words, what length of time back in the homeland should be considered return? What constitutes resettlement in the homeland versus circular migration, wherein immigrants engage in periodic migrations throughout their lives? Such questions result in the continued deliberation over the meaning of return migration.

The subject of return migration is further complicated by the numerous types of migrant populations. A substantial portion of the literature on return focuses on refugees (Oxfeld 2004; Zetter 1999; Stepputat 1994; Al-Rasheed 1994). Scholars who study the return migration of labor migrants may focus on highly skilled labor migrants (Coniglio et al. 2009; Gibson & McKenzie 2011), temporary labor migrants (Thom 2010; Dustmann & Mestres 2010; Christian Dustmann & Weiss 2007), or undocumented labor migrants (Coniglio et al. 2009; Cobo et al. 2010; Jones & De La Torre. 2011). And there is work specific to the return movement of subsequent generations of immigrant families (King 1978; Ghosh 2000; Conway 2009).

While these immigrant groups engage with and experience return movement differently, they can be grouped into typologies. Gmelch’s typology of returned migrants is as follows:

- “1. Returnees who intended temporary migration. The time of their return is determined by the objectives they set out to achieve at the time of emigration.
2. Returnees who intended permanent migration but were forced to return. Their preference was to remain abroad but because of external factors they were required to return.
3. Returnees who intended permanent migration but chose to return. Failure to adjust and/or homesickness led to their decision to return” (1980, p.137).

Several other typologies for return migrants exist (Bovenkerk 1974; King 1978; Ghosh 2000), yet all are alike in that they delimitate return migrants by return intention or reason for return.

Ideologies of Return

It is well documented that many people immigrate with the intention of returning home (Waldorf 1995; Coniglio et al. 2009; M. Moran-Taylor & Menjivar. Cecilia 2005; da Coulon & Wolff 2010; Thomas-Hope 1999; Reyes 2001). “The range of movements has been wide and varied, extending from permanent movements (both voluntary and coerced) to transient or circular, temporary migrations. But, in common with many migration traditions has been an intention to return” (Potter et al. 2005, p.1). And most intend permanent settlement back in the homeland (Sinatti 2011; Cornelius & Ruiz 1976; Brettell 1979; Rubenstein 1992; De Souza 2006; Rodman & D. Conway 2005). For many return trips are delayed significantly or never realized. In such cases migrants may have altered their return intentions (Philpott et al. 1973), while “others consistently viewed their departure as temporary and, even after twenty years abroad...still maintained a hope of eventual return...” (Brettell 1979, p.72). In the 1970’s scholars were particularly interested in refugees’ and migrants’ enduring desire for and feelings about return which they termed “ideology of return” (Philpott et al. 1973; Cornelius & Ruiz 1976; Dahya 1973; Anwar 1979; Hoffmann-Nowotny 1978; Brettell 1979). Few scholars have directly addressed this concept since (Zetter 1999; Moran-Taylor 2001; Al-Rasheed 1994).

“Ideology of return” is the discourse and activities migrants engage in to express their nostalgia for and desire to return to their homeland. Within this ideology, “migration is perceived as a temporary state, mainly to gain money, which will ultimately result in a return to the home society” (Philpott et al. 1973, p.188). This ideology has also been called the “myth of return”

(Al-Rasheed 1994; Anwar 1979), the ‘return illusion’ (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1978), or the “mirage of return” (L. E. Guarnizo 1997). These terms communicate the elusive quality of return for immigrants whose return trips are continually delayed. Importantly, Al-Rasheed notes “that the possibility of and desire to return is never regarded as a myth by the actors themselves. It is the outside researcher who first invents the phrase ‘myth of return’ and later uses it to describe a frame of mind predominant among some immigrants and refugees” (1994, p. 201). I argue for a revival of investigations into immigrant ideology of return, because it can reveal important details about the immigrant experience that otherwise go unseen. I will further develop this argument later on and explain how and why I incorporate a focus on ideology of return into my own study of return, transnationalism and Guatemalan labor migration.

Scholars are not normally concerned with how ideology of return translates into “real” or “actual” return, but rather the social functions the discourse serves during the migrants’ sojourns (Al-Rasheed 1994; Philpott 1973; Brettell 1979; Moran-Taylor, 2001). Within the literature, ideology of return is portrayed as having the capacity to serve three main functions. First, it encourages the sending of remittances to home communities. The migrant “knows he is expected to send money and clothing to a range of people at home and to attempt to provide passages for others” (Philpott 1973). Second, it can work to distance the migrant from assimilation within the host community. In this way, it can help facilitate and ensure eventual return (Al-Rasheed 1994; Ghosh 2000). Or, inversely, it can help migrants cope with feelings of homesickness, alienation from the host society or the guilt of their absence, allowing them to feel a loyalty to home but still remain abroad (Plaza & Henry 2006). Referring to the home-host country divide Al-Rasheed writes, “the myth of return is an expression of one’s intention to continue to remain a member of both” (1994, p. 200). While I do not deny that ideologies of return can serve this last function in

certain contexts, I take ideology of return at face value; I view the existence of an ideology of return as simply the expression of the intent and desire to return and settle permanently back in the homeland. I do not assume that ideologies of return signify a subconscious justification of an immigrant's desire to remain in the host society.

Determinants of Return Migration

Despite immigrant intentions, return migrations are not always realized. Throughout the migration trip an immigrant's expectations, circumstances and aspirations can change based on a variety of outside influences. Why do some immigrants return home while others stay? Much of the research on return migration investigates this question and reveals a number of push and pull factors influencing immigrant's decisions to return home (Pinger 2010; Coniglio et al. 2010; Waldorf 1995; Hong 2010; Kennan & Walker 2003; Lindstrom 1996).

Return migration is often a planned event based on economic concerns. People who immigrate to find more lucrative work plan to return home after reaching a savings goal (G. J. Borjas 1988; Sinatti 2011). Thus the savings behavior of immigrants is investigated as a determinate of return (Reyes, 2001), especially by economists (Dustmann 2003; Kirdar 2004; Kirdar 2009; Silvio Rendon & Alfredo Cuecuecha 2007; Galor & Stark 1990; Thom 2010; Kennan & Walker 2003). Immigrants who reach their savings goal are labeled within the literature as eligible for successful return, whereas those who return for lack of employment or insufficient earnings are seen as engaging in failed return (Newbold 2001; Sinatti 2011). Economists, among others, explain that changing economic conditions such as employment opportunities and decreased cost of living in places of origin relative to destination locations also influence return migration (Christian Dustmann et al. 2011; Lindstrom 1996; Yang 2011; Piotrowski & Yuying 2010; Chan 2010).

Another economic motivation for return concerns an immigrant's retirement plans and needs (Zimmer & Knodel 2010; Wong & Gonzalez-Gonzalez 2010; Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Hunter 2011). Immigrants may choose to settle where they have the greatest access to better or more affordable medical care (Hunter 2011). Some may choose to return to where they have family who can provide care. Others may choose to retire back home if they anticipate having greater purchasing power (Lindstrom 1996).

There are also numerous non-economic motivations for and against return migration. A leading reason for return is to be with loved ones back home such as children or a spouse (Plaza & Henry 2006; Piotrowski & Yuying 2010). On the other hand, the presence of family or the birth of a child in the receiving society discourages return (Bailey & Ellis 1993). Return to perform care work, particularly for female immigrants, is another factor. Immigrants' elderly parents, for instance, may need assistance (Aranda 2007; Zimmer & Knodel 2010; C. Dustmann 2003). Immigrants may return simply because they feel out of place in the host society (Aranda 2007). Some return is thought to result because people immigrate with erroneous notions about what life and work will be like, and thus arrive ill-prepared (George J. Borjas & Bratsberg 1994). Still, immigrants may decide against return feeling that assimilation back to the social and economic conditions of their home communities would be too difficult (Potter et al. 2005; Pinger 2010). Others return or stay for political or security reasons (Lindquist 2009; Pinger 2010; Moran-Taylor 2001). Some Guatemalan immigrants in the US, for instance, explain that while they would like to return, they are waiting for political and economic conditions back home to improve (Moran-Taylor, 2001).

For undocumented immigrants border enforcement has been shown to greatly influence the return decision (Angelucci 2005; Reyes 2004; R. C. Jones 2009; Massey 2006). Increased

border enforcement in the United States, meant to keep illegal Mexican immigrants out of the US, has functioned better at keeping already existing migrants in (Massey 2006). Border enforcement works to decrease rates of return, not because migrants' physical return becomes more difficult, but because physical re-immigration, if so desired, would be more difficult, dangerous and costly. Massey writes, "America's tougher line roughly tripled the average cost of getting across the border illegally; thus Mexicans who had run the gantlet at the border were more likely to hunker down and stay in the United States" (Massey 2006, p.2). It seems likely that greater legalization of labor migrants into the US or a softening of border security would result in greater rates of return migration or an increase in frequency of migrants circulating between their origin and host societies. The impact of border security on immigrant mobility is a prominent theme revealed by my own research of Guatemalan labor migration, presented in chapter four.

Rates of Return

Again, immigrant's return movements are difficult to quantify. There is a deficiency of out-migration data, the movements of undocumented immigrants are largely invisible, and determining return to home versus onward migration is complicated. Regardless, migration scholars today generally believe that rates of immigrant return migration are decreasing, especially return that results in permanent settlement back in the origin community (Black & King 2004; Angelucci 2005; Reyes 2004; Jones 2009; Massey 2006; Jones & De La Torre 2011; Guarnizo 1997). In the context of Jones' research of Bolivian immigrants, this belief comes from the observation of fewer first time-migrants, longer migration durations and the arrival of immigrant family members to the US (2009: 7).

From his work on border militarization and Mexican immigrants in the United States Massey has been able to develop statistics on Mexican immigration and estimates that “in the early 1980’s, about half of all undocumented Mexicans returned home within 12 months of entry, but by 2000 the rate of return migration stood at just 25 percent” (2006, p. 1). Jones 2009 investigation of immigrants from Zacatecas, Mexico further shows that increased border security results in longer or even permanent stays in the US by immigrants who otherwise would return. Jones and De La Torre have also documented a decreased rate of return from the standpoint of a Brazilian origin community (2011). Based on a sample of immigrant households, they found that between 2001 and 2006, immigrant return decreased by eighteen percent (2011, p. 15). Decreasing rates of return are also reported for West Africa (Black & King 2004) and South East Asia (Lindquist 2009).

Previously I explained that many immigrants today maintain the desire to return and settle back in their origin communities. If at the same time return migration is more difficult to achieve, how does this affect the immigrant experience, and family members left behind? Later I will show how contemporary migration scholars have come to consider shorter visits home and processes of circular migration or transnationalism, a substitute for return migration and settlement in the home community. I will contest this conceptualization and suggest that the viability of return has important quality of life implications. I will also make a case for further attention to permanent return migration.

The Experience of Returning Home

A number of scholars interested in return migration focus on the experience of reintegration, or what immigrants feel and confront once they are home (Bailey & Ellis 1993; Aranda 2007; Ardittis 1991; Cobo et al. 2010; Enchautegui 1993; Markowitz & Stefansson 2004;

De Souza 2006; Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2009; Potter et al. 2005). Some studies concentrate on the occupational mobility of returned labor migrants once they are home. Cobo, Giorguli and Alba find that returned migrants from the US to Latin America generally experience greater upward mobility than those without migration experience, accounting for age and education level (2010). Ardittis examines the professional reintegration of highly skilled migrants (1991). Enchautegui assesses the value of acquired skills and labor market experience among Puerto Rican returned migrants (1993).

Scholars also address more personal aspects of reintegration in terms of how migrants adjust socially back with their local communities and households. Many works explain that migrants have difficulty adjusting to their home societies (Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2009; Aranda 2007; Markowitz & Stefansson 2004; Potter et al. 2005). Migrants who return to their homes in developing countries may find it difficult to adjust to the material conditions. Becoming accustomed to one's role in the household and family may be a challenge. Sabatas and Wheeler examine how immigrant expectations about their return home play out against their actual experiences (2009).

Return Migration and Development

Return migration is important to social and economic development (R. Black & R. King 2004; Tsuda 2009; Hugo 2009; Christian Dustmann et al. 2011). Return migration can relieve socio-economic pressure on host societies. For example return can relieve problems of unemployment for host societies experiencing labor abundance (López & Davis 2010) and the return of immigrant populations can help preserve esteemed cultures (Tsuda 2009).

However, it appears that immigrant origin communities, especially within underdeveloped countries, stand to gain more from return migration. The return of highly skilled

migrants counteracts the brain drain effect (Gibson & McKenzie 2011; Dustmann et al. 2011). Furthermore returnees, skilled or otherwise, invest in local economies through the establishment of new businesses (Christian Dustmann & Kirchkamp 2002). Individuals return to take up important care work. Children left without parents during the migration process suffer various physical and emotional stresses as a result (Moran-Taylor 2008). Thus, the return of parents is important to the social development of origin communities. Returnees fulfill the role of caretaker for elderly parents as well (Potter et al. 2005). Scholars also explain that immigrants intending to return remit more and families expecting a loved one's return manage to save more, resulting in smarter investments and greater community development (Hugo 2009; Dustmann & Kirchkamp 2002). It is believed there is an optimal migration duration for immigrants which will result in maximum development potential (Hugo 2009) and thus migration trip duration is a focal point within migration studies (Reyes 2001; Dustmann & Kirchkamp 2002; C. Dustmann 2003).

Given the value of immigrant return there is a call for immigration policies and laws that encourage repatriation (Amin & Mattoo 2005; Tsuda 2010; Massey 2006; Reyes 2004; Ardittis 1991). Some nations have developed strategies and programs to encourage their expatriates to return home (Tsuda 2009), especially of skilled migrants (Luo & Wang 2002; Tsay 2002; Ardittis 1991). Others encourage the out-migration of immigrants. Due to high levels of unemployment, Spain recently implemented a plan to pay a lump sum to immigrants who have lost their jobs if they agree to leave the country (López and Davis 2010).

Increasing Attention to Return Migration

The research discussed above illustrates that attention to return migration is more extensive than as generally believed. In fact, increased attention to return migration is accredited to transnationalism theory (Sinatti 2011) which developed in the early 1990s. Transnationalism

defined as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al. 1994, p. 8). Migration scholars developed the concept while observing an increased connection of people across borders, which they attributed to advancements in communication and transportation technology (Basch et al. 1994; Guarnizo 1997). The theory of transnationalism was also derived from the observation that migrants were increasingly engaged in a back and forth movement between home and host societies, rather than permanently settling in any one place. The acknowledgement of this “back” movement allowed for, a break away from the preoccupation with immigrant assimilation in host societies, and an acknowledgment of return. Transnationalism research is responsible for much of our knowledge of return migration processes. In fact, the study of return migration today is bound to transnational theory (Sinatti 2011; Moran-Taylor & Menjivar 2005; Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Guarnizo 1997; Rodman & Conway 2005; Smith & Bailey 2004).

The Neglect of Definitive Return Migration

Interestingly, although return migration is well investigated, *definitive* return migration is largely disregarded within migration studies. I consider definitive return migration to be return that results in permanent settlement in the origin community. I still rely on Gmelch’s definition of return migration, “the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle” (1980, p. 136), but I interpret “homeland” to be the immigrant’s town or village and “resettle” to mean permanent settlement.

Ironically, at the same time that I attribute an increased attention to return migration to transnationalism theory, I argue that as a dominant framework in migration studies transnationalism theory both diverts attention away from and obscures the issue of *definitive*

return migration. Already I have shown that ideology of return, which directly engages definitive return through immigrant discourses, has received little attention since the 1970s. And, in her study of Guatemalan transnationalism Moran-Taylor in fact states that “permanent return migration” is “an aspect of migration processes generally ignored in transnational migration perspectives” (2001, p. 94). This obfuscation occurs first because the transnational framework is concerned with instances where movement and connections through space are fluid and changing rather than permanent. Thus, within the transnational framework return migration is depicted in terms of circular migration and temporary visits home (R. Black & R. King 2004; Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Aranda 2007). A second reason that transnationalism precludes awareness and account of definitive return is because there are several known weaknesses built into transnational theory that hinder a consideration of more permanent forms of settlement. Later in this chapter, I will review the literature on transnationalism and how the weaknesses of the transnational framework preclude an awareness of definitive return.

Definitive return migration needs to be a renewed area of study for three reasons. First, it is important to the socio-economic development of origin communities. In fact, compared to patterns of circular migration that only involve return visits, definitive return may better secure the investments and skills immigrants bring back home, as well as the social reproduction of a community. Regarding the flow of immigrant remittances “migration is most beneficial if it is temporary, in other words, if migrants leave their country with the intention to return someday for good” (Pinger 2009, p. 143).

