

CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRATION: A Framework for Analysis*

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The subject of Central American migration encompasses a broad range of experiences that challenge traditional approaches to migration studies. Past interpretations of migration have tended to be based on mutually exclusive typologies or to focus on certain dimensions of migration while excluding others. Thus migration could be internal or international, cyclical, temporary, or permanent, voluntary or involuntary, economically or politically motivated (the latter issue often treated in a separate literature on refugees and exiles), motivated by "push" factors in the country of origin or "pull" factors in the receiving country, or the result of individual decisions or underlying structural conditions.

Recent studies of specific migration experiences, however, including those of Central Americans, reveal that the lines of demarcation between the dimensions are rarely clear-cut, and this complexity is now being recognized in theoretical analysis. Economic difficulties or crises may be politically generated or aggravated, and economic underdevelopment is often accompanied by political repression (Zolberg 1981, 20; Richmond 1986). Central Americans have migrated for both economic and political reasons, and preliminary research on Central Americans who have come to the United States in recent years suggests that in many cases it is difficult to separate the two (Schoultz 1987, 11-13). Generally, some combination of "push" and "pull" factors influence the decision to migrate, and individual decisions occur within a framework of internal and international structures that condition individual needs and the choices available (Papademetriou 1983, 472-78; Portes and Bach 1985; Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1986; Cohen 1987). Temporary moves may become permanent if reasons for leaving continue or are aggravated or the rationale for remaining is increased, as happens when families of labor migrants join them in the host country (Zolberg 1983, 36). Even cyclical migration may establish patterns and networks that become the basis for

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long-term or permanent migration (Portes 1983, 74–75; Kearney 1986, 353).

Indeed, current migration patterns often have a historical dimension. Although the recent escalation of Central American migration (within the region and to the United States) is in many respects a new phenomenon (Schoultz 1987, 9–10; Aguayo 1985, 21), the long historical tradition of migration within and between the countries of the region has undoubtedly affected current patterns of migration.

The purpose of this article is to develop a framework for analyzing Central American migration that takes into account historical and contemporary dimensions, economic and political motivations, and domestic and international structures. We will begin by briefly discussing some factors already identified in the theoretical literature on characteristics and causes of migration, focusing on structural approaches as a basis for establishing a framework for examining Central American migration. The subsequent section draws on existing studies and statistical data to discuss the historical and contemporary patterns of Central American migration in the context of this framework. In the conclusion, we analyze the appropriateness of the framework for explaining Central American migration through a series of propositions that can serve as the basis for future studies.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

Many proponents of a structural approach identify migration as resulting from the logic of capitalist development, its penetration into peripheral areas (those at a precapitalist or relatively low level of capitalist development), and the incorporation of these areas into the world economy. One major outcome of capital penetration is the direct recruitment of labor from the peripheral area, whether coerced (as in importing seven and a half million Africans to work as slaves in Europe and its colonies from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries) or contracted (as in contracting Eastern European peasants to work in U.S. manufacturing industries in the nineteenth century). The latter process has continued in various forms well into the twentieth century (Portes 1983; Cohen 1987; Zolberg 1983).

Exporting capital from core countries (those having a dominant position within the world economy) to peripheral regions may also produce economic distortions and dislocations that result in emigration by uprooted groups who can no longer find work in their own countries. To the extent that these groups emigrate to the relevant core areas, capital penetration becomes an element in indirect labor recruitment (Cheng and Bonacich 1984; Cornelius 1980). These processes have been accentuated as peripheral areas and countries become incorporated into an increas-

ingly integrated but highly asymmetrical world economic system. These areas become even more vulnerable to external economic conditions ranging from fluctuations in commodity prices to global recession, again leading to emigration to core areas by uprooted populations.

Exporting capital from core countries has often been accompanied and supported by political penetration and control by the government of the advanced capitalist country, which reinforces the bilateral dominant-dependent relationship between the core country and the peripheral society. This relationship helps to explain the direction of international migration flows (such as Algerians migrating to France and Mexicans to the United States). Once established, patterns of migration continue to operate, partly because of transnational social networks (Bach 1985, 28; Kearney 1986),¹ even when efforts are made to close off opportunities for migration into the dominant country. A prominent example of the persistence of such patterns is demonstrated by the ineffectiveness of U.S. refugee and asylum policies and related efforts to block immigration via more restrictive laws and sanctions (Cheng and Bonacich 1984; Cornelius 1980, 71–72; 1988; Cue and Bach 1980, 257–59; Portes and Bach 1985).²

The penetration of capital into peripheral economies occurs on national as well as international levels, with comparable implications for political or economic dislocation, labor recruitment, and other inducements to migrate. At the same time, the peripheral state may play a pivotal role in facilitating conditions for foreign or national capital or both and in managing contradictions that arise from capitalist development. It may directly or indirectly affect emigration if its development policies de-emphasize satisfying internal demands, particularly in a context where cultural penetration creates attraction to actual or perceived opportunities for a higher standard of living in the core (Bach 1985, 25; Portes 1983, 79–81).

While refugee movements tend to be generated by political conflicts that can include political repression, revolutionary movements, and international war, such conflicts result in many cases from economic contradictions—indeed, the same dislocations that lead some to migrate may lead others to revolt. Here the role of the domestic state is again important because state efforts to control such conflicts often lead to political repression. In short, the dislocations produced by foreign (or domestic) capital penetration and changes in the world economy are not only a direct economic cause of migration but may also be an indirect political cause when they result in revolution or other forms of political

1. Kearney develops the concept of an articulatory migrant network linking the sending communities with daughter communities in the receiving country or region (1986, 353–55).

2. Wayne A. Cornelius, "Migrants from Mexico Still Coming and Staying," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 1988, Metro section.

conflict. This effect becomes direct when external states intervene politically or militarily and thus share responsibility for generating refugee flows resulting from these conflicts and for determining their course (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1986, 151–52, 156–58).

Finally, foreign states intervene in migration and refugee flows in their “gate-keeping” function, that is, in their immigration and refugee policies. Immigration policy in receiving countries is related to larger domestic and foreign policy concerns, and changes in policy reflect conflicts between domestic groups who benefit from migration flows (in the form of cheap labor, for example) and those who do not (Bach 1985, iii, 24). Refugee policy in prospective receiving countries may also help determine refugee immigration and is often tied to foreign policy, as is evident in the U.S. policy of accepting and even encouraging refugees from communist countries while denying refugee status to individuals fleeing countries friendly to the United States (Zolberg, Surke, and Aguayo 1986, 154–56; see also Teitlebaum 1984; Schoultz 1987, 67–69). As noted above, however, the effectiveness of these laws may be partly neutralized by strong migratory networks.

To summarize, migration can be explained as the effect—or one effect—of contradictions, dislocations, and opportunities resulting from the penetration of capitalism (domestic or foreign) into nations or regions at a lower level of development.³ These processes affect and are affected by the preexisting productive structures and the state’s role in maintaining those structures, which requires managing the contradictions resulting from class divisions and from the articulation of different structures of production. In concrete terms, this role ranges from promoting specific development models to repressing groups or forces that oppose the dominant economic structure. Penetration by foreign capital is often accompanied and facilitated by political penetration by the external (core) capitalist state, which takes various forms ranging from diplomatic influence to military intervention in political conflicts. The core state also performs a gate-keeping function through its immigration and refugee policy, which in turn reflects foreign and domestic policy concerns.

The above discussion suggests a framework for our analysis of Central American migration in the following section. We shall be specifically concerned with five issues: first, the relationship between capitalist penetration into less-developed or precapitalist areas and migration (how such penetration affects or is a factor in migration); second, the ways and

3. We are not contending that capitalist penetration necessarily leads to migration or that migration necessarily results from capitalist penetration. The relationship between the two depends on the nature of capitalist penetration and the characteristics of the peripheral area, among other factors. But capitalism is a major factor in historical and contemporary patterns of migration, including many cases where this relationship is not immediately obvious.

extent to which developed capitalist or “core” economies (and regions) function as “poles of attraction” for immigration directly through labor recruitment or indirectly through cultural, economic, and social influences; third, the implications for migration of state policies on economic development and the role of the state in mitigating, managing, or aggravating contradictions and conflicts emanating from these policies or from the process of development itself; fourth, the ways and extent to which developed capitalist or core states directly or indirectly encourage or discourage migration through political or military intervention as well as through immigration and asylum policy; and finally, the role of migratory networks in reinforcing preestablished patterns of migration even when the initial conditions accounting for them have been modified or no longer exist.

The following analysis of Central American migration patterns relies on existing studies and statistical data on Central American migration. It includes an extensive study undertaken by CSUCA (the Consejo Superior Universitaria Centroamericana) in the 1970s based on census information from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s as well as our preliminary findings on Central American migration to the United States. Although migration within the Central American region predates the colonial period, our analysis will begin with the nineteenth century, the first important period of capitalist development in Central America, and will emphasize the postwar period, one of rapid development of capitalist markets and relations of production. El Salvador was chosen for in-depth examination because it typifies the more general patterns of capitalist development and displacement and also because it is the source of the largest Central American immigrant population in the United States.

