

Expectations and Motivations of Hondurans Migrating to the United States

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the expectations and decision-making processes of potential migrants at a community in Honduras. Hondurans have become one of the fastest growing populations in New York. Yet, although approximately 80 000 Hondurans try to reach the US annually, only 25 per cent succeed. To reach the United States they must undergo a dangerous journey across Guatemala and Mexico, a process to date under-researched by social sciences. As new undocumented migrant streams continue to expand within the global economies, scholars and practitioners who work on their behalf should understand the pre-migration values and expectations because they shape the way migrants adjust to and develop new cultural patterns in the receiving countries. Drawing on immigration and narrative theory, I hypothesize that narratives of migration from media, prior migrants, coyotes and community practices play an important role in the construction of potential migrant expectations. To represent narratives across several individual and community domains, the research design includes individual interviews, analysis of local newspapers, participant observations and teaching English classes. Analysis across these data reveals complex dilemmas potential migrants face as they weigh the costs and benefits of migration. Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: expectations; motivations; migration; e/immigration; transnationalism; narrative; undocumented migrants; globalization; Honduras; Latin America

INTRODUCTION

Undocumented immigration has become an important issue, much debated again in the United States. As President Bush emphasizes the ‘need to choke off the flow of illegal immigrants’ (Stevenson, 2005, *NY Times*), local Arizona residents called the Minutemen, took this task upon themselves and have patrolled the US–Mexico border since the summer of 2005. Many are again concerned about the impact of migration on the United States but little attention is paid to who the migrants are, why they come, what they know about the

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United States before they come and what they expect. This knowledge is essential for adding the psychosocial dimension to public discourse about migration, which are often portrayed in a distant manner. This research poses and aims to answer some of those questions from the perspective of a community in Honduras, from which emigration to the US is widespread. This paper presents the global and local historical context of this migration, integrates immigration and narrative theory to lay out pre-migration social-psychological processes, explains research methods and finally offers data analysis and its discussion.

GLOBAL CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

Most of the world is currently bound together by a global capitalist system (Glick-Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Harvey, 2005). Within this system, the growing internalization and restructuring of capital has disrupted the local economics of much of the so-called Third World through the intrusion of large-scale business and tourism. These economic shifts have created a displaced, underemployed labour force, not easily or quickly absorbed by the growing, but still relatively small, highly capitalized sector of the economies. As a consequence, increasing numbers of families and individuals do what they can to resolve this global maldistribution of material and symbolic goods (Hall, 1997). Many have migrated to another city or country, where they believe they will find more opportunities, and by doing so have generated unprecedented levels of domestic and international migration (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, 1994; Suarez-Orozco, 2002). On the receiving end of this migration, the United States¹ is experiencing its biggest wave of immigration since the beginning of the 20th century. According to the 2000 Census, more than 28 million people living in the United States are foreign born, and about 11 per cent of the population (over 50 per cent of all immigrants) are from Latin America (Suarez-Orozco, 2002).

Sassen (1998) and Schmalzbauer (2004) explain that the concentration of capital and employment in the north has spurred extensive migration from Latin America (the south), currently mired in an economic crisis. Martín-Baró (1994) claims that 'the important problem faced by the vast majority of Latin Americans is their situation of oppressive misery, their condition of marginalized dependency that is forcing upon them an inhuman existence and snatching away their ability to define their own lives' (pp. 26–27). Galeano (1997) puts this oppression into a historical perspective: 'The division of labour among nations is that some specialize in winning and others in losing... Latin America... continues to exist at the service of others' needs, as a source and reserve destined for rich countries which profit more from consuming them than Latin America does from producing them' (p. 1). This exploitation of Latin America by foreign countries as well as their own corrupt governments has led to massive poverty and inequality. 'The human murder by poverty in Latin America is secret; every year, without making a sound, three Hiroshima bombs explode over communities that have become accustomed to suffering with clenched teeth. This systemic violence is not apparent but is real and constantly increasing: its holocausts are not made known in the sensational press but in Food and Agricultural Organization statistics' (Galeano, 1997, p. 1).

¹Although many countries are experiencing increased migration, this research focuses on migration to the US.

Honduras, in particular, has become one of the poorest countries in the global south, with more than half of its population living in poverty (United Nations Human Development Report, 2003). Unemployment in Honduras is high, wages are low and social programs are almost non-existent. Hurricane Mitch in 1998 caused major damage to an already weak economy and destroyed many fruit fields, which resulted in many multinational fruit companies leaving (Schmalzbauer, 2004). According to the Honduran newspaper *Tiempo* (7/8/04), 4.5 million of the total 7 million inhabitants do not earn enough to cover their basic necessities. In addition, more than 207 000 young people are neither working nor studying, and one in every five persons over 15 years of age does not know how to read or write (*Tiempo*, 9/8/04).

