

Land, ethnic, and gender change: Transnational migration and its effects on Guatemalan lives and landscapes

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Abstract

Migration to the United States of America from Guatemala effects many aspects of Guatemalan life. We document, through extensive ethnographic fieldwork, how migrants and their remittances effect gender relations, ethnicity, land use, and land distribution. Our evidence is drawn from research in four communities. San Pedro Pinula and Gualán represent communities of eastern Guatemala. San Cristóbal Totonicapán is an Indigenous town in Guatemala's western highlands, and San Lucas is a lowland frontier community in the Guatemalan department of Ixcán, which borders Chiapas, Mexico. Our results reveal that migrants and their remittances, both social and tangible, result in significant changes in land use and land distribution in Ixcán. Migrant money permits the conversion of rainforest into cattle pasture and also results in the accumulation of land in the hands of migrants. In terms of land use, we see in San Pedro Pinula that migrant money also allows the Pokoman Maya to make small entries into the Ladino (non-indigenous) dominated cattle business. In San Pedro Pinula, the migration and return of Maya residents also permits them to slowly challenge ethnic roles that have developed over the last five centuries. When we look at how migration effects gender roles in Gualán and San Cristóbal we also note that migration and social remittances permit a gradual challenge and erosion of traditional gender roles in Guatemala. We point out, however, that migration-related changes to traditional gender and ethnic roles is gradual because migrants, despite their increased earnings and awareness, run into a social structure that resists rapid change. This is not the case when we examine land transformations in Ixcán. Here, migrants encounter few barriers when they attempt to put their new money and ideas to work. Despite the advantages that migration brings to many families, especially in the face of a faltering national economy and state inactivity regarding national development, we conclude that migration and remittances do not result in community or nation-wide development. At this stage migrant remittances are used for personal advancement and very little money and effort is invested in works that benefit communities or neighborhoods. We call for continued studies of the effects of international migration on Guatemalan hometowns that build on our initial studies to better understand the longer-term ramifications of migration in a country where no community is without migrants.

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1. Introduction

Almost a million and a half Guatemalans live and work in the United States and Canada. These migrants,

who flee political repression and abysmal economic conditions in their homeland, begin to challenge and change traditional social structure, livelihoods, and landscapes in Guatemala. Absent family members, migrant earnings sent home (remittances), return migrants, and transnational ties contest and slowly transform traditional gender and ethnic relations, land-use practices,

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and land ownership in a nation characterized by patriarchy, ethnic conflict, and highly unequal land distribution.

The Bank of Guatemala and the popular press proudly report that remittances now form the most important source of income for the country—“*migra dollars*”¹ far exceed earnings from traditional money-making export crops such as coffee, bananas and sugar (Prensa Libre, 2002). Economists project that migrants in the United States and Canada will send just over U.S. \$1.5 billion dollars back to family and friends in Guatemala in 2002 (Prensa Libre, 2002). Daily, Guatemala’s leading newspaper, *Prensa Libre*, runs reports on migrants living in the United States, the visible impacts of remittances, the hardships endured by migrants when they cross international borders, deportation of Guatemalans from Mexico and the United States, or the impacts of migrants and their money on local economies. Glossy color photographs depict mansions in rural areas built on the sweat of migrant brows. Western Union plasters Guatemalan roadsides with bright yellow billboards that advertise the ease of money transfers. Clearly, the popular press and Guatemalan families, who rely on migration for survival, quickly recognized the all-pervasive presence or absence of migrants and remittances, yet scholarly study provides little in-depth knowledge to enhance our understanding of migration-related changes in Guatemala.

Indeed, if 15% of a 12 million-strong population migrates to “el Norte,”² how do these people and their earnings alter Guatemalan lives? Do Guatemalans form new places and livelihoods like “Oaxacalifornia,” that are shaped by international migration (Kearney, 2000)? Do the once popular notions of adapted peasant production systems forwarded by cultural ecologists, while providing valuable baseline information, pertain to contemporary globalized rural society (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001)? Based on a cumulative 41 months of fieldwork in four culturally and regionally distinct sending regions from 1999 to 2002, we document specific migration-related changes in gender and ethnic relations and land use and distribution in small-town and rural Guatemala. After clarifying methods and describing the study sites, we offer a brief history of migration from Guatemala. We then deliver four detailed case studies from the *municipios* (townships) of Gualán and San Pedro Pinula in Eastern Guatemala, San Cristóbal Totonicapán in the western

highlands, and Ixcán in the northwestern lowlands (Fig. 1). We also place our results in the context of discussions addressing transnational migration, gender, ethnicity, and land in Latin America. First and foremost, though, the objective of this paper is to show how international migration gradually transforms Guatemalan lives and places. The discussion of these transformations is brought to life by bringing together the experience of three researchers and their distinct emphasis on changes taking place in this Central American country.

2. Methods and study sites

The results presented here rest on research by three individual researchers. We all conducted ethnographic research in Guatemala between 1999 and 2002. We each held distinct research agendas. However, after meeting many times during those fieldwork and subsequent years at academic and informal meetings, we decided to bring our results together in one paper to provide a wider view of the impacts of migration on Guatemalan people and land. Many of the statements made in this paper are based upon intensive research in each of the regions that lasted nearly 12 months for each study site. Collectively, we completed 84 in-depth interviews and numerous informal and semi-structured interviews. Our knowledge of migration-related changes in these Guatemalan communities also rests on 504 surveys (albeit not the same survey, as mentioned above we each held distinct research agendas and thus used unique survey instruments created after at least 6 months of ethnographic research in the communities). The results presented here rely heavily on the ethnographic aspect of our fieldwork—we intersperse our ethnographic analyses with the voices and proverbs of Guatemalans because, after all, they are the migrants and this is their story.

We bring together findings from distinct cultures and regions of Guatemala to provide a more nuanced understanding of contemporary migration and resultant impacts in a country that is split along ethnic and regional identity lines—Ladino and Maya. Gualán, in the eastern department (state) of Zacapa, is largely a *Ladino* (non-indigenous) community that sits in the lowlands of the Motagua River valley. The *municipio* of Gualán is dominated by *latifundias* (large coffee and cattle estates). Gualán residents generally migrate to Los Angeles (California), Las Vegas (Nevada), and Chicago (Illinois). Michelle Moran-Taylor, a half native (half American/half Guatemalan) to the region, conducted 9 months of research in Gualán. San Pedro Pinula, in the department of Jalapa, holds a rich history of migration to Boston, Massachusetts. San Pedro Pinula is also

¹ The term “*migra dollars*” is recognized by scholars and migrants and refers to the money earned by migrants in the United States and Canada.

² “El Norte,” in migrant parlance, simply means the United States or Canada.

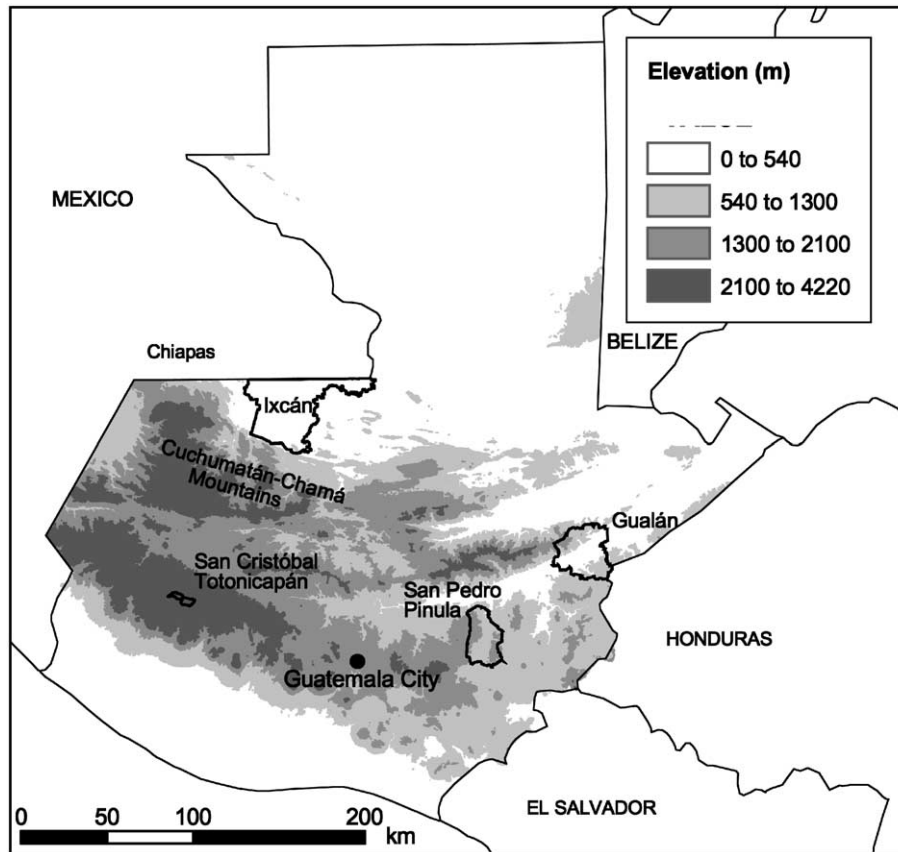


Fig. 1. Location of the four study municipios in Guatemala.

a Ladino-dominated community, but a place where indigenous³ villages surround the town. Debra Rodman Ruiz lived for 18 months with her relatives in San Pedro Pinula. Her representations of San Pedro life, then, are also based on an intimate knowledge of the people and place of San Pedro Pinula. Our representation of migration from Guatemala's indigenous western highlands comes from San Cristóbal Totonicapán (hereafter referred to as San Cristóbal), a town with strong migrant ties to Houston, Texas, and Los Angeles, California. Moran-Taylor has conducted migration-related research in San Cristóbal since 1992, and since 1999 has lived for 9 months in this bustling indigenous town. By including research from Ixcán, we also demonstrate

³ We use the term indigenous, Maya, indian, interchangeably. In doing so, however, we do not ignore the powerful connotations behind each term. The indigenous people of Guatemala most often describe themselves as *natural*, *pobre*, *indio*, or *campesino* (naturals, poor folk, indians, or rural farmer). Ladinos generally use the derogatory term *indio* when referring to indigenous people. Mayans call Ladinos *los ricos*, *gente de vestido*, or *Ladino* (the rich ones, people dressed in Western clothing, or non-indigenous). Although much scholarship reports on the rise of the Pan-Maya movement in Guatemala (Fischer and Brown, 1996; Warren, 1998), we found that few indigenous people self identify using the term *Maya*. Rather, when asked about how they understand the label *Maya*, invariably folks responded “*ah si, nuestros antepasados*” (oh yes, our ancestors).

the impact of migration on Guatemala's lowland forested frontier zones. Ixcán residents prefer to migrate to rural jobs in Oregon, Washington, and Tennessee. Matthew Taylor lived in four frontier communities of Ixcán for a total of 14 months between 2000 and 2002. He has developed an intimate rapport with the people of this war-torn region of Guatemala.

