



A memorial to victims of *La Violencia*, the Guatemalan government's scorched earth campaign against insurgents, which took place in the 1980s. Ostensibly intended to root out guerrilla forces, military campaigns often targeted civilians in rural indigenous communities.



# The Maya of New Bedford: Genesis and Evolution of a Community, 1980 – 2010

LISA MAYA KNAUER



**Editor's Introduction:** *New Bedford has a long and storied history. Europeans first settled the area in 1652 when Plymouth Colony settlers purchased the land from the Wampanoag tribe. During the nineteenth century New Bedford was one of the most important whaling ports in the world. Today it remains one of the nation's largest fishing ports. Its working waterfront and Whaling Museum attract visitors from around the world.*

*In the late nineteenth century, New Bedford also emerged as one of the largest producers of cotton textiles and yarns in the country. In 1920, at the height of its prosperity, seventy mills employed 41,380 workers, and the city's population reached 121,217. Today it stands at roughly 95,000, making New Bedford the sixth-largest city in Massachusetts.*

*In 2007 a raid on a local garment factory by immigration agents shone a national spotlight on the extent to which the local fish processing and garment production industries relied upon a largely undocumented immigrant workforce. New Bedford has always had a unique, multicultural, and mixed-race population, with waves of immigrants providing the labor for its ships, mills, and factories.*

*African Americans, Portuguese, and Cape Verdeans joined Irish, French Canadian, and other European immigrants. Today, however, Latinos are among the city's fastest-growing population. By official census counts (which may underrepresent their true numbers), in 2000 Latinos were 10.1 percent of the city's population; in 2010 they were 15.1 percent and 28 percent of students in city schools were Latino. The Maya community in New Bedford is among the most recent and least well-known.<sup>1</sup>*

*Drawing on a long-term ethnographic study of Central American communities in New England, this fascinating article explores the formation of the Maya community in New Bedford, examining why the Maya chose to leave Guatemala and the social and economic conditions that drew them to New Bedford. Lisa Maya Knauer is an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. She has traveled extensively in Guatemala.*

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On March 7, 2007, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, along with state and local police, carried out a dramatic assault-style workplace raid on the Michael Bianco Inc. factory, one of a small number of garment and textile factories still operating in the former mill town of New Bedford, Massachusetts. With patrol cars surrounding the plant, helicopters swirling overhead, and Coast Guard vessels patrolling the harbor to prevent any escapes by water, ICE agents and other law enforcement officers, many dressed in riot gear, entered the factory. There they encountered a largely undocumented and female immigrant workforce making leather backpacks to be used by U.S. troops; the company had won a lucrative contract with the Department of Defense. Within a few hours, ICE officials loaded 361 employees onto buses and sent them to an immigration processing center at Fort Devens, where other officials collected data and fingerprints.<sup>2</sup> ICE then sent most of the workers to detention facilities, some as far away as Harlingen, Texas—against the protests of New Bedford's mayor, Scott Lang, and Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick.<sup>3</sup>

While the detainees included migrant workers from several countries, nearly half were Guatemalans, and most of those were Maya from the



March 6, 2007: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials (ICE) arrested 361 workers during a raid at Michael Bianco Inc., a leather goods factory in New Bedford, and arrested the company's owner and three top managers. They were charged with helping workers obtain false documentation to live in the United States. Source: [www.southcoasttoday.com](http://www.southcoasttoday.com)

department of El Quiché, a region in the western highlands with a predominantly indigenous population. The next largest national group represented among the detainees was Salvadorans, with Hondurans ranking third. Other nationalities represented included Portuguese, Brazilians, Cape Verdeans and Mexicans.<sup>4</sup> Over half of the detainees were women—not surprising, as most workers in garment industries worldwide are female—and several were mothers of young children. The raid placed New Bedford's Central American communities in an unaccustomed spotlight as the story quickly spread to national and even international media.<sup>5</sup>

The raid exposed what had been an open secret: the extent to which local businesses (especially fish processing and garment production) had come to rely upon a largely undocumented immigrant workforce. While many local residents, especially those in the historically immigrant and working class North End and South End neighborhoods, were aware of the newcomers, most did not realize how extensive this population was and how embedded it was in the local economy. The fact that so many detainees were women and mothers also made evident a dramatic demographic shift in the “new immigrant communities”: these were no longer primarily composed of men on their own, but now included women, couples, and families.<sup>6</sup>

The raid produced mixed responses both locally and nationally. Many were outraged by the harsh and peremptory treatment of the workers, and especially by the plight of children, including breast-fed infants, whose mothers had been sent thousands of miles away. Local churches opened their doors, and many elected officials, including Governor Deval Patrick, Senators Ted Kennedy and John Kerry, Congressman Barney Frank and other members of the Massachusetts congressional delegation rushed to New Bedford in the days following the raid. There, they visited the basement of Guadalupe Parish at St. James Church (effectively a Latino parish sharing a church building with an English-speaking congregation) which had been turned into the nerve center of the support and advocacy efforts. At the same time, the raid catalyzed anti-immigrant sentiment, prompting local radio talk show hosts to step up their invective against the immigrants.<sup>7</sup>

Thirty-five people who could prove they were caregivers of young children were released within two weeks. Others remained in detention for several months; the last detainee was released in March 2008, over a year after the raid.<sup>8</sup> One hundred sixty-five of the detainees were deported,

some voluntarily and others involuntarily, while the remainder were released. Many of these have pending immigration cases.<sup>9</sup>

News of the raid hit our campus, only five miles from New Bedford, almost immediately, and many in the university community lent moral and material support to the families of those detained. In the weeks and months after the raid, students (and colleagues) would frequently ask, “But how did all those Guatemalans wind up in New Bedford?” a city that was fixed in many people’s minds as a stronghold of Portuguese and Azorean immigrants and their descendants. This article, based on a long term ethnographic study of the Central American communities in New Bedford, sketches the formation of the Maya community in New Bedford, using the 2007 raid as an entry point. Although there are sizeable Central American communities in several Massachusetts cities (notably, East Boston, Chelsea and Lynn) and in nearby Providence, Rhode Island, and Willamantic, Connecticut, scholars have only recently turned their attention to these populations.<sup>10</sup>

Colleagues had told me about the Maya community when I first came to southeastern Massachusetts in 2003, but they were only tangentially related to my research interests at the time. I had begun a project about heritage politics and urban development in New Bedford, examining how ethnically and racially defined communities used festivals, parades and other performances to stake claims on urban space against the backdrop of urban revitalization projects and historic preservation. One day in the summer of 2005, I attended a Portuguese street festival in New Bedford’s North End, a solidly working class neighborhood whose streets are lined with wooden triple-decker houses. I had brought a camera to help me analyze both the performances and the audiences’ engagement. In other words, I was conducting ethnography.

But as I observed and photographed a brightly costumed folk dance troupe twirling around on a cordoned-off stretch of pavement, my eye was attracted to a small cluster of people standing at the back of the crowd—a few young men, and one woman pushing a stroller. Not only was their appearance distinctive—they were all short in stature, with straight black hair and golden-brown skin—but they also held themselves apart physically. They stood quietly at the edge of the performance space, while the rest of the audience carried on animated conversations in varying mixtures of Portuguese and English. These, then, I told myself, must be some of the Maya that I had heard about.<sup>11</sup> One of the men pulled out a small camcorder and recorded some of the dance, and then they moved off to another part of the festival. I was curious about what their “take” on the

festival might be (although I did not approach them to ask), and what they would do with the recording. Were they gathering images for a personal archive or to share with family back home?<sup>12</sup> It occurred to me that they were conducting ethnography, after a fashion. Throughout the afternoon I saw others who appeared to be Maya, usually sticking together in small groups, and my curiosity was piqued. As I walked back to my car I started to look at mailboxes and buzzers and noticed many Spanish surnames mixed in with the Portuguese ones.

At the same time, I heard more negative responses to the Maya presence from community activists in New Bedford's South End, another working-class neighborhood of triple-decker houses and housing projects historically populated by Portuguese, Cape Verdean, and other immigrants who worked in the nearby mills. During community meetings and informal gatherings in 2005 and 2006, a few voiced concern that Central Americans were taking away what had been entry-level jobs for minorities and complained that the new arrivals received preferential treatment from the Catholic Church and social service organizations. It was not until a few months after the 2007 ICE raid, however, that I decided to shift my research focus.