This situation has resulted in increased migration of Hondurans to the United States (Schmalzbauer, 2004). Many families send a member with the highest wage-earning potential to the United States, expecting that s/he will be able to send remittances back home to support the family (de la Garza & Lowell, 2002; Keely & Tran, 1989; Puerta, 2002). It should not be a surprise then, that Hondurans are one of the fastest-growing populations in New York (NYCDPPD, 2004). Although the overall number of Honduran migrants legally admitted to the United States lags behind the numbers of legal migrants from El Salvador and Guatemala, the increasing presence of Hondurans can be explained by high undocumented migration (Puerta, 2005).

These Honduran migrants are part of the 1 million undocumented migrants who annually join the 10 million already working in the United States illegally (*The Economist*, 2005, 21/5/05). Although this undocumented labour force is usually depicted in the United States as unwanted and law-breaking, many US employers, who use and seek undocumented migrants, in fact, help perpetuate it (Krissman, 2005). Migrants, aware of the labour demand north of the US–Mexico border, encounter a myriad of dangers during the crossing, including suffering of dehydration or hypothermia in desert areas, getting lost or losing one's children, being robbed, raped, apprehended by border patrol officers, or even killed by gangs, border bandits or coyotes² (Chavez, 1998; Hagan, 1998; Menjivar, 2000). Although the exact number of casualties is hard to ascertain, between 1993 and 1997, more than 1600 deaths were recorded in the United States–Mexico border region due to illegal border crossing (Eschbach, 1999). More recent statistics point to an increased death rate associated with greater border surveillance.

Although the US–Mexico border poses a large barrier for undocumented Mexican migrants, the border zone (Alvarez, 1995) is much wider for migrants coming from other parts of Latin America. For Honduran migrants, this zone spans over 1000 miles and includes the entire countries of Guatemala and Mexico. Puerta (2005) speculates that in recent years 80 000 Hondurans have tried to reach the United States annually and of those, only 12 000–15 000 enter the US illegally and 6000 with visas. Many of the remaining 60 000 migrants get raped, robbed, injured or detained along the increasingly more dangerous journey through Mexico (Gutierrez, 2002; Nazario, 2005; Puerta). Considering the difficulty of the journey, most migrants hire a coyote to help them get to the United States. However, coyotes charge approximately \$5000 per person, a price many cannot afford, and even those who manage to gather the financial resources to pay, still experience many impediments on the way. The increased numbers of Hondurans participating in the traversing of several borders is a timely example of the global migration and stratified international movements of people.

²Human smugglers.

These flows have been theorized by scholars in many disciplines (Appadurai, 1990, 2003; Cunningham, 2004; Ong, 2002). In addition to people, Appadurai (1990) theorizes movements of media images, ideologies and capital around the world. Even though this framework consists of ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples and ideoscaples, I focus only on the first two, as I attempt to integrate migration and narrative theories. Appadurai's (1990) 'ethnoscaples' signify people who constitute the shifting world we live in. They encompass migrants, tourists, refugees and guest-workers who increasingly deal with the realities of having to move, or the fantasies of wanting to move. 'Mediascaples' refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television, film, etc. now available to growing parts of the world), and the images of the world created by these media.

These mediascaples tend to be image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and they offer a series of elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts of imagined lives can be formed. The scripts may constitute proto-narratives of possible lives or fantasies that could 'become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement' (Appadurai, 1990, p. 299).

The current research provides specific examples of mediascaples and illustrates how people make sense of them and migration in a particular context. In Copán Ruinas, Honduras, newspapers, TV programs, tourists and prior migrants provide many of those narratives, in text forms as well as embodied in remittances, gifts, pictures and advertisements. These narratives permeate the entire community, compete for people's attention and contribute to potential migrants' decisions.

IMAGINING IN NARRATIVE THEORY

Narrative theorists have long considered the potential power of individual and national narratives to influence individuals' actions. Powerful narratives 'have perlocutionary power that can influence the subsequent actions of narrator and audience. They can shape future actions in decisive ways, and this only increases the complex and intertwined relation between telling stories and taking actions' (Garro & Mattingly, 2000, p. 18). Sarbin (2004) illustrates the power of narrative to lead readers to action by pointing to the influence Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* had on increased suicide rates in Europe in the final quarter of the 18th century, as young men adopted as a guiding fiction the main character Werther's struggle with rejection and his ultimate suicide.