A second reason is that definitive return migration is the goal and desire of many immigrants (Sinatti 2011; Moran Taylor 2001; Potter et al 2005) and thus the achievability of return impacts migrants and their families’ quality of life. Interestingly, some immigrant

populations think of return migration in terms as success and failure depending upon its permanency. Sinatti reports that for unskilled migrants their “self-perception of successful return is still largely associated with permanent return” and that failed return is attributed to returnees who must re-emigrate for lack of accumulated savings (2011, p. 2). Immigrants may desire permanent settlement in their home communities because they identify strongly with their native culture and find they are not able to adjust in the host society. Plaza and Henry explain:

“In the modern globalized world, alienation and rootlessness associated with living in huge, impersonal, fast-paced, industrial megalopolises have served to isolate people from traditional communities of meaning and acceptance. These are the motivating forces behind the modern search for, maybe preoccupation with, identity and belonging...” (2006, p. xiii)

In fact, Potter, Conway and Phillips write, “when defined on the basis of the returnees national identity, return migration becomes a manifestation of a basic human right” (2005, p. 2). An immigrant may also feel persecuted because of racism or for lack of documentation and long for settlement back home where they have greater freedom. Some may not be able to find work and need to return home where there are fewer expenses. Others may simply wish to settle where they can be close to family, and may suffer greatly their separation from loved ones. In a recent New York Times article titled “*The New Globalist is Homesick,*” Matt presents a history of immigrant nostalgia or homesickness and reveals the continued relevance and detriment of homesickness today, despite our celebration of globalization and global citizens (2012). Matt writes, “In nearly a decade’s research into the emotions and experiences of immigrants and migrants, I’ve discovered that many people who leave home in search of better prospects end up feeling displaced and depressed” (2012, p. 1). I argue that migration scholarship today does not give enough weight to such feelings of homesickness among immigrant populations. This will become even more evident in the discussion of immigrant transnationalism.

Accounts that return migration is increasingly difficult to achieve (see previous section on rates of return) emphasize the point that quality of life for immigrants who intend return is negatively affected. What happens to immigrants who feel they are unable to return home due to the increased border enforcement that Massey (2006) and Jones (2009) report or because they are unable to earn enough money? Lindquist's 2009 ethnography of Indonesian labor migrants tells the story of poor young Indonesians lured to the bustling Island of Batam by rumors that they could find lucrative work, earn enough money to return home, build a house, and start a family. Unfortunately they often become trapped in exploitive tourist and manufacturing industries which render them destitute and unable to return for fear of persecution by their families for having failed to bring back savings. Drawing attention to definitive return migration is one of the main objectives of this thesis.

The final reason that definitive return migration is an important subject of study, and the second main argument of this thesis, is that attention to definitive return migration can refine and advance our understandings of transnational theory and transnational livelihoods. In part two of this chapter, I review the work on transnationalism and lay out this argument.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is the leading theoretical framework used to study international migration today. It is both lauded and criticized for being an extremely flexible concept. Although scholars recognize a common definition, "the process by which migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together societies of origin and settlement" (Basch et al. 1994, p. 7), interpretations of its meaning are wide ranging and applied in disparate ways. To grasp the inherent meaning and value of transnationalism one must understand its

beginnings. Therefore, I will explain transnationalism's origins, before I discuss the many ways it is operationalized.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s migration scholars started to notice that many immigrants remain intimately involved in the places they leave behind (Rouse 1992; Basch et al. 1994; Levitt 1997; Schiller et al. 1992). "Increasingly...immigrants live their lives across borders and maintain their ties to home, even when their countries of origin and settlement are geographically distant" (Glick Schiller 1992, p. ix). Up until this time migration scholars generally assumed "that individuals or groups retain fixed and monogamous connections to the territory of one nation state, or another, either the host or the origin" (Bailey 2001, p. 4). Research focused on the resulting adjustment processes on either side of the border (Harding & J. Rouse 2006; N. G. Schiller 1997). Most work investigated the socio-economic impact of new immigrant populations and their means of assimilation within host societies (e.g. Portes et al. 1980).

Some scholars recognize the early 1990s as a time when "a new kind of migrating population" emerged (Glick Schiller 1992, p. ix). Scholars attribute this new migration to the period's increasing rate of international migration on a global scale (Bailey 2001; Basch et al. 1994) and to advancements in transportation and communication technology (Basch et al. 1994). Others contest the newness of the phenomenon, arguing that throughout history immigrant groups have preserved bonds with their places of origin (Portes 2003; Smith 2011). Whether immigrants were newly engaged in cross border social formations or scholars had just begun to notice, existing models for approaching research on migration were decidedly too rigid (Basch et al. 1994; Glick Schiller 1992; Bailey 2001; Portes 2003). Glick Schiller writes, "a new conceptualization is needed in order to come to terms with the experience and consciousness of

this new migrant population (1992, p. 1). Agreeing, Rouse feels that the existing framework has “obscured the ways in which many settlers...create new kinds of communities that span international borders” (2006, p. 9).

Transnationalism developed as a framework that could look beyond unilateral understandings to address a wide range of migrant groups, behaviors, social formations and experiences (Basch et al. 1994; Schiller et al. 1992; Schiller 1997; P. Levitt 1997; Sinatti 2011). With their definition (above) Basch, Glick Schiller and Blanc pioneered the theory. They also termed immigrants who “develop and maintain multiple relationships –familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political – that span borders” “transmigrants” (1994, p. 7) which now is used interchangeably with the term “transnational.” The concept of the “transnational community” or a “set of intense cross-border social relations that enable individuals to participate in the activities of daily life in two or more nations” was also developed (Portes 1996). The past twenty years has seen numerous interpretations and variations of these definitions.

Kevin Dunn’s 2010 accounting of transnationalism is a helpful resource in terms of learning the different ways that transnationalism is applied. However, it is most important to recognize two distinct and prominent understandings of transnationalism. The first is relatively simple and more literal. Some use transnationalism to describe the frequent movement of people and objects across international borders or what Cassarino terms “transnational mobility” (2004, p.262). A second understanding of transnationalism is more subjective in that looks for the exchange of ideas across borders and the identity formation of individuals who do not necessarily travel but feel they are a member of more than one society – “transnational identities” (Cassarino 2004, p. 262). This is a more abstract understanding of transnationalism,

which also seeks to describe spaces of social, political and economic inclusion that not only span borders but also have the effect of minimizing distance. These two understandings have produced a number of findings about the impact of immigrant transnationalism, which I will explain next.

The Impact of Transnationalism: From a Hybrid Community to a Tool for Resistance

Sinatti writes, “the transnational framework allows scholars to incorporate a whole range of people; permanent settlers in the country of immigration and others who shuttle regularly between places of origin and temporary overseas residence” (2011, pg. 156). Sure enough within the literature there are transnational accounts of refugees (Shami 1996; Horst 2006; Hyndman & Walton-Roberts 2000), labor migrants (Kearney 1998; Moran-Taylor 2001; Goldring 1998), both skilled (Kennedy 2007; Ley & Kobayashi 2005) and undocumented (Moran-Taylor 2009; Menjívar & Agadjanian 2007). There are investigations of the transnational processes of dual citizens (Ley and Kobayashi, 2005), subsequent immigrant generations (Menjívar, 2002; Levitt, 2006) and works that take account of gender (Salih 2001; Georges 1992). These investigations tend to highlight a few main themes: transnational social fields, impacts on the nation state, immigrant’s multiple identities, development impacts and transnationalism as a form of resistance.

Many accounts of transnationalism discuss the existence of “transnational social fields” (Horst 2006; Goldring 1998; Fournon & Glick-Schiller 2002; Peggy Levitt & Nina Glick Schiller 2004; Basch et al. 1994). Transnational social fields, like transnational communities, result when immigrant populations remain connected to their communities of origin through transportation and communication technology to the extent that geographic distance becomes insignificant. Transnational social fields are hybrid spaces where people from distant locations experience a

shared identity and lived experience. Transmigrants “reconfigure space so that their lives are lived simultaneously within two or more nation-states” and generate “landscapes of hyper connectivity, fluidity and dispersion” (Basch et al. 1994, p. 28). For example, scholars show that immigrants not only influence the culture of a host society, but through transnational social fields, induce changes in the culture of their origins (Burrell 2005). These landscapes are elsewhere referred to as transnational spaces (Faist & Özveren 2004; Jackson & Dwyer 2004; Vertovec 2001) or “third spaces” (Gutiérrez 1999). As I will explain later, transnationalism is critiqued for exaggerating the impact of communication technologies and immigrant’s ability to maintain these hybrid spaces.

Scholars are interested in how transnationalism impacts the nation state (Schiller et al. 1992; Levitt & De La Dehesa 2003; Coutin 2007). Some suggest that shrinking geographies of transnational spaces or social fields erode political borders and the dominance of the nation state (Basch et al. 1994; Levitt & De La Dehesa 2003; Gupta 1992; Miyoshi 1993; Smith & Guarnizo 1998). Similarly, the meaning and experience of citizenship are called into question (Smith & Bakker 2008; Coutin 2007; Waters 2003; Koopmans & Statham 2001). Coutin, for instance, explores how complex and frequent movement between the US and El Salvador impacts Salvadorian immigrants’ perception of citizenship (2007), especially considering the expression that their population in the US represents a 15th department of El Salvador (Baker-Cristales 2004).

The next thread of investigation involves transmigrant identities (Bailey 2001; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2002; Vertovec 2001; Smith 1998; Aranda 2007; Castles 2000). The previous discussion of the changing nature of citizenship suggests that transmigrants’ national, ethnic and racial identities may also be subject to change both in terms of immigrant self-

perceptions, and in terms of how others perceive them. Transnationalism scholars, for example, often suggest that immigrants identify as members of multiple societies (Basch et al. 1994; Vertovec 2001; Aranda 2007; Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004). Aranda writes, “One of the most intriguing features of transnational communities is the role that personal identity plays in the consciousness of its members. Some identify more with one society or another while others assume multiple identities” (2007, p. 8). Again, in line with prevailing critiques of transnationalism, I will argue that the framework tends to ignore the ways in which class, race and the political economy of host and origin communities limit immigrants’ ability to feel a true sense of belonging to more than one society.

A concentration occurs around the development impact of transnationalism (P. Levitt 1997; Townsend et al. 2002; J. H Cohen 2001b; Faist 2008). Remittances are an important source of income in many origin communities’, especially within developing countries. Thus, investment trends and impacts of transmigrant remittances are analyzed (Dennis Conway & Jeffrey H Cohen 1998; Orozco 2005). The development potential of hometown associations is also studied (Orozco 2002; Orozco 2005; Alarcón 2002). Hometown associations are defined as “organizations that allow immigrants from the same city or region to maintain ties with and materially support their places of origin” (Orozco & R. Rouse 2007).

A final theme involves the recognition of transnationalism as a positive adaptation and form of resistance to oppressive economic and political environments (N. G. Schiller et al. 1992; A. Portes 2003; R. Rouse 1992). Labor migration to centers of production increases due to the new international division of labor, economic restructuring and growing inequality on a global scale. While labor migration is itself a means of coping with difficult economic conditions back home, the subsequent settlement of immigrants in places rich in capital has added consequences.

Immigrant populations often face new forms of poverty and racial oppression in their host societies. Some transnational scholars explain that maintaining a bond to home through frequent communication, visits and participation in hometown associations, or in other words, the adoption of transnational livelihoods, is as a form of resistance to these oppressions. Glick Schiller writes,

“By maintaining many different racial, national, and ethnic identities, transmigrants are able to express their resistance to the global political and economic situations that engulf them, even as they accommodate themselves to living conditions marked by vulnerability and insecurity. These migrants express this resistance in small, every day ways that usually do not directly challenge or even recognize the basic premises of the systems that surround them and dictate the terms of their existence” (1992, p. 11).

In this way, immigrants who adopt transnational livelihoods and identities exercise agency rather than passively adapting to conditions forced upon them. “Once treated as passive and bound to custom” through transnationalism theory immigrants are “reconceptualized as active and creative agents” (Rouse 1992, p. 29). Scholars also critique the idea that transnationalism functions as a tool for resistance. Much like them, I argue that transnationalism is instead a strategy for survival and viewing it otherwise makes invisible the troubles many immigrants face. I talk about this and the other main critiques of transnationalism next.

Prevailing Critiques

There are four important critiques of transnationalism theory. The first is that the concept is overused. In other words, transnationalism incorrectly characterizes some immigrant groups. The second critique is that transnational theory tends to overlook how proximity to the local and barriers to movements still govern most people’s lives. Third, scholars point out that most accounts of transnationalism neglect to mention how processes of international migration negatively affect and marginalize some immigrant populations. Finally, the framework fails to

take proper account of real immigrant perspectives. I will explain each of these critiques in detail below.

I described already deviations within the theory's definition and meaning, the range of migrant groups it portrays and its various operationalizations. Interestingly, at the same time that transnationalism theory is acclaimed for this flexibility, (Sinatti 2011; Schiller et al. 1992) a recurrent critique is that transnationalism is not well defined and therefore is used to characterize too many different kinds of migrant populations and migration conditions (Smith & Bailey 2004; A. Portes 2003). For Smith and Bailey transnationalism has simply "become a rather overused term" (2004, p. 357). Portes attributes this overuse to the term's "appealing ring" and warns, "a concept that seeks to cover an excessive range of empirical phenomena ends up by applying to non in particular, thereby losing its heuristic value" (2003, p. 876).

Even given a static definition, how many and which immigrant populations truly exhibit transnational qualities? It is possible to count physical movement across borders, but identity formation, participation in daily life across borders or the ability of a family to remain functional across borders are subjective. Scholars suggest that too many migrant groups are characterized as transnational (Smith & Bailey 2004).

"The methodology used in earlier studies which had "a strong tendency to 'sample on the dependent variable,' focusing on instances where the phenomena of interest is present, but not on those where it is absent. Yet the very impetus generated by the earlier empirical findings led to their generalization to the entire immigrant population" (Portes 2003, p. 876).

Portes, Haller and Guarnizo report on research that did "confirm the existence of transnational activities, but...also demonstrated their limited scope (2001, p. 201). Smith and Bailey advocate for "deconstructing taken-for-granted, pre-existing conceptualizations of transnational migrants which are utilized in ubiquitous ways" (2004, p. 359). Thus, scholars see the need to decipher between transmigrants and immigrants who experience international migration in other ways.

Georges forecasted such in his 1992 study of transnational migration and the Dominican Republic.

“The project of the great majority of U.S. is a long term one; to accumulate sufficient resources to return and sustain themselves and their families securely in the Dominican ‘middle class’...It may at some point be important to determine the proportion of these versus the proportion who would like to be successful in the United States” (p.217).

Similarly and nearly a decade later, Bailey (2001) explains that “connection to territory” is an important variable in determining transnational status:

“Although it has received less attention...transnational migrants can be distinguished from circulators according to territorial commitment. Although both groups shuttle backwards and forwards between origin and destination, circulators move between a fixed home base and temporary destination, and thus maintain an unequal commitment to the two places, while transmigrants maintain links between two (or more) homes, and have more equal commitment to these territories” (p.418).

Bailey’s mention of connection to territory heralds another criticism of transnational theory; that it often overlooks the continued a deep relevance of place and distance to the construction of people’s lives.

Transnational theory’s tendency to exaggerate immigrant’s ability to maintain connections across space, and form hybrid cultural spaces that transcend borders is a second enduring critique (Bailey 2001; Jones & De La Torre 2011; Dunn 2010; Mitchell 1997; Conradson 2005). An early, argument comes from Mitchell’s 1997 article *Transnational Discourse: Bringing Geography Back In*. Here Mitchell discusses transnationalism broadly to include not just the transnationalization of migration, but economic and political transnationalizations. Yet, in all three arenas, she argues research too frequently forgets the continued salience of place. Concerning transmigrants she writes, “unstated assumptions are made about the ways that individuals experience time and space under supposedly ‘hybrid conditions’” and adds, “the abstract celebration of travel, hybridity and multiculturalism is premature” (p. 109). In 2001, Bailey confirmed a “lack of attention to space-time relations”

(2001, p. 415). Moreover, as recent as 2010, Dunn resounded, “Transnationalism...does not transcend the frictions of distance and the sticky embeddedness of place. These matters have long been studied by population geographers, and the valiancy of distance and place remain unchallenged...” (p. 7). A main argument of this thesis is that by ignoring present obstacles to movement and people’s continued need for proximity, transnational theory does a disservice to the many immigrants who maintain a desire for return.

“The persistence of homesickness points to the limitations of the cosmopolitan philosophy that undergirds so much of our market and society. The idea that we can and should feel at home anyplace on the globe is based on a worldview that celebrates the solitary, mobile individual and envisions men and women as easily separated from family, from home and from the past. But this vision doesn’t square with our emotions, for our ties to home, although often underestimated, are strong and enduring” (Matt 2012, p.1).

Next, I will give four reasons why transnational theory inadequately accounts for the continued significance of place and the enduring obstacles surrounding border crossings.

First, movement through space is actually complicated and irregular across populations (Mitchell 1997; Conradson 2005; Dunn 2010). Despite the availability of transportation method, frequent travel is costly and thus restricted. “And the extent of choice and compulsion (of both mobility and sedentariness) is uneven across racialized axis, birthplace, gender and disability” (Dunn 2010). We see this more pointedly in border regions. National borders are not as porous as transnational accounts suggest (Conradson and Latham 2005). Birthplace, race, and money determine border crossings, which excludes many people. Unauthorized people, who manage to cross, confront life-threatening terrain, racial discrimination, and exploitation.

“In contrast with homogenizing analysis of territorial containment, in which borders are depicted merely as places through which goods and people pass, border zones must be theorized as highly contested and dynamic areas of ideological, cultural and physical turmoil” (Mitchell, 1997, p. 6).

Interestingly, I find that the literature on transnationalism tends not to engage the issue of immigrant documentation. Accounts of both documented and undocumented migrant groups inform transnational scholarship, yet the distinction and its significance to the construction of transnational theory is barely addressed. Considering the impact of borders on undocumented immigrants (Massey 2006) documentation status is surely an important variable to understanding and verifying accounts of transnationalism.

