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Guatemalan Mobility: Understanding Indigenous and Ladino Migration Through a Critical
Analysis of Key Literature

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Latin American and Iberian Studies

by

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December 2020

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December 2020

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Analysis of Key Literature

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by

Katia Rodriguez

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Indigenous migrants from Guatemala, especially to Indigenous women whose experiences have been silenced for far too long. Brave women that engage in a treacherous journey to be free of systemic violence. Indigenous women who are much more than victims.

Este trabajo lo dedico a mis abuelitos Eduarda Argueta y Candido Lemus quienes desde niña me inspiraron a soñar y a luchar para poder llegar hasta este momento. A mis padres Rene Rodriguez, Dilma Lemus y José Ortega por el amor y apoyo incondicional que me brindan. Especialmente mi madre Dilma Lemus, una mujer luchadora que me enseña todos los días a no rendirme. Gracias mamá por creer en mí cuando yo no creía en mí misma, esto es para ti. A mi hermana gracias por cuidarme y creer en mí. Justain and Alexa this is for you. A mi familia por su apoyo, espero hacerlos sentir muy orgullosos. A mi familia en Honduras esto está dedicado a ustedes. Quiero agradecer a una persona muy especial que me apoyo en todos mis años de educación superior, Idaul Villatoro, gracias por su ayuda y su cariño. Los quiero mucho.

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Throughout the process of writing this thesis people questioned my identity and the reasons for working with and for Indigenous migrants from Guatemala. I work to lift the voices of a community that has been neglected by different institutions. As an ally to Indigenous migrants, I work with and for Indigenous communities from Guatemala and other Central American countries.

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ABSTRACT

Guatemalan Mobility: Understanding Indigenous and Ladino Migration Through a Critical

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by

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The study of Guatemalan migration is an emerging field which has received a lot of scholarly attention in recent years due to the increase in Central American migration. Guatemalan migration, in particular, is oftentimes analyzed from a political perspective with less analytical attention on Indigenous migration. This critical review of the field of Guatemalan Studies attempts to understand how the political unrest of the country has caused the migration of Guatemalans, by utilizing four key contemporary books that contribute to the emergent field of Guatemalan Studies. The analysis of these four key books demonstrate that migration from Guatemala is not always caused because of political instability, there are different factors such as violence, gender norms, and economic instability that influences decisions to migrate. To some extent, these four contemporary books still lack indigeneity as a central focus of their framework. Indigeneity is often presented as a point of comparison but not necessarily as a central tenet. A focus on indigeneity allows for a better vantage point to understand how Indigenous migration functions within different forms of colonialism and settlement.

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Introduction

Locating Indigeneity and Gender within Guatemalan Studies

A vast area of literature examines the causes and consequences of migration from Central America. For instance, studies within anthropology since the 1970s have expanded within migration studies often using cross-cultural frameworks.¹ Variations in international migration are routinely explained in economic terms² and political science explores the role of the state in regulating migration flows.³ Studies within sociology points to the importance of social networks between sending and receiving societies.⁴ Each of these fields examine the economic, political and cultural integration of migrants into their host society, as well as the reactions and attitudes of “natives” towards migration. While there has been much research on international migration, “both before and after the impact of the recession became evident there were many studies and publications on international migration”⁵ a few researchers have taken the migration of Indigenous people into consideration. Unfortunately, “official data on the migration of indigenous peoples as well as policies to aid indigenous migrant communities remain limited.”⁶ In the article “International Migration and Indigenous Peoples

¹ Brettell, Caroline. "Theorizing migration in anthropology." *Migration theory. Talking across disciplines* (2000): 97-137.

² Hollifield, James F. "The politics of international migration." *Migration theory: Talking across disciplines* (2000): 137-186.

³ Artistide Zolberg was among the first to try to insert political variables into the migration studies field.

⁴ Douglas Massey, who was one of the first sociologists, Hollifield, James F. "The politics of international migration." *Migration theory: Talking across disciplines* (2000): 137-186.

⁵ Oyarce, Ana María, Fabiana Del Popolo, and Jorge Martínez Pizarro. "International Migration and Indigenous Peoples in Latin America." *Revista Latinoamericana de Población* 3, no. 4-5 (2009): 143-163.

⁶ Trujano, Carlos Yescas Angeles. *Indigenous Routes: A framework for understanding indigenous migration*. Hammersmith Press, 2008, 8.

in Latin America,” the authors mention that Indigenous migration has “only recently come strongly to the fore, mainly propelled by Indigenous organizations themselves.”⁷ The research that does exist is due to the concerted efforts of Indigenous organizations, and their interest to shed light into the social situation of Indigenous people who migrate to Western countries.

Contemporary literature on Indigenous migration concentrates primarily on the migration of Indigenous communities from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico to the United States, because of their significant growth in the United States since around the 1980s.⁸ Researchers have concentrated on Mexican Indigenous migration for many years, creating a strong presence of Oaxacan Indigenous migrants within the migration literature. This is important because it helped create a framework to understand Indigenous migration in general. Yet, it also homogenized the migration experience and identity of unique Indigenous people from different parts of Latin America:

Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) point out that the transnational studies of the 1990s generally present a more local than transnational image and a homogenized general image of individuals, families, and communities as transnational. This critique applies to the studies of indigenous migration that are dominated by the experience of Mixtec and Zapotec migrants.⁹

⁷ Oyarce, Del Popolo, and Pizarro. "International Migration and Indigenous Peoples in Latin America." 146.

⁸ See Robson, James P., and Raymond Wiest. "Transnational migration, customary governance, and the future of community: A case study from Oaxaca, Mexico." *Latin American Perspectives* 41, no. 3 (2014): 103-117. PP 106 and Sanchez, Daina. "Racial and structural discrimination toward the children of Indigenous Mexican Immigrants." *Race and Social Problems* 10, no. 4 (2018): 306-319.

⁹ Ortiz, Laura Velasco, and Dolores París Pombo. "Indigenous migration in Mexico and Central America: Interethnic relations and identity transformations." (2014): 5-25, 11.

There is another group of Indigenous migrants that have also had a significant growth in the United States since the early 1960s but have not received as much attention from researchers and academics. In particular, Indigenous migrants from Guatemala have an extended history of migration, across hemispheres and international borders. This thesis makes the case to shift our attention to Guatemala.

It is imperative to create more research on the migration of Indigenous people because it helps better understand the vulnerability and the exclusion that they suffer. The lack of research contributes to the negation of Indigenous people's existence in current history. Therefore, the goal of this critical review of the field of Guatemalan Studies is to analyze how the political unrest influences the migration of Indigenous people from Guatemala. To analyze their migration process not only from a political or economic point of view, but how the combination of different aspects impacts decisions to risk the migration. I use the term "Guatemala Studies" to signal attention to the specificity of Guatemala and to distinguish its political struggles from their neighboring countries. For this critical review, I will be using four key books in order to understand the emerging direction of Guatemalan Studies and how these key books bring into the conversation the topic of indigeneity.

The first book, *Guatemala- U.S. Migration: Transforming Regions* (2014) by Susanne Jonas and Néstor Rodríguez, serves as an introductory book to the field of Guatemalan Studies and Guatemala migration. The second book, *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State* (2019) by Shannon Speed focuses on the migration and detention of Indigenous women from Central America in the United States. The third book, *Migranthood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation* (2020) by Lauren Heidbrink explores the deportation of Indigenous youth who migrate unaccompanied

from Guatemala to Mexico and to the United States. The last book *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles: Understanding Their Immigration* (1998) by Gabrielle Kohpahl examines the increasing number of Guatemala women migrating to the United States and looks into the diverse reasons for their migration. These four books with the exception of *Voice of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles*, are all recently published within the last six years. Each of these books contributes to a different aspect of Indigenous migration from Guatemala, such as gender, deportation, violence, and youth migration.

