From Wage Migration to Debt Migration?

Easy Credit, Failure in El Norte, and Foreclosure in a Bubble Economy of the Western Guatemalan Highlands

by
David Stoll

In the 1990s there were two new ideas to make the Ixil Mayas of Nebaj, Guatemala, self-sufficient. The first idea, conceived by microcredit consultants, was to make it easier for the Ixils to borrow money so that they could become entrepreneurs. The second idea, conceived by Ixils, was to use the credits to smuggle themselves into U.S. labor markets. In the process, Ixils turned many of the credits into loans to other Ixils at 10 percent interest per month. By 2006-2007 many stateside Ixils were failing to find enough work to pay their loans, and their serial debts were collapsing back in Nebaj. Currently an association of Nebaj women is asking international organizations and the Guatemalan government to save their houses and land from foreclosure. The stories that Ixils tell suggest that migration is a highly competitive process not just in U.S. labor markets but in the sending population, where people are being forced to go north by remittance- and credit-driven inflation. Their stories also suggest that migration is a process that runs on debt, with migrants indebting themselves and their relatives to the migration stream in ways that many are unable to repay. The debts not only enable migration but require more people to migrate north, in a chain of exploitation that may suck more value from the sending population than it returns.

Keywords: *Migration, Debt, Credit, Guatemala, Ixils, Mayas, Peasants, NGOs*

My first intimation that debt could be the motor of migration came on a warm evening in Baltimore. I was visiting an ex-combatant of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor. Now he worked for a Korean grocer 72 hours a week. He, his two sons, and ten other Guatemalans were living in a three-bedroom apartment in a heavily patrolled complex that seemed to include people from all over the world. Suddenly the revolving lights of a squad car flashed across the quad. Burly paramedics were trying to strap a drunk, bawling Guatemalan youth to a gurney. The kid had punched his stepfather in the face, the stepfather had grabbed the phone to call the police, and the stepson had fallen or jumped off a second-story balcony. They were quarreling over the debt he owed for his trip to the United States, and he had been talking about killing himself because he could not find work.

Mexican and Central American migration to the United States is attracting much attention, but I have yet to find any research that focuses on the necessary

David Stoll is a professor of anthropology at Middlebury College. For comments on earlier versions he thanks John Sherman, Walter Little, Fred Krissman, Leon Fink, Ed Kissam, Armando Alfonso, Sandy Davis, Ann Miles, John Maluccio, Stener Ekern, Eli Sutton, Ben Stoll, Jan Rus, and the *LAP* editorial board.

LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 170, Vol. 37 No. 1, January 2010 123-142
DOI: 10.1177/0094582X09355430

underpinning of debt. I say "necessary" because where else can Central American peasants find the US$5,000 they need to get through Mexico and across the U.S. border? If the U.S. labor market needed them, relatives with stable U.S. jobs would pay for the trip and new arrivals would soon work off the debt. But many of the stateside Guatemalans I meet do not have stable jobs, and it is unclear that the U.S. economy needs them. Five months before the September 2008 credit collapse, in Homestead, Florida, at 7:30 a.m. I counted more than 100 Guatemalans standing beside the road in one location—a hiring line in which no one was getting hired. Worse, there was nothing very new about their plight. For several years Guatemalans have been struggling to find work in Homestead, and yet more have continued to arrive. Are they deluded by media images of the fabulous life to be had in El Norte? Or have they kept coming not because they are pulled by the wages (which in Homestead are often below the legal minimum) but because they are pushed by their debts back in Guatemala?

In sociocultural anthropology and Latin American studies, the prevailing assumption is that migrants are being forced to come to the United States by neoliberalism (but see Kyle, 2000, and Cohen, 2004) and that migration is broadly beneficial to both migrants and their sending communities (but see Fletcher, 1999; Levitt, 2001; Miles, 2004; Nazario, 2006; Smith, 2006; and Foxen, 2007). Ethnographers refer to debt, but no one seems to burrow into it, at least in Latin America. The closest scholarly literature that I can find focuses on the microcredit industry (Lont and Hospes, 2004) but mainly in South Asia, where anthropologists and sociologists have taken on the Grameen Bank and its founder, Muhammed Yunis, winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize.

Debt is easy to ignore because migrants are often reticent about it, but it has become a public issue in the Ixil Maya town of Nebaj because of the sudden bursting of an economic bubble. For two decades, a blissful succession of international aid projects, low-interest loans, and remittances from the United States enabled thousands of Nebajenses to prosper as never before. Then something went wrong, in the year before the U.S. credit crisis, and thousands of Ixils fell behind on their payments. Currently an association of Nebaj women is asking international organizations and the Guatemalan government to save their houses and land from foreclosure.

What follows is a fortuitous window on an obscure subject—how Guatemalans use formal and informal credit to finance unauthorized migration to the United States. The town that has suddenly thrown open this window is not a typical Mayan Indian town—it has received more aid projects than any other in Guatemala—but I am eager to know if other researchers are hearing echoes of what I have heard. The stories Nebajenses are telling suggest that migration is a highly competitive process not just in U.S. labor markets but in the sending population, fueled by competition over land, inheritances, jobs, and scarce opportunities for upward mobility. Nebajense stories also suggest that migration is a process that runs on debt, with migrants indebting themselves and their relatives to the migration stream in ways that many are unable to repay, resulting in the loss of homes and productive assets. The debts not only enable migration but require more people to migrate north, in a chain of exploitation that may suck more value from the sending population than it returns.

NEBAJ AS AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT HUB

When I visited Nebaj for the first time in November 1982, it was a quiet, scared town occupied by the Guatemalan army as it chased Marxist guerrillas in the surrounding mountains. At one point much of the Mayan population, which is predominantly Ixil but includes a dynamic K'iche' minority, seemed to support the Guerrilla Army of the Poor not just in Nebaj but in the neighboring municipios of Cotzal and Chajul. In retaliation, the Guatemalan army committed massacres and burned down the rural settlements. Thousands of people died, and more than a third of the population took refuge in born-again Protestant churches, whose members now provide a majority of the town's leadership.

Since then the guerrillas have demobilized, the army has dwindled to a platoon, and Nebaj has become the most bustling town in the region. Thanks to the many aid projects, Ixils and their K'iche' neighbors have replaced the domestic livestock they lost in the war. They are growing a wider repertoire of agricultural products. Shuttle looms bang out textiles. Ixils have taken over the local teaching profession, and thousands of Ixil youth have obtained secondary education. Ixils are in charge of the municipal government, dozens of Protestant congregations, and the Catholic parish. The streets are filled with pickups, motorcycles, and careening three-wheeled taxis. Teenage girls clump by in high heels gabbing on cell phones. A delegate from the European Union visited for the first time, saw all the three-story houses going up, and exclaimed: "This has got to be the drug trade!"