Second despite great technological advancements in communication technology, its impact is exaggerated (Mitchell 1997; Matt 2012). Access to the internet remains limited or absent in many places. And while the proliferation of cell phones in even very remote parts of the world has allowed for greater communication between immigrants and the people they leave behind, these calls may not be the “social glue” Vertovec claims (2004). Cell phone use is still a luxury for poorer populations, and thus the frequency of telephone communication between immigrants and their families may be limited. Furthermore,

“The immediacy that phone calls and the Internet provide means that those away from home can know exactly what they are missing and when it is happening. They give the illusion that one can be in two places at once but also highlight the impossibility of that proposition” (Matt 2012, p. 1).

Immigrants who can afford to call home every day may not be able to abolish feelings of distance and separation. I reveal in my own research of Guatemalan labor migrants and their families that frequent communication by phone or email is not a sufficient substitute for real participation in family life.

Scholars also suggest accounts of transnationalism focus too heavily on the behavior of privileged immigrant classes (Mitchell 1997; Ong 1999). Indeed, concepts such as transnational communities, transnational spaces and hybrid transmigrant identities are largely built around the study of highly skilled labor migrants (Yeoh & Willis 2005; Gibson & McKenzie 2011; P.

Kennedy 2007), the business elite (Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Teo 2011), tourists or backpackers (Allon & Anderson 2010) or those who have dual citizenship (Teo 2011; Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Sparke 2009). Highlighting the movement and cross border connections of these advantaged individuals, who exercise greater choice, embellishes the prevalence of transnational culture.

Lastly, accounts of transnationalism overlook daily life activities rooted in place (Conradson 2005). Transnationalism is the ability of individuals to participate in the activities of daily life in two or more nations (Portes 1996), where families “remain functional across international borders” (D. Jones 1992). Yet many daily life activities cannot be shared across distance. Care work is one important example. Immigrants leave behind elderly parents or young children whose care cannot be managed remotely. Conradson and Latham point out that

“Even the most hyper-mobile transnational elites are ordinary: they eat; they sleep; they have families who must be raised, educated and taught a set of values. They have friends to keep up with and relatives to honour” (2005, p. 230).

They add that addressing the daily circumstances of immigrants can counter the “inflationary tendencies” (p. 230) within the literature.

A third critique of transnationalism is that it overlooks processes that negatively affect vulnerable populations (Mitchell 1997; Castles 1998; Bailey 2001). The tendency is to depict transnational social formations or communities in a positive light, as spaces of change, greater mobility, flexibility and progression. Transmigrants are seen as exercising greater agency and choice (P. T. Kennedy & Roudometof 2002). Yet,

“In numerous celebratory representations of ‘new’ transnational cultures and hybrid subject positions, the powerfully oppressive socio-economic forces underlying the changes are neglected, as are many of the people caught within them” (Mitchell 1997, p.9).

Again, privileging studies of affluent immigrant groups leads to this oversight. Dunn points out that “research on globe trotting of corporate elites offers less to the public good, they are not a group who require (as much) public assistance or protection” (2010, p. 5). The interpretation of transnationalism as a form of resistance to forcible political and economic changes in the world further obscures the oppression immigrants face throughout their migrations. “A different set of problems arises when theorists herald hybridity precisely because they believe it to be the only space of resistance left to the marginalized...” (Mitchell 1997, p. 9). One of these problems is that by celebrating transnationalism as a progressive form of adaptation, we disregard the injurious sacrifices, inequalities, and harmful conditions immigrants face. Although there are exceptions (see Aranda 2007, p. 74) little distinction is made between immigrants who elect to adopt transnational livelihoods versus those who adopt transnational livelihoods as a survival strategy and whose race, gender and class make them targets of discrimination and violence.

A fourth and final critique is that transnational research leaves out the immigrant perspective (Mitchell 1997; Dunn 2010; Sinatti 2011) “On the ground experiences are relegated to a secondary position—if included at all—in the general reach to proclaim the beneficial potential of hybrid forms...” (Mitchell 1997: p. 9) Generally, transnational investigations examine broad processes and patterns, rather than taking account of the real people involved. By investigating at the level of individual migrants transnational scholarship will avoid the three pitfalls already discussed; Immigrant’s stories can highlight the continued significance of place, obstacles to movement, inequalities and struggles immigrant’s experience. This is expressed by Mitchell; “By bringing in ‘real’ bodies, the actual physical, geographical constraints encountered by refugees as they seek to move across space challenges a spatial and abstracted concepts”...which has the potential to “ground theoretical understandings” (1997, p. 11).

Similarly and more than a decade later Dunn calls for an “embodied transnationalism” (2010) or research conducted at the scale of the migrant rather than research that contemplates patterns of movement at a distance. He writes, “At the embodied scale the affective and emotional geographies of transnationalism are more palpable “revealing “the ever present valiancy of place” (2010, p. 8). Investigating at the scale of individual migrants is also supported by feminist scholarship (Nagar et al. 2002).

In the final section of this chapter, I bring return migration and transnationalism together. I show how transnationalism is newly conceptualized as a form of, substitute for return migration, and argue that this conceptualization reinforces the four weaknesses of the transnational framework described above. I call for more attention to return migration through ideologies of return, as a solution, or a way to respond to the critiques of transnational theory. I end, making a case for my own study of immigrant ideologies or return.

Bringing Transnationalism and Return Migration Together

As previously explained, over the past twenty years transnational scholarship has furthered attention to return movements due to its emphasis on cross border mobility. At the same time, transnationalism works exclude a consideration of permanent return within migration studies, or what I call *definitive* return migration. Moran-Taylor agrees in her study of Guatemalan labor migrants, that transnational theory neglects definitive return.

“Whether manifested physically or mentally the notion of permanent return in migration is generally not accounted for in a transnational framework despite emphasis on bidirectional flows” (2001, p. 108).

Why is the concept of definitive return absent from transnational research, and migration scholarship overall?

Principally, transnationalism theory is concerned with movements that are fluid, flexible and changing. Conceptually, definitive return is rigid and static. In this way, transnationalism and definitive return are inherently at odds. Again, it is important to remember that transnational theory developed out of scholars' dissatisfaction with more traditional conceptualization of international immigration, which they feel worked to file immigrants into fixed categories assuming various permanent forms of settlement. However, soon after its adoption a number of migration scholars began to see limits to this supposedly flexible framework because it *did* preclude an awareness of fixed and stationary ways of being in the world. The disregard of persisting obstacles to travel, how transnational movement injures rather than liberates certain groups, and immigrant voices, obscures the existence, benefit and desire of more permanent forms of settlement, such as definitive return. The general neglect of ideologies of return since the 1970s confirms this. Furthermore, I argue that the popularity of the transnational framework today has resulted in less migration scholarship with epistemological approaches that would take notice of definitive return migration.

Yet, consideration of definitive return is not only lacking due to the dominance of this ontological position, but because migration scholars perceive the practice of definitive return to be decreasing and thus not relevant to the study of contemporary patterns of international migration (Black & King 2004; Black et al. 2004; Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Aranda 2007). Sinatti writes,

“in the transnational age, return becomes increasingly less permanent and assumes a variety of forms of commuting more or less frequently between home and host countries” (2011, p. 153).

These scholars argue that return is one-step in a migration process, rather than as the final step or closure to a migration cycle. From their analysis of the migration behavior of dual citizens between Canada and their native Hong Kong, Ley and Kobayashi explain that “in a transnational

era, movement is better described as continuous rather than completed” which complicates “the tale of return migration—extending the linear model of return migration to a circular model”

(2005: pg. 5). In addition, Aranda writes,

“Until recently, migration was understood in terms of two opposing outcomes” permanent settlement or permanent return. Return migration especially was thought as the final outcome of the migration process. This relatively static bipolar model is a simplistic depiction of unilinear flows as well as return migration and is not consistent with the realities of population movements in an increasingly transnational world. These complexities, which characterize migration and the return migrant, are more aptly encompassed within a framework and the return migrant, are more aptly encompasses within a framework of migration processes” (2007, p. 6)

This comes from Aranda’s study of Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States and again appears to theorize contemporary return migration as a passing moment in a series of brief settlement hiatuses.

The view of contemporary migration as an unending project, has even led to the consideration of transnationalism as a form of return migration and replacement for definitive return (Black and King 2004; Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Sinatti 2011; Duval 2004). Black and King claim, “transnationalism itself can arguably be conceptualized as a form of return, just as it can be seen as a form of integration in host societies” (2004, p. 78). To support this viewpoint they explain that transnational return is a more sustainable than definitive return:

“Thus, contrary to the perspective of northern governments, where any return that involves re-emigration is seen as indicating a failure of the sustainability of return (cf. International Organization for Migration, 2002), an alternative view would suggest that in order for their return to be sustainable, returnees need to retain continued access to the wider international professional and social world in which they have worked and lived” (2004, p. 81).

Jeffrey and Murison also report that scholars have begun to contest the “dual assumption that return must be permanent and that re-emigration indicates failed return, arguing instead that perpetual circulation may be a key feature of sustainable return (Jeffery & Murison 2010, p.134).

However, through this thesis one of my main objectives is to contest the theorization of

transnationalism as a form of return, a conceptualization I find problematic to both migration scholarship and to the cause of immigrants around the world. I explain this further next.

Problematizing Transnationalism as a Form of Return Migration

I argue that the contemporary conceptualization of transnationalism as a form of return migration not only impedes attention to definitive return, but also reinforces known weaknesses within the transnational framework. First, the push to theorize return as one step in a series of moves, rather than a final movement, advances a “normalization of mobility” (Jeffrey and Murison, 2010) that scholars like Mitchell (1997), Dunn (2011) and Bailey (2001) say overlooks persisting obstacles to movement through space and the sustained importance of place and proximity to people’s lives. Second, by conceptualizing transnationalism as a form of return and celebrating it as a more sustainable form of return, we obscure the real, on the ground, and sometimes-injurious experiences lived by immigrants through their comings and goings. Third, this conceptualization leaves out the perspectives of actual immigrants. The argument that transnationalism is kind of return comes from the observation that immigrants are less sedentary, rather than from a notion that immigrants feel less of a desire, or need, for permanent return and settlement. Due to these oversights, scholars apply the concept of transnational return to immigrant groups who in reality do not exhibit transnational livelihoods. Thus, I contend the conceptualization of transnationalism as a form of return. In the next section I call for studies of international migration that directly engage the notion of definitive return through ideologies of return, which I argue will produce better transnational scholarship.

Attention to Definitive Return Produces Better Transnational Theory

By investigating the notion of definitive return migration primarily through ideologies of return we can begin to respond to and overcome the general gaps in transnational inquiries. For

one, examining immigrant ideologies of return necessitates a focus on real immigrant bodies and perceptions, which works to “ground theoretical understandings” (Mitchell, 1997). Again,

“Looking at the scale of migrants rather than migrations and transnationals rather than transnationalism, a much more complicated and realistic picture emerges” (Dunn 2011, p. 8).

This grounded perspective can bring into focus immigrants whose movement through space and across borders is still limited. After all, “It is the ability to return and re-emigrate – to circulate, in other words – that underpins transnationalism” (Black and King 2004, p. 77). Immigrant ideologies of return may also highlight the continued importance of place and proximity to people’s daily lives, by revealing the limits of long distance communication. In addition, a focus on ideologies of return could bring into focus expressions of vulnerability, grief, and sacrifice and the “forces of oppression” (Mitchell, 1997) that transnational theory often overlooks. We know processes of international migration marginalize some immigrant populations. Sinatti reports:

“A common sentiment, in fact, is that once they have engaged in the process of migration, they are unable to stop, trapped between the luxury of ensuring a better livelihood for those who have stayed behind and the need for geographic distance to uphold local demand” (2011, p. 158).

Moreover, Dunn explains, “Transnationals are unevenly empowered within the emergent transnational fields, and the analysis of their embodied movement draws attention to these power imbalances” (2011, p. 2).

To reiterate, examining ideologies of return can draw out the oversights frequently committed by the transnational framework, and bring vulnerable populations to the attention of scholars. In this way, I argue that attention to definitive return will result in better understandings about the nature, extent and relevance of transnationalism in the world today, and thus help build better transnational theory.

Interestingly, through his recent investigation of skilled labor migrants shuttling between their native China and Canada, Teo (2011) has arrived at the nearly the same argument. In the article, “*The Moon Back Home is Brighter’?: Return Migration and the Cultural Politics of Belonging*” he writes,

“the recognition of transnationalism necessitates a conceptual re-examination of return migration” and “the study of return migration has the potential to sharpen our understanding of transnationalism as a process” (p. 3).

In fact, similar to my own study which is explained shortly, Teo investigates Chinese immigrant’s “myth of return” and contrasts this against the media’s popular depictions of a ‘flexible citizen’ which he uses to reveal limitations to these immigrants sense of belonging in two societies.

Again, in this past section, I have shown how definitive return can enhance and amend our knowledge of transnationalism. The re-theorization of transnationalism is an important task for today’s migration scholars, especially because the nature of international migration has changed over the past twenty years. Much of transnational theorization developed during the decade prior to 911. Since the attack, management of people’s movement across borders has increased significantly. In 2001 Bailey saw the need already writing, “Given the heightened political attention currently given to immigration, it is timely to consider further the productivity of the transnational turn” (p. 417) and in 2004 Smith and Bailey repeated the call for a critical assessment of transnationalism (p. 358). I too question the utility of transnational theorization today, when national borders are controlled so tightly, and closed to so many people. What is the benefit of current conceptualizations of transnationalism, such as the notion of transnationalism as a form of return, to immigrants? Who truly is transnational and are there better ways to understand some contemporary migration flows? What is the role of return migration?

Case Study of Guatemalan Origin Community Ideologies of Return

This project draws attention to definitive return migration and contributes to our understanding of transnationalism through a study of Guatemalan labor migration. I focus particularly on perceptions of returned migrants and migrant family members. Specifically, my study investigates ideologies of return within Guatemalan immigrant origin communities.

I build on related work that has incorporated ideologies of return into their studies of immigrant transnationalism (Sinatti 2011; Teo 2011; Moran-Taylor 2001; M. Moran-Taylor & Menjivar. Cecilia 2005). Sinatti looks at patterns of Senegalese immigration to and from Europe. Moran- Taylor and Menjívar focus on Guatemalan labor migrants. These scholars have anticipated my argument and study to some extent, yet I am encouraged and excited by their work. This recent attention to return and ideologies of return, especially by Teo (2011), highlights the relevance of my argument to contemporary migration studies. My work is distinct in that I bring new understanding to transnational theory through a focus of undocumented labor migrants from the perspective of an immigrant origin community.

Teo (2011) investigates skilled immigrants authorized to move between Canada and China. My study would look at the issue of return for a population of undocumented labor migrants. Again, documentation status and the issue of border enforcement are major factors affecting the nature and experience of immigrant migration, yet literature on transnationalism has not adequately addressed how documentation status factors into transnational livelihoods. Moran-Taylor and Menjívar's work investigates mainly undocumented Guatemalan labor migrants' ideologies of return, yet they focus on immigrants currently living in Tucson, Arizona. My study would take place in an origin community to capture the perceptions of returned migrants and migrant families, a perspective that is less common, especially within literature on

ideology of return. Furthermore, although Moran-Taylor and Menjívar seek to draw attention to the issue of permanent return migration, they do not question the characterization of immigrants as transnational. Despite immigrant return intentions, Moran-Taylor and Menjívar conceptualize Guatemalan labor migrants as transnationals. And while Sinatti questions the use of the term transnational to characterize Senegalese immigrants, whom she suggests may more appropriately qualify as “unsettled returnees,” Sinatti’s analysis is confused as she also celebrates the theorization of transnationalism as a form of return migration and replacement for definitive return (p. 154). Again, besides simply drawing attention to definitive return migration I seek to inform new understandings of transnational theory. In summary, by focusing on a population of undocumented labor migrants from the perspective of an immigrant origin community and by applying these findings to a greater discussion about the utility of the transnational framework this thesis seeks to make both an empirical and theoretical contributions.

In the next chapter, I further explain the design of my case study in terms of the specific research questions, mode of observation, study population and how I know that this study will produce the kind of knowledge I am looking for. I also describe, on a more personal level, the approach to fieldwork, taking into account how my identity and position as a researcher influence the project and its findings.

Chapter Three: Design and Approach to Fieldwork

Research Questions, Population and Mode of Observation

This thesis re-focuses attention on definitive return migration and ideologies of return and contributes to the theorization of transnationalism. Transnationalism theory neglects definitive return and ideologies of return because it pushes for a conceptualization of return as one of many steps in the migration process rather than the final stage of a migration cycle. Some scholars consider the transnational framework to be analytically weak because it generally disregards the sustained relevance of place and distance, neglects the marginalization of vulnerable immigrant populations, and does not sufficiently incorporate migrant voices, all of which result in the conceptualization of too many immigrant groups as transnationals. The conceptualization of transnationalism as a form of and substitute for definitive return reinforces these weaknesses. I argue that attention to definitive return through ideologies of return can bring new understandings to the nature and extent of transnationalism in the world today.

I conducted a study to explore ideologies of return as well as the experience of migration and return within a Guatemalan origin community. Through this case study, I draw attention to definitive return and contribute to better understandings of return migration and transnationalism. Thus, I seek to make both an empirical and theoretical contribution. My research questions are: 1) How do emigrant origin communities experience migration and return? 2) What are emigrant origin community ideologies of return? 3) And what do answers to both these questions tell us about the nature and extent of transnationalism for Guatemalan labor migrants?