## **HOW DID THE MAYA GET TO NEW BEDFORD?**

For several years prior to the 2007 raid, the Maya and other Central American immigrants had been a visible presence in the New Bedford landscape, although they remained somewhat marginal socially and culturally.<sup>13</sup> Residents who drove along State Route 18 or other roads along the waterfront often saw Maya men (and some women) walking or bicycling to and from jobs in the seafood and fish-processing plants (in local parlance, "fish houses"). They were so ubiquitous in that area that some locals called the stretch of North Front Street that extends from the docks up to the North End residential area "Maya alley."<sup>14</sup> On the commercial strip along Acushnet Avenue in the North End, Portuguese bakeries and restaurants were joined by Mi Tierra (My Land) Grocery stores and the Tienda Centroamericana (Central American Store). The media coverage of the ICE raid and its aftermath called attention to the extent and depth of the Central American presence in New Bedford, and many local residents, like my students, began to ask why the Maya and other Central Americans had come to New Bedford. These are really two separate but related questions: Why did the Maya leave Guatemala? And why and how did several thousand of them wind up in New Bedford?

## THE MAYA DIASPORA FROM GUATEMALA

The Maya migration to New Bedford spans a period of approximately twenty years, starting in the late 1980s during the height of the government-sponsored massacres in Guatemala's highlands, colloquially called *La Violencia* (the violence). The government's "scorched earth" campaign, ostensibly to wipe out a guerilla insurgency, prompted a massive outmigration from the war-torn areas.<sup>15</sup> Although the armed conflict officially ended with the signing of peace accords in 1996, the country continues to be plagued by violence, corruption, and economic disruption, and migration has continued. However, the Maya diaspora has much deeper roots in centuries-old patterns of economic and political inequality and discrimination against the indigenous population.<sup>16</sup> My Maya interlocutors in New Bedford often place themselves in a five hundred year history of repression dating back to the Spanish conquest.

Like many of its Latin American neighbors, Guatemala is characterized by extreme disparities in wealth, status and power, with a tiny, privileged elite and a deeply impoverished majority. More than 60 percent of Guatemala's population is indigenous (mostly Maya, with even higher



Church procession in Guatemala in memory of those disappeared during the war.  
Photo: James Rodriguez/ [www.mimundo.org](http://www.mimundo.org)



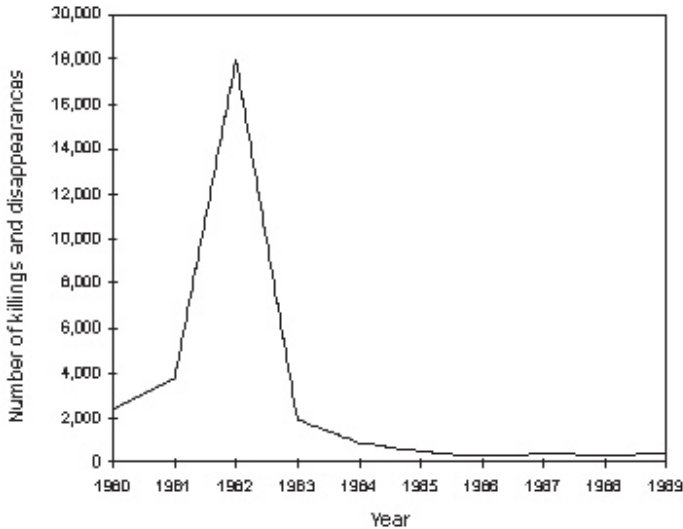
concentrations in some areas).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, about 70 percent of Guatemala's population is rural, and 80 percent of that rural population is poor.<sup>18</sup> Yet, the government and economy have been run almost exclusively by the landed elite, who are almost entirely *Ladinos*, meaning of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent.

For most of the modern period, foreign capital—especially multinational corporations based in the United States—has dominated Guatemala's economy, skewing development towards exports of agricultural goods such as fruit, coffee, and cardamom. The economy is thus highly susceptible to fluctuations in world market prices for agricultural commodities. Since the 1980s, Guatemala has also become part of the global assembly line as many multinational companies have opened assembly plants (*maquiladoras*), mostly near the nation's capital, Guatemala City, and its environs.

While many Maya are small farmers, deeply entrenched inequities in land ownership—two percent of the population owns seventy percent of the land—mean that it is difficult to support families on small plots. And wage labor in cities or plantations has coexisted with a subsistence rural economy. Men or even entire families continue to migrate to coastal plantations for several months out of the year. Others, especially young men and women, also migrate to Guatemala City in search of jobs.<sup>19</sup> Most of the Maya I have interviewed during the course of my research had been internal migrants prior to migrating to the United States.

The actions of U.S. corporations and the U.S. government are also at least partly responsible for the arrival of Guatemalans in the United States. In the first half of the twentieth century, much of the country's export-oriented agricultural production was controlled by U.S. companies such as the United Fruit Company. In the 1950s, U.S.-based corporations and the United States government saw President Jacobo Arbenz' proposed agrarian reform as a threat to United Fruit and other U.S. interests, and the CIA engineered his overthrow in 1954, setting the stage for decades of military rule by repressive regimes intent upon wiping out domestic opposition and terrorizing the populace into submission, policies that received the blessing (and material support) of several U.S. presidents.<sup>20</sup>

The emergence of a guerrilla movement in the 1960s, based primarily in the rural highlands, unleashed a murderous response from the military-backed government, and the armed conflict lasted for more than 30 years, until the signing of peace accords in 1996. The war took a heavy toll on the country's indigenous majority. While some Maya supported the guerrillas and others backed the government, many tried to remain neutral. This was often difficult, as each side accused the Maya of sympathizing with



Graph depicting the total estimates of killed. Source: *State Violence in Guatemala, 1960-1996: A Quantitative Reflection*, by Patrick Ball, Paul Kobrak, and Herbert F. Spirer, p. 83.

the other. The army launched military campaigns to root out support for the guerrillas, often targeting rural indigenous communities.<sup>21</sup> The attacks increased in pace and intensity in the 1980s.<sup>22</sup> Government forces carried out some spectacularly bloody massacres, burning down entire villages, including crops and livestock, and killing all the inhabitants. In many cases they rounded up all the men and boys, who were then tortured and/or killed; women and girls were not immune. The army established “civilian patrols” in many rural areas, forcing the male inhabitants to join or face torture and death.<sup>23</sup>

The *Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico* (Commission for Historical Clarification), established by the United Nations under the Oslo accords, estimated that over 200,000 Guatemalans were killed during the armed conflict: 83 percent of those killed were Maya. Government forces were responsible for 93 percent of the killings.<sup>24</sup> The department of El Quiché was at the epicenter of the violence; over half of the documented massacres—344 of 669—occurred in El Quiché.

Over a million Guatemalans, many of them Maya, left their homes and many fled their country. Some went to nearby Belize and southern Mexico,

and others made it to the United States.<sup>25</sup> The first Maya communities appeared in the southwestern United States and Florida, where Maya joined the ranks of migrant agricultural laborers and factory workers. Some traveled farther north and arrived in southern New England; around 1984, a small group of Guatemalans fleeing the violence in El Quiché arrived in Providence, Rhode Island, where they were able to find jobs in some of the remaining industries. As word got back to their home communities in Guatemala that there were jobs available in Providence, friends and relatives of the “pioneers” made the journey north as well. Gradually these migrants formed a small enclave.<sup>26</sup> The Maya were not the only Guatemalans affected by the violence and economic instability, and many Ladinos also left their country and settled in the United States.<sup>27</sup> By the mid-1990s, there were around 15,000 Guatemalans in Providence, but only about a third were Maya.<sup>28</sup>



Monsignor Gerardi (pictured) led the exhaustive Recuperation of Historic Memory (REMHI) report: *Guatemala Never Again*. He was assassinated in 1998 just days after it was published. Photo: James Rodriguez / [www.mimundo.org](http://www.mimundo.org)