MIGRATION PATTERNS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Historical Patterns from the Nineteenth Century through World War II

Capitalism’s penetration of Central America incorporated the region into the world economy definitively when coffee production was expanded for export in the nineteenth century.⁴ Coffee production for

4. Incorporation of Central America into the world economy actually began in the colonial period with mineral exploitation and the creation of landed estates producing cacao, indigo, and other dye products for export. These activities functioned via the *repartamiento* (a system of forced recruitment of labor for a specified task or period of time), debt peonage, and other forms of coerced labor. Incorporation into the world economic system was sporadic, however, with landed estates shifting from export production to production for subsistence and local markets when export potential contracted (Woodward 1985, 41–47). When the coffee economy developed in the nineteenth century, the affected Central American economies became fully integrated into the world market (Santana Cardoso 1975, 54).

export had an immediate impact on migration, although different patterns emerged in each country. In Costa Rica, which had abundant land and limited labor, coffee production expanded into frontier zones and capitalist structures developed immediately: coffee estates hiring wage labor coexisted with family farms that shifted at least partially to coffee production for export. The national population, initially centered in the province of Cartago, gradually extended westward on the central mesa following the expansion of coffee production (CSUCA 1978a, 39–41.) In El Salvador and Guatemala, where precapitalist forms of production and labor prevailed in the indigenous communities and on the agricultural estates, capitalist elements of production were mixed with precapitalist forms of labor appropriation. Both countries passed liberal legislation to bring land into the market by reducing or eliminating *ejidos* and other forms of communal land and by expropriating church properties (Bulmer-Thomas 1987, 20–21; Woodward 1985, 168–69). In El Salvador, peasants expelled from their communities in the central and western highlands were forced to continue subsistence farming as squatters on unused lands on the estates or by migrating to other, generally poorer land in different regions of the country (Browning 1971, 219–20).

Labor for coffee production, however, was initially nonwage and often coerced (in forms of peonage or tenancy), shifting only gradually to wage labor. The estates continued to depend on the subsistence (pre-capitalist) sector for labor during the harvest through seasonal migration from subsistence farms in other areas of El Salvador (a pattern later replicated in Nicaragua) and in Guatemala through forced recruitment of Indians from the highland communities to work on the coffee estates in the sparsely populated coastal areas or lowlands of San Marcos, Santa Rosa, Quetzaltenango, and Sololá (Santana Cardoso 1975, 16–30; CSUCA 1978a, 77–78; Deere and Marchetti 1981, 43–44). Thus incorporation of the Central American countries into the world economy as coffee producers and exporters was a factor in the cyclical migration patterns still found in these countries as well as in the expulsion of subsistence farmers onto marginal lands.⁵

When banana enclaves were established in the early twentieth century in Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala, and later in Nicaragua, the pattern was repeated of a permanent labor force (based on wage labor in this case) being supplemented by seasonal harvest workers who also depended on small plots that they owned or rented in other parts of the

5. Immigration (chiefly from Europe) also played a role in expanding coffee production, particularly in Guatemala, where German planters emerged as an important segment of the landowning class. In El Salvador, families of European immigrants also figured prominently in establishing coffee plantations (Browning 1971, 146–47). Coffee technology was imported by German and French immigrants as well as by Colombians in Costa Rica.

country. Where the banana companies opened up new lands for cultivation (as in the Honduran departments of Cortés, Atlántida, Yoro, and Colón on the northern Atlantic coast), these areas attracted migrants from other parts of the country to either work on the new plantations or establish small farms (CSUCA 1978a, 38).

Growing U.S. economic and strategic involvement in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean from the late nineteenth century onward resulted in new patterns of international migration.⁶ In Central America, the banana enclaves and particularly the construction of the Panama Canal reinforced existing patterns of international migration, such as immigration by workers from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands to Panama and the Caribbean coasts of Central America, which had begun several decades earlier when the Panama railroad was built. These factors also introduced new migration patterns, such as the emigration of Hondurans to New Orleans.

Legally documented Central American migration to the United States increased in the first two decades of this century from five hundred individuals entering between 1890 and 1900 to eight thousand between 1900 and 1910 and to seventeen thousand between 1910 and 1920. But the number of Central Americans seeking entry to the United States continued to be limited compared with those from other areas, and it fell sharply to less than six thousand in the 1930s, presumably due to quotas restricting the flow of immigrants from the Western Hemisphere during the 1920s (see U.S. INS 1978, t. 13).

By the early twentieth century, patterns of internal migration (and international migration, to a lesser extent) had emerged that would continue for the rest of the century. These patterns can be directly related to capitalism's penetration into precapitalist regions. One notable characteristic of this relationship is that the new zones of capitalist production were areas of expulsion of peasant labor and recruitment zones for seasonal estate labor. When new commercial crops were introduced in the 1940s, this pattern would be intensified.

Migration in the Postwar Period

The period beginning in the 1940s brought dramatic socioeconomic changes resulting from agricultural modernization and industrialization. This period also revealed the inability of traditional economic and political structures to accommodate the changes resulting from modernization, resulting in political conflict and crisis in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

6. For a thorough, well-documented discussion of Caribbean migration, see Chaney (1985).

The 1940s witnessed the fall of dictators who had come to power in the early 1930s in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as the initiation of reform-oriented governments in several countries determined to end their traditional economic dependence on exporting one or two primary products (coffee, bananas, or both). In Costa Rica and Guatemala, economic reform was accompanied by social and political reform—the establishment of the welfare state and the 1948 revolution in Costa Rica, and a short-lived democratic revolution culminating in a far-reaching, but ultimately aborted, agrarian reform in Guatemala. Economic changes included introducing new export products (especially cotton and sugar), making technological improvements in agriculture, and expanding roads, ports, and other infrastructure.

Introducing cotton particularly disrupted the peasant economy in the Pacific coastal zones, where cotton production displaced major centers of corn production. In Nicaragua, the cotton estates' expansion in the Pacific states of Chinandega and León forced peasants onto marginal lands in the northern mountainous regions or to the east, where many were then recruited for seasonal labor on the cotton estates. In El Salvador, where the Pacific coastal plain had already been taken over by large estates, tenant farmers who had constituted a resident labor force were driven off the land as cotton production became increasingly modernized, making a large permanent labor force in the cotton regions unnecessary. Lack of access to land forced many former peasants into the cash economy because money was now needed to buy corn that they had previously grown. Labor for the harvest season was recruited in the slums of the major cities and the most impoverished peasant areas (Williams 1986, 54–65).⁷

According to the CSUCA study, by 1960 each country could be geographically divided into capitalist zones (the modern agricultural export sector and major urban areas) and zones of production for use (subsistence areas). In departments or provinces where production of export crops predominated, land was usually concentrated in large estates or plantations, tenancy or other forms of nonwage labor were replaced by wage workers, and chemical and technological inputs were used more intensively to varying degrees. Usufruct or subsistence areas were generally characterized by proliferating small holdings (*minifundia*) or, particularly in the highlands of Guatemala, community holdings de-

7. Williams notes that cotton production led to modernizing production of other crops as well (such as coffee), further reducing the need for a permanent labor force on the agricultural estates. He views cotton production as a major force in destroying the peasant family because elimination of access to land meant that women were forced to find work in the urban areas to supplement the seasonal agricultural work of male members of the family (Williams 1986, 70–71).

voted to producing basic grains (corn, beans, and rice) for consumption or domestic sales.

As the above overview indicates, no consistent correlation exists between the capitalist or subsistence nature of agriculture and migration patterns during this period. In El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, departments and provinces with the most dynamic capitalist development generally experienced net emigration, as small producers were pushed off the land by expanding estates. In El Salvador, migration flowed from the western coffee departments of Ahuachapán, Sonsonate, and Santa Ana and from the southern Pacific cotton region of La Paz toward the poorer subsistence departments in the north and east. One exception was Usulután, an important coffee- and cotton-growing region, which experienced net immigration. In Nicaragua, the expansion of coffee and later cotton production in the Pacific and central departments pushed peasants to the north central provinces of Jinotega and Nueva Segovia and to the frontier regions of San Juan and Zelaya. Other departments with net immigration were Managua, including the capital city (a strong pole of attraction), and Chinandega, a growing area of capitalist agriculture that was also a frontier area. In Costa Rica, the expansion of coffee production in the central mesa pushed subsistence agriculture into the peripheral lowland regions. Once again, this flow of migration from capitalist to subsistence zones has been accompanied by a reverse cyclical migration as *minifundistas* migrate temporarily to coffee, cotton, or banana zones for the harvest.