Rather than discussing the effects of migration on gender, ethnicity, and land at each site, each author, instead, delves into their specialty. So, for example, Taylor provides details about land use in Ixcán, we learn from Moran-Taylor how international migration affects gender relations and roles in Gualán and San Cristóbal, and Rodman Ruiz elucidates emerging ethnic relations in San Pedro Pinula. While we do not intend to generalize detailed results across regions because of the circumstances unique to each town, discussion amongst the authors and visits to each other's research sites revealed that basic migration-related changes remain constant in each area.

3. Guatemala: The context of migration

Before considering the impacts of international migration on Guatemalan society, we must understand

Table 1
Distribution of farmland in Guatemala

	Below subsistence plots (<1.4 ha)	Sufficient for subsistence (1.4–3.5 ha)	Plots than can produce for internal market (3.5–45 ha)	Large, export-oriented farms (above 45 ha)
Percent of total farms	54	24	19	3
Percent of total farmland	4	7	25	65

Data are derived from the *latest* agricultural census in 1979 (Naciones Unidas, 2000).

the structures that drive migration. Quite simply, we ask: Why do Guatemalans leave their homeland? Most Guatemalans struggle to meet their every day needs. Indeed, over 80% of rural Guatemalans live below the international poverty line of U.S. \$2 per day. And, of all Guatemalans living in poverty, 26% live in extreme poverty. That is, their daily income is less than one U.S. dollar. Abysmal living standards for Guatemala's majority results from a highly skewed land distribution—2% of Guatemalans own 60% of the arable land, rapid population growth, and a brutal civil war, which lasted almost four decades and laid waste to many rural communities and fields (Le Bot, 1995).

3.1. Land, population, and poverty at the country scale

Guatemala's population is still predominantly rural. Rural residents account for two thirds of the almost 12 million people (Naciones Unidas, 2001). In rural Guatemala 54% of farm plots are not large enough for subsistence farming (Table 1). Additionally, average plot size of holdings below 1.4 ha decreased from 0.7 ha in 1964 to 0.19 ha in the 1990s (Bilsborrow and DeLargy, 1990; Brockett, 1998; Elías et al., 1997). This desperate land situation is due to long-term evolution of unequal land distribution,⁴ and population increase on a land base that is not getting any larger (Davis, 1997; Early, 1982; Gleijeses, 1998; Lovell, 1995). Below subsistence agriculture and lack of employment alternatives in Guatemala's cities and towns drive widespread poverty and a large informal economy (Jonas, 2000).

Forty years of conflict (1954–1996) between guerrillas and the state exacerbated poverty in most rural areas (CEH, 1999; Diocesis del Quiché, 1994; Falla, 1992; Naciones Unidas, 2001). Guerrilla insurgency and subsequent military repression radically altered the lives of Guatemalans. This period of “unrest,” arguably the most turbulent and bloody conflict in recent Latin American history, left an astounding 200,000 killed or disappeared, 150,000 refugees, and 1.5 million internally displaced (Jonas, 2000; North and Simmons, 1999). During the years of violence many residents fled to refugee camps in nearby Chiapas, Mexico (Manz, 1988),

and others fled further afield to the United States and Canada.

During the same 40-year period Guatemala's population quadrupled from 3 to 12 million, and environmental change, such as deforestation, soil erosion, microclimate change, and pollution, is clearly evident (Elías et al., 1997). The civil war officially ended in 1996 with the signing of an internationally-brokered peace accord, but the wounds created by the conflict are far from healed (Nelson, 1999; Nunca Más, 2000; Remijnse, 2001). In areas hardest hit by the conflict, residents still fear members of ex civil patrols (Prensa Libre, 2001a,b), distrust neighbors and any form of community organization for fear of reprisals, lack basic services, and continue to live in the midst of poverty. The state, NGOs, and foreign governments targeted regions of previous conflict for a wide range of development efforts, but these development projects do little to ameliorate the lot of poor Guatemalans (Jonas, 2000). Rural and urban populations now struggle to secure access to basic resources like land, firewood, potable water, education, and health care (Naciones Unidas, 1999, 2000). Mounting impoverishment now comes face to face with growing ecological impoverishment. In the face of apparent insurmountable adversity and lack of local alternatives, many Guatemalans follow in the footsteps of earlier migrants who left Guatemala in the 1960s for economic reasons and thereafter in the 1980s to escape death.

Despite the magnitude of the Guatemalan migrant stream, little is known about this northward movement and its effects in Guatemalan society. Most research on Guatemalan migration examines their adaptation to the United States and Canada as well as the new communities these migrants create in “El Norte” (e.g., Rodríguez and Hagan, 1992; Burns, 1993; Hagan, 1994, 1998; Popkin, 1999; Loucky and Moors, 2000; Hamilton and Chinchilla, 2001; Fink, 2003). While this previous research helps situate our study among Guatemalan migration scholarship, we also rely on migration work that relates to the Guatemalan example. These studies attend to U.S.-bound Mexican migration, especially among the Mixtec and Zapotec people (e.g., Kearney, 1996, 2000; Mountz and Wright, 1996; Cohen, 2002; Conway and Cohen, 2003). As migration from Guatemala grows and matures, assessing the effects of this trend in the homeland is imperative—we must evaluate

⁴ The Gini coefficient for land distribution in Guatemala is 0.85—the highest in Central America and one of the highest in the Western Hemisphere (Southgate and Basterrechea, 1992).

and analyze transformations in sending regions to better understand the full ramifications of transnational migration in *both* home and host communities. We now turn to examine the impacts of international migration in four Guatemalan places: Gualán, San Cristóbal, San Pedro Pinula, and San Lucas in Ixcán.

For each case study, we provide an introduction that includes a description of the study area and also a discussion of the literature relevant to that section of the paper. When Moran-Taylor, for example, discusses the interplay of gender and migration, she provides the reader with sufficient background from the extant literature on gender roles in Latin America. Rodman Ruiz and Taylor perform similar literature reviews for their sections on ethnic relations and land, respectively. In this way, a reader can select a section of the paper and gain a complete understanding of the selected subject. Likewise, other readers can read the whole paper and better understand the combined impact of migration on various facets of Guatemalan life.

4. Migration-related changes in land distribution and land use in Northwestern Guatemala

At least 10% of Guatemala's population lives and works in the United States and Canada (Naciones Unidas, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000), and yet we know little about the impacts of international migration on this country's most valuable resource—its land. Who works the land when men, or both men and women migrate? When migrants return to their homeland do they buy more land to plant subsistence crops or do they intensify agriculture on existing plots? Do return migrants turn away from their maize heritage to cultivate cash crops? How does the infusion of outside capital impact land ownership and distribution? And, more generally, what is the impact of remittances and return migrants on the environment? We address those questions in this section of the paper.

Demographers traditionally neglect the environmental context of demographic change (see the calls in Gober and Tyner (2004), Hunter (2000), and Pebley (1998) for demographers to consider the environmental aspects of demographic dynamics). Granted, a notable body of work from political ecology informs the interaction of humans and the environment. Much of this research focuses on the developing world where increasingly greater shares of the global population reside and struggle with shortages of basic natural resources like land, water, and firewood (Bryant and Bailey, 1997; Hunter, 2000; Peet and Watts, 1996). However, most political ecologists triumph politics and economics over population factors (e.g., size, distribution, and composition) as variables that better explain resource-use decisions at the community and household level (Peet and

Watts, 1996). By including important demographic factors like international migration and how it influences land use and ownership practices, we promise to shed light on how local ecologies, just like local places and culture, are transformed and transnationalized. We document specific migration-related changes in land use and distribution in San Lucas, Ixcán, in the northwestern lowlands (Fig. 1). But first we provide a brief discussion of land and migration in Guatemala, a brief history of San Lucas' settlement and people, and a summary of methods.

4.1. Land and natural resources: In changing hands?

Guatemalan rural landscapes are far from static and are even further from National Geographic images of the “timeless Maya” tending fields of maize (Lovell, 1995). This is not to imply that rural Guatemalans have lost their ties to the land—rather, that relationships with the land are changing due to violence and economic-related migration, population pressure, and macro-level political and economic forces (Montejo, 1987; Watanabe, 1992; Wilson, 1995). Simultaneously, land in Guatemala remains a highly charged political issue (Cambranes, 1992; Prensa Libre, 2001a; Villa and Lovell, 1999) where, despite provisions for land reform and rural social development that were included in the 1996 peace accord, distribution remains highly unequal (Bilsborrow and Stupp, 1997). In the face of state inactivity, rural and urban Guatemalans took matters into their own hands and migrated en masse to the United States and Canada to escape grinding poverty and limited access to resources (Jonas, 2000). Again, the combination of migration and unequal land distribution in Guatemala, and the separate studies of these phenomena, force us to ask, as Pebley (1998) prompted: “What are the *environmental* consequences of remittances in the sending countries.” The results we provide here pull away from the macro-scale generalizations made about land and population growth (e.g., Bilsborrow and Stupp, 1997) in an effort to provide concrete examples that illustrate the impact of economic and social remittances, both of which, through infusions of money and ideas, alter rural communities and landscapes (Conway and Cohen, 1998). Preliminary investigations suggest that migration and remittances impact the land in many ways: for example, ethnobotanical knowledge erodes as agriculture is left in the hands of hired help (Steinberg and Taylor, 2002), some farmers intensify and grow non-traditional crops using more fertilizers and insecticides, others purchase land in distant areas, and some even sell their land and start small businesses (Watanabe, 1992). But again, what is needed are specific, detailed studies that can ask if “migra-dollars” are enabling environmental degradation or preserving land resources for future generations. And, maybe even more

importantly, we must ask if international migration results in concentration of land in the hands of migrant families.