Since the focus of the critical review of the field of Guatemalan Studies, concentrates heavily on Indigenous migration, it is important to define the use of both indigeneity and Indigenous. The term indigeneity is the “quality of being indigenous,” while identifying as indigenous is an act of self-identification. To identify as Indigenous relates to natural resources, distinct social, economic or political systems, and distant language, culture and beliefs.¹⁰ Although Indigenous identity can be hard to define, there have been some issues pertaining to the definitions that try to be inclusive of all of the aspects that contribute to the identity of an Indigenous person. It is important to note that being Indigenous does not equate to being primitive to the land. It is not about who was there first, but rather who is most rooted to the land. This includes familiarity with the soil, weather patterns, and its environmental living beings such as plants, animals, and people.

In *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State* (2019) Shannon Speed emphasizes how even Indigenous people tend to be settlers in the land of other Indigenous people, when they migrate and they settle in an area that belong to others they become implicated in settler-colonialism. While they engage and

¹⁰ Trujano, *Indigenous Routes*, 2008.

become part of the settler-colonialism, they do so because they are forced to when they are being displaced from their land. The concept of settler-colonialism, as defined by Speed, means: that settler colonialism is a structure and not an event, and that Guatemala and the rest of Latin America should be viewed through the lens of settler colonialism in which Indigenous people through violence are dispossessed of their land and force to migrate, moving through settler spaces.¹¹ Spanish colonialism is not different from British colonialism; Latin America cannot be viewed only as labor extraction because it is also composed of land dispossession.¹² Therefore, it is important to make the distinction between who is best rooted to the land and who was there first.

It is also important to mention that the act of migration is not new. Many cultures have experienced migration for decades, which is also the case for Indigenous immigrants, and Latin American Indigenous migration is often characterized as “a multiethnic phenomenon that is much older than mestizo migration.”¹³ It is necessary to discuss that the notion of migration through the driving forces of colonialism is not an event of the past. In the twenty-first century the scars of colonialism continue to contribute to the migration of Indigenous people to Western countries. The forced migration of Indigenous people can be traced back since the colonization of Latin American by the Spaniards in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, “contemporary indigenous migration contains traces of the ancient movement of colonization through pre- and post-conquest ethnic territories with new paths of industrialization and economic globalization.”¹⁴ *Incarcerated Stories*, discussed a few pages

¹¹ Speed, *Incarcerated Stories*, 18.

¹² Speed, *Incarcerated Stories*, 19.

¹³ Ortiz and Pombo, Indigenous migration in Mexico and Central America, 5.

¹⁴ Ortiz and Pombo, 5.

later, stresses how Indigenous women from Guatemala are driven to migration because of the forces of colonialism.

The international migration of Indigenous people from Guatemala to the United States can also be recognized as a form of transnational migration. The term transnationality is defined by Anju Mary Paul as: “migrants can develop significant networks in their host country(ies), while their temporary migrant status means that they can never completely lose their connection with their origin country.”¹⁵ This is most certainly the case of Indigenous migrants, who have a transnational identity, because of their strong community ties in their home country¹⁶ as well as the new networks in their host country and their participation with Indigenous organizations.

Transnational migration is a key aspect of Indigenous Guatemala migration, because in the most successful migration settlement of Indigenous people from Guatemala in the United States they have managed to create a strong link between the city where they live in the United States and their hometown. Remittances become a significant part of transnational migration, sending money to their family members to pay for loans, for the education of their children or simply for the development of their communities’ back home; these remittances contribute to the connection between the U.S. and Guatemala. All these are exposed in *Guatemala-U.S. Migration*, which details how Indigenous people in Houston managed to maintain a strong connection to their hometown through remittances while also creating a community in Houston very similar to their community in Guatemala.

¹⁵ Paul, Anju Mary. *Multinational maids: stepwise migration in a global labor market*. Cambridge University Press, 2017, 23.

¹⁶ Ortiz and Pombo, 5.

Guatemalan migration is oftentimes analyzed from a Civil War framework. Each of the four books analyzed in the critical review make use of the period of the Guatemalan Civil War(s) to set the stage for Indigenous migration. War is one of the causes of the first wave of migration and because Indigenous people were one of the most affected groups during the armed conflict, it has had a major impact on the migration and settlement of Guatemalan Indigenous communities, “within only a few years, army offensives involved numerous massacres and destruction of over 400 Mayan villages by the military's own account.”¹⁷ Economic disparities have also contributed to the migration of Indigenous people as well as political instability of Guatemala, “poverty and economic instability were major factors for Guatemalans, usually entire families, deciding to leave the country for a better life.”¹⁸ The economic disparities can be traced back to the Civil War and to natural disasters that have occurred in Guatemala, that have also affected Indigenous people the most because they live in the highlands and many of them have not been able to recover from those damages. Also, the field of Guatemalan Studies is increasingly influenced by younger people and scholars that are Indigenous not necessarily from Guatemala but understand the need to bring Indigenous migration from Guatemala into an academic setting.

Moreover, recent events that have influenced the field of Guatemalan Studies and the lens through which migration is analyzed are the recent caravans of migrants from Central America coming to the United States “although the migrant caravan is not a new

¹⁷ Hiller, Patrick T., J. P. Linstroth, and Paloma Ayala Vela. “I am Maya, not Guatemalan, nor Hispanic”—the Belongingness of Mayas in Southern Florida.” In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol. 10, no. 3. 2009, 3.

¹⁸ Hiller, Linstroth, and Ayala Vela, “I am Maya, not Guatemalan, nor Hispanic”, 3.

phenomenon, it has received increasing global attention within recent years.”¹⁹ In particular, the humanitarian crisis with unaccompanied children migrating to the United States affected all Central American countries but especially Guatemala. Indigenous children and youth from Guatemala were one of the groups who migrated the most to the United States and Mexico, “By 2019, Guatemalans comprised 40 percent of all unaccompanied children.”²⁰ Therefore, the book *Migranthood* is an important contribution to the field of Guatemalan Studies and it really opens the door for more research to continue exploring this topic that is so timely for the identity of Indigenous migrants. *Migranthood*, as discussed later, provides a key discussion about the agency of youth.

This critical review contributes to the field of Guatemalan Studies by bringing into conversation four key books that contribute to the field but also points at the direction in which the field of Guatemalan Studies is heading. This critical review attempts to analyze the field not from a political perspective per se, but from a combination of factors that influence the migration of Indigenous people from Guatemala. It attempts to understand how the political unrest affects the decision to migrate to the United States and to what extent the four key books previously mentioned discuss indigeneity or how central indigeneity is for these books. Also, these four key books make the distinction between Central American Studies and the field of Guatemalan Studies.

The way in which migration is analyzed not from a Central American focused but from a Guatemalan, Indigenous concentration is valuable, because Central America cannot be

¹⁹ Wurtz, Heather M. "A movement in motion: collective mobility and embodied practice in the central American migrant caravan." *Mobilities* (2020): 1-15.

²⁰ Heidbrink, Lauren. *Migranthood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation*. Stanford University Press. (2020), 9.

analyzed as a whole because even though they might have similar political and economic systems, Indigenous people and citizens in general have had different experiences that need to be recognized. Therefore, analyzing Guatemalan migration separate from Central American migration is one of the greatest contributions of these books to the field of Guatemalan studies. The field of Guatemalan studies is without a doubt a field that still needs development, but these four books concentrated on Guatemala demonstrate that the field can continue to grow and perhaps in the future have the same impact as Mexican Indigenous migration to the United States.