No, it is first of all the result of international projects, especially from the European Union, in an aid bonanza that began in the late 1980s and shows no sign of ending. The justification for the endless parade of new programs is that most of Nebaj's population was displaced by the war. True, but equally devastated municipios have never been deluged with projects like the Nebajenses. What makes them such a magnet for international donors? Looking handsome, having a knack for getting on with foreigners, and living in a majestic mountain valley have not hurt, and so the Ixils have become calendar Mayas, in two senses. Their diviners still use the Mayan calendar, and the splendor of their traditional female dress gets them into calendars put out by aid organizations as symbolic capital for fundraising.

This is not to say that the Ixil-internationalist marriage is a happy one. What motivates the Ixils welcoming international organizations is their desire to *superar* (get ahead), not their loyalty to the picturesque traditions that foreigners so prize. While some families are plaintiffs in the genocide indictments against former dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt (1982–1983), many more Ixils have voted for Ríos and his political party on repeated occasions. When Guatemalan voters turned against Ríos in the 2003 election, all three Ixil municipios elected mayors from his political party. Yet Nebaj is so attractive to international donors that they have chosen to overlook its political conservatism and born-again religiosity.

Despite all the projects—sustainable agriculture and nontraditional exports; marketing cooperatives; a veterinary association and village pharmacies; a model justice center with legal aid, mediators, translators, and sociologists to resuscitate traditional community law; food supplements and education for mothers and small children; medical teams from the United States and Cuba—how many times have I heard young Ixils lament that none of these organizations really help them?

If we look at Nebaj as an economy of desires and attempts to meet those desires, it is apparent that what Ixils want has changed dramatically over the past 50 years. Because they are Native Americans, international donors would like to believe that they are guardians of the earth, keepers of ancient wisdom, faithful defenders of their traditions. There are Ixils who fit this description; many do not. About their culture Ixils tend to feel the way that Americans like myself feel about the 1950s. Sometimes we are nostalgic about the 1950s; sometimes we are not. Getting drunk in honor of the saints, subsisting on diets of maize and beans, living in dank adobe houses—Ixils have good reasons to abandon many of their traditional ways. They are proud of who they are and where they come from, but they are also eager for the bright lights of modernity, the creature comforts that they see on television and that they can attain only by abandoning many of the traditions that make them attractive to tourists.

When international donors fell in love with Nebaj, they took on a mission with no foreseeable end. Before the war, most Ixils engaged in below-subsistence farming in which they made up for their land shortage by migrating to coastal plantations for several months a year. The majority of Ixil children did not attend school, and most Ixils lived and died without modern medical care. Their self-sufficiency ended when the army burned down their farmsteads in the early 1980s. The majority of Ixils became refugees and learned how to stand in line for rations. They also learned that an array of *instituciones* could be petitioned for an array of needs. "¿Que proyecto trae?" (What project do you bring?) became an acceptable opener with foreigners. As for all those aid agencies, they could hardly confine themselves to restoring the status quo. Before the war the majority of Ixils lived in huts without running water, latrines, and electricity, so all these necessities of modern life would have to be provided for the first time. Moreover, because Ixil women still bear an average of six children who begin reproducing in adolescence, every year Ixils start hundreds of new households. Therefore every year some combination of government agencies and donors is being petitioned to finance modern housing, electricity, potable water, roads, schools, and health care for the equivalent of several new villages sprouting across the landscape.

Aren't development projects supposed to help people become self-sufficient? Aren't they supposed to generate new sources of income? Dozens of Nebaj projects have tried to do just that. There have been successes, such as two associations that enable coffee growers to sell their crop at higher prices. Farmers in favorable microclimates are producing new exports such as French beans. But most Ixils do not have the right kind of land for such strategies. Even if the area's remaining large holdings were broken up (and many already have been), small cultivators would still not have enough land to become self-sufficient. According to a study by French agronomists, Ixil country is too steep and has too little soil to provide the agricultural income needed to power the area's development (Aubry and Servadio, 2004). What about factories? Maquiladoras across Central America are struggling against low-wage competition from China. As for retail commerce, every category has multiplied to the point of saturation. So has motor transport—the streets are clogged with vehicles whose owners barely make their monthly payments. Artisan production such as furniture and textiles provides employment but not of the kind that satisfies aspiring consumers. None of these endeavors can absorb the tens of thousands of Ixil youth without enough land to live by farming. As a result, Nebaj's most important product, its principal industry, continues to be the export of surplus labor.

TWO STRATEGIES FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY

In the 1990s there were two new ideas to make Ixils self-sufficient, the interactions between which will occupy the rest of this article. The first idea, conceived by aid consultants, was to make it easier for Ixils to borrow money so that they could become entrepreneurs. We have all heard how microcredits can help the poor work their way out of poverty. Even if that is not actually the case, Ixils and other Mayas are eager for a safe place to put their savings; they are also eager to make large purchases, and some indeed do manage to conjure up new businesses and jobs. For aid agencies, meanwhile, lending money to individuals and partnerships avoids the endless accountability problems of communal projects. Lending money to Ixils seemed like such a good idea that, by 2008, they could borrow from at least 23 banks, credit associations, and revolving-loan funds within a few minutes' walk from the Nebaj plaza.

The second way to make Ixils self-sufficient—this one conceived by Ixils rather than aid consultants—was to seek a more advantageous market in which to sell their labor. Ixils have plenty of experience with selling their labor on disadvantageous terms. When a family runs out of maize, several months before the next harvest, it is customary for the entire family to go to a coffee plantation—not so much for the pay, which is minimal, but for the food ration. To earn money faster, up to US$11 a day, Ixil men go to coastal plantations to cut sugarcane, but the pace is too brutal for many. As for Guatemala City, thousands of Ixils have tried factory work and street sales, but living expenses are so high that the majority return without savings.

This leaves the United States, about which Ixils have been asking me for two decades. "How much is a day's pay? Can you help me find a job there?" The same idea has occurred to many other Guatemalans. According to a U.S. Census (2006) projection, there are 875,000 Guatemalans in the United States, half of them legally (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2007). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2008), there are 1.5 million Guatemalans in the United States, a third of them legally. That would be one of every nine Guatemalans. In 2008 Guatemalans in the United States sent back US$4.4 billion, the country's largest source of foreign exchange and almost equal to the country's total exports. According to the IOM, almost 1 million Guatemalan households and more than 4 million Guatemalans (a third of the country) benefit from remittances.