Although the government and the guerilla forces signed peace accords in 1996, thirty years of war had taken a harsh toll on the economy, particularly in rural areas. Army attacks left entire villages depopulated and destroyed homes, crops and livestock. While a full discussion of post-war Guatemala is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note a few developments, as immigration has continued and perhaps even increased during the post-war period—at least until the recession that started in 2008.<sup>29</sup> In the fifteen years since the peace accords were signed, the Guatemalan economy has stagnated. Although some international NGOs established offices in Guatemala and launched new development projects, many never saw completion.<sup>30</sup>

Further, the cessation of hostilities did not mean an end to the violence. While Guatemala is nominally a civilian democracy, many observers

both inside and outside the country argue that the nature of power, and the basic structures of inequality have not changed, except in external appearance. Some of the military leaders who were the “authors” of the wartime atrocities are still active in political life, while others operate through more shadowy criminal enterprises.<sup>31</sup> Political assassinations have continued. A prominent Catholic clergyman, Bishop Juan Gerardi, was murdered in 1998, two days after the publication of *Guatemala Nunca Más!* (Guatemala Never Again), a report about human rights abuses during the war that Gerardi had co-authored.<sup>32</sup> Guatemala has one of the highest murder rates in Latin America, and gang violence is a persistent problem, especially in the cities.<sup>33</sup> According to human rights activists, there are approximately twenty murders a day, as well as numerous abductions and rapes. In recent years, these attacks are increasingly directed towards women, leading human rights advocates to use the term “femicide.”<sup>34</sup>

## THE MAYA ARRIVE IN NEW BEDFORD

The formation of the Maya community in New Bedford also needs to be understood in terms of larger historical patterns of migration, where ethnic and family-based social networks (along with the local labor market) play a large role in determining where refugees and migrants settle. In a pattern that is common to many immigrant populations throughout the world, once a small number of people from a particular region, town or ethnic group have settled in an area, that town becomes a magnet for their relatives, friends and co-ethnics as word travels back to the “sending community.” Since employers often prefer to use employees’ social networks rather than formal labor markets for hiring, those early arrivals can often find work for their relatives and friends.

By the height of the Guatemalan civil war in the 1980s, New Bedford had succeeded in establishing itself as an internationally prominent fishing port, primarily for scallops and groundfish. Investors set up seafood processing plants along the waterfront, and there was plenty of work to go around. Initially the work was unionized and relatively well-paid, and the workforce was largely comprised of Azorean, Cape Verdean, and other immigrants and their descendants. A concerted effort by the owners of the packing houses broke the unions in 1983, laying the ground for the employment of undocumented immigrants who began to arrive in New Bedford around the same time.<sup>35</sup>

As already noted earlier, by this time Guatemalan refugees and migrants from El Quiché—both Ladino and Maya—had already established a small

enclave in Providence, Rhode Island. According to oral histories collected by Dirlam et al, the settlement in New Bedford began when a Maya man had trouble finding work in Providence and headed for New Bedford, where he knew no one and spent the first night under a highway overpass. The next day he found a job at one of the fish houses and sent word back to friends in Providence. He was soon joined by one of his brothers and another friend.<sup>36</sup> Over the next few years a small trickle of Maya moved from Providence to New Bedford.

The early arrivals took whatever jobs were available that did not require English language proficiency or specific skills. In addition to the fish houses, some found work in construction, in various craft occupations, and in the garment industry. Work was plentiful if grueling; as Jimmy, a Salvadoran immigrant recalled, “They would come to your house and knock on your door and offer you work.”<sup>37</sup>

During the first years of Maya settlement in New Bedford, it was a secondary destination for migrants. Most migrants spent months or even years living and working in other areas (including but not limited to Providence) and then moved to New Bedford. Few set out from Guatemala with the intention of settling in New Bedford. However, by the early twenty-first century, New Bedford had become a primary destination. While some still go to Providence first, many Maya now settle directly in New Bedford. However, familial and other ties continue to link the two communities, along with other Maya nuclei throughout New England, including Willimantic, Connecticut; East Boston; and Lynn, Massachusetts. Providence boasts several Guatemalan grocery stores, bakeries and restaurants, so many of New Bedford’s Maya residents make shopping trips to Providence. The Guatemalan consulate has a regional office in Providence, and although the consul visits New Bedford a few times a year to take care of routine matters like issuing government ID cards, important or urgent consular matters are another reason that New Bedford residents visit Providence. In addition, many have relatives or friends in Providence, and some still commute from one city to the other for work.<sup>38</sup>

The community in New Bedford grew slowly. Not all of the early arrivals stayed, or at least not the first time they came to New Bedford. Several of my interlocutors had left Guatemala in the late 1980s or early 1990s, but returned after a few years because of familial obligations or because they thought the situation in Guatemala had calmed down sufficiently for them to resume their livelihoods there. However, a combination of violence and poverty pushed them to migrate again.<sup>39</sup> Most of the early migrants were

young men, often traveling on their own or with a small number of friends or relatives. Although the army (and the guerrilla forces) was sometimes indiscriminate in its attacks on indigenous communities, the army and government-backed death squads more often targeted men. Young men were especially vulnerable to forced conscription into the army or civilian patrols. My research assistant Adrian Ventura recounted on several occasions the degrading and dehumanizing treatment he received as an unwilling recruit into the army before he was able to escape.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the war had disrupted traditional economies since violence and the threat of violence forced people to flee, and it was hard for people to tend their *milpa* (corn) plots if they frequently had to seek refuge in the jungle, leave their lands entirely, or serve in civilian patrols. Migrating to coastal plantations was also risky since travel meant passing through numerous army checkpoints, which always carried the risk of arbitrary detention, conscription, or worse.<sup>41</sup>

Genaro's story is fairly typical.<sup>42</sup> He was fourteen years old when he made up his mind to leave Guatemala in 1991. Two of Genaro's older brothers were already in New Bedford. He traveled alone through Mexico and into the United States, where he was sheltered by a family in the Southwest. They were eager for him to stay with them but he wanted to join his brothers, and once they were able to send him the money he headed across the country to New Bedford. He told me that when he arrived, "There were only five Central Americans in New Bedford. There were my two brothers and me, and two Salvadoran brothers. That was it." While Genaro's two older brothers have since returned to Guatemala, other siblings, along with cousins and friends, followed Genaro, who has remained in New Bedford.

Some Maya had witnessed the armed forces torturing and/or killing family members or neighbors, or were themselves threatened by the military. Human rights advocates have argued that the government practiced selective assassination to remove potential opposition leaders. In rural areas like El Quiché, the government forces singled out community leaders, including those who held traditional *cargos* (local leadership positions), peasant organizers, or human rights activists.<sup>43</sup> These analyses are borne out by the experiences of my interviewees. Anibal Lucas, the longtime director of Organización Maya K'iche (OMK), a cultural and advocacy organization in New Bedford, said that the government had targeted his father because he was a community leader, and a successful store owner.<sup>44</sup> His father-in-law, another community leader, was also assassinated. According to Lucas, the army wanted to kill all the men in his family,



Anibal Lucas was the Executive Director of the Organizacion Maya K'iche in New Bedford. Source: <http://www.wbur.org/2010/05/10/invisible-communities-i>

7, 1982, the army attacked the village of Agua Tibia, burning seventy-two houses, including those of Ventura's relatives. In another village, the army tortured and killed the pregnant wife of one of his cousins: they cut out her tongue, gouged out her eyes, and removed the fetus from her womb before finally killing her.<sup>47</sup>

Ventura, like some others in the community, has a complex migration history. He left Guatemala four times altogether: the first two times he went to Mexico and then returned to Guatemala where he married and had children. He first came to the United States in 1993 but returned to Guatemala the following year. After the signing of the Peace Accords, he worked with the Catholic Archbishop's Human Rights Office (known as the Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado, or ODHA). That work resulted in the 1998 publication of *Guatemala Nunca Más!* (Guatemala Never Again), the report mentioned above.<sup>48</sup> He later participated in local government in the municipality of Chinique but was disgusted by the widespread corruption he encountered. He was asked to sign off on kickbacks to local officials, and his refusal to do so put him in a risky position. As the post-war situation continued to deteriorate, he left Guatemala again in 2003, this time heading for New Bedford.