Chapter 1

Transnational Migration: Guatemalans Moving Across Regions

The study of Guatemalan migration is an emerging field which has received a lot of attention in recent years due to the increase in Central American migration. This chapter reviews a key book that contributes to the literature of Guatemalan migration, as well as Central American Studies. Specifically, the book contributes our understanding of the developing field of Guatemalan Studies. The book *Guatemala-U.S. Migration: Transforming Regions* (2014) is a comprehensive study that analyzes Guatemalan migration to the United States since the 1970s to the present. *Guatemala- U.S. Migration* is a collaboration between the authors Susanne Jonas and Néstor Rodríguez.²¹ Both Jonas and Rodríguez have extensive experience conducting research on Guatemala and Guatemalan migration. Therefore, the book *Guatemala-U.S. Migration: Transforming Regions* is the best place to start learning about the migration process through which Guatemalan migrants engage, how their migration process looks like and the spaces where they arrive and settle.

The book is organized in six detailed chapters, with each chapter analyzing different aspects of Guatemalan migration. Their opening chapter is a theoretical perspective of Guatemalan migration and provides an overview of the main themes, as well as how the book came to be. Although the main focus of the book is Guatemalan migration, in this chapter and throughout the book Jonas and Rodríguez include Central America as part of their

²¹ Since the 1990s, she has become a specialist on Guatemalan/ Central American migration. Néstor Rodríguez, his present research focuses on Guatemalan migration, U.S. deportations to Mexico and Central America.

analysis. When Jonas and Rodriguez refer to Central America, they refer to the “Northern Triangle” composed of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador,²² the focus is extended to these areas in order to understand the migration process and the regionalization. The concept of the “Northern Triangle” came to be in 1991 with Guatemala and El Salvador signing a free trade agreement and in 1992 Honduras became part of the agreement forming the “Northern Triangle.”²³ The emphasis of the concept was on the economic integration of the Central American countries, since at the time of the agreement they had similar conditions. However, over the years these countries have changed and they no longer have the same economic, political, and social conditions. For this reason, the term is problematic and some scholars discourage the use of the phrase the “Northern Triangle”. Their second chapter focuses on the various phases of migration, which has been divided into five key phases and outlined below.

Phase one “Fleeing Social Turmoil 1977-1985”, describes the first wave of migration due to violence caused by the government during the civil war years. Phase one also shapes the stage for the rest of the migration process. After fleeing the civil war, the legalization process began for many Guatemalan migrants as well as Salvadorans, through The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986- 1988.²⁴ This legalization process led to one of the most important phases according to Jonas and Rodriguez, phase three. This was an important period because:

It was in this phase that the annual number of admitted Guatemalan immigrants peaked in Guatemalan immigration in the United States... the estimated average

²² Jonas and Rodriguez, *Guatemala-U.S. Migration*, 1.

²³ Consultorio de Comercio Exterior, Triángulo norte centroamericano, 2008.

<https://www.icesi.edu.co/blogs/icecomex/2008/10/17/triangulo-norte-centroamericano/>

²⁴ The first major revision of America’s immigration laws in decades, given amnesty to Guatemalan migrants who entered the United States before the 1980s.

annual volume of total Guatemalan immigration (legal and undocumented) reached the highest point, at 45,504.²⁵

In phase four, the “number of undocumented migrants was greater than the number of legal Guatemala migrants”²⁶ and the migration pattern looked similar to that of phase one. It also looked different because the Guatemalan-origin population and U.S. born Guatemalans participated in more mainstream organizations than they had done in previous phases. The last phase examines the inclusion and exclusion of Guatemalan migrants from legal and public view in the United States from 2004 to the present.

An important aspect of *Guatemala-U.S. Migration* is the fact that Jonas and Rodriguez include Mexico as part of the analysis of Guatemalan migration. This is crucial because Mexico serves as the bridge between Central America and the United States. In order for Central Americans to arrive in the United States they have to go through Mexico, therefore a complete and strong analysis necessitates the inclusion of the experiences of migrants crossing through Mexico. In the case of Guatemala before and during the Civil War, Mayans and ladinos (non-Indigenous)²⁷ would migrate to Mexico. In her article “Guatemala Migration in Times of Civil War and Post-War Challenges” Jonas states that at beginning of the Civil War in 1960 there was no significant migration to the United States, instead “the 1960s phase sparked a trickle of political emigrants primarily to Mexico, joining a pre-existing diaspora of largely professional, middle-class Guatemalan political exiles in Mexico

²⁵ Jonas and Rodriguez, 47.

²⁶ Jonas and Rodriguez, 53.

²⁷ Ladinos are non-Indigenous Guatemalans; they are the equivalent of mestizos in Mexico. Mix of Indigenous people with Spaniards. Batz, Giovanni. "Maya cultural resistance in Los Angeles: The recovery of identity and culture among Maya youth." *Latin American Perspectives* 41, no. 3 (2014): 194-207.

City."²⁸ Mexico was the destination for political exiles during the first years of the Civil War hence the importance of Mexico in the Guatemalan migration process.

One of the many strengths of *Guatemala- U.S. Migration* is the inclusion of both populations in the case study of Guatemala; ladinos and Mayan migrants. Many case studies either focus on Indigenous migrants exclusively or only on ladino migrants. Although there are some case studies that are inclusive of both populations, it is often broad in context. However, Jonas and Rodriguez include an analysis of the experience of ladinos and Mayans in two different cities in the United States. The experiences of ladinos and Mayans are starkly different in Guatemala and in the United States, thus having a study that compares both cases is fundamental to understanding Guatemalan migration. Houston, Texas and San Francisco, California are the two gateway cities compared by Jonas and Rodriguez. In this comparison they detail the ways in which Guatemalan migrants transform the space where they settle. They also analyze the economic situation of the cities at the moment of their arrival and the ways in which the migrants contribute to that economy. In including economic statistics, Jonas and Rodriguez emphasize the importance of Guatemalan migrants within an economic context or as valuable workers to the U.S. economy. However, this argument Jonas and Rodriguez places an economic value on Guatemala migrants and converts them into a commodity for the U.S. economy, although their values truly should be considered beyond their economic contributions.

Chapter four is dedicated to the analysis of Mayan migrants who arrived in Houston, and the ways in which their settlement transformed Houston's structure. According to Jonas and

²⁸ Jonas, Susanne. "Guatemalan migration in times of civil war and post-war challenges." *Migration Policy Institute* 27 (2013), 2.

Rodriguez, it was in the early 1980s that Guatemalan migrants started arriving in Houston.²⁹

The group of Mayan migrants in this particular study are from the “*municipio*”³⁰ of San Cristóbal Totonicapán in the western highlands of Guatemala. In the 1980s the population living in San Cristóbal Totonicapán were mainly artisans and peasants. Sancristobalenses were not directly affected by the civil war, “but the conflict in surrounding areas and accompanying economic decline pressured many sancristobalenses to emigrate.”³¹ The arrival of Mayans in Houston overlapped with the economic recession of the metropolitan area.³² The recession allowed migrants to locate housing in areas that were dominated by white middle class residents.

A compelling finding from Jonas and Rodriguez’s case study is how Houston adapted to the arrival of Mayan migrants and ladinos as well. In order to attract migrants, apartment owners changed “apartment names from English to Spanish, replacing front office staff with bilingual rental agents.”³³ In this case Mayans had a much better outcome settling in Houston, in part because of the recession they were able to acquire houses and once they were able to legalize their status, they had better job opportunities. Mayans who established livelihoods in Houston had a more successful long term settlement than other Mayans and ladinos in other parts of the United States.

