

Los Efectos de la Migración Internacional Extrema en Comunidades de Origen: Un estudio comparativo entre México y El Salvador*

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Abstract

This working paper looks very closely at one community which is self-proclaimed to be the pioneer community of Salvadoran migration to the United States. This community, called Intipucá, instantiates the phenomenon of “cumulative causation” in such a way that even surpasses many Mexican communities. We argue that compared to the Mexican case, or to other communities with very high prevalence of international migration in either México or El Salvador, Intipucá shows signs of more extreme social and economic stratification of its residents due to the infusion of both family remittances and the collective remittances managed by the hometown association. In comparison with many Mexican sending communities, Intipucá has experienced a series of more advanced physical effects in its local infrastructure, a more radical transformation in its local culture and economy as a result of massive international migration among its residents, and a more active transnational agenda through the Internet, as can be witnessed on their website, www.IntipucaCity.com.

Key-words: Salvadoran migration, transnational networks, Intipucá, cumulative causation

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¹ For the purposes of this research paper, we are not following the usual protocol of changing the name of the community under study; in this case we are using the real name of the town "Intipucá" with the permission and at the urging of town officials who wish the story of Intipucá to be broadcasted.

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Introduction

Given the importance of the international migration flow from Mexico to the United States that has taken place during the second half of the twentieth century, academics have primarily utilized the Mexican case to develop theories about international migration (i.e., Massey et al. 1987; Massey et al. 1994; Smith 1998; Massey Nolan and Malone 2004; Massey, Douglas, Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino and J. Edward Taylor 2005). However, another important immigrant group is the Salvadorans, who according to the Pew Hispanic Center's 2010 fact sheet, represent the second largest Latino immigrant group in the United States. Even though important research work about international migration has also been developed about El Salvador and has even gained international attention, such as Cecilia Menjivar's book, *Fragmented Ties*, for the most part the focus has been placed on Mexico's massive migration flow to the U.S. Researchers have been avoiding laborious research work in El Salvador for a number of factors, such as the violent civil war during the 1980's, the political instability that ensued, and gang violence during the past decade in El Salvador. In fact, only a few qualitative studies have been done so far in comparison with the endless research work done in Mexico (Informe Sobre Desarrollo Humano El Salvador 2005).

Though Latin American migration theories are overrepresented by analyses of the Mexican case, we believe that the Salvadoran community of Intipucá is the quintessential model of a transnational community from El Salvador. It exemplifies the economic, social, political,

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and cultural effects migration can have on a sending community, even surpassing what can be witnessed in many Mexican towns. It shows the extent to which the migration machine can operate, in terms of social organization, infrastructure development, and community politics. Through a micro-level analysis of Intipucá, an icon of Salvadoran emigration to the United States, we characterize the positive and negative consequences that result from a culture of migration that is dependent on remittances. We also examine the conditions central to the perpetuation of transnationalism in Intipucá, including a strong reliance on social networks, collective efforts by migrants in the U.S. to improve their original community through the formation of a hometown association, and the use of diasporic media, such as the Internet, to create a transnational social space (Benítez 2006).

Mass migration from El Salvador began in the 1980s and was primarily driven by the bloody civil war that occurred during this decade. Between 1979 and 1992, over one million people emigrated from El Salvador, fleeing the violence and political repression of the war (Bailey 1995). However, migration from Intipucá instead began for economic reasons, as an alternative for rural workers who were displaced in the 1960s by governmental shifting of land tenure in an effort to increase agricultural production (Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008). In fact, Intipucá proudly claims to have sent the first “pioneer” migrant, a man named Sigfredo Chávez, to Washington D.C. in 1967 (Benítez 2005). Year after year, migrants from Intipucá, and later other parts of El Salvador, created an enclave in the American capital, a growing network of social contacts that perpetually encouraged further migration. The transnational nature of this particular community, with some of its members living in Intipucá and others in D.C., was already apparent by 1979, when the phenomenon was first featured in a Washington Post article highlighting the positive economic changes in Intipucá as a result of mass migration and the incoming flow of remittances (Dickey and DeYoung 1979). In contrast with residents of surrounding Salvadoran communities which were still dependent on the local economy, Intipucateños with migrant family members were able to significantly improve their economic