In Honduras, in contrast, the expansion of coffee, tobacco, sugarcane, and grain production, especially in the fertile northern region (also a center of banana production), attracted migrants who had been pushed from more densely populated areas where expansion of export-oriented production resulted in the land being monopolized. Thus the northern zone's attraction was as much the availability of land as the growth of capitalist production, and as a result, the expansion of capitalist estates worked by wage labor was accompanied by the extension of small and medium holdings in this region (CSUCA 1978a, 85, 311–13).

In Guatemala, only six departments registered population increases between 1950 and 1964 (Escuintla, Izabal, Guatemala, Retalhuleu, Suchitepequez, and Petén), while sixteen others registered declines, including all of those with a high proportion of Indians. The major zones of attraction fell into three categories: the newly industrializing urban centers, especially Guatemala City in the department of Guatemala; capitalist departments of the southern coast (Escuintla, Retalhuleu, and Suchitepequez) and Izabal in the northeast, a center for banana production; and zones of new colonization like Petén and Izabal (CSUCA 1978a, 83–114, 311–12). Internal migration within Guatemala was reinforced after the reversal of the short-lived agrarian reform of the early 1950s and

expansion of export agriculture (including increased cotton production in the southern zone) throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Migration of rural workers from subsistence farming to large, export-oriented plantation areas increased notably on both seasonal and permanent bases, and migration from rural to urban areas accelerated despite relatively little expansion in formal employment.

The inconsistent relationship between the introduction of cotton production and migration can be partly explained by two factors. In some cases, peasants moved to forested areas along the Pacific coast that were being cleared for cultivation. After they had cleared the area and planted corn for two or three seasons, however, peasant cultivators were expelled to make room for cotton plantations. At the same time, in the first years of cotton production, much of the work was labor-intensive and required permanent as well as seasonal labor, with growers giving peasants access to small plots of land in return for labor. This arrangement changed as cotton production became increasingly mechanized. While large numbers of seasonal workers were still wanted for the harvest, the need for permanent labor declined, resulting in workers being expelled from the estates (Williams 1986, 52–60).⁸

Seasonal migration of rural workers also extended across borders. Salvadorans migrated seasonally not only to the cotton-growing areas of their own country but also to Guatemala (where they constituted 10 percent of the seasonal labor force for cotton), to Nicaragua, and prior to the soccer war, to Honduras (Williams 1986, 63). Guatemalan Indian workers migrated to harvest coffee in Chiapas in southern Mexico. According to one source (Monteforte Toledo 1959, 61), Guatemalan Indian *braceros* have crossed the Mexican border to work in coffee harvests since at least the 1920s, attracted by the wages, a low cost of living, and the possibility of bringing back contraband to sell at a profit. Some ten to fifteen thousand men and women reportedly crossed the border periodically for this reason in the late 1950s; in the next twenty years, the number grew to an estimated sixty thousand (Clay 1984, 46–49). Some Guatemalans inevitably ended up settling in Chiapas as a result of these migrations, with some blending into the local society and passing for Mexican. Others continued to preserve their distinct indigenous culture. Small-scale trade across the border followed the flow of labor, with both movements falling outside the realm of official regulation.

Migration across borders was also affected by political factors. The massacre of peasants following the 1932 uprising in the western states of El Salvador encouraged emigration to Honduras and other parts of the

8. In El Salvador, legislation mandating a minimum wage for rural workers in 1965 became an additional reason to minimize the use of permanent labor. The extension of social security coverage to rural workers in Guatemala had a similar effect (Williams 1986, 59).

country (see below). Political upheaval or repression has also led to a periodic exodus of Guatemalans to other countries, as occurred following the ouster of the dictator Jorge Ubico in 1944 and the overthrow of the 1944–1954 revolution in 1954, a change that ushered in strong repression in subsequent decades.

Central American migration to the United States remained limited but continued to grow nonetheless. After declining to less than six thousand in the 1930s, it jumped to more than twenty-one thousand in the following decade (possibly reflecting U.S. recruitment of labor during the war years) and doubled again between 1951 and 1960 (U.S. INS 1978, t. 13).⁹ The small number of Central American migrants, however, and the lack of data on country, age, and sex make it difficult to analyze these trends more specifically.

The Case of El Salvador

The dynamics of migration processes can be better understood by examining in greater detail historical developments in one country. As the smallest and most densely populated country in the region and source of the largest number of Central American immigrants to the United States, El Salvador exemplifies how capitalist penetration has resulted in extensive population movement within a limited space.¹⁰

In the second half of the nineteenth century, coffee displaced indigo as El Salvador's chief export, and elements of capitalist production began to displace subsistence production and previous production relations. Indigo production, hampered by the lack of roads and other infrastructure and by the mercantilist restrictions imposed by Spain on trade with Europe, had expanded only gradually over the centuries of colonial rule. But coffee production expanded rapidly in response to increasing prices for coffee on the world market, facilitated by the construction of roads, ports, and railroads. Although indigo production had coexisted with subsistence production, expanding coffee production involved dis-

9. Chaney notes similar patterns for Jamaicans coming to the United States (1985, 113–14).

10. Although it might be expected that population-density pressures would exacerbate dislocations resulting from structural rigidities and capitalist penetration, comparison of internal migration in Guatemala and El Salvador during the 1960s shows that the rate of migration (the proportion of migrants to the total population) is roughly the same in both countries (approximately 15 percent). This finding suggests that El Salvador's greater population density has not affected rates of migration (CSUCA 1978b, 83). Durham points out that while geographic population density in El Salvador is seven times greater than in Honduras, the difference in arable density (agriculturally active population divided by land in cultivation) is less than 1.5 times that in Honduras (Durham 1979, 109–10). Thus population density alone cannot be taken as explaining Salvadoran migration, although it is undoubtedly a contributing factor.

possessing small subsistence producers, particularly communities in the western highlands of Santa Ana, Sonsonate, and Ahuachapán.

These processes were expedited by control of the state by the emerging coffee oligarchy. It enacted a series of liberal measures that eliminated flexible conditions of land tenure and usage, including communal forms of production, and instituted individual ownership of private property as the dominant form of tenure. Where legislation failed to dislodge the communities, force was used. The state role in establishing capitalism in El Salvador thus included constructing infrastructure to facilitate commercialization, passing legislation reinforcing private property in the means of production, eliminating communal property, and repressing those who resisted this restructuring (Browning 1971, 155ff.).

Although the shift to capitalist forms of property ownership was rapid, elements of precapitalist relations of production remained in El Salvador. To insure a permanent labor force, the coffee landowners often established nucleated villages for workers, who also received food in partial payment for their labor. But the landowners continued to depend on the subsistence sector for seasonal labor, provided by migrants from other regions of the country.

As noted above, at least two patterns of population movement resulted from the expansion of coffee production. First, the expulsion of subsistence peasants from their communal lands in the western departments forced many to migrate to other parts of the country, often to marginal rural areas for subsistence farming. Many went to the northern departments of Chalatenango, Cabañas, and Morazán, areas that were to become strongholds of guerrilla activity in the 1970s and 1980s. Second, a pattern of cyclical migration was reinforced as subsistence peasants from other parts of the country (including the northern departments) migrated temporarily to the coffee regions during the harvest season. Also reinforced was the pattern whereby migratory peasant families formed squatter settlements wherever they found unused land—on the fringes of private estates, on government land, along the roads and highways, and eventually even in the riverbeds that intersect the capital city of San Salvador. Partly a result of population pressures, squatting also constitutes a form of resistance to the concept of private ownership of land, an idea alien to the traditional concept of possession based on living on and working the land (Browning 1971, 219–21, 259–64; Pearce 1986, 45–46).

A drop in world coffee prices in the 1920s pushed many of the smaller coffee producers off the land when they defaulted on loans, leading to further concentration. This outcome was followed by a more dramatic drop in coffee exports in 1931 during the world depression, which led to massive unemployment of rural workers in the western zones of the country. This development proved to be central to the

peasant uprising in this region in 1932, which was brutally repressed by the military government of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. Land concentration in the 1920s, unemployment resulting from the depression in the early 1930s, and particularly the 1932 massacre (in which an estimated thirty thousand peasants were killed) caused a major migratory flow from the western and central region of El Salvador toward the eastern provinces, especially Usulután, San Miguel, Morazán, and La Unión. Migrants also went to neighboring countries, especially Honduras, where they provided labor for banana plantations on the Caribbean coast (Durham 1979, 431; CSUCA 1978a, 141).