In Nebaj the two largest credit institutions transmitted Q115 million from the United States in 2007. The following April they handled 2,653 remittances. If we add an estimated 1,225 remittances that same month through two other credit institutions and two private agents and assume the same level of remittance, this would add up to Q169 million from the United States in 2007. From an estimated total of 3,878 remittances in April 2008 I estimate a sending population of 3,152—not including Nebajenses who are unable to send anything.[1] Except for a handful of pioneers in the 1990s and a few hundred others in 2000–2001, most Nebajenses have gone north since 2002. Most are males between the ages of 15 and 35, along with a few older men and wives joining their husbands and a growing number of unmarried girls in their teens and early twenties.

All but a handful of Nebajenses—a spouse, a college student, a diplomatic employee—have gone to the United States illegally. Only a few more have been able to obtain tourist visas. From many swindles and robberies in Mexico, Nebajenses have learned that they must pay Q40,000–Q45,000 to human smugglers, typically from the neighboring department of Huehuetenango, who deliver them to Mexican smugglers based in Chiapas. At 7.8 quetzals to the dollar, each trip costs more than US$5,000. Typically Nebajenses are walked or floated across the Guatemalan/Mexican border, then driven or shipped in containers as far as Altar, Sonora, and then walked across the Arizona desert to safe houses in Phoenix, where they are detained until a relative or moneylender wires the balance to a Mexican bank.

Nebajenses have taken up residence from Los Angeles to Syracuse, but they tend to agglomerate because their lack of English makes them dependent on relatives and friends to find work. Concentrations include Phoenix, West Palm Beach, and North Carolina, but the three largest are Homestead, a plant-nursery suburb of Greater Miami; Centerville, a Virginia suburb of Washington, DC; and Dover/New Philadelphia in southeastern Ohio. In the latter, Nebajenses work for the union-busting meatpacker Case Farms and other nonunionized factories. In Homestead and Centerville, they work for more established immigrants who have learned the same lesson as Salvadorans and Peruvians on Long Island—that they can climb into the American middle class only by taking advantage of more recently arrived immigrants through chronic flouting of U.S. labor laws (Mahler, 1995).

For such employers—immigrants with U.S. residency or citizenship—Nebajenses work 12 hours a day, six days a week, without overtime pay and without health insurance. Nebajenses are eager for overtime, but the habitual violation of legal standards means that this is sweat labor (Gordon, 2005). If they are not lucky enough to find such an employer, they stand beside the road hoping that a passing motorist will offer a day or two of work. Yet some have come home as men of means. Of the eight such persons I have interviewed, all went before 2003. The majority found unusually well-paid work in construction or an itinerant labor crew for an Anglo boss who spoke little Spanish but was so impressed by their work ethic that he made them foremen. Equally impressed have been their fellow Nebajenses, thousands more of whom have gone north. Ever since, their relatives have been waiting for the remittances to pour back. The majority have been disappointed. Why isn't he sending money, they ask, or sending only US$100 a month, not enough to pay back the loan that sent him north?

For wives, the answer may be all too obvious. Doña Feliciana (this and all names have been changed) is a weaver who borrowed heavily to buy a comfortable house. She is about to lose her house, according to Doña Feliciana, because her husband is in Minnesota getting drunk and chasing women instead of sending her money. "Oh," I said brightly, "give me his phone number, and I'll call him when I get back to the United States." Out popped the cell phones, and, before I knew it, I was on the line with her no-good husband. "Tell him he has to send us money or you're going to get him deported!" Feliciana hissed. And so I spoke with her husband, who had been away for seven years. An injury had put him out of work at a meatpacking plant. After an idle period, he had just joined a bakery at the lower wage of US$6.50 an hour. He and three other men were paying US$1,000 a month for an apartment in which the pipes had frozen, so they had no running water.

Many Nebajenses who left between 2003 and 2006 have been able to send home enough money to buy a lot and start building a house or at least to make a down payment on a motor vehicle. A few are still sending back monthly remittances of US$1,000 or more, but many are stalked by the fear of *fracaso* (failure). It turns out that, while sneaking into U.S. labor markets is an obvious way to obtain a higher price for one's labor, there are enormous risks. Nebajenses must find enough work to pay three major financial obligations: the money they owe for being smuggled into the United States, their living expenses (always higher than expected), and only then the large remittances that their families expect. Unfortunately, finding enough work to meet the three obligations means competing with other Guatemalans and Mexicans who have arrived in the same labor markets with the same idea. The worst-case scenario is to be arrested and deported after paying the US$5,000 but before being able to work off the debt. No legitimate occupation back in Guatemala will pay it. Now the migrant is under even more pressure than before to invest another US$5,000 in a second try, doubling his wager on whatever destiny awaits him.

Now for an obvious question: Where do Ixils borrow the small fortune needed to buy their way into the United States? If they already have a stateside relative with a steady job, he can pay the *coyote* (smuggler) out of his earnings, but few Ixils are so blessed. If they still have a bit of land, they can sell it—at the risk of ending up with no land at all. That leaves two other possibilities. They can borrow the money from a local coyote—a term that in Nebaj refers to a recruiter (*enganchador*) or moneylender (*prestamista*) rather than an actual trafficker who takes Ixils across borders. Unfortunately, Nebaj moneylenders typically charge 10 percent interest a month. Even though interest is not compounded, the debt will double in less than a year and triple in less than two years.

The other place to borrow US$5,000 is from one of those 23 banks, credit unions, and revolving-loan funds. Their purpose is not to finance illegal migration; if anything, easy credit is supposed to help Guatemalans stay at home and earn their living locally. Officially, no Nebaj institution will accept a loan application for going to the United States, but until recently loan officers did not necessarily view the diversion of their loans to wage migration as a serious problem. Indeed, the two largest institutions accepted remittances as evidence of the ability to repay a large loan that the borrower could never repay from Guatemalan income. Neither lenders nor borrowers thought much about what would happen if remittances dried up.

THE WIVES-AND-MOTHERS PROBLEM

Knowingly or unknowingly, Nebaj's credit institutions have taken on investments in the American Dream. They have imported into their balance sheets a tangle of complications that I will call the wives-and-mothers problem. Fathers and uncles are involved, but many of the people who borrow money to send their wage pilgrim north are female. They remain behind with the debt, and, if their man fails, they pay a large share of the consequences. Once in debt Q40,000 for a trip north—or Q80,000 or Q120,000, because families often send two or three siblings to keep each other company—they become accustomed to chronic uncertainty over their future akin to that arising from sending a man off to war. Their future hinges on whether remittances arrive, as well as on phone calls, which have become very cheap and very dangerous because they enable the instant transmission of misfortune and distrust. Hence the proverbial phone call from the husband who has gotten drunk because he lost his job—or has lost his job because he got drunk—and accuses his wife of infidelity. When money fails to arrive, families wonder whether their man has relapsed into drinking or set up a new household with another woman. I have no way of quantifying, but everyone in Nebaj agrees that illegal migration is hard on marriages. According to the IOM, 36 percent of the families of Central American migrants disintegrate (*Prensa Libre,* May 18, 2008).