situation with the remittances they were receiving, replacing their shacks with concrete houses, using electric stoves instead of open fires, and putting shoes and socks on the children's bare feet. Before the Salvadoran civil war had even begun, migration represented the path of upward mobility for this community. Intipucá continued to periodically appear in newspapers and magazines in the United States and around the world since then (Arocha 1988; Gruson 1989; Gibb 1990; Sanchez 1990; Gonzalez 2001; Silver 2004). It has also been used as a case study for various dissertations and academic articles, but it has generally been mentioned briefly as part of other larger studies, or the focus has been about remittances or hometown associations (Montes and Garcia 1988; Orozco 2000; Pederson 2002 & 2004; Benítez 2005 & 2006; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008; Villacrés 2009). In this article, by utilizing existing literature and the original quantitative and qualitative research work collected in Intipucá in 2007, we attempt to assess the effects that massive emigration can have on a sending community. Through the specific case of Intipucá, we compare and contrast these social, economic and demographic effects to the Mexican case.

Methodology

This study draws from data collected from a total of eight communities, four communities of different sizes in El Salvador and four communities of different sizes in Mexico. The fieldwork combined qualitative and quantitative data collection, replicating the methodology utilized by the Mexican Migration Project and the Latin American Migration Projects². The *Ethosurvey* questionnaire collects retrospective information in a survey form about the life histories, labor and migration histories of the head of the household, as well as the demographic characteristics of all household members. The *Ethnosurvey* was designed by Douglas Massey and colleagues and was implemented alongside extensive ethnographic data collection in the form of participant observation, open-ended interviews with community leaders and community

² More information about these projects can be found online at: <http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/home-en.aspx>.

members, and additional data at the community and municipal level for each of the sites. To complement our data we also rely on the historical accounts and findings of other scholars who have also studied the effects of international migration on the sending communities in Mexico and in El Salvador.

Theoretical Framework

Cumulative Causation

The Mexican migration flow has been prominently featured throughout the development of international migration theories, due to Mexico's unique relationship with the United States. The Salvadoran case should also be an important center of research regarding these theories. Cumulative causation refers to the tendency of migration to self-perpetuate, regardless of what causes the original migration in the first place (Myrdal 1957; Massey 1990). According to the social network theory of international migration, migration becomes easier and less risky over time as a result of a growing network of social contacts in the receiving community. These contacts share information and resources with future migrants, whether family, friends, or people from the same community, that aid in the process of migration and search for employment in the host country. These resources and connections are forms of social capital that dramatically increase the likelihood of additional migration among persons who have family or friends already living in the United States (Massey et al. 1987). For the case of Intipucá, El Salvador, the network theory explains how Intipucueños were able to reduce the cost and risk of migrating to the United States over four decades by accumulating the number of social ties mainly in the destination city of Washington D.C., and in other areas in the states of Maryland and Virginia. This vast network of family and friends aids new migrants in the process of migration and the search for employment. One family, which we will call "los Fernandez", explained in an interview, "This is how and why all Intipucá has left; we have supported each other one by one... One person helps the next and so on and so forth and we are all very proud of that." A statue of

the very first migrant, Chávez, was placed in the main plaza as well as a photograph of him in the town's *Casa de la Cultura*, a community museum, amphitheater, and library established to preserve local culture. These symbols represent the glorification of migration that now exists in Intipucá.