In the period following World War II, expanding production of cotton (particularly in the southeastern coastal zones of La Paz, Usulután, and San Miguel) and sugar (chiefly in the central and southwestern departments of San Salvador, Cuscatlán, San Vicente, La Libertad, and Sonsonate) increased land pressures and migration internally and to Honduras. According to the CSUCA study, by 1950 zones of capitalist penetration had encompassed the agro-export departments of the west (Santa Ana, Ahuachapán, and Sonsonate), the more urbanized west-central areas (especially San Salvador) and La Libertad, and the southern coastal departments (especially La Paz). The northern, central, and eastern states (Chalatenango, Cuscutlán Cabañas, San Vicente, Morazán, and La Unión) made up a subsistence region devoted chiefly to grain production with relatively low productivity. San Miguel had elements of both (CSUCA 1978a, 144–45). Prior to 1950, the subsistence areas were the main zones of in-migration (particularly Cabañas, Chalatenango, Morazán, and La Unión), which may be explained by the expulsion of rural workers and peasants from the western regions as a result of unemployment and repression in the 1930s combined with the expulsion of tenant farmers and smallholders from La Paz and other cotton-growing areas in the postwar period.

Beginning in 1950, industrial modernization was also stimulated under the governments of Colonels Oscar Osorio (1950–1956) and José María Lemus (1956–1960). Taking advantage of high world prices for coffee, the government began building infrastructure: completing the Pan American and coastal highways, starting construction of the Acajulta port (in Sonsonate), expanding hydroelectric plants, and extending housing construction. With infrastructure expanding and new legislation promoting industry (including the tariff-free import of capital goods and raw materials as well as tax exemptions), profits from coffee and cotton exports that had been deposited abroad began to be invested in industry. Foreign investment in manufacturing also grew rapidly, and when world coffee prices dropped at the end of the 1950s, foreign loans began to displace export earnings as a major source of financing (CSUCA 1978a, 147–50).

The 1950s brought a marked change in the pattern of migration flows in El Salvador. Subsistence regions of the north and east, including the provinces adjacent to Honduras, lost population, while San Salvador and La Libertad and to a lesser extent Ahuachapán and Sonsonate in the west began to attract migrants. In San Salvador, La Libertad, and the eastern department of San Miguel, migrants largely moved to urban areas, while migrants to Sonsonate and Ahuachapán chose rural areas (also true of La Paz). But in the southern coastal area (including the department of La Paz and southern parts of San Vicente, Usulután, and San Miguel), cotton estates continued to expand into grain-producing areas, a major factor in continued migration to Honduras (CSUCA 1978b, 72–75, 327–28). As for internal migration, 36 percent of net negative migration flows came from the poorer subsistence provinces of Cabañas, Chalatenango, and Morazán. Thus the flow of migration from the west to the north and east, typical of the pre-1950 period, had been reversed, with population flows from the north and east moving toward the center and west.

One explanation for this shift in migration patterns is that it was primarily a rural-urban flow, particularly to San Salvador, which grew by more than fifty-five thousand inhabitants. Between 1950 and 1961, 73 percent of all migrants moved to the cities, and 41 percent to the department of San Salvador. Other departments with major urban centers (Santa Ana, San Miguel, and La Libertad) recorded net urban migration gains ranging from three to six thousand (CSUCA 1978b, 73–85). Because the economy was expanding in the 1950s, one may surmise that the growth of industry and urban services enhanced the attractiveness of urban areas of these departments. At the same time, net rural gains occurred in the western coffee-producing departments of Ahuachapán and Sonsonate and the southern cotton department of La Paz. In the coffee regions, limited possibilities for expanding into new areas suitable for growing coffee resulted in intensive use of labor and technology to increase output and thus take advantage of the coffee boom. Finally, the decline in productivity in basic grains suggests that the poorer lands of the northern and eastern zones were becoming less productive, another possible explanation for out-migration from these areas.

Emigration to Honduras continued to increase, with Salvadorans finding work on banana plantations in the northern coastal area of Honduras or establishing their own farms closer to the Salvadoran-Honduran border. Estimates of Salvadorans in Honduras increased from twenty-five to thirty thousand in the late 1930s, to one hundred thousand in 1949, to three hundred and fifty thousand by the 1960s (Durham 1979, 59, 124–25). As Durham points out, striking parallels between internal migration and migration to Honduras suggest similar causation (see Durham 1979, t. 2.6, p. 61).

Finally, increased labor demands during the harvest resulted in large seasonal migrations to work in the coffee, sugar, and cotton harvests between October and April, particularly in November and December. During the rest of the year, migrants returned to their homes to survive on savings, farm subsistence plots, or work in the urban informal sector. Based on estimates of the economically active rural population and the labor needs at the peak of the harvest season in each state, one study posited two major seasonal flows: from San Salvador, Sonsonate, and Cuscatlán to the coffee harvests of Ahuachapán and Santa Ana, and from Morazán, Cabanas, and La Paz to Usulután and San Miguel (CSUCA 1978b, 352–54). By 1970 an estimated five hundred thousand temporary workers were making this annual pilgrimage (Achaerandio 1983, 4).

Thus in El Salvador, internal migration, international migration, and seasonal migration represent three responses to capitalist penetration and its consequences for subsistence production and government initiatives to insure conditions for production, whether through repression, legislation, or incentives to investment. The shift from subsistence to commercial agriculture for export meant expanding commercial estates at the expense of smallholdings and driving small peasant producers to more remote areas of the country, to Honduras, and to new squatter settlements on the fringes of private agricultural estates or on unused rural or urban land. Labor-saving technological innovations resulted in rural workers being expelled into subsistence rural areas or urban centers, which became poles of attraction due to expanding industry and urban services. Finally, declining productivity in subsistence areas in the north and east turned these regions into zones of permanent emigration to urban areas of El Salvador or to Honduras. They also provided seasonal migrants to work on coffee, sugar, and cotton estates.

Migration in the 1960s and 1970s

Quantitative and qualitative changes in Central American migration flows beginning in the 1970s, particularly in international migration, can be explained largely by events of the 1960s and 1970s. These decades were characterized by contradictions built into rapid modernization based on foreign investment in a context where traditional socioeconomic structures remained intact, as in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Demands for change resulting from modernization and its effects were resisted by traditional political structures, which responded with increased repression that intensified opposition.

As indicated, the period following World War II brought agricultural modernization based on expanding export agriculture into cotton and sugar production, and in El Salvador and Guatemala, limited industrialization. By the end of the 1950s, however, economists, business groups,

and government officials in these societies had recognized the limitations of depending on commodity exports and were seeking to promote import-substitution industrialization by creating a regional market (reducing or eliminating tariffs between the Central American countries) and by attracting foreign investment. Regional integration succeeded in obtaining foreign investment (primarily from the United States and later from Western Europe and Japan), chiefly in processing and assembly industries and in nontraditional export crops. Creation of the Central American Common Market and consequent foreign investment fostered impressive rates of growth, which averaged 7.7 percent in the region as a whole during the 1960s. But like previous modernization projects, this one led to numerous dislocations that affected rural and urban areas.

Modernization's impact on the rural areas where most Central Americans lived and worked varied according to country and situation. In some cases, it meant the takeover of peasant lands or Indian communities when members of the landowning oligarchy expanded their estates or government officials seized control of areas where new industrial projects had raised land values (as in the northern Transversal strip of Guatemala). In other cases, modernization caused a shift from subsistence farming to growing cash crops destined for U.S. supermarkets (like cauliflower and snow peas). In still other cases, it meant a reduction in the work force due to mechanized agriculture and the shift in production from agriculture to livestock in response to the market for beef created by rapid growth in hamburger and fast-food chains in the United States. Thus several patterns emerged: the proletarianization or semiproletarianization of the peasantry, a shift from subsistence to market-oriented production, and in some cases, reduced availability of agricultural jobs (Chinchilla and Hamilton 1984b, 240–42).

In El Salvador, agricultural modernization caused a dramatic shift in land tenure. In 1961, 11.8 percent of rural households were landless; by 1971, 29.1 percent owned no land, and by 1975, 40.9 percent. In addition, the percentage of farms having less than one hectare increased from 40.4 to 49 percent between 1950 and 1971 (Deere and Diskin 1984, 18).

The precarious economic conditions in which many Central Americans lived were aggravated by increasing inflation in the 1970s, due largely to the increased prices of imports (particularly petroleum), which in turn affected prices of agricultural and manufactured products. Prices of imported inputs for manufacturing industry increased by 11.4 percent annually between 1970 and 1978, and the overall inflation rate increased by 12.8 percent annually between 1970 and 1977 (Weeks 1985, 68–71, 148–49). As a result of changes in the previous two decades, substantial sectors of the population that had previously depended wholly or partly on subsistence farming now depended on cash income and were therefore hit hard by price increases. Even in the sectors that benefited from

minimum-wage laws and wage adjustments, wage increases could not keep up with price increases.

