

1 Introduction

DURING THE 1980s, unprecedented numbers of Salvadorans and Guatemalans, uprooted by war and violence in their own countries, immigrated to Southern California. It was a time when the region¹ was both reinventing itself as a prospective capital of the Pacific Rim and being reinvented through the juxtaposition of old and new ethnic groups as a major multicultural center. Salvadorans and Guatemalans arriving from violence-torn countries thus encountered a society in the throes of change, to which they adapted in various ways and, in turn, contributed. This encounter represents a significant chapter in the history of immigration to the United States, a chapter important to understanding the immigrant experience in the contemporary period.

Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigration to Southern California during the 1980s was part of a massive migration of Central Americans both within their respective countries and across borders as a result of revolution and counterrevolution in Nicaragua, civil war in El Salvador, and counterinsurgency in Guatemala. In 1979, following a protracted revolution against the Somoza dynasty, which had controlled the government since the 1930s, the Sandinistas took power in Nicaragua, only to face a U.S.-supported counterrevolutionary war that lasted for most of the decade. In 1980, insurgent groups in El Salvador joined forces to form the FMLN (Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation), which confronted both government forces and right-wing death squads in a civil war that lasted into the early 1990s. In Guatemala, a prolonged but relatively hidden war between intermittent insurgent groups and successive military governments intensified with the emergence of a new revolutionary movement in the 1970s and the instigation of a brutal counterinsurgency campaign by the military that decimated numerous indigenous communities in the northern altiplano.

The political turmoil resulted in an unprecedented surge in internal, regional, and international migration, although the trajectories followed by refugees and migrants had to a large extent been established through previous migration. Refugees from rural areas fled to provincial or departmental capitals and from there to major cities, or across borders

into neighboring countries: Nicaraguans into Costa Rica or Honduras, Salvadorans into Honduras, Guatemalans into Mexico. Significant numbers made their way to the United States, and for Guatemalans and Salvadorans, California, particularly the Los Angeles area, was a major destination (Fagen 1988; Aguayo and Fagen 1988).

Central Americans had been coming in small numbers to the Los Angeles area for several decades, but, according to the 1970 census, the foreign-born Central American population was still relatively small, 22,400, and Salvadorans and Guatemalans combined were only 37 percent of the total.² The number of Central Americans coming to the region grew rapidly during the 1970s, and there was a dramatic shift in countries of origin: by 1980 the Salvadoran and Guatemalan populations together constituted over two-thirds of the total Central American population in the area, which totaled 125,200. With the added impetus of political turmoil in their countries of origin, the population of Guatemalans and Salvadorans increased over four times during the 1980s. By 1990 they represented 80 percent of the Central American population in the Los Angeles region, now totaling 456,146, and 59 percent of the Guatemalans and 53 percent of the Salvadorans in the country (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996, 95; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993, 14, 20).³

Although Mexico continues to be the major source of immigration to the United States and Southern California, Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants have been recognized as among the significant new Latino groups (Tomás Rivera Policy Institute/NALEO, 1997a). They differ from many other immigrant groups, however, in that they are neither strictly economic migrants nor accepted as refugees, but have the characteristics of both. Although many fled political persecution or, more generally, conditions resulting from war and civil unrest, their applications for asylum were routinely denied during the 1980s, and they lacked access to refugee assistance available to such groups as the Cubans and the Vietnamese. At the same time, in contrast to labor migrants from Mexico and other countries, Guatemalans and Salvadorans often carry the psychological scars resulting from war and persecution while confronting the social and economic challenges common to all new immigrant groups.