Illegal migration is also hard on revolving-loan funds. When wives and mothers lose a wage earner to El Norte, many have tried to compensate by borrowing money from credit institutions at 2 percent a month (the most common interest rate) in order to lend it to neighbors at 10 percent a month. They hope to live off the difference. My first good look at this phenomenon occurred in October 2007 and April 2008, when I talked with a total of 24 Nebaj coyotes who were recruiting and/or moneylending. (Since I was snowballing through personal contacts, this is not necessarily a representative sample.) Fifteen were men, ranging from occasional recruiters to fast-talking brokers sending up to a dozen migrants per month—only three had ever gone to the United States themselves. Of the nine women, at least five were borrowing money from institutions in order to lend it to migrants at 10 percent a month. Of the five, all but one were now saddled with defaulters from whom they had obtained no collateral or collateral that turned out to be worthless. They were keeping their heads above water by taking out more loans.

One of the two female coyotes who has worked in El Norte, Doña Marta, is a weaver and a political activist. Around 2001 an anthropologist helped her and her husband to obtain a tourist visa from the U.S. embassy. As soon as they arrived in the United States, they went to work in a factory. Three years later Marta returned to Nebaj in a state of prosperity, prompting neighbors to ask how they could share in her good fortune. She decided to help them go north by providing loans at 10 percent a month. The loans were very profitable until three migrants failed to repay. Now she and her children were in danger of defaulting on their bank loans and losing their two-story house. Her husband was still in the United States, laboring for Korean grocers and angry that she had lost his savings. What was their solution? Going even farther into debt to send Doña Marta back to the United States, this time with three of her grown children—none of whom had found work as of May 2009.

In this particular migration saga, the biggest loser thus far is a son-in-law and his family. Thanks to a loan from Doña Marta, the son-in-law made it to Los Angeles but had a hard time finding a job. The night his wife was giving birth to their first child back in Nebaj, he fell off a fire escape and landed on his head. A hospital saved his life but only by removing part of his cranium. After three months in a coma, he was released to his brother, who brought him back to Guatemala. When we met, he was lying in bed under a big American flag tacked to the wall. His parents had spent Q40,000 in eight fruitless consultations with neurosurgeons in the capital. His brother had gone north again but not found steady work. At last report, the parents were in debt to three financial institutions and two moneylenders for Q160,000 and were about to lose their house and the last of their agricultural land.

The most successful of the nine female coyotes is Doña Maria. The majority of her family was massacred by the army when she was a child, and from the age of 14 to 16 she was a combatant in the Guerrilla Army of the Poor. In the late 1980s army offensives pressured thousands of EGP–administered civilians into surrendering, including Maria. After several narrow escapes she then fled Ixil country to work in factories. In the 1990s a refugee organizer persuaded her to return and administer programs for women, for which she received a salary and eventually a house. Maria was unusual in having only two children. "It's good to show that it's not just men who have capacity, that we women can get ahead as well," she told me. "Sometimes men don't know how to handle money, they waste money, drinking in bars and chasing other women. In contrast, women are responsible for children, we're more responsible; we can provide education for our children and get ahead."

While buying project animals in Huehuetenango, Maria met a coyote who asked her to help him find new customers. Between 2004 and 2008 she sent 40 people north, in each case paying for the trip as far as the Mexican border but no farther until her customers reached a safe house in Phoenix, whereupon she wired a bank transfer to the "señor coyote" in Comitán, Chiapas. By January 2009 Maria had two problems. First, she owed Q72,000 for two migrants who were arrested and deported only a few days after she paid for their safe arrival. Second, she owed Q11,200 to four credit institutions every month. Keeping up with relentless payments would require sending more migrants north, but Ixil job seeking in the United States was going so badly that some would turn into defaulters.

HOW DOÑA ESPERANZA INTERPRETED SOLIDARITY

This is not the first time that Ixils have had trouble repaying loans. During the coffee boom in the early twentieth century, ladino (nonindigenous) entrepreneurs used distilled alcohol to tempt Ixils into borrowing money for religious fiestas and then used the debts to grab land and turn Ixils into peons. Predatory ladino moneylending is much reduced, but this is probably where Ixils learned to charge 10 percent interest a month. Strangely, Ixils charge each other this rate without incurring opprobrium. I have yet to detect a local term with the negative connotation of "loan-sharking"; a monthly rate of 5 percent is regarded as generous, and it is only 15 to 20 percent that is perceived as unneighborly. Still, until recently few Ixils had the wherewithal to make large loans, so they seized or lost little property in this manner.

Then two developments multiplied the funds at their disposal. First, an Italian contractor of the United Nations Development Program, the Program for Displaced People, Refugees, and Returnees in Central America (PRODERE), earned a terrible reputation by lavishing most of its large budget on itself. By way of compensation, PRODERE left behind revolving-loan funds that soon disappeared into the pockets of Ixil administrators and borrowers. Second, the newly arrived gospel of microfinance assured the aid organizations of the next wave that they could set up more credit programs and, armed with the latest development lingo, ignore what had happened to their predecessors (Faceta Central Desarrollo Empresarial, 2002). Soon there was nothing micro- about the amounts being lent by the larger agencies, particularly Banrural, a USAID-supported Guatemalan bank, and COTONEB, an Ixil-organized credit union. Both were willing to lend Q50,000 or more, accepted remittance stubs as proof of the capacity for repayment, and required collateral in the form of property titles. Some loan officers suggested setting up a credit bureau to detect double-dippers, but higher-ups rejected the idea.

Meanwhile, smaller organizations busied themselves with actual micro-credits of Q10,000 or less. Instead of asking for collateral, they followed the example of the Grameen Bank and required their borrowers to join so-called solidarity groups. In a solidarity group, no one can obtain a second loan until everyone has repaid the first. This can produce a high level of repayment but because of social pressure rather than solidarity.

In Nebaj, a particular case put loan officers on notice that many of their credits would never be repaid. In 2007 a 52-year-old villager named Esperanza organized more than 50 women into a series of solidarity groups. But these were not solidarity groups as envisioned by microcredit agencies; they were set up in secret by Doña Esperanza and her confederates. Each member of each group applied for credit as an individual and then turned the money over to Doña Esperanza in exchange for a *regalo* (gift) of up to several hundred quetzals. Doña Esperanza said that she would take charge of repaying each loan. That same year, she also approached more than a dozen neighbors and asked them for loans too—again one-on-one, to prevent anyone from grasping the scale of her borrowing.