## MIGRANTS OR REFUGEES?

and so he left Guatemala in the mid-1980s, first settling in Florida. He returned to Guatemala but left again in the early 1990s and came to New Bedford.<sup>45</sup> René Moreno, a court interpreter, was a young child when his father, also a community leader, was murdered by death squads in San Andres Sajcabajá. He went into hiding with his mother and his baby brother, and when he was older, left for the United States. René's father's remains were retrieved when many mass graves were excavated after the peace accords were signed.<sup>46</sup>

Adrian Ventura, who was briefly discussed above, lost several family members in one of the large-scale massacres in El Quiché. On February

Some Maya, especially those who witnessed or whose families were directly affected by the terror of the civil war years, are frustrated that many of their American neighbors and co-workers view them as “immigrants” who came to the United States in pursuit of the American Dream. When I called Adrian to check the details of the 1982 massacre and find out if he wanted me to use his real name, he exhorted me, “Make sure you tell them that it was the government of the United States that was responsible,” citing the U.S. government’s support of then-president Efraín Ríos Montt, and the role of the School of the Americas in training Guatemalan military officers.<sup>49</sup> What I thought would be a short and perfunctory fact-checking query turned into a lengthy discussion about the ethics of scholarship and the politics of representation. Adrian was adamant that I use his real name because he wanted readers to have to confront historical realities: these events happened to real people with names and biographies.

However, in most cases it is difficult to untangle the varied factors that prompt decisions to migrate. Several of my interlocutors, especially those who assumed leadership positions in the New Bedford community, frequently pronounced that the Maya were refugees and not immigrants, insisting in public statements and private conversation that the violence of the war and its aftermath were solely responsible for their arrival in the U.S. They further stated that as indigenous people of the Americas, they knew no borders.<sup>50</sup> In some instances, these discursive claims seemed intended to distinguish the Maya from other Central and Latin Americans in the local community and more broadly. To elaborate their claims of difference, Maya leaders often emphasized that they were not native Spanish speakers but that the language had been imposed on them by force.

By interrogating these claims, I do not want to diminish the very real trauma of massacres, torture, or the genocidal nature of the violence, nor do I want to diminish the structural and persistent racism that shape the lives of indigenous Guatemalans. Many interviewees, without prompting, directly linked their departure to the war. This was especially true of the early arrivals. One of my male interviewees chose the pseudonym “Sobrevivente” (survivor). However, Ventura’s statement above, that the Maya were not searching for the American dream, needs to be qualified. When asked about their reasons for coming to the United States, Maya interviewees frequently used terms like “para salir adelante” (to get ahead),



and “para sacar adelante la familia” (to improve the family’s situation or to help the family advance).<sup>51</sup>

Rural Guatemala still bears the scars of the war, but it is also scarred by structural conditions that shape much of the global South: declining prices for agricultural goods, neoliberal policies that privilege exported industrialization, and the failure of state policies to address historic inequities in land tenure and promote rural development.

When asked why he risked a second journey to the United States after being deported, former Michael Bianco Inc. employee Jorge told me, “I couldn’t do anything there [in Guatemala].” Jorge explained that after eight months of unsuccessfully looking for work, he and his wife decided to borrow the thousands of dollars necessary for the journey north, leaving their seven-year-old son in the care of Jorge’s mother-in-law.<sup>52</sup> However, he also spoke about threats to his life from *bandillas* (gangs), sponsored by current and former military personnel.

## WOMEN’S MIGRATION NARRATIVES

Most of the early Maya arrivals were men, as Jorge’s story makes clear. But it is no longer an exclusively sojourner or bachelor community. Jorge had traveled alone the first time, but his wife decided to accompany him the second time. This demographic shift in migration was revealed dramatically in the New Bedford ICE raid, as over two hundred of the detainees were women. The presence of so many women challenges the prevailing image of the “typical” undocumented worker as a single man, perhaps a day laborer who hangs out on a street corner. It also contrasts sharply with stereotyped views of Latin American women, and especially indigenous women, as being tied to the domestic sphere. While male day laborers may be the most visible segment of the undocumented immigrant population, the Michael Bianco Inc. raid, and subsequent ICE raids in Postville, Iowa and Mississippi, where many employees were women and young people, demonstrate that the immigrant population is more diverse.<sup>53</sup>

The large number of women among New Bedford’s undocumented immigrant population points to the growing feminization of both internal and international migration. Women now account for half of the foreign-born population in the United States.<sup>54</sup> Scholars have argued that we need to understand the specificities of women’s migration experiences. Many early studies of transnational migration ignored or underemphasized gender. Some early studies of Mexican migration noted that many women

who migrated to the Southwest were following their husbands. However, more recent studies show that more women are migrating on their own.<sup>55</sup>

My research shows similar patterns among Maya women in New Bedford. Among my interviewees, around half the women had migrated on their own<sup>56</sup>. Preliminary interviews suggest that the first Maya women to arrive in New Bedford were teenagers, traveling on their own, who were joining older male relatives, usually fathers and brothers, who were already living in New Bedford. Jessica, who spent three months in a Harlingen, Texas detention center after the Michael Bianco Inc. raid but was later released, typifies these women. Jessica was the oldest daughter in a family of six children (three girls and three boys), in Aguascalientes, a small village near San Andres Sajcabajá. Her father came to the U.S. in the late 1990s, and her oldest brother followed a few years later. Jessica set out a year after her brother, and moved in with her relatives when she arrived; she still shares an apartment with her father. Her brother has moved out but still lives nearby.<sup>57</sup> One of her father's sisters also lives in New Bedford.

Some women came to join husbands already in New Bedford. In a small number of cases, couples made the journey together, leaving their children with relatives in Guatemala. Maria, another Michael Bianco Inc.



**Maya K'iche' Women Sewing**

These women are making beaded “boarders” for the skirts, blouses, and aprons they sell. Totonicapan, Southwestern Guatemala. Photo: Brian W. Konz.

worker, came to New Bedford with her husband, Pedro, leaving their three children, now teenagers, with Maria's mother.<sup>58</sup> Still other women were single when they arrived but married or established partnerships in New Bedford.

While several of the women, especially those who had accompanied or followed their husbands to the U.S., were *amas de casa* (housewives) in Guatemala, nearly half had had experience with wage labor outside their home communities.<sup>59</sup> Sometimes older daughters accompanied their fathers and brothers as seasonal migrants to coastal plantations, leaving mothers, young children, and elders to cultivate family plots. In some cases entire families migrated. Another common wage labor experience for women was domestic work in Guatemala's larger towns and cities. Middle class Ladino families in Guatemala City and elsewhere customarily employ young indigenous women as maids, and girls in their teens (or even younger) often migrate to cities on their own to work as domestics to help their families.<sup>60</sup>



**Maya K'iche Children**

Department of Totonicapán, Southwestern Guatemala. Photo: Brian W. Conz

Still others had factory experience. The neoliberal policies implemented by “post war” governments to promote foreign investment culminated in Guatemala’s signing the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in 2004.<sup>61</sup> As a result, Guatemala is now home to hundreds of foreign-owned garment and textile factories producing almost exclusively for foreign markets. The garment industry employs more than 100,000 people, and around seventy-five percent of these are women.<sup>62</sup> Several of the Guatemalan women I interviewed in New Bedford had previous



**Ixil Maya Mother and Child**

Department of Quiche. Photo: Brian W. Conz

experience working in garment factories in Guatemala, some starting in their early or mid teens.