Central Americans who left political upheaval in their respective countries of origin in the 1980s to come to Southern California found a region that was itself undergoing significant change. Among the factors fueling economic growth was the expansion of high-tech industries,

particularly aerospace and information-linked industries, as well as the growth of traditional low-wage industries such as garment and furniture manufacturing, increased construction (and, in the 1980s, real estate speculation), and foreign trade, notably with Pacific Rim countries, with a related increase in services such as finance and shipping.⁴

During the 1970s and 1980s the region also experienced significant demographic and cultural change. Salvadorans and Guatemalans were part of a broader influx of immigrants, particularly from Latin America and Asia, and new ethnic neighborhoods, such as Koreatown and Little Saigon, were added to existing ethnic concentrations such as Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and East Los Angeles. In the 1980s, ethnic groups that had been segregated in specific neighborhoods expanded into other areas of the city. Areas such as East Los Angeles, which had been fourth- or fifth-generation Mexican American, became first- or second-generation immigrant, and interethnic relations, which had largely been defined in terms of black-white or Anglo-Latino relations, expanded to include Chinese-Latino relations in Monterey Park, Latino–African-American relations in South Central, and Central American–Korean relations in Pico Union and Koreatown. With the influx of new immigrants and white flight to the suburbs, minority groups became “the new majority” in the city of Los Angeles, and Latino children constituted 63 percent of the population in Los Angeles public schools (Moore and Vigil 1993; Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996, 97–98).

The experience of Salvadorans and Guatemalans in Los Angeles can be described as an encounter between a relatively new and in certain respects unique group of immigrants and a metropolitan region undergoing a dramatic economic, demographic, and cultural transformation. It is the dynamic of this encounter that our study will explore. The purpose is to understand both the context of migration and how it shapes the experience of Guatemalan and Salvadoran migrants, and the ways in which these migrants in turn have shaped conditions in their old and new environments.

A better understanding of this dynamic can also contribute to ongoing efforts to reconceptualize the migration experience. Traditional studies of migration often focus on issues such as whether international migration occurs because of structural conditions in the country of origin or receiving country or as a result of decisions made by individual immigrants, whether immigrants become assimilated or are marginalized in the receiving country, and whether their relative success can be

attributed to the “human capital” they bring with them—their education, skills, and experience—or to the context into which they are incorporated. Although such studies provide valuable information and insights, particularly by identifying significant factors in the migrant experience with greater precision, their focus on monocausal and unidirectional explanations, or on narrow criteria for determining effects and causes, fails to capture the complexity of the migrant experience.

In analyzing the experience of relatively new immigrant groups in a rapidly changing environment, our goal is not to arrive at precise conclusions regarding specific facets of their experience, but to capture its complexity. We are concerned with the ways in which Salvadorans and Guatemalans, shaped by conditions and experiences in their home countries, cope with the challenges of migration and of living in Los Angeles—finding jobs and housing, dealing with the problems of deteriorating neighborhoods, adjusting to urban life, attempting to build communities that can protect their rights and interests and promote their collective well-being—while attempting to maintain ties with families and communities in their countries of origin. Our challenge is to capture this complexity and diversity and at the same time discover the underlying patterns in the experiences of Central American immigrants.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Explanations for migration, particularly international migration, generally divide into those that focus on the decisions of individual immigrants, families, or households and those that focus on structural causes, such as socioeconomic conditions in the country of origin and the receiving country, or conditions linking the two.⁵ However, as many analyses of migration recognize, the process of migration is a multidimensional experience involving the decisions and actions of individuals, households, and groups (both migrant and nonmigrant) within specific structural contexts that may influence and constrain these decisions and actions but do not determine them (Gold 1997).

Structural explanations tend to focus on these contextual constraints and influences. Often drawing on theories of class, dependency, or world systems analysis, they link migration to the growth of capitalism in core or more advanced capitalist countries and its penetration into peripheral or less developed regions. Colonization, labor recruitment,

and various forms of investment in peripheral areas may disrupt existing patterns and displace workers, peasants, or small farmers, who are then forced to move to other areas or across borders. Geopolitical penetration (such as through military support for government or opposition forces), which often parallels economic expansion, may also result in displacement and migration. Over the long term, these asymmetric relations may result in international migration from the peripheral area to the core, which would explain such trajectories as Algerians migrating to France, Indians migrating to England, and Dominicans and Mexicans migrating to the United States (Cornelius 1980; Cheng and Bonacich 1984; Gold 1992; Richmond 1986; Sassen 1988; Zolberg 1981; Zolberg et al. 1986).