Relative Deprivation

The cumulative causation theory also argues that international migration perpetuates itself as a result of changes in the context at the place of origin (Massey 1990). In other words, the sending community undergoes cultural, social and economic transformations that change the conditions in which migration decisions are made. These new economic circumstances tend to propel further migration. For example, the infusion of remittances into the local economy aggravates income inequality among households with migrant family members and those without. This causes a sense of relative deprivation for those who do not receive remittances, which is only exacerbated by the conspicuous spending of those who do. Migration then becomes more attractive for households to improve one's standing both absolutely as well as relative to others in the reference community (Stark and Taylor 1989; Massey 1990).

For decades, Intipucá continuously underwent extreme economic and cultural transformations as a product of migration and remittances. However, economically, there is an extraordinary difference between those who live in Intipucá and those who live in its rural *caseríos*, or surrounding communities, such as huge inequalities in the standard of living, public infrastructure, and access to basic necessities such as electricity and potable water. While certain migrant households have been able to improve their economic situation— some even to the point of exaggerated luxury— other non-migrant households have felt increasingly financially deprived in comparison. In the long run, this sense of relative deprivation has perpetually inspired additional migration from Intipucá to the glorified *mundo especial* (“special world”) that is the United States (Parducci 2008). Feelings of inequality and deprivation are exacerbated when households receiving remittances conspicuously build mansion-like homes and purchase

expensive possessions such as name-brand clothes and imported vehicles (Silver 2004). In Intipucá, no display of wealth is spared, causing extreme social stratification among migrants and non-migrants. Lifestyles requiring abundant economic resources become widely admired. For example, one Intipucueño became very wealthy as a drug dealer in Washington D.C. during the 80s and practically became a celebrity in Intipucá when he returned, showing off the brand new motorcycle he shipped from overseas by boat (Pederson 2004). As a sending community, Intipucá has also undergone an Americanization of its local culture. Even some of the town's street signs are in English; the welcome sign is hugely symbolic of the town's transnational nature, reading "Bienvenidos a Intipucá. Welcome to Intipucá City," posted there by an Intipucueño hoping to promote the English language and English courses (Hernandez 2006).

Culture of Migration

The transformation of Intipucá has occurred on many levels as the social and economic value of remittances became deeply rooted in the local culture. It created a pervasive "culture of migration," that is transmitted throughout generations and social networks (Kandel and Massey 2002). For young people in Intipucá, the aspiration to migrate eclipses that of continuing their education. In a community that boasts forty years of migration to the United States, the lack of interest in school is just as much integrated into their culture as the expectation to live and work abroad at some point in their lives. This is only reinforced by the absence of their parents and family who have migrated to work in the United States. For various generations, the children left behind in Intipucá, who are largely supported by remittances, are directly and indirectly encouraged by their community and family to continue the cycle of migration. This is because education is not made a priority. In comparison with other cities, residents of Intipucá have significantly lower levels of education. In fact, the results from the ethnographic and survey work performed in Intipucá by the leading author of this paper in 2007, around 22% of Intipucueños 15 years old or older had zero years of education, out of both migrant and non-migrant respondents. Slightly over half of them (52%) had completed only 4 years or less of education. The majority,

84%, had not completed high school. An interview with the town's school director revealed the little priority students have to continue studying. Instead they preferred the prospects of migration. He also mentioned how many children lived with their grandmothers or other relatives when one or both parents were working in the United States. In fact, about 38% of Intipucuenos are under the age of 15, while 11% were over the age 55.

Intipucá is known as the *Ciudad del Dólar* ("City of the Dollar"), receiving approximately \$150,000 in remittances each month and ranking 39th among all municipalities in El Salvador in the percentage of households that receive remittances (41%) as of 2005 (Informe Sobre Desarrollo Humano El Salvador 2005; Granadas 2006). Because Intipucá's economy is almost solely based on remittances, there are high levels of local unemployment, few business and little commercial activity in the quiet streets of the paradisiacal town (Villacrés 2009). One Intipucueño journalist identifies the few employers in his hometown, indicating the difficulty of obtaining a job at one of them in the first place: "the clinic, school, local radio station, Infocenters, Telecom, Casa de la Cultura, the mayor's office, and the three or four convenient stores" (Granadas 2006). He explains how the high unemployment rate has caused delinquency among youth who are indifferent about education.