4.2. *Ixcán and San Lucas*

Ixcán (1575 km²) is one of the most remote and least developed regions of Guatemala. The *municipio* (county), created in 1985, occupies borderlands in the extreme north of the departments of El Quiché and Huehuetenango. The Mexican state of Chiapas and the vast Lacandon Forest form the northern border of the *municipio*. The southern limit of the Ixcán abuts the massive 3000 meter-high Cuchumatán-Chamá mountain range (Fig. 1). In this once rain forest covered region, annual precipitation ranges from 2000 to 5000 mm. Ideally, soils of the Ixcán lend themselves to the cultivation of permanent crops such as rubber, coffee, and cardamom. Most families, however, plant corn, beans, and rice for subsistence—initial yields are not sustained and much land is severely degraded. Population grew from a few thousand in the 1960s to over 70,000 today. The current growth rate, including migration, is 3.47% (Salud Pública, 1999).

The first settlers to the Ixcán in the late 1960s were homogenous indigenous groups from Huehuetenango (i.e., from the same ethnic group and geographic area) who occupied lands west of the Xalbal River in a cooperative called *Ixcán Grande*. These church-sponsored pioneering groups demonstrated high levels of cooperation in order to survive the rigors of settling a virgin rain forest infested with malaria carrying mosquitoes: "... social responsibility, community cohesion, and leadership responsibilities were paramount in the original settlements... tasks were rotated and resources pooled and, in fact, the economic, social, and political activity revolved around the cooperative" (Manz, 1988, pp. 129–130). Church-organized colonization also took place east of the Xalbal River in an area known as the *Zona Reyna* (Taylor, 1998). Indigenous settlers from the densely populated highlands of Quiché, through extremely hard physical labor and high levels of social organization, achieved a level of success similar to the cooperatives to the west. In the early 1980s, state-sponsored colonization of the area between the Xalbal and Chixoy Rivers to the north of the *Zona Reyna* consisted mainly of Q'eqchi' indians from Alta Verapaz and Ladinos from all over Guatemala (Dennis et al., 1988). Settlers from Huehuetenango, Quiché, and eastern Guatemala, formed the community of San Lucas in 1974 with a land grant from the government.

Soon after the successful establishment of families on relatively large parcels of land that varied in size from approximately 10–30 ha (versus 0.2 ha in Guatemala's western highlands), guerrilla insurgency and subsequent military repression forced many Ixcán residents of their

plots of land and into refuge in Mexico or into hiding within Guatemala (Falla, 1992). San Lucas residents, however, decided to remain in their community and weather the storm of revolution and repression because, in their words, "we were not a cooperative like the other communities around us, and therefore we had nothing to fear from the army—we stood and defended our land" (during the 1980s, the Guatemalan military targeted any form of community organization for destruction, arguing that a strong civil society formed a good base for guerrilla activities; Schirmer, 1998). Escaping all pervasive violence in the region, men, 20–30 years old, first left San Lucas in 1982 for agricultural jobs in Oregon and the Miami, Florida area. Migration to the United States is now commonplace for many San Lucas men (female migrants are rare). Only three families reported that females from their household had migrated during between 1992 and 2002.

4.3. *Methods*

In addition to relying on ethnographic research and the voices of Ixcán residents, the results presented in this section rest on a complete household census in San Lucas ($n = 156$), a more detailed survey of sixty households, and 18 in-depth interviews. Results from the household census and survey are linked to a plan of land ownership in San Lucas in a Geographic Information System (GIS) software package to better visualize and map land use and land cover change over a 15-year period and to examine linkages between migration and land use. This was a laborious process because two satellite images of the area, land ownership maps, surveys, and resident's histories were tied in space using a global positioning system. This time-intensive method, however, produces rewarding results. This method allows researchers to explain the change seen in remotely sensed images (in this case Landsat satellite data) with social information gathered in surveys and interviews. Moreover, social explanations of observed land use and land cover change are not general (i.e., at the community level), but can provide insight into change at the sub-parcel level (i.e., an area of land that measures 30 by 30 m).

Specifically, triangulating ethnographies, satellite imagery, survey results, permits us, in this case, to document a transformation from subsistence and small-scale cash cropping to cattle raising that is intimately linked to migration and migrant money.

4.4. *Migration, land use, and land distribution in San Lucas*

Traditionally, farmers in San Lucas cultivate maize, beans, and rice for subsistence—small surpluses reach local markets and the revenues from sales provide

families with capital for everyday purchases. Families also cultivate and sell cardamom⁵ to supplement meager earnings from maize and bean sales. The 156 families of San Lucas (average household size hovers around 9.5) always left the major part of their 30-ha land parcels relatively untouched—they simply lacked resources to exploit all the land and only employed about 1.5 ha for subsistence crops (moving to a new patch of forest every few years) and, at the most, 2 ha for perennial cash crops like cardamom. When cardamom prices peaked, as they did in the 1970s and early 1980s, farmers cultivating cardamom reaped handsome profits, which allowed settlers to realize the promised utopia of frontier life in Ixcán. Indeed, settlers in Ixcán, despite their isolation, enjoyed wealth unheard of in rural Guatemala at the time (Manz, 1988). Feelings of optimism during the “golden years” in San Lucas and Ixcán, buoyed by large tracts of land and cardamom profits, soon drowned in fluctuating and falling cardamom prices and the sea of human massacres in northwestern Guatemala during the 1980s and early 1990s.

4.4.1. From cardamom to cattle

In the 1980s only five families from San Lucas raised cattle on their land parcels. Taking the large step over from cardamom cultivation to cattle corrals requires large initial capital outlays. Pioneer investors in cattle from San Lucas first made their money in cardamom. For example, men in the cardamom trade (buying and selling) own the largest herds in San Lucas (over 100 head each). These men buy fresh cardamom, dry the seeds using firewood, and then truck the exportable product to market towns. Other cattle prospectors in the 1970s and 1980s started out small. Daniel Antonio, after a good year in cardamom in 1978, cut down his cardamom plantation and remaining forest and invested in a few head of cattle: “That is how I started,” he stated, “just with a few head, and with much care those few go making many cattle”.

In 2002, however, involvement in the cattle business in San Lucas is somewhat distinct—a full 61% of residents own pasture and/or cattle. Of these 94 families connected to the cattle business 57 families (61%) report that remittances from a family member(s) in the United States during the last 5 years eased their entry into the cattle trade (Fig. 2). The household census also shows that 37 non-migrant families are somehow involved in the cattle busi-

ness. These non-migrant families rent land to cattle owners who need more land for larger herds. The fact that so many non-migrant families are involved in the cattle business requires more explanation: The household census reveals that fourteen non-migrant families only converted part of their parcel to pasture to rent to cattle owners—they meet the demand for pasture by putting what they deem “unproductive” land (i.e., soils too steep and/or poor for crops) into pasture and charging cattle owners U.S. \$4 per head of cattle per month.

Quite simply, as new and old cattle ranchers emphatically stress, “cattle needs initial capital to start because you must pay to *botar* (literally, “drop” the forest), *sembrar zacate* (plant grass), *alambrar* (fencing), and finally, *al menos comprar un toro y una vaca buena!* (at least buy a bull and a good cow).” This initial capital now comes from the United States. Lack of credit from Guatemalan banks and the government forces farmers to look elsewhere for their start in life—they look North.

The ties between migration and the cattle trade stand out clearly in Adelio’s story. We took a break from planting maize with digging sticks in a recently burnt patch of forest and Adelio recounted with pride:

Half of my dad’s parcel is already in *potrero* (cattle pasture). And all of this was done with money from over there [United States]. I spent eight and a half years in Miami in the flower/nursery business working with the plants and then later with the labels. When I returned in October last year [2001] the first thing I did was build the house where my parents and I now live. Also, with the money I paid to have land on the parcel cleared and planted in grass. It was only a few months ago that they [workers] put the fences up. The idea is this August [2002], when the grass gets big with the rains, we’ll rent out the pasture to people with cattle at a price of thirty Quetzales [U.S. \$4] per month per head. The section of the parcel that we were planting in maize now, and other, yet to be cleared land, will also be put to pasture and fences. The goal is to have three separate pastures to rotate the cattle—maybe have 30 at a time and that we come up with about Q900 [U.S. \$115] a month. We are doing this because this is not good land—not as good as my brother’s, which we will save to plant maize and beans. His land is more fertile. Maybe, if prices keep on going up for land in pasture, we’ll sell the parcel and concentrate on the coffee and cardamom on other land I bought up near our home town of Barillas. A parcel that is just forested may sell for about Q100, 000 [U.S. \$11,500], whereas a parcel with all the work done and in good pasture can fetch Q150, 000 or more [about U.S. \$19,000]. Other migrants who are really into cattle buy the land or sometimes

⁵ Scientific name: *Elettaria cardamomum*. Family: Zingiberaceae—Ginger family. Dried fruit of cardamom, known as “the queen of spices,” is used in curries, European pastries, and Arabic coffee. Moreover, the oil extracted from the seeds is widely used in perfumes, confections, and liqueurs. Guatemala, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are the main exporters of this spice. Cardamom is the third most expensive spice; only saffron and vanilla are more costly (Missouri Botanical Gardens, 2002).