Imagination is one psychological sense-making activity that intervenes between the story and its often profound behavioural effects on the reader or listener (Sarbin, 2004). Similar to Appadurai's mediascaples, which can lead to a person's desire to leave or at least imagine leaving, Sarbin's readers 'project' themselves into the story or are 'transported' by it into its world. 'Imaginings' are 'emplotted narratives carrying implications of causality and duration. They are fashioned from concurrent perceptions of proximal and distal stimulus events, from remembering, cultural stories, legends, myths, articulated theories ... and experiences' (Sarbin, 2004, p. 11). Through constructing their worlds, human beings are able to place themselves not only with reference to objects and events that are present in their world of occurrences but also with reference to absent objects, places and events.

Some narratives and their characters are more convincing than others and have the potential to transform one's world and lead to action. The narratives to which individuals

are exposed are often contradictory and do not present a coherent or unified image, and individuals struggle to create their own discourses or ideologies within them (Bakhtin, 1981). The individuals internalize only the discourse that becomes persuasive for them and guides their actions (Bakhtin, 1981). In the context of migration, powerful narratives about the immigrant experience from different mediascapes persuade people to migrate or to stay.

CONSTRUCTION OF IMMIGRANT NARRATIVES

Immigration scholars have examined some of the mediascapes that contribute to imaginings of potential migrants. Prior migrants are creators of stories that circulate back to their native communities and contribute to the construction of imagined worlds of potential migrants. Mahler (1995) and Pessar (1995) claim that most of these sources provide mythical and unrealistic information about the immigrant life in the United States and thus perpetuate migration. Even migrants who try to discourage others by telling them their stories can foster increased migration (Reimers, 1992) because those who hear their stories often do not believe them or use them to fit their already formed plans.

These narratives that prior migrants send back home in the form of letters, phone calls and email messages, or embodied in remittances and other material goods, get integrated into narratives from local newspapers, TV programs, coyotes and tourists. Individuals, families and entire communities accept some, reject others and combine them into imagined worlds often far away from their situated reality (Appadurai, 1990). If this imagined world becomes powerful and persuasive, just like the young men who adopted the role of Werther, some individuals may project themselves into the role of a migrant in a desired destination, and this imagining may lead to actual migration. Others may imagine themselves on the difficult journey to the United States and may choose to stay in their community.

This research illustrates the complexity of the narratives and the expectations that the community and individuals in Copán Ruinas have about the pros and cons of going to the United States. By doing so, the research begins to fill in gaps in the immigration literature, which needs to take into consideration pre-migration processes because immigrants' expectations and values inform how they adjust to and develop new cultural patterns and identities in the US (Deaux, 2006; Foner, 2001; Vertovec, 2004). Moreover, Hermans and Kempen (1998), inspired by Appadurai's work, call for further research on the role of imagination and people's responses to discrepancies between the imaginal and the actual. Moreover, a critical analysis of migrants' narratives prior to their departure will lead to a deeper understanding of the migrants' complex expectations and decision-making processes, and their perspectives can potentially contribute to humanizing of the discourse of immigration in the US.

Grounded in the integration of migration and narrative theory, I posed the following questions to guide my inquiry: What are the narratives of migration in Copán Ruinas, and what expectations do they foster? How do individuals make sense of those narratives, and how do they describe their imagined worlds of the United States, the most frequent destination of Honduran migrants?

RESEARCH SETTING

Copán Ruinas in Honduras is a community of about 3000 people located 12 miles from the border with Guatemala. Many emigrate from this community to the United States, and

because of its location, many migrants from other parts of Latin America pass through on their way. Copán's natural beauty and the presence of Mayan Ruins have attracted thousands of tourists, and many foreigners end up staying for long periods of time, establishing and running hotels and restaurants catering predominantly to other foreigners. These tourists, who are able to spend money in hotels, restaurants and in local gift shops, can be conceptualized as one of Appadurai's 'mediascapes' (1990), contributing to local residents' imaginations of life in foreign countries and possibly encourage emigration. Even with the influx of tourists, the local economy is not strong enough to support those who do not participate in the tourism industry. Moreover, tourism hikes the prices of food and other commodities, making them unaffordable for local residents. And so, outside of the small tourist centre, many people live in remarkable poverty, and are unable to feed, clothe or house their families. The state of Copán is the fifth poorest in Honduras, already one of the poorest countries of Latin America, and has high levels of unemployment. In fact, one of the most significant sources of income in the community are remittances from the US. Thus, many Copán Ruinas households continue to traverse two nation-states as the productive labour occurs in the US and the reproductive labour in Honduras (Schmalzbauer, 2004).