In addition, there are also natural circumstances occurring in Intipucá that continue to fuel the cycle of migration: Respondents complained about the lack of rain in recent years which has affected the farmers who used to rely on it to irrigate their crops for most of their lifetimes. Respondents explained that the weather had changed and that during some years they would not receive enough rain to yield successful crops.

High levels of unemployment and the inability to depend on agriculture has encouraged more people to want to migrate to the United States and other countries. Similar to the situation in El Salvador, the ethnographic work in the rural areas in Mexico also observed similar complaints from respondents about the lack of rain and the resulting failure of their crops. Consequently, job opportunities become limited and people begin to rely primarily on

remittances for daily subsistence. One of the few available jobs identified was to watch and maintain the homes of those migrants who were in the United States, which were left empty in most cases. In contrast to what was found in Mexico, those who were taking care of the empty homes in El Salvador also lived in those homes in order to make sure no one broke in, nothing would be stolen, and to maintain the overall security of the house. In Mexico, most houses owned by migrants abroad are left empty, and those who take care of them live in their own homes, usually nearby.

Comparing effects on the sending communities in Mexico and El Salvador

The case of Intipucá serves to further our understanding on the extent to which massive emigration can have on important social, economic, political and demographic dynamics of a sending community. While similar tendencies are also observed in many Mexican communities, and while research continues to focus on the Mexican case, the town of Intipucá manifests these effects to an extreme level and serves as an exemplary model for migration theories, which largely neglect the “culture of migration” taking place in other Latin American countries such as El Salvador. When it comes to conspicuous spending, for example, Mexican migrants use remittances to construct nice houses in their hometowns all over Mexico; however, it is rare to find so many exaggerated “palaces” concentrated in one place, as witnessed in the case of Intipucá. The homes in Intipucá, built with *migradolares*, are designed with many of the architectural qualities that resemble homes found in parts of the United States such as the state of Virginia. Some homes occupy entire half blocks if not complete blocks, have long corner terraces and some even have glass floors on the second floor. The home in which one of the authors and the interviewers stayed in Intipucá during the fieldwork was nicknamed “the palace” by the some members in the community and it had an alarm system which included cameras and televisions all around the house, built-in closets made with Chinese woodwork, detailed murals painted on the walls, expensive tile floors, and it even resembled a “palace” from the outside.

Several other homes in Intipucá had similar characteristics, something that is not regularly seen in any sending community in Mexico.

In Mexico, most communities like the ones visited by our research team and others with a long history of out-migration, like Arandas and Ticuani, built their basic infrastructure with the help of collective remittances. They added sewage systems, installed electricity, paved roads, and built schools, churches and places for community gatherings; but no community in Mexico has gotten as far as building a “Casa de la Cultura” that includes a large auditorium, a library and a museum. Collective remittances in Intipucá even funded the construction of a \$400,000 soccer stadium that overlooks the sea, and continue to fund the monthly paychecks of the soccer players for the team which the city owns. Also, the soccer field is surrounded by advertisements of businesses owned by Intipucateños in the United States. In addition, Intipucá has a sound system which has been installed all around the city and is used to keep everyone informed about current events. Collective remittances in Intipucá have purchased vans and pay for drivers to go and pick up returning migrants at the San Salvador airport free of charge, as a service to the migrants returning to the community. These are some ways in which the transnational connection of the migrants in the United States and those who stayed in Intipucá is maintained, helping them to stay connected and feel welcome and proud of belonging to the community of “Intipucá City.”

At the same time, extreme levels of social stratification still hold among its inhabitants, given the extreme differences between those who own the “palaces” and those who live on the outskirts or surrounding communities who have not benefitted from the massive emigration of Intipucateños to the United States. Even neighboring communities feel frustrated and deprived.