A few months later, five different institutions in the municipal seat realized that they had more than 50 female borrowers in a single village who denied that they had any obligation to repay their loans. Instead, the women pointed to Doña Esperanza, who, on December 17, 2007, loaded her possessions and chickens on the early-morning bus and left for Guatemala City. When I showed up looking for victims, one of the first doors on which I knocked led to a meeting with six of Doña Esperanza's creditors who had lent her a total of Q122,000. Just one of her solidarity groups—the 12 women of "Las Rosas"—gave her Q115,000. If these are average totals for the 75 victims who had stepped forward as of May 2008, Esperanza managed to borrow Q978,000 or US$125,000—equivalent to the annual income of 100 poor households.

What could she have done with so much money? Doña Esperanza declined to speak with me. Her Spanish is minimal, she has never gone to school, and she does not know how to read and write. She has no criminal record and, like many Ixils seeking to get ahead, belongs to an evangelical church. Her only antecedent is that she belonged to a "community bank" (*banco comunal*), that is, a solidarity group set up by a microcredit agency. When asking neighbors for loans, she pointed to the new house she was building (another handsome two-story affair) and a son studying to be a lawyer as the reasons she needed to borrow. She would repay, she explained, with remittances from her husband and another son, both in the United States. But like so many Ixils gone north, her husband and son failed to find enough employment to build the house of their dreams. This, evidently, was another way.

Three months after Doña Esperanza fled, a village delegation found her near Guatemala City. Instead of turning her over to the police, they brought her back to Ixil country. According to Esperanza, it was all the fault of her husband, who had instructed her to duplicate property deeds, and of her son studying law, who had instructed her to organize women into multiple borrowing groups. They had all the money, she claimed. The response of the husband and son was to sue her for defamation. Victims could not take possession of the house because, while it was being built by Esperanza, one of her sons held the title. Nor could they sue the husband or son, because the only one who owed them anything was Esperanza. My guess is that the budding lawyer figured out how to take advantage of all the weaknesses in the credit system so that his mother's debts would be unrecoverable.

Doña Esperanza is not the only credit sinkhole being peered into by Nebaj loan officers. She is just one of at least five women who have used their social skills to orchestrate loan rings, not to mention a far larger number of borrowers—no one knows how many—who decided to meet those burdensome monthly payments by taking out a second loan with another institution, and then maybe a third and a fourth. New institutions arriving with fresh capital have never been lacking, because, as I have mentioned previously, Nebaj is a town where so many aid organizations want to work.

By 2008 Nebaj loan officers conceded that many of their borrowers were overindebted. They blamed competition among institutions for fostering a culture of nonpayment. Several of the loan officers also blamed the most philanthropic institutions, which do not have to recover capital for their funders, do not confiscate property pledged as collateral, and tend to prioritize loans to women. Since loan officers tend to be men, this chain of reasoning leads to blaming the *señoras*. Here is what Doña Esperanza's loan officer told me about her, with an I-told-you-so air:

> Her attitude changed. She became one of these señoras who walks down the street with her cell phone, talking about her movements, always with her deals, maybe she's involved in fraud. Cell phones are for emergencies and businessmen. The [women] always want to borrow larger amounts. I saw the change and told myself, the next time the loan will not be paid.

THE WOMEN'S DEBT COMMITTEE

Aside from their headaches over the señoras, Nebaj loan officers are worried that all the bad news from the United States—including the recession, Ixils losing jobs in the construction industry, and enforcement of immigration laws—will cut off the remittances that so many of their clients need to repay their loans. And so we come to the debtors' committee, which has gone through several name changes including "the Organization of Women Affected by the Economic Crisis in the Ixil Area." The first petition, in October 2008, begins:

> We are victims of the Internal Armed Conflict which brought poverty and hunger to our children and families. After the signing of the peace accords, we were left without material goods, all that remained was our house lot. This obliged some families to journey to the United States to pursue the American Dream, but unfortunately some of us have not had the luck to attain it, with the result that we return home with empty hands.

According to the petition, 76 individuals—all but 11 of them women—owe a total of Q5.4 million. That is an average of Q71,000 or US$9,000 per household in a town where many households get by on US$1,500 a year or less.

When I visited in January and June 2009, the committee was in more or less permanent session. A stream of women who spoke little Spanish pulled loan documents out of blouses and asked me to decipher them. The executive committee consisted of women proficient in Spanish. Two of the founders had been men, but they were now leading a rival group, partly because of their dubious personal antecedents and partly because an all-woman organization would be more appealing to donors. There is a long history of aid projects to empower Ixil women, and the debt committee is the latest result. The meetings consist almost entirely of women, but the first I attended was opened by a pentecostal pastor and closed by another pentecostal pastor, both of whom led the group in vocal appeals to the Almighty.

Gringos also have a certain magical quality in Nebaj, so I too was welcome to the deliberations. Even though I reiterated that I did not represent an aid organization, could not pay their debts, and was only doing a study, my presence signified that the *internacionales* cared about their plight, and women lined up to tell me their stories. Forty women (all but a few with husbands), a man, and a couple explained their situations to me. The average debt they reported was Q126,500 or more than US$16,000 per household. Thirty of them had lent money or property titles to others. The purpose, in 25 of the cases, was to send someone to the United States. Eight of the 25 deals had been undermined by deportation, 2 by the death of the migrant, and 3 by incapacitating injuries. Ten of the 42 family heads I interviewed had already lost their houses to foreclosure or debt-forced sale. Unfortunately, Guatemala provides no bankruptcy protection for one's house.

The president of the committee, whom I will call Doña Sara, was a small, bustling figure who in January had the reassuring air of a fairy godmother but by June was being ground down by adversity. Ixil women are known for their intricate weaving, and this is how Sara used to make her living; in fact, she was a protégé of Padre Javier Gurriarán, the Spanish priest who introduced liberation theology to Nebaj before he was run out by the army, and she had participated in a succession of projects to empower women. Liberation theologians and feminists are horrified by born-again Protestantism, but Doña Sara is now a born-again Protestant like most other Ixil leaders.

"We all have our work before the Lord," Sara told me:

> The people here are very poor, and my work is to help them with their journeys. My husband was drinking, he didn't support me, and I was weaving to earn my living, but I was really getting tired and my legs were affected. So five years ago I switched to this kind of work. The gentlemen at Banrural gave me a hand and I gave a hand to those who travel north. That's why I lent them money for the trip—yes, at 10 percent interest per month—until they have their own remittances and can take out their own loan from the bank.

In short, Doña Sara was borrowing money at 2 percent a month in order to lend it to migrants at 10 percent a month, aside from receiving Q5,000 commissions per head from the coyote.

In the first three years, she estimated, she had doubled her investment in each migrant she sent north. When I asked how many, she showed me her accounts. They consisted of tattered school copybooks in which she had jotted down names, phone numbers, and arithmetic in no apparent order (she has two years of formal education). Of all the people she sent north, only five had failed to pay her, but these five had sunk her. Once in the United States, they either could not find work or decided that repaying her was not a priority. When she approached the father of one deadbeat, his response was: "Tie me up and kill me if you want, but I cannot pay."