The case of Mayans in Houston is important because they created a community that not only transformed the space of Houston but prepared itself for future cohorts of migrants. But

²⁹ Jonas and Rodriguez, 115.

³⁰ The departments of Guatemala are divided into 340 municipalities or *municipios*.

³¹ Jonas and Rodriguez, 116.

³² Jonas and Rodriguez, 119.

³³ Jonas and Rodriguez, 119.

the later waves of migration were not as successful as the first one, in large part because of their immigration status. Mayan migration in Houston is so significant that there are more case studies that take place within that metropolitan region, for example Jacqueline Maria Hagan's *Deciding to be Legal: A Maya Community in Houston* (1994). Hagan's early study tries to understand the active role of Mayans in Houston regarding immigration policies.

In contrast to Mayans who settled in Houston, ladinos who migrated and settled in San Francisco, had more difficulty affording housing. Jonas and Rodriguez focused on migrants living in the Mission District, which was known as "little Central America"³⁴ since the presence of Central Americans was noticeable in the District. Unlike in Houston, Guatemalans were not able to create a community like the one that was built in Houston, instead as described by the authors it remained a "comunidad fragmentada (fragmented community)."³⁵ They become part of one broad, homogeneous Latino community. Also, one of the many factors that influenced the lack of opportunities were the challenges in securing affordable housing and the difficulty of moving out of low paying jobs. The rapid development of San Francisco as a high-technology sector made life that much more difficult for Indigenous migrants to find some stability much less to form meaningful communities.³⁶

With the area's burgeoning high-technology sector, came the displacement of Latinos and Guatemala ladinos from Latino neighborhoods. It is important to mention, that even though Guatemalans did not have as many opportunities in order to have a successful settlement in San Francisco, the city was indeed welcoming. Jonas and Rodriguez write that

³⁴ Jonas and Rodriguez, 163.

³⁵ Jonas and Rodriguez, 186.

³⁶ Jonas and Rodriguez, 187.

“...Central Americans and specifically Guatemalans...were received with great sympathy.”³⁷

There were also a lot of organizations that helped Guatemalans adjust their immigration status in San Francisco.

The contrasts between the two case studies gives a much better understanding on the immigration process and settlement of Guatemalan migrants, ladinos and Mayans alike. Jones and Rodriguez provide a comprehensive picture of the different phases of migration, and how the spaces through which they are crossing are transformed, because as they demonstrate in the book not only are migrants influenced by the spaces through which they cross and settle but their spaces are also influenced by their presence.

In addition, one of the central contributions of their book is the development of the transregional term. Although the term is not coined by Jonas and Rodriguez, it is applied differently to the field of Guatemalan Studies. Usually the term transnational is used to describe the process of moving across international borders and the relationship that is built between the host country and the country of origin. According to Jonas and Rodriguez “transnational processes span across nation-state boundaries; transregional processes span throughout an entire region, in addition to across borders.”³⁸ A transregional framework is used to connect all the regions in which Guatemalan migrants are present.

Another important aspect about Guatemalan migration is the agency that migrants exercise when they decide to migrate. Jonas and Rodriguez state that “the exercise of agency by Central American migrants has been crucial in shaping their own experiences.”³⁹ In the case of Mayans in Houston they exercise their agency by demanding better working

³⁷ Jonas and Rodriguez, 166.

³⁸ Jonas and Rodriguez, 14.

³⁹ Jonas and Rodriguez, 11.

conditions or changing jobs when their rights were being violated, “in one store, sancristobalense workers staged a temporary walkout when they felt they were being treated unfairly.”⁴⁰ They built better working and living conditions in Houston, making their experiences different from Guatemalan migrants in San Francisco.

Overall, *Guatemala- U.S. Migration: Transforming Regions* is a valuable contribution to the literature of Guatemalan migration. The book’s analysis demonstrates how important it is to make the distinction between Mayans and ladinos, since race and colorism impacts how one’s migration structures their experiences. Moreover, the analysis is concentrated mostly on first generation migrants, with second and third generations mentioned broadly. This is one area that needs more research and development. It would be beneficial to see what is the situation of younger generations in comparison to first generation Guatemalan migrants. Also, even though Jonas and Rodriguez mentioned the situation of Indigenous women in the area of Houston, it was also referenced within a broader context and not with specific detail. There was no emphasis on gender although gender structures the migration experience of Indigenous migrants as well. Ultimately, *Guatemala- U.S. Migration: Transforming Regions* introduces us to the emerging Guatemalan field of study and its detailed analysis focuses on Guatemalan migrants in the United States and Mexico as well. It allows for the understanding of Guatemalan Studies and alerts readers of how much more research needs to be done.

⁴⁰ Jonas and Rodriguez, 132.

Chapter 2

Gender: Indigenous Women Migrants and State Violence

The field of Guatemalan Studies has opened the door for scholars to discuss Guatemalan migration not only in terms of politics and economics, but to focus on gender and indigeneity. The book *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles: Understanding their Immigration* (1998) uniquely shaped the direction of Guatemalan studies in terms of gender by examining why Guatemalan women are migrating more than Guatemalan men. Although the book introduces violence as one of the factors that influences the migration of Guatemalan women, the author Gabrielle Kohpahl does not explore the different forms of violence women experience in Guatemala that eventually forces them to make the long trek north. However, this book opened the door for other researchers and scholars to expand on this topic. Shannon Speed picks up where *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles* left off in her book *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler- Capitalist State* (2019).

In *Incarcerated Stories*, Shannon Speed focuses on Indigenous women migrants that flee their home country in search of refuge in the United States. Speed demonstrates the different ways in which Indigenous women face levels of systematic violence through every part of their journey. Speed uses oral histories to record the *testimonios* of Indigenous women in U.S. detention centers. *Incarcerated Stories*, starts by exploring the conditions in which these migrants live in their home countries and the violence that they face in their communities. Later on in the book she recounts the stories that Indigenous women narrate while they are detained in a private immigration center. Shannon Speed's book contributes to the

understanding of Indigenous women migration by studying how gender and state violence are linked and the effects that state violence has on Indigenous immigrants in their home countries and in the United States. Moreover, Speed is critical about the impact that settler state and neoliberalism has on the migration process of Indigenous women. Throughout Speed's book, settler state is defined as "independent nation-states [that] sought to establish their sovereignty and control over the populations within their territories, in part by extending legal jurisdiction over them"⁴¹ and neoliberalism as the "centralization of wealth and power in the hands of a few, achieved through dispossession of the public's wealth or land through privatization."⁴² Together, these concepts structure Speed's framing of violence on Indigenous communities and their "legal" elimination.

As Kohpahl introduced her book, *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles*, with the insistence that the face of migration is changing.⁴³ Kohpahl meant that more women are migrating to the United States. The high levels of violence in Guatemala caused women to migrate in record numbers. As Shannon Speed demonstrates this violence comes from multiple sources. During the civil war, Mayans constituted the majority of victims of violence. Since then, violence has expanded to other the Indigenous communities.⁴⁴ This prompted Indigenous people to migrate internationally. Due to its close proximity, Mexico was their first arrival stop before continuing to the United States. While in Mexico,

⁴¹ Speed, 22.

⁴² Speed, 25.

⁴³ Kohpahl, Gabriele. *Voices of Guatemalan women in Los Angeles: Understanding their immigration*. Taylor & Francis, 1998.