Even though scholars such as Smith (2006) claim that returning and visiting migrants transform the local culture with the use of the English language and other cultural behaviors that are transferred back and forth from the receiving and sending communities, such New York and Ticuani for example, in Intipucá the cultural transformation has gone so far that during our fieldwork we learned that the “Casa de La Cultura” was built in an attempt of desperation to

maintain and preserve the local culture given the extreme cultural transformations that had resulted from the massive emigration flow to the United States. Another unfortunate effect has been the development of an extreme “culture of migration” in which children grow with the desire to migrate to the United States instead of getting an education. The principal of the school explained:

Children don't care about school at all. They express that their main goal for their future, instead of attending college, is to migrate to the United States, so therefore, why should they put up an effort on doing well at school, at all?

Our qualitative and quantitative evidence regarding the culture of migration among Intipunqueños indicates that international migration has provoked a negative effect on the levels of education of Intipunqueños.

The Role of Hometown Associations

The economic responsibility migrants feel for their hometown is a phenomenon of a transnational culture of migration. The town's long history of migration reveals the long-term effects on social and economic development due to remittances. While personal remittances are one form of financial support toward their families back home, the collective remittances migrants donate for the improvement of public infrastructure, education, and other purposes show still a stronger bond and sense of belonging to their hometown, because they benefit the sending community as a whole. These monies are often managed by hometown associations (HTAs), which are usually voluntary organizations formed by migrants who share the same community origin. In all Latin America, HTAs have been gaining increasing prominence and international attention in high-level discussions among scholars, policy-makers, and diplomats (Burton and Gammage 2009). This is especially occurring in Mexico and El Salvador because they are among the largest recipient countries of remittances from the United States (Sutter 2010).

There are many debates as to whether personal or collective remittances are a development strategy or just another form of economic dependency. Since most remittances are used for family maintenance and consumer goods, some scholars are convinced of the limited potential they actually have on development (Cortina and de la Garza 2004; Rosser 2008). Nevertheless, Mexican and Salvadoran governments have attempted to channel remittances toward more “productive use,” such as community projects and local development (Andrade-Eekhoff 2005). Similar to that of Mexico’s 2x1 and 3x1 policy (where the local government matches two or three times the amount sent in form of collective remittances by migrants residing in the U.S.), the Salvadoran government has its own program designed to invest and channel remittances toward community improvement, called “Programa Unidos por la Solidaridad.” It is functions in cooperation with hometown associations and the “Social Investment Fund for Local Development” (FISDL) in order to maximize the development potential of remittances. Government attention and its programs that match donations have contributed to the relatively recent formalization of many HTAs in both countries (Pederson 2004; Gammage 2006). Although hometown associations developed as institutions in Mexico, many Salvadoran HTAs are among the most effective Latin-America, such as the one in Intipucá (Orozco 2000).

The HTA serves as both a social and economic link between the migrants and their hometown. There are both positive and negative effects that came with the formation of the Intipucá’s hometown association, “Fundación Unidos por Intipucá” (FUPI), which was remarkably successful during the years it operated. Founded in 1986, it funded at least 10 large scale projects and many smaller ones during its first decade alone, including paving streets, installing a water septic plant, improving electricity and healthcare, purchasing ambulances, and building a soccer stadium (Orozco 2000; Burton and Gammage 2009). The Fundación was able to succeed through collaboration and partnership with local and national government programs that matched funds, although the government often tried to take control of projects. Despite the immense improvement of Intipucá’s physical infrastructure, the organizational structure of the

Fundación created a lot of controversy among Intipucacanos. It consisted of two committees: one based in Washington D.C., which focused on planning and fundraising, and the other in Intipucá, whose role was implementation of those decisions. The Washington-based committee undoubtedly held a powerful position in the social life of Intipucá, having the authority to determine how and where money would be invested (Villacrés 2009). In some ways, the Fundación exacerbated social stratification through its administration practices, considering there were no formal regulations to ensure equal voice among all Intipucacanos, and the leaders allocated funds according to their personal interests. The surrounding caseríos remained underdeveloped because no one was there to represent them in the Washington-based committee. In fact, it received so much criticism from particular people in Intipucá that it ultimately disbanded itself in 2007 (Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008). By then, the association had contributed at least \$800,000 to local development projects in Intipucá (Aizenman 2006).