Doing this work within an immigrant origin community is valuable because it brings a unique perspective to existing conversations of ideologies of return. Investigations of return ideologies normally focus on immigrant populations in host societies. Yet, I hypothesize that

returned migrants and migrant family members left behind contribute to or maintain their own ideologies of return and experience migration in ways important to our understanding of transnationalism. Sinatti also explains that migrant perceptions including “the ones of their families, are in fact a key element in clarifying the otherwise fuzzy status of their journey’s and sojourns” (2011, p.156). Furthermore, those left behind experience their own adjustment process during their loved one’s migration and communicate their ideas and feelings across borders.

Investigations of return ideologies and transnationalism that focus only on the perspective and experience of individuals in host societies currently engaged in migration may not capture a complete picture or holistic understanding of how ideologies of return and transnational livelihoods are constructed or practiced. Current migrants’ feelings about return migration may be distinct from migrants already returned or non-migrants back home. However, studies performed in origin communities, like my own case study, run the same risk. Returned migrants and family members of migrants abroad likely think and talk about return and migration differently than current migrants. Attempting to understand ideologies of return and transnationalism solely from the perspective of origin communities is also misleading. Ideally, research on ideologies of return and transnationalism would be multi-sited to gather data from individuals currently engaged in migration within host society communities as well as data from those back home in the same migrants’ origin communities. Because I only conduct research in the origin community, I acknowledge the limits of this case study to bring a complete understanding of the nature of return ideologies and transnationalism as they pertain to Guatemalan labor migration. Through the interpretation of my findings, I offer summary conclusions about the nature of Guatemalan labor migration and return. However, due to the inherent bias associated with doing this work on just one side of the border, I caution that these

findings are better brought into conversation with the existing literature than taken as holistic conclusions on their own.

To answer my research questions I conducted in-depth interviews with people connected to the migration experience within an indigenous village in Guatemala's central highlands. I consider returned migrants as well as the family members and friends of immigrants abroad, as people connected to the migration experience. I also rely on empirical observations gathered during my time in the community. These kinds of qualitative evidence are necessary to answer my research questions because I am primarily interested in subject's thoughts, feelings and perceptions about return, migration and transnationalism. Drawing partly on Lawson (2000) Rodman and Conway write,

“Many authors have lamented the difficulties of quantifying return migration, often highlighting the lack of satisfactory data on the phenomenon (Ravenstein 1985; Gmelch 1980; Byron; 1994). The use of migrant stories addresses this problem by illuminating the varied and complex experiences and relationships inherent in contemporary mobility” and migrant “narratives highlight the extent to which...migrants operate within a transnational existence...”(2005, p.89)

And previously, both observation and interviews were methods found useful in investigations of ideologies of return(Al-Rasheed 1994).

Furthermore, there is a repeated call from scholars to place the migrant experience and voice (which I argue should include those left behind) at the center of analysis (Silvey & Lawson 1999; Mitchell 1997; Sinatti 2011; Dunn 2010; Faist 2008; Piper 2009). Sinatti explains,

“seldom...has research taken into account the view of migrants themselves...In defining whether respondent mobility patterns configure more as forms of return or as transnational circulation, it is therefore appropriate to turn to their works and practices as a source of verification” (2011, p.156).

And according to Mitchell,

“It is the problem of frequent disregard for grounded empirical work that limits many epistemological inquiries into transnational processes” (1997, p.9).

My study is an attempt to answer these calls, and illuminate the voices of migrants and their families.

Field Site

I am interested in Guatemalan labor migrants because they have frequently been characterized as transnationals or as fostering transnational communities (Moran-Taylor 2001; Taylor et al. 2006; Burrell 2005; Popkin 1999; Norma Chinchilla 1999; N. Chinchilla 2005; Menjívar 2002; Montejo 1999) and a primary goal of this thesis is to investigate the real extent and nature of transnationalism. Immigrants to the US from Mexico, the Caribbean and other Latin American countries are also repeatedly described as transnational (Gutiérrez 1999; Georges 1992; Cohen 2001a; Conway & Cohen 1998; Levitt 1997; Caglar 2006; Goldring 2001; Kearney 1998; Vertovec 2004b). In fact, so much transnational scholarship has come out of this region, any migrating population originating from here, is in a sense branded “transnational.”

Conradson and Latham explain this writing,

“Individual scholars have rarely explicitly delimited the scope of the transnational, claiming that it is the province of particular groups and not of others. Nonetheless, largely as by-product of the fact that so much contemporary transnational research has focused on movement between North America and the poorer countries of Central America and the Caribbean, transnationalism has to some extent become a de facto descriptor of just these patterns of mobility (2005, p.3).

This further communicates the need to question specific applications of the transnational framework, which in some cases may be inaccurate.

The largely undocumented nature of Guatemalan labor migrants is also important to this study. Of the 1.5 million Guatemalans in the US today, an estimated 60% are undocumented (GHRC/USA 2012). As I explained in Chapter One, undocumented labor migrants are more likely to experience barriers to movement and feel marginalized within host societies. This may limit both transnational movement and a sense of transnational identity. The investigation of a

largely undocumented migrant flow can reveal important limitations of the transnational framework's ability to characterize some groups.

I conducted this research in several indigenous villages surrounding the municipality of Santa Lucía Utatlán in the department of Sololá (Figure 1). I chose this site because I lived and worked in the area as a Peace Corps volunteer (2007-2009) and thus know the villages to be well-established immigrant origin communities. Furthermore, the familiarity and trust I established with the communities during my service, as well as the relationships I have maintained were important to the nature of my research. Immigration is a sensitive topic within these communities, especially when raised by an outsider. If I were a stranger, I doubt many people would have been willing to discuss their experience of migration with me. Furthermore, my research period was limited to the month of September 2011. Given the time constraints, I could not have accomplished the fieldwork in an unfamiliar community. I will explain more about how I carried out this work later on. First, I will describe the field site in more detail, situating the community within the historical and socio-economic context of greater Guatemala.

Santa Lucía Utatlán (Santa Lucía) is located in a mountainous region of Guatemala's central highlands near the volcanic lake Atitlán and sits at an elevation of 8,504ft. Roughly 14,000 (Tageo 2004-2012) people live in the municipality, mainly in small villages and are largely ethnic K'iche', a subset of Guatemala's 41% indigenous Mayan population (CIA World Factbook 2011). Both Spanish and K'iche', one of Guatemala's twenty-three indigenous dialects, are spoken throughout the region. However in many communities K'iche' is the preferred language, especially among older generations. There are also villages where the majority of people do not speak or understand Spanish despite their proximity to bi-lingual villages. This highlights the isolated nature of much of the indigenous population within Guatemala.

Figure 1. Map of Guatemala, Illustrating Case Study Community



(Ezilon 2009)

Catholicism and evangelical Christianity are the two main religions in Santa Lucía and throughout Guatemala. People generally shun traditional Mayan beliefs; however, one can see evidence of the continued practice of Mayan religion hidden in the hillsides. Small displays and remnants of ceremonies are visible in cut out banks or shallow caves. Yet no matter the religion, many people here believe in the supernatural. During my Peace Corps service, for example, I was warned about the angry woman down the street who turned herself into a cat at night and rattled her neighbors' roofs.

There is a long history of discrimination and dispossession of the Maya. Guatemala's ladino majority, or those who are of mixed Amerindian-Spanish decent and are European in appearance, look down on the indigenous Maya. The indigenous population has little representation or involvement in government. Towards the end of Guatemala's thirty-six year

civil war, which ended just sixteen years ago, Santa Lucía was a site of particular violence. The government at the time assisted in the mass killings of numerous non-combative Mayan people. In Santa Lucía, the military forces massacred entire families, kidnapped children to train as soldiers and stole many people away from their families. Today it is easy to meet people who still do not know what happened to their fathers, mothers and children. Beyond the devastation of the civil war, the people of Santa Lucía Uatatlán are suspicious of strangers due to the widespread violence that exists in Guatemala today. Theft, armed robbery and kidnapping for ransom are common occurrences in many communities, and government authorities offer little protection. In fact, my fieldwork was complicated by the kidnapping of a friend and neighbor, which I detail later.

The indigenous population of Guatemala, including the communities of Santa Lucía Uatatlán, is subject to extreme poverty stemming from this violence and subjugation. In greater Guatemala, seventy three percent of the indigenous population lives beneath the poverty line, and fifty eight percent of people live in extreme poverty, defined as having an income below “the amount needed to purchase a basic basket of food” (The World Bank 2011). Malnutrition, especially among children, is a leading problem. There is a forty percent probability that a child will die before the age of five (WHO 2012). Poor water sanitation and access to healthcare are also notable problems. In Santa Lucía, there are many families in need of food. Rural communities, households far from a town center, and particularly poor households still lack electricity and plumbing and many families still cook over open fires in the corner of the kitchen. While today most children attend primary school and secondary school for some length of time, children often stay home to help their parents in the house or with the crops, or because the

family cannot afford the school fees. Illiteracy, especially among older generations, is common and further prevents the acquisition of work outside the agricultural sector.

Agricultural work accounts for half of Guatemala's workforce (CIA World Factbook 2011). In the villages of Santa Lucía, little work is available outside of agriculture. Many of the people are subsistence farmers, surviving off the cultivation of maize, black beans, and fava beans. Fortunate families maintain small plots of maize near their houses or buy and rent land nearby. Some are able to sell excess harvest in the market. The husbands and male children of families who cannot afford their own land work as day laborers. Currently a day's work in the maize fields earns a family fifty quetzales, or about six dollars, which does not go far for families, which normally include six to twelve members.

Although the signing of the peace accords that ended the civil war in 1996 has allowed Guatemala to make important social and economic advances, the country still faces many challenges. Government corruption limits the funding for and effectiveness of social programs, and the ladino controlled government offers little protection or support to impoverished indigenous communities. Income inequality is severe with reports that the wealthiest twenty percent of Guatemalans account for more than fifty percent of consumption (CIA World Factbook, 2011). Natural disasters, including earthquakes, volcanic eruption, landslides, tropical storms and drought are continual setbacks to socio-economic advancement. In the past few years, Santa Lucía has suffered the loss of much of its maize harvest due to tropical storms and severe drought.

Declining soil fertility in Santa Lucía and throughout Guatemala is also contributing to food insecurity. Elders within Santa Lucía talk about a time when the average maize stalk held five or six cobs, rather than today's two or three. They hold out their hands to show you how

much bigger the cobs use to be. Soil erosion and declining soil fertility are problems throughout Guatemala. High population density is partly to blame. Land ownership is highly concentrated in Guatemala. The wealthy minority hold title to most of the land. Thus Guatemala's large and growing population, the largest in Central America, is dependent on smaller and smaller plots with each passing generation. The generous application of synthetic fertilizers has also contributed to declining soil fertility. My assignment as a Peace Corps volunteer was to teach methods in organic gardening and help people to use these techniques in small kitchen gardens.

The poverty, resulting from declining soil fertility, inequality, crime, social unrest, government corruption and natural disasters, has led communities like Santa Lucía Uatlán to adopt labor migration as a survival strategy. Many of the people from these villages leave to find work in Guatemala City as domestic workers or construction workers, earning money for their families back in Santa Lucía. Many go on to find work in the United States, or in the case of Santa Lucía, Los Angeles. Remittances from the United States are Guatemala's largest source of foreign income (CIA World Factbook, 2011) amounting to over four billion dollars (GHRC, 2012).

My Own Return to Guatemala and Gathering Respondents

I arrived in Santa Lucía Uatlán on the last day in August of 2011 to begin my fieldwork. I arranged to stay with the host family I lived with during my Peace Corps service in a small village near Santa Lucía. Although it had been two years since my Peace Corps service ended, walking down the main road people recognized and welcomed me. I planned to spend the first few days visiting with the family, reorienting myself to the community and finding old friends. Because I needed to return to the United States by September 23rd, and thus had only three weeks to complete my fieldwork, I also began to set up meetings with potential informants.

Before I left the US, I contacted a few people from nearby villages, with whom I had maintained a relationship since my Peace Corps service, and arranged for them to serve as informants. These individuals include people involved with local non-profit organizations and informal but influential community figures. Mainly, I needed their help identifying initial interview respondents. I approached additional subjects through snowball sampling (Babbie 2007).

Probability sampling is not possible for this study as Guatemalan communities are largely informal. Generally, lists of community residents, let alone families associated with migration, are not available (Babbie, 2002, p. 179). Snowball sampling is also necessary because given their history of subjugation and victimization the people here are suspicious and weary of outsiders. Furthermore, immigration is a sensitive issue as people fear speaking about their loved ones' undocumented migration with a stranger may put their family in danger. If I had attempted to approach people myself, without the help of a trusted member of the community or prior interviewees', I might have frightened or made potential respondents nervous. I also was careful to be clear that my interest in return migration is not political, but that I want to take a humanitarian approach to the issue of migration, drawing attention to the needs and wants of actual migrants. Local informants are necessary to help with village dogs, which are aggressive, especially with unfamiliar people. This had been a constant challenge to my work in the Peace Corps. Because non-probability sampling can lead to a sample in which all subjects share the same traits, I stratified the sample, to ensure that men and women, as well as returned migrants and non-migrants of various ages were represented (Babbie, 2002, p. 200).

My informants approached potential respondents privately and if they were interested set up an introduction and time for an interview. Prior interview subjects would do the same.

Certainly, some people approached were not interested in being interviewed. However, the majority of people approached welcomed the opportunity to participate.

The only requirements for participation, besides having experience with migration personally or through a loved one, were that respondents be able to speak and understand Spanish, and be over eighteen years of age. I conducted all interviews in Spanish as I only understand a few words or phrases in K'iche' and did not want to rely on a translator which can lead to inaccurate translations of responses. I excluded people under the age of eighteen because I feel their experience or memory of a loved one's migration is limited. Finally, I gave small cash remuneration (80 quetzales or \$10) to each respondent for their time. In this community, it is customary to offer a gift in exchange for participation in programs or events.

Interview Design and Approach to Observations

I conducted twenty interviews with men and women of various ages. Each interview lasted about an hour. Most interviews took place in the kitchen or bedroom of the respondents' homes. A handful of respondents preferred to be interviewed in my house. I had great results using a Sony digital recorder (\$80) and taking some notes by hand.

To collect the kind of information I was interested in I developed six interview questions that would elicit in-depth responses (Figure 2). I designed the questions to capture information about one or more of the following themes: migration and return intentions, imaginings of return (how the individual imagines the experience of return), the migration experience, livelihood strategies, and social ties. These themes are found to be useful points of focus in studies of return ideology and transnationalism (Moran-Taylor & Menjivar 2005; Sinatti 2011; Dunn 2010). I also prepared probes for each question to help further direct subject responses towards these themes.

However, taking an inductive approach, I was careful not to design questions and probes too narrowly, to allow for the emergence of new themes, concepts and diverse responses.

Table 1. Interview Script

#	Question
1	I am interested in your background: where you are from, how you grew up, what you have done for work, where you have lived and the important people in your life. Can you tell me about your life history?
	Probe: timeline. Probe: movement. Probe: important actors
2	Why did/do (you, he, she) want to migrate?
	Probe: reasons. Probe: goals.
3	Can you tell me about your experience while (you, he, she) was/is abroad?
	Probe: daily routine. Probe: friends/family. Probe: adjustment. Probe: challenges
4	During (your, his, her) time abroad how did/do (you, he, she) communicate with others?
	Probe: who? Probe: how? Probe: how often? Probe: what
5	Did/do you think about or discuss (your, his, her) returning home?
	Probe: how often. Probe: why return. Probe: importance. Probe: challenges. Probe: discussions about returning home. Probe: with whom?
6	When you thought/ think about (your, his, her) return, what were/are your plans?
	Probe: life back home? Probe: how? Probe: challenges. Probe: Attempts of return.

The first question, asking about life histories, is meant to gather initial characteristics about respondents and contextual information about the construction of life in Santa Lucía. A broad, open-ended question like this can reveal important details unique to each respondent. The

question also serves as a kind of warm up for respondents who may be shy or unsure about how to proceed in the interview.

In question two I ask about the subject's migration intentions, or about the agreements and understandings between migrants and non-migrants, in terms of migration intentions. This question looks to gather information about the goals of migration or ideas about return that make up ideologies of return, answering my second research question.

Question three, again, is broad and meant to reveal how subjects felt about their or their loved one's experience in the United States in terms of living conditions, work, and social life. The subjects I interviewed who were non-migrants reported on their experience back home and on the conversations they had with their loved one in the US. This question looks to answer the first research question.

Interview question four asks about subjects' communication with friends and loved ones during migration in terms of frequency and subject of conversation, and is meant to reveal the extent to which immigrants and their families maintain communication across distance. This helps to answer research question one and two.

Question five is more direct, asking whether subjects discuss their or their loved one's return to Santa Lucía. In this way, I was able to inquire about respondent's ideologies of return, answering research question number two. Interview question six serves the same purpose by asking specifically about subject's life plans after return.

As mentioned earlier, to answer my research questions I also relied on general observations of the people and community. I imagine that the daily routine of interview respondents is affected by the migration experience and the subject's expectations or desires

concerning their or their loved ones return. Thus, I collected some information on subjects' daily activities or livelihood strategies.

Initial Findings

Of the sixteen interview subjects, seven are men and nine are women ranging in age from the late twenties to early fifties. All were born into poor farming families, worked at a young age and have little education. Each subject is a returned migrant, the wife or child of an immigrant in the US, or both. Los Angeles was the migration destination reported by most subjects, where the immigrants mainly work in clothing factories and restaurants or as domestic workers. All returnees report that friends or family received them upon their arrival in Los Angeles.