Over the past few decades these processes have accelerated as a result of global economic restructuring, resulting in the international dispersal of production as core country corporations have sought cheap labor or market proximity through subcontracting, establishing assembly plants, or moving entire production processes abroad.⁶ This dispersal has been facilitated by developments in communications and transportation, and by global financial services. Economic globalization has accelerated the integration of the world economy while at the same time reinforcing processes of dislocation in affected countries, both core and peripheral (Basch et al. 1994; Castles and Miller 1998; Mittelman 1996; Sassen 1988).

Although dislocations resulting from the erosion of traditional economies and lifestyles constitute a factor in emigration from peripheral regions, changes resulting from global economic restructuring also produce areas of attraction for new immigrants in core areas. Deindustrialization and reindustrialization have led to a decline in midlevel manufacturing and management jobs—those with job security, relatively high pay, and good benefits—and a corresponding emergence of the “hour-glass economy,” characterized by the growth of both high-skill jobs in growing technological industries and in services such as finance, insurance, and real estate, and low-skill, low-income jobs in services and subcontracted manufacturing sectors such as the garment and electronics industries (Bonacich et al. 1994; Sassen 1988; Soja et al. 1983).

This highly differentiated but interdependent labor force often comes together in major metropolitan centers, particularly “global cities”—centers of capitalist production, technological development, and finance, which also draw on workers for low-income jobs in restaurants and hotels, building maintenance, child care, and house cleaning (Sassen

1991, 1996). In addition, the dissemination of Western culture through movies, television, and other media to even the most remote regions of the world has provided images of alternative lifestyles, however unrealistic (Smith 1994).⁷ These global economic and cultural processes have thus constituted “push” and “pull” factors in the growth of international migration, prompting the migration of both highly educated and low-skill (in many cases, undocumented) workers.⁸

Structural conditions and changes constitute a powerful explanation of the context within which migration decisions are made. In cases of forced or “involuntary” migration, external conditions are compelling: refugees may have no choice but to leave if they are to survive, and they may have limited choice in terms of their destination. For other migrants, however, structural conditions create a framework of constraints and opportunities within which they may choose to leave or not, and may choose where to go. Furthermore, the migrant acts in a context that includes not only structural constraints and opportunities but also other, nonmigrant actors. Migration is often part of a household’s economic or survival strategy: the migrant’s journey may be financed by other family or community members; the journey may require the assistance of other individuals or institutions; and the immigrant may depend on relatives or other contacts for housing, jobs, or other assistance at the point of destination (Massey et al. 1987; Weyland 1993).

These relations among migrants and between migrants and nonmigrants help to explain why migration continues even when the structural conditions that initially gave rise to migration no longer hold (Bach 1985; Kearney 1986). Once immigrants become relatively established in the host country, they are often in a position to facilitate the migration of other family members, friends, or neighbors through job contacts or financial assistance. These networks ease the adjustment of the immigrant to the receiving society and may become the basis for ethnic communities (Gurak and Caces 1992). By lowering the risks of migration, networks facilitate further migration, which is also encouraged by demonstration effects when remittances sent by migrants to family members at home enable them to improve their standard of living relative to that of their neighbors. Long-term migration may also result in the establishment of institutions that perpetuate the process, such as a black market to smuggle immigrants into countries where restrictions against border crossing are enforced, as well as institutions to respond

to the needs of immigrants or defend their rights when these are threatened (Massey et al. 1993).

In addition to efforts to explain why people migrate, a substantial literature has developed to explain what happens to migrants once they arrive. Why do some immigrants experience economic mobility and success while others become permanently relegated to low-income jobs? To what extent do they assimilate, learning the language of the host country, adopting its social norms and cultural values, and incorporating themselves into its economic institutions and political processes? How do they negotiate the different and often conflicting expectations, loyalties, and values of their home and host societies?