Mexican and Salvadoran HTAs are similar and different in various ways. The organizational structure of Mexican HTAs is generally more democratic, in which leaders are elected and community participation is relatively cohesive, unlike the example from Intipucá (Orozco 2004). Mexican and Salvadoran HTAs engage with the government differently, with the Mexican government having a more sustained outreach to its diaspora than that of El Salvador (Burgess 2008). However, Smith (2006) found that in a small Mexican town called Ticuani, The Ticuanences who belonged to the HTA in New York had more political power in Ticuani than even the local authorities.

In contrast to the Mexican case, in which usually the members of the local town participate in the paving of streets, building of schools, parks, and other projects, in El Salvador (as revealed in the ethnographic fieldwork), the members of the community are not allowed to participate by offering their free labor. Instead, the government requires the HTAs to hire a construction company that in most cases has a monopoly of the construction industry.

Another difference is that Salvadoran HTAs are more likely to work with counterpart organizations in the hometown. In the case of Arandas, Mexico, domestic HTAs have been able to channel government resources on a much greater scale than its transborder HTAs (Fitzgerald 2008). However, as for organizational density, however, Salvadoran HTAs tend to have the same group of people in charge for longer periods of time. Migrants based in the United States generally have more authority in the process of project selection than do the locally based members. This has been noticed not only in the case of Intipucá, but also of other HTAs in El Salvador such as Santa Elena and La Libertad (Burgess 2008).

Transnationalism

“Transnational migration is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Schiller et al. 1995). A transnational social space can be generated through Internet communication, as can be seen in the case of Intipucá. One Washington-based citizen, Carlos Velásquez, founded “www.IntipucaCity.com” in December 2001. He boasts Intipucá as the first community in El Salvador to create an online portal connecting migrants with their hometown, according to the website. The active online community, with an average of over 300 page views a day as well as its own ad revenue, keeps members in touch through advanced features like chatroom, video uploads, photo albums, and its own twitter page, elements which are especially popular among the youth (Parducci 2008). The website serves as a great example of how extraordinary transnational ties can be developed, allowing a single community to be anchored in more than one geographic region. This is yet another vehicle through which “social remittances” can be transferred to the younger generations, which may continue to perpetuate the culture of migration in Intipucá. Even though sending communities in Mexico may also have their website to promote transnational ties, our extensive internet search and our ethnographic fieldwork

concluded that the extent to which this Intipucá's website is used in order to create a transnational social space is difficult, if not impossible, to find even among Mexican communities.

Mexican New York, by Robert Smith (2006) represents an example of how transnational scholars have used the Mexican case to theorize about transnationalism. Smith performs a longitudinal study about the members of a Mexican community which settled in New York. Even though we learn a lot about transnationalism in the study, by no means Smith was able to find anything even close to what we have witnessed in Intipucá regarding the extent to which transnationalism was executed via a sophisticated website with relatively high web traffic. Even the work of David Fitzgerald (2008), who studied Mexican communities with long history of international migration, such as Arandas, Jalisco, was by no means able to find the level of social organization characteristic of Intipucá.

Transnational politics are kept up to date and vibrant with the help of the HTAs and technology. Intipuca's website has all the features which help maintain not only social and cultural connections between Intipucaneños in El Salvador and the United States, but also direct contact and participation in local politics. The website maintains chatrooms and photo galleries to keep users updated in detail on how the town is being governed and how resources are being administered. The website is also used as a venue for social interaction, with opinion blogs and gossip columns. For example, in the comments section of a particular news article, various users in expressed disapproval at the physical changes made to the central plaza, complaining that the new mayor had painted it too colorful and that it gave a bad impression to visitors. The website posted before and after pictures in a very constructive way and allowed for public comments to be made.