⁴⁴ Jonas, Susanne. "Guatemalan migration in times of civil war and post-war challenges." *Migration Policy Institute* 27 (2013).

Indigenous women face more threat and violence because of their gender or because they look Indigenous or are suspected of being from Central America. Given the fact that they are undocumented immigrants in Mexico, they are also subjected to violence from the police and the Mexican state.

Guatemalan Indigenous women have also migrated because of escalating domestic violence, which is one of the most prevailing types of violence. This type of violence was also mentioned in Kohpahl's book *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles* (1998). Indigenous women are forced to migrate in order to escape the violence they are suffering at the hands of their husbands, "other family members."⁴⁵ Speeds demonstrates this violence through the oral stories told by the Indigenous immigrants interviewed at detention centers in the U.S. Many of the stories transcribed by Speed are strong and heartbreaking. Through these stories, we realize how these women are made vulnerable and often victims of violence within their own families. They are not able to rely on the authorities because they also perpetuate the violence towards Indigenous women.

Furthermore, when Indigenous women enter the United States, they are exposed to different forms of subtle violence "the condition of being incarcerated has led to deepened emotional trauma"⁴⁶ it is not only physical but also emotional violence. An example of this comes in the form of language. Speed retells the story of two Mam-speaking women, one of them "requested a Mam interpreter, only to find that it took months to procure one, making her deportation officer hostile to her," the other Mam-speaking woman went through a

⁴⁵ Kohpahl, *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles*, 32.

⁴⁶ Speed, 82.

similar experience and waited for over a year to find an interpreter. According to Speed, “Mam is one of the most prevalent Mayan languages in the United States,” and denounces the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) implementation of U.S. laws as inadequate, and fails to provide even the minimum protection for non-English speakers.⁴⁷ This demonstrates that there is not only a lack of resources to help Indigenous women migrants, but that even if there are resources the U.S government is reluctant to provide any help to this community, because the government argued “that the detention of women and children was necessary”⁴⁸ Therefore, no help was provided just the criticism of the government towards the Department of Homeland Security. If Indigenous people are marginalized within their own country and by their fellow citizens it is not surprising that their situation will be similar once they migrate and settle in the United States, the example being the “the new family prisons”⁴⁹ in which they are placed upon their arrival.

Another form of violence is structural violence, such as exploitation, and symbolic violence, where individuals internalize inequalities and deem it as facts rather than the injustices that they are. Speed refers to the structural violence as one that is systemic. In the book, she explores the conditions by which Indigenous women are treated in U.S. detention centers—this is that same state violence being carried out beyond Guatemalan borders. Speed states “[t]he women at Hutto are isolated from their friends and families and still are vulnerable to intimidation and assault by the guards working there.”⁵⁰ This shows the vulnerable position of Indigenous women migrants. The abuse of human rights in detention

⁴⁷ Speed, *Incarcerated Stories*, 86.

⁴⁸ Speed, 80.

⁴⁹ Speed, 77.

⁵⁰ Speed, 74.

centers, demonstrates power of state policies in making Indigenous women vulnerable and invisible. The violence they experience in the detention center at the hands of the guards is in many cases similar to the one they experience by their domestic partners or family members in their home countries.

Speed based much of her argument of the effects of neoliberalism and settler states. The role that neoliberalism has in forcing Indigenous women to migrate to the United States. Neoliberalism calls for privatization and decentralization, it affects political restructure, resource extraction as well as other institutions that affect vulnerable groups of people. For example, people who rely on relief from the government to make ends meet while holding a job themselves, can be affected by the budget cutbacks imposed by the state onto these relief programs. In *Incarcerated Stories*, Speed states that “neoliberalism engenders inequality through the uneven development of states and through the restructuring of class power in favor of the elites.”⁵¹ How this is achieved is through the imposition of shifts in financial markets, manipulation of crises, tax codes and state redistributions. Neoliberalism creates problems such as violence, that continues to affect vulnerable communities.

One of the contributions of *Incarcerated Stories*, is the creation of the term neoliberal multicriminalism, which derives from neoliberal multiculturalism. Through neoliberal multicriminalism Speed argues that “United States is every bit as “multicriminal,” in the sense of generating a context for, and lack of accountability for, violations of national and international laws and rights, as Mexico, Guatemala, or Honduras.”⁵² The United States is as responsible for the violence that Indigenous women suffer, as the countries where they come

⁵¹ Speed, 25.

⁵² Speed, 6.

from. Speed makes a clear argument about the United States' responsibility of violence produced in Central America and Mexico because of US state-sponsored interventions while serving as the principal market of illegal goods such as drugs.

Speed stresses that the analysis of different women's stories is a way to give visibility to experiences that have been made "invisible". Speed writes, "I want to reveal the multiple ways in which Indigenous women are rendered vulnerable to a range of perpetrators through structures of settler capitalist power, and resist by surviving."⁵³ Speed makes sure to differentiate between being vulnerable and being made vulnerable. These women are made vulnerable by the conditions of settler-colonialism and state policies. Speed's work makes the consequences of settler-colonialism visible.

Without a doubt, Shannon Speed's *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler- Capitalist State* (2019) represents a key book to understanding Indigenous migration from Guatemala and other parts of Central America. It helps to understand the journey of Indigenous women that migrate to the United States, and it uncovers the violence that they suffer prior to migration, during their migration and once they arrived to the host country. Speed sheds light on the state violence that Indigenous women are victims of and how they do not escape the violence from home countries; instead, they face different types of violence in the United States. The vulnerability of Indigenous women is created by nation-states, and reinforced through neoliberal policies. Speed discusses throughout the book, how Indigenous women, due to their race, class, and gender, have faced specific marginalization and violence by the nation-state that cannot be neglected

⁵³ Speed, 5.

or diminished. *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler- Capitalist State (2019)* is pointing to the direction of detention and deportation of Guatemalan immigrants, these are issues that need more research and more attention in Guatemalan Studies.

Chapter 3

Youth Migration: An Act of Love and Familial Responsibility

Young people migrating from Central America to the United States seeking asylum had received intermittent attention in the media and more so since 2014 from scholars, researchers, governmental institutions and the media. Since 2014 over seventy thousand unaccompanied children from the Northern Triangle have arrived in the United States, in what was called a “humanitarian crisis.”⁵⁴ Within these seventy thousand unaccompanied young migrants, a significant number included Indigenous youth migrating from Guatemala. Anthropologist Lauren Heidbrink, whose research focuses on transnational migration, Central America, and youth migration, examines the phenomenon of children migration from Guatemala. In her most recent book *Migranthood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation* (2020) Lauren Heidbrink explores the migration of Indigenous Guatemalan youth, the impact that deportation has on young Indigenous migrants, as well as their own personal desire to migrate.

Migranthood offers much needed research that sheds light on an aspect of migration that has been understudied: the deportation of young Indigenous Guatemalans from the United States and Mexico. For this research, Heidbrink utilized a mixed method and multi-sited approach and the data was collected over multiple years from 2013 to 2017. Longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork, community centered, interviews with stakeholders, surveys, and walking ethnography were some of the methodological approaches used to complete this

⁵⁴ Heidbrink, Lauren. *Migranthood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation*. Stanford University Press. (2020), 1.

fieldwork. Heidbrink shows what it is like to do fieldwork with a mobile population of youth, in constant move between regions.