The past two years have been hell for Doña Sara. She showed me a bag of pills she was taking to get to sleep. According to the October 2008 petition, she owed four different institutions a total of Q160,000. But according to Sara herself, she owed Q300,000 to just one institution—Banrural—and another Q300,000 to at least six of her neighbors. I say "at least" because rarely did a day go by that I did not hear more about her tangled affairs. Functionaries at three additional institutions claimed that she had also borrowed from them—but through intermediaries, on their own property deeds. If the accusations are true, Doña Sara borrowed from at least seven different institutions. She was able to stay current with Banrural only by persuading neighbors to lend her money or property titles which she used as collateral for new bank loans. Many of the new deals cost her 10 percent monthly, with each supposedly guaranteed by the imminent repayment of previous deals. One creditor stripped her kitchen of its appliances. Another creditor put a lien on the salaries of her daughter and her husband. She wanted to sell her two-story house but was getting no offers, and Banrural initiated legal proceedings to take it.

By January 2009 Doña Sara's group had grown to 221 members. None of the 42 family heads I interviewed were as deeply in the hole as she was, but the majority had several things in common: (1) they had borrowed large amounts of money from institutions at low rates of interest; (2) they had turned around and lent the money to someone else they thought they could trust; (3) that person was usually going north or sending a husband or son there; (4) they hoped to live off the difference between the two rates of interest.

In its October 2008 petition, the debtors' committee accused the institutions of failing to verify their ability to pay—that is, failing to detect that they were engaging in multiple borrowing. According to the same petition, the 76 households were indebted to an average of 3.1 institutions each, with 29 reporting debts to 4 or more institutions. When the serial debts collapse, agricultural land is the first to be sold or seized, then the house and often a relative's or neighbor's property as well. In one such case, Doña Sara persuaded her daughter-in-law Violeta to use the title to her house to borrow Q25,000 from an association and give her the money. Sara managed four payments on the loan before she went into arrears and penalties doubled the debt. Violeta had not consulted her husband before putting up their house as collateral, and when he found out he beat her so badly that she had to go to the hospital. In a compromise, a judge gave the couple four months to come up with Q38,000 to save their house.

"Please tell the internationalists that there is no peace because the institutions take advantage of women who cannot read or write," Doña Sara told me. "We beseech international human rights to protect the rights of Ixil women." Expeditions to the capital led to a Spanish organization's offering an income-generating project of the weaving-and- vegetable variety that will not generate enough income to save houses from foreclosure. Brushing aside doubts within the committee, Doña Sara persisted in looking for a bailout. "They say they are going to give us a project, but we do not need projects. What we need is to speak with the First Lady Sandra [de Colom] so that she will speak with the bank. What we need is a fund to pay our debts." But the First Lady turned them down, and by June 2009 Banrural was processing 40 foreclosures at the local courthouse, with many more to follow.

NEBAJ AS A BUBBLE ECONOMY

Loan officers holding houses and land as collateral were convinced that, if they took pity on the most innocent and needy defaulters, the bulk of their clientele would stop paying. That is what happened in the 1990s when Nebaj's first generation of revolving loans vanished. After some borrowers stopped paying, entire villages followed suit. Even then, some borrowers had put up real estate as collateral, but loan agencies declined to confiscate it. European Union administrators wanted to help Ixils, not profit from them; taking their property seemed immoral, and so, without intending to, donors accustomed Ixils to the idea that any debt with an *institución* would sooner or later be forgiven.

In the gospel of easy credit as a development strategy, the most appealing assumption is that lack of cheap credit is a major cause of poverty. But most poor people are not budding entrepreneurs. Most people in wealthy countries are not budding entrepreneurs. When people borrow money, it is usually for consumption or emergencies, not for productive investment. According to researchers in South Asia, many microborrowers are unable to invest in a profitable enterprise. When they fail to generate a new income stream, they are trapped into loan recycling—paying off the old loan by taking out a new loan—or selling off precious assets, making themselves poorer. As for the high rates of repayment achieved through so-called solidarity groups, these groups are actually liability groups that can be used by unscrupulous borrowers to offload their obligations onto gullible cosigners. Because group liability is so exploitable, microcredit is as likely to undermine preexisting solidarity as to reinforce it. At bottom, viewing microcredit as a panacea ignores the power relations within neighborhoods and families, through which even a modest loan can become yet another instrument of exploitation (Lont and Hospes, 2004; Bond, 2006; Dichter, 2006; Cons and Paprocki, 2008).

Still, because financial institutions charge much lower rates of interest than the rates that Nebajenses charge each other, would this not undermine loan-sharking? Paradoxically, in Nebaj easy credit seems to have increased loan-sharking by multiplying the amount of cash that Ixils have to lend to each other. For returned migrants, the most obvious way to multiply their usually slender savings is to lend it to the next wave of migrants, either directly or through a moneylender who becomes their broker. Loans to migrants are also the most obvious way for stay-at-homes to make money, and the most obvious source of capital is to go to a credit institution with a story about needing the money for something else. Thus migration north has become a credit sinkhole not just for Ixils in the United States who are struggling to make their investment pay but also for Ixils back home who are attracted by the high return. The result is chains of debt, the funds for which originate in remittances and institutional credits, which then get farmed out in idiosyncratic person-to-person deals, each at a higher rate of interest than the last, until one collapses and default reverberates back down the chain.

Why would Ixils engage in such risky behavior? Until recently, as I have said, they had no experience with a bank or savings-and-loan actually seizing collateral. Then, too, it is easy to find borrowers who lack basic arithmetic and have fallen for ludicrous pitches. But Ixils are also peasants who, in their competition for increasingly scarce land and jobs, have schooled each other in the precise calculation of self-interest. Doña Marta, Doña Maria, and Doña Sara are savvy market women, and many of the migrants are obviously energetic and intelligent. Yet even households that have incurred heavy losses and that have personal experience with the despair of standing on a U.S. curb waiting for the next day of work ask me to help them send more of their youth north.

Two additional explanations for high-risk borrowing emerge from the stories I have heard. First, once Nebajenses are in danger of losing a house or land, the only way to save it is to seek U.S.-level wages. Second, all the new sources of cash—from aid projects, loans, and remittances—have had a severe impact on the price of real estate in Nebaj. The scholarly literature on sending communities includes terse references to rates of inflation (Kyle, 2000: 103; Smith, 2006: 50; Foxen, 2007: 98), which turn out to be astronomical. In Nebaj it is not just the price of pasture and cropland that has skyrocketed. So has the cost of house lots, a matter of urgent concern to a typical family with five, six, or seven children surviving to adulthood, most of whom will have to build new houses. In early 2008 typical prices for house lots in the town of Nebaj were Q200,000–Q250,000 (US$25,000–$32,000); even on the edge of town and in villages lots were selling for US$5,000–$10,000, and good agricultural land reached the level of US$6,000 an acre.