### **THE MAYA PRESENCE IN NEW BEDFORD PRIOR TO THE RAID**

The ICE raid, and the local debate about immigration, takes place against a backdrop of an economic decline and a host of “urban problems” and uncertainty about the city’s future. New Bedford has been struggling to rebuild its sagging economy and its reputation for more than a decade. It is widely perceived, both within the surrounding communities and more broadly within the state and region, as a violent, drug-ridden, and economically depressed area.<sup>63</sup> This image was established, in part, by the media coverage of a 1983 gang-rape of a young woman at a local bar named Big Dan’s (and the success of the film based on that incident, *The Accused*, starring Jodie Foster).<sup>64</sup> In more recent years, the city has seen a string of unsolved murders, mostly of young men of color, some of which may be tied to the drug trade or gang- and neighborhood-based rivalries.<sup>65</sup>

Recent studies have highlighted some of the “problem areas.” There has been a noticeable decline in full-time, living-wage jobs in the area. In terms of educational attainment, 42 percent of New Bedford residents did not graduate from high school. Only 11 percent of New Bedford residents have a college degree. In 2009, the unemployment rate was 12.7 percent, significantly above the statewide average of 9.3 percent. The 2000 census showed that the city’s population had continued to decline; New Bedford lost 6.2 percent of its population between 1990 and 2000.<sup>66</sup>

While fishing and seafood processing are still an important part of the local economy, they offer only limited employment opportunities. While there were twenty-four seafood processing plants in the early 1990s, there are now only seven, and they employ only about 450 workers.<sup>67</sup> During the past decade, local government officials, businesses, developers, and others have proposed various strategies and projects that are intended to “revitalize” the economy and attract new businesses and/or population. These include developing a “creative economy,” preserving New Bedford’s historic architecture, promoting tourism, and opening gambling casinos.<sup>68</sup> Several unused mill buildings, as well as other vacant properties in the downtown historic district, have already been turned into condominiums or upscale rental units. In 2005, a developer’s proposal to tear down an underutilized mill building, the Fairhaven Mills, and replace it with a

Home Depot sparked a heated public debate. The controversy simmered for several years but eventually in 2009 the mill was razed.

There are no completely accurate figures on the Maya population in New Bedford. Earl Chase, a member of the American Indian Friends Coalition, the first local organization to systematically reach out and offer support to the Maya, did an informal survey of households and estimated that by 2000, there were between three and five thousand Maya in New Bedford.<sup>69</sup>

Undocumented residents are chronically undercounted in census figures as many prefer to remain in the shadows rather than risk exposure. There are several other factors that complicate the picture. While many Maya and other Central Americans have lived in New Bedford uninterrupted for many years, undocumented immigrants are very vulnerable to short-term fluctuations in local economies and labor markets and they therefore may leave the area temporarily (or permanently) for work elsewhere.

In addition, because of the complexities of Maya identity, and the nature of ethnic/racial categories on census forms, the Maya population may have been especially underrepresented. Many of New Bedford's Maya do not identify as "Latino" or "Hispanic." Most speak some Spanish, but many did not learn it until they were older, and some learned Spanish only after leaving Guatemala. Some are nearly monolingual K'iche' speakers. While many identify as indigenous, they might not see themselves in the census category "Native American."<sup>70</sup> Immigrant advocates currently estimate the Maya population at four to six thousand.<sup>71</sup> It is hard to give precise figures on gender and age breakdown, or family and household composition. But it appears to be a relatively young community, with many recent migrants. For example, at a fall 2008 meeting on local policy regarding immigrants, when Anibal Lucas, then director of Organización Maya K'iche', asked how many had been in New Bedford prior to 2001, only five or six of the 75 attendees raised their hands.<sup>72</sup>

There is anecdotal evidence from outreach workers at local health clinics and Catholic Social Services of a "Maya baby boom."<sup>73</sup> At nearly every public event that I have attended in the last three years, there are always infants and at least one pregnant woman. The Massachusetts Department of Education reports that 27.4 percent of the student population in New Bedford's public schools are Hispanic.<sup>74</sup>

People in maritime industries knew that most of the workers in the fish processing plants were undocumented. A former student of mine who worked for one of the major seafood companies reported that nearly all of

the workers “on the floor” in his plant were Guatemalan, and that most of them were undocumented.<sup>75</sup>

As noted above, the Maya were highly visible as they walked or bicycled to jobs in the fish houses or garment factories; few owned cars, and the local buses are relatively expensive. Since many were paid in cash, or used check-cashing services because they did not have bank accounts, they were often victims of muggings or robberies.<sup>76</sup> According to immigrant advocates and the police, immigrant crime victims were often reluctant to report the crimes, for several reasons. First, they often feared that the police would turn them in to the immigration authorities. But also, many had painful histories with law enforcement officials in Guatemala.<sup>77</sup> Guatemalan police often collaborated with the military during the armed conflict. Even today, officials investigating the role of the police in the conflict, as well as the officials’ families, have been threatened, beaten, kidnapped, and tortured. There is widespread police corruption and there have been numerous allegations, including by Guatemalan president Alvaro Colom that members of Guatemala’s National Civilian Police, or PNC, collaborate with drug traffickers.<sup>78</sup>

OMK and other groups that serve the immigrant community approached the New Bedford Police Department and city administration about the victimization of immigrants, and the police agreed they would not ask questions about immigration status when people reported crimes.<sup>79</sup> Police officials worked with immigrant advocates to encourage immigrants to report crimes or other abuses. After a young Mayan man was murdered in September 2006, Catholic Social Services held a community forum to discuss violence and invited the police, and there have been several subsequent meetings.<sup>80</sup>

In another move that demonstrated the city government’s recognition of the immigrant community, in 2005, then-Mayor Frederick Kalisz issued an executive order that the city would recognize the identification cards issued by the Guatemalan government as a valid form of identification. The ID cards would help Guatemalans prove who they were to utility companies, the police and social service agencies.<sup>81</sup>

However, while the Maya community maintained, for the most part, a good working relationship with the Mayor’s office and the police department, Maya and other immigrant workers were also subject to many workplace abuses such as speed-up, which often resulted in workplace accidents; forced overtime, often with no additional compensation; inadequate health and safety measures; and pressure against collective action or joining a union. New Bedford is a city with a strong trade union

tradition, and local union officials as well as other labor advocates had been trying to reach out to and offer support to the immigrant workers, including helping the fish house workers file claims against their employers. An investigation into the operations of the Michael Bianco Inc. factory after the raid revealed that to avoid paying overtime, the owners had set up a second, sham company, Front Line Defense Inc., operating at the same address and performing the same work. After their normal shift, workers would clock out on their Michael Bianco Inc. timecards and clock in for the second company.<sup>82</sup>

Prior to the raid, while there many have been some resentment of the newcomers, the Maya co-existed relatively peacefully with other residents. While limited language skills, timidity, and lack of cultural familiarity meant that many Maya had few friends and little contact outside the tight circle of co-ethnics, there were efforts by Maya to reach out to municipal authorities and other communities, as well as interest from other residents about the Maya. The Organización Maya K'iche was founded in 1996, with the explicit mission of promoting and preserving Maya culture both within and outside the Maya community. In addition to occasional workshops and classes on topics such as cosmology, weaving, and traditional dance, geared mostly toward community members, they also organized cultural events for non-Maya audiences, such as a 2002 exhibit of Maya weaving at the public library, and participated in cultural events and festivals organized by other groups.<sup>83</sup>

This contrasts with Maya in nearby Providence and Boston.<sup>84</sup> In both of those cities where the Guatemalan population is either predominantly Ladino or more evenly divided between Ladino and Maya, Maya did not foreground their indigenous identity; many simply called themselves "Guatemalans" and did not use the label "Maya," and did not publicly display markers of Mayan identity (such as language or traditional clothing). The open expression, and even foregrounding, of Mayanness in New Bedford may be due in part to the fact that there are relatively few Ladinos in New Bedford and so the Guatemalan population is predominantly Maya. Another important factor is the resurgence of Maya identity politics and the emergence of a pan-Maya movement in Guatemala during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>85</sup> Through writing, public forums, and other means, Maya intellectuals and other community leaders put forward both political and cultural agendas of "Maya revindication," including a strong push to preserve, legitimate and promote indigenous languages.<sup>86</sup> Maya activism stepped up during the negotiation and signing of the peace accords; for example, in 1994, 150 Maya groups came together to form Coalition



of Organizations of the Maya People of Guatemala (COPMAGUA), to ensure that Maya concerns were heard in the peace negotiations between the government and the guerrillas.<sup>87</sup> At least a few leaders in the Maya community in New Bedford either had relatives who were active in Maya and *campesino* (peasant) organizations in Guatemala, or were involved themselves.<sup>88</sup> Whether or not they were directly involved in Mayanist politics, most of New Bedford's current Maya population were living in Guatemala during this time and this undoubtedly had an impact.