In this setting, I designed a method for gathering and analysing data to represent how the social-psychological expectations of migrants are developed and enacted.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND SPECIFIC METHODS

The data were collected in Copán Ruinas over a period of 7 weeks in the summer of 2004. While in Copán Ruinas, I was a researcher, an observer, a participant in the community's life, an English teacher, a friend. As part of this modified ethnography, I made observations and took frequent field notes, I read locally available newspapers, taught free English classes for adults and conducted 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals from within and around the community.

English classes

In order to participate meaningfully in the community and to gather community-level data, I taught a free beginning and low-intermediate English classes for adults.³ Although the community has an expanding English-Spanish bilingual elementary and middle school, there were no classes for adults at the time. I offered classes for interested students recruited mostly by word of mouth. Themes of migration, general knowledge and opinions about the United States, and socio-cultural and historical information about Honduras provided the context and content for English learning. Students talked, read, wrote and studied grammar for 4 weeks, which culminated in the publication of a collection of the students' written work. Written consent to use these writings in this research was received from all students and is part of the data analysis. Moreover, the class became a recruitment tool as several students volunteered to participate in individual interviews after the courses were finished.

³I have experience teaching and administering English programs for Speakers of Other Languages (ESL) in varied contexts.

Field notes

In addition to teaching, I made frequent participant observations within and around the community and documented them in detailed field notes. These notes include descriptions of events such as families of migrants picking up their remittances in the local banks; a group of local women opening a package from a migrant in Los Angeles; children playing with gifts from their parents in the United States and notes on casual conversations about migrants either reaching their destinations or experiencing trouble on their way.

Newspaper articles

I read locally available newspapers (*La Prensa, Tiempo, La Tribuna*) on a daily basis and collected 80 articles that covered migration issues.

Individual interviews

Participant observations grounded the 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews I conducted with participants from Copán Ruinas and its surrounding communities. Even though the number of participants is relatively small, they are representative of the community. They range in age from 18 to late 50s, span education levels from third grade to career degrees,⁴ from being unemployed to holding jobs as tailors, Spanish teachers, radio DJs and drivers. The participants include two men who had attempted to migrate to the United States but did not reach their destinations; one man who at the time of the interview was actively preparing for his journey to the United States; and other men and women who were either trying to get an American visa or did not plan to migrate or at least did not admit it to me at the time of the interviews. All participants have family members or friends who had migrated to the United States. I recruited participants mostly through word of mouth, through friends and my teaching. All interviews lasted around 60 minutes, were audio-taped and were conducted in Spanish, the native language of all participants.

I designed the interviews drawing on Mishler (1986), who suggests that we are more likely to find stories when using relatively unstructured interviews in which participants are encouraged to speak in their own voices, given some control over the topics and flow of the conversation and encouraged to expand their responses. Thus, if a new theme or question developed during the interview, I encouraged participants to elaborate on their thoughts. As a result, each interview took its own path, depending on the individual participant's experience with migration and the dynamics of the interview. In fact, each interview felt like a 'construction site for knowledge' (Kvale, 1996, p. 14), at which both the participant and I changed through new understanding and insights.

I conceptualized the data and the brief migration history offered above as units of analysis following positioning theory, which proposes that positioning is a discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as participants in jointly produced story lines (Bamberg, 1997; Davies & Harré, 1999). Moreover, discourse in interviews has a relational nature and participants often address various audiences at the same time (Bakhtin, 1986). Thus, I assume that both the participant and interviewer bring with them a set of expectations and assumptions

⁴Honduran education system includes 6 years of compulsory elementary education, 2 years of colegio, 2 years of career degree and college. The majority of Hondurans do not have more than 6 years of schooling.

that get played out at the interview. The roles they imagine for themselves and their counterpart may be different from the ones the other believes to be occupying. For example, in an interview with an older woman from a village in the mountains near Copán Ruinas, it quickly became clear that she thought I was a kind of 'coyote', that my role was to help people get to the United States. She pleaded with me to write her a letter of invitation so that she could bring it to the embassy to get a visa and visit her sons, whom she had not seen in 10 years. My inability to help her was difficult for me to handle and reminded me of the potential exploitative nature of the research. Another participant spoke of an 'imaginary Gringo' who would invite him to go to the United States, perhaps hoping I would hear his plea. The roles I assumed in the participants' imaginations and the expectations I had of them reflect the local context and culture and my limited familiarity with it at the time of the interviews.

ANALYSIS

As a result of the methods that tap into community and individual domains, the analysed data include 12 individual interviews, 80 newspaper articles, my field notes and a booklet of students' writings. The Honduran national newspapers available in Copán Ruinas include *La Tribuna*, *Tiempo* and *La Prensa*. As I browsed through the newspapers on a daily basis, I cut out articles pertaining to the issue of migration. Further analysis revealed that while most articles focused on accidents and detentions along the illegal journey from Honduras to the United States, others address issues of remittances, Honduran immigrants in the United States and immigration policies in Honduras. Though an in-depth examination of the socio-political background of the newspapers is not part of the present analysis, it is worthwhile to mention that *La Tribuna* and *Tiempo* are owned by influential politicians of the Liberal Party (PL), while *La Prensa* is associated with the National Party (PN). Still, the focus of articles and their perspectives on migrant issues did not vary significantly across the newspapers. The Honduran government has been accused of manipulating the Honduran press, but the Committee to Protect Journalists reports that the situation may have improved since 2002, when Ricardo Maduro of the National Party was elected president (CPJ, 2001). The 80 collected articles used in the analysis are representative of all three newspapers available in Copán Ruinas between 1 July 2004 and 16 August 2004.

The first step in conducting data analysis involved reading the newspaper articles closely, listening to the interviews and reading their transcripts, detecting important themes, terms and issues. I identified expressions of expectations across the interviews, newspaper articles and student writings. To examine their interaction required engaging critical discourse analysis such as searching for patterns, connections and contradictions within and across the data and the identified migration expectation statements (Fairclough, 1995; Stanley & Billig, 2004). This process yielded consistent motivations and expectations of migration as well as incongruencies within individual expectations.

RESULTS

The results presented in this section are the social-psychological expectations expressed across all levels of data. Even though the quotes come from individual participants or newspaper articles, I include only those examples that represent the consistent themes

identified in the entire data pool. To illustrate the complexity of the data, I also present some contradictions that emerged from within the individual interviews.

Motivations for migration

la mayoría se va por la necesidad; la mayoría por pobreza se van; Tienen que ir allá a echar pisto [*the majority goes out of necessity; the majority goes because of poverty; they have to go there to make money*]
 Porque aquí el mundo está muy difícil la vida. Demasiado difícil, acá en Honduras. . . el sueldo mínimo es demasiado bajo. Para los gastos de uno no es suficiente [*Because here the world, the life is very difficult. Quite difficult. here in Honduras the minimum salary is quite small. For the expenses, it's not enough*]

The major motivation that emerged from the interviews corresponds to the economic category proposed by the limited research on migrant motivations (Papademetrious & Dimartio, 1986; Tartakovsky & Schwartz, 2001), which also includes politics, self-development, aspirations for children and the pursuit of studies as main motivations for migration. These findings fit within the global context of migration, which blames poverty and unequal distribution of goods and capital for the current mass movements of people (Glick-Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Hall, 1997).

Expectations of the United States

The data present a few categories of people's expectations of life in the United States. Collective writings of students in the English classes reproduce the narrative of a desirable and powerful United States:

The U.S is one of the most important countries in the World. It is a world power. The economy is better in comparison with other countries. The economy is little bad after September 11. The American technology is very good. There are jobs for all people and more money.

Thirty per cent of the population is Hispanic . . . Many people from Latin America go to the United States to help their families. Educational opportunities in the United States are better than in Honduras (book of student writing, August 2004).

While this narrative is bound to lure people to the United States, individual interviews reveal a more detailed and complex expectations of life in the US. Although many potential migrants expect to find jobs easily through their friends and family, individual data consistently show that people are aware of the difficulties that Honduran undocumented immigrants may experience. The hardships cited by the interview participants include limited freedom of movement due to fear of detention and deportation, and discrimination against Latino immigrants. Another striking finding is that the length of stay in the United States is expected to be limited to about 2–5 years. These expectations are illustrated by more data below.

Work

si hay oportunidades de estar allá y ganar, hay oportunidades porque varios que se han ido, les va bien [*there are opportunities there to earn, there are opportunities because some that have gone, they are doing OK*]

Sí, cuando vienen, traen dinero [*when they return, they bring money*]

dinero se gana diez y ocho veces major que aqui, porque a eso esta el dolar [*money is made 18 times as much as here because that's how much dollar is*]⁵

⁵In July and August 2004, one dollar cost approximately 18 Lempiras (Honduran national currency).

These short excerpts illustrate the power of narratives of previous migrants, whether expressed through personal accounts sent from the US, told upon their return, or through remittances sent home to support families. It became clear from the interviews that migrants often do start working upon their arrival in the United States because they leave after a relative or close friend alerts them to work opportunity in the United States. While finding work initially does not seem to be an issue, migrants worry about their ability to move around freely.

Limited freedom of movement

Entonces, . . . si tienes que salir a tomar algo, a un restaurante o a alguna parte tienes que andar con cuidado para que inmigración no te deporte [*so, . . . if you have to go out for a drink, to a restaurant or somewhere, you have to walk carefully so that immigration doesn't deport you*]

Entonces, uno tiene que quedarse en su casa, más que todo siempre tienes que quedarte en su apartamento, donde vives [*so, one has to stay home, more than anything, you have to stay in your apartment, where you live*]

Sin salir a ninguna parte, . . . entonces es dura la vida de vivir aquí [*without going anywhere, . . . so life is hard here*]

The narrative of restricted freedom of movement was pervasive throughout the interviews as many participants have a relative or friend who was detained in the United States, and arrested and/or returned back to Honduras by the US immigration authorities. In addition, many newspaper articles are devoted to the detention and deportation of Hondurans from the United States. Even though this narrative is widespread, it does not seem to be powerful enough to stop people from migrating. Instead, the restricted freedoms are considered a necessary evil for the limited period of time they plan to stay in the US.

The above quotes from participants illustrate the perlocutionary powers of some prominent narratives (Bakhtin, 1986; Sarbin, 2004) in the community (i.e. finding work in the US is easy) and illustrate how individuals construct imagined worlds, which are far away from their daily, lived experiences in Copán Ruinas.

Temporality of stay

Creo que despues 5 años puedo tener dinero para venir a Honduras a trabajar con mi propio dinero y estar un poco más tranquilo [*I think that after 5 years I can have money to return to Honduras and work with my own money and be a little more at peace*]

Para mí es sólo eso. Para mí el sueño americano es tener . . . ir a trabajar un poco tiempo, nada más [*and, for me, that's it. For me, the American Dream is to have, go to work for little time, nothing more*] Sí, no una vida completa en Estados Unidos [*yes, not a complete life in the United States*]

The interview data show a consistent community narrative of going to the United States for 2–5 years, make money, and come back to live a better life in Honduras. Nevertheless, critical discourse analysis of the interviews revealed potential dilemmas in the individuals' narratives about the length of stay. For example, the participant who provided the quote above continues later on in the interview:

Participant (P): Tal vez mucha gente piensa a ir a trabajar y, y . . . volver pero . . . cuando ya está allá creo que ya no regresan [*Maybe, many people think to go and work, and return but when they are there, I think they don't come back*]

Interviewer (I): No, no regresan [*no, they don't return*] pero para usted es diferente [*but for you it's different*]

P: Es diferente, sí [*It's different, yes*]

I: Aha

P: Bueno, no sé, si consigo vivir allá [*well, I don't know, if I get to live there*] Cambian los pensamientos [*thoughts change*]

Another participant who was getting ready to leave and who has two undocumented and one American citizen sibling in the US, said he wanted to go only for 2 years. But his account of his brother's situation puts the likelihood of return in doubt:

I: No va a regresarse (el hermano)? [*and he is not coming back (the brother)?*]

P: A qué vendría él a Honduras? [*for what would he return to Honduras?*] Si, yo creo que a nada [*yes, I think for nothing*]

It is not easy to imagine or discuss the possibility of leaving one's home and loved ones forever or for an undetermined potentially long period of time. Thus, the accepted narrative of potential migrants emphasizes the temporary nature of the leaving. However, critical discourse analysis (Parker, 1997) reveals dilemmatic nature of thought processes and indicates that individuals are aware of the possibility of staying in the United States longer. The dilemmas may not be easily resolved in the migrants' narratives because of contradictions (Stanley & Billig, 2004) between local contexts with desires and expectations to return to one's family and loved ones, and larger contexts such as the increasingly dangerous journey one must undergo to and from the United States (see below), making it harder to go back and forth. The quotes above indicate the awareness of possible change of thoughts and decisions influenced by a new lived experience in the United States.

The journey

Theoretically, there are two main ways to go to the United States: legally with a visa, or as 'mojado' or 'wetback', illegally by crossing countries and borders between Honduras and the United States. Most who entertain the idea of going to the United States would like to do so legally, however, this option is viable only for people with substantial economic means. In order to apply for a tourist visa to the United States, Honduran citizens have to first make an appointment with the US embassy in the capital, Tegucigalpa, and pay \$100 for the appointment. The appointment is made at a bank, illustrating the money-making nature of this enterprise, especially since the majority of Hondurans have their application denied but do not get their money back. People are aware of the difficulty of obtaining a visa:

Te piden demasiados requisitos. Tienes que tener unos doscientos mil lempiras en cuenta bancaria, tienes que tener papeles de casas, papeles de carros, eh . . . un montón de documentos que son inalcanzables para uno . . . tal vez de . . . la sociedad de uno que es un poco . . . media. O sea, a Estados Unidos van las personas que tienen dinero aquí en Honduras

[*They give you lots of requirements. You need to have 200,000 lempiras in a bank account, papers for houses, cars, hm, a bunch of documents, which are unattainable, maybe for the society which is a bit . . . middle(class). So, people who have money here in Honduras go to the United States.*]

This reality does not stop many from trying their luck, hoping they would not need to travel illegally. In addition to tourist or other visa applications, many Hondurans participate in the Diversity Visa Program, better known as the green card lottery, every year. However,

many do not understand the requirements for participation and only approximately 35 people actually win annually (*Tiempo*, 23/7/04).

Those, who are not as lucky, either decide to stay and wait for a different legal opportunity to migrate or consider the illegal journey, either alone or with the help of a coyote, which costs approximately \$5000. When asked how people get that much money, participants told me that most borrow it from extended families, friends or banks (allegedly for house repairs or other investments), and some sell most of their possessions. They explain that it is easier to borrow money for a coyote than for direct investments in Honduras because the return rate is expected to be higher with income earned in the United States.

Newspaper articles and cartoons about the journey are frequent in the Honduran press. Most focus on the dangers, which include death, injury, robbery, detention or being sent back home. The following headlines offer representative examples:

El peligroso viaje a los Estados Unidos [*The Dangerous journey to the United States*] (*Tiempo*, 2/8/04)

Detenidos en Mexico 110 hondureños [*110 Hondurans Detained in Mexico*] (*Tiempo*, 20/7/04)

Hondureños arrollados por tren serán repatriados [*Hondurans arrested on a train are repatriated*] (*La Prensa*, 25/7/04)

Regresan sin piernas cinco jóvenes que buscaban el sueño americano [*Five young people who looked for the American Dream return without Legs*] (*Tiempo*, 29/7/04)

The discourse of these articles is clear: do not try it; it's not worth it; you may die, you may be injured, you may be detained. Its sentiment is expressed wonderfully in a cartoon that portrays a young man in a wheel chair rolling on railroad tracks in the direction of the 'American Dream'. He is holding a sign that reads: 'Don't attempt it'. (*Tiempo*, 30/7/04).

This narrative of danger persuades some in the community not to go. A young man who sold me *La Prensa* every morning told me:

Pues a mí me gustaría irme pero ese es el problema, no tengo valor de ir mutilado ahí [*Well, I would like to go, but this is the problem, it's not worth it to go mutilated there*]⁶

Yo veo muy costoso eso de irse uno de mojado, mucho problema [*I see it very costly to go as a wetback - many problems*]

Porque muchos, pues, pierden la vida [*because many, well, lose their lives*]

Los matan por allá en esos caminos [*They get killed there on those roads*]

The encounters with newspaper narratives that warn their readers about the dangers is powerful and contributes to this young man's decision not to migrate at this time. For him, the danger outweighs potential benefits of migration to the United States.

I also interviewed two men who did not make it to the United States because of problems in Mexico, emphasized in their accounts of the journey. One of the participants focused on experiences he had while travelling on top of a freight train:

en ese tren vi una experiencia bien grande. Tres muchachos atacaron. . . cuando nosotros íbamos en el tren, nosotros miramos que estaban asaltando a una muchacha de acá de Honduras también [*on this train, I saw an experience quite big. Three guys attacked . . . when we were on the train, we saw that they were assaulting a woman from here, from Honduras too*]

. . . y . . . ella nos dice: 'muchachos, ayúdenme, ayúdenme, me quieren asaltar' [*and she told us: guys, help me, help me, they want to assault me*]

Entonces nosotros nos bajamos, pero cuando nosotros vamos para abajo, ellos nos hacen unos tiros [*so, we climbed down, but when we went down, they shot at us*]

Nosotros nos subimos al tren de nuevo, porque. . . tuvimos miedo [*So we climbed on the train again because. . . we were scared*]

⁶The participant is referring to injuries many sustain from jumping on and off trains in Mexico.

Y nosotros pensábamos que la iban a asaltar o iban a hacer algo con ella pero la iban a dejar. Pero nos contaron los muchachos, nos contaron llorando que ellos vieron cómo la estaban matando y no podían hacer nada [*and we thought that they were going to assault her or do something with her and then leave her. But some guys told us, they told us crying, that they saw how they were killing her and could not do anything*]

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... se viven muchas cosas. Cuando veíamos en el camino a un muchacho que iba a agarrar en el tren, a un amigo de nosotros. El por subir a una compañera de él, él se cayó, ... para abajo del tren. . . [*You experience many things. We saw a guy on the way who was going to catch a train, a friend of ours. He, to help raise a female companion, he fell under the train*]

This man, having tried the journey told me he would not go without a visa again. His account corroborates reports from both Honduran and Mexican newspapers, which indicate that of every 100 people who board one of these trains (which in the Mexican state of Chiapas is called 'El tren de la muerte' or 'The Train of Death') only three or four will make it all the way north (Gutierrez, 2002).