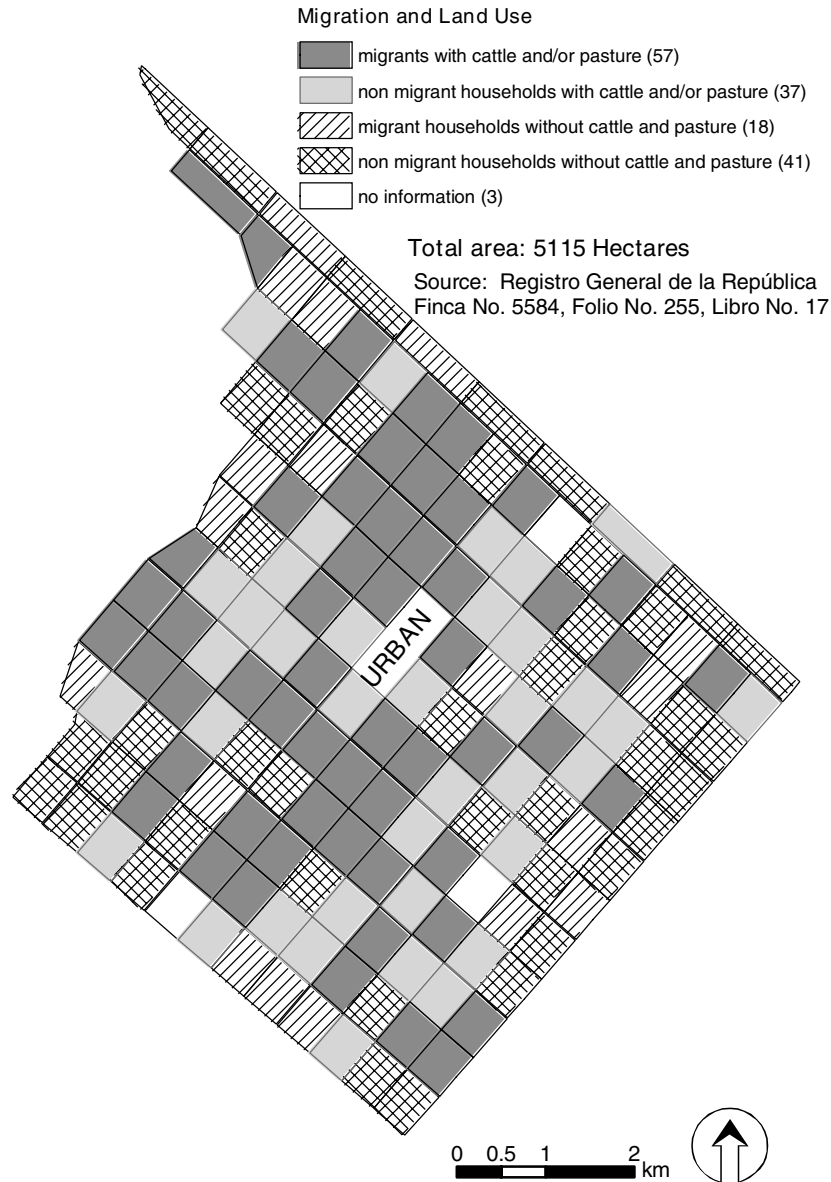


Fig. 2. Land use in San Lucas, Ixcán. Based on a complete household census, household surveys, in-depth interviews, and Thematic Mapper Satellite data from 2000. Each “regular” land parcel measures about 500 by 600 m—30 ha.

men from Soloma or Barillas in *Huehue* [the department of Huehuetenango], who have several sons in the States, come down from the mountains and make offers on our land.

Later, after leaving thousands of maize seeds three to a hole in a charred field, we returned to Adelio’s house to suck on sweet pineapple slices. Revived, Adelio donned his rubber boots and made for his dad’s pasture. In the field a cow is in *celos* (heat) and Adelio wanted to make sure his bull paid attention. Clearly then, census results and everyday actions of San Lucas residents tell the story about the linkages between international migration and the transformation of forest and cardamom fields to cattle pasture.

4.4.2. Land concentration in the hands of migrants: Locals and outsiders

The mention of outsiders buying land in San Lucas, and Ixcán in general, brings us to our next migration-related change on land in Guatemala—distribution. Slowly, land in San Lucas and Ixcán concentrates in the hands of migrant families. Migrants from San Lucas and from areas outside Ixcán buy land. In San Lucas, for example, twelve migrant families own 28 parcels between them—some own up to four parcels. Another two migrant families from San Lucas purchased additional parcels in nearby communities. Non-migrant families also buy additional land parcels, but to a lesser extent. In San Lucas only four non-migrant families own an extra parcel, which they purchased from profits made from

trading cardamom, working in the petroleum industry, or as shop owners. Undoubtedly, land ownership is far from the “one family, one parcel” egalitarian origins in 1974. Moreover, owners of a second, third, or even fourth parcel invariably turn the extra land into cattle pasture. Only one migrant family uses their surplus land in a unique fashion—following the example of an international non-governmental organization (Community Housing Foundation) the head of the household dedicated one 30-ha parcel to his own agroforestry project where he planted thousands of hardwood tree saplings.

Sitting at the entrance to San Lucas while waiting for a truck to take us to a nearby community to look at land, Guadalupe Martínez explained how, and maybe why, he purchased more land in Ixcán.

Look Matthew, I'll tell you the truth and how things work here. Right now I'm visiting from West Palm Beach [Florida] where I have lived for the last 13 years. First, I worked for a time in Syracuse, New York picking lettuce and cabbage. Now all of my family lives with me in Florida. I work repairing canals and my wife prepares lunches for about 20 men at \$40 each per week. She alone comes out with \$300 profit a week. I earn about \$8.50 per hour and work 9 to 9.5 hours a day and make about \$360 a week. I tell you, the first thing I purchased with the money was cattle and land! And now I am here again looking for more land near Santiago, Ixcán. If I can buy a parcel of 42 manzanas [30 ha] for Q125,000 [U.S. \$16,000] I'll do so today and see if it is good for cardamom. You understand that cardamom gives better money than cattle *if* the land is good. The only thing about cattle is that you have to be with them every day or pay some cowboys who are expensive and only go to check the cattle twice a week when you pay for every day—*cabrones* (bastards). Cardamom requires less care, but the land must be good and not too hot.

Guadalupe wrapped up by saying “you've seen it in the States, there you have no land, but look at me here—right now I'm off to buy 30 ha! Yes, I tell you man, here you are your own boss.” Many migrant men share Guadalupe's ideals, motivation, aspirations, and actions. Indeed, many men in San Lucas emphasize that the relationship between cattle and migration is far from coincidental. The household census from San Lucas shows an increase in migration and the amount of families connected to the cattle business (Fig. 2). This relationship as it stands is not causal, but in-depth interviews and detailed household surveys provide additional evidence that firmly root changes in land use and ownership in migrants and their money from el Norte. Migration and migra dollars drive the conversion from cardamom to cattle. The direct words of Oswaldo sum

up the relationship: “Look, you see patches of forest here and there, but with more people migrating that will soon disappear. The only reason for the forest patches you see is that we were slowed down by the war—we could not migrate or come out to clear our parcels. If it were not for the war all that you see would be pasture.”

4.4.3. *Why cattle?*

We now know that international migration permits migrants to buy more land and to get a start in the cattle business. But why do migrants prefer cattle to cardamom or any other crop? The men of San Lucas who meet late every afternoon in the center of the community to talk about cattle, cardamom, maize, rain, poor roads, and lack of potable water provide primarily economic reasons for the choice of cattle over cardamom. The men state that 0.7 ha of cardamom on San Lucas soils and elevation produces about 30 *quintales* [hundred weights] of green cardamom, which even at a low price of U.S. \$38 per quintal gives the farmer about \$1150 for his effort. A mere five to ten miles to the south, increased elevation and precipitation allow farmers to harvest 240 quintales from 0.7 ha—resulting in a gross income of \$9200. From this amount, cardamom growers must pay pickers from the highlands U.S. \$0.13 per pound of cardamom and provide room and board. This reduces net profit to about \$6080—still a handsome income for rural Guatemalans.

Given cardamom economics we must again ask, why cattle? In San Lucas, men report that profits from cattle can double income from cardamom—provided a substantial initial investment and a stable herd size of at least 20 head. A cattle owner need only sell four head a year to equal profits from cardamom. Parcel owners stress that to grow more cardamom requires labor—surprisingly, a ready supply of labor is problematic in Ixcán because most people own sizeable plots of land. Moreover, San Lucas residents report that it is now harder to grow cardamom in their community. Why? Quite simply, in their words, “it burns. *Por el ganado* (because of the cattle) there is less humidity and shade and the plant just does not produce any more because of this”.

Parcel owners also state that the cattle market is stable and indeed prices creep up every year. Demand for beef in Guatemala's growing urban areas provides incentive for Ixcán farmers to invest in cattle. Once a week a cattle truck from Huehuetenango makes a perilous decent from the high Cuchumatanes Mountains into the steamy lowlands of Ixcán expressly to buy cattle in San Lucas. The return ascent of a mere 170 km takes two days over steep, slick, muddy, gear grinding, and lurching mountain roads. During this odyssey the animal cargo reduces its weight by fifty pounds per animal, but profits makes this hardy trade viable.

Economic and ecologic (more cattle in San Lucas creates a positive feedback into even more cattle because micro-climate changes prevent cardamom cultivation) logic explains why migrant and non-migrant families turn to cattle for sustenance. We now understand how, in some regions of Guatemala, international migration and migra-dollars play an important role in the transformation of land use, land distribution, and livelihood transformation from cash and subsistence cropping to cattle raising.

5. San Pedro Pinula: Ladino and indigenous relations in the transnational sphere

San Pedro Pinula residents first migrated to the United States in the late 1960s. Now, especially strong transnational ties unite San Pedro Pinula with its migrant community in Boston, Massachusetts. In this section we describe how international migration impacts ethnic relations in a bicultural community of Ladinos and Maya in Eastern Guatemala. For many community members transnational migration reinforces inherent racism while at the same time creates new spaces for residents to discuss, confront, and transform Maya-Ladino relations.

5.1. *The Maya and Ladinos of the East*

San Pedro Pinula is a municipality with a 55,000 strong population in the Eastern Highlands of Guatemala. This region is identified as the *Oriente* (Eastern region)—a region of Guatemala dominated by Ladinos. Even so, the *Oriente* contains various indigenous groups, such as the Chortí and the Eastern Pokomam. Various ethnographies on the Chortí (Wisdom, 1940; Metz, 1995, 1998) and the Pokomam (Tumin, 1952; Gillen, 1951) document their lives, but generally the Maya of the *Oriente* remain outside the familiar focus of Maya cultural studies—the western highlands of Guatemala. Detailed documentation of Ladino life in Eastern Guatemala is equally scarce. Again, most research focuses on the twenty or so Maya groups of the western highlands.