One of the major contributions of *Migranthood* to the field of Guatemalan Studies is the focus on indigeneity and youth, offering a critical analysis of the impact that state policies have on Indigenous youth migrants and their communities, the different forms of violence that they suffer on their journey to the United States, as well as the profound impact that deportation has on Indigenous young migrants and U.S. citizens. According to Heidbrink, “Guatemalan authorities began to consistently record statistics on child migration only in 2008”⁵⁵ which has created a limited amount of data on child migration. However, the recent limited data shows that “by 2019, Guatemala comprised 40 percent of all unaccompanied children apprehended in the United States”⁵⁶ and that does not include unaccompanied children apprehended in Mexico.

Migranthood does an admirable job in presenting the demographics of this social group and in challenging the category of “unaccompanied child” often used by both the state and the media. Heidbrink convincingly argues that it is important and necessary to define the term “unaccompanied children” to better understand the demographics of the children who are migrating. The average age of unaccompanied children is “over thirteen years and fourteen and a half”⁵⁷ which by Guatemalans structural standards, at that age they would be entering adulthood, according to Heidbrink.

⁵⁵ Heidbrink, 9.

⁵⁶ Heidbrink, 9.

⁵⁷ Heidbrink, 6.

The term “unaccompanied children” itself is problematic because it sends the message that children are migrating alone however as demonstrated in *Migranhood* this is not always the case. In fact, most of the children in Heidbrink’s fieldwork are migrating accompanied by an adult, “...the vast majority were accompanied by customary care providers-extended family, family friends, or community members --- or entrusted to ‘facilitators (smugglers) through the duration of their journeys.”⁵⁸ The category of unaccompanied children creates a discourse in which children are portrayed as abandoned or having irresponsible parents that send them on a dangerous journey.

Like most Indigenous immigrants, Indigenous youth also exercise their agency by making the decision to migrate to the United States. Through *Migranhood*, Heidbrink gives a voice to Indigenous children to express the ways in which they understand their mobility and to demonstrate their level of involvement with their families and communities. For the most part the decision to migrate is made by the children and not necessarily the parents; Heidbrink found that in some cases the parents are not informed of their decision to migrate to the United States. The classification of young Indigenous migrants as unaccompanied ignores the power that they have their own decision making. Indigenous youth make conscious decisions, by understanding the risk of their journey, and often deciding to migrate because it is the only viable option to help their families.

Furthermore, young migrants have engaged in migration for many years before the humanitarian crisis in 2014. According to *Migranhood*, “...Indigenous youth like Domingo have long enlisted migration- internal, seasonal, regional, and increasingly transnational- as a

⁵⁸ Heidbrink, 7.

form of intergenerational caregiving.”⁵⁹ Indigenous youth’s mobility can be understood as multigenerational labor migration, in which they move from their municipality to Guatemala City, or more transnational to Mexico to help their parents work in the field. One example is Alfredo, who “has been participating in migration to the Pacific coast since the age of nine.”⁶⁰ From a young age they migrate with their parents and once they are thirteen, fourteen years old they have the agency to decide to migrate to the U.S. in order to continue supporting their families.

From the perspective of young migrants and their families, their decision to migrate is an act of care, described by parents as: “he will be someone. I am proud. Look, migration is an act of love.”⁶¹ In order to support their families’, young Indigenous migrants move transnationality which at their age is a powerful decision. This decision can be dangerous, but these young migrants are experts on migration, they know how the process works. They understand better than anyone what it is like to migrate to the United States and what are inherent risks involved in migration.⁶² Therefore, it is important to give them a space for them to discuss migration as their expertise, where their knowledge can influence policymakers to create policies that can have a positive impact on their migration.

Heidbrink provides important historical background about Guatemala and connects it to the migration of Indigenous youth’s mobility. Heidbrink as well as other scholars and researchers in the field of Guatemalan Studies emphasize the effect that the civil war had and

⁵⁹ Heidbrink, 33.

⁶⁰ Heidbrink, 35.

⁶¹ Heidbrink, 43.

⁶² Heidbrink, 65.

continues to have on Guatemalan, especially Indigenous communities. Although the state classified Indigenous youth migrants as economic migrants, Heidbrink demonstrates how that category is not suited for unaccompanied children. There are a variety of factors that influence their decision to migrate, such as violence, financial instability, lack of resources, health problems, and/or no access to education.

Many of these young Indigenous migrants come from families that lost their lands during the civil war and/or during natural disasters in which their families were affected so profoundly that they still have not recovered. A lack of support from the government and the institutional racism that exists in Guatemala makes recovery incredibly difficult. As a result, this caused Indigenous youth to start working at young ages to become financially responsible for their families. Not only are they financially responsible at young ages but they also contribute to their households by tending to animals or caring “for younger siblings or aging grandparents” or by cleaning clothes or working in the fields.⁶³ Indigenous youth have always taken responsibility for their families, the financial instability in their towns influences their decision to migrate in order to provide for their parents and siblings.

Another strength of *Migranthood* is the critical analysis of the state policies that criminalize Indigenous youth in the United States, especially the deportation process and what happens once they are deported to Guatemala. According to Heidbrink, “U.S. refugee and asylum policies have systematically discriminated against Central Americans.”⁶⁴ Hence, the mass deportation of young Indigenous migrants who are denied asylum and refugee status.

⁶³ Heidbrink, 69.

⁶⁴ Heidbrink, 49.

In the book *Refuge Beyond Reach: How Rich Democracies Repel Asylum Seekers* (2019) David Fitzgerald argues that rich democratic countries like the United States have developed ways to evade international humanitarian laws, and have found ways to prevent asylum seekers from arriving in the country. When young Indigenous migrants apply for asylum and refugee after being detained at the border and placed in detention centers for months, in some instances, lawyers do not take their cases because many of them will be deported. There are common cases in which Indigenous youth migrate because of financial instability or because they suffered violence perpetuated by authorities or gangs. They also often experience violence on their journey to the United States which does not hold in court.

Let us not forget that the United States has a long history of deportation. As reminded in *Migranthood* the United States created laws that allowed for the deportation of undocumented migrants in 1978 with the Alien Act and much earlier with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Therefore, it is important to be critical of these policies that criminalize young Indigenous migrants and deport them regardless of what conditions they will be returning to. After months of detention Indigenous youth are deported to Guatemala, where they have to face the discrimination of governmental institutions that are supposed to protect them and support them, but instead they are confronted with exclusion.

After their return to Guatemala, Indigenous migrants are also confronted with family debt. Indigenous youth feel responsible for their deportation and for not having the economic means to help pay for the loans that their families requested in order to finance their migration to the United States. But deportation does not only affect young Indigenous migrants, it also affects U.S. citizens that have returned to Guatemala because their parents were deported to Guatemala. This return does not only affect them financially but it also has

an emotional toll on them, “young people absorb the stress, depression, and anxiety of a parent who is deported”⁶⁵ they feel the responsibility to provide emotional support for their parents as well as financial support.

In the last chapter of *Migranthood*, Heidbrink concentrates on “el derecho a no migrar” (the right not to migrate). In this chapter we read how young Indigenous migrants imagine a different world in which they remain in their countries of origin without the need to migrate. The alternative for Indigenous youth is known as the path of decolonization or reclaiming their Indigenous identity to be able to live in Indigenous cosmovision. The right not to migrate, requires their needs to be considered and met, for the government to create policies that protects them from violence, discrimination, access to health care, education and to provide jobs that are accessible to everyone in their communities. The right not to migrate is a political movement in which not only Indigenous youth are involved but also Indigenous women and men from Mexico, “Alma slung a *rebozo* around her head... joining the fight for “the right not to migrate”: *el derecho a no migrar*.”⁶⁶ Indigenous people in Latin America are demanding alternatives to forced migration. Indigenous youth do not engage in migration because it is their desire but because they do not have the resources to stay in Guatemala.