In addition to the economic dislocations accompanying modernization, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed an increased U.S. presence in El Salvador, particularly in the form of multinational corporations investing in manufacturing. In contrast with Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica, where U.S. banana companies had operated for decades, and Nicaragua, which had a long history of U.S. military, political, and financial intervention, direct U.S. penetration in El Salvador was relatively new. In all five countries, however, increased contact with U.S. manufacturing, commercial, and financial interests undoubtedly expanded information about the United States, including work and educational opportunities. Employment in U.S. companies may also have made migration to the United States more accessible: a worker in a Texas Instruments plant in San Salvador could, at least hypothetically, transfer his or her skills to an electronics assembly plant in the United States. Or a domestic servant working for an American family in Nicaragua could work for a similar family (or in some cases, the same family) in the United States. The growth of a low-wage, semi-informal economy in the United States during the 1970s, based on services or subcontracting, took advantage of an increasing undocumented labor force and provided work for immigrants from Central America and other areas.

Additional factors led to dislocations in specific countries. The 1969 war between El Salvador and Honduras abruptly ended Salvadoran migration to Honduras and caused the rapid repatriation of an estimated two hundred thousand Salvadorans. This return migration drastically aggravated already serious pressures on the land and undoubtedly increased the number and proportion of landless rural workers in El Salvador between 1961 and 1971. In Guatemala too, economic dislocations were aggravated by other factors. During the 1960s and 1970s, a succession of military presidents and their colleagues exploited political positions to amass personal wealth. In the mid-1970s, for example, they engaged in rapacious speculation in the northern Transversal strip crossing several states in the highland region, which became the construction site for a road and an oil pipeline to the coast (Black, Jamail, and Chinchilla 1984). During this time, entire Indian communities were displaced into other regions of the country or across the border into Mexico.

Finally, a factor generally discussed in studies of refugee populations, rather than in migration studies, was increasing governmental and extragovernmental repression, which targeted groups seeking to organize around issues and problems resulting from economic dislocations: peasant organizations set up to contest land takeovers, labor unions demanding increased wages and improved working conditions, protests by Indian communities who had lost their land in Guatemala, and demon-

strations against increases in food prices and bus fares in the major cities. Death squads made up of members of the landowning oligarchy and security and military forces in Guatemala and El Salvador targeted peasant leaders, union militants, and political activists. In El Salvador in 1969, the military formed a paramilitary organization among peasants known as ORDEN (short for the Organización Democrática Nacionalista) to carry out surveillance and even assassinations of selected leaders and militants (Black, Jamail, and Chinchilla 1984, 83–97; Montgomery 1982, 88–89).

All these factors significantly affected migration during the 1960s and 1970s. Migration flows increased substantially, and new patterns emerged. For the period from 1950 to 1973, the CSUCA study of Central American migration suggests three trends. First, mobility increased in these years: the number of internal migrants doubled in Guatemala, tripled in Nicaragua, and quintupled in Honduras (comparable figures for El Salvador were not available). Second, regions with agricultural modernization tended to expel population except in areas that also contained frontier or new colonization zones (such as Izabal in Guatemala). Third, new subsistence areas and urban centers became zones of attraction (CSUCA 1978a, 322–27).

In Costa Rica, the dominant migration trend from the 1920s (net emigration from the central mesa where coffee production predominated) was reversed in the early 1960s due to new economic circumstances. Beginning in the 1920s, labor surpluses had emerged in the central mesa and the wages of coffee workers declined, causing an exodus to the surrounding lowlands, which became the new frontier for subsistence farmers. Gradually, large landowners also amassed vast holdings in these regions. In the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. and multinational lending agencies as well as the Costa Rican government began to promote livestock production for beef export, which expanded these estates further and shifted production from agriculture to livestock. For example, in the Pacific north province of Guanacaste, cattle estates expanded at the expense of small farms, and the shift of agricultural estates to livestock production required much less labor and caused increasing unemployment. This trend led to a shift in migration patterns, with migrants leaving the cattle-producing areas of the lowlands for other peripheral areas or urban centers, particularly the capital city of San José. But despite growth in industrial production (7.1 percent annually between 1965 and 1973), the capital-intensive nature of production meant that new employment in industry was limited, increasing from 11.7 percent to only 12.9 percent between 1963 and 1973 (Taylor 1980). As Edward Taylor summarized the situation, “The Costa Rican peasant—once small landholder in the meseta, displaced, then small landholder in the periphery, again displaced—is left with no alternative but to set out on a trek which will almost invariably take him to the urban center. Yet the system which strips the peasant of his

livelihood in the countryside denies him a livelihood in the city. For most migrants, there will be no jobs available wherever their migrations take them" (Taylor 1980, 89).

A similar dynamic appears to have affected migration trends in El Salvador, where the centralization and urban attraction evident in the previous decade became even more pronounced between 1961 and 1971.¹¹ San Salvador attracted by far the largest number of migrants (40.8 percent of the total), followed by La Libertad and Sonsonate. The remaining departments reported net emigration. These figures, however, tend to hide the intensity of migration flows because many departments have experienced levels of emigration and immigration (often in the form of exchange with adjacent departments), possibly reflecting the high population density (CSUCA 1978b, 82–83, 85). This kind of exchange has occurred in the two largest urban centers after San Salvador: Santa Ana, with thirty-two thousand immigrants and almost fifty-seven thousand emigrants, and San Miguel, with thirty-one thousand immigrants and fifty-one thousand emigrants (CSUCA 1978b, 83–89). The poorest rural areas, in the mountainous northern departments of Chalatenango, Cabañas, and Morazán, have experienced high levels of net emigration. In fact, it appears that both capitalist and subsistence rural areas have become areas of net emigration, presumably reflecting the fact that no "new" subsistence areas exist in El Salvador.

Deteriorating conditions in the countryside, as indicated by increasing numbers of landless rural families, and the attraction of the urban centers as a result of industrialization (especially San Salvador) undoubtedly contributed to migration trends in this period. But as noted, the growth of industry and related services were able to absorb only part of the growing work force because of the capital-intensive nature of new industry. While the manufacturing sector grew by 24 percent between 1961 and 1971, employees in industry increased by only 6 percent. Growth in urban and industry-related services could not absorb the difference between the numbers of rural-urban migrants and jobs available in manufacturing. By the early 1970s, 40 percent of the nonagricultural labor force was working in the informal sector, and unemployment in San Salvador had reached 10 percent (Armstrong and Shenk 1982, 47; Deere and Diskin 1984, 32).

As indicated above, the number of Guatemalans migrating to southern Mexico increased from an annual average of ten to fifteen thousand in the 1950s to an estimated sixty thousand per year in the 1970s.

11. Migration statistics for the two periods are not directly comparable because the census did not include categories for migration until 1971. Figures for 1961 consist of estimates based on comparing the population in each department according to the 1961 census with projected population changes since 1950.

The expulsion of Salvadorans from Honduras during the 1969 war also augmented Salvadoran migration to Guatemala, which has been estimated between 1973 and 1984 at seventy thousand, most going to the frontier and central-south departments or to Mexico (Torres Rivas 1985, 28).

This period also saw dramatic changes in patterns of migration to the United States. As noted, prior to the mid-1960s, a small but growing number of immigrants migrated from Central America. During the following decade, the number of legally admitted Central American immigrants more than doubled, from forty-five thousand between 1951 and 1960 to more than one hundred thousand between 1961 and 1970, and exceeded one hundred and thirty-four thousand during the 1970s (U.S. INS 1978, tt. 13, 14; U.S. INS 1984, t. IMM1.2). The number of illegal immigrants increased even more dramatically, as indicated by the number deported, most of them for having "entered without inspection or with false documents." Moreover, the U.S. Immigration and Nationalization Service (INS) estimates that for every undocumented person apprehended, another three to five remain in the United States undetected. Between 1969 and 1978, the number of Guatemalans deported increased from one hundred to twelve hundred and the number of Salvadorans from one hundred to thirty-four hundred (U.S. INS 1978, t. 27).

Growth in the number of Central Americans coming to the United States in the 1970s has been documented in a study of Central Americans and Mexicans in California based primarily on the 1980 census. This count found that 40 percent of Central American immigrants living in California in 1980 had entered during the previous five years and that 63 percent of these lived in Los Angeles. More than half of the Central American immigrants were women, 45 percent of those over twenty-five had completed high school, about 25 percent had attended college, and some 30 percent had worked in white-collar occupations. Thus in California, at least, Central American immigrants came disproportionately from the upper educational and occupational segments of the population in a region where only one-eighth of the economically active population had completed more than six years of school (Wallace 1986, 659–64). Most Central American migrants who arrived in the United States before 1975 presumably came for economic reasons, but by the second half of the 1970s, many were escaping violence, repression, or persecution at home, which began to accelerate in the mid-1970s.

This immigration coincided with a period of economic restructuring in the United States that involved a decline in traditional manufacturing industries accompanied by growth in high-technology industries and high- and low-skilled services (Sassen 1988). Once in the United States, many of the Central Americans were employed in low-paying jobs in the

rapidly growing service sectors, in manufacturing sectors that rely on low-cost foreign labor (like the garment industry), or in agriculture.