This research on the Eastern Pokomam Maya of San Pedro Pinula was conducted over an 18-month period between 2001 and 2002. This section of the paper is based on over twenty in-depth interviews, participant observation, and several focus groups sessions with both local Ladinos and the Pokomam Maya. Results also rest on 3 months of research and over a dozen in-depth interviews with migrant family members of those interviewed in Guatemala in the migrant destinations of Boston and Providence, Rhode Island. While this section emphasizes Ladinos' perspective on the migration-driven changes to the community, Maya groups hold a similarly strong

reaction to these changes—many of which, due to lack of space, cannot be more fully explored.

5.2. *San Pedro Pinula*

San Pedro Pinula's population is 98% Pokomam Maya. Ladinos, who control politics, economics, and land in the municipality, make up the remaining 2% of the population.⁶ San Pedro Pinula's municipal seat is, quite simply, also named San Pedro Pinula (hereafter referred to as Pinula). The town serves as a general gathering point, supply depot, and bureaucratic center for the predominantly rural population of the municipality. The Pokomam Maya live in 46 villages and hamlets nestled in the mountains surrounding Pinula. Most Ladinos reside in the town, and even though they make up about 10% of the town's population, they dominate all aspects of Pinula life.

Anthropologist John Gillen and sociologist Melvin Tumin conducted ethnographic research in nearby San Luis Jilotepeque in the 1950s, but no past work on Pinula exists. We can, however, draw some information about ethnic relations from Tumin's work in San Luis Jilotepeque. He described the relationship between Indians and Ladinos as a "state of peaceful tension" (Tumin, 1952, vii). Tumin portrayed relations between the two groups as "castelike in character" and noted that their social system worked in "a type of equilibrium." (Tumin, 1952, p. 59). Though both Tumin and Gillen documented in great detail the disparities between Ladinos and Pokomam, they felt these relations were complementary.

Sixty year later, the general sense of small-town tranquility belies underlying tensions in the town's history and everyday discourse. In fact, through time the battle for scarce resources created hostility between Ladinos and Indians and the "peaceful tension" that Tumin described, often erupted into violence. In general, we concur with Tumin and Gillen's findings about the rigid ethnic and social structure that govern Maya and Ladino relations, but disagree on their assessment of ethnic accord in this eastern region.

Ladinos in Pinula dominate the economy: raising cattle, making cheese, running the formal businesses, and owning most of the land in and around Pinula. Ladinos traditionally depend on Maya labor to maintain their lifestyle and rent land to the Pokomam in exchange for labor and a share of the maize and bean harvest. While Ladinos are the dominant ethnic group in Guatemala, ethnic divisions are particularly deep-seated in Pinula, as large populations of Maya are drowned in a

⁶ These numbers have varied from census to census, but these inconsistencies may be due to attitudinal changes or assumptions made by those conducting or locally directing the census.

sea of Ladinos, with little access to land and limited economic possibilities. On the surface, daily social interactions between Maya and Ladinos are formal and pleasant and make their colonially inherited relationship bearable as well as functional. Yet racism and discrimination are part and parcel of the everyday reality and reaffirm the state's national race order that places the Ladino as racially and socially superior. Though Pinula did not suffer the same levels of political oppression as many other parts of Guatemala, especially in the Western Highlands, Pinula has not escaped past surges in violence or its present threat.

5.3. *Ladino migration to the United States*

Migration from Pinula to the United States began in the late 1960s. The stories of the first Ladino migrants make up part of local lore in Pinula. Residents recount how the first “adventurers” found a willing *gringo* in Mexico to take them as far as his final destination—Boston, Massachusetts. Oral histories reveal that family feuds may have propelled the first sojourners to seek refuge on foreign soil. To subsequent young Ladino migrants, *migra* dollars offered the chance to escape from familial and parental dependence—return Ladino migrants soon purchased their own land and cattle. Violence in the 1970s during Guatemala's civil war also added migrants to the economically driven stream of workers. During the tense years of civil unrest in the 1970s more Ladinos obtained tourist visas to join family and friends in Boston, New York, and Los Angeles. In the eighties, the migrant stream flourished as migration to the United States became the norm for young Ladinos after school graduation.

While Ladinos fled to the United States, local Pokomam Maya remained and many males endured military service. Many Pokoman males fell victim to military round-ups, but others saw military jobs as a better option than working for “*los ricos*” in the town. Many men, as young as 14, left their villages in Pinula to serve alongside indigenous peoples from other regions of Guatemala. During the 1980s, the war escalated in the Western Highlands and Maya men from Pinula were often sent to the heaviest battle zones, such as Ixcán, the Ixil triangle in Quiché, and Petén. Since the Peace Accords were signed in 1996, many ex-soldiers now add to the migration flow north. As one young man stated,

I really wasted my time in the army. I thought I would receive training or learn some skills. Before you could get work in the city as a Congressional bodyguard, but since the Peace Accords there is no work for ex-soldiers. I spent all that time for nothing. I am going to the states because there is nothing here for me.

5.4. *Indigenous entrance in the migrant stream: The importance of patron-client relations*

The Pokomam of San Pedro Pinula entered the international migration stream in the late 1980s. Patron-client relations that govern Ladino and Maya interactions in the *pueblo* (town) often worked to the advantage of the Maya when a local Ladino patron helped his clients (workers) migrate to Boston. For example, Carlos administered the family farm after his father passed away. Like many young Ladinos, Carlos was poor in terms of ready cash—all the family wealth lay in fixed capital like land. Carlos left the farm in his younger brothers' charge and used family connections to migrate to Boston. Before he left for the United States, several of his *mozos* (wage laborers) begged him to take them along. Once in Boston, although his family adamantly objected, Carlos managed to lend several Maya the money for their journey through Mexico. Upon their arrival to Boston he provided them with a place to stay, janitorial positions at a prestigious Boston university, and assistance in political asylum applications. From these first few Maya migrants who utilized patron-client relations, their home village became the first to send many men to the United States.

Carlos' mother blames her son for what she sees as the “demise” of the community:

If it weren't for my son, none of those *inditos* (damn little indians) would have anything. They wouldn't be driving their fancy pick-up trucks or their women sitting around getting fat while they wait for their dollars to arrive. The indians are lazy and they no longer want to work for us [Ladinos]. They have lost respect for the old ways.

Most Ladinos in Pinula feel that Maya migration produces “lazier” and “less respectful” indians. Despite this disparaging view of the Maya and migration, Ladinos do not let their opinions interfere with their business acumen—Ladino patrons, including Carlos' mother, underwrite Maya migration by providing high interest loans. When Pokomam Maya want to join their relatives in the United States they solicit their patrons for loans. Money lending is now big business in Pinula because interest rates stand at 10–20% per month on loans of several thousand U.S. dollars. When Pokomam folk run behind on payments, Ladinos seize homes and the small parcels of land that were put up as collateral on loans.

5.5. *Maya migration and increased ethnic divisions*

Since Carlos started the movement of his workers to the United States in the late 1980s, Maya migration spread like wildfire through the indigenous communities of San Pedro Pinula. Pokomam Maya prefer migrating

to the United States than working for Ladinos, migrating to the city, or joining the army. The lack of Maya laborers and increased capital in the hands of the Maya makes Ladinos uneasy—they see their traditional power over Indians eroded by mass Maya international migration.

Local discourse emphasizes these divides. Terms such as *Indios Lamidos*, or *Indios Perdidos*, illustrate how Ladinos feel about returning indigenous migrants who think they are better than the position local social structures ascribe to them. *Indio Lamido*, traditionally described Indians who socialized with Ladinos but “then begin to think they are just like Ladinos and act like they are something they are not and even go as far as wanting to be with Ladina women.” These individuals were always tolerated but never fully accepted by local society. In the current context, *Indios Lamidos* and *Indios Perdidos* refer to Indian return migrants or remittance-receiving relatives who wear Western manufactured dress, drive cars and pick-up trucks, and who generally expect equal treatment.

5.6. Rapid return of Pokomam Maya to the migrant circuit

Most Ladinos complain that indigenous migrants return to spend their money overzealously on elaborate housing and fancy cars. Indian “stupidity” and “inability” to handle the responsibility that comes with earning dollars, Ladinos believe, is the reason why Maya men rapidly return to the migrant circuit. While Ladino migrants average only one trip to the United States, Maya who arrive with the goal of staying in their natal communities often re-enter the migrant circuit within 1–2 years. Even though Maya migration is only a decade old, interviews and surveys for this research reveal that repeat migration is more common among the Maya population.

Ladinos disparagingly remark that rapid return to the United States by the Maya is due to their incompetence. This research, however, points to the low initial resource base of Maya and Ladino monopoly over viable income generation in Pinula as reasons why Maya must return to the United States. Attempts by the Maya to invest in local income-generating activities are often suppressed or frustrated by Ladino control over land, material resources, and information.

5.7. Ladino monopoly over cattle and land

In San Pedro Pinula cattle ranching stands as an important symbol of wealth and power that is dominated by the Ladino sector of society. Attempts to invest in cattle by Maya migrant returnees are thwarted by lack of access to large blocks of land necessary to support cattle. In the eyes of aspiring Indian cattle ranchers,

Ladinos take advantage of small Maya landholdings and their general ignorance about cattle administration. One Ladino, however, offered his view of Ladino-Indian interaction around cattle ranching:

I tried explaining to this *indito* [damn little Indian] how to raise the cattle. I was trying to help him out and explain to him how you raise and feed them, what time of year you have to do this and how to buy and sell. But the Indians are as bad as us. We don't trust them and neither do they trust us. Even though I was telling him the truth he didn't listen to me. I sold him calves in the winter [rainy season] and when the summer came I had to buy them back at half the price. The poor things were starving. The Indian gave up and left again for the states soon after.