Indeed, *Migranthood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation* is an excellent contribution to the field of Guatemalan Studies and it opens the door for scholars to continue doing research on Indigenous youth migration, in order to contribute to changes within state policies. The methodological approach used by Heidbrink allowed for a detailed, compelling study.

⁶⁵ Heidbrink, 127.

⁶⁶ Andrews, Abigail Leslie. *Undocumented politics: Place, gender, and the pathways of Mexican migrants*. Univ of California Press, 2018, 4.

Heidbrink emphasizes the importance to listening and understanding youth's perspectives.

They are clearly the experts of their journey.

Chapter 4

Women's Path To Freedom: Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles

Central American migrants continue to grow in numbers in the United States. Yet there remains limited information about the identities of this community. The few research produced that does focus on Guatemalan migration is often from a political perspective. Most of the time it lacks mention of either Indigenous migration or gender. However, an emerging Guatemalan field is producing research in which new areas of Guatemalan migration are being explored. This is the case of the book, *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles: Understanding their immigration* (1998) by Gabriele Kohpahl. Considering the year of publication and the fact that during this time there was not extensive research on Guatemala and much less on Guatemalan women *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles* is a significant book that continues to influence recent scholarship. Kohpahl explores the different patterns of Guatemalan migration with a focus on gender, indigeneity and helps readers understand the direction of Guatemalan Studies.

According to Kohpahl, "Guatemalans are the third largest Latin American immigrant community in Southern California"⁶⁷ and yet the attention received by social scientists has been limited. The rapid increase of Guatemalan migration to Los Angeles, occurred during the early 1980s, due to the political violence and the economic crisis in Guatemala. Considering the vast Guatemalan presence in Los Angeles, it is important to question who are the people migrating from Guatemala and what are their motivations for migrating?

⁶⁷ Kohpahl, *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles*, 3.

Statistics confirm that Guatemalan migration to the United States is female dominated since more women are participating in transnational migration than men.⁶⁸ Kohpahl's research attempts to understand this phenomenon, specifically what are the causes that force women to migrate to the United States, which women are migrating, and lastly what are the conditions that women left behind in Guatemala?

In order to understand Guatemalan women's migration, Kohpahl's study compares selected case studies of Guatemalan migrant women who made the decision to migrate with cases of women who did not make their own decision to migrate to the United States. The conditions that influenced women's decision to migrate to the United States vary from personal, marital and familial relationships, gender-role constraints, the socioeconomic and the-then political situation in Guatemala.⁶⁹ The study uses feminist immigration theory to analyze how women's marital status impacts their opportunity to migrate and the intersection of socioeconomics, political causes and marital status. In the case of Guatemala, due to the Civil War(s), the political causes for migration have to be included within the analyses of female migration.

Feminist immigration research, "first drew attention to the importance of gender in the migration process and how it was related to factors such as class, race and socioeconomics."⁷⁰ It also demonstrated that female migration processes are different from male's and it proved that women could also take the initiative to migrate. Guatemalan statistics support the findings of female migration processes, since the data demonstrates that

⁶⁸ Kohpahl, 3.

⁶⁹ Kohpahl, 4.

⁷⁰ Kohpahl, 12.

more women than men migrated to Guatemala City. Moreover, “Guatemala is among those countries which sent more documented women to the United States than men.”⁷¹ However, there are some restrictions that prevent women from migrating, such as gender roles, their age and their marital status. Single women have more freedom in terms of migration, since married women have other responsibilities like child-care that prevent them from migrating.

Although Guatemala is among the countries that sent more documented women to the United States than men, for Kohpahl’ study her population were mostly undocumented Guatemalan refugee women living in Los Angeles. The study is based on field work, concentrated on Westlake, Pico Union and South Central Los Angeles, that began in June 1992 and continued over a one-year period. There were in total twenty-eight Guatemalan women interviewed, fifteen women were Ladinas and thirteen were Mayan women. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended, in-depth interviews that allowed women to express their own opinion on the issue of migration. Most interviews were conducted in women’s homes, coffee-shops, a church auditorium and a group meeting at a garage.

As previously mentioned, this research was conducted with mostly undocumented Guatemalan women in Los Angeles. Kohpahl described the experience of working with undocumented refugee women as extremely difficult. The information obtained is sensitive because they do not have a work permit to secure employment in the United States, and the information about women’s life in Guatemala could threaten the lives of their families back in Guatemala. According to Kohpahl, the status of Guatemalan women is unique because “their refugee experience is combined with an undocumented status.”⁷² This occurs because

⁷¹ Kohpahl, 13.

⁷² Kohpahl, 21.

only three percent of Guatemalans that apply for asylum actually received it forcing asylum seekers to live an undocumented life. Even though most Guatemalan women left due to the violent Civil War, few secure asylum including Indigenous women who suffered the repression of the government and the persecution of the military. However, as Kohpahl argues their status continues to be of an undocumented refugee.

Another important distinction that Kohpahl describes in the methodology of her research are the differences in working with ladinas and Mayan women. Ladina women are considered non-indigenous women, who only speak Spanish. For Kohpahl, working with non-Mayan women (ladinas) was easier than working with Mayan women. According to Kohpahl, “most non-Mayan Guatemalan women were literate and from urban centers,”⁷³ most of them were head of household, economically active and played an active role in civic organizations. Meanwhile, Mayan women depended more on their husbands, they mostly spoke K’anjolab with limited Spanish knowledge. It was also difficult for them to have access to the Mayan community because they did not have much interaction with non-Mayan Guatemalans. Even though there were some differences between the Mayan community and non-Mayan community, they both had in common the distrust, at the time of the interviews. This is understandable, because as an undocumented community their information is very sensitive, and it is difficult to trust a stranger who is not part of the community.

Moreover, the distinctions between Mayan women and non-Mayan women are important, because it demonstrates that there are different ethnic groups within Guatemala and that their experiences in Guatemala and in the United States vary according to phenotype, language. *Voices of Guatemala Women in Los Angeles* opens the door to talk

⁷³ Kohpahl, 27.

about indigeneity in Guatemalan Studies, because it not only concentrates on Guatemalan women in general, but it makes a much-needed distinction between ladinas and Mayan women. It acknowledges an ethnic group that has been silent for so many years in Guatemala and in the United States as well. Indigenous women migration has not received much attention, although this book contributes to the acknowledgement of Indigenous women, is very limited. Indigenous women migration is analyzed in terms of reunification with a husband and does not go beyond the reunification, when there are other aspects that also influence Indigenous women migration.

On the other hand, ladinas' motivation to migrate had a lot to do with being left as head of household, due to divorce, abandonment, or perhaps widowed. Other reasons for migrating had to do with the economic crisis of the early eighties in Guatemala as well as the violence produced by the Civil War. Reunification of family is another form of migration that forces women to migrate to the United States or to go back to their home country to reunite with their children left behind.

Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles, contributes to the understanding of Central American migration to the United States, specifically Guatemalan migration. It contributes to the understanding of the field of Guatemalan Studies and in some ways it helps us understand the gendered directions of Guatemalan Studies. The focus on women and the causes that motivate their migration to the United States allows for future research on gender that questions how violence has impacted Guatemalan women. Or, how women oftentimes feel forced to migrate, whether it is transnational migration or international migration.