Thus the dramatic increase in internal migration, intraregional migration, and the number of Salvadorans and Guatemalans coming to the United States during the 1970s can be correlated with deteriorating economic conditions, increased repression in their own countries in the late-1970s, and perceived opportunities and "indirect" labor recruitment in the United States. Conditions in Central America worsened further in the late 1970s and the 1980s, when the economic situation deteriorated into a regionwide crisis while political polarization and conflict deepened in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.

Population Movements since the Late 1970s

In the last fifteen years or so, war and political upheaval in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala compounded by rapidly deteriorating economic conditions have resulted in massive dislocations in all three countries. In Nicaragua, the Somoza regime countered the Sandinista campaign with massive repression, including extensive bombing of rural areas and finally the major cities, prior to the Sandinista victory in July 1979. In El Salvador, revolutionary movements that had developed throughout the 1970s coordinated forces and began a military offensive in the early 1980s. During the same period in Guatemala, a revolutionary movement emerged incorporating Indian and non-Indian (*ladino*) populations.

These revolutionary offensives resulted in escalating violence by military and security forces as well as by death squads. In Guatemala, government-instigated terrorism against opposition leaders in urban areas combined with a brutal counterinsurgency campaign against the Indian population that killed thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands. Nicaragua had not yet recovered from the effects of the revolution against Somoza when the new Sandinista government was confronted by counterrevolution, organized and financed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. In El Salvador, the war against the guerrilla forces often involved attacks against civilian populations in rural areas, including the massacre of the entire population of villages believed to be sympathetic to the guerrillas. Beginning in 1979, the United States became more and more enmeshed in these conflicts, resulting in an exponential increase in the militarization of the region as well as in the technological level of conflict, particularly in El Salvador (Leach, Miller, and Hatfield 1985).

Political repression and war have also aggravated the region's economic stagnation, an additional factor in displacement and migration. In El Salvador, national production declined 33 percent between 1978 and 1983, and by the mid-1980s, gross national product per capita had fallen to

the level of the 1950s. The causes include massive capital flight and economic distortions resulting from U.S. financing of balance of payments, which has sustained the commercial sector while production declined (Weeks 1985, 191). Salvadoran unemployment is estimated at 33 percent, and estimates of combined unemployment and underemployment range from 50 to 75 percent (*Coyuntura Económica* 1989).¹²

The combined effects of political crisis, war, and the economic crisis aggravated by political conditions have transformed a normal migration flow into massive displacement and exodus. In terms of internal displacement, it has been estimated that by 1987 up to a million Central Americans (including a quarter-million Nicaraguans, one hundred thousand to a quarter-million Guatemalans, and half a million Salvadorans) had been displaced within their own countries (Fagen 1988, 75).

In El Salvador, the first wave displaced by the war were peasants from rural areas in the northern province of Chalatenango and the north-eastern province of Morazán. During 1980 these first major guerrilla strongholds came under heavy government attacks that included massacres of civilian populations (U.S. Committee for Refugees 1984, 9). Initially, most of the displaced persons remained in their departments, moving only from the rural areas to cities and towns, presumably hoping to return to their homes soon (CONADES 1983, 2). But new waves of refugees followed the first as the war intensified and expanded to other zones of El Salvador, and the movement from rural areas to municipalities was accompanied by displacement to the larger cities, especially San Salvador. Between 1980 and 1982, the military and security forces' campaign against the organized opposition and peasants suspected of sympathizing with the guerrillas reached massive levels in the cities as well as the countryside, accounting for the huge increase in Salvadorans displaced to other countries. In 1984 the military launched a drive to eliminate the civilian population from guerrilla-controlled or -contested zones, including massive bombing and strafing of designated areas followed by the destruction of homes and crops. In 1985 the guerrilla forces expanded their operations to all departments of El Salvador, including the little-affected western region, which led to increased military operations in these regions. The new initiatives exacerbated the continuing displacement of Salvadorans (Montes Mozo et al. 1985, 35–40, 80–83).

Various studies of the displaced population in El Salvador indicate that it consists of the most destitute sectors of the Salvadoran population, whose situation has been made even more desperate as a result of their circumstances. Of the displaced, the vast majority (80 to 90 percent) come from rural areas, more than half are under fifteen years of age, and half

12. See also "Informal Economy Cushions Unemployment," *Central America Report* (27 May 1988): 159–60.

are illiterate. The mortality rate is high (24.4 per thousand according to one study, 67 percent of the deaths claiming children under five). Already low levels of employment have decreased as a result of displacement: unemployment increased from 58 to 74 percent of the economically active population after forced migration, according to one study (Alens 1984).¹³

In Guatemala, military attacks against the indigenous populations in the northern departments caused massive displacements, with those who could flee to Mexico or the United States. Some of those displaced within Guatemala were subsequently obliged by force or hunger to return to areas controlled by the military and to join civil patrols to help the counterinsurgency campaign of the armed forces.

In Nicaragua, those displaced directly or indirectly by the Contra war include the indigenous population near the Honduran border, who were resettled in the interior, and small peasant families in the north central departments of Nicaragua. Some indigenous families later returned to the border areas.

Overall, emigration to other countries also increased substantially. Between 1971 and 1978, the annual rate of Salvadoran emigration was 5.1 per thousand inhabitants; by 1978–1980, it rose to 16.2 per thousand (Torres Rivas and Jiménez 1985, 28). Refugees seemed to follow patterns established during previous migration: Nicaraguans went to Honduras, to Costa Rica, and more recently to the United States; Salvadorans went to refugee camps in Honduras and in smaller numbers to Nicaragua and Costa Rica as well as to Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States; Guatemalans usually went to Mexico and the United States and sometimes to other Central American countries. Much migration within Central America consisted of rural populations moving to border regions: Nicaraguans into Costa Rica and Honduras, Salvadorans into Honduras, and Guatemalans into southern Mexico.

Nearly all the estimated two hundred thousand Nicaraguans who had fled between April 1978 and April 1979 (most of them to Costa Rica and Honduras) returned to Nicaragua when the Sandinistas won in 1979. A new exodus began in the 1980s, however, partly in opposition to the Sandinista government and partly aggravated by the U.S.-financed Contra war. This wave included Miskito Indians and other indigenous populations of the Atlantic coast region. By 1987, twenty-two to one hundred thousand Nicaraguans were living in Costa Rica, forty-three thousand in Honduras, and up to twenty thousand in Guatemala (Fagen 1988, 75–76).

13. Since 1986 some efforts have been made to repopulate rural areas, including the Salvadoran government program United to Reconstruct and efforts by the affected population themselves, aided by church or other nongovernmental organizations. Conditions in repopulated zones continue to be insecure, however, and many in the repopulated communities confront the danger of military attack as well as the difficulties of reconstruction (Americas Watch 1987, 155ff).

Following agreements between the Sandinista government and the Atlantic coast indigenous groups, several thousand members of these groups returned to Nicaragua.¹⁴

By 1987, some 85 percent of the Central Americans who had left their countries were living in Mexico and the United States. Most of them passed through the Soconusco zone of Mexico, a narrow fertile plane along the Pacific coast that has become the traditional entering point for Central American emigrants. Although many Guatemalans and most Salvadorans continue on to Mexico City and in some cases to the United States, the Mexican states near the Guatemalan border, especially Chiapas, have become major centers for Central Americans. Nearly all of these migrants belong to indigenous populations from the northern and western highland states of Guatemala. Being of Mayan descent, they have a heritage similar to the population of Chiapas, to which they are also linked by trade and by social and kinship ties.

The indigenous Guatemalan population that has fled to Chiapas consists of two major groups. The first is made up of Guatemalan heads of household who have traditionally migrated to Chiapas from the western states on a seasonal basis to work on the coffee plantations in the Soconusco region. After 1979, as the Guatemalan government's counterinsurgency program targeted indigenous communities in these areas, the number of migrants in Chiapas grew as new groups arrived, sometimes with their families, and seasonal migrants stayed on rather than return to Guatemala as in the past. A second group consists of families from the northern states, particularly the regions of Quiché, Alta Verapaz, Izabal, and El Petén, which had been affected by the Franja Transversal project in the 1970s. In the early 1980s, indigenous communities in these areas were also subjected to brutal government persecution. The survivors fled first to the mountains and then en masse to Mexico, where they lived in refugee camps along the frontier in Chiapas. Some were subsequently moved to camps in Campeche and Quintana Roo. Since 1986, some three thousand have returned to their homes in Guatemala but most remain discouraged by continued military control of the countryside (Aguayo and Fagen 1988, 1-7; Aguayo 1985, 29-38; Manz 1988, 145-55; Salvadó 1988).¹⁵

Central Americans who have traveled on to Mexico City and other parts of Mexico are much more difficult to analyze than those in Chiapas. In the first place, they are scattered, having traveled individually or in families rather than as entire communities. Most are undocumented, and many attempt to pass as Mexicans. Studies of Central Americans in Mexico City have found that unlike the migrants in Chiapas, they were

14. "New Attention to Refugee Crisis," *Central America Report* (29 July 1988):225-27.