An interview with a participant who was preparing for his departure to the United States presents a different expectation of the journey:

P: Es que los coyotes . . . una manera que te pone en los Estados Unidos en ocho o diez días [*It's that the coyotes . . . the way they get you to the US is in 8 or 10 days*]

I: Ah, no es mucho [*that's not much*]

P: No es mucho, no sé cómo harán, pero dicen que no caminas . . . [*It's not much. I don't know how they do it, but they say you don't walk*]

I: En el carro [*In a car*]

P: Sólo te andan en el carro y hasta en avión [*They only take you in a car and even an airplane*]

P: . . . policía tiene que estar implicado, pues para que. . . porque cogen demasiado . . . es demasiado dinero. Imagino que tienen que haber reparticiones entre ellos [*The police have to be implicated, because, because they take a lot, it's a lot of money. I imagine that they split it among themselves*]

This narrative of ease enabled by corruption stands in sharp contrast to the previous narratives of danger and is most likely created and distributed by local coyotes competing for clients in the community. It is possible that the imminent action of embarking on the journey led this migrant to favouring this narrative and repressing other narratives of danger and difficulty. The expectations of the journey of the above participant belong to what Mahler (1995) calls 'first class, undocumented style' travel (p. 62). Coyotes constitute an informal but integral part of the economy of many Honduran communities (Kyle, 2000; Kyle & Dale, 2001) and in order to make a living, they sell their services by supplying narratives that draw attention away from the difficulties of the journey.

DISCUSSION AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research corroborate the aforementioned argument of global inequity leading to increased migration, in this case from a small community in Honduras to the United States. It can be argued that the bleak socio-economic conditions in Honduras constitute the largest, underlying narrative in which the residents of Copán Ruinas are embedded, and which most identify as their motivation for migration. Contrary to much of

the literature of global flows of people, which emphasizes fluidity, the experiences of migrants from Honduras to the United States remind us that especially since 9/11 nation-states are asserting more control over the national and international landscapes (Cunningham, 2004). While citizens of the so-called developed countries travel freely on business or for pleasure, those coming from under-developed countries, such as Honduras, travel out of need and encounter numerous obstacles and dangers as they traverse oceans, lands and borders (Ong, 2002).

The data analysis has shown that the community of Copán Ruinas is filled with migration narratives that come from the media, prior migrants, tourists and coyotes. My analysis across the community (newspapers, English Classes) and the individual (individual interviews) domains suggests that those narratives compete for people's attention (Bakhtin, 1981) and both encourage and discourage people from migrating. Many people are persuaded by powerful narratives of immigrant success and as they project themselves into these narratives (Sarbin, 2004) they eventually migrate. Others are persuaded by the narratives of danger, difficulty and failure and for the time being stay in Honduras. I am not arguing that making decisions about migration is a straightforward process simply based on imagining. Puerta (2005) proposes a complex cost/benefit formula that indicates when individual emigration will take place:

$$\text{Decision to emigrate} = \text{expulsion} + \text{attraction} > \text{costs and risks}$$

This model, which follows the push-and-pull factor analysis of migration, includes 'expulsion' mostly economic and political motivations (e.g. unemployment, expensive credit, unstable government) and factors such as good pay, availability of work or adventure in the 'attraction' factors. The combination of those two factors must outweigh risks and costs, which include the loss of native language, possible decline in social status, accrued debt in order to pay for the journey and the journey itself. Although I started my research with a rather general notion of individual and community motivations, the data analysis suggests they should be subsumed into one category of social-psychological expectations. They serve as basis for the decision-making that migrants go through and that benefit the individual, family and possibly the entire community. Additional exploration of the nature and working of these processes and the sources that inform them as well as how they compare to or affect actual post-migration experiences should be researched further.

In conclusion, the discursive methods that explored data across and within individual and community domains offered a way to examine expectations and decision-making as a social-psychological phenomenon. People in Copán Ruinas are aware of the difficult living conditions of undocumented migrants in the US as well as the possibility to make money there to provide for their families and return home in a relatively short period of time. They weigh these and other costs and benefits and their decisions are nested in difficult socio-economic conditions of the community and the country, as well as the global context of mass migration. Far from rosy dreaming, individuals and households in Copán Ruinas are faced with a difficult dilemma brilliantly expressed in a cartoon from *Tiempo* (3/8/04) in which a young Honduran man is deciding between the 'Honduran and American nightmares'.

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