One of the strengths of the book is the discussion of how the immigration studies has evolved to consider the ways in which feminist studies can be apply to analyze the migration

of Guatemalan women to the United States. Although, feminist theory does have its limitations, namely because it is narrowing focused on proving the economic independency of women that engage in migration. An economic framework is not enough to understand the motivations of Guatemalan women who decide to migrate, a framework that includes other aspects that influence migration is needed. Although the book introduces and presents violence as a factor that might influence women to migrate, it mentions that there is not enough data and research on this specific topic. Therefore, more research is desperately needed in order to have a better understanding on the type of violence that Guatemalan women suffer in Guatemala that forces them to make the decision to migrate to the United States. Or worse, what is their situation once they have arrived to their host country.

Conclusion

Reimagining the Field of Guatemalan Studies

The emergent field of Guatemalan Studies is a field that requires more attention and development. The four key books discussed in this critical review contribute to the growth of this field and point towards new productive directions within the field of Guatemalan Studies. These four books shed light on issues considered exclusive to Guatemala and to the migration of Guatemalans. Each book is multifaceted; they bring into the conversation different features that when placed in conversation or analyzed together, they reveal the importance of developing the field of Guatemalan Studies.

This critical review of the field of Guatemalan Studies also attempted to analyze how the country's political unrest influences the migration of Indigenous people from Guatemala. I also wanted to move from looking at their migration process from a political or economic point of view, as many researchers have done before. This thesis analyzed the field of Guatemalan Studies through four key books that utilized different frameworks to understand the migration of Guatemalan migrants. For this critical review, I reviewed the books: *Guatemala- U.S. Migration: Transforming Regions* (2014) by Susanne Jonas and Néstor Rodríguez, *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State* (2019) by Shannon Speed, *Migranthood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation* (2020) by Lauren Heidbrink, and lastly *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles: Understanding Their Immigration* (1998) by Gabrielle Kohpahl. I analyzed the documentation of migration of Guatemalans to the United States through these four key books and investigated how each author incorporated indigeneity into their work (or not).

This critical review came to be because of the lack of research that exists about Indigenous migration specifically from Guatemala. As Mexico managed to have a space in academia, Guatemala has very little presence in academia. As mentioned before Indigenous migration from Mexico, has a strong presence, because of an uptick in research with Oaxaca migration to the United States.⁷⁴ They have managed to create a community in California that is so strong that it is often referred to as OaxaCalifornia. This is amazing for Indigenous migrants from Mexico to have such a strong presence in California because it allows them to have resources that otherwise would not be available to them. Also, they have created a model that can be followed by Indigenous people from Guatemala in the United States. Not to mention, that the framework created to understand Indigenous migration from Oaxaca might be applied to Indigenous migrants from Guatemala. Their experiences are different, so the framework would have to be adjusted in a way that can be applied to Indigenous migrants from Guatemala to reflect their situation more accurately. Therefore, this critical review attempts to contribute to the emergent field of Guatemalan Studies, to advocate for more academic conversations which will hopefully open the door for future research.

The finding of this critical review indicates that although indigeneity is so essential to Guatemala, it is not necessarily the central focus for many of the books reviewed. In fact, two out of the four books concentrate on Indigenous migrants from Guatemala. That is not to say that the other two books do not mention Indigenous people at all. They are mentioned within a broader context. This is not enough because the experiences of Indigenous people are so different from those of the ladinos, that such studies cannot be reduced to just one chapter of

⁷⁴ Sanchez, Daina. "Racial and structural discrimination toward the children of Indigenous Mexican Immigrants." *Race and Social Problems* 10, no. 4 (2018): 306-319.

a book. *Incarcerated Stories* and *Migranthood* which are the most recent books within the field, make indigeneity the center for their work and they attempted to understand the migration of Indigenous people to the United States, and the ways in which political unrest affects their decision to migrate with a combination of other factors that can be exclusive to Indigenous people. They also reveal that migration for Indigenous people tends to be much older than those of ladinos, whose migration starts internally within Guatemala as they slowly engage in transnational migration. In some cases, transnational migration is the only migration process through which they engage. Some of the contributions of these four books has been to understand the Indigenous identity of the migrants. These books give a space for Indigeneity to be present, it embraces a population that has been silent for many years and continues to be silent not only by Guatemala, but now by the United States as well.

Moreover, these books also contribute to the understanding of Indigenous women migration and ladina migration as well. As mentioned before *Incarcerated Stories* by Shannon Speed is perhaps one of the most complete books in terms of gender, indigeneity and migration. Speed confronts the idea of neoliberalism and settler-colonialism. It shed lights on the violence that Indigenous women suffer in Guatemala and how that violence continues to be perpetuated in the United States and in every part of their migration journey. Gender is not a theme that is present in every book in this critical review, with exception of *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles* by Gabrielle Kohpahl. *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles* does in fact concentrate on women from Guatemala, but is mostly ladina women. Indigenous women only serve as a comparison in *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles*, but they are not necessarily the main focus of the book. Therefore, having *Incarcerated Stories* concentrate on Indigenous women only is so valuable because

there is someone that recognizes how important and central Indigenous women are in the migration process. Gender is a variable that migration studies needs to pay more attention to since more Indigenous women are migrating in comparison to Indigenous men. Thus, future research should focus on different aspects of Guatemalan migration, so readers can have a better understanding of the settlement and migration process of Indigenous women.

Indigeneity and gender were two of the key aspects of this critical review. One new comment about the field of Guatemala Studies is youth migration, an aspect that Heidbrink challenges. Although, Indigenous youth migration is not something new, as proven by *Migranthood* it has a long history, almost as long as Indigenous adults migrating transnationally and internally. *Migranthood* is one of the most innovative books of research in contemporary migration studies in the field of Guatemala studies.

There are some articles that explore how Indigenous youth make sense of their own migration and their families' migration from a Critical Latinx framework. However, this is only applied for Indigenous youth that managed to settle in the United States and their families. It does not apply to Indigenous youth migrating to the United States and who are deported to Guatemala. Deportation is an aspect that affects Indigenous migrants and migrants in general, in this case it depicts a reality that is so unusual for young people and children, but for Indigenous youth it has recently unfolded in greater numbers these past few years.

Youth migration and deportation is another aspect that needs more research. *Migranthood* opens the doors and creates a framework for people willing to contribute to the field of Guatemalan Studies. Indigeneity should be more present in any research done about Guatemala. Charles Hales has remarked that in order to understand Indigenous people,

scholars should work with the dominant population, the ladinos, and from there, understand the social power dynamics and how Indigenous people are affected.⁷⁵ The reality is that the experiences of Indigenous people and their migration cannot be understood through the experience of ladinos. Hence, the importance of the field of Guatemala Studies with a concentration on Indigeneity and all the other aspects such as gender that make up the unique experience of Indigenous migrants.

This critical review attempted to analyze and evaluate four key books that contribute to the understanding of the field of Guatemalan Studies. The four key books, *Guatemala- U.S. Migration: Transforming Regions* (2014) by Susanne Jonas and Néstor Rodríguez, *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State* (2019) by Shannon Speed, *Migranhood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation* (2020) by Lauren Heidbrink, and *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles: Understanding Their Immigration* (1998) by Gabrielle Kohpahl are excellent contributions to the field of Guatemalan Studies. One of the main goals was to analyze the field of Guatemalan Studies from a different point of view that was not so focused on politics, that was possible because the framework used in each book was so diverse. These four key books allow readers to realize the agency that Guatemalan migrants have and how they exercise that agency when they move across regions. All these can be found in the emergent field of Guatemalan Studies.

⁷⁵ Charles, Hale. Classroom Lecture. Latin American & Iberian Studies 200. UC Santa Barbara. November, 30, 2020.

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