Studies of immigrant assimilation and success generally focus on socioeconomic assimilation as measured by level of income, type of employment, income and job mobility, and in some cases intermarriage, access to services, or neighborhood location (see Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996; Suarez-Orozco 1998). The literature on economic assimilation has again led to a debate over individual versus structural factors. Analysts emphasizing the former relate successful incorporation to the characteristics of the individual immigrant, such as level of education, technical skills, and previous work experience. Others argue that whereas individual characteristics (which may themselves be the result of class and gender structures in the country of origin) might explain the economic incorporation of highly skilled immigrants, they do not necessarily explain the differential occupational options of immigrants whose socioeconomic qualifications are similar to those of each other or of groups within the U.S.-born population. Instead, they look at the context of reception of different groups, including the structure of the labor market, government policies, mainstream attitudes, and the characteristics of the ethnic community (Portes 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). These conditions interact with the characteristics of individual immigrants to determine the mode of incorporation.

Analyses of labor markets have traditionally differentiated between the core or primary market, generally in the corporate sector, which is characterized by relatively permanent jobs with medium to high wages and substantial benefits, and the peripheral or secondary market, which is characterized by relatively unstable jobs with low wages and few or no benefits (Piore 1979; Lamphere, Stepick, and Grenier 1994). New immigrants are disproportionately recruited into the latter, a situation that is facilitated when they are undocumented.

As an alternative, some immigrants turn to entrepreneurship, opening small businesses that fill a niche in the dominant economy or target the immigrant/ethnic market (Waldinger et al. 1990, 19–21). The latter may eventually become ethnic enclaves, in which businesses geared to the ethnic market recruit successive cohorts of immigrants as a labor force and draw on other ethnic businesses for suppliers, thus forming an integrated ethnic economy. Over time, workers in these enterprises may form their own businesses, recruiting successive generations of immigrants who work for them and follow similar patterns of mobility within the enclave (Portes and Rumbaut 1996).

Just as processes of economic globalization have led to an intensification of the migration process, they also affect the process of incorporation of migrants in the host country. One of the most significant changes has been the shift to an “hourglass” economy, with jobs concentrated at the top and bottom and little possibility for mobility. This situation distinguishes the opportunity structure of current immigrant populations from the opportunity structure of immigrant populations of the early twentieth century, who over time were able to move into stable working-class or middle-class jobs (Massey 1995; Sassen 1988).

Immigrant incorporation may also be affected by the official reception given different groups of immigrants in the host country according to whether they are undocumented or have legal status or are considered refugees, which entitles them to certain benefits not available to “economic” immigrants. Thus, Cubans differ from Mexican immigrants not just because of their incorporation into ethnic enclaves rather than the secondary labor market. They also differ because they were received as refugees, in contrast to Mexicans, who were economic immigrants and often undocumented as well (Portes and Bach 1985; Pedraza-Bailey 1985). Immigration policy is affected by domestic and foreign policy concerns, and refugee status is frequently granted on political grounds rather than on the basis of need (Zolberg, Surke, and Aguayo 1986; Schoultz 1992).

Historically, immigrants have also confronted discrimination by mainstream society, which is aggravated by racism in the case of non-European immigrants. Economic conditions also affect receptivity toward immigrants, who often become scapegoats in periods of economic recession or depression. Pressure from anti-immigrant groups is also a factor in anti-immigrant legislation at both the local level (in the form of

discriminatory housing ordinances, for example) and the national level. Societal attitudes thus affect incorporation both directly and indirectly, and may result in “segmented assimilation” into an underclass (Alba 1998; Castles and Miller 1998; Portes and Grosfoguel 1994).

The existence of an ethnic community both simplifies and complicates the process of incorporation. Ethnic social networks facilitate new immigrants’ “learning the ropes” and, by providing the immigrant with a culturally familiar context, ease the problem of adjusting to an unfamiliar environment. But the ethnic community can delay or impede incorporation into the mainstream society, and social networks based exclusively on ethnic communities can limit the prospects and opportunities of immigrants—by channeling them into dead-end jobs, for example (Gurak and Caces 1992; Hagan 1994; Portes 1995).