While the Maya normally work in the cattle industry as laborers and *corraleros* (foot cowboys), local and countrywide cattle cartels hinder Maya access to the cattle trade. Ladinos raise most of their revenues, not from milk or cheese production, but by buying and selling cattle among local families and Ladinos from the Petén and the coast. As long as Ladinos maintain control over land and the cattle industry, cattle will remain a Ladino dominated activity.

Ladinos, in contrast to Maya return migrants, because of existing structures and traditions can devote their migra-dollars to long-term investments such as cattle production and local businesses. Remittances aid the purchase of more cattle and extensive tracts of land from relatives at relatively low prices. While the Maya pay as much as Q8000 (\$1000) for a three-quarter hectare plot, Ladinos obtain the same land at a fraction of the price and in larger quantities by purchasing land through their families or receiving advances on their inheritances. Lower class Ladinos, without family ties to land resources, generally opt to start local businesses related to home construction, such as hardware and building supply stores that cater to the burgeoning, migration-spurred home construction boom. Some Maya returnees also set up small businesses, but they remain traditional enterprises within the accepted sphere of Indian occupations, such as tailoring, small general goods stores, and liquor sales.

5.8. Maya remittance use to purchase Ladino land

Maya who return from the United States generally invest in home construction and land purchases for maize and bean cultivation. They buy land in small parcels, averaging from 1 to 7 ha. Maya acquire land from local Ladino landowners. Some Maya elders see the irony in migration and the purchase of land by Maya men with money from the United States. They explain that the United States is so wealthy because its people

originally stole all Guatemala's riches years ago and transferred the booty north. These Maya elders interpret current migration patterns as a way to return pilfered indigenous lands. Colonial manuscripts confirm that the lands around Pinula were once communally owned by the Pokomam Maya, who were eventually co-opted by immigrating Ladino families in the 1800s (AGCA, 1981; 1814, 1818; Feldman, 1981; IGN, 1983). An elder Maya man, when commenting on migration and its impacts in his hometown, said, "my children are forced to travel far to work, but it's good because now we can buy [back] what was stolen from us in the past". Maya migrants return to Pinula with a new found pride in owning land. Moreover they feel that their experience from the United States frees them from their dependence on Ladino landowners for their livelihood.

5.9. Attitudes of Ladinos toward Maya migrants

Ladino landowners and return migrants do not share Maya positive attitude about United States migration experiences. Ladino landowners think migration results in "lazy," "disrespectful," and "uncooperative" Indians. Years ago, landowners experienced no trouble finding *mozos* (laborers) to work their lands in exchange for part of the harvest. Before migration took Maya men to the United States, most Pokomam Maya worked *a medias* (sharecropping) with their patrons. This arrangement gave Maya access to land in exchange for a set amount of days to work on the patron's fields and a share of the harvest. Sharecropping creates a social relationship that places the Maya at the beck and call of the patron. When a patron needs his fields tended or fences fixed, he calls on his *mozo*. Patrons complain that in recent years client-patron relationships deteriorated and they now encounter problems finding good *arrendantes* or *mediantes* (renters or sharecroppers). Ex *mozos* now prefer to work their own land purchased with migra dollars or to use remittances to pay elevated rental prices. In other words, migra dollars free Maya men from traditional binding labor obligations with Ladinos. In the past decade, Ladinos report a significant loss in number of workers and an associated loss in land productivity.

Resentment towards Maya access to migra dollars go beyond the need for labor. Ladino return migrants also complain about changing indian attitudes and behaviors. Don Fulano, a Ladino return migrant, remembers an incident that exemplifies this sentiment.

I remember I had a fight [in the United States] with some stupid indian from the village. We were washing dishes together in a seafood restaurant in Cambridge. He told me that here in the States I wasn't any better than him so I better stop acting *creído* [stuck-up]. I told him that even though we were the same to gringos, we both knew, no matter

what, that I was a schoolteacher and he would always be an indian.

Don Fulano felt superior to Maya people and he did not sympathize with North American racial categories that lump all Latin Americans, Ladinos and Maya alike, into the same category. He returned to Pinula after earning enough money to feel secure about never working in the United States again.

While rural female Maya migration is still relatively rare, Ladina women do migrate to the United States, albeit to a lesser extent than men. Female Ladino returnees expressed strong opinions about their reasons for return to Guatemala. Primarily, they returned to be with family, but significantly they also mentioned a desire to return to their positions of privilege in Pinula. Adela, a young upper-class Ladina, recounted her negative migration experience as a chambermaid in the United States. When her younger brother decided to migrate North she warned him that he would return soon,

I know how it is there. I worked as a hotel maid—can you believe that? I told my brother that he wouldn't like working under anyone. Like the rest of us in this family, we are used to being the boss. Here he is the *Patron* and there he will be nothing. There I was just a maid. Here I am the *Patrona*.

Adela, like many Ladinos from Pinula, did not take pleasure in her experience working in the United States and she cherishes her high status back in the home community. For many Ladinos, working as a migrant means accepting downgrades in social levels, which is often viewed as not worth the dollars they earn. Many Ladinos see little need to go to the United States and view migration as an adventure and capital-building exercise rather than as a necessity. For Adela, like many Ladinos, returning to Pinula represents a return to the high status bestowed upon them from birth.

5.10. Inter-ethnic marriages

International migration also results in the opening of a once covert and rare activity—inter-ethnic relations and marriages. Inter-ethnic relations always existed between Ladino patrons and Maya servants. Illegitimate children (*hijos de casa*) joined the ranks of their indian mothers. Formalized unions between Ladinos and the Maya are, however, new to the community. These relationships usually develop in the United States away from parental and community controls, and bring together Ladino men and urban Maya women. Conversely, inter-ethnic marriages in San Pedro Pinula generally unite urban Maya return migrants males with local Ladina women.

Community members often view these marriages as racially offensive and degenerate and attribute such

unions to greediness and witchcraft. Families caught in the middle of these trans-ethnic love affairs accuse one another of engaging in *brujerías* (witchcraft). On a few occasions I (Rodman Ruíz) became unwittingly caught in the middle of inter-ethnic family conflicts. Because I often took photographs of Pinula residents, people requested that I photograph migrants on my visits to the Boston area. Although I knew photographs often formed the material base for casting spells, my naiveté was shattered when a Maya woman arrived at my door after my return from a Christmas trip to the United States—she requested the photographs I took of her son in Boston. Prior to our meeting she received a phone call from her son, who expressed that the photographs that I took of him and his wife in Boston would be given to his mother-in-law. The Maya woman at my doorstep explained that if the photographs fell into the wrong hands they might be used to harm her son, who purportedly bewitched his Ladino wife into falling in love with him. As it turned out, the respective mothers in this inter-ethnic marriage were involved in accusations of witchcraft since their children united in the United States years before. On other occasions Ladino mothers asked me to obtain photos of the *inditas putas* (Indian whores) who stole their Ladino sons away into impure marriages—I politely declined these requests.

5.11. Changing Ladino and Maya Ethnic relations

International migration undoubtedly plays a role in shaping ethnic relations in San Pedro Pinula. Traditional patron-client relations eased Maya entry into the migrant circuit, but these very same relations and rigid traditional social structures prevent Maya entry into Ladino-dominated economic activities. Paradoxically, inter-ethnic marriages and the equalizing influences of U.S.-racial categories, which ignore Maya and Ladino differences, create a new environment in Pinula whereby younger migrants challenge long-standing ethnic divides. The resulting ethnic tensions and inter-ethnic dynamics in San Pedro Pinula illustrate yet another change that international migration brings to Guatemalan livelihoods and places—albeit a gradual change that is tempered by 500 years of Ladino-dominated society.

6. Gendered transformations in Guatemala

In this section, we draw on the gender and migration literature to explore how migration brings about changes in gender relations and roles in Ladino and Maya communities. By doing so, it forces us to examine orthodoxies surrounding gender ideologies in Guatemala and other developing countries that experience large population flows to the United States. Increasingly, transnational migration scholars look at how gen-

der configures and is in turn reconfigured due to international migration (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Mahler, 1999; Hirsch, 2003). The work presented here also considers whether and how migration affirms and structures gender. This section is not about stay-at-home women. It is not about caretakers and how the social reproductive labor is organized. And it is not about how social relationships alter between parents, caretakers, and children (elsewhere this topic is treated extensively, see Moran-Taylor, in preparation). Rather, it is about those who go and those who return with the idea to stay. More specifically, it is about how gender relations, roles, and ideologies in migrant households may change due to social remittances (i.e., the ideas, beliefs, and attitudes that migrants bring back home, see Levitt, 1998, 2001). Before turning our attention to the intersection of gender and transnational migration, we first provide a brief migration history from both communities addressed in this section. We then examine how international migration affects traditional gender roles and relations in two transnational towns in Guatemala—Gualán and San Cristóbal.

6.1. U.S.-Bound migration from Gualán and San Cristóbal

The discussion that follows is based on cross-cultural and cross-regional fieldwork conducted in Guatemala over a period of 18 months with folks in the sending communities of Gualán, in the department of Zacapa, and San Cristóbal in the department of Totonicapán. Migrants from Gualán head mainly to Los Angeles, California. San Cristóbalenses, in contrast, migrate primarily to Houston, Texas (Moran-Taylor, 2003). While past comparative studies of migrant and non-migrant communities have insightfully shown migration-related changes on gender (e.g., Georges, 1990), such a research strategy is not possible in Guatemala. In Guatemala migration is institutionalized and touches, in one way or another, all Guatemalan villages, towns, and cities.

Migrants originating from Gualán and San Cristóbal (each with a municipal population of about 30,000) initially ventured northward to the United States in the mid to late 1960s. Migration increased in the 1970s, and thereafter, well-established transnational ties ensure a steady stream of migrants hailing north from both localities today. The socio-demographic composition of the U.S.-bound migrant flow emerges as a clear difference between both communities. More women journey North from the Ladino town of Gualán than those from Maya-dominated San Cristóbal. In both places, however, situated at opposite ends of the country and representative of distinctive ethnic identities, international migration pervades everyday talk and almost all households remain tightly linked to a Guatemalan community

in the United States. Importantly, these Guatemalan families rely heavily on the cash remittances sent from loved ones working abroad for their daily survival.

6.2. Patriarchy and migration

Patriarchy is generally defined as male dominance over female labor and sexuality (Hartman, 1981). And, as in many other Latin American countries, social life in Guatemala remains largely governed by traditional patriarchal norms. Women are usually shunted to the private sphere. In other words, women's activities largely become limited to a narrow domestic realm of cleaning, cooking, and caring for children. Distinctions between private and public spaces in Guatemala's countryside gradually erode as more women attend school, further their education in Guatemala City (the capital), enter the work force, control their reproductive lives (through contraception), and/or acquire a broader awareness of human and women's rights, particularly in the aftermath of the 1996 Peace Accords and the influx of foreign NGOs. In short, because of these social and cultural changes, as many Gualantecas and San Cristobaleñas put it, "today Guatemalan women are becoming more *despiertas* (awakened)." Undoubtedly, transnational migration injects new ideas and material capital into both Gualán and San Cristóbal, which are traditionally male-driven places. In turn, this shift allows, in varying ways and degrees, a change in power relations among women in private and public domains. Prevailing gender ideologies and norms of women typically relegated to the domestic versus public arena play a vital role here in how gendered spheres are viewed. And while much feminist scholarship critiques this binary model (e.g., Ehlers, 1991, 2000), it continues to be central in how many Guatemalans organize their daily realities and spaces.

A common refrain in Guatemala is that "*el machismo abunda aquí*" (*machismo* abounds here). Gualantecos say that their department [Zacapa] constitutes the most machista (patriarchal) place in the country. Newly acquired wealth, or U.S. money migrants bring back from their northward ventures, also influences the divergent ways some returnees behave, particularly males embracing a greater sense of power and social status in their home community (see also Goldring, 1998). Elvin, a male returnee in his early twenties eloquently summarized attitudes of many returnees, *vienen más brincones* (they come back more ready to pick up fights). "Perhaps," he added after some contemplation, "much of this *machismo* stuff is something that they have learned from the Mexicans over there. *They* [Mexicans] are really *machistas*," Elvin blurted. Others mentioned that returnees "don't let anyone step over them and often carry themselves as if they were big cocks." Returnees in Gualán, for example, gather in *cantinas* (bars) where

new money is spent on alcohol and women. Then, emulating America's Old West male returnees are quicker than other locals to solve any misunderstandings or conflicts that may crop up simply with a show or use of pistols.⁷

Stay-at-home Ladino and Maya women often view men who come back from the United States in the following terms: "they leave all *humilditos* (humble) and then when they return they are all full of airs." A young, Ladina non-migrant remarked that males returned more machista from the United States because they acted more jealous toward their wives. She added, "when migrants leave women behind for too long they return thinking that perhaps *certain* things have happened during their long absence." Repeatedly, Gualantecos and San Cristobaleños indicated that many male returnees tend to be spendthrifts and drink up their hard-earned cash, particularly in the case of Ladinos in Gualán. Overall, locals in Gualán and San Cristóbal say that many returnees (both male and female) come back more confident and arrogant. These attitudes help shape how gender relations and ideologies unfold in Guatemalan Ladino and Maya communities.

6.3. Female empowerment and migration

Because Ladina and Maya women increasingly participate in international migration, albeit to a lesser extent in San Cristóbal than in Gualán, their views about traditional gender roles, relations, and ideologies at home inevitably change. Women now act out their wants and needs more dynamically. Such an attitudinal change is particularly evident when female migrants in the United States, who find themselves working and earning U.S. dollars, do not want to become dependent on their husbands if they return to their home communities. Also, women's exposure to American culture imbues them with novel ways of perceiving and acting out their male–female interactions. As others show (e.g., Pessar, 1995) this exposure and employment experience often helps Guatemalan female migrants break away from the shackles embedded in traditional gender norms.

According to narratives and survey data collected for this study, international migration offers a clear option to Ladina and Maya women who have endured years of hardship under physically abusive husbands. The U.S. escape valve does not surface without complications, because, even though women may desire a life away from abusive husbands, other ties bind women to their homes in Guatemala. Some migrant mothers,

⁷ In Gualán settling disagreements in this fashion was common practice prior to the arrival of a new police corps in 1999. Prior to the arrival of the heavily armed police, residents reported killings on a daily basis and a general sense of lawlessness in the town.

for instance, cannot resist the emotional pull of their children and return to their home communities. Despite the strong patriarchal constraints faced at home and the emotional hardships of leaving children behind, increasingly women migrate to seek more tranquil, stable lives, and economic independence. Such migrant flows, however, are more pervasive among young and middle-aged women, as well as many unwed mothers, in the eastern Ladino-dominated community of Gualán.

Once in the United States, female migrants not only feel that they gain greater gender equity, but also a greater awareness of how to cope with marital violence. A Gualanteca returnee in her late thirties, for instance, explained: “Because the laws in the United States protect females, then men are afraid of lifting a finger against us. They are afraid to go to jail and to be deported. But here [Guatemala], since there are no laws helping women, then men take advantage of this and feel free to belt us.” Similarly, Quique, another Ladino returnee in his late forties, commented that in the United States men could not even lift their voice against women. “You can’t,” he asserted, “because the first thing a woman does over there [United States] is dial 911 and they [the police] then take you *bien penqueado* (beaten to death) to jail.” Like Hirsch (2003) observes, such remarks reveal how domestic violence takes on new meanings in the United States. Equally important, the ideas that returnees bring back about domestic violence and state intervention may begin to influence gender ideologies back home.

6.4. Return migration and gender parity

Though past studies that examine migration and gender observe that in the home community women achieve gender equity after their husband’s return to the home community (see, for example, Grimes, 1998), the path toward gender parity in Gualán and San Cristóbal is torturous and makes for slow changes. *Initial* increases in gender parity soon evaporate into the accepted gendered norms of Guatemalan life (in both Gualán and San Cristóbal). When Ladino and Maya male returnees first arrive in their places of origin, especially during the initial years, they seem more enthusiastic and likely to contribute to household chores. Male returnees report that they often change diapers, care for children, shop in the market, wash dishes, and cook—decidedly female concerns and tasks. Return migrants attribute such a transformation to an exposure to American culture coupled to the different lifestyles and hardships their compatriots endure while working and living in the United States. Male migrants must be creative in their household division of labor to survive in the United States. And, this practice often entails men taking a more active role in household duties (see also Grimes, 1998). Like other Latino migrants in the United States, when Ladi-

no and Maya migrants go North they face numerous challenges and must contend with situations seldom encountered in their communities of origin: sharing an apartment with a dozen or more fellow countrymen, performing their own household chores, procuring and making their own food arrangements. These new experiences in the United States influence their demeanor towards what they previously may have considered female social spaces. But also, this American exposure provides male migrants with a novel understanding of women’s roles in their places of origin in Guatemala, albeit for a brief period upon their return.

Olinda, a stay-at-home female in her late twenties, explained how her husband changed after working in Los Angeles for nearly a decade. Although her husband strongly expresses his male dominance from time to time, in other ways he appears open to help out with “women’s things.” Olinda recounted, for example, how occasionally she requests that her husband swing by the store after work and purchase sanitary pads for her. “There he brings it,” she said with a big, mischievous smile across her face, “hidden, but he brings it. But then... there are men here that forget it!” she said. “They don’t even like to go out in public with their wife... why do they even get married!” she exclaimed in dismay.

Eduardo’s case also illustrates changes in gender relations in Guatemala. He is a returnee in his mid forties whose 8-year stay in the United States dramatically altered his perspectives and behavior. Sitting on top of several dozen 100-pound maize sacks neatly stacked in the corner of his animal feed store, he related how his migratory experiences influenced his life:

Back then I used to change my clothing two, even three times per day and I used to wander around very well pressed, but not anymore. Now, I know that if my wife can’t press my clothes it’s because she’s helping me in the store—then I don’t demand such a request. My stay over there [United States] truly made me a more sociable person. Here, I have friends who have never left their home, their town... so if their wife doesn’t serve them breakfast they don’t eat. But me, if my wife is busy, I prepare my own food, serve my children, and serve *her* too.

To reiterate, changes in attitudes and behavior for many male returnees (both Ladino and Maya) are often short lived. Based on interviews and observations from this study, after merely 1 or 2 years spouses, boyfriends, and/or brothers revert to previous patriarchal ways. They revert to traditional cultural norms held before migrating to the United States.⁸

⁸ In contrast, Grimes (1998) observes that changes among male Mexican returnees appeared permanent.

6.5. Decision-making and power relations within the household

In Guatemala males are typically the breadwinners and locus of decision-making within the household. A recurrent theme of locals in Gualán and San Cristóbal is that: “*el hombre es el que manda*” (men wield authority). Though Ladino and Maya community members in both localities comment that household decision-making represents a joint male–female venture, both sexes of migrants and non-migrants concur that in the end, males make the *most* important decisions, particularly when it boils down to financial matters. Even when males migrate and their wives remain behind, men often continue to exercise their decision-making authority from a distance. Findings from this study reveal that Ladino and Maya men continue to determine how remittances and any other monies should be spent within and outside the household—regardless of how women contribute to household expenses.⁹ Further, regular remittances (upon which households in Guatemala rely for daily survival) also enable male migrants to maintain and reinforce their status as primary household heads. Such an approach, then, discourages the emergence of any gender parity in Guatemalan families and helps reaffirm traditional gender relations.

When further exploring the issue of decision-making within the household, contrasting ideas alluding to such actual practice and social behavior emerged, particularly among some Ladinos in Gualán. Coyly, folks admitted that women held the household reins and dictated spousal activities. Gualantecos pointed out that women were more astute and knew how to handle matters better (e.g., when it pertained to decision-making power in the domestic sphere). A male returnee, for example, commented:

The man can yell and beat his wife, but in the end if the woman sobs, the man winds up doing what she wants. Even if the male is very macho, he will do whatever the female tells him. Also, this happens because of women’s subtlety, charisma, and maturity... women have a certain level of maturity that men just don’t have and can never catch up with. Perhaps it’s because of the maternal instinct, but it’s something that’s always present.