Some of the men and women speak of migrations that were undertaken while they were young and single, others talk about migrations commencing after the start of a family. On average subjects report that migrations lasted about four years before return. However, the average initial migration intention was only two years. Some of the subjects talk about migrations that took place in the 1990's, others within the past ten years, and some report on the migrations of loved one's currently abroad. All illustrate dangerous and traumatic borders crossings, detailing harsh terrain, lack of food and water and frequent confrontations with immigration authorities. Most migrations resulted in detainment by immigration at least once, many more than once. Interestingly, almost all migration attempts were eventually successful.

Subjects described similar migration savings goals. Most explain that they or their loved one went to the US to earn money to build a house or buy land in Guatemala. Additionally, subjects engaged in migration to earn money for their children's education, to start a business, to pay off existing debt or simply to pay for the family's general costs. See Figure 3 for a summary table of respondent's general characteristics.

Table 2. Basic Characteristics of Subjects

General characteristics of respondents	# Men	#Women
Gender	7	9
20 -30 years of age	2	3
30- 40 years of age	2	2
40 + years of age	3	4
Who are return immigrants	7	4
Who are non- migrant family member of migrant abroad	2	8
Average migration duration (for both immigrants and reported for loved ones)	4 years	4 years
Average intended migration duration	2 years	2 years
Migrated to save money for a house	7	8
To buy land	7	7
Additional savings goal: to educate children, start a business, pay debt, support family generally	7 Combined	9 Combined

Position as researcher and methodological challenges

My interest in Guatemalan labor migration and the research questions pursued in this thesis began to form during my time in the Peace Corps. Living and working in the immigrant origin communities surrounding Santa Lucía Utatlán I developed my own ideas, assumptions and hypothesis about how the people there experience and think about migration and return. My personal feelings and past or present experiences influence the theoretical justification for this study, central questions and methodological approach. My identity and role as a researcher also

affect the course of fieldwork and nature of empirical observations. This happens in many subtle and invisible ways and can both limit observation and lend important insight.

In doing my own qualitative research I had some awareness of how my identity as an American, graduate student and woman influenced the information I gathered from interviews and general observation. My interaction with the community and interview subjects was marked by subtle tensions and ever-shifting power dynamics. I noticed, for example, that male subjects are more forthcoming and willing to be interviewed than their female counterparts. At the same time, I suspect that, female subjects are more comfortable being interviewed by a woman than they are by a man. Both males and females showed small hesitations and shyness in answering interview questions, as well as anxiety about whether their responses were appropriate or correct. There were moments when I felt my background of education, privilege and appearance of professionalism contributed to this tension. It is likely this tension led subjects to highlight or volunteer information they believed I wanted to hear rather than express their unencumbered ideas and feelings. At the same time, my prepared research questions and probes may have limited the range and quality of subjects' responses. I conducted interviews under the influence of my own assumptions about Guatemalan labor migration and return; assumptions formed by an outsider coming from a very different background and circumstance.

The first week of my trip, I was particularly aware of my privilege as an American and identity as an outsider. The morning after I arrived to the village and compound of the family I had arranged to stay with, the family's twenty-year-old daughter was kidnapped and held for ransom. The extended family, the mayor of Santa Lucía and village leaders with experience in kidnappings gathered at the family's house. The family rearranged my room for hostage negotiations and I moved into the families shared bedroom. The young woman returned after

four days, many threats and extensive negotiation. Fortunately, she appeared in relatively good health, despite some physical and sexual abuse, as well as severe emotional trauma.

Of course, the ordeal was traumatic for the parents of the young woman and the rest of her family as well. They feared not being able to raise enough money to meet the kidnappers' demands. I too feared for the young woman's life. She had been a friend during my time in Santa Lucía. However, I also feared for myself. During negotiations, I worried that my presence in the village and with the family could be dangerous to me as well as their daughter. Though I tried to be helpful, I worried that my presence was a nuisance and invasion of privacy. Most of all I questioned my role in the affair, in terms of what help would be appropriate to give. Given the circumstances, I questioned whether continuing my research was ethical. Ultimately, I was able to complete the fieldwork, but the kidnapping heightened the tension I felt surrounding my role as a researcher.

The kidnapping of my host family's daughter highlights the extreme vulnerability of this population. Without just authorities or government officials to turn to, poor indigenous families fall further into debt from kidnapping, theft, and robbery. This violence is a root cause of Guatemalan labor migration.

Chapter Four: Respondents' Stories, Answering the Research Questions

Overview of Results

Again, this thesis looks to draw attention to definitive return migration and contribute to a better understanding of return migration and transnationalism through an investigation of an immigrant origin community. My research questions are: 1) How do emigrant origin communities experience migration and return? 2) What are emigrant origin community ideologies of return? 3) What do answers to both these questions tell us about the nature and extent of transnationalism for Guatemalan labor migrants? In this chapter, I address the first two research questions, detailing the common ideas communicated by interview respondents. In terms of their migration and return experiences respondents discuss difficult border crossings, burdensome living and working conditions in the United States, longings for return migration, desires to reside in one place with the family, regular but infrequent communication with family across borders and bittersweet homecomings. In terms of ideologies of return respondents express their view of migration as temporary and return migration as permanent, the importance of the family being together, a feeling that migration outcomes are a matter of faith and their perception of the US as a country of vice that tests migrant fortitude. I also indicate how each theme speaks to the final research question, which I more thoroughly answer in the concluding chapter.

Research Question 1: How do emigrant origin communities experience migration and return?

Treacherous Border Crossings

“I went and yes, I suffered this trip. I suffered much in the desert, too much.”

“Fui y si sufrí para ir. Sufrí mucho en el desierto, demasiado.”
(Isabel, 26 yrs., personal interview)

Both returned migrants and migrant loved ones left behind describe the initial migration trip through Mexico and border crossing into the United States as a fearful process.

Undocumented, Guatemalan labor migrants may experience thirst, hunger and extreme physical discomfort in their effort to travel undetected. They walk for days or nights through harsh and remote environments. While the Rio Grande River, high fences and United States border patrol are major obstacles, it is journeying through Mexico that produces the most fear. In Mexico, migrants are vulnerable to theft, kidnapping, dehydration and serious injury. A common strategy is to travel on top of trains through Mexico, but due to fatigue people fall off, losing arms and legs, or dying. Indigenous Guatemalans are particularly vulnerable, as they confront discrimination and racism throughout Mexico. Mexican immigration authorities especially mistreat indigenous Guatemalan immigrants.

Gloria went to the United States to help her ease her family's mounting debts but was caught by immigration authorities and detained in Houston Texas before being returned to Guatemala. Her words describe the dilemma of being caught between the two opposing oppressions that many Guatemalan's face.

“I passed the Rio Grande River at ten at night, I woke, and the immigration authorities found us, they hit us, yes they hit us, they made us run with exhaustion, with fatigue, with everything. They grabbed us and put us in jail, and there the immigration police, the women there...began to scold us, to mistreat us. They gave us food, rotten food and there we slept, there we ate and there we bathed...They treated us...like an animal. They do not know that we come out of necessity, we come because of the poverty in Guatemala...”

“pase en el rio bravo a las diez de la noche, amanecer, nos encontrar los inmigraciones, nos pegaron, si los pegaron, nos correaron y con cansancio, con sueño, con de todo. Nos agarraron y fuimos a entrar en al cárcel, y allí inmigraciones, las mujeres de allí, pues los oficiales, nos empezaron a reganar, a maltratar. Nos dieron comida, mal comida y allí dormimos...allí comemos, y allí bañamos...nos hicieron...como que un animal...”
(Gloria, aprox. 50 yrs., personal interview)

All the returned migrants I interviewed report being found by authorities and held in jail at least once, many more than once. Interestingly, it seems that no matter how many times an immigrant is detained and returned by immigration police, they eventually cross the border successfully. From the day they leave their village it may take weeks, months or up to a year for a Guatemalan labor migrant to successfully reach the United States.

Undocumented migration to the United States is not only dangerous, it is expensive and the cost increases with each failed attempt. David, a returned migrant, remembers:

“I had to borrow almost fourteen thousand Quetzales [\$1,750] to go. Already this is a lot. Up there I had to pay twenty thousand Quetzales because I was caught by immigration, thirty five thousand Quetzales in the end...”

“Yo tuve que prestar casi cerca de 14 mil Quetzales para ir. Ya es tanto. Yo allá tenía que pagar casi 20 mil por lo que me encontraron, el fin 35 mil Quetzales...”
(David, 36yrs., personal interview)

Today, an initial migration trip costs around thirty-five thousand quetzales, or between four and five thousand dollars. Like David, many of the subjects interviewed report borrowing money until their migration trips were successful. Essentially, they become trapped between the burdens of accumulating enormous debt in repeat attempts and returning home where there is no work. Only in the United States will they be able to earn enough to cancel the debt. This was the dilemma on Alexander’s mind when immigration police found him on a bus without proper documentation near the US/Mexico border.

“There are many, in each place, each town, there are roadblocks, there are posts. So, I arrived to the last roadblock, the post where there is border security. It was about one in the morning and the immigration police entered, they entered with their lamps. It was in the middle of the desert...They only had me get out because only I was without papers and they took me to an office and they questioned me...It was in the middle of the desert, middle of the night, only this post, only this office was there...They left me in the office with the door open and they went into the bus to see my bag, well to retrieve it. At the same moment they left the door open I left, I left the office running. Only me running and well, I escaped...with fear. I did not think I just did it. I did not think about what would happen to me in the future, tomorrow, I didn’t think about this.”

“Hay muchos, cada lugar, cada pueblo, hay retenes, hay garitas. Entonces llegue en la ultima reten, la garita donde esta la inmigración. Era como a la una de la mañana, entro la inmigración, entro con su linterna. Estaba en medio del desierto...Solo yo me bajaron porque solo yo no tengo papeles y me llevaban en una oficina y me preguntaban...Estaba medio de la desierto, media noche. Solo este garrita, solo este oficina estaba allí...Me dejo en la oficina solo con la puerta abierta y se entraron en el autobús a ver mi maleta, traerlo pues. Mientras que me dejo abierta la puerta, yo salí corriendo del oficina, yo salí corriendo y bueno, me escape...con miedo pues. No pensé solo hice. No pensé que me va a pensar en el futuro, mañana, no pensé en eso.”
(Alexander, 29yrs., personal interview)

Although this time Alexander avoided detainment and return to Guatemala, he would be caught by immigration once more before a final attempt and successful crossing.

Those left behind also suffer the initial migration trip. At the time of my interview with Rosa Florida, she was waiting to hear news about her husband’s migration attempt.

“He is on his way now, he is on his way and I now have spent a little more than twenty days not knowing about my husband. How is he? Is he well? Is he in jail? And there is a risk as well that, sometimes, they are killed on their journey.”

“Hoy anda en camino, va en camino y yo ya llevo un poco mas de veinte días de no saber de mi esposo. ¿Como esta el? ¿Esta bien? ¿Esta encerrado en el cárcel? Y pasa un riesgo también que a veces les matan en el camino”
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interview, talking about her husband)

Interestingly, a different interview was interrupted a few days later when the subject’s daughter called worried that she had not heard news of her husband’s recent immigration attempt and whether or not he was safe.

Returned migrants express a desire to immigrate again to the United States to work or visit friends and family, but nearly all explain that the danger of the border crossing prevents this. Later it will become clear that difficult border crossings also limit Guatemalan labor migrants return movement from the United States, similar to reports on Mexican labor migration by Massey (2006).

Stories of perilous border crossings, imparted from the perspective of an immigrant origin community, support Mitchell’s (1997) argument that the celebration of swift movement through

space and across borders is premature. Returned migrant's reports of harsh desert terrain, frequent roadblocks, mistreatment at detainment facilities, and burdensome debts incurred prove that contemporary migration is a highly uneven and sticky process. Accounts from those left behind, who must endure weeks or months of waiting to hear from their migrant loved one, further illuminate the persisting nature of distance as a formidable obstacle. The wife of Eduardo, a returned migrant in his 40's contemplating re-immigration to the US, said it well:

"If I knew now that you would go tomorrow and be there, I'd be happy...the problem is the journey."

"si yo supiera que ahorita te vas ya mañana estas allá, yo feliz...pero el problema es por el camino."

(Eduardo, 43 yrs., personal interview, talking about his wife)

Given the barriers to movement, particularly concerning international border crossing that undocumented migrants experience, we must question the accuracy and utility of characterizing these groups as transnational.

Fuimos a Luchar, Life During Migration is Expressed as a Fight

"He went to fight for us"

"Él se fue para luchar para nosotros."

(Rosa Florida, 30yrs., personal interview, talking about her husband)

Although most returned migrants describe enjoying the material comforts of life in the United States, they explain that the hard labor and discrimination experienced on a daily basis was a struggle. Many describe twelve-hour long shifts of repetitive, physically demanding work, with only one day a week to rest and sometimes none. Mario, now forty years old, married and had children at a young age. He and his family were living in a single room in his parent's house when he decided to go to Los Angeles to find work and earn money to buy their own land and build a house. He spent four years working in the US and except for the long hours enjoyed his life there. He remembers his return:

“The experience I had in the United States was beautiful...what affected me was the stress. The stress is to say the daily routine...one goes to work, from work to the apartment and like this pass the years...I was a little tired in the United States for so much work and it is for this reason that I said, okay, if I continue here I might get sick from so much work...I am going to return before I become ill here. And here I have no way to get better. There are doctors, but private, but very expensive.”

“Muy bonito la experiencia que yo tuve en Estados Unidos...lo que mi afecto un poquito fue el estrés. El estrés es puedo decirle el diario vivir...entonces una va al trabajo, del trabajo al apartamento y así paso año y año...Estaba un poco que cansado allá en los Estados Unidos por trabajo y por esa razón que yo dije bueno si voy a seguir aquí quizás me voy a enfermar por tanto trabajo...me voy a regresar antes que me enferme acá. Y acá no tengo manera de curarme. Hay médicos, pero privados, pero muy caro.”
(Mario, 40 yrs., personal interviews)

Migrant’s like Mario also find that while their wages are much higher than they would be in Guatemala, they struggle to cover the high costs of living in Los Angeles, and still manage to send money home to their families.

Discrimination and racism in the US against Latinos also burdens the lives of Guatemalan labor migrants. Isabel worked in Los Angeles for seven years. Now she is twenty-six and living with her mother and two small children back in Guatemala while her husband takes his turn working in the US. For Isabel working in the United States means being treated as though you have little worth.

“It was hard too, very, because the people of the states are able to give you opportunity when you know a little English. If you know more or less English they help you and it helps you, but if not, they treat you how they like...Yes I suffered very much. I have suffered very much being there...Its very difficult because the people take advantage of you, they really take advantage, they rob you, your time and they do not take notice of your work, they do not value you...”

“Era duro también, muchísimo, porque la gente de los estados te pueden dar la oportunidad cuando tu sabes un poco Ingles. Si sabes mas o menos Ingles te ayudan y tu te ayudas, pero si no, te tratan lo que ellos quiera... Yo si sufrí mucho. He sufrido mucho de estar allá...Es muy difícil porque la gente se aprovechen de ti, se aprovechen mucho, te roban, tu tiempo no se dan cuenta de tu trabajo, no lo valoran...”
(Isabel, 26 yrs., personal interviews)

Oscar is a returned migrant in his mid-thirties and feels similar to Isabel. His father sent him to Los Angeles during the civil war after hearing rumors that the government forces, known to kill entire families and steal children, were soon to come through Santa Lucía Utatlán.

“I noticed that in the United States I was not able to live because of a lot of racism. Yes, much of the Latino people I feel are not free, it is not free there. You carry fear wherever you go...”

“Me di cuenta que en Estados Unidos no me conviene vivir porque mucho racismo. Si mucha gente latina que yo siento no esta uno libre, no es libre porque allá. Uno anda con miedo...”

(Oscar, 35yrs., personal interviews)

Although Mario enjoyed his life in the US and would have liked to stay longer, he felt similarly to Oscar. Without documentation, staying in the US was uncomfortable.

“When you are not legal...you run a risk. Any moment they could detain you and deport you...so I arrived in Guatemala and here how I feel more free...because I have my rights as a citizen, so then I have the liberty to go wherever I like...”

“Cuando uno no esta legal...corre un riesgo. Cualquier momento lo detienen a uno y lo deportan...entonces llegue a Guatemala y aquí como me sentía yo mas libre...porque tengo mis derechos como caudino, entonces puedo yo salir a cualquier lugar con libertad...”

(Mario, 40yrs., personal interviews)

Due to the struggles labor migrants face living and working in the United States, such as long work hours, low pay, discrimination and racism returned migrants talk about migration and life in the United States as a fight, frequently using phrases like “fui a luchar” (I went to fight) or “él esta luchando allá” (he is fighting there).

Those left behind also describe their lives back home with the absence of their loved one as a fight.

“A fight begins here as well, because it could be that he does not find work easily. I stayed to take care of the children, I stayed to take care of the house, to look after the crop, to look after my things here, but do not think that this is easy, this is difficult...”

“También empieza una lucha aquí, porque puede ser que no consigue tan fácilmente trabajo. Yo me quede para cuidar los niños, me quede para cuidar la casa, para ver la milpa, para ver mis cosas aquí, pero no crea que esta es fácil, esto cuesta...”

(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interviews)

Those left behind are left without much money or resources when their spouses leave for the United States. And it may take the migrant a year or more to be able to find work and pay off the initial migration debt before they can begin remitting money to their families.