Thanks to all the inflows of aid, credit, and remittances, Nebaj has become a bubble economy or, more precisely, a dependent inflationary economy. The economy is dependent in that, although the main livelihood is still farming, the community is unable to produce enough food to sustain itself and therefore depends on exporting labor to the outside world. It is inflationary in that the inflow of aid donations, credits, and remittances from the United States has led to a price bubble for assets that are in fixed supply. Land is the prime example (in stark contrast to labor, which continues to be very cheap). Thus aid donations, credits, and remittances have increased the supply of money in Nebaj, the price of house lots and agricultural land has risen beyond reach, and the only way that youth can afford to buy real estate is by undertaking all the risks of seeking work in the United States.

IS WAGE-DRIVEN MIGRATION BECOMING DEBT-DRIVEN MIGRATION?

At the time of my most recent visit in June 2009, remittances had plunged. I could obtain no figures, but, judging from remarks at three agencies, remittances were roughly half what they had been a year before. Default rates were climbing into the teens. Ixils were still going north but only in small numbers, apparently because many had grasped the lack of jobs and, in any case, it was much harder to raise the necessary Q40,000. The price of real estate had collapsed, making it impossible for debtors and creditors to recover their capital. And so the bubble had turned into Nebaj's own version of the global credit crisis. In an uncanny anticipation of the U.S. bubble and how it burst, Ixil speculators borrowed other people's money to multiply their gains but only by incurring higher risks that are now bankrupting both them and their creditors.

What should we make of Nebaj's sagas of indebtedness? Let me close with a minimalist and then a maximalist interpretation. For a minimalist, Nebaj is a special case because of its peculiar attractiveness to loan institutions and because Ixils are so new to the U.S. labor market that they are especially vulnerable to an economic downturn. As for the women's debt committee, it may represent only the most vulnerable (in some cases, self-destructive) members of the population. The committee's 221 households constitute less than 2 percent of the municipio's 14,000 or so households. Even if we assume that debt is sinking every migrant to the United States and that every migrant comes from a separate household (neither of which is the case), my estimate of 4,000 Nebajenses in El Norte would mean that less than 30 percent of households are being pulled down by bad bets of this nature. The actual number of migration-sunk households is smaller, but multiple borrowing and debt chains afflict a wider circle of households that have never sent anyone north. I am unable to estimate the number, but any visitor will be able to confirm that the topic of debt occasions much shaking of heads.

The women's debt committee would like to be viewed as victims of Banrural, two smaller banks with more conservative lending policies, three savings-and-loan cooperatives, and the microcredits—a panoply that deserves more attention than I can give it here. Banrural is a profit-driven private bank that markets itself as a public-service enterprise ("your friend who helps you grow") and has mushroomed in response to the indigenous demand for banking services. COTONEB is a home-grown operation whose Swiss-cheese portfolio endangers Q15 million of the Nebajenses' own savings. Other outfits are funded by varying combinations of local deposits, donations, and low-interest capital from governments, international organizations, and corporations. It can be no accident that, during the same period in which bankers were pushing so much credit on Americans, they were pushing credit on Guatemalans with similar results. Collectively, the town's loan institutions are indeed responsible for tempting low-income households with far more credit than they could handle.

But to blame only the loan institutions is to ignore the agency of the borrowers, including the considerable skill with which some Ixils have taken advantage of other Ixils. Once we bestow the term "community" on ourselves or an attractive population such as the Nebajenses, we expect the people in question to support each other. But an Ixil town is not a community in the warm, supportive sense evoked by writers of grant proposals. Ixil social life is extremely competitive, in ways that are very common among peasants. The most obvious compulsion is that land and employment are extremely scarce, and the most obvious reason for the scarcity is that the population has been doubling every 25 years. Population growth has ended any possibility of self-sufficient subsistence agriculture for most Ixils.

The people of Nebaj face cruel choices, and I know many who have made deep sacrifices for each other. But when some choose narrow definitions of self-interest, exploitation reaches into the heart of neighborhoods and families. One strategy for a struggling below-subsistence cultivator is to engender more wage earners, who will expand his household income in their adolescent years but inherit even less land than he did. "They think of their family like a machine of production," a young Ixil feminist claimed. "Many think like that. They look on their children as machines to exploit. They think, 'The more children I have, the more they can support me.' " Another strategy is to take advantage of the *confianza* (trust) of one's near-and-dear and leave them holding the bag. Some of the stories I have heard from betrayed spouses, parents, and siblings are heart-rending.

The fallible humanity of the Nebajenses leads me to a maximalist interpretation of their debt crisis—that it is generated by the very process of seeking work in the United States. According to this reading, Nebaj's debt levels are a particularly dramatic example of a much wider aspect of mass migration north that usually escapes scrutiny. In Nebaj debt has become visible because Ixils are accustomed to crafting their problems into aid appeals. In the Department of Chimaltenango debt has become visible because of the 287 Guatemalans deported after the 2008 Postville, Iowa, raid. According to the National Council for Attention to the Migrant, 158 of them have returned to debts ranging from Q5,000 to Q100,000 that threaten their land and houses (Fernández and Bonillo, 2009).

Debt has escaped scrutiny not just because migrants are usually reluctant to talk about it but also because many researchers seem to share the assumption of the migrants themselves that the U.S. economy has a boundless capacity to absorb them. True, as long as migrants are able to find remunerative employment, debt should be a temporary expedient, even if they are paying exorbitant amounts of interest. But Ixils were failing to find enough employment before the 2008 credit crisis, as were other Guatemalans and Central Americans standing next to them on curbs. It was when they began to agglomerate on street corners that wage migration began to look suspiciously like debt migration. In debt migration, debt not only enables the move but requires further migration, in a steady extraction of value from the sending population that will probably never be returned, appearances such as those two- and three-story houses to the contrary.

Fred Krissman (2005: 14) has pointed out a crucial omission in the migrant-network model of Douglas Massey that has been so popular with scholars. By focusing on symmetrical relationships between migrants who come from the same hometown, the migrant-network model takes at face value the normative ideals of the people in question, who stress loyalty to family and locality. Thus the migrant-network model focuses on the supportive and cooperative aspect of migration streams. But what about all the conflicts of interest that any serious ethnography reveals? The migrant-network model also sidelines key figures such as employers, human smugglers, and labor contractors. In short, it implies a smooth functionalism that anthropologists and sociologists have long put behind us in other realms. It underestimates the competitive quality of migration as a chain of exploitation in which each actor—the employer, the coyote, the migrant—passes along a risk or wager to someone else with less power who, when the wager goes bad, pays the price. Those passed-along risks and chains of debt are what are now taking the land and houses of Ixils who have never set foot in the United States.