15. *Ibid.*

younger, urban, middle- or lower-middle-class, and relatively well-educated. Thus they were in a much better position than the indigenous migrants in Chiapas to take advantage of informal migration networks established by family members or friends who had previously migrated to the United States (Aguayo 1985, 42–45, 160).¹⁶

Finally, the number of Salvadorans and Guatemalans coming to the United States since 1979 has continued to grow. Since 1988 the number of Nicaraguans has also increased rapidly, motivated by opposition to the Sandinista government or disintegrating economic conditions. Because most of these migrants are undocumented, exact figures are not available. Salvadorans continue to represent the second-largest number of nonlegal immigrants apprehended by the INS (after Mexicans). The number of undocumented Salvadorans apprehended doubled between 1977 and 1981 from eight to sixteen thousand and reached seventeen thousand in 1985 (data from the INS). Most observers, noting the increased number of Salvadorans and Guatemalans in Los Angeles and other major U.S. cities, believe that the rate of increase has actually been much greater. One recent study estimates that three-quarters of a million to 1.3 million Central American migrants are living in the United States, two-thirds of them Salvadorans, and up to one-fifth Guatemalans (Ruggles and Fix 1985, 45–47). The U.S. General Accounting Office estimates the number of undocumented Salvadorans in the United States at six to eight hundred thousand (U.S. GAO 1989).

The majority of Central Americans (up to a half million) live in Los Angeles, with substantial numbers in San Francisco, Texas (especially Houston), Washington, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and Miami. Many have been able to take advantage of existing migration networks through Mexico, and some have obtained help from family, friends, or even communities already established in the United States (Rodríguez 1987; Ruggles and Fix 1985; Schoultz 1987, 30–33; Montes Mozo and García Vázquez 1988, 28–29). Those lacking such networks have tended to come to areas with established Latino populations that have cultural and sometimes political affinities (like the Mexicans in Los Angeles or Cubans in Miami). While Salvadorans constitute the majority of Central Americans in most cities (followed by Guatemalans), Nicaraguans predominate in Miami and Hondurans in New Orleans (Ruggles, Manson, Trutko, and Thomas 1985; Ruggles, Fix, and Thomas 1985).

16. For the reasons noted above, the results of these studies are limited and cannot be generalized. One poll (incorporating a large number of students) found that most Central Americans were employed with good incomes, while another (of Central Americans receiving refugee assistance) found 70 percent unemployed and only 10 percent with jobs commensurate with their previous work experience (Aguayo 1985, 46). In short, the studies suggest the varieties of Central American experience in Mexico but cannot be taken as representative of the entire Central American population.

The large number of undocumented Salvadorans and Guatemalans coming to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s indicates that U.S. immigration restrictions have had little impact on the number of Central Americans arriving, although they undeniably affect the process of migration (for example, in forcing migrants to depend on expensive and often unreliable coyotes as "guides"). They also affect the experience of immigrants once they arrive. Similarly, while U.S. refugee and asylum policies tend to reflect foreign policy concerns and thus have tended to discriminate against Central Americans with the partial exception of Nicaraguans, little evidence suggests that they have deterred immigrants from coming or from returning if deported. It is still early to evaluate the consequences of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which grants amnesty to undocumented immigrants who can prove they arrived prior to 1982 but penalizes employers for hiring workers who cannot prove they are here legally. Most preliminary studies indicate, however, that IRCA has had little effect in deterring immigrants from coming to the United States, although the law has made it more difficult for them to obtain employment (Espenshade et al. 1988).¹⁷

To what extent does the influx of Central Americans since 1979 represent a continuation of previous immigration patterns rather than a qualitatively new phenomenon? Because of the recent arrival and undocumented status of most Central Americans in the United States, information on this population is fragmentary and even contradictory. Compared with the Salvadorans displaced within El Salvador or in refugee camps in Honduras or with Guatemalans in Mexican refugee camps, the majority coming to the United States appear to have higher levels of education and income, similar to those in Mexico City (Ruggles and Fix 1985; Montes Mozo and García Vázquez 1988, 14–24). But Salvadorans' educational and income levels are undoubtedly lower on average than those of earlier migrants to the United States, and a larger proportion come from rural areas.

It would thus be a mistake to assume that Central Americans

17. Although the INS has reported a decline in the number of arrests of undocumented migrants attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexican border since 1986, this decline may be partly attributed to a reduction of INS agents in the San Diego area. See Patrick McConnell, "Too Few for So Many," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 Nov. 1989, pp. A3, A48. By the beginning of 1990, however, it was widely agreed that the number of undocumented migrants had increased dramatically, and INS arrests in the period from October 1989 through March 1990 were up 50 percent from the same period in the previous year. See Patrick McConnell, "Illegal Border Crossings Rise after Three-Year Fall," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Apr. 1990, pp. A1, A34–35. Refugee associations in Los Angeles reported an increase in the number of Salvadorans coming to the area following the November 1989 FMLN offensive. The growth in the number of undocumented immigrants is also apparent in the growing number of street vendors and in the increase in day laborers congregating at street corners in the Los Angeles area. See Cornelius, "Migrants from Mexico Still Coming," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 1988, Metro section.

migrating to Mexico and the United States during the 1980s represent a simple continuation of previous migration flows. Aside from the greater numbers and socioeconomic differences, many of those coming after 1979 have directly experienced violence or repression, including the assassination of family members, or have themselves been targets of detention, interrogation, and even torture. Many Central Americans living in Mexico and the United States assert that survival and personal safety are their primary motivation for emigrating. Although rural communities in Guatemala and El Salvador have been the major victims of military violence, persons targeted for repression by death squads and security forces tend to be urban-dwellers who are relatively well-educated, including labor and party leaders, students, and professionals (Aguayo and Fagen 1988, 30; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1984a, 11-17; Montes Mozo and García Vázquez 1988, 13; Aguayo 1985, 43, 146, 154). Some young men from El Salvador flee recruitment by the armed forces or the guerrillas (Montes Mozo and García Vázquez 1988, 31). In short, those immigrating since 1979 appear to represent a broader socioeconomic spectrum than past immigrants to the United States, and a large proportion are coming for reasons related to the war.

Many who have not been affected directly by violence and conflict have been affected indirectly, like the factory workers who have lost their jobs because the conflict has prevented production from continuing (Rodríguez 1987, 22). Thus the situation is complex because individuals and families often immigrate to another country for a combination of economic, social, and political reasons and also because the economic difficulties of the Central American countries have been prolonged and aggravated by political conflict (Stanley 1987, 146).

Current migration flows exhibit elements of both continuity and change. War, increased levels of violence, and conditions of economic crisis generated or aggravated by the political situation have become key factors in migration to the United States, to other Central American countries, and to Mexico. At the same time, like regional migrants, recent migrants to the United States for whatever reasons are taking advantage of previously established patterns of migration and networks of family, friends, or other Latino communities already in the country.

Summary and Conclusions

The foregoing analysis confirms that national and international capital penetration, resulting structural changes, and foreign intervention are central to explaining Central American migration. This review of the Central American migration experience also demonstrates that causal processes are complex and that careful analysis of each situation is necessary to determine precisely how they will affect migration.

Effects of Capitalist Penetration on Migration

Capitalist expansion in its various forms has resulted in migration between capitalist and precapitalist sectors in each country, while constantly reducing the size of precapitalist sectors and the capacity of capitalist sectors to absorb new workers. But while our earlier discussion suggests that capitalist penetration results in migration from less-developed to more-developed areas, the Central American experience indicates that the direction and patterns of migration vary according to conditions and structures within the peripheral economy or region.

Virtually all major instances of capitalist penetration have led to internal or international migration: the introduction and expansion of the coffee export economy in the nineteenth century; the creation of U.S. banana enclaves at the turn of the century; agricultural modernization by introducing technological innovations in existing crops and introducing or expanding estates that produce new export crops (especially cotton and sugar) in the postwar period; and industrial modernization in the 1960s and 1970s via creation of the Central American Common Market and increased foreign investment.

In addition to the direct effects of capital penetration, the changing dynamic of world capitalism has affected Central American economies in at least two respects. First, it has directly or indirectly affected penetration of foreign capital in the region. Thus the expansion of U.S. capitalism at the turn of the century was manifested in its growing economic and political hegemony in the Caribbean region, evidenced in Central America in the expansion of United Fruit (and later Standard Fruit) and in U.S. political, military, and financial intervention in Nicaragua. Second, economic cycles, booms, and depressions directly affect economies tied into the world market, whether through depressed (or increased) commodity prices, the opening of new export markets or closing of existing ones, or the transfer of inflated costs through the import of raw materials, machinery, or other agricultural and industrial inputs.