The expression that life in the United States and back home during a migration is a fight suggests the need to question the extent to which Guatemalan labor migrants should be characterized as transnational or as fostering transnationalism. Returned migrant's stories of difficult working conditions, low wages, and discrimination reveal their vulnerable position as immigrants, rather than their ability to resist socio-economic marginalization by adopting transnational livelihoods (Schiller et al. 1992; Portes 2003; Rouse 1992). Furthermore, these experiences imply that Guatemalan labor migrants do not feel a sense of belonging to both US and Guatemalan society, as transnationalism theory would suggest.

Longings for Return

“I wanted to return, because I had my father, I have my mother, I had my little brothers and sisters. I wanted to be with them.”

“Yo quería regresar, porque tenia mi papa, tengo mi mama, tenia mis hermanos pequeños. Quería estar con ellos.”
(Oscar, 35yrs., personal interviews)

Both returned migrants and non-migrants express strong desires for return migration. Generally, tied to this desire is a subject's wish to be reunited with loved ones. This is particularly evident in Rosa Florida's story from Chapter One, in which she explains that most of her life she has eagerly awaited the return of family from the United States. However, Rosa Florida's longing is not unique. Eduardo left his wife and young children to find work in Los Angeles, and like many, he reports the following:

“I was sad. Yes, I was sad, it tore my heart apart. I wanted to be here with the family”

“Yo me sentía triste. Si me sentía muy triste, se me partía la corazón, quería estar aquí con la familia.”

(Eduardo, 43yrs., personal interviews)

His family back home also suffered the separation, apparent in Eduardo’s reported conversations with his wife and parents:

“She counted the months. She told me ‘already you have been there fourteen months, already you will be here within ten months.’ She counted the months, the time that I told her, she was waiting this time that I would arrive. She told me, ‘already in the next Christmas you will be with us.’ My parents also wanted me to return. Yes, they told me, ‘my son, already you have your truck, come back and work with us!’”

“Ella contaba los meses. Ella me decía ‘ya llevas catorce meses, ya dentro de diez meses estas aquí.’ Ella iba contando los meses, el tiempo que lo le dije, ella estaba esperando ese tiempo que ya llegar. Ella me decía ‘ya por la otra navidad tu vas estar con nosotros.’ Mis padres también querían que yo regresar. Si ellos me decían, ‘mijo ya esta su camión, vente a trabajar con nosotros, eso me decía.’”

(Eduardo, 43 yrs., personal interview, conversations with family)

In the US Eduardo was saving money to buy a truck he could drive back to Guatemala and use to start a construction supply business.

Longings for return are also expressed in connection with migrant’s advancing age or physical injuries. Older migrants struggle to meet the physical demands of working in the United States, where they cannot afford to take a day of rest. They look forward to retirement back in Guatemala. Similarly migrants in the US who are injured or become sick, desire to return home where rest is more affordable. Corina’s husband is on his third and longest migration trip to Los Angeles. For the past seven years, he has worked in a clothing factory but arthritis in his hands is making this difficult. Corina talks about her husband’s experience:

“This country [Guatemala] is beautiful as well. We have the lake, very beautiful, but there isn’t money. He misses his country. He would like to be here. He would like to be here with the family in the country of Guatemala, everything, because here is a home. Well, its true, in the United States [there is] work, everything, but when one is already old you cannot do anything, then it is different, he wants to be here...”

“Bonito este país también. Tenemos el lago, bien bonito, pero no hay dinero. Extraña su país. Quisiera estar aquí. Quisiera estar allí con la familia en país de Guatemala, todo, porque aquí es in hogar. Pues, es cierto, en los Estados Unidos trabajo, todo, pero

cuando una ya es ancianito ya no puedo hacer nada allá, ya es diferente, quiere estar aquí...”

(Corina, 50 yrs., personal interviews, talking about her husband)

Alexander’s brother in Los Angeles is in a similar situation. While only in his early twenties, a hand injury makes what little work he can find too difficult. Alexander describes his brother as “desperate”:

“He wants to return because he tells me that there is not work there, to pay the rent, the water, the lights, all this. It is not enough and apart from this, he is sick. He has a wound in the hand. His hand swells and he went to the hospital...but it is the same. He is desperate and not able to work. He is alone. He is not able to work and if he works, it tires his back. The cold hurts it, hot weather hurts it, everything affects it...”

“Él ya quiere regresar porque cuenta de que ya no hay trabajo allí, pagar la renta, el agua, la luz, todo eso, ya no alcanza y aparte de eso él está enfermo, Tiene una herida en el mano; se la hincha la mano y va a hospital....pero igual, él es desesperada y no puede trabajar, esta solo, no puede trabajar, si trabaja mucho se cansa le espalda. Mucho frio le afecta, mucho calor le afecta, todo le afecta...”

(Alexander, 29 yrs., personal interviews).

Much like Corina’s husband and Alexander’s brother, return migrants who experience life and work in Los Angeles as a fight or struggle due to difficult working conditions, low pay and high costs of living, commonly talk about return as a desire for rest. Oscar articulates this feeling well.

“There [Los Angeles], how do I say, every day you have to work to pay the rent. On the other hand here, you have your house, though it is a very humble house, but you do not have to pay the rent.”

“Allá, como le decía yo, todo los días hay que trabajar para pagar la renta. En cambio aquí tiene su casita, aunque muy sencilla la casita, pero no paga renta uno.”

(Oscar, 35yrs., personal interviews)

Similarly, subjects often express Guatemala as “tranquillo” or quiet and peaceful in comparison to Los Angeles.

Immigrants initially intend to spend a limited amount of time in migration, most often two to four years, by which time they plan to remit a specified amount of money. Yet, high

unemployment in Los Angeles, migrants increasing debt burdens and interest rates, as well as high costs of living in the US and in Guatemala, hinder migrants' ability to meet their savings goals and return when planned.

“We decided that I would be absent from the country [Guatemala] two years, but upon arrival to the United States, in the year that I arrived, the work was a little low, so this caused me to have to stay another two years, so it increased from two to four years.”

“Decidimos que yo iba a ausentarme del país dos años, pero llegar a Estados Unidos en ese año que yo llegue el trabajo estaba un poquito malo, entonces eso causo que yo me quedaba otros dos años mas, entonces se aumentar a dos a cuatro años”
(Mario, 40yrs., personal interviews)

When return migration is delayed, as it was for Mario, desires for return or a loved one's return are more commonly expressed. Gloria has five children and an unfinished home; mainly it needs windows and a door. Her husband sends back money from Los Angeles, but most of the money is used to pay old debts. What money is left goes towards food and clothing. She is not sure when her husband will be able to return.

“Okay, he told me five years or six years, but how the money goes and here we owe money, so he pays his debt still and all our expenses. It is not enough. He is still working...now he has about twelve years. He has not returned...ah, I want him here already tomorrow.”

“Bueno, el digo cinco anos o seis años. Pero como el paso el dinero aquí de debemos entonces el pago deuda su vida ya y mucho gasto nosotros. Eso es como no alcanza. Todavía esta trabajando...ahorita como que tiene doce anos. No ha regresado...Ah, yo quiero ya de aquí de mañana.”
(Gloria, approx. 50 yrs., personal interviews, talking about her husband)

Longings for return are often in conflict with a fear of return, or a fear that once the migrant is back in Guatemala they will not be able to make a living, and if needed re-immigrate to the US.

This is the case for Rosa Florida's father. She explains:

“He says said he was going to do some three or four years but more has passed. It has been more and he is afraid to return. Why? Because there is no work here. How will he work? ‘What will I do to maintain my wife and myself?’ my father says. This is why he continues there. But he says, ‘sometimes I begin to think that now I want to return, now I want to go, because here I am tired and I want to rest...’”

“Él dijo que se va ir hacer unos tres o cuatro años pero ya paso mas. Ya pasó más y él tiene miedo de regresar. ¿Porque? Porque aquí no hay trabajo. ¿Como va a trabajar? ‘¿Como voy hacer para mantener a mis esposa y para mantenerme a mi mismo?’ dice mi papa. Por eso que el aun sigue allá. Pero él dice, ‘a veces me pongo a pensar que ya quiero regresar, ya quiero ir, porque aquí estoy cansado y quiero descansar...’”
(Rosa Florida, 30yrs., personal interviews, conversations with her father)

People who feel a loved one back in Guatemala is in need of care express desire for return migration most intently. At one point, both Corina and her husband went to Los Angeles to work and left their four young daughters behind with an aunt and uncle. Before long, they heard the children were separated among various extended family members and were being mistreated. Corina talks about her decision whether to return or stay in the US.

“Yes, I felt very bad. I said ‘it is better than I go. I will go see my children because my daughters are important to me.’ But it is that we did not have any money. We had not gathered together anything for a flight, or anything we had come to get and we had just arrived. Just a year we were there and will still did not have any money. For this reason I did not come. Better, what I did was start to work more, and I would return.”

“Yo si sentí muy mal. Decía, ‘me voy, mejor, voy a ver a mis hijos, porque mis hijas son importantes para mi.’ Pero como no tenemos dinero. No hemos juntado nada para el vuelo, para toda vamos a traer y como apenas estamos llegando. Como un ano estamos allá, y no tenemos dinero todavía, por eso no vine. Mejor lo que hice empecé a trabajar mas de allí me regrese.”
(Corina, 50 yrs., personal interviews)

Many of the expressed return desires coincide with a discussion of a loved one back in Guatemala who was sick or dying. Some of the migrants interviewed ultimately returned to be with a sick parent or sibling. Others, like Isabel, were not able to return. Despite her father’s directions, Isabel delayed her return because she still owed money on the initial trip to the US.

“He told me, ‘no, you will go for four years and no more, and you are going to return.’ So we agreed and I went. I said, ‘four years and I will return, I have to return. But when...the immigration police caught me I said, ‘no, I have to stay more years because I lost almost a year [in jail], I have to stay, I have a lot of debt.’”

“él decía, ‘no, tu te vas para cuatro anos y no mas, y tu vas a regresar.’ Entonces de acuerdo y me fui. Dije, ‘cuatro anos y regreso, tengo que regresar.’ Pero no, cuando me agarro la inmigración dije, ‘no, tengo que estar mas anos porque casi un ano perdí, tengo que estar, tengo mucho deuda.’”
(Isabel, 26 yrs., personal interviews)

When Isabel's father became ill, she still was not able to return to Guatemala. She cried telling the story.

“Wow, very sad. My father suffered. They told me that, ‘your father already died.’ It was hard for me. I said, ‘if I were not in the United States I would have returned, I would have gone to see my father. But I could not because I did not have papers. I did not have the opportunity to return and see my father for the last time because to return it was easy, you come in a plane and already you arrive. But, to return [to the US] it would be very difficult and we don't have, as immigrants, we do not have the opportunity to return to the United States. It's very difficult to do it over again and yes I suffered a lot.”

“Wow, muy triste. Sufrió mi papa, me dijeron que, ‘tu papa ya murió.’ Fue duro para mí. Yo decía, ‘si yo no estuvieras en los Estados Unidos regreso, ir a ver mi papa. Pero no pude porque no tenía papeles. No tenía la oportunidad de regresar y ver la última vez a mi papa, porque para regresar era fácil, venir en avión y ya llegar. Pero para regresar era muy difícil, y no tenemos como inmigrantes, no tenemos la oportunidad de regresar en los Estados Unidos. Es muy difícil hacer de nuevo y si sufrí mucho.”

(Isabel, 26 yrs., personal interviews)

Isabel's mother, saddened by the loss of her husband and getting older herself, had trouble living on her own. Eventually Isabel returned to be with her.

Longings for return migration communicated by returned migrants and loved ones left behind suggest that the transnational nature of Guatemalan labor migrants is limited. While transnational theory often characterizes immigrant populations that feel a sense of belonging to more than one society across borders (Cassarino, 2004), this study suggests that Guatemalan labor migrants feel a greater connection to their country or community of origin than to society in the United States. Transnationalism is also understood as frequent movement across borders (Cassarino, 2004), yet these real world accounts of migration and endeavors for return reveal that cross border mobility is highly restricted, both economically and politically, for Guatemalan labor migrants. While the theoretical articulation of transnational communities works to characterize immigrants as having the ability to “participate in the activities of daily life in two or more nations” (Koser, 2002), migrant and non-migrants' desires and motivations for return migration suggest that Guatemalan families are little able to adequately share and contribute to

each other's daily lives. Finally, the frustrations and sorrows communicated here, in regards to immigrant's inability to move easily across borders, do not suggest that Guatemalan labor migrants are able to leverage their international circumstances as a form of resistance to socio-economic restructuring as some suggest (Glick Schiller, 1992; Portes, 2003; Rouse, 2006), but that these migrants are deprived of choice or agency.

Content in the United States, but Not Without Family

Some returned migrants talk about feeling happy with the lives they had in the United States. Even those who expressed longings for return migration, at other times, communicated feelings of contentment remembering their time in Los Angeles. While the work was difficult in the US, it was also described by some migrants as "beautiful" because, in contrast to Guatemala, there is enough work for everyone and it pays relatively well. Others mentioned enjoying the material comforts of life in Los Angeles, such as the ability to eat in a restaurant or buy nice clothing. For these reasons, a few subjects said that during their migration they had wanted to stay and build a life in the US. Some still would like to. However, all of the returned migrants who hold this mentality explain that life in the United States would only worthwhile if they could have their families with them. Mario explains this idea below.

"The thing is that to be there, to see the opportunities that this country [US] gave me in comparison to Guatemala, it did not occur to me to return quickly, it occurred to me to stay for longer there... I said, 'what am I going to do?' Return to Guatemala or stay here?' So it crossed my mind to send for my wife, to send money, yes I thought this, to send for my family to live in the United States, but unfortunately the situation changes a lot [in terms of] legality, right?"

"Fijase que al estar allá, al ver las oportunidades que me daba este país en comparación de mi país, no nació de mi venirme rápido, nació a mi quedarme mas tiempo allá...dije, '¿que voy hacer?' ¿Regresa a Guatemala o me quedo acá?' Entonces paso por mi mente mandar a traer a mis esposa, mandarle el dinero, yo ese pensé, mandar a traer a mi familia para vivir en los Estados Unidos, pero lamentablemente la situación cambie tanto legal verdad."

(Mario, 40yrs., personal interviews)

Eduardo felt similar to Mario after his return to Guatemala.

“I missed the United States, I missed it, it made me sad. I said, ‘how I would like to be there,’ because I tell you I like the atmosphere, the people, the climate, I like it more than here. I wished, I said, ‘how I would like to have my family here.’ How I would have wanted my wife and children to be there... If I could have had all my family there! Because the salary is beautiful, yes it’s beautiful, one earns, I earned.”

“Me extrañaba Estados Unidos, extrañaba, ponía triste. Decía yo como quisiera estar allá, porque le digo me gusto el ambiente, el gente, el clima, me gusto mas de aquí. Yo deseaba, decía, ‘como quisiera tener mi familia aquí.’ Como hubiera querido yo que mi esposa y mis hijos estuvieran allá... ¡Si pudiera tener toda mi familia allá! Porque también el salario es bonito, ya es bonito, se ganaba, yo ganaba.”
(Eduardo, 43 yrs., personal interviews)

Eduardo still would like to return to the United States for a short while to earn some extra money for his son’s school fees. However, he regrets the idea of being away from his children.

“Many years I don’t want, I want a little time. Because I tell you, the children also miss one. They still need [me]. I see this with my son. He talks to me, he tells me, ‘look father...’ Sometimes he tells me his joys or his problems so he needs, he needs the care. Yes, he needs it so...but the need [for money] I tell you...if god gives me the opportunity I will go. Yes, yes if god gives me the opportunity I will go because I want my children to succeed.”

“Mucho anos no quiere, quiere poquito tiempo. Porque le digo, los niños también la extrañan a uno. Todavía necesitan. Eso veo yo con mi muchacho. Platica conmigo, me dice, ‘papa mira...’ A veces me cuentas su alegría o su problema entonces el necesita, necesitas el cariño. Si necesita por eso, pero la necesidad le digo...si dios me da la oportunidad me voy. Si, si dios me da la oportunidad me voy porque quiero que mis hijos logran.”
(Eduardo, 43 yrs., personal interviews)

Returned migrants who express feelings of contentment with life in the United States, and aspirations for settlement or re-immigration suggest that some Guatemalan labor migrants feel a sense of belonging to both US and Guatemalan societies, and thus could be characterized as transnationals. However, the corresponding notion that migrants would not choose to settle apart from their families highlights the continued importance of place to Guatemalan immigrant lives. Mario and Eduardo’s stories, particularly Eduardo’s commentary about his son needing care, reveals that Guatemalan labor migrants do not feel they can participate in both home and host

communities across distance. The relevance of proximity to these migrants', and non-migrants' lives should lead us to questions their characterization as transnationals.

Communication across Borders

During migrations, most subjects report talking to their immediate families once a week, or once every two weeks. Only one or two people said they communicated daily. Non-migrants tell stories about, ten years ago, having to wait in line at a community telephones to call their migrant loved ones, and mainly relying on letters. Today cell phones are wide spread. David remembers conversations with his family during his migration:

“Each week by telephone...we always talk about the children, how they are here, how things are going, if they feel above all well, that they are not sick, that nothing is going wrong...above all she [spouse] talked about when we would be together again, when I [would] return...”

“Cada semana por teléfono...siempre hablábamos sobre como están los niños, cómo les van ellos aquí, como le van pasando, si se sienten mas que todos tranquilos, no están enfermos, no les ha pasado nada...mas de que ella hablando todo cuando vamos a juntarnos otra vez, cuando regreso.”
(David 36yrs., personal interviews)

Migrants discuss their daily lives with family back home, and make decisions with spouses about the children and how to spend remittances money. The subject of return is also a common topic of conversation.

“Yes, I talked with my father. He told me, ‘my child hurry, my daughter its already coming to your time to return.’ I always called each weekend. I always talked with my parents.”

“Si, hablaba con mi papa. Él me decía, ‘mija te apuras, mija ya esta llegando tú tiempo para regresar.’ Yo siempre cada fines de semana llamaba. Siempre hablaba con mis papas.”
(Isabel. 26 yrs., personal interviews)

However, despite the relative convenience and affordability of cell phones, frequency of communication does not seem to have increased significantly. In addition, telephone communication is generally limited to immediate families. Communication with friends or

extended relatives engaged in migration such as aunts and uncles, cousins and even older brothers or sisters is uncommon. Some migrants, talk about losing all communication with friends they made in the United States. Oscar immigrated to the United States with several friends from Santa Lucía Utatlán and they remained close during their time in Los Angeles.

“I think to return because I have friends there...we went together...but they never came [back]...I came and no longer new anything about them. Who knows if they are alive, who knows if they are dead. Nor do they communicate with their families.”

“Pensando regresar porque yo tengo amigos allá...juntos nos fuimos...pero ellos nunca vinieron...yo me vine y ya no supe nada de ellos. Saber si están vivos, saber si se murieron. Ni comunican con sus familias.”
(Oscar 35yrs., personal interviews)

The main reason for limited call frequency and lost communication is that call rates are still expensive for migrants in the US and those left behind. In Guatemala, people use cell phones with calling cards. However, the frequent purchase of a phone card is considered a luxury. In these communities, one often hears the phrase, “no tengo saldo,” meaning, “I don’t have minutes.” Subjects also mention lack of communication due to losing friends and relatives’ telephone numbers.

From conversations with people in these immigrant origin communities we learn that despite advancements in communication technology, such as the cell phone, maintaining contact with friends and family across international borders is still expensive and therefore restricted to more affluent populations or individuals. Evidence that immigrants only speak with their families two to four times a month questions the relevance of transnational community or ‘transnational social fields’ for Guatemalan labor migrants and their communities of origin (Horst, 2006; Goldring; 1998, Fouron and Glick-Schiller, 2002; Levitt and Schiller, 2004; Basch et al, 1994).

Bittersweet Homecomings

Homecomings are a time for celebration, but also for adjustment. Both returnees and their loved ones left behind rejoice upon being reunited, especially if return corresponds with the migrant reaching their savings goals. However, once settled in, migrants who remember looking forward to return to Guatemala often describe feeling disillusioned with life back home.

After two years working in the United States, Corina was able to return home to her daughters. She remembers how she felt coming home and the reunion with her family.

“When I returned I felt happy because I was in Guatemala again. I came to see my country, I came to see my daughters...the girls were happy because they came to meet me at the airport in Guatemala [city] and my family was happy too. I told them what date I was going to, [and asked] if they would do me the favor of coming to meet me. They brought a van and brought my daughters, my mother, and my in-laws and they went to meet me in the airport, and here, I thanked god because I was back again in Guatemala, in my country, in my home...”

“cuando yo regrese me sentí feliz porque yo vine otra vez en Guatemala. Vine a ver mi país, vine a ver mis hijas... las niñas estuvieron feliz porque me fueron a encontrar en el aeropuerto en Guatemala y se sintieron feliz mis familiar también. Yo les avisé tal fecha que voy a ir, me hace gran favor me van a ir a encontrar. Llevaron un microbús, y llevaron mis hijas, mi mama, mis cunados y se fueron encontrarme en el aeropuerto, y ya aquí, y agradecí a dios porque yo vine otra vez en Guatemala, en mi país, en mi casa...”
(Corina, 50 yrs., personal interviews)

Like Corina’s daughter, Alexander’s mother was happy to have him back. She missed her son greatly, but was also sick and needed care.

“She was...it made her cry. Well, she was happy. She was content that I arrived. I took her to a doctor in the capital, to cure her.”

“Ella estaba...se puso a llorar. Pues estaba feliz. Estaba contenta como llegue. Le llueve con doctor en la capital, lo cure pues...”
(Alexander, 29 yrs., personal interviews)

For migrants who accomplish their objectives such as remitting enough money to buy land and build a home, or save enough money to start a business, return is time to enjoy one’s success. Eduardo, for example, had gone to Los Angeles to save money for a house and to buy a

truck that he could use for a business. When asked about life back in Guatemala, similar to other returned migrants, he stated the following:

“I felt happy; happy because I won my house; happy because I won my truck.”

*“Me sentía feliz, feliz porque logre mi casa, feliz porque logre mi camión.”
(Eduardo, 43yrs., personal interviews)*

However, after the initial excitement of their return passes, many explain they have difficulty adjusting to life back in Guatemala. Although Alexander was happy to be home where he could take care of his mother and be free from the burden of work in the US, assimilating to his old way of life was a challenge.

“When I arrived I felt that it is very poor here, that it is very cold here, that the food is very poor, that there, there is different. There are many beautiful things, a lot of food. It was hard for me, but I had it in my mind that this is how it is here. I cannot blame my mother for giving me herbs [flavorful plants people collect from their yards] or the food that my mother has eaten since she was little. I ate this. I could not blame her, because it is not her fault. So I, I endured it, I endured...also I was very stressed in the United States; a lot of work and very alone and to come here is like I was calm...”

*“Cuando yo llegue yo sentí de aquí es muy pobre, que aquí mucho frio, que la comida es muy pobre. Que allá, allá es diferente, hay muchas cosas buenas, mucha comida, me costó. Pero tenía la mente de que aquí es así, no podía reclamar mi mama que me da yerba o esa comida mi mama así come desde pequeño. Yo comía eso. No podía reclamarle, porque ella no tiene la culpa. Entonces yo, yo aguante, aguante...como estaba bien estresado en los Estados Unidos también; mucho trabajo y muy solo y llegue aquí es como ya estaba tranquilo...”
(Alexander, 29 yrs., personal interviews)*

Comparing his home community to Los Angeles, Mario also regretted the lifestyle he returned to in Guatemala, but eventually felt he was able to adjust.

“Sincerely, I see that I went to United States to live well, to have everything, the commodities and all the facilities of work but later my experience of return again to Guatemala was a little, you could say, a little sad because to come here it was hard to adapt...In the United States you live better and to come to Guatemala well its difficult, but this is my country and little by little I became accustomed, again I adapted...”

“Sinceramente, yo veo de que yo fui... a Estados Unidos a vivir bien bonito, a tener todo los comodidades y toda las facilidades de trabajo pero luego mi experiencia de regresar otra vez a Guatemala fue un poco, puede decirle, un poco triste porque como que a llegar acá me costó a adaptarme...En los Estados Unidos se vive mejor, se vive mejor y a

llegar a Guatemala pues es un tanto difícil, pero como aquí es mi país y poco a poco me fui acostumbrando, otra vez adaptarme... ”
(Mario 40yrs., personal interviews)

Return is difficult not only because of a change in material lifestyle but because returnees and those left behind have to re-adjust to life back with the family. When David returned to Guatemala, the children he had left behind were quite a bit older. David remembers how it felt to be back with his children who have grown up without him:

“They felt happy because we were together again here in Guatemala, and since I left my children when they were little...they did not know me when I left. When I returned they almost didn’t know me as well. I felt bad, because it was me that left them and, how do I say, I did not abandon them, but because one leaves here to help them.”

“Ellos sintieron felices porque estábamos otra vez juntos acá en Guatemala, y los niños como yo deje mis niños pequeñitos...no me conocía cuando yo me fui. Ya cuando yo me regrese casi no me conocía también. Sentí mal, porque yo mismo los he dejado y como decir no abandonarles si no que por uno salir de aquí para ayudarles.
(David 36yrs., personal interviews)

The lack of work in Guatemala and low wages present the greatest challenge to returned migrants.

“It was hard, because it no longer was equal. Well here, you earn...fifty quetzals a day, there...some sixty or sixty five dollars; one sends it [home] then it comes out a little more. Now here no, here fifty Quetzales is the most that one can earn see, so it is a big change...”

“Estaba duro ya, porque ya no era igual. Pues aquí se ganaba...cincuenta quetzales al día, allá... unos sesenta o sesenta y cinco dólares; uno lo mandaba entonces salieron un poco mas. Ahora acá no, acá cincuenta quetzales es lo ultimo que se gana va, entonces es un cambio muy grande...”
(David 36yrs., personal interviews)

Eventually lack of work leads some returned migrants to think about re-immigration to the United States, especially during years of drought or severe tropical storms, which destroy portions of the maize crop.

“Sometimes there are times that come, years that the harvest was good, one doesn’t think to leave [for the US], but when there are times that there is no work, yes one thinks to return [to the US].

“A veces hay tiempos que vienen, anos que estaban bien la cosecha y todo eso, uno no piensa ya de irse, pero cuando hay tiempos cuando no hay trabajo acá, si uno piensa regresar...”
(David 36yrs., personal interviews)

These real life stories about the reunification of immigrants with their loved ones back home further illuminate the significance of return migration and proximity to family for Guatemalan migrant populations. At the same time, returnees’ descriptions of difficult homecomings suggest that by living and working in the United States Guatemalans develop new expectations, behaviors and perceptions, which they bring home with them to Guatemala. This finding supports the characterization of Guatemalan labor migrants as transnational, in that international migration may foster new and changing identities (Basch *et al*, 1994; Vertovec, 2001; Aranda, 2007; Levitt, 2004).

Research Question 2: What are emigrant origin community ideologies of return?

Migration is Viewed as Temporary, Return is Planned to be Permanent

“Sooner or later I am going to return to Guatemala, to my country, because it is there that I was born. I am here in the United States temporarily to work, for that I came’ he told me”

“Tarde o temprano yo voy a regresar en Guatemala, en mi país, porque allí donde nací. Aquí en los Estados Unidos estoy temporalmente por venir a trabajar, por e so me vine’ dijo él”
(Rosa Florida, 30yrs., personal interviews, conversation with her husband)

Returned migrants and non-migrants view migration to the United States as a way to earn money to put towards specific life goals in Guatemala, such as buying land, building a house, starting a business or sending a child to school. Before they leave, migrants and their families,

come to an agreement about how many years will be spent working in the United States. Return migration is expected. Mario and Juana remember working towards that ultimate goal.

“You take advantage of each minute that passes, to work and work to the maximum to achieve, to do something, and return quickly.”

“Cada minute que pasaba era aprovecharlo, aprovecharlo y aprovecharlo al máximo para lograr, hacer algo, y regresar pronto.”
(Mario 40yrs., personal interviews)

“We were thinking only two years, no more...to my debt, to buy my land.”

“Pensamos solo dos años, nada más...pagar mi deuda, comprar mi terreno.”
(Juana approx. 50yrs., personal interviews)

The most common migration goals are to earn money to buy land and build a house in their Guatemalan home communities. Walking through most villages within Santa Lucía Utatlán it is easy to identify homes funded by remittances; they are constructed out of bloc, have large windows cased in decorative and secure wrought iron and have two or more stories. Families without a connection to the US still live in adobe homes with only a few rooms, which may still have dirt floors and open windows. David remembers his goals before migration.

“The goal is to have a house, where one can live with the family and a little land and be able to live here. Because one leaves here to go there because they want to succeed, to have a house, to have land, to have something, so that you can be here peacefully with your children.”

“La meta era de tener una casa, donde vivir con la familia un poco terreno y poder sobrevivir aquí pues. Porque uno se va de aquí por allá para querer superar, tener una casa, tener terreno, tener algo, para estar tranquilo aquí con sus hijos.”
(David 36yrs., personal interviews)

As David’s words suggest, migrants build homes back in Guatemala planning for their return to be permanent. This is also expressed by Oscar when he talks about his brother’s migration. The common phrase, “se vienen de una vez,” signifies that something is permanent or finished.

“They built their houses here; they bought the land, now they [brothers] are saving money to come back for good. Yes, they are coming back for good.”

“Les hicieron su casa por acá; compraba terreno, aborita están juntando dinero y se vienen de una vez. Si, se vienen de una vez.”

(Oscar, 35yrs., personal interviews, talking about his brothers)

Saving money to start a small business in Guatemala is another commonly mentioned savings goal. Others talk about migrating to earn money for existing debts, or a child's education. Paying for his children's education is a high priority for Oscar, and the reason why he is considering a second trip to the United States.

“My father could not give me [the opportunity] to study because he did not have money. I want my children to grow, to become professionals, go to the university, to become licensed, this is what I am thinking of for them...”

“Mi papa mio no me dio estudio porque no tenia dinero. Yo quiero que mis niños crezcan, van hacer profesionales, van en la Universidad, van hacer licenciados, eso es que yo pienso para ellos...”

(Oscar 35yrs., personal interviews)

Even when return migration is delayed significantly or seems unlikely, those back home maintain the expectation of return. A common expression is that a migrant just needs to stay a little longer or just save a little more money in the United States, and then they will be able to return. For instance, despite the fact that Gloria's husband has been working in the United States six years longer than initially planned, she guesses that he will only have to work one more year before he can return. The return of Corina's husband has also been significantly delayed, and she reports that they still have not saved any money with which to live on after his return.

Furthermore, Corina's daughter is working in Los Angeles and married there. Recently she had her first child. Despite these obstacles to return Corina remarks:

“He only has to be there a little longer, then he returns...He will return, he will return and his daughter will return as well.”

“solo tiene que estar otra poquito mas allá, después regresa...Va a venir, va a venir hasta su hija también va a venir también.”

(Corina, 50 yrs., personal interviews)

Guatemalan emigrant origin community ideologies of return are largely that migration to the United States is temporary and meant to help Guatemalans achieve their goals for life back in Guatemala. Return is a planned event and expected, or at least hoped to be permanent. If we endeavor to understand migration and return migration from the perspective of returned migrants and their families, as scholars like Sinatti (2011), Mitchell (1997) and Dunn (2011) suggest, then based on this ideology we must question the transnational characterization of Guatemalan labor migrants.

Most Important Thing is Family

“Now money, although we have little, but the most important things is our family”

“Ahora dinero, aunque poquito tenemos, pero lo mas importante es nuestro familia”
(Corina, 50 yrs., personal interviews)

Returned migrants and non-migrants often express that the most important outcome of migration is the re-unification of family. Although the goal of migration to the US is to earn money to improve family members’ quality of life, and for many families labor migration is a means of survival, several subjects made comments similar to Corina’s above, explaining that ultimately money is less important than the family being together.

“She said, ‘no, I don’t want money, I want you...’ I returned for her.”

“Ella decía, ‘no, yo dinero no quiero, yo te quiero a ti...’ Por ella yo regrese.”
(Isabel, 26 yrs., personal interviews, conversation with her mother)

“There are moments when I despaired, because my mother cried. I despaired and saw that my mother was suffering, and I said, ‘it’s not important, I will go without anything, and this is how I decided to come [return]...”

“Hay momentos cuando yo desespere, porque mi mama como lloraba. Me desespere y veía que mi mama estaba sufriendo, y le dije, ‘no importa, yo me voy sin nada, y eso es que me disidí venir...”
(Alexander, 29 yrs., personal interviews)

Connected to the idea of family reunification is the notion that ultimately migrants want to live in one place. When Oscar worked in Los Angeles, he had a green card. As he understands it, if he had stayed in the US and maintained the card for three or four years longer, he would have had the opportunity to gain residence status. He talks about why he didn't:

“They would have given, how do you say this, residence, but I said, ‘if I get residence I go and I come, so I don’t know if I live here, I don’t know if I live there, I am not in a one place.’ So, better I came here [Guatemala].”

“Hubieran dado, como le llaman esa, residencia, pero yo dije, ‘si saco residencia voy y vengo, entonces no se si vivo aquí, no se si vivo allá, no estoy en un lugar fijo.’ Entonces mejor me vine por acá.”

(Oscar 35yrs., personal interviews)

While residence status would allow one to live and work comfortably in the United States and move easily across borders, as Oscar understands, it, for Oscar living in one place, close to his family is more important.

“I am with my family. I help them...My father is seventy-six years old now. If my father gets sick we are here, if my mother gets sick we help them in one way or another...On the other hand if I were there [US] something happened to my father then I would not be able to come quickly...here we take care of each other. There is happiness because the family is together.”

“Estoy con mis familiares. Yo les ayudo... Mi papa tiene setenta y seis años ahorita. Si se enferma mi papa estamos nosotros, si se enferma mi mama nosotros de una a otra forma le ayudamos...En cambio si yo estuviera allá le paso algo a mi papa ya no puedo venir rápido...aquí nosotros nos cuidamos. Hay felicidad porque la familia esta junta.”

(Oscar 35yrs., personal interviews)

The notion of wanting to live in one place with the family is also evident in comments presented earlier by Eduardo and Mario. Both expressed the desire to build a life in the United States, but only if they could bring their wives and children with them.

Here we see that ideologies of return within emigrant origin communities in Guatemala are tied to motivations to reunite the family in a fixed location. This ideology highlights the importance of proximity and place in the lives of contemporary Guatemalan labor migrants.

Migration and Return Are in the Hands of God

Generally, indigenous Guatemalans are highly religious. Their faith influences their perceptions of migration and ideologies of return. When asked about the outcome of migration and return many subjects communicate an attitude of unknowingness and suggest that the fate of migration and return is in the hands of God. They frequently use phrases such as “solo Dios sabe” (only God knows) and “es en Dios” (it is for god to decide) when asked about the migration trip and if or when a loved one will return. For example, when asked if he was afraid to make the difficult trip to the United States David said the following:

“to leave one thinks of God...one doesn't think in what things could happen...so I wasn't afraid.”

“para salir uno piensa en Dios...no piensa uno en que le va a pasar algo...entonces no tenía miedo”

(David 36yrs., personal interviews)

Like David, Isabel believes that ultimately God is responsible for what happens. When she was detained in a United States prison for nearly a year because she was a minor found crossing the border without documentation Isabel requested periodic visits to a Catholic church.

“with the chains on the hands, on the feet, like that I entered the church, in chains, and I cried...there I cried and I said, ‘father help me. I achieved entry into the United States, here I am, but help me...’ I asked every day, and He did it for me.”

“con las cadenas en los manos, en los pies, así entre en la iglesia, en cadena, y yo lloraba...Allí llore y dije, ‘padre ayudarme. Yo logre entrar en los Estados Unidos, aquí estoy, pero ayúdame...’ yo pedía todos los días y si, lo hizo conmigo.”

(Isabel, 26 yrs., personal interviews)

Isabel explains that an Uncle, her mother's brother, eventually came to the prison and was able to bribe the guards to release her, which ultimately she feels was God's doing.

The notion that Guatemalan labor migrants and those left behind consider the outcome of migration to be largely dependent on God's will suggests that immigrants and their families feel a lack of control and choice throughout the process of international migration. This contradicts

transnational theory's depiction of contemporary immigrants as newly empowered agents in opposition to social and economic structures (Glick Schiller, 1992; Portes, 2003; Rouse, 2006).

Rather this fatalistic attitude reveals this population's sense of vulnerability.

"País de Perdición" – Country of Ruin

"A lot of people say that this is a country [US] of ruin"

"Mucha gente dicen que este es un país de una perdición"
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interviews)

Also, influencing ideologies of return in Guatemalan origin communities are perceptions of the United States as a "país de perdición" or "country of ruin." This is to say that the US is viewed as a place of vices and sin. Mario explains:

"[The] United States is a country with much licentiousness... There are many friends that have gone and become involved in drugs, they become involved in other things and in all sometimes come to die there and sometimes do not return, they remain lost there in vices, smoking drugs and all this."

"Estados Unidos es un país con mucho libertinaje... Hay muchos amigos que han ido y se meten a las drogas, se meten en otras cosas y total que a veces se mueren allá y a veces ya no regresan, se quedan perdidos allá en vicios, fumando drogas y todo eso."
(Mario 40yrs., personal interviews)

Like Mario, Rosa Florida thinks of the United States as a place where migrants are lost.

"This... is a country [in which] the immigrants that go are lost, they lose their family, and we are left suffering..."

"esa país es un país de los inmigrantes que van que ellos se pierden allá, pierden a su familia, y nosotros quedamos sufriendo..."
(Rosa Florida, 30 yrs., personal interviews)

Because of the perceived risk of immigrating to the United States returned migrants and non-migrants in communities of origin talk about the importance of going with the right kind of mindset as an immigrant. In other words, successful migrants are seen as maintaining a focus on their goals throughout migration, staying active in the church and remembering their responsibilities towards their families. Mario explains:

“Thank god everything worked out with the time I was there. I brought my principles from here from Guatemala, joined a church and this was what helped me from becoming desperate...so thanks to god I was kept from the bad things, from the vices and all that and it helped me to not believe in bad things...”

“Gracias a dios todo sali3 bien en tiempo en que fui. Yo llueve mis principios de ac3 de Guatemala, acercarme a una iglesia y eso fue lo que me ayudo a no desesperarme...entonces gracias a dios estuve apartado de las cosas malas, de los vicios y todo eso y me ayudo a no crear en cosas malas...”
(Mario 40yrs., personal interview)

And Rosa Florida explains,

“Those that go with a good mindset and those that do [their work] there return with happiness, but unfortunately there are some that forget their goals when they get there...”

“Los que van con una menta Buena, y los hacen all3 regresan con una felicidad y no con una tristeza, pero lamentablemente hay unas que se olvidan de sus metas cuando llegan all3...”
(Rosa Florida, 34 yrs., personal interviews)

The belief that the United States is a country full of vice leads to the perception of return migrants as having maintained the right kind of mindset. Meeting their migration goals and returning to the family, they are viewed as a success. The notion of maintaining the right kind of mindset during migration is an element of Guatemalan ideologies of return.

In the next chapter, I discuss more explicitly, what these migrant stories, and answers to research questions one and two, reveal about Guatemalan labor migrant transnationalism.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Research Question 3: What do answers to research questions one and two tell us about the nature and extent of transnationalism for Guatemalan labor migrants?

Discussion

Guatemalan origin communities' ideologies of return and perspectives of migration problematize the characterization of Guatemalan labor migrants as transnationals and as fostering transnational communities. In contrast to key claims within transnational theory, findings for research questions one and two illustrate that both in terms of Guatemalan return migrants' and non-migrant loved ones' perceptions and behavior migrant lives are highly organized around place, fraught with difficulty, and their mobility across borders remains limited.

Subject's accounts of difficult border crossings are compelling evidence that Guatemalan labor migrants do not practice "transnational mobility" (Cassarino 2004, p.262). Returned migrants remember their initial migration trips to the United States as dangerous due to harsh physical conditions and confrontations with immigration authorities. Most were caught by immigration and spent time in detention centers before being deported and trying to cross again. Some were apprehended multiple times before they were able to cross undetected. Furthermore, a migration trip is expensive, causing many migrants to borrow more than they can earn in two years of steady work in Guatemala. Subjects explain these barriers discourage their or their loved one's further attempts to cross the border, either to repeat migration or return home.

Consistent with Massey's (2006) report that increased border enforcement is keeping undocumented migrants within the United States longer, my findings show that undocumented

Guatemalans in Los Angeles are prolonging their stays and returning to Guatemala later than intended. This is because they fear that once home in Guatemala, they won't be able to re-immigrate to the US if the need arises. Reports of delayed return migration for fear of becoming stuck on one side of the border reveals the inaccuracy of characterizing Guatemalan labor migrants as transnationals who experience frequent and fluid border crossings. Again, this finding emphasizes the significance of documentation status and border enforcement to the nature and practice of migration, and the need to make the distinction between document and undocumented migrants explicit in conversations of transnationalism.

Neither do my findings support the existence of "transnational identities" (Cassarino 2004, pg. 262) among Guatemalan labor migrants. Rather than identifying with both US and Guatemalan societies, as transnational theory would portray (Basch et al. 1994; Vertovec 2001; Aranda 2007; Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004; Popkin, 1999), the majority of returned migrants remember feeling alienated in the United States. Burdensome workloads, resulting from low pay and high costs of living, cause migrants to feel heightened levels of stress and disconnection from the rest of society. Racism and fear of deportation add further stress. This anxiety is one reason for desired return to Guatemala where subjects explain they feel a greater sense of freedom and peace. The notion that migrants look forward to return to Guatemala because they will be more at ease illustrates that Guatemalan labor migrants may feel a greater affiliation to their origin society than that of their host.

Guatemalan origin communities' ideology of return is further evidence that Guatemalan labor migrants generally do not adopt transnational identities. My findings show that Guatemalan labor migrants and their families intend migration to be temporary and maintain the expectation of return throughout the migration trip. Moreover, return migration is planned to result in

permanent settlement back in Guatemala. Taking these desires for return seriously, it is clear that Guatemalan labor migrants should not be portrayed as transnational, as they do not self-identify as members of more than one society, but as temporary visitors who ultimately intend to settle in their community of origin.

My findings also strongly contest the occurrence of Guatemalan transnational communities or transnational social fields. Communication between labor migrants and those left behind in Guatemala is limited. Cell phone rates in the US and Guatemala remain high. As a result, most subjects report being able to talk with loved ones only two to four times a month. Furthermore, telephone communication is generally only maintained between immediate family members. This pattern of communication does not fit with theories of transnational or hybrid spaces where frequent interactions across borders via advanced communication technologies allow immigrants to live “simultaneously in two or more nation-states” (Basch et al. 1994: 28).

Subject’s reasons and longings for return migration deny the existence of Guatemalan transnational communities defined as a “set of intense cross-border social relations that enable individuals to participate in the activities of daily life in two or more nations” (Portes et al. 1996, p.15) . The main motivation for return migration is to reunite the family. Several respondents talk about ultimately having to return home to care for a sick loved one, or about the sadness of being separated from one’s family or missing the death of a parent when return is not possible. Others return to children who are unfamiliar and distant from growing up in their absence. The care of loved ones cannot be accomplished from afar, especially since Guatemalan labor migrants are not able to make periodic visits home or maintain daily communication for lack of documentation or monetary resources. Therefore, they are not able to adequately participate in

daily life across borders and do not operate within “landscapes of hyper connectivity, fluidity and dispersion” (Basch et al. 1994: 28).

My findings for research question one and two reveal that some returned migrants favor the opportunities and amenities available in the US, and would choose to settle and build their life there, granted they could bring their families with them. Thus, it can be argued that Guatemalan migrant’s desire to reside with their immediate families in one place outweighs their desire to return to reside in Guatemala specifically. In other words, while Guatemalan origin communities maintain a strong ideology of return migration, in which they intend to settle permanently in Guatemala, this goal is motivated more by a wish to settle in one location where they can live peacefully with their children, and less by patriotism or homesickness for their origin community. It is to this end that Guatemalans originally decide to engage in migration. Given the legal barriers to settlement in the US, return and settlement in Guatemala becomes the next best thing.

The desire to live in one place or as Oscar puts it “en un lugar fijo,” (“a fixed place”) reveals that Guatemalan migrants themselves do not feel an ability or desire to live divided from their families or conduct their lives adequately across borders as transnationals. Rather their endeavor to find a fixed place to settle conveys the continued importance of proximity to the construction and quality of their daily lives.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, my study of origin community perspectives on migration and ideologies of return proposes that Guatemalan labor migrants generally do not exhibit transnational qualities. Rather Guatemalan labor migrants engage in international migration temporarily, albeit for varying durations, to secure permanent settlement with their families on one side of the border or

the other. While most subjects desire return and permanent settlement in Guatemala to escape the oppressions and exclusions they feel in the US, some would prefer settlement in the US if they could have their families with them. For the later subjects, return to Guatemala becomes the next best thing.

The beginning story of Rosa Florida illustrates the continued relevance of place and proximity to the lives of Guatemalan labor migrants and their families left behind. Rosa Florida has waited most of her life for the promised return of a loved one, suffering a childhood of absent parents and repeated separation from her spouse throughout adulthood. She struggles to support her children in the absence of their fathers. She talks about their return as a time of healing, but her husband has only just left for the United States and for now she has no way of knowing if he will arrive safely or how long he will have to stay.

At the same time that socio-economic forces of oppression in Guatemala push vast numbers of Guatemalans to cross international borders, socio-political forces at the border and in the US limit their mobility and capacity to maintain connections with friends and family across distance. Scholarly works that label or depict Guatemalan immigrants as transnationals or as fostering transnational community overlook and essentially dismiss the significant challenges and forces of oppression they face. This characterization also undermines migrants' desire and right to remain with their families in Guatemala that organizations like the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission advocate.

Given my findings, it is conceivable that more lenient enforcement at the US/Mexico border or legalized labor migration would motivate more Guatemalan labor migrants to settle in the US, or increase their frequency of border crossings as they circulating between the US and their home communities. If this were the case then perhaps transnational livelihoods would be a

real possibility for this population. As it stands now, documentation status is a major driver of Guatemalan migration intentions and behavior. For this migrating population there is no possibility of an in-between livelihood, in which life is lived on both sides of the border simultaneously. Rather the border presents a clear division between life in the US and life back home.

This thesis has sought to draw attention to and encourage further study of *definitive* return migration. I explain that definitive return has the potential to maximize return migration's impact on community development, and contribute positively to the quality of life for immigrants and their families who maintain strong desires for return (Sinatti 2011; Moran Taylor 2001; Potter et al 2005). The main argument within this thesis is that the study of definitive return migration can refine and enhance our understanding of transnational theory and the nature of migration for specific populations.

Transnationalism is the leading theoretical framework used to study international migration today, and given that much of the theory developed prior to 911, it is productive to question its efficacy today. It becomes especially important to assess its effectiveness upon consideration of the transnational framework's acknowledged faults. Transnationalism is applied too broadly (D. P. Smith & Bailey 2004; A. Portes 2003; Mitchell 1997). It overlooks the difficulty many people still face moving through and remaining connected across space (Bailey 2001; Jones & De La Torre 2011; Dunn 2010; Mitchell 1997; Conradson 2005). It neglects how processes of international migration marginalize some immigrant populations (Mitchell 1997; Castles 1998; Bailey 2001). And finally, it fails to significantly incorporate the perspectives of real world immigrants (Mitchell 1997; Dunn 2010; Sinatti 2011). Furthermore, while transnational scholarship characterizes both documented and undocumented migrant groups,

explicit conversations about the important differences between documented and un-documented migrants and how the distinction influences their migration experience are lacking. These weaknesses both prevent and necessitate a focus on definitive return migration within investigations of transnationalism.

Due to the dominance of transnationalism, contemporary migration scholars perceive rates of definitive return migration to be decreasing and therefore of little relevance to immigration studies (Black et al. 2004; Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Aranda 2007). Instead they explain that return migration is just one step in a continual migration process (Richard Black & Russell King 2004; Aranda 2007; Ley & Kobayashi 2005). From this some scholars have begun to conceptualize transnationalism as a form of and replacement for definitive return migration (Ley & Kobayashi 2005; Richard Black & Russell King 2004; Sinatti 2011; Duval 2004), considering it to be more sustainable form of return. I argue that this conceptualization reinforces transnational theory's known weaknesses. By directly investigating definitive return migration, primarily through ideologies of return, we can respond to and counteract the failings of the transnational framework.

Ideologies of return necessitate a focus on individual immigrants' perspective, which can show how real bodies experience movement through space and across borders and how they experience migration and settlement, revealing vulnerable populations within the system of international migration. Ultimately, by investigating definitive return migration and ideologies of return for specific migrant populations, we gain a more complete picture of the nature of international migration and extent of transnationalism.

Building on the work of Moran-Taylor (2001), Teo (2011) and Sinatti (2011) I present a case study of Guatemalan labor migration to the United States that investigates origin community

perspective on migration and ideologies of return. The origin community focus is unique to studies of ideologies of return and transnationalism by allowing for the incorporation of the non-migrant perspective. This is important because I assume migrant loved ones left behind contribute to ideologies of return and the migration experience. Like studies that only investigate return ideology and transnationalism from the perspective of current migrants in host societies, my study is somewhat one sided as it attempts to draw conclusions from only the perspective of return migrants and migrant family members left behind. Thus, I emphasize the need to bring this study's findings in conversation with the existing literature on ideologies of return and transnationalism. Finally, focusing on Guatemalan migration is appropriate because they have been characterized as exhibiting transnationalism (Moran-Taylor 2001; Taylor et al. 2006; Burrell 2005; Popkin 1999; Norma Chinchilla 1999; N. Chinchilla 2005; Menjívar 2002; Montejo 1999) and because a substantial portion of transnational scholarship is derived from the study of Latin American migrations.

By gathering a grounded perspective on migration and return, through in-depth interviews with returned migrants and migrant loved ones left behind within immigrant origin communities, I suggest that Guatemalan labor migrants to the United States generally do not exhibit transnational qualities. Rather, my findings reveal the continued difficulties these migrants face in their attempt to move and manage their lives across international borders, and the continued relevance of place and proximity to the quality of their lives.

My findings support the argument that scholarly attention to definitive return migration can reveal new insights about the nature of migration and transnationalism. While I did not discover that Guatemalan labor migrants generally desire definitive return to Guatemala for a love of their country or a sense of patriotism, my focus on return did reveal the continued

importance of place and proximity to the lives of Guatemalan labor migrants. My case study highlights Guatemalan's strong desire to reside in a "fixed place" with their families, on one side of the border or the other.

While transnational theory contributes importantly to migration scholarship by allowing for the study of migration processes that connect places of origin and destination, the transnational framework is applied to populations of migrants that in truth may not exhibit or desire transnational lifestyles. My case study of Guatemalan labor migration to the United States suggests that undocumented migrants, who are racially and economically marginalized, do not experience greater mobility across international borders or hybrid and multi-national identities as transnational theory advocates. Characterizing such migrants as transnationals does a disservice to these populations by masking the obstacles, injustices and vulnerabilities they encounter at home and through the process of international migration. It also disregards the significance of their enduring attachments to home or desires to live in a "lugar fijo" or "fixed place" (Oscar 35yrs., personal interview).

We must continue to ask the question, "who really is transnational?" particularly in consideration of undocumented, indigenous and other racially subjugated immigrant populations. Not all bodies characterized as transnational move frequently or easily across borders or maintain satisfying relationships across distance. Furthermore, not all immigrants, particularly those pushed into migration by socio-economic forces at home, desire transnational livelihoods. We must take seriously the importance of home places for some immigrant populations and their desire, and right, to remain there. Attention to definitive return can reveal which immigrant populations, in reality, function successfully and happily as transnational.

I end with a call for more empirically grounded research of ideologies of return to further our understanding of the extent and nature of transnationalism. Future research should pay particular attention to how specific populations' historical and contemporary circumstances such as class, racial and ethnic struggles as well as environmental conditions, influence migration intentions and experience. Multi-sited investigations, that research ideologies of return and transnationalism from the perspective of both immigrants in host societies and their loved ones left behind in origin communities, can contribute more holistic findings and should be a priority of future study.

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