Thus, the leadership Organización Maya K'iche' have, for the most part, adopted a strongly indigenist stance. Early on they developed strategic alliances with local Native American communities, especially the Mashpee Wampanoags, who have allowed the Maya to hold ceremonies on their sacred land.<sup>89</sup> The walls of OMK's offices are hung with brightly colored *huipiles* (woven tunics or blouses usually worn by women) and other Maya textiles, along with posters depicting Maya and Native North Americans in heroic poses. The Mayanist theme is carried over onto the organization's website, and even most of the screen savers on the office computers are images of Maya archaeological sites, calendars and hieroglyphs.<sup>90</sup>

In the aftermath of the ICE raid, both the organization and the community were thrust into the spotlight. In some cases, Maya identity was now strategically deployed for political ends. For example, at one of the early immigration hearings, OMK brought all the Michael Bianco Inc. detainees—whether Maya or not—to one of the early immigration hearings dressed in *traje típico*, or typical dress.<sup>91</sup> This gesture was designed to underscore the distinctiveness of the Michael Bianco Inc. workers and to bolster the indigenist stance that the Maya, at least, were not “immigrants.”

## CONCLUSION

Three years after the raid, it is still difficult to make a simple assessment of its impact on the community. The community has hardly remained static, with many departures (voluntary and involuntary) as well as arrivals via continued immigration as well as births. In some ways, the Maya community is more firmly established, but the economic crisis that erupted in 2008 has made the employment situation even more precarious.

Many former Michael Bianco Inc. employees have had trouble finding stable employment. Following the raid, according to my interlocutors,

many New Bedford companies would not knowingly hire former Michael Bianco Inc. employees, so they learned to omit that information from their job history. Many of the released detainees who remained in New Bedford continue to be caught up in legal proceedings with few clear indications regarding the ultimate outcome of their cases.

Those who were deported suffered a second shock. Being returned to their country in a diminished status without having accomplished the economic goals they had set was often humiliating. Some were recent arrivals who had only been working at the company a short time and had not yet repaid the loans that had financed their journeys to the U.S. Many spent months without work, and some still have not found stable work in Guatemala.<sup>92</sup> Some are resigned to remaining in Guatemala; however, as many as half of the Michael Bianco Inc. deportees have returned to the U.S.<sup>93</sup> This is not a decision lightly made, as they must not only indebt themselves again to pay for the journey, but they also face harsh legal penalties if caught a second time.

At the same time, the raid also forced, or encouraged, members of the New Bedford community to use that heightened—and initially unwanted—visibility to assert their presence, forge alliances, and stake claims.<sup>94</sup> The community, and especially OMK, has also gained a national and international reputation. When ICE carried out workplace raids in Iowa, Mississippi, and elsewhere, local advocates contacted OMK for advice and help, and OMK director Lucas flew to Iowa and Mississippi. Meanwhile, the Guatemalan government has recognized the potential importance of transnational migrants, and has established a new organization called CONAMIGUA in an effort to “integrate” migrants and their concerns into national planning; Anibal Lucas, the longtime director of the K’iche cultural and advocacy organization OMK, was named as New England representative. A small number of individuals who were victims or survivors of torture and massacres have begun the process of applying for refugee status.

The global and national economic crisis that started in 2008 had a harsh impact on local business, which has dried up many employment opportunities for immigrants. Many have been laid off or have seen their hours cut, and many report that working conditions have deteriorated. Many employers, while continuing to hire undocumented workers, are using temporary employment agencies rather than hiring workers directly—presumably to shield themselves from legal penalties. At the same

time, however, Maya and other undocumented workers have become increasingly vocal in articulating their rights as workers.

HJM

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Historical and demographic information from the City of New Bedford, Official Website [www.newbedford-ma.gov/Tourism/OurHistory/Historyofnb.html](http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/Tourism/OurHistory/Historyofnb.html) and the U.S. Census.

<sup>2</sup> There were 362 undocumented workers at the plant that day, but one woman was injured in an attempt to evade the government officials and she was taken for medical treatment, resulting in 361 workers being sent to detention.

<sup>3</sup> See Aaron Nicodemus, "Governor, mayor complain as immigrants are sent to prisons throughout country." *The (New Bedford, MA) Standard-Times*, March 9, 2007, A-4.

## BRAZILIANS IN SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

While many long-time New Bedford residents voiced concern about the Central Americans, they are not the only newcomers. There is a sizeable (and also largely undocumented) Brazilian immigrant population in southeastern Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> However, for several reasons, they do not attract as much attention or play as central a role in immigration debates. Most did not walk across the Mexican border on foot like the Central Americans but instead arrived at airports with valid tourist visas, which they overstayed. Relative to the rest of the local population, they are not as physically distinctive as the Central Americans; while much of Brazil's population has African ancestry, the Brazilians who travel abroad tend to be whiter. Since they speak Portuguese they can—at least from an outsider's perspective—blend in fairly easily with the large Portuguese and Azorean communities in southeastern Massachusetts.

Researchers who have studied Brazilian immigrants in New York, New Jersey, California and elsewhere argue that Brazilians are relatively “invisible,” as their racial/ethnic identities are fairly ambiguous in terms of U.S. racial/ethnic categories. This seems to be equally true in Southeastern Massachusetts and Cape Cod, with substantial populations of immigrants from the Portuguese-speaking world and their descendants.<sup>2</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Eduardo Siqueira and Cileine de Lourenço, “Brazilians in Massachusetts: Migration, Identity, and Work,” *Latinos in New England*, Andres Torres ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 187-201; and M. Gloria de Sa, “Brazilians in New Bedford and Fall River,” Paper presented at workshop “New Immigrants in Urban New England,” Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Brown University, Providence, RI, April 2003.

<sup>2</sup> See Maxine Margolis, *Little Brazil: An Ethnography of Brazilian Immigrants in New York City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Ana Ramos Zayas, “Between ‘Cultural Excess’ and Racial ‘Invisibility’: Brazilians and the Commercialization of Culture in Newark,” in *Becoming Brazuca: Brazilian Immigration to the United States*, eds. Clémence Jouët-Pastré and Leticia J. Braga (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008)

<sup>4</sup> The advocacy and support groups working with the detainees and their families, including Catholic Social Services (CSS), the Community Economic Development Council (CEDC), the Organización Maya K'iche (OMK) and Greater Boston Legal Services, tried to compile a rough demographic breakdown of the detainees. The information in this paragraph comes from conversations with Anibal Lucas (OMK), Corinn Williams (CEDC), and Denise Porche and Marc Fallon (CSS)

<sup>5</sup> Yvonne Abraham and Brian Ballou, "350 Are Held in Immigration Raid," *The Boston Globe*, March 7, 2007; and "Raid Legal, But Outcomes Troubling," *The Boston Globe*, March 7, 2007. An Associated Press story on the raid was picked up by national and international newspapers (see, for example, Ray Henry, "Children Left Stranded After Migrants Held in Factory Raid," *The (London) Guardian*, March 8, 2007, 21). Several news articles appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* within a few days (see, for example, Lynn Brezosky, "Massachusetts Pursues Immigrant Case To Texas," *The Houston Chronicle*, March 11, 2007, 3). See also Pam Belluck, "Lawyers Say U.S. Acted in Bad Faith After Immigrant Raid In Massachusetts," *The New York Times*, March 22, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Migration Information Source, an online database and research hub, calculates that women comprised 49.2 percent of the foreign-born population of the U.S. in 2000, and 50.1 percent of those who immigrated in 2000. It is not clear whether these figures fully account for undocumented migration. See Aaron Terrazas and Jeanne Batalove, "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," published October 2009, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=747#2>

<sup>7</sup> See Becky Evans, "'Without Her I'm Dead': Families Torn Apart by Immigration Raid Struggle to Find Hope," *Standard-Times*, March 11, 2007, A-05; Yvonne Abraham, "Raid Bares Deep Divide; in New Bedford, hard lines over illegal immigration," *The Boston Globe*. Apr 15, 2007, A1.

<sup>8</sup> One of the 361 detainees, who was only seventeen years old at the time of the raid, was granted permanent residency as he was a minor without a parent (his mother remained in Guatemala).