The term assimilation has been rejected by some critics as implying a one-sided process whereby the immigrant sheds the characteristics of his or her country of origin and takes on those of the host society. They argue that the experience of immigrants in the host society is instead shaped through the continual interaction between the cultural and social patterns immigrants bring with them from the sending society and their mode of incorporation into the receiving society. Incorporation into the mainstream economy may coexist with identification with one’s home country or cultural integration into an ethnic community (Castles and Miller 1998; Levitt 1999). Studies focusing on culture, ethnicity, and identity draw on models of cultural pluralism or concepts of cultural bifocality rather than the “melting pot” or assimilation or acculturation to explain immigrant experience in host societies. Many of these studies focus on the dynamic role of immigrants in constituting their own identities and communities (Gutiérrez 1995, 1996; Sánchez 1993).

Writing in the early part of the twentieth century, Thomas and Znaniecki (1920) pointed out that Polish immigrants to the United States were characterized by neither rapid assimilation nor total identification with Poland, but by the formation of a Polish-American community, with elements from each forming a unique combination. Studies of Mexican Americans have suggested that the creation of a distinct Mexican-American culture is (1) the effect of contradictory pressures to assimilate into U.S. society, on the one hand, and to retain a Mexican identity

and nationality on the other, and (2) a constructive response to the discrimination experienced by Mexicans (as well as other non-European immigrants) in the United States (Sanchez 1993, 10–14).⁹ Thus the emergence of a distinct ethnic community is both reactive and creative.

The assimilation approach has also been challenged by the literature on transnationalism, defined as processes by which international migrants, through their daily life and political, social, and economic relations, forge and sustain social fields linking societies of origin and settlement—implying a two-way flow of people, ideas, and cultural symbols (Basch et al. 1994; Guarnizo 1996). Although relations between societies of origin and societies of settlement are not new, they have intensified as a result of easier and faster transportation and communications, the growing economic significance of migrant remittances to their home countries, and greater recognition by sending states of international migrants as a resource and a constituency (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Goldring 1998; Levitt 1998).

Transnationalism may create new options for migrants, enabling them to maintain two distinct but linked identities and lifestyles: with money earned as laborers in the receiving country, migrants can raise their class or social status in their countries of origin by purchasing land, establishing a small business, donating to community projects, or conspicuous consumption (Rouse 1992; Goldring 1996; Smith 1998). But these options vary according to such factors as class, gender, and legal status (Gold 1999; Weber 1999). A Dominican entrepreneur whose business requires frequent travel between the Dominican Republic and the United States is in a much better position to enjoy the advantages of transnationalism than an undocumented Haitian or Salvadoran who has been separated for years from a family dependent on her earnings. As Weber asks, “How many can afford the phone calls, faxes, or electronic mail to live ‘simultaneously’ in two communities?” (Weber 1999, 52).

The literature on transnationalism has been criticized in its turn for overemphasizing the newness of transnational links, which have historically characterized the experience of previous international migrants. But it is significant in refocusing the immigration literature toward a broader, transnational perspective, which is particularly important in an era of increasing globalization. It has also made a valuable contribution by emphasizing, implicitly or explicitly, the active role of international immigrants in shaping their own experience within transnational con-

texts and transforming both the receiving and sending societies in the process (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Rivera-Salgado 2000; Smith 1998).

In examining the Central American experience in Los Angeles, we raise another issue in addition to that of incorporation: the somewhat counterintuitive possibility of an uprooted immigrant population finding a community in an urban metropolis. Community is frequently seen as the antithesis of modern society and, for the migrant, something that he or she left behind in fleeing from intolerable conditions or in the search for better opportunities. On the one hand, the process of modernization, involving industrialization, the growth of the urban metropolis, and the movement of vast numbers of people from rural to urban areas, offers release from the sometimes stifling structures and restrictions of traditional communities and provides opportunities for individual achievement and growth. On the other hand, by isolating the individual in an impersonal and rapidly changing environment, the process of modernization or of migration from a traditional community to an urban metropolis can be a source of anomie and personal disintegration.