Similarly, Quique, a married, outspoken and successful Ladino returnee assertively said: “Look, it’s like this. Women allow their husbands to reprimand them in public, but once within the confines of their own intimacy,

then, the woman asserts control.” While such remarks illustrate subtle variations in Maya and Ladino cultures, nonetheless, they represent differences between both communities.

6.6. Migration-related gender changes

The Ladino and Maya Guatemalan case demonstrates that traditional patriarchal ideologies are neither monolithic nor fixed as they can vary according to individual social characteristics (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). Gender relations in Gualán and San Cristóbal are not changing radically. Slow change results primarily because migration reinforces a long history of patriarchy in the region. This realization does not negate evidence indicating that some men do depart from their expected male gender roles and relations (e.g., dominance over women), although for a short period after coming back home. Under the patriarchal constraints that permeate and persist in Gualán and San Cristóbal women are largely left, as many people repeatedly mentioned, with *ni voz ni voto* (neither voice or vote). Such remarks aptly capture the attitude that many Ladino and Maya men maintain towards women and highlight the “unchanged” conditions enveloping the everyday lives of many Guatemalan women.

Migration, then, provides women with options for more independent, confident, and less submissive life ways. In cases where females prefer to return and stay in to their hometowns, this experience often endows them with wisdom and confidence to challenge traditional gender roles. Even more importantly, transnational migration provides an alternative to women involved in abusive spousal relationships. Despite how much women alter their views and identity—whether due to migration or other social, cultural, and economic forces operating at the local, regional, national and global levels—this does not necessarily translate into a change in their relationships with men. Migration is driving fast and radical transformations in *other* facets of Guatemalan society such as landscapes, schooling, and rural development. But behind the new cinder-block buildings and smoked-glassed windows of migrant-built homes, gender roles and relations between men and women remain relatively unchanged. Yes, we can point to individual Ladina and Maya women who resist and fight for change, however, we must temper these isolated cases of resistances with the observation that most females in Guatemala still remain largely dominated by traditional patriarchal norms.

Quite simply, gender roles and relations in Guatemala remain largely unchallenged. As others observe (e.g., Georges, 1990; Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Hagan, 1994), migration does little to strengthen women’s gender roles and relations, particularly when analyzed from the perspective of migrants’ places of origin. It is a rare case

⁹ This also holds true with cases of international and internal migration. For example, see Georges’ (1990) study among U.S. bound Dominican migrants, and more recently, Weinstein Bever’s (2002) research on internal migration among the Yucatecan Maya from their community of origin to Cancún.

where women translate their personal transformations into new relationships with men, and at the same time, it is a rare male who embarks on large departures from entrenched macho actions and attitudes. Although women in Guatemala become aware of other options and lifestyles, the rigid structure and social norms back home in Guatemala do not permit women to act on their new found freedom and desires for equality and change in male–female relationships. Men still control most aspects of Guatemalan social life. Like the Maya in Pinula, who run into a strong Ladino dominated social structure, women in migrant towns can only begin to slowly chip away at long-standing social structures. Change is in the air, but rapid and radical migration-induced changes to male–female relationships and gender roles remains a distant desire for most Guatemalan women who continue the struggle just to survive—the struggle for equality and fair treatment takes second place to providing food and shelter for children and elders.

7. Guatemalans, Guatemala, and international migration

International migration influences every aspect of daily life in Guatemala. Migra dollars form the “bastion of the economy” (Siglo Vientiuno, 2002), make informal land-distribution possible (i.e., non-government funded buying of land by landless folk and buying “back” of land by the Maya), enhance the conversion from forest to cattle pasture, and, at the same time create tension between Ladinos and indians when indians move up the economic ladder. Moreover, international migration and the information and freedom it provides to Guatemalan women permits the gentle opening and relaxation of the gender aperture. This paper illustrates how migration and remittances interact with land, ethnicity, and gender in Guatemala. We did not focus on the minutia of remittances (i.e., who gets what and how it is sent), that is the topic of other studies and manuscripts. We know that remittances are received on a large scale and we wanted to examine the effects of remittances, not how remittances arrive to the homeland. Rather, we know that migration clearly permeates many facets of Guatemalan culture, but we must temper our temptation to label this infiltration in the category of “radical and rapid change” because new money and ideas from the North run into 500 years of rigid ethnic and gender relations. Our case studies from Gualán, San Cristóbal, and San Pedro Pinula illustrate how the potential for increased equity in gender and ethnic relations and land reform is dampened by long-standing structures. Regardless of the rate of change, we show how migration becomes the agent behind much social and cultural change.

Migration-driven change in land use and land ownership, however, proceeds rapidly. Massey et al. (1987)

also report an accumulation of land by migrants. Pokomam Maya in Pinula now slowly buy back land owned by their ancestors and attempt to break into Ladino-dominated cattle cartels. Ixcán migrants with migra dollars buy more land and create cattle pasture, which in turn incites non-migrants to convert part of their parcels into pasture to support large migrant cattle herds. The ramifications of the expanded cattle industry on Guatemala’s environment remains a topic open for exploration. Also, in the face of land accumulation in the hands of migrants, what awaits those rural landholders pushed out by migrants with dollars?

How does this work fit in with research conducted by other natural and social scientists investigating international migration and agriculture? The results presented from Ixcán support other case studies from Latin America that show how migration and remittances lead to investment in agriculture because money from migration permits families to overcome capital and labor constraints (e.g., Pessar, 1991; Jones, 1995; Durand et al., 1996). Research in Ixcán does not support other arguments showing how migration often leads to declines in land under cultivation due to labor shortages or lack of interest in the land, and investment in consumer items and house construction (see Jokish, 2002 for a recent summary of this debate). Primarily, families from San Lucas invest in their land. They do this because their plot sizes are significant (i.e., large) by Guatemalan standards (30 ha) and are worth improving. Yes, migrants spend money on what others might consider frivolous consumption items like clothes and cars, but migra dollars are primarily directed towards the purchase of more land and improvement of that land by any means possible—even if that means deforestation for cattle pasture. In Pinula, however, Ladino landowners do report a shortage of labor to work their land. Lack of labor to work Ladino land may lead to less land in cultivation, which may further encourage labor migration from other regions of the country or changes in the way the land is used. This is a topic open for future investigations of the type carried out by Taylor in Ixcán (i.e., research that focuses on the land and environmental consequences of migration). Only long-term investigations that build on current work will tell the full story.

Important, and almost impossible to avoid, is a discussion of our results in the context of the polarized debate about the impact of remittances on local development (see Conway and Cohen, 1998; Russell, 1986 for summaries of the debate). In the cases we illustrated here, the ramifications of international migration on home communities and countries are many and are not restricted to the narrow field of development. Migration-related change takes place in the communities we studied, especially for the families directly associated with migration. However, just because a segment

of the population benefits from financial and social remittances does not mean that we see “development” of the community as a whole. Often, as is illustrated in the communities we studied, the benefits of migration are very much a family affair. Yes, other families and individuals who are not directly associated with migration (i.e., they do not have, or have had, a family member migrate) benefit in that they are employed by migrant money and migrant stimulated enterprises (e.g., construction, forest clearing, drivers, cowboys), but the communities as a whole are not developing. If we wanted to look at migration and development in Guatemala, we would have to view development within each community as piecemeal and family oriented. Money is primarily devoted to family advancement. Rarely are funds spent on any type of public community improvement like roads, potable water projects, education, parks, or sewage systems. Jones (1995) documents a similar trend in Mexico. At this stage, we reiterate, migration is an individual affair that allows economic advancement to members of society who would normally be “locked in” at levels governed by 500 years of state development that rests on established elite landowner reliance on the majority of Guatemala’s population for labor. Migration allows many Guatemalans, who for 500 years have run into a brick wall in terms of their advancement, to slowly seek many new avenues around and over the brick wall of colonial structure. The same can be said for gender relations, which should be seen as an integral aspect of development. Migration, and the new world views gained with migrant experiences and social remittances, allows migrants to slowly challenge, break down, and then rebuild the wall of gender relations in Guatemala. Migration though, in the face of state inactivity, corruption, and ineptitude, permits a development that is orchestrated from below, by the migrants themselves. This type of development, including land redistribution (see the cases of Ixcán and San Pedro Pinula) does not benefit all residents, but is better than the opportunities presented by the state. Indeed, one could argue that migration creates a new class of elite, a new elite, who accumulate land and capital with their migrant earnings. Massey et al. (1987) report a similar scenario in Mexico where migrants are the only people who can now afford to acquire land in their home communities. Remittances do not help Guatemala’s poorest who cannot afford to migrate in the first place and migration therefore perpetuates the inequities there (c.f. Massey et al., 1987).

Is any of this development sustainable? If we look at the Ixcán case we can comment that cattle ranching on thin rainforest soils is not sustainable. In Ixcán, migrant monies may be better invested in forestry projects or cash crops like vanilla, cardamom, or palm hearts (see Taylor, in press). The investment in cattle is a response

to the high demand and prices for meat in Guatemala’s urban areas. In Guatemala’s *Oriente*, specifically in San Pedro Pinula, we see how migrant money permits Maya entry into the once Ladino-dominated cattle ranching. Here, we do not see change in land use, but a change in land ownership with a similar intended land use. The sustainability of Maya cattle ranchers is yet to be gauged. Do Maya ranchers possess the expertise to manage their new lands and cattle herds in a sustainable way? This is a topic open for future research and the results will inform us about the longer term impacts of migration.

The original intent of this paper was to document how Guatemalan culture and relationships to the land *change* due to international migration. Moreover, here we illustrated how “transnationalism from below” (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998) operates at the local level in Guatemalan sending communities. Continued research in these communities over the next few decades will provide more information about the impacts of migration on Guatemalan lives and development. We then caution against hasty claims about the impacts of migration on development. Indeed, we can document migration-related change, but we call for more longitudinal studies like the Mexican Migration Project led by Douglas Massey and colleagues. Because migration is becoming such an important component in the economy and society of Guatemala, continued and larger-scale studies are imperative.

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