<sup>9</sup> Becky Evans, "Last of Bianco Detainees To Be Freed," *SouthCoastToday.com*, March 19, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> See Debra Rodman, "Gender, Migration and Transnational Identities: Maya and Ladino Relations in Eastern Guatemala," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 2006; and Patricia Foxen, *In Search of Providence* (Knoxville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> While many people, both Maya and non-Maya, use physical appearance as one marker of identity, it is important to clarify that a collection of visible physical markers, or phenotype, is not synonymous with ethnicity. In Guatemala, indigenous and/or Maya identity is usually defined by several factors: geographic location (rural origins, and even more precisely, the specific town, village or hamlet where one resides), speaking one of the twenty-two recognized Maya

languages, and wearing clothing defined as *traje típico* (“typical garments”). Most of the New Bedford Maya are from the department of El Quiché, and speak the K’iche’ language, and sometimes identify themselves as Maya-K’iche’, to make clear the specificity of their ethnic origins. However, as Foxen points out, in contemporary Guatemala these identity markers are continually in flux, as many Maya have migrated to cities or abroad, learned Spanish (not always voluntarily) and adopted jeans and other “urban” and “modern” clothing styles. Also, as a result of centuries of inter-ethnic sexual relationships (not always consensual), monolingual highland communities include light-skinned and fair-eyed residents. A few of my self-identified Maya acquaintances in New Bedford who were raised away from their parents’ natal villages, spoke Spanish as their mother tongue and spoke little or no K’iche’. I follow the convention among Guatemalan scholars in using the Spanish spelling, *Quiché*, for the geographic region and *K’iche’* (used by linguists and indigenous activists) to refer to the language and the ethnicity.

<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, I have spoken to other Maya in New Bedford and they confirm that they often send CDs and DVDs with photos and videos of events in New Bedford to their families in Guatemala.

<sup>13</sup> March 2007 was not the first time ICE had raided a New Bedford workplace. In December, 2005, ICE conducted a sweep on the New Bedford waterfront and raided several fish processing plants, arresting thirteen men and sending shock waves through the immigrant communities. See Yvonne Abraham, “Immigration Raids Empty New Bedford Fish Plants,” *The Boston Globe*, December 7, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> I first heard this term from Kim Wilson, a labor activist who has spent many years working with and advocating for Central American workers, particularly in seafood processing (Kim Wilson, personal communication, July 2007). While it may have derogatory connotations in some contexts, I have primarily heard it used by those in or close to the community.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Beatriz Manz, *Refugees of a Hidden War: The Aftermath of Counterinsurgency in Guatemala* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> The classic work on this is Severo Martínez Peláez, *La Patria del Criollo: An Interpretation of Colonial Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). Other sources include Carol Smith, ed. *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540 to 1988* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990) and Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> James Smith, “Guatemala: Economic Migrants Replace Political Refugees.” *Migration Information Source* database. <http://migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=392> (2006).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>19</sup> Foxen.

<sup>20</sup> The classic source on the CIA-engineered coup is Stephen Kinzer and Stephen Schlesinger, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University David Rockefeller Center for Latin

American Studies, 1999). See also, Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Ricardo Falla, *Massacres in the Jungle: Ixcan, Guatemala, 1975-1982* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Marlis Simons, "Guatemala: The Coming Danger," *Foreign Policy Magazine* (Summer 1981): 93-103; Robert M. Carmack, *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); David Stoll *Between Two Armies In The Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Greg Grandin's *Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Daniel Wilkinson, *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror and Betrayal and Guatemala* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> *Guatemala Never Again: The Official Report of the Human Rights Office, Archdiocese of Guatemala* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Comisión para Esclarecimiento Histórico, *Guatemala: Memoria de Silencio* (*Guatemala: Memory of Silence*) The English text of the report is available online at <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/toc.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Nora Hamilton and Norma Chinchilla Stoltz, "Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis," *Latin American Research Review*. 26:1 (1991): 75-110; Allan Burns, *Maya in Exile: Guatemalans in Florida* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Foxen.

<sup>27</sup> See Rodman.

<sup>28</sup> Foxen.

<sup>29</sup> James Smith, "Guatemala: Economic Migrants Replace Political Refugees," published in 2006 on *Migration Information Source* database.

<sup>30</sup> See Foxen for a discussion of some of the NGOs established in El Quiché.

<sup>31</sup> A case in point is former president Efraín Ríos Montt. According to Amnesty International, the worst atrocities of the 36-year war occurred during his 16-month presidency. Although Spanish courts have charged Ríos Montt with genocide and crimes against humanity, and have issued an international warrant for his arrest, Guatemalan courts have consistently refused to either bring him to trial or order his extradition to Spain. See "Amnesty International Again Calls for Ríos Montt to Either Be Tried in Guatemala or Extradited to Spain to Face the Charges Against Him," press release, January 18, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Over a decade after Gerardi's assassination, the Guatemalan legal system has failed to find out who was responsible for the crime. See Francisco Goldman, *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?* (New York: Grove Press, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Thelma Mejía, "Central America: Soaring Violent Crime Threatens Democracy," Interpress Service, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=34743>.

<sup>34</sup> Joe Dirlam, Dan Georgianna, Ralph Townsend and Corinn Williams, "The Flexibility of Fresh Groundfish and Herring Processing in New England," *Final*

*Report Cooperative Marine Education and Research NOAA*, 2006; Jack Spillane, "Waterfront Rife with Abuses," *The (New Bedford, MA) Standard Times*, June 30, 2008. According to Spillane, the starting wages at seafood processing plants in 2008 were between \$7.50 and \$8, around the same as they were in 1983.

<sup>35</sup> Dirlam et al.

<sup>36</sup> Jimmy Bataneco, interview with author, April 2008.

<sup>37</sup> I base this analysis upon two years of participant observation in New Bedford, occasional visits to Providence with New Bedford residents, and numerous conversations with my interlocutors. Although I have not formally surveyed the New Bedford Maya on their ties to Providence, approximately half of my interviewees had friends or relatives in Providence. The interconnectedness of the two communities was underscored in August of 2009, when ten Maya men were injured in a gas explosion at a New Bedford-based company, ABC Recycling. The men were all from Providence, and traveled to New Bedford each day in a van operated by a co-ethnic. "Fumes Knock Out Workers At New Bedford Trash Facility," *The (New Bedford, MA) Standard Times*, August 3, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Interviews and personal communication with Anibal Lucas (2007) Adrian Ventura (2008, 2009) and Luciano S. (2009).

<sup>39</sup> Adrian Ventura, personal communications, various. Adrian has spoken about his experiences in public meetings in the community on several occasions.

<sup>40</sup> Numerous such incidents are detailed in Falla and in *Guatemala Nunca Más!*

<sup>41</sup> Author's interview with Genaro, October 2007, plus several informal conversations.

<sup>42</sup> Patrick Ball, Paul Kobrak and Herbert F. Spirer, *State Violence in Guatemala, 1960-1996: A Quantitative Reflection, report prepared for the American Association for the Advancement of Science*.

<sup>43</sup> Organización Maya K'iche' was established in 1996 as a cultural and educational organization to provide services for the growing Maya community. At the beginning, the organization was run out of Lucas' apartment, but by the time I learned about the organization in 2006, they had acquired a storefront office in New Bedford's North End, with the assistance of Catholic Social Services.

<sup>44</sup> Anibal Lucas, interview with author, November 2006, and personal communications, various, 2007, 2008 and 2009.

<sup>45</sup> René Moreno, presentation to anthropology class at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, Spring 2006 (author's notes). I am deeply grateful to René for sharing these unimaginably painful memories with my students and for allowing me to include his story (and his name) in this article. There are two monuments in San Andres Sajcabajá commemorating the genocide victims. René's father, Pedro Moreno, is the first name on the list.

<sup>46</sup> I have heard Adrian tell this story on numerous occasions between 2007 and the present, both in private conversations with me and in public settings.

<sup>47</sup> The report was originally published in Spanish by the Office of the Archdiocese



of Guatemala in 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Adrian Ventura, telephone conversation, March 2009.

<sup>49</sup> During the nearly two years that I volunteered regularly at the Organización Maya K'iche', I heard statements of this nature quite frequently, both in casual conversation around the office, as well as in meetings of the Guatemalan Maya community and other public events.

<sup>50</sup> See also Foxen.