We also observed, for example, on the website of one of the communities we studied in Mexico, that the people were complaining about the bad quality of the work that had been done installing a sewage system around the community, an investment funded by collective remittances. In the same way as the Intipucá website, there were photos and explanations posted

showing the water tubes installed too close to the surface, resulting in the rupture of some of the water ducts. One of the posts complained that the entire project had become a total waste of the collective donations sent by the migrants. Even though both websites were able to portray a problem connected to local politics, in the case of Intipucá for example, the dialog and responses about the issue had many more participants and back-and-forth discussions than those of the Mexican community. Intipucá showed a more active participation on cyberspace and a very significant transnational social interaction through the internet. Future research work should look into how the internet can develop, maintain and/or transform transnational communities in Latin America.

Discussion

In light of the recent global economic downturn, the future of Intipucá may hold many challenges for its remittance-dependent inhabitants. Although growth of remittances sent to El Salvador remains positive as of 2008 (3%), the growth has curbed sharply since 2006 (Lopez et al. 2009). Because Intipucá's economy is primarily dependent on these remittances, residents have been operating under the assumption that the stream of money can continue in the long-term. However, considering the potential impact of the declining world economy, Intipucá would surely collapse without the steady flow of remittances. This is because Intipucá has developed a "culture of migration" crippled by a lack of local employment and an irrelevance of education as a goal for the future. If the decline in remittances is substantial enough, this could shake the foundations of the mindset of both Intipucá's migrants and its sedentary population, including the youth.

One way in which local leaders are addressing this issue is through the possibility of ecotourism in the town's near future, because of Intipucá's strategic location near a beach. They have considered a project aimed to make the beautiful untouched beaches adjacent to Intipucá important tourist spots and have been targeted by international investors in the past, including

those who own hotels in Cancun, Mexico. The possibility has given rise to many initiatives, such as the “Casa de la Cultura,” seeking to instill the local culture in young Intipucqueños and teach them English, in order for them to one day make a living in Intipucá rather than leaving for the U.S. In fact, the new mayor of Intipucá, Hugo Salinas, announced during his campaign his goal to convert Intipucá the number one bilingual city in El Salvador, according to an article on IntipucaCity.com (Velazquez 2010). The ecotourism project may give Intipucá a viable economic alternative to remittances.

Even though the theory of cumulative causation was developed by studying Mexican communities, Intipucá is an example of how it can occur and the circumstances under which it does in another country like El Salvador. The extent to which the migration machine works in this town is astounding, considering that it does not even border the U.S. As an example of cumulative causation of migration, the case of Intipucá surpasses that of many places in Mexico, despite Mexico’s older history of migration, closer proximity to the U.S., and longer time in which networks have been active.

The extreme cumulative causation process in Intipuca has created several advantages and disadvantages to its inhabitants. On one hand, it has allowed for people who receive remittances to sustain themselves given the lack of job opportunities in the area, and has helped them survive and even live in a place which has been transformed in unimaginable ways. On the other hand, the extreme culture of migration has created a lack of interest in education which has placed the educational level of the people of Intipuca at a very low level, which turned out to be the lowest compared to the other three communities that were surveyed.

Compared to many Mexican communities, Intipucá has experienced a more extreme transformation of its local culture and physical infrastructure due to remittances, featuring exaggerated homes and immodest displays of wealth. It has an economy based largely on remittances, creating a way of life that is inclined toward sharp social stratification and perpetually predisposed to further migration. Compared to the Mexican case, Intipucá also

features a more active transnational agenda through Internet communication, and higher levels of political participation in the transnational context. Future research should further investigate more in depth the historical and social processes which have made Intipuca an icon of international migration in Latin America.

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