It is tempting to ignore the implications of these chains of debt (cf. Vélez-Ibañez, 2004: 130) and extractions of value because of the importance of remittances to national economies—indeed, the dependence of entire national economies upon them. The glamour of macroeconomics has made it easy to bypass the critical question of exactly who gets remittances, who does not, and the impact on the have-nots. The dilemma I see exemplified in Nebaj is simple: If remittances set off inflationary spirals in sending populations, then they pressure wider circles of people to come north. When have-nots go deeply into debt to keep up with their neighbors, they take on enormous risk. Wherever remittances have produced dependent inflationary economies, an inner ring of apparent success stories could be surrounded by less visible outer rings of imitators who are indebting themselves to go north, failing to find sufficient employment, and losing assets.

But wait—what about the impact of border enforcement? True, tougher enforcement of the U.S.-Mexican and Mexican-Guatemalan borders, along with the rampant criminality that border enforcement spawns, have multiplied the cost of the trip and with it the obligatory debt. In the early 1990s one of the first Ixils to go north paid less than US$2,000. Without border enforcement, a passport application and bus fare would cost less than a tenth of what the trip currently costs Nebajenses. Without border enforcement, migrants would not go into the hole so quickly and deeply. Yet I doubt that border enforcement is the fundamental problem. Once remittances hyperinflate the cost of real estate in a peasant locality, every family is under pressure to send at least one member to the United States, where the migrants will tend to flood the "ethnic niches" that are open to them (Kaufman, 2000: 363). If this cruel paradox is not unique to Nebaj—if instead it is common in peasant populations—then the chain migration that inflation engenders is guaranteed to produce deficits as migrants pay U.S.-level prices without stable U.S.-level incomes.

In conclusion, I wonder if migration and debt are generating each other in other Latin American localities. If the right to cross the U.S. border and seek employment is the main issue, then denying that right is the way capitalism forces Latin Americans into the unregulated underground of the U.S. economy. Legalizing unauthorized immigrants should enable them to demand their rights. But if converging streams of migrants from multiple countries flood the available ethnic niches, as has already occurred with the Ixils, labor organizing is unlikely to rescue them from their actual function in capitalism, which is to serve as the reserve army of the unemployed. To assume that more and more competing migration streams and more and more surplus workers will eventually achieve their place in the sun is to assume that the U.S. economy can offer near-limitless employment. Cornucopian assumptions about capitalism should come easy for the *Wall Street Journal* but not for critics of capitalism (Chacón and Davis, 2006; Bacon, 2008) who are calling for open borders.

NOTE

1. According to local directors, in April 2008 the Banrural branch in Nebaj received 2,338 remittances and the COTONEB savings and loan received 315, for a total of 2,653. Estimates from two other financial institutions and two private agents would add 1,225 more remittances that month, for a total of 3,878. If half the remitters are sending money twice a month, one-quarter are sending it once a month, one-eighth are sending it four times a month, and one-eighth are sending it once every two months, the sending population would be 3,152. If a quarter of the Nebajenses in the north are not remitting any money at all, the total population in the United States would be 3,940.

REFERENCES

Aubry, Laura and Charlotte Servadio
2004 "Intensificación y migraciónes temporales frente a la presión hipotecaria: diagnóstico agrario de dos valles altos del municipio de Nebaj, area Ixil, Guatemala." Ph.D. diss., Instituto Nacional Agronómico Paris-Grignon.

Bacon, David
2008 *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Bond, Patrick
2006 "Beyond microcredit evangelism." http://www.pambazuka.org (accessed September 15, 2008).

Chacón, Justin Akers and Mike Davis
2006 *No One is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border.* Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Cohen, Jeffrey H.
2004 *The Culture of Migration in Southern Mexico.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Cons, Jason and Kasia Paprocki
2008 *The Limits of Microcredit—A Bangladesh Case.* Food First Backgrounder 14 (4).

Dichter, T.
2006 "Hype and hope: the worrisome state of the microcredit movement." http://www.microfinancegateway.org (accessed September 22, 2008).

Faceta Central Desarrollo Empresarial
2002 *Realización de un inventario y tipificación de la oferta-demanda de crédito en el Triángulo Ixil*. Convenio GUA/B7-2120/98/482. (Report to the U.S. Agency for International Development.) Guatemala City.

Fernández, Marcela and Cristina Bonillo
2009 "Estafan a migrantes deportados de Postville." *Prensa Libre,* August 26.
Fletcher, Peri L.
1999 *La Casa de Mis Sueños*: *Dreams of Home in a Transnational Mexican Community.* Boulder: Westview Press.
Foxen, Patricia
2007 *In Search of Providence: Transnational Mayan Identities*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
Gordon, Jennifer
2005 *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
International Organization for Migration
2008 *Encuesta sobre remesas 2008 y medio ambiente*. Cuadernos de Trabajao sobre Migración, September. Guatemala City.
Kaufman, Kathy A.
2000 "Outsourcing the hearth: the impact of immigration on labor allocation in American families," pp. 345–368 in Nancy Foner, Ruben G. Rumbaut, and Steven J. Gold (eds.), *Immigration Research for a New Century: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
Krissman, Fred
2005 "*Sin coyote ni patrón*: why the 'migrant network' fails to explain international migration." *International Migration Review* 39 (2): 4–44.
Kyle, David
2000 *Transnational Peasants: Migrations, Networks, and Ethnicity in Andean Ecuador.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Levitt, Peggy
2001 *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Lont, Hotze and Otto Hospes (eds.)
2004 *Livelihood and Microfinance: Anthropological and Sociological Perspectives on Savings and Debt*. Amsterdam: Eburon Delft.
Mahler, Sarah
1995 *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Miles, Ann
2004 *From Cuenca to Queens: An Anthropological Story of Transnational Migration.* Austin: University of Texas Press.
Nazario, Sonia
2006 *Enrique's Journey*. New York: Random House.
Smith, Robert Courtney
2006 *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
U.S. Census
2006 *Hispanic or Latino Origin by Specific Origin: 2006 American Community Survey.* Washington, DC.
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2007 *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: Population Estimates August 2007.* Washington, DC.
Vélez-Ibañez, Carlos G.
2004 "The political ecology of debt and class formation among Mexican colonias in the Southwestern United States," pp. 129–151 in Hotze Lont and Otto Hospes (eds.), *Livelihood and Microfinance: Anthropological and Sociological Perspectives on Savings and Debt.* Amsterdam: Eburon Delft.