<sup>51</sup> Jorge, interview with author, October, 2009. Based on conversations with numerous migrants, the cost for the trip to the United States runs around \$6,000, a substantial sum of money in a country where the GDP per capita was only \$2,537 in 2007. United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report Guatemala – 2009*, [http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/data\\_sheets/cty\\_ds\\_GTM.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_GTM.html).

<sup>52</sup> Grant Schulte, "Sholom Rubashkin guilty on 86 charges in fraud trial involving Postville meat plant," *Des Moines Register*, November 13, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> Jeane Batalova, "Immigrant Women," Migration Information Source, Dec. 2009. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=763>.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Norma Ojeda de la Peña, "Transborder Families and Gendered Trajectories of Migration and Work," in Denise Segura and Patricia Zavella, eds., *Women and Migration in the U.S. Mexico Borderlands* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 327-340.

<sup>55</sup> Among my female interviewees, the youngest age at the time of migration was fifteen. Among my male interviewees, the youngest was fourteen.

<sup>56</sup> Jessica told her story at a public event at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in March 2008, and came to speak to one of my anthropology classes a few weeks later.

<sup>57</sup> Maria, personal communication, Fall 2007.

<sup>58</sup> The term *ama de casa* does not seem to mean exactly the same as "housewife" in English but rather refers to a woman who does not work for wages outside the home. In addition to the numerous tasks involved in preparing food, washing and cleaning, women in rural areas, especially the wives of *agricultores* (small farmers), are involved in agricultural work, tending family plots and caring for animals.

<sup>59</sup> All of the middle class households I visited in Guatemala City had Maya female domestic workers.

<sup>60</sup> The government's ratification of CAFTA was met with widespread protests from labor and human rights groups who were concerned that the agreement would privilege the rights of foreign investors over those of Guatemalans and would further exacerbate the country's poverty by undermining the viability of small producers, especially in agriculture. See Xuan-Trang Ho, "Back to the Bad Old Days? Guatemala and CAFTA," *Counterpunch*, March 31, 2005.

<sup>61</sup> According to industry sources and the CIA, in 2007 there were 476 textile and garment factories in Guatemala, and over ninety percent were owned by Koreans.

“Around the World: Guatemala,” *FIBER* (Fiber Industry Business Education Response), Online Journal of the International Fashion and Apparel Industry, January 2008, <http://www.udel.edu/fiber/issue1/world/>. On women in the garment industry, see Laura Gonzalez, “Central America: Crisis Chews Women Up, Spits Them Out,” *Interpress Service*, September 11, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> This is a common reaction among students at my university, most of who are from Southeastern Massachusetts.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Lisa M. Cuklanz, “Public expressions of ‘progress’ in discourses of the Big Dan’s rape,” *Women and Language*, 17:1 (Spring 1994), 1-11.

<sup>64</sup> See Sally Jacobs, “Drugs Claim a Neighborhood, and a Child is Lost,” *The Boston Globe*, February 29, 2004, A-1.

<sup>65</sup> City of New Bedford, Community Development Office, “Demographics,” Fact sheet. <http://www.ci.new-bedford.ma.us/cd/pdfs/Demographics%20page%202-%20population.pdf>. Employment figures are from September 2009. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/web/laummtrk.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> See Dirlam et al.

<sup>67</sup> “Initial plans for New Bedford casino unveiled,” *New England Business Bulletin*, August 24, 2008.

<sup>68</sup> Dirlam, 41.

<sup>69</sup> The counting of indigenous immigrants should improve in the 2010 census, as the Census Bureau has announced that it will include a space for handwritten entries specifying that respondents are members of a Central American indigenous group.

<sup>70</sup> Anibal Lucas, personal communication, 2008. According to Lucas, OMK counted at least 5,000 Maya during its own door-to-door survey of Maya residents of New Bedford a year or so before the raid.

<sup>71</sup> Author’s field notes.

<sup>72</sup> Father Marc Fallon, personal communication, 2007. Father Fallon worked for Catholic Social Services for several years and was CSS’s liaison to the Maya community.

<sup>73</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School District Profiles, Enrollment Data for New Bedford. <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student>.

<sup>74</sup> E.G., personal communication, September 2006.

<sup>75</sup> Kim Wilson, personal communication, June 2007; Corinn Williams, personal communication, September 2007. Kim Wilson is the Labor Extension Program Coordinator at the Arnold Dubin Labor Education Center at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and a longtime labor activist in New Bedford. Corinn Williams is the executive director of the Community Economic Development Corporation (CEDC), a local non-profit that provides many services to immigrants. See also Brian Fraga, “Police Say Weekend Robbers Targeted Guatemalan Immigrants,” *The (New Bedford, MA) Standard Times*, November 20, 2007.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*; Brian Fraga, “Immigrants More Likely to be Victims of Crime,” *The* (New Bedford, MA) *Standard Times*, June 30, 2008.

<sup>77</sup> “Guatemalan President: Drug Traffickers Behind Police Corruption.” *Latin American Herald Tribune*, November 23, 2009.

<sup>78</sup> Mayor Scott Lang, speaking at a November 18, 2008 forum held at St. Killian’s Church in New Bedford and in an April, 2009 meeting with New Bedford Chief of Police Ronald Teachman (author’s field notes).

<sup>79</sup> Fraga, “Immigrants More Likely.” The preceding discussion is based upon conversations with immigrants, immigrant advocates and police officials, as well as participation in several meetings and public forums.

<sup>80</sup> Brian Boyd, “Mayor: City Will Honor Guatemalan ID Cards,” *The* (New Bedford, MA) *Standard Times*, October 23, 2005, A9.

<sup>81</sup> Becky Evans, “Settlement Reached in Bianco Case,” *The* (New Bedford, MA) *Standard Times*, November 19, 2008.

<sup>82</sup> David Boyce, “Mayan Artistry on Display at Library,” *The* (New Bedford, MA) *Standard Times*, June 13, 2002, C-6.

<sup>83</sup> Foxen; Rodman.

<sup>84</sup> For a fuller discussion of the Maya activism and the pan-Maya movement up to the signing of the peace accords in 1996, see Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) and Edward Fischer and R. McKenna Brown, eds., *Maya Cultural Activism In Guatemala* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1996).

<sup>85</sup> See Demetrio Cojtí Cujil, “The Politics of Maya Revindication,” in Fischer and Brown, eds., 19-50.

<sup>86</sup> See Antonio Otzoy, “Guatemala: The Struggle for Maya Unity,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 29:5 (March/April 1996), 33-35.

<sup>87</sup> As Foxen and others note that in Guatemala the word *campesino* is virtually synonymous with “indigenous.” Until relatively recently, many did not use the label “Maya” but instead referred to themselves as *campesinos* or *naturales* (natural people). Adrian Ventura’s father was one of the founders of LIO Campesino, a national peasant organization.

<sup>88</sup> In September, 2007, I attended a Maya ceremony in Mashpee, directed by an *aq’iq*, a traditional Maya priest, who had been brought from Guatemala for the occasion, and have seen photographs of other Maya ceremonies in Mashpee.

<sup>89</sup> Author’s field notes.

<sup>90</sup> Father Marc Fallon, personal communication.

<sup>91</sup> These observations are based upon my field visits to Guatemala in August 2009 and January 2010, and in particular, conversations with Ana Gutierrez and Sister Ana Maria Alvarez in Zacualpa, who are both involved in many projects with deportees and the families of migrants, Father Byron, the parish priest of San Andres Sajcabaja, and José Sam, the president of the Cooperative in San Andres Sajcabaja.

<sup>92</sup>This estimate is based on conversations with Adrian Ventura and others in New Bedford, and Ana Gutierrez, Sister Ana Maria Alvarez and Father Byron in Guatemala.

<sup>93</sup>Hartnett, Ken. 2007. "Raid Rips Apart Fabric of Our Community," *Standard-Times*, March 11, 2007, B-08.



### **The New Bedford Labor History Mural**

The mural was a project sponsored by the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, Arnold M. Dubin Labor Education Center. This mural was created in October 2001 by Irish muralist Dan Devenny. For a complete explanation of all the people and scenes depicted, see: <http://umdlaborcenter.org/umass-labor-history-mural>