The disappearance of traditional communities has accelerated with the intensity and rapidity of change in the contemporary period. Extended families have fragmented, with the nuclear family, and increasingly the single-parent family, becoming the norm. Buildings and entire neighborhoods are torn down to make room for new highways or commercial centers. The experience of community based on neighborhood and workplace becomes increasingly rare as neighbors move away and jobs or whole companies disappear. Immigrants are not only uprooted from their communities, they are also separated from "the cultural enclosures that have organized and sustained experience," resulting in what has been called "cultural mourning" (Ainslee 1998, 286–87).

Modernization, and particularly the experience of spatial mobility, means that community cannot continue to be based solely on personal interrelations in a shared space. Yet, as pointed out in a recent study examining community and communication in Los Angeles, "people are social animals who do not suffer asocial conditions passively" (Ball-Rokeach 2000, 10). In effect, seeking community is part of being human. One implication is that in modern society, communities may be constructed rather than given, and that people engage actively in this

process. These communities may be based on neighborhood, but they may also be constructed on the basis of shared culture, interests, activities, or experience, and may span distances and indeed cross borders, as the concept of transnational community implies. The question that concerns us here is whether Salvadorans and Guatemalans have been able to construct communities in the difficult environment of Los Angeles, and if so, how they have been able to do it. In summary, our examination of the experience of Guatemalans and Salvadorans in the Los Angeles region will draw on following framework:

1. International migration results in large part from changing structural conditions within both sending and receiving countries and the relations between them. These conditions and relations are often shaped by the differential economic and political power of the two countries, including the economic and geopolitical penetration of the more advanced (core) country into the less advanced (peripheral) regions; more generally, they are shaped by changes in the world economy. Such changes may produce dislocations in the country of origin and perceived opportunities in the country of destination, creating contexts for migration.
2. Although structural conditions are a constraint, they are not a determinant. Within these constraints migrants (and nonmigrants) make choices; over the long term their actions in turn have an impact on both home and host societies. Through migrant networks they also create new structures reinforcing links between the two that may perpetuate migration.
3. Over the past several decades the process of global economic restructuring has accelerated change in the economic (and often political and social) context of the country of origin, influencing not only decisions to migrate but also decisions of international migrants regarding return. It also affects the context of the receiving area, particularly economic opportunities and social and political receptivity toward immigrants. Finally, through developments in transportation and communication technology, it facilitates interaction between immigrants and their communities of origin.
4. The mode of incorporation of the immigrant into the receiving society results from the interaction of the attributes of the individual immigrant (such as education, skills, and experience) and the context of reception, including economic and labor market conditions, gov-

ernment receptivity, societal attitudes, and the existence of an ethnic community. The process of incorporation also reflects the cultural values, social norms, and behavioral patterns the immigrant transmits from the country and community of origin as influenced by class origins, gender, and nationality. First-generation immigrants rarely become fully assimilated into the culture of the receiving country, even if they are successful in incorporating themselves legally and economically.

5. In the context of a multiethnic, rapidly changing metropolis and a spatially mobile population, the traditional basis of community has been eroded, an experience that is particularly acute for immigrants uprooted from their home countries. Often experiencing a profound sense of loss, immigrants may nonetheless, over time, construct communities based on shared culture, interests, activities, and experiences.

The methodological approach emphasizes the dynamics of structure and agency and history and biography in the immigrant experience (Mills 1959). On the one hand, it stresses the significance of contextual factors in the countries of origin and in the receiving country or region as shaping immigrant experiences, recognizing that these contexts themselves change over time. On the other, immigrants are not seen simply as passive victims of conditions and forces beyond their control but as actively involved, individually and collectively, in shaping their destinies within these contexts and influencing these communities, regions, and countries in the process.

INFORMATION SOURCES AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

We have studied the Central American region and have been involved with the Central American communities in Los Angeles since the early 1980s. In addition to constant interaction with members of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan communities, we have interviewed refugees and other immigrants and activists, Guatemalan and Salvadoran community leaders, service providers, political leaders, businesspeople, labor organizers, teachers, pastors and other religious leaders, and many others. We reviewed newspaper articles, reports, and other secondary sources. We have also carried out three surveys. The first, in 1987–1988, was a study of eighty-three small Central American

businesses for the purpose of determining their origins, types of product or service provided, relations with the Central American community, and needs. The sample was drawn in part from lists provided by the consulates or chambers of commerce of the respective countries and in part through canvassing Westlake and to a lesser extent other areas with significant Central American populations.

The second, in 1989–1990, was a survey of Mexican and Central American workers in the Los Angeles area. A snowball sampling technique was used with different points of entry to incorporate the most significant categories of workers, including day laborers, garment workers, janitors, domestic workers, and street vendors, among others. Information obtained included migration histories and histories of work experience as well as the impact of the Immigration Reform and Control Act on different groups of workers.

The third study was part of a joint project with a research team in San Francisco and involved six hundred interviews with Guatemalans and Salvadorans—three hundred each in the Los Angeles area and the San Francisco Bay area. A snowball sampling technique was used based on multiple points of entry, including immigrant service organizations, soccer games, English-language classes, and churches. An effort was made to replicate the proportions of different groups, based on such factors as nationality, gender, and socioeconomic status, of the 1990 census. This study, which was carried out in 1995, was designed to identify factors in the decisions of Salvadorans and Guatemalans to remain permanently in the United States or to return to their respective countries of origin, and to discover how the peace process had influenced their decisions. The study also examined the nature of links with countries and communities of origin as well as work experience, living conditions, and leisure activities in the United States.

Snowball sampling techniques were used rather than random samples because a substantial proportion of the target population was undocumented, some of the survey questions were highly sensitive, and the questionnaires were quite lengthy. Interviewers were for most part native Spanish speakers, many of them Salvadorans and Guatemalans with experience in the respective communities. The use of snowball sampling methods with multiple points of entry aimed to obtain a broad representation of the target populations. All of these studies incorporated open-ended questions as well as quantifiable data.

The following chapters examine particular aspects of Central American immigration and the experience of Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles. Chapter Two investigates the origins of Central American migration within the framework of structural change in the global economy and in the Central American countries, analyzing how contemporary patterns and trajectories of migration have been shaped historically.

Chapter Three shifts the focus to Los Angeles, examining economic and demographic changes resulting from global restructuring. We then look at the living and housing arrangements of Salvadorans and Guatemalans in Los Angeles, focusing particularly on Westlake, an area of immigrant settlement, and examine problems of drugs, crime, and gangs, as well as the emergence of support institutions and the efforts of preexisting institutions, such as churches and schools, to assist immigrants.

Chapter Four examines ways in which the restructuring of Los Angeles has affected the type of work Central Americans find, the role of niches in work patterns, and immigrant labor organizing. In Chapter Five we turn to the refugee/asylum movement in Los Angeles, including the Sanctuary movement, and consider Central American immigrants' efforts to change asylum policy and their role in solidarity and anti-interventionist movements.

Chapters Six and Seven focus on the current situation of Central Americans in Los Angeles. Chapter Six examines the changing context of the 1990s. The peace process in El Salvador and Guatemala ostensibly established conditions for immigrants to return to their home countries; however, these conditions are modified by the continued insecurity and lack of economic opportunities in these countries. At the same time, recession and the decline in economic opportunities in Los Angeles in the early 1990s and the growing political hostility toward immigrants (as manifested in Proposition 187 and the new immigration laws of 1996) made remaining in the United States more difficult. Thus, Chapter Six looks at factors influencing decisions of Central Americans to remain in the United States or return to their countries of origin, and their own assessments of their situation and future.

Chapter Seven explores the ways in which Guatemalans and Salvadorans deal with the challenge of building community in Los Angeles while at the same time continuing to maintain contacts with family and communities in their countries of origin. Among other issues,

we examine political, economic, and cultural empowerment and the emergence of a new generation, as well as the role of hometown associations and other binational relations in reinforcing links with home communities.

A concluding chapter redefines the concept of community by examining the interaction of structural context and the individual and collective actions of immigrants in shaping the experience of Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles.