

Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles. By Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001. xii + 296 pp. Maps, illustrations, tables, appendices, notes, and index. \$19.95.

In their new book, *Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles*, Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla explore the encounter between two relatively new, in some ways unique, groups of immigrants and a metropolitan area experiencing major economic, demographic and cultural change. They want to understand how the context of reception shapes these new immigrants' lives and, in turn, how the immigrants themselves reshape their new environment. They are interested in the incorporation experience and in the somewhat "counterintuitive" possibility that an uprooted population can find community in an urban metropolis. Their goal, they say, is not to arrive at a single conclusion about such a complex set of experiences but to offer a nuanced account that captures its diversity while at the same time uncovering its underlying patterns.

This book is quite successful at the first goal and more moderately successful at the second. These authors clearly know a great deal about the Salvadoran and Guatemalan communities because their research is based on over twenty years of field experience. As a result, they are able to provide rich descriptions of and perceptive insights into the migration journey, the process of settlement, the world of work, the role of family and social networks, the legal climate that migrants encounter, and the organizations that serve them. We learn much about the forces that initially propelled economic and political migration from El Salvador and Guatemala. We gain insight into how migrants negotiate the process of incorporation into an urban landscape that is changing dramatically. The courage that migrants demonstrate in facing the many challenges they are presented with comes alive in the personal narratives included in the volume. The fragility of migrants' life strategies also becomes abundantly clear. Finally, we come to understand how migrants manage the competing demands of incorporation into the United States at the same time that they maintain strong ties to their sending communities. We learn how migrants organize locally to promote development in their sending communities and the kinds of panethnic alliances that arise in the process.

This book, then, is an invaluable resource for those interested in the Central American experience. It is less successful at moving us beyond the Central American case and demonstrating how it compares to other migration experiences or by highlighting how it calls into question conventional wisdom about migration. These are missed opportunities these data could have been used to realize. For example, though comparisons to the Guatemalan and Salvadoran experience are made in every chapter, readers would benefit from a clear summary about how and why these experiences are different. Furthermore, several studies have been published on the Salvadoran experience alone (including Cecilia Menjivar's *Fragmented Ties* and articles by Alejandro Portes et al., Patricia Landolt, and Manuel Vásquez and his colleagues to name a few). How do these experiences compare to those described in this volume? New York and Washington are also areas undergoing fundamental transformation. How do Central Americans in these cities fare in relation to those living in Los Angeles and why? How does the experience of the Salvadorans living in suburban New York, whom Sarah Mahler studied, resemble their counterparts in urban Los Angeles? Finally, one of the most interesting, innovative contributions of this book is its details regarding the transnational nature of so many aspects of migrants' lives. Yet this book would be an even more useful resource had the authors linked their findings more explicitly to ongoing debates about transnational migration.

Peggy Levitt
Wellesley College