One response to changes and dislocations resulting from these global trends has been migration. Massive unemployment among Salvadoran coffee workers caused by depression-generated production cutbacks in the 1930s was one factor (along with the *matanza* of 1932) in the migration from the western coffee regions to central and eastern sectors of the country and into Honduras. Inflation produced by the oil crisis of the 1970s was passed along to consumers in Central America through higher costs of imported consumer goods or inputs to production and contributed to the dislocations of the 1970s that led many Central Americans to emigrate north. Currently, cotton workers in El Salvador are being driven from the southeastern regions of the country by production cutbacks while world cotton prices remain well below the costs of production.

Although a relationship can be established between capital penetration and migration in Central America, the extent and direction of this migration vary according to a number of factors. If the affected region is sparsely populated or relatively uninhabited, then little or no migration may result, or the region may even become a zone of attraction, as occurred with the development of banana enclaves along the northern coast of Honduras in the early twentieth century and the agricultural expansion following World War II. In some cases, migration to these areas may be reversed, as occurred with the opening of certain areas for cotton cultivation in the postwar period. In such cases, peasants are drawn to clear forested areas, then expelled as cotton plantations take over areas they have cleared and planted in corn; or a labor force attracted to the region to work on cotton plantations in return for small plots of land is subsequently expelled as cotton becomes increasingly mechanized.

In more densely populated areas, where precapitalist structures of production exist, peasants are pushed from their land when it is taken over for capitalist production. In some instances, they may migrate to more developed urban centers, but in other cases, they migrate to more marginal areas to reestablish a subsistence economy. This pattern has recurred in several Central American countries: in El Salvador and parts of Guatemala with the introduction of coffee production in the nineteenth century; in El Salvador and Nicaragua with the expansion of cotton production in the postwar period; in Costa Rica with the transfer of agricultural land to livestock production in the 1960s and 1970s; and in Guatemala with the shift from subsistence to cash-crop production in the highlands and more dramatically with the expulsion of indigenous population from communal lands during the development of the northern Franja Transversal in the 1970s. As opportunities for subsistence agriculture contract, migration takes the form of emigration to neighboring countries, as exemplified by Salvadorans moving to Honduras.

Capitalist penetration has also resulted in migration to the core economy itself, once a relationship is established between the core and peripheral economies. Thus factors determining the direction of migratory flows of uprooted populations include the existence of unincorporated areas in the home or neighboring countries where peasant agriculture can be resumed (an increasingly limited option in Central America), the existence and nature of opportunities in the capitalist sector of the economy, and the existence of structural and institutional ties between the peripheral economy and that of the core.

Capitalist or Core Economies as "Poles of Attraction" for Labor through Economic, Social, and Cultural Influences

The same process of capital penetration that pushes peasant cultivators off the land often results in cyclical migration due to seasonal labor recruitment as peasants migrate to work in coffee, cotton, and sugar harvests—a process evident in virtually every country in Central America. Also, areas of capitalist penetration may become poles of attraction with the opening of new lands for settlement (as in Honduras) or in response to actual or perceived opportunities for jobs, education, and other services resulting from urbanization and industrialization. Such opportunity has been at least one factor in rural-urban migration during the postwar industrialization in several countries. The fact that in many cases these opportunities did not materialize is evidenced by the large percentages of urban populations found in the informal sector (particularly in El Salvador), even before the political conflicts and economic crisis of the 1980s. The cultural and economic penetration accompanying the expansion of foreign investment during the 1960s and 1970s undoubtedly became a factor of attraction operating in conjunction with factors of expulsion (the dislocations accompanying modernization) to account for increased migration to the United States during this period. Immigration to the United States also followed a pattern of "indirect" labor recruitment as new Central American immigrants were absorbed into low-paying jobs in agriculture, industry, and the rapidly expanding service sectors in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The Role of the Peripheral State in the Development Process and in Managing Resulting Contradictions

The role of the state in capital accumulation has affected migration significantly. One example is the legislation enacted by liberal governments to insure land and labor for coffee production during the nineteenth century. It eliminated forms of communal property and forced smallholders off their land in El Salvador and forced indigenous communities in the Guatemalan highlands to supply labor during the harvest season. Another example is the creation of development poles by providing infrastructure and incentives to encourage investment. Other state policies have also affected migration, such as military recruitment in El Salvador and Nicaragua, which has led to an exodus of young men of draft age to neighboring countries, Mexico, and the United States.

Efforts to manage contradictions arising from the development process or resulting dislocations have been most successful in Costa Rica. In general, however, and particularly in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, the state has leaned heavily, if not exclusively, toward repres-

sion, which has led to politically motivated emigration. Examples are numerous: the *matanza* in El Salvador in 1932, which drove Salvadoran peasants from the western departments eastward and into Honduras; the destruction of indigenous villages in Guatemala and repression in other parts of the country in the early 1980s, which has driven hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans into Mexico and the United States; and the combination of persecution and war that has led to the exodus of a substantial proportion of the Salvadoran population. It can be argued that the failure or inability of these states in the past to successfully manage the contradictions resulting from capitalist production and its articulation with precapitalist modes accounts for the current political crises in these countries.

Foreign Intervention and Migration

Intervention by foreign states in internal conflicts may intensify or prolong these conflicts, in turn aggravating conditions that lead to displacement or emigration, but no clear relationship exists between migration and policies on immigration, asylum, and refugees. Foreign (particularly U.S.) intervention has been a factor in intensifying and prolonging the current conflict in El Salvador and in resulting population dislocations. The bombing and strafing of rural areas utilizing bombers, helicopters, and other equipment supplied by the United States since 1984 has directly caused population flight from these areas.¹⁸ Moreover, the Reagan administration's emphasis on a military solution was an important factor in prolonging the war, aggravating the economic crisis, and stimulating the continued flow of migration from El Salvador to other countries. U.S. financing of the Contra war was directly and indirectly responsible for population dislocations and economic crisis in Nicaragua and the flow of refugees and migrants into neighboring countries and to the United States. In Guatemala, where U.S. intervention is less obvious today, a long history exists of foreign military and political intervention, including the U.S.-directed counterinsurgency programs of the 1960s,

18. As this example demonstrates, when analyzing the role of the state, it is difficult to separate the role of domestic regimes from that of the U.S. government, partly because the influence of the latter is often overwhelming and partly because they are generally aligned. Two notable exceptions to alignment are the Arbenz government in Guatemala (1950-1954), whose program for developing national capitalism in Guatemala conflicted with the interests of U.S. capital as epitomized by the United Fruit Company, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, whose efforts to extricate themselves from dependence on the United States clashed with the drive for continued hegemony in the region by the U.S. government or the factions that currently control it. More often, differences arise over means rather than goals, such as the occasional disagreements between the U.S. government and the Salvadoran military regarding the internationally permissible level of repression.

foreign training of military personnel, and assistance by foreign advisors in the antiguerrilla campaign of the early 1980s.

Overall, U.S. foreign policy appears to have been more effective in generating refugees than U.S. immigration and refugee policies have been in preventing their entry. The latter policies have primarily made migration and the sojourn in the United States more difficult. This situation has been aggravated by IRCA (for all but those eligible for amnesty), although it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of the new law in stemming the flow of migrants.

The Role of Migratory Patterns and Networks

Patterns of migration established in earlier periods may continue to operate even when the original conditions for migration no longer exist or when new causes of migration are introduced, due in part to networking among families or community members at the points of immigration and emigration. This tendency has been particularly evident in the movement of migrants and refugees across borders during the past decade, which appears to follow previous patterns of migration where possible (Nicaraguans into Honduras and Costa Rica, Salvadorans into Honduras and Guatemala, Guatemalans into southern Mexico). In some cases, such migration takes advantage of relationships established in the receiving country through prior migration. Some Central Americans entering the United States have followed migratory networks established by earlier Latino immigrants to communities with cultural and perhaps political similarities. By the mid-1980s, however, a large proportion of the Central American migrants had relatives or friends in the United States, many of them in major urban centers where entire networks from the sending communities may have been established. These social networks reinforce the structural and institutional ties between core and periphery in determining the direction of migratory and refugee flows.

In conclusion, while Central American migration in the 1980s is a quantitatively and qualitatively new phenomenon, the factors identified in our analytical framework help to explain it. What distinguishes the massive population movements in Central America today from those of the past is the conjuncture of several factors: an economic crisis, a consequence of the changes in the capitalist world economy and their specific forms in each Central American country, combined with political conflict arising from the growing contradictions between capitalist modernization and the backward socioeconomic structures maintained over time by the repressive state apparatus. U.S. involvement in these conflicts has prolonged and intensified them without resolving the structural contradictions from which they emerged. Prolonging the conflicts has in turn aggravated the economic crisis, which cannot be expected to disappear

once the conflicts end. Thus one effect that can be anticipated is the continued dislocation, displacement, and migration of substantial sectors of the